



## Decay, deconstruction and reinvigoration of fantastic fauna. Characterization of the mythological monster in the recent Mexican narrative.

Decadencia, deconstrucción y revigorización de la fauna fantástica.  
Caracterización del monstruo mitológico en la narrativa mexicana  
reciente.

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the various ways in which the figure of the mythological monster is constructed in the recent short narrative by three authors: René Avilés Fabila, Cecilia Eudave, Fernando de León. The above is based on the original representation of these creatures in ancient and medieval bestiaries, and focuses, above all, on the core change in their characterization in current texts, which leads to scenarios of decadence, deconstruction or reinvigoration of the imaginary fauna, explained this as a result of the exhaustion of magical thinking before the scientific one.

**Keywords:** Bestiaries. Mythological monster. Short narrative. René Avilés Fabila. Cecilia Eudave. Fernando de León.



## RESUMEN

El presente artículo aborda las diversas maneras en cómo se construye la figura del monstruo mitológico en la reciente narrativa breve de tres autores: René Avilés Fabila, Cecilia Eudave, Fernando de León. Lo anterior tiene como base la representación original de estas criaturas en los bestiarios antiguos y medievales, y se centra, sobre todo, en el cambio medular en su caracterización en los textos actuales, lo cual deriva en escenarios de decadencia, deconstrucción o revigorización de la fauna imaginaria, explicado esto a raíz del agotamiento del pensamiento mágico ante el científico.

**Palabras claves:** Bestiario. Monstruo mitológico. Narrativa breve. René Avilés Fabila. Cecilia Eudave. Fernando de León.

## Introduction

Mythological monsters, that group of beings that make up the oldest fantastic zoology, among which are the dragon, the amphibina, the chimera, the griffin and many other creatures, fruit of the combination of existing animals, have populated the literature almost from the beginning. Such monsters do not represent the same in the works of Antiquity as in the present, nor are they presented to us in the same way. Originally they constituted a fearsome fauna, endowed with supernatural powers and linked to wonder and the divine, however, in recent times their figure has diminished, and they have been trivialized, impregnated with puerility, or relegated to oblivion. From military emblems and repositories of the fury of the gods, they have passed into children's publications, at best. This article briefly addresses the history of these beings, as well as, through the analysis of some texts that have appeared in recent years, by Mexican authors, it is intended to show how they are represented and what change of meaning this entails.

The narrative analyzed in this article is necessarily related to the genre of the bestiary, which has been for obvious reasons the type of work in which fantastic zoology is most often included. For this reason, *Los animales prodigiosos* (1989), by René Avilés Fabila, a full-fledged bestiary, is addressed. It is also studied, partially, *Para viajeros improbables* (2012), by Cecilia Eudave, in its character of compilation of texts whose protagonists are, especially in the second section of the book,



animals and beings typical of Greco-Latin mythology. In the same way, we work with two narratives by Fernando de León, "Manual del comportamiento fantástico" (2006) and "Un rastro de animales muertos" (2015), in which ancient monsters are central to the plot. It is worth mentioning that, as selection criteria, this article deals in the foreground with texts that deal with creatures of zoomorphic configuration, either in their entirety or to a greater degree; thus, humanoids and transformations of the human being are excluded.

## I. On the bestiaries

The bestiaries, books characterized by being divided into sections dedicated to the description of both real and imaginary fauna, although they have their origin in Antiquity, with authors such as Aristotle and Pliny – his works are *Historia de los animales* and *Historia natural*, respectively – have their peak in the Middle Ages. Their popularity became so great at this time that, as teaching material, they were "surpassed only by the Bible" (Luesakul, 2008, p.144). There is a contrast between ancient and medieval bestiaries. The former offered information about creatures, as a scientific treatise. The latter, although based on classical sources, among them Ptolemy and the pair of authors mentioned above, emphasized religious moral elements: each section "begins with the description of being and ends with Christian teachings [...] The animals treated in the bestiaries were not regarded by themselves, but as symbols charged with the allegorical value of doctrine" (p.144). Later the American bestiaries emerged, during the process of colonization, at the end of the fifteenth century. These took up the characteristics of the ancients, since their purpose was to inform about the discoveries made in the newly explored lands.

The European bestiary, on the other hand, is of importance in the resurgence of the genre in the twentieth century: "Its presence in contemporary texts underlines two interesting points: the valuation of the medieval bestiary as canon and the reconsideration of the genre" (p.145). The current bestiaries do not pretend to have the same function as the medieval ones, because although they take the structure from these –a section is granted for each animal, of which its description, customs, food, and other identifying features are noted– they ignore the religious or moralizing function. Its



informative aspect is also taken up, although modified, because, as Zavala mentions, "the literary bestiaries produced in Latin America consist of the allegorical *poetization* of natural or imaginary beasts"<sup>1</sup> (Zavala, 2003, p. 14), so that the characteristics of each creature are polysemic, as in the paradigmatic case of *Bestiario*, by Juan José Arreola. Even the *Manual de zoología fantástica*, by Jorge Luis Borges and Margarita Guerrero, a work dedicated above all to the description of mythological beings, and therefore of very similar configuration to the medieval bestiary, takes the informative factor differently: it should be noted that although the authors open in the classical sources,<sup>2</sup> they also distance themselves from them, not only for the obvious reason that it is considered at all times, as the title itself announces, fantastic to the fauna addressed, but because the general theme of the book comes to be treated in a playful way at various times.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the disbelief in the reality of the fantastic beast, as well as the lack of seriousness in describing it, Deriee Sariols expresses:

Modern intellectual distance thus reconverts bestiaries and animal fables to adapt them to a skeptical and playful mentality. In the end, the meaning of all this is the elaboration of individual bestiaries as the artist's trademark (how not to forget the Borgian tiger and the axolotl of Cortázar). In this way, the very concept of the genre has changed over time, and expresses, more than the medieval glossary, the animal imaginary or mythology of a writer. (Sariols, 2012, p. 47).

<sup>1</sup> Zavala also records the peculiar case "of the Toluca writer Marco Antonio Urdapilleta, who has created the voice of a fictional author, Fray Rodrigo de Macuspana, in whose writing the various voices of the chroniclers are condensed", to create a work with echoes of other centuries: *Bestiario de indias* (2003, p. 15).

<sup>2</sup> As Noguerol (2012, p.29) points out, Fernández Porta enunciates the differences between the Greco-Latin and medieval traditions of the bestiary (distributed in five paragraphs), and how it is that some of the characteristics of the former apply without any problem to the *Manual de zoología fantástica*: indeed, "1) [...] the formation of an archive, of a series of transmitted knowledge. The animal is constructed from information, and not concentrated in an ahistorical allegory. 2) This file is a set of knowledge that passes from one author to another, with or without accreditation of source. The history of the animal is collective. 3) The scientific-experimental impulse of the genre is inseparable from anecdote, invention and gossip." (Fernández, 2002, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> An example is the section dedicated to the "Chancha con cadenas", text extracted almost entirely from the *Diccionario folklórico argentino*, 1950 publication (appeared just seven years before the publication of the *Manual*), and of a markedly playful nature – a purpose not contemplated in bestiaries of other times – for this reason, as well as for its novelty, this section contrasts with the informative way of addressing the characteristics of the mythological beings described.



Among the Spanish-American bestiaries are canonical *Manual de zoología fantástica* and *Bestiario* – which opts for the zoo instead of mythology– the first for the novelty of its format and the second for its –prompt– break with this model.<sup>4</sup> The writing of this type of work in Latin America has become a literary tradition developed extensively, as can be seen in the lists of books shown by Noguerol (2014, p. 75) and Luesakul (2008, p. 146). "This phenomenon of *resurrection* of an archaic mold has had a great impact on Ibero-American literature" (Noguerol, 2012, p. 127), not only in relation to minifiction,<sup>5</sup> but, on the other hand, contrary to what might be expected, various formats of the genre can be considered, as argued by Fernández Porta, who in his article "Bestiaries of the future. Guide to the animal in postmodern literature", describes a very diverse typology, nourished with postmodern derivations, including narrative texts in which is "the theme of animality as a representation of sentimental and sexual relationships, in what can be considered as the contemporary derivation of the medieval subgenre of the bestiary of love" (Fernández, 2002, p. 6), the "monstrous possibilities", the "animataphores", and the extinct side.<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that there are few works, among those referenced in this article, in which the mythological fauna appears. Notable exceptions: *Manual de zoología fantástica* and *Los animales prodigiosos*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Noguerol corroborates and documents both cases (2012, p. 130 and p. 136).

<sup>5</sup> Such an increase in the number of works that address the format of the bestiary, largely appearing in the twentieth century, is related to the parallel proliferation of minifiction. This is evident, since both this and the sections dedicated to each animal coincide in brevity. In this regard, Noguerol comments: "The minifictional emergence of recent decades has enhanced the recovery of the bestiary for various reasons: its brevity – the creations do not exceed the page of extension – generic hybridity – these are protein texts that combine essay, prose poem and narration – and rescue of formulas of ancient writing". (Noguerol, 2012, pp. 127-128). To the above, with regard to the reappearance of the bestiary, can be added what Sariols mentioned: "The fragmentary form of these texts [the bestiaries] admits a particular, non-linear reading, which is perfectly adapted to the current way of life. The speed, the unlimited information, the feeling of ubiquity that new technologies give us ask for an approximation in counterpoint, ephemeral and fast, as you read a dictionary or consult the internet." (2012, p. 48).

<sup>6</sup> Fernández Porta, in relation to the diversity of bestiaries that he consigns, adds: "the Encyclopedia as a fictional form (Queneau) and [...] retrospective reading as a re-creation (Borges) are at the origin of a series of ironic revisits of a genre that, precisely because of its archaeological character, invites a reconsideration in terms of fabulism or fantastic literature" (2002, p. 2).

<sup>7</sup> Precisely Zavala mentions that in Mexico "mythology of European origin has also been played, as can be seen in the ironic versions elaborated by Augusto Monterroso, René Avilés Fabila and Raúl Renán." (2003, p. 15).



## II. Degradation of mythological animals

The creatures of the ancient and medieval bestiaries remain as a literary motif, although with the passage of time their symbolism and purpose has changed. In Antiquity they had a very necessary and important role. "Since the night of time, the monster has occupied a relevant place in human societies, linked to fears, to fears, to projections that in each historical context represented threats" (Orsanic, 2019, p.1). With regard to this, the case of the dragon can be addressed, which in the West "was always conceived as evil [...] One of the classic feats of the heroes (Hercules, Sigurd, St. Michael, St. George) was to defeat and kill him." (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 64). In *Manual de zoología fantástica*, it is also read how this beast is represented on the bows of the ships and shields of the Scandinavian pirates, on the insignia of the Roman cohort, and that the Germanic kings of England used it on the banners: in these cases the creature was related to military power, political and bellicose, that is, he was part of the elements that the adversaries had to fear. In addition to the above, it is necessary to remember that the tangible existence of fantastic creatures was believed. Thus, Borges points out that "People believed in the reality of the dragon. In the middle of the sixteenth century, it is recorded in the *Historia animalium* of Conrad Gesner, a work of a scientific nature." (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 65).

However, while in the past the figure of the dragon was fearsome and formidable, linked to evil and strength in various ways, as well as being attributed the role of antagonist in various mythical and religious stories, "Time has significantly worn [its] prestige [...] it is perhaps the best known, but also the least fortunate of fantastic animals", (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 65). This misfortune is constituted not only because it is known as an imaginary being, devoid of biological reality, but also because at a symbolic level it has been degraded, since it is no longer linked to power or weapons —Avilés Fabila makes a relationship between the dragon and the warlike, in one of his mini-fictions, addressed later—: "It seems puerile to us and often contaminates the stories in which it appears with puerility. [...] modern prejudice, perhaps caused by the excess of dragons in fairy tales" (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 65). Not only the concept of this animal, as well as the rest of the fantastic fauna, have suffered a decline, but, along with them, the whole world of which they were part (understand



the one made up of magical elements, transformations of the human being into other creatures, or fantastic places, for example) has suffered the same fate. In coincidence with Borges, William Ospina enunciates

Those who persist in inventing universes similar to those of classical mythology, in weaving variations on the old world of dragons, gnomes, and magical objects, such as Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings*, tend to be relegated to the junior realm of authors for children, and theirs tends to be seen as naïve and puerile literature (Ospina, 2002, p. 210).

From the above, the question can be asked, what has led to this change of meaning that mythological animals have suffered? The answer is related to the beliefs of the human being. Ospina comments on how the great mythologies were collective creations, just as collective was also the destiny of those who were part of the ancient civilizations. As time progressed, myths were overtaken, and individualism prevailed over the collectivity.<sup>8</sup> "The great contemporary creators" are distinguishable figures, with name and surname, and can be identified with "men of philosophical mentality", including among them Borges himself. Thus, the imagination, expressed through the works of these creators, ceased to be spontaneous, to become more intellectual. It was no longer as in ancient times, when one tried to "dream of freedom, making use of what Borges called, not as a censorship, but as an accomplice description, the irresponsible imagination" (Ospina, 2002, p. 214).

In addition to the fact that the imagination has been intellectualized, it is also necessary to take into account another very important factor: the arrival of the era of science and reasoning. When in antiquity various situations were explained by mythology or magic, scientific knowledge gradually relegated those beliefs and created, from its discoveries, new explanations for all kinds of phenomena. In this way, Ospina mentions: "Chesterton wrote that the difference between the ancient and modern ages is the difference between an age that fights with dragons and an age that

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<sup>8</sup> The individual also prevailed over the collective in the bestiaries: how Can be read in the second footnote of this article, Fernández Porta points out that in the classic tradition of the bestiary "The history of the animal is collective", in contrast to the works of authors such as Arreola or Avilés Fabila.





fighters with microbes" (2002, p. 209). Moreover, science, and its practical extension, technology, came to settle definitively in the imagination. Ospina, in addition to listing various examples with which this argument can be verified in certain literary passages of the last two hundred years, adds that "It is as if it were already difficult for us to dream without the help of thought, science, information [...] imagination is docile to the influence of circumstances" (p. 210). All kinds of gadgets and technological creations replaced magic in works of art, and also in the imagination.

Thus, "In the age of technology and science, the inhabitants of the bestiaries have no function, [...] they have lost their cosmic value, so [...] they suffer a demystifying treatment" (Luesakul, 2008, p.149). The mythological fauna ceased to be part of the explanations of the world, although the cultural baggage in which it was housed remained and, therefore, survived in the stories and symbology. Although they still persist today, "These animals of different origins and of recognized image no longer reveal the specific situation of the society where they arose, but that of all of us who think, live and suffer in the contemporary world." (p.144). Thus, mythological animals remain to speak now of our society, according to the designs of each particular author, although they would appear in current works under the parameter of reason, filtered by scientific thought or subject to technology.

### III. *Los animales prodigiosos: a zoo of degraded beings*

*Los animales prodigiosos*, by René Avilés Fabila, is part of the tradition of the bestiary. In this work appear various beings, both real and mythological, of various origins, captives in the cages of a zoo. It should be noted that, in terms of imaginary fauna, it is not satisfied with the Greco-Latin, since it also incorporates the American, so that in its pages there are texts dedicated to the cenacoatl and other types of snakes, and, on the other hand, original creations of the author are included equally, such as the vandak or ponzoñini. It is necessary to clarify that not all creatures appear behind bars, this is because the mini-fictions included in this work – as Luesakul points out – had previously appeared in the bibliography of Avilés Fabila: "*Hacia el fin del mundo* (1969), *Alegorías* (1969), *Fantasías en carrusel* (1978), *Los oficios perdidos* (1983) and *Cuentos y descuentos* (1986)" (Luesakul,





2008, p.148). Therefore, some texts present their protagonists in freedom, or even in brief stories or reflections in which they appear only partially.

*Los animales prodigiosos* are divided into three parts: "Persiones de la naturaleza", "Serpentario" and "Breviario mitológico". The first shows the decline in which the members of the fauna born in Antiquity are found. The second, as the name implies, deals only with ophidiomorphic beings; the latter is constituted by practical, artistic, commercial or social considerations – in a playful way, of course – with respect to mythological animals in our time, for example, taking care of the Sphinx thanks to a joint team of archaeologists and gerontologists, or the development of Gorgonism, a sculptural current based on the conversion of living beings to rock through technology. Broadly speaking, it can be seen in the description of the book what was already argued at the end of the previous section: the creatures appear degraded (enclosed), represented as something old, achacoso, or completely replaced by science, as in the case of "Gorgons or vanguardism in art", history in which the technological factor is fundamental. All of the above shows a pessimistic scenario, condensed in the following sentence, corresponding to the section of the tap: "man has exterminated several animal species through hunting, persecution or [...] through oblivion. [...] ignores the remedy to stop the destruction of thousands of years of fantasy." (Avilés, 1995, p. 217).

The degradation in this work can be observed, in the first place, in the fact that several of these animals are shown as prisoners in the bounded plots of a zoo: they are shown in a space and an order contrary to nature, with limits marked by men.<sup>9</sup> They are held captive (no longer free, fierce: threatening, in reference to Orsanic) in a place created by a rational enterprise: that of preserving, and showing, by being confined. It could be said that the mythical beast is exhibited: it is not believed in, but it is shown as a diversion, as something to be entertained with. In addition, it should be mentioned that there are quite a few cases in which visitors do not show the slightest respect: they throw food at the animals, which appear tired, achacosos and are depositories of mockery, stripped of their wonderful and lethal supernatural powers. In this regard, Luesakul points out that the current

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<sup>9</sup> The bestiary itself, as a genre, is an effort prior to that of the zoo: the study of nature, fixing it, presenting it, making it known to the reader, at least, as information.



bestiary "has diverse purposes, ranging from making jokes and satirizing traditions to reflecting philosophical thoughts or human deterioration in contemporary society" (Luesakul, 2008, p.147). In the same way, Fernández Porta comments that Avilés Fabila officiates "a slight but consistent trivialization of the effects of impression, especially in the section *Perversiones de la naturaleza*", (Fernández, 2002, p. 10). In fact, in this section there are texts such as "El grifo", "El mirmecolón", "De dragones", "Aviso en la jaula del ave fénix" or "Los nisanas". In all of them the mockery of the fantastic creature is constant, just as its representation is related to old age or submission to the human being, as detailed below –for the present analysis are taken, with one exception, only the texts located in the zoo–.

1) "El grifo" (p. 217 - 218). Of this, "lion's body, eagle's head and wings", it is said to be almost extinct because of human greed; "that one old and boring specimen", which gradually loses feathers, survived its peers, stalked to plunder their nests, made of jewelry and precious stones obtained by the animal. Another element of decadence is the pieces of the fortune on which the exhibited copy rests: they are "excellent forgeries". The curious age in front of the cage of the "poor and achacoso grifo", waiting to see him put a jewel (as if it were an egg).

2) "El Mirmecoleón" (p. 218). He is described "with the lion's front and ant's back, more than terrible it is comical". The mammal part insists on being a butcher while the insect part "works tirelessly", so the beast, desperate, even suffers from convulsions: the public, it would be said that, in a sadistic way, enjoys seeing her suffer. Of this creature Borges commented in the *Manual* that it arose from a mistranslation, "an inconceivable animal".

3) "De dragones" (p. 220). Caged, "they walk their boredom, they walk for hours [...] the limits of his prison." Not only are they held, but they have no fire. The phrase "Literature no longer uses its services" objectifies them, turning them into disused writing. The same thing happens in the last sentence of the text, when comparing them with weapons of war: "Ah, if some power –of those very bellicose– replaced armored vehicles and flamethrowers with dragons": technology appears as superior to the dragon.



4) "Aviso en la jaula del ave Fénix" (p. 221). It does not appear in the text, and is replaced by a sign, in which it is reported that every hundred years, "approximately at 12:30 p.m.", the rite after which it is reborn begins. Thus, the fabulous fact is reduced to mere spectacle.

5) "La hidra de Lerna" (p. 216 - 217). She is ridiculed, as visitors have fun throwing treats at her to see how she catches them with her nine heads. Polycephalous reptile, he appears stripped of the mortal powers pointed out by Borges: "Even when she slept, the poisonous air that surrounded her could be the death of a man" (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 87).

6) "La esfinge de Tebas" (p. 215). "The once cruel [...] she gets bored and remains almost silent [...] a little complexed", this because the riddle that Oedipus solved was "the only intelligent one in her repertoire", so the children, "between laughter and mockery" solve the simple riddles that he proposes to them.

7) "Los sátiros" (p. 215 - 216). They constitute an exceptional case, because inside their cage they live in a continuous bacchanal, so "they do not miss their freedom, better yet, it would seem that they never knew it", which is why they arouse the envy of visitors, who observe "the cage for weeks, increasingly sad not to be in it, they languish and die right there". Therefore, satyrs are among the few undegraded beings in this zoo. Those who observe them would like to be locked up with them, but there are guards and a sign that prohibit such interaction: the relationship between observer/fun, resident/despondency is reversed.

8) "Las quimeras del siglo XXI". Although it is not a descriptive text like the previous ones, but a reflection, since it is rehearsed on the fact of being able to create beings similar to mythological ones in the laboratory, it is addressed at this point by the relationship between technology and imaginary fauna. First, by chimera is meant not only this fantastic animal, but actually all the like: "Griffins, minotaurs, sphinxes, gorgons and other aberrations can come out of the laboratory" (p. 273). Then it is argued that creatures with such an origin would not cause any impact, but would be humiliated: "they would not cause people fear. Monsters made with a laser scalpel would at most accomplish some circus task of little responsibility, nothing more" (p. 273). This is because these monsters born of technology would lack a mystical origin, they would not be "the product of indignant



gods or of curses and conspiracies of sorcerers and demons" (p. 273 - 274), they would be deprived of "their wonderful capacity to terrorize". Avilés Fabila closes this text with this sentence: "The fear of the unknown, of the supernatural, has unfortunately been banished in this century in which everything is possible thanks to science" (p. 274). This text seems to be a perfect example of what Ospina, quoted above, argued about how science and technology have become ubiquitous in the imagination.

In short, this work shows a distance from the original splendor of these animals, whose symbolic power is diminished, relics of another era that have lost their link with the divine and their function in the collective imagination (according to Luesakul). As already mentioned, there are constant references to the old age, fragility or simplicity of the captives. At the same time, on more than one occasion technology appears, which is represented as superior to the supernatural. The zoo also shows visitors, the current civilization, represented by faceless characters, ignorant of their past, which they treat without respect and, in addition, this same attitude is the one they wield against the captive beast, whether real or imaginary, which is just a diversion, a prisoner to mock, or that it represents, at best, a visual entertainment (with the exception of the satyrs, the last stronghold of the past: image of a freedom of action lost today).

#### IV. "Apócrifamente hablando", to survive in deconstruction

*For unlikely travelers* it is –in similarity to *Los animales prodigiosos*– a "compilation of all the short or very short stories I have written in the last decade" (Eudave, 2012, p. 7). Divided into four parts, "Países que debo visitar algún día", "Apócrifamente hablando", "Animales y prodigios para algún jardín..." and "Un epílogo menos breve, pero con luna de cocodrilos", it is the second section that includes the mythological fauna: mermaids, cyclops, centaurs, basilisks, harpies, dragons, the sphinx, the minotaur, the chimera, and even beings of their own invention, such as the Agripians and the Astomos. The third part is not free of animals, because it shows an invisible monkey fond of ink, a centipede, snakes, ants, a variation of the Kafkaesque insect and an imaginary pet, which, obviously, only the protagonist can see. In the epilogue appear some crocodiles of dreamlike nature.



"Apócrifamente hablando" is an unorthodox mythological bestiary, according to the characteristics of the genre, already mentioned earlier in this article,<sup>10</sup> because:

[...] in the bestiary the 'is' predominates over the 'does' or, what is the same, the plot loses weight in favor of the portrait, a fact that brings it closer to the prose poem and the essay, and distances it from the narration [...] (Noguerol, 2012, p. 128).

Of course, some of these texts by Eudave are narratives, as will be seen later. Noguerol also comments, with regard to minifictional creation, that not only the bestiary is a recurring format, but also "other possible versions of some Greco-Latin myths [...] the revision of these plots and characters constitutes a fundamental resource in the micro-narrative modality" (Noguerol, 2014, p. 70). In this way, microlatists by "updating" such plots constitute themselves as creators of "new mythologies". Examples of the above will be addressed below, to which can be added "Minotaur without labyrinth", in which this character, very wise, leaves his dwelling to share his knowledge with human beings. These, "Seeing him, far from respecting him, from treating him as a mythical being, they killed him in one fell swoop. It was, without more, a genetic malformation or a clone"<sup>11</sup> (Eudave, 2012, p. 50). This plot is another clear example of the decline of the mythological creature: symbolic representation very adequate to show how scientific thought has imposed itself on magic: the knowledge of a semi-divine being is rejected, and it is confused with a mere product of technology, powerful and capable of erasing the past.

Next, to deepen, six texts of "Apócrifamente hablando" are analyzed.

1) "La mirada antigua". The text speaks of a book –the controversial *La genealogía ancestral*– in which it is established that "certain humans possess traits that are not of human nature", specifically, some mothers "are carriers of an ancient and macabre trait typical of a being called basilisk. This trait is the gaze that paralyzes, the gaze that kills" (p. 41). After such an argument, it is

<sup>10</sup> Although a full-fledged bestiary, according to what Fernández Porta postulated.

<sup>11</sup> This example is already referred to by Noguerol, who adds: "Eudave approaches in this way authors who, as [...] Avilés Fabila – in the aforementioned *Los animales prodigiosos*–, they denounce the lack of awareness of our time. (Noguerol, 2014, p. 72).



clear that no basilisk appears in this minifiction, but that of these only the characteristic already described is mentioned. This analogy points to the intimidating power of the gaze of either the mother or the father. Just as the parents identify with the mythological creature, the same goes for the mirror and the son or daughter:

The text makes a brief reference to mirrors as a powerful weapon to annihilate them, because only their own image fulminates them. / However, it cannot be any mirror, but one right in its image and likeness [...] the text throws up a millenary phrase perhaps mistranslated: from such a mother (or father) such a child. (Eudave, 2012, p. 42).

The basilisk ("this ancient and respected monster", says the narrative voice), is reduced to his gaze, an important element around which the text revolves, as demonstrated from the title and in the final mention of mirrors. Significantly, Borges, with whom Avilés Fabila agrees in saying that the imaginary fauna is extinguished by carelessness, states that "In the course of the ages, the basilisk is modified towards ugliness and horror and now it is forgotten [...] What does not change is the deadly virtue of his gaze"<sup>12</sup> (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 36). Thus, from this cross of snake with rooster, Eudave takes its most characteristic element to develop an analogy. In addition, it reverses the recurrent procedure in books such as *Bestiary*, in which an animal is clothed with human characteristics to talk about certain archetypes of people, because in "La mirada antigua" there are certain types of characters, the progenitors, who acquire a characteristic of the basilisk to explain one of its features (the hardness of its look and character).

2) "Habladurías". The text gives voice to the Harpies, which are also humanized, as there is no indication of their zoomorphic appearance (wings, claws). The only mention in terms of bodily

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<sup>12</sup> The Argentine author also mentions at the end of the section referring to the basilisk: "The Christian encyclopedists rejected the mythological fables of the *Pharsalia* and sought a rational explanation of the origin of the basilisk [...] The hypothesis that achieved the most favor was that of a contradictory and deformed egg, laid by a rooster and incubated by a snake or a toad" (Borges, p. 37); already from the time of the Encyclopedia the monster began to be filtered through reason.



elements is that relating to the "unclean belly",<sup>13</sup> described in the Borgean Manual: "we binged tremendously, and we liked to eat at feasts, for this reason [...] we have not an unclean belly, but a voluminous [...] Outside this troglodyte belly we are very graceful" (Eudave, 2012, p. 43). Again the same process described in "The Ancient Gaze" appears: the beast is humanized, or, rather, only one trait relative to its physiology is maintained, with which certain human characters are characterized. Also, in the same way, the title refers to that link between the protagonists and the mythological creature in question: the gossip that emerged at the banquets to which they attended, ended up showing them as despicable beings, causing the misfortune of other characters, such as Oedipus: "And gossip does not blame us! [...] This happens to us as swallows, because we like to eat and drink, because we are communicative, sociable and attentive" (pp. 43-44). Thus, the author deconstructs the history of the harpies, as in the case of her text of the basilisk: the protagonists are, in a playful way, a mirror of the winged monsters.

3) "Sobre dragones". In this text there is a conference on the non-existence of these beings, "protagonists of a number of stories, [...] of supercheries and of: conferences" (p. 46): such a description shows them as a mere narrative theme (not a corporeized being), which coincides with the phrase "Literature no longer uses its services", in "De dragones", by Avilés Fabila – although the latter is much more pessimistic. The speaker is a "specialist in *dragonry and other faunas*": the italics, of the author, thus equate to other types of creatures: they run with the same fate of the dragon. The overwhelming amount of information presented at the event "confirmed the existence of the monster, not the opposite" (p. 47), in addition to speaking of its universality, being present in various cultures, and physical power. After the request that those who still believed in dragons leave the room, one appears, huge, "who poured fire powerfully on the tent." It should be noted that the invitation to leave makes her safe, and denotes that the rapporteur was aware of the early appearance of the beast, whose reality, in fact, was confirmed, after the long previous presentation. From the outside, the narrator observes, along with another character. She mentions, during the

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<sup>13</sup> The "long and beautiful hair" is also mentioned, in correspondence with the "long and loose hair" of the *Manual*, but this element is not relevant in the development of the text.





attack, that this was "a spectacle of lights and stereophonic sounds that came out of the animal and flooded the sky" (p. 47): this phrase reifies it, by equating it, curiously, with devices, with technology linked to entertainment (a concept already observed in Avilés' work: the mythical being as fun). Near the end, the narrator's companion tells her, "He did well not to belittle the power of the imaginary." Although at the beginning the dragon is described as a narrative theme, a mere concept, its appearance becomes real: by transgressing the barrier between levels of fictionality (appearing as a tangible being in the eyes of the protagonist, after having been considered only a character in the stories referred to in the conference), it shows its reality as a literary being and as a symbolic being.

4) "El verdadero origen de la esfinge" (pp. 48 - 49). Much of what is stated in the title, an apocryphal version of the origin of the monster, is a story referred to by the grandfather of the narrative voice. The sphinx, "a very beautiful woman", summons gods of various religions to a banquet, to ask them about their beauty, which she considers a curse, because men "only saw their appearance and not their interior". They decide to help her and, oblivious to human sensibility, transform her.<sup>14</sup> A lagging god of little importance, after the departure of others, not understanding his sadness considers it an enigma, and then, tells him that "from now on for them to reach you they will have to decipher you". At the end of the story, grandpa "gave a mocking laugh that I didn't know where to put." The title is ironic, as the "true origin" is a story told by a burlesque narrator. The story referred to takes as its axis the dissatisfaction with the physical aspect: the sphinx is humanized, approaches a subject that is almost frivolous, and is stripped of the aura of dangerousness that was attributed to it: "it devastated the country of Thebes, proposing enigmas to men (because it had a human voice) and devouring those who did not know how to solve them" (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 70). The text becomes a *sui generis* renewal of the myth, as a nocturnal story, partly playful, partly universal in terms of the chosen background theme. On this occasion, unlike the first two texts of the author addressed above, there is no element of the monster with which to characterize any human

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<sup>14</sup> His new image corresponds to that of "The Greek Sphinx [which] has the head and breasts of a woman, the wings of a bird, and the body and feet of a lion" (Borges, p. 70).



character in a way that creates a reverse allegory: it is, therefore, an apocryphal version of the myth in its entirety.

5) "Una quimera es una quimera" (p. 51). This text is entirely a progression from the corporeal to the incorporeal, and then to the conceptual. Thus, with respect to the creatures referred to, there is talk of trying to extinguish them (corporeal), disappear (corporeal), not be able to find them (corporeal-incorporeal), verify "that it was one of the many impossible created by man" (incorporeal-conceptual), appear triumphant (conceptual), achieve its mission, because "it became immortal and more real than ever" (conceptual). From an animal that is sought, when it is not found, the chimera becomes recognized as an imaginary creation, which endures as a concept. Hence Eudave closes the text with which, to the chimeras, "if they are defined, they are". Thus, "Now, they inhabit the dictionaries of the world called as: *false idea or vain imagination*".<sup>15</sup> This corporeal-incorporeal-conceptual progression points to the process suffered by mythological creatures: from being considered real, as in the medieval bestiary, they become mere concepts, of which, that of the chimera is paradigmatic, among all the ancient imaginary fauna: "Over time, the Chimera tends to be 'the chimerical' [...] The incoherent [animal] form disappears and the word remains, to mean the impossible. *False idea, vain imagination*, is the definition of chimera that the dictionary now gives", (Borgesand Guerrero, 2009, p. 124).<sup>16</sup>

6) "Sobre la inspiración a base de tintas" (p. 57). This text is in the third section of *Para viajeros improbables*, "Animals and Wonders for Some Garden..." It should be noted its relationship with the *Manual de zoología fantástica*: a section dedicated to "The Ink Monkey" appears in this one, which consists of a sample of writing attributed to Wang Ta-Hai: it presents a creature from the Far East, "soft as a pillow. He is very fond of Chinese ink" (Borgesand Guerrero, 2009, p. 106), which he drinks after someone has stopped writing. Eudave, for his part, writes about a Chinese merchant selling

<sup>15</sup> Something similar happens in another text by the author, "Doble naturaleza", in which the centaurs "ceased to exist in the movement, condemned to be sad representations in paintings, engravings or sculptures [...] jealously guarded in books, illustrations or museums" (p. 40).

<sup>16</sup> Note, as a curious fact, that both the definition of the monster given by Eudave and that of the Argentine author is almost the same, even in italics in the originals.



invisible monkeys: the purchased copy is allowed easy access to the ink, which he drinks at night, and if he likes it, "he will gently remove the pillow from his head and put himself in its place [...] Its slow heartbeat dictates to our imagination [...] the most fascinating stories." As can be seen, the reference is obvious. However, the author reverses the process that occurs with the animal and the ink, because the first does not wait for someone to stop writing to drink, but, after performing this action, grants the writing of the hand of the one who has offered the ink. Presented in this way, the monkey is more supernatural than that of the *Manual*. However, two factors demerit and degrade this situation: the first is that they are invisible monkeys, which raises the following question: if it is not seen, will it exist?<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the text ends with the sentence: "Guaranteed success that now comes in papyrus certificates *made in China*." As in "The Chimeras of the XXI Century", by Avilés Fabila, the wonderful is produced in series, and in this case, with the addition that it comes from China. This is so to continue with the original reference, but also points out a current commercial element: if it comes from that country, it is of poor quality. The wonder is overshadowed by the doubt of its existence and the fact that it is a product made in series, and possible bad invoice, in addition. The old is mixed with the recent in the monkey, as well as in the guarantee: "papyrus certificates".

The mythological fauna addressed by Eudave is represented in various circumstances: the basilisks and harpies are humanized, the chimeras (like the centaurs) appear as a mere symbolic representation, the sphinx as a metaphor for female nonconformity in a story told by an old man, and the ink monkey as a product of possible dubious effectiveness marketed and exported from China. Thus, it does not appear explicitly degraded, as in the work of Avilés Fabila, but is reused in various ways, as a literary motif: deconstructed myths, in addition to creatures that are transmuted and recognized only as a symbol are the constant, although in some cases they appear subordinated to commercialism or the domestic sphere. Only in "Sobre dragones" is there a permanence of the power

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<sup>17</sup> With regard to invisibility, Noguerol argues that "In today's bestiaries paradoxically invisible animals often appear, which deny in their essence the 'scientific' character of the generic mold to which they ascribe. Borges and Guerrero opened the door to analyze the impossible by describing the 'A Bao A Qu', a minifiction of idealistic overtones that presents an animal with the ability to appear or disappear as observed or not (1977: 17). This is also the case with 'El Vandak', by René Avilés Fabila (1994: 182), and in Eudave with 'La mascota imaginaria', dead because its owner stopped attending to it for fear of the opinion of others" (Noguerol, 2014, p. 75).



of this being in the realm of the textual, without alterations. All of the above means that the mythical monsters survive, in this book, not embodied (as in the case of *Los animales prodigiosos*) for the most part, but as allegorical deconstruction of itself, which is an inverse process in itself with respect to the configuration of the mythological animal.

## V. Two tales by Fernando De León: the scientific reinvigoration of the monster

### 1) *Manual del comportamiento fantástico*.

This short story first appeared in Luvina magazine in its fall 2006 issue. Then he was included in the anthology *Sólo cuento I* (2009) published by the UNAM, in the book *Mudo espío* (2011), by its author, Fernando De León, and in *Tierras insólitas. Antología de cuento fantástico* (2013). The title is striking, very similar to that of the bestiary of Borges and Guerrero. In the narrative appears a work entitled precisely *Manual del comportamiento fantástico*, which will be discussed a little later. The story is set in the year 2121, when, in addition to there being cars of fictitious brands, and the disease of the marre, "or bad of the portrait" (consisting of those who used to a large extent the scintigraphic cameras -thus exposing themselves to gamma rays-, little by little they lose mobility, until they are immobile and suffer a final nervous breakdown), there is also the presence of mythological fauna. It is remarkable at first that a story in which these types of creatures appear is set in the future.

During a traffic jam, the taxi driver Grisóstomo saw how "a gigantic bird took between its claws the roof of the Vermilion Bostitch and took it to the flight with everything and driver" (De León, 2006, pp. 42-43). The protagonist is surprised when he discovers that no other driver noticed the presence of the animal. Despite the above, its existence was not in doubt: "even then genetics could do that and much more. In fact, after the mass extinction of 2077, geneticists set out to recreate the missing species" (p. 43). The narrative tells us that lacking a record of the zoology that populated reality, scientists turned "to all books: those of natural history and treatises of mythological beings alike. They began to create turtles, mermaids, cats, dragons, owls, unicorns, frogs, catoblepas, horses, krakens, sea snakes, dogs, griffins" (p. 43). This fact is similar to that described by Avilés Fabila in "Chimeras of the XXI century": mythological beings are created in the laboratory (in this case in conjunction with



the real ones, as if it were a medieval bestiary), which means that, in the same way as in the other text, they lack the wonder of which ancient supernatural animals are clothed: "now everything existed and a gigantic Roc bird had nothing amazing about it" (p. 43).

Thus, the surprise of the protagonist is not to have seen a being of that type, but that, precisely because it has an enormous size, no one saw it. To find out about the monster, the protagonist buys and reads "an ancient medieval manuscript that he obtained in one of the thousands of antique manuscripts that after the emergence of the new fauna abounded in every corner of the city" (p. 43). This coincides completely with the production of fantastic beings in laboratories, and also with an element of "On inspiration based on inks", by Eudave, because in that minifiction there is also a hybrid of ancient document fused with current commercial elements: the "papyrus certificates" are pairs of the "sale of ancient manuscripts", which, in addition, in both cases, they are produced in series. The *Manual del comportamiento fantástico* acquired by the taxi driver, in addition to being an ancient manuscript, has a current title. Incidentally, the existence of a publication like this indicates that in the end it was known which beings were mythological: information not available in laboratories, but yes, ironically, in the position of a spokesperson. Everything recorded above shows that not only the imaginary fauna is equated in De León's narration with the real one, but also that ancient wisdom is popularized, with which the supernatural becomes everyday.

The protagonist when reading discovers that the bird Roc acts in the time that lasts a blink, and in addition, only the last of its prey can see it, which explains why only he noticed its appearance. It is then that the title of the story is explained: Grisostomo understands how the aerial monster behaves. This one is portentous: when he preys on a second car, a grape-colored Adanada, the protagonist "saw the black chassis pass by captured by an imposing claw. The shadow he cast took time to pass, proving how large the body that generated it was" (p. 45). The man, excited, buys a dagger to defend himself from possible chicks if he is taken to the nest, several meters of rope, a parachute, puts a burner to get out there if necessary and also acquires an armored vest, to protect himself from the huge claws at the moment of being lifted into the air. Its existence until then simple,



boring and monotonous, described at the beginning of the text, takes as its axis the encounter with the bird Roc, which has broken its daily life.

Grisostom despairs that the announced day will not come: "He began to fear that he would die without having fallen prey to the bird Roc" (p. 45). He is then exposed to the solitude offered by a hill, outside the city, to facilitate the task of the monster. When the inevitable finally passes, the enthusiasm to know his destiny is fulfilled is manifested: "by the burner he saw the scaly skin of the bird's leg. Filled with a strange joy he touched her" (p. 45). Finally, already in the nest, the Roc bird dies, because as the *Manual* announced, only its last prey can look at it. However, the end for the man also came, because "The egg cracked with a loud crackling and the taxi driver experienced the secret pleasure of knowing himself food of a new wonder" (p. 45), since, victim of the marre just on the day of the meeting, he loses the mobility of the body.

The Roc bird is imposing, it is effective in its hunts by preying on drivers, it reproduces, and despite having a laboratory origin, it appears covered with a certain supernatural aura, being only seen by the last person it will hunt. While it is a product of technology, its behavior is, as the title advertises, fantastic. It also lives in a desert, on a summit, as Borges records in his bestiary, because it is a creature with origin in the Arab tradition. Thus, although a laboratory animal should not be fearsome, as mentioned before, because it lacks a supernatural origin, the Roc bird is formidable, worthy heir of those who sailed the sky in the stories of Antiquity. His appearance also breaks the daily life of the protagonist: wonder prevails over the normal.

## 2) *Un rastro de animales muertos*

In this text appears a basilisk, symbolic representation of the same devil, according to the biblical reference: it is half rooster, half snake.<sup>18</sup> In the second paragraph the protagonist, Julia, describes it as "a huge insect, the size of a dog [...] It was like a gut with four branch legs and small hooves", (2015,

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<sup>18</sup> It must be remembered that the devil metamorphoses into a serpent in the Bible. In the detailed article by Lucía Orsanic, "El basilisco, del bestiario al libro de caballerías castellano. The case of the *Palmerín de Olivia* (Salamanca, Juan de Porras, 1511)", addresses the origin, history, evolution and meanings of the creature in question.



p. 122). When disturbed by the woman with a shovel, he makes a sound between growling and squawking. She fails to see him in the eye, and watches him flee through a window. Then, he pursues him, to realize that "That rare animal had left in its wake a clear trail of death: birds, lizards, rats, squirrels and – the saddest thing – his beloved dog Tuca". (p. 123). This is the explanation of the title, the mortality left to the passage of the creature. Julia also falls into the same emotional state as Grisostomo, because after the encounter, she not only pursues her for revenge: "very soon she felt excited to have seen something that she had never seen before, in her considerably long life" (p. 123). Armed with a gun, she decides to go cross-country in pursuit of the murderer of her chickens and her pet, still not knowing what it is, without consulting her late husband's books, which, she was convinced, explained everything. Despite how difficult such a persecution could be, the woman does not lose track of the trail of dead animals. At this point it is necessary to point out that, in a similar way to the other text of De León, in which the mythological fauna is equated at the beginning with the real one, being equally recreated in the laboratory –although later the bird Roc stands out, being a hunter of humans– in this story the basilisk is imposed on the other creatures (from the same title), which do not resist the lethal power of his gaze.

The situation of the basilisk is painful for Julia, because after reflecting that he kills without wishing it, something like this seems a curse. However, "she became convinced that such a harmful animal should be hunted and was thrilled to be the one who was chasing it" (p. 124). Along with this new show of enthusiasm on the part of the protagonist, another description is offered: "mixture of snake with rooster and giant insect legs [...] he could not stop killing what he found in his path" (p. 124). After a chase through the open field, which consumes the rest of the day, the night encounter with the basilisk occurs in the open field. While trying to collect firewood, Julia plays in the dark "something cold and flaky, like a fat gut", after which she hears "a kind of scaly hiss", which she had never heard, and stays there, listening to "that strange noise that emitted, pitiful and terrible" (p. 125). Again alone, the woman reflects that this dangerous animal can be related only to madness, because it is not normal, and no one would have believed her if she told what happened. This is a parallel with the Roc bird from De León's first revised tale: only the protagonists can see it, even in





the case of the flying being, despite its size. Julia tries to convince herself that "The animal she saw was *strange*, only that, *strange*, and she was not going to be left with the doubt of what it was"<sup>19</sup> (p. 126), with which she tries to give normality to the basilisk.

Almost asleep from fatigue, although too restless, the protagonist hears a noise approaching. Then the meeting with Dr. Tario occurs. When he questions her about what she does there, she enters into a momentary silence, because, she thinks, she does not want to look like "a madwoman chasing a unique and *strange* animal"<sup>20</sup> (p. 126). He, however, is aware of the presence of the beast, of which he knows everything, and when it reappears, during the dialogue of the characters, he protects his interlocutor, throwing himself on her and covering her eyes. "Excuse me for behaving so *strangely* but trust me"<sup>21</sup> (p. 127), he tells her. Although in the text various mentions are made of the silhouette or legs of the basilisk, it is in this new contact when the noise that characterizes it stands out: "The animal made a strange noise, like a metallic purr, explosive, a crackle alternated with a serious hiss, like the one made by tall trees when they are shaken by the wind" (p. 127). Mentions of both the appearance of the creature and the sound it emits are important. The first are because they offer a fragmented description, which gradually appears throughout the narrative. References to sound become important when, later, Tario explains that not only the basilisk's gaze, by itself, is deadly. Lying on the ground, the characters feel it on them, but survive by not looking at it, until it moves away. After that, and already on her way to the doctor's cabin, Julia felt "a sudden consolation: that of being involved in a *strange* situation, because *strange* had been the beginning, *I miss* the animal; but then persecution had become normal and normal is disconcerting when one pursues something extraordinary"<sup>22</sup> (pp. 127-128). At this point it is necessary to explain the italics marked in the most recent four footnotes: in all four cases the word "stranger" is highlighted in relation to the basilisk: himself, the behavior of Tario, and the situation derived from the encounter with the being. The insistence of the narrative voice on this adjective is remarkable, because it indicates the process that

<sup>19</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>20</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>21</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>22</sup> Italics are mine.



Julia goes from the strange to the normal, as expressed in the previous quote: Julia tries to say that this animal does not have a defined nature, and with that in mind, the adjective "strange" is repeated, even in the voice of Tario, until the moment in which it is accepted that the strange is normal. However, the situation is not normalized, but Julia accepts that it is extraordinary:<sup>23</sup> the hunt for something supernatural approaches the everyday, by integrating into it another character, knowledgeable about the reality of the beast and has knowledge about it.

Once under shelter, the woman discovers that her host, like her late husband, has many books (in this case, four booksellers). Tario has knowledge, in both senses: not only does he know which monster they are facing, but also that knowledge he obtained thanks to the publications he keeps. In this narrative, unlike "Manual del comportamiento fantástico", the book does not appear popularized, mass-produced and sold en masse, a fusion of the old with the present: it is shown in its proper measure, as a repository of knowledge, practical at the time of confrontation. Remarkably, being surrounded by books, it is when Tario comments that "That kills everything in its path. The basilisk lives in the desert, creates the desert" (p. 128), an argument presented as an almost faithful Borgean quote: "The basilisk resides in the desert; rather, create the desert", (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 37). It is then that again the extraordinary – or wonderful – approaches the everyday, when the doctor, in his explanation of what is the beast with which they met, reflects on how its morphology does not have to be a problem to accept its reality, and thus equates the real fauna with the imaginary, by mentioning that

We consider it a mythological animal because all news about it almost always comes from books of mythology, but tell me, really, why shouldn't there be an animal like the basilisk? Isn't the elephant strange? Isn't the giraffe formidable? What problem is there with a snake that has bird legs and moves like a mantis the size of a wolf? (p. 128).

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<sup>23</sup> It could be said that wonderful, to remember Todorov: from strange or "normal" it becomes wonderful, or extraordinary, so it would seem that Julia accepts the wonderful situation in which she is immersed.



These arguments seem to bring the wonderful closer to the everyday, by equating the morphology of the basilisk to others that might not be common. On the other hand, as Ospina comments, science has come into our imagination to remain and manifest. Thus, Tario adds that the basilisk kills as it does thanks to its gaze in conjunction with the sound it emits:

[...] living is [...] a pattern of behavior, the most ingrained that exists [...] an ancient pattern, but a pattern at last; and death is also another pattern of behavior, one that, when activated, we stop living instantly [...] most of our behavior, the most elementary and profound, takes place on a *neural level* impossible to modify. [...] the basilisk is not death itself, but almost, because that rare and bestial animal is actually the *switch* that activates our neural *engram* of death: if we look into the eyes and it makes that strange noise we hear tonight, the sum of image and sound puts us in lifeless "mode". We cannot avoid it, it is *configured in this way in the most animal part of the brain*, the one that we share with the lizards and that lasts in every living being. It does not matter if we are more reflective or intelligent than a dog or a chicken, when we see the basilisk in the eyes we will fall dead [...] <sup>24</sup> (2002, p. 129).

The previous fragment is a scientific explanation of how the basilisk kills: in italics all the terms that prove it are highlighted. This strips the creature of any supernatural element. Like the Roc bird of the previous narrative, both beings have a relationship with science, to a greater or lesser degree, since one is created by it, and another is endowed with an explanation based on it. It is worth mentioning that, although the gaze of the basilisk is its main characteristic, as already said before, the way of killing attributed to the sound it emits is not the creation of De León. Borges reports that in a passage of book IX of the *Farsalia* it reads: "The blood of Medusa, because in this / site produced the armed basilisk / in tongue and eyes of insanity plague" (Borges and Guerrero, 2009, p. 37). Similarly, the basilisk is described by Isidore of Seville:

[...] she is the queen of snakes, in such a way that they all flee to her, because she kills them with her breath and man with her sight [...] *Sibilus* is the same basilisk, and it is given this name

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<sup>24</sup> Italics are mine.



because with its whistle it kills before it bites [...] (De Sevilla, 1951, cited by Orsanic, 2019, pp. 7-8).

The protagonists stay to sleep in the cabin, where Julia "recognized a different feeling: [...] a discomfort that began to put her in the place of the animal and to feel a certain mercy for him. I would have dreamed of the mighty basilisk" (p. 130). These lines are significant, because the woman experiences something different from the impulse to hunt the monster, and recognizes, on the contrary, empathy towards it. Also that the narrative voice uses the adjective "powerful" is remarkable. A few shots awaken the host and his guest. Outside, a local has died, after looking at the lethal eyes. As soon as the creature gets above the human being by killing one of them, Tario devises a plan to capture it, which succeeds, by using goggles and drops to dilate the pupil: "Seeing blurred will allow us to make the image of the basilisk incomplete and vague. This must be enough so that in our mind the engram of death is not activated" (p. 131), a plan that appeals to rationality, according to the explanation offered by the doctor hours before. Once captured and with his head inside a hood, they discovered that "the yellow of his skin were feathers and not scales" (p. 132), while Julia caressed him to calm him. At the same time, "She kept thinking that she had never seen something so strange and in the background so beautiful and terrible: the image of death." Finally, the captors take the animal to the desert, its natural habitat, and when they let go, but not before putting on drops and goggles again, "The basilisk rubbed its back against Julia like a complacent cat and then walked away" (p. 132). Thus, the dangerous monster is reduced to a zalamero being, which kills without the purpose of doing so, and which is completely harmless, once neutralized the situation of risk that activates the engram of death.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Orsanic quotes "However, it is a beautiful animal, of beautiful color stained with white. But the same happens with many things that are attractive, but bad" (Malaxecheverría, 1986, quoted by Orsanic, 2019, p. 10). In De León's text, the basilisk appears stripped of the moralizing character, and is seen as a biological being: beautiful, but dangerous, because it causes death without wishing it. Thus, "bad" is replaced by "dangerous", since there is no moralizing eagerness, but the monster appears equated to the real fauna.



In De León's narratives, both the roc bird and the basilisk appear at first as supernatural beings, although later explained through rational discourse. This does not diminish the physical power of each one, protected in his biology and not in a divine endorsement. Both, however, are fragile to a certain extent, since the first dies (and his chick hatches before a defenseless prey, a fortuitous fact that saves him from the dagger of the taxi driver) while the second is caught, by nullifying the way in which it can be dangerous, and, before its release, it is even zalamero and nothing wild. In other words, both creatures, by showing fragility and being explained through science, are largely equated to the existing fauna, especially the Roc bird, which has the same origin as this (laboratory), although Also Dr. Tario offers arguments as to why the basilisk can be considered as common as the elephant or the giraffe, which is confirmed after the explanation of his lethal powers and his capture. Thus, in this pair of narratives, the mythological animals are shown as if they were real, with the consequences that this could have, although the Roc bird retains an element of the supernatural: only its last prey can see it, a fantastic fact explained in a manual. Although they appear equated to non-mythological zoology and explained from science, both monsters are represented in the most positive way in the texts analyzed: in freedom and as deadly as in ancient or medieval legends, both are successful as biological beings, which is how they are shown (although their supernatural aura still remains: they destroy the boring daily life of the protagonists). A situation that is more favorable with respect to the deteriorated captive beings of the Avilés Fabila Zoo, and a very different way of surviving time, with respect to the deconstructions of Eudave: the Roc bird and the basilisk retain their corporeity, their faculties and freedom.

## Conclusions

The texts analyzed in this article are, of course, only a partial sample of how mythological fauna is represented in the current narrative. A larger textual sample would be needed to determine in what general way it is represented in the literary works of our time. However, it can be said that the three authors present the survival of these monsters, as a literary motif, in a different way, it could almost be said that antithetical: where there is a zoo, on the other hand, there are animals in freedom, where



some are decadent, on the other hand, they survive as a symbol or deconstructed history, where they continue in an abstract way, on another side they are still splendid and dangerous. The same thing happens with the way in which information is obtained about them: when they are exposed behind the bars of the zoo and signs in it (Avilés Fabila), from different narrators —self-digestible, extradiegetic—, dictionaries, books —controversial, with title and references to their content—, conferences, confessions of merchants: in short, oral or written communication (Eudave) and ancient medieval manuscripts —very popularized— and books —shown as discrete objects, en bloc, and as preservers of knowledge to which a general allusion is made— (De León). In all cases, the means of information is related to the way in which the monster is exposed: prisoner exhibited and degraded (*Los animales prodigiosos*), mythological deconstruction or conceptual permanence ("Apocryphally speaking") and being biological created en masse in the laboratory or as natural as the elephant or the giraffe (the texts of De León). Thus, it can be concluded that there is no single way in which these beings are represented, but several: as a symbol come to an end (the mythological monster without purpose: Luesakul) by the replacement of magical thinking by the scientist, as a symbol deconstructed from the recreation of ancient myths (update of ancient legends: Noguerol) or linguistic assimilation, and as a reinvigorated symbol, precisely, thanks to scientific thought. It is interesting to note how the representations of Avilés Fabila and De León are antithetical: the creature come to less because of rationality, deprived of its magical powers, and the monster revitalized because of science, endowed with biological and even supernatural powers – both cases linked, in a semi-indirect way, to how the real fauna is perceived: some captive specimens in the zoo, and the mass extinction of 2077, countered by the laboratory recreation of the species— while the representation of Eudave is alternate, showing him as merely imaginary, symbolic, deconstructed. In all, however, permeates scientific thought (Ospina), the exhaustion of magic, or the symbol on bodily reality – an alternative procedure to the embodiment of the monster: instead of a claim of it from technology, its acceptance as a symbol and reuse and recoding as a literary concept – all facts that point to current models of thought, in contrast to the ancient or medieval bestiaries, characterized by showing other ways of thinking and conceiving reality, in times different from ours. The mythological fauna, then, persists to



show us, in addition to the general way in which our time is conceived, the thought and message of each author who uses them in his literature.

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