This volume awakens the monster as an academic topic. Combining John Block Friedman’s historical-literary approach with Jeffrey J. Cohen’s theoretical concerns, Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle have marshaled chapters that comprise a seminal work for everyone interested in the monstrous. Wide-ranging chapters work through various historical and geographic views of monstrosity, from the African Mami Wata to Pokémon. Theoretical chapters consider contemporary views of what a monster is and why we care about them as we do. Taken together, the essays in The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous reveal that monsters appear in every culture and haunt each of us in different ways, or as Mittman says, the monstrous “calls into question our (their, anyone’s) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us … to acknowledge the failures of our systems of categorization.”

David Sprunger, Concordia College, Minnesota, USA

An impressively broad and thoughtful collection of the ways in which many cultures, ancient and modern, have used monsters to think about what it means to be human. Lavishly illustrated and ambitious in scope, this book enlarges the reader’s imagination.

Professor Lorraine Daston, Director of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Germany
The *Ashgate Research Companions* are designed to offer scholars and graduate students a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the-art review of current research in a particular area. The companions’ editors bring together a team of respected and experienced experts to write chapters on the key issues in their speciality, providing a comprehensive reference to the field.
The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous

Edited by
ASA SIMON MITTMAN
California State University, Chico, USA
WITH
PETER J. DENDLE
Pennsylvania State University, Mont Alto, USA

ASHGATE
Contents

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11 List of Figures ix 11
12 List of Contributors x 12
13 Acknowledgments xvi 13
14 Preface by John Block Friedman xxv 14
15
16 Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies 1 16
17 Asa Simon Mittman 17
18
19
20 PART I: HISTORY OF MONSTROSITY 20
21
22 1 The Monstrous Caribbean 17 22
23 Persephone Braham 23
24
25 2 The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity 25
26 from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment 49 26
27 Surekha Davies 27
28
29 3 Beauteous Beast: The Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa 77 29
30 Henry John Drewal 30
31
32 4 Rejecting and Embracing 32
33 the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome 103 33
34 Debbie Felton 34
35
36 5 Early Modern Past to Postmodern Future: Changing Discourses 36
37 of Japanese Monsters 133 37
38 Michael Dylan Foster 38
39
40 6 On the Monstrous in the Islamic Visual Tradition 151 40
41 Francesca Leoni 41
42
43
44
45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Human of the Heart: Pitiful Oni in Medieval Japan</td>
<td>Michelle Osterfeld Li</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Maya “Cosmic Monster” as a Political and Religious Symbol</td>
<td>Matthew Looper</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Monsters Lift the Veil: Chinese Animal Hybrids and Processes of</td>
<td>Karin Myhre</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>From Hideous to Hedonist: The Changing Face of the</td>
<td>Abigail Lee Six and Hannah</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nineteenth-century Monster</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali: Medieval</td>
<td>Karl Steel</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture</td>
<td>Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>PART II: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO MONSTROSITY</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Posthuman Teratology</td>
<td>Patricia MacCormack</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the Vagina Dentata</td>
<td>Sarah Alison Miller</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Postcolonial Monsters: A Conversation with Partha Mitter</td>
<td>Partha Mitter, with Asa Simon</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mittman and Peter Dendle</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity</td>
<td>Dana Oswald</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages</td>
<td>Debra Higgs Strickland</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters</td>
<td>Chet Van Duzer</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
For Grendel
Welcome into the hall
List of Figures

0.1 The Heap, Hillman Comics, 1940
1.1 Christopher Columbus arrives in the Caribbean surrounded by sirens and tritons, Jan van der Straet, 1592, published by Theodor de Bry in Americae pars quarta (Frankfurt, 1594). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.
1.3 A cannibal feast among the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil, published by Theodor de Bry, Americae tertia pars memorabilis provinciae Brasiliæ historiam (Frankfurt, 1592). Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, John Hay Library.
2.1 P. Melanchthon and M. Luther, Deutung der zwei gewöhnlichen figuren Baptesels zu Freyburg en Meyssen funden, mit anzaugung des jungstentags (Wittenberg, 1523), sigs [A.i.v.–A.ii.r.], Papal Ass and Monk Calf, Classmark F152.d.1.30 (reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).
2.3 Ulisse Aldrovandi, Monstrorum historia (Bologna, 1642), p. 18, one of the Gonzales sisters, Classmark M.13.43 (reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).
2.4 Ulisse Aldrovandi, Monstrorum historia (Bologna, 1642), p. 11, four-eyed Ethiopian, Classmark M.13.43 (reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).
3.1 Dona Fish, Ovimbundu people, ca. 1950–1960, wood, pigment, metal, sacrificial material, 75 cm, Fowler Museum.
3.2 Mami Wata shrine figure, Annang Ibibio peoples, Nigeria, 1950s–1960s, wood, pigment, metal, sacrificial materials, 87.6 cm, Michael J. Carlos Museum, Emory University, 1994.3.9. Photograph by Bruce White.
3.3 Sowei/Nowo headdress, Sherbro-Bulom peoples, Sierra Leone, late nineteenth century, wood, pigment, 41.9 cm, Fowler Museum X65.4778. Gift of the Wellcome Trust.
1. 3.4 Adolph Friedlander Company (possibly Christian Bettels), Der Schlangenbandiger (The Snake Charmer), originally commissioned 1880s, reprinted 1955, chromolithograph (reprinted from the original by the Shree Ram Calendar Company, Bombay, India), 35.6 cm. Henry John Drewal and Sarah K. Khan Collection. 35.6 cm. Henry John Drewal and Sarah K. Khan Collection. 91 5
2. 3.5 Photograph of a water spirit headdress, J.A. Green, Niger River Delta town of Bonny, by 1901. Photograph courtesy of the Nigerian National Museum, neg. no. 106.94.17. 93 8
3. 3.6 Kwame Akoto, aka Almighty God (Kumase, Ghana, b. 1950), Do Not Go to Maame Water, 2001(?), board, oil paint, 61 x 81.3 cm, Fowler Museum, x2007.2.1. Gift of Doran H. Ross. 98 11
4. 3.7 Daniel Larya, aka Sowwy (b. 1966, Accra, Ghana), Splash, ca. 1995, paint on canvas, Ernie Wolfe Gallery, Los Angeles. 99 13
5. 4.1 Armed with his lightning bolt, Zeus battles the winged, serpent-legged Typhoeus. Greek (Chalidian) black-figure hydria (water-jug), ca. 540 BCE. 109 16
6. 4.2 Athena fighting the giant Alkyoneus, who gained strength whenever he touched his mother, Earth. Eastern frieze, Great Altar of Pergamon, first half of the second century BCE. 110 19
7. 4.3 Heracles has captured Cerberus. Caeretan black-figure hydria attributed to the Eagle Painter, ca. 525 BCE. Note the snakes emanating from Cerberus’s heads. 117 22
8. 4.4 Scylla. Etruscan cinerary urn, second century BCE (?)
9. 5.1 Mōryō from Wakan-Sansaizue. Photograph by the author. 137 24
10. 5.2 Playful image of a kappa used on a sign urging people to “work together to make a livable environment” (Shizuoka Prefecture). Photograph by the author. 144 27
11. 5.3 Close-up of bronze figurine of Mizuki’s tenjōname in Sakaiminato. Photograph by the author. 145 29
12. 5.4 Bronze figurine of Mizuki’s kuchi-sake-onna in Sakaiminato. The cute, almost comical, image is typical of Mizuki’s manga style; while retaining features of the monster of legend, the creature is domesticated enough for popular consumption. Photograph by the author. 149 34
16. 6.4 161 44
17. 6.5 161 44
18. 6.6 161 44
19. 6.7 161 44
20. 6.8 161 44
21. 6.9 161 44
22. 6.10 161 44
23. 6.11 161 44
24. 6.12 161 44
25. 6.13 161 44
26. 6.14 161 44
27. 6.15 161 44
28. 6.16 161 44
29. 6.17 161 44
30. 6.18 161 44
31. 6.19 161 44
32. 6.20 161 44
33. 6.21 161 44
34. 6.22 161 44
35. 6.23 161 44
36. 6.24 161 44
37. 6.25 161 44
38. 6.26 161 44
39. 6.27 161 44
40. 6.28 161 44
41. 6.29 161 44
42. 6.30 161 44
43. 6.31 161 44
44. 6.32 161 44
45. 6.33 161 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Rustam kills the <em>div-i safid</em> (white demon). <em>Shahnama</em> of Muhammad Juki, Herat, ca. 1440. Royal Asiatic Society, London, Ms. 239, folio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Tahir Shah defeats the <em>divs. Shahnama</em> of Shah Tahmasp, Tabriz, ca. 1525. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1970.301.3 (photo credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource NY)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>“Hell of Measures (hell 2),” from <em>Scroll of Hells (Jigoku zōshi)</em>, twelfth century, one scroll (photograph provided by Nara National Museum, the Collection from Nara National Museum).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>“Hell of the Iron Mortar (hell 3),” from <em>Scroll of Hells</em>, see details for Figure 7.1 (photograph provided by Nara National Museum, the Collection from Nara National Museum).</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Statue of Zōchōten (Sanskrit: Virudhaka), a directional guardian (south), standing on a <em>jaki</em>, ca. 747 (photograph provided by Nara National Museum).</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Scene depicting one of three types of suffering of <em>gaki</em> who eat the ashes of the cremated, as described in the <em>Sutra of Meditation on the Correct Teaching</em> (Zhengfa nianchu jing in Chinese or Shōbō nenjo kyō in Japanese). From <em>Scroll of Hungry Ghosts (Gaki zōshi)</em>, twelfth century (image: TNM Image Archives; source: <a href="http://TMNArchives.jp/">http://TMNArchives.jp/</a>).</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>One of the Buddha’s disciples, Ananda, listens to the suffering of a flaming-mouth <em>gaki</em>. From <em>Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts (Gaki zōshi)</em>, twelfth century (image: TNM Image Archives; source: <a href="http://TMNArchives.jp/">http://TMNArchives.jp/</a>).</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Copan, Margarita facade, detail. Drawing by the author.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Piedras Negras Stela 6, drawing by David Stuart, <em>Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions</em>, vol. 9, part 1, Piedras Negras (reproduced courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College).</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Yaxchilán Structure 44, Step III, drawing by Ian Graham, <em>Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions</em>, vol. 3, part 3, Yaxchilán (reproduced courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College).</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Quiriguá Zoomorph B, views of south and east sides with rollout of tail. Drawings by the author; tail rollout adapted from drawing by Andrea Stone.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Diagram detailing part of the <em>Taotie</em> or monster mask motif (Columbia Asia for Educators website).</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Detail of four-ram <em>fang zun</em>. Anyang, <em>Great Bronze Age</em>, plate 20.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Four-ram <em>fang zun</em>.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Painted stucco figures of monsters. Astâna, tomb iii. 2. First half of eighth century.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Vaîrâvana and Retinue of Yakṣas. Dunhuang, Five Dynasties, mid tenth century. British Museum, Stein Painting 26.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>Alexander’s army versus gigantic Saracen Cyclopes, <em>Romance of Alexander</em>.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>London, BL, MS Royal 20.B.xx, fol. 79v (detail) (© British Library Board).</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>Monstrous, marginal Jew, Rutland Psalter. London, BL, Add. MS 62925, fol.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23v (detail) (© British Library Board).</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.10</td>
<td>Ethiopian head and hybrid. Rutland Psalter. London, BL, Add. MS 62925, fol.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26r (detail) (© British Library Board).</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.11</td>
<td>Antichrist (far left) and henchmen, Gulbenkian Apocalypse. Lisbon, Museu</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calouste Gulbenkian, MS L.A. 139, fol. 22v (detail) (source: Courtauld</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institute Gallery).</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>Hereford <em>Mappamundi</em>, circa 1285 (reproduced by kind permission of the</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dean and Chapter of Hereford and the Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust).</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>BL MS Add. 28681, f. 9r, Psalter map, Africa (© British Library Board).</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>Martin Waldseemüller, <em>Carta marina</em> (1516), India monstrous races (courtesy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the Library of Congress).</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>Burgo de Osma Beatus map, Cod. 1, ff. 34v-35r (Cibdulo de la Catedral).</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.5</td>
<td><em>Mappamundi</em> (circa 1180), Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CLM 7785,</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. 2v (by permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek).</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>Martin Waldseemüller, <em>Carta marina</em> (1516), South America detail,</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cannibals, opossum (courtesy of the Library of Congress).</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

List of Figures

xiii
List of Contributors

Persephone Braham received her BA in political science from Columbia University and her PhD in Spanish from the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico (2004) and numerous articles on monsters in Latin American literature and film. She is the Director of the Latin American and Iberian Studies program at the University of Delaware, where she teaches Latin American literatures and cultures.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is Professor of English and Director of the Medieval and Early Modern Studies Institute at the George Washington University. His books include Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain; Medieval Identity Machines; and Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages. He is the editor of the collections Cultural Diversity in Medieval Britain; The Postcolonial Middle Ages; and Monster Theory: Reading Culture.

Surekha Davies is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of History, Classics, and Archaeology at Birkbeck. Her research interests include cultural encounters, travel writing, the history of knowledge, geographical exploration, cartography, monstrous bodies and global medicine ca.1400–1800. Her current project examines representations of African, Asian, and American peoples across several textual genres. She has published articles in Imago Mundi and Terrae Incognitae, and a forthcoming article, ‘America and Amerindians in Sebastian Münster’s Cosmographiae universalis libri VI (1550)’ will appear in Renaissance Studies (2011). She is preparing a monograph provisionally entitled America Newly Described: Ethnography and Imagery on European Maps, 1500–1650. She is also co-editing, with Neil L. Whitehead, a special issue of History and Anthropology.

Peter Dendle is an Associate Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, Mont Alto, where his research focuses on constructs of the demonic past and present. His publications include two monographs (Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature, 2001, and The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia, 2001), two more to appear shortly (Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England and a zombie movie follow-up book), and numerous articles on medieval and modern literature, folklore, and ritual.
Henry John Drewal received his BA from Hamilton College. After graduation, he joined the Peace Corps, and during his two years in Nigeria apprenticed himself to a Yoruba sculptor. That experience was transformative. He studied at Columbia University in African Studies with an interdisciplinary specialization in African art history and culture, receiving two Masters degrees and a PhD. Since 1991, he has been the Evjue-Bascom Professor of Art History and Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Adjunct Curator of African Art at the Chazen Museum of Art, UW-Madison. He has published several books and edited volumes and many articles on African/African Diaspora arts, and curated several major exhibitions, among them *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought; Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe; Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas;* and most recently *Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria,* which opened in Spain.

Debbie Felton is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. In addition to her book *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost Stories from Classical Antiquity,* she has published on various aspects of folklore in classical literature. Her current project is a book on serial killers in the ancient world.

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Introduction
The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies

Asa Simon Mittman

Monsters do a great deal of cultural work, but they do not do it nicely.¹ They not only challenge and question; they trouble, they worry, they haunt. They break and tear and rend cultures, all the while constructing them and propping them up. They swallow up our cultural mores and expectations, and then, becoming what they eat, they reflect back to us our own faces, made disgusting or, perhaps, revealed to always have been so. It is not only the Doppelgänger of Shelley or Poe that is our evil twin. All monsters—from headless (but human?) blemmyes to bestial dragons to the amorphous, disembodied forces of the virus—all “monsters” are our constructions, even those that can clearly be traced to “real,” scientifically known beings (conjoined twins and hermaphrodites,² for example, as seen through pre-modern lenses); through the processes by which we construct or reconstruct them, we categorize, name, and define them, and thereby grant them anthropocentric meaning that makes them “ours.”

But why should we study them? Why should we read, write, and teach about monsters and the monstrous? Why should we use them as theoretical constructs to apply to other subjects? I will try here to offer some initial answers, as well as frame the necessarily heterogeneous contents of this volume. At the very outset, though, I wish to note my amazement that, in the space of a few years, the study of monsters has moved from the absolute periphery—perhaps its logical starting point—to a much more central position in academics.

I will begin with an anecdote: during a job interview a few years ago, I was asked: “Where do you see yourself in 20 years?” I replied: “I’d like to be the head of the world’s first academic center for Monster Studies.” After this session of the interview, a member of the department called me into his office. He told me that he

¹ My thanks to Marcus Hensel for his helpful comments on a draft of this essay.
² These figures are discussed in Michel Foucault, Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–75, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 66–75.
had been teaching in the program for 50 years, and that he had some advice for me. In what I think he intended as a gruffly avuncular manner, he leaned on his desk and said: “Listen, Asa, you’ve got to drop all this monster stuff and start doing real scholarship.”

I really did not know what to make of this at the time, but have thought about it quite a lot since. “Drop all this monster stuff.” “Real scholarship.” What is “real scholarship?” What constitutes a worthwhile subject of study? What was I supposed to be working on? For a medieval art historian, perhaps images of Jesus or cathedral architecture or illustrations of saint’s lives would be seen as “real.” But not monsters, and certainly not the made-up field of “Monster Studies” or, as Jeffery Jerome Cohen (whose ground-breaking work appears like a leitmotif throughout these essays) first phrased it, “Monster Theory,” a phrase that serves as the title of his collection of essays from 1996 that in some ways can be seen as having inaugurated the field.3

Still, and with all due deference to Cohen (who makes no such claim) and his insightful work, the study of monsters can hardly be said to have begun in 1996. The essays in this collection—exemplary rather than encyclopedic4—examine a wide range of significant texts, images, and other forms of important cultural representations, some scholarly and others not, from literary and artistic to scientific and geographical, from theoretical to theological to mythological, and ranging from the most ancient of history to the present day, and from Africa to Europe to Asia to the Americas. The Epic of Gilgamesh, replete with monstrosity as a central theme, is the world’s earliest extant epic, written in Sumerian around 2000 BCE.5 Debbie Felton examines the vast range of monstrosity in the classical world, from Gilgamesh forward. Karin Myhre opens her study of China with monsters contemporaneous to those in the ancient West, focusing on taotie masks that “function as a central decorative motif” in Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600–1000 BCE) art, and carries her discussion up to the twentieth century. Matthew Looper finds monstrous figures in the art of the Maya of the Classic (ca. 250–900 CE)

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3 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), Monster Theory: Reading Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). The study of monsters has gone by a number of terms, including not only the new “Monster Studies” and “Monster Theory.” An older term is “teratology,” from the Greek τέρας (monster, prodigy), primarily used in the Enlightenment to refer to the medical study of “unnatural births.” The Oxford English Dictionary attests to its usage as early as 1678 to refer to “a discourse of prodigies and wonders.” A century and a half later, in 1842, the term is first attested to refer to its more common usage, “the study of monstrosities or abnormal formations in animals or plants.” (teratology, n., 2nd edn, 1989; online version November 2010, <http://oed.com:80/Entry/199333>, accessed March 12, 2011. Earlier version first published in New English Dictionary, 1911.) The term has, though, recently returned to its original broader valence, appearing in several essays here to refer to the study of monsters more generally.

4 Other volumes are in progress of more encyclopedic nature, such as the forthcoming Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

and Post-classic (ca. 450–1500 CE) periods, more or less equating to the period covered by Karl Steel in his work on the European Middle Ages, and with much chronological overlap with Francesca Leoni’s essay on the monstrous in the Islamic visual tradition from the tenth through the sixteenth centuries. Surekha Davies examines the early modern period, and Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson cover the fertile nineteenth century. Michelle Li focuses on Japanese monsters in the eighth through the sixteenth centuries, and Michael Dylan Foster then carries them through to the present, where they are juxtaposed with Jeffrey Weinstock’s work on present-day monstrosity in the West. Persephone Braham tackles the monstrous Caribbean, beginning in 1492, also concluding in the present. Henry Drewal examines the monstrous in modern Africa. And this list only covers the first part of this collection, containing a series of geo-historical essays.

What are we to make, then, of the assertion that the study of monsters is not “real scholarship,” in light of this tremendous breadth of global cultural interest? In the European tradition, for example, some of the most influential scholars of the early Christian and medieval periods sweated over the definition and etymology of monstra [monster], and the problem of the presence of monsters within God’s supposedly perfect creation. Influential passages by Augustine and Isidore are cited in many works that cover the subject, and by Chet Van Duzer, Karl Steel, and Debbie Felton, here.

We can, though, tread further back, to the Roman period, when, in the first century of the common era, Pliny the Elder could be said to have been a scholarly practitioner of Monster Studies, writing at length about the wonders at the edges of the known world, as well as others closer to home; and we might travel back to his source for these, Herodotus, the putative “Father of History” himself; and to two influential sources, Megasthenses (ca. 350–290 BCE), Greek ambassador to India, and Ctesias of Cnidus, a Greek writer of the fifth-century BCE, who probably journeyed to the ‘East,’ where he claims to have seen wondrous peoples and animals. Both wrote now fragmentary texts called Indica.

Of course, as a modern academic field of study and theoretical discipline, Monster Studies is relatively new on the horizon, the most recent in a long series of thematic fields from Women’s Studies to Gender Studies to Transgender Studies, from Africana Studies to Peace Studies to Jewish Studies. But Jeffrey Cohen’s Monster Theory is 15 years old, and a great wealth of scholarly literature on the monstrous is available. The challenge of this volume, and this introduction, then, is not a paucity of scholarship—as it might have been 20 years ago—but an overabundance thereof.

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Still, there is one apparent difference between Monster Studies and these other thematic disciplines: monsters, of course, do not exist. To assert that they do is to enter into the realm of cryptozoology, as carefully articulated by Peter Dendle, co-editor of this collection. I am often asked if medieval people believed that the monsters—the one-legged men, elves, dragons and so on—were real. My colleagues working on monsters in other subject areas meet the equivalent questions. The short (if slightly misleading) answer is generally yes, they did. This binary of real and unreal, though, is as problematic when applied to monsters as it is when applied to scholarship. In both cases, there are two troubling implications: first, they suggest that fictitious or constructed subjects are not worthy of study (though who questions the study of Shakespeare’s Puck, or of Beowulf himself?) Second, they imply that the “real” and “unreal” exist in a binary arrangement, while careful consideration of the monstrous reveals a great deal of what Cohen has termed (in another context) “difficult middles.”

The reality of monsters (or the belief therein) has been discussed in several studies. Cohen, arguing for the “simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster’s composition,” directly answers the question:

Perhaps it is time to ask the question that always arises when the monster is discussed seriously ... Do monsters really exist?

Surely they must, for if they do not, how could we?

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8 For a full discussion of this in regard to the European Middle Ages, see Asa Simon Mittman and Susan Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts: The ‘Wonders of the East’ in the Beowulf Manuscript* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, forthcoming), chapter 6: “Framing ‘the Real’: Spatial Relations on the Page and in the World.”


10 Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 20. This article, foundational to the field, was the subject of a roundtable which I organized at the 44th International Congress on Medieval Studies in 2009, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses (A Roundtable),” featuring Larissa Tracy, Mary Kate Hurley, Karma de Gruy, Stuart Kane, Jeff Massey, Derek Newman-Stille, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Each thesis was examined and discussed, and the influence of the work as a whole considered. The standing-room only attendance spoke to the interest in the subject and the positive tone and tenor of the discussion confirmed the inclusive nature of the article and the field. The roundtable was sponsored by MEARCSTAPA (Monsters: the Experimental Association for the Research of Cryptozoology through Scholarly Theory And Practical Application), an academic association that takes its acronymic title from the Old English for border-walker, one of the terms applied to Grendel and his mother in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (R.D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles (eds), *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 4th edn [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008], line 1348). Note: all quotations from *Beowulf* are from this edition, and all translations are my own.
I would like to briefly tackle the question again, from two angles: the localized beliefs of individual societies and the utility of a notion of belief in current academic studies. Part of the trouble (if that is what it is) that inspires the question over and over again may be located in the term “monster,” which bears a varying host of culture-specific associations. In seeking authors for the collection, we found scholars working in some periods to be very receptive to the term, whereas others were either hesitant about or resistant to applying the label to phenomena in their areas of subject. It is my hope, though, that this volume will work to expand productively the scope of the monstrous, a subject that is, by its nature, heterogeneous or even heterodox.

Though there is considerable study of the etymology of “monster” in the volume, and its period-specific meanings at prior points in history, there is little discussion, directly, of its present scholarly valence, of its meaning in the volume’s title. Modernity would, I think, generally define a literal “monster” (in contrast with the more metaphorical use of the term to refer to particularly depraved people, such as the serial killers discussed by Weinstock) as that which is horrible, but does not actually exist: silly sea monsters, in contrast to terrifying but real creatures like the oarfish or frilled shark. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us, for example:

*Originally:* a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening. The centaur, sphinx, and minotaur are examples of “monsters” encountered by various mythical heroes; the griffin, wyvern, etc., are later heraldic forms.

This suggests that the difference between animal and monster is not the degree of terror it induces, how horrible it is, how hodgepodge in appearance or apparent construction, but its reality or lack thereof.

As a point of contrast, the Middle Ages might well have defined a monster as “a creature” with such qualities, leaving out the qualifiers that it be “mythical” or “imaginary.” We are thus faced with two approaches to the question of the “reality” of the monsters in other periods, neither one of which we wish to accept here—either that medievals, or whomever the group in question might be, like us, wisely and rationally viewed sea serpents and oni and centaurs and yōkai and the

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like as metaphors, and never really believed all that nonsense, or that they were “superstitious” and “benighted” products of a dark age, unable to arrive at rational conclusions in the same manner as modern people. However, as David Stannard argues in respect to the Puritan period:

We do well to remember that the [pre-modern] world ... was a rational world, in many ways more rational than our own. It is true that this was a world of witches and demons, and of a just and terrible God who made his presence known in the slightest acts of nature. But this was the given reality about which most of the decisions and actions of the age, throughout the entire Western world, revolved.13

Belief in monsters was common throughout the pre-modern world, and continues, as Dendle, Foster, and Weinstock demonstrate, today. Their importance, their significance, extends well beyond the base question of their reality, though. Whether we believe or disbelieve the existence of a phenomenon is not what grants it social and cultural force. The question is not therefore “Did people believe in monsters?”—they did, and still do—but rather, “What is a monster?”

I wish to argue here that a monster is not really known through observation; how could it be? How could the viewer distinguish between “normally” terrifying phenomena and abnormally terrifying monstrosity? Rather, I submit, the monster is known through its effect, its impact.14 Therefore, from this perspective, all the monsters are real. The monsters in all of the traditions discussed here had palpable, tangible effects on the cultures that spawned them, as well as on neighboring and later cultures. Beliefs die very slowly, and while it is a common trope that we live with the ghosts of the past, so too, we live with the monsters of the past. We still live with the horned Jew and the giant Saracen, with Japanese water monsters,

14 Several of our contributors have argued related points, explicitly and implicitly, most especially Patricia MacCormack: “Defined through this word ‘marvel,’ teratology describes a study of relation more than of an object;” Cohen: “It is true that some of us have never glimpsed a monster. Yet none of us have beheld time, or oxygen, or the wind. We vividly perceive their effects, and from this evidence we postulate agency and cause. The effects of the monster are undeniable;” and Jeffrey Weinstock: “The recurring concern underlying contemporary monster narratives is that, through a sort of retroactive causality, we now can only determine the monster’s presence through its effects.” See also Noël Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart (New York: Routledge, 1990), especially page 14: “Like suspense novels or mystery novels, novels are denominated horrific in respect of their intended capacity to raise a certain affect. Indeed, the genres of suspense, mystery, and horror derive their very names from the affects they are intended to promote—a sense of suspense, a sense of mystery, and a sense of horror. The cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror.”
with Frankenstein’s monster and (over and over again) the vampire. We live with the *vagina dentata*, the cyborg, the hostile alien living beyond our reach (though we live within its). As we cannibalize the Others of others, as we tear them apart and stitch them back together, we continually redefine the parameters of the monstrous.

**Finding and Defining the “Monstrous”**

How might we locate the monstrous, how might we, like the casual art observer, “know it when we see it?” I would argue that the monstrous does not lie solely in its embodiment (though this is very important) nor its location (though this is, again, vital), nor in the process(es) through which it enacts its being, but also (indeed, perhaps primarily) in its *impact*. Yes, the paradigmatic Grendel is larger than a man (“næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer”15 [except he was greater than any other man]); yes, he has a claw or talon of some sort (“hæþenes handsporu”16 [heathen’s claw]); and yes, he lives at the periphery of civilization, far from the mead hall (“hælærna mæst; scop him Heort naman”17 [greatest of halls; he assigned it the name “Heorot”]), in a churning, dragon-filled mere (“Nis Þæt heoru stow!”18 [That is not a pleasant place!]); but this is costume and set-design, whereas the heart of the monstrosity lies in the missing head of Æschere:

> Ne frin þu after sælum! Sorh is geniwd Denigea leodum./Dead is Æschere.19
> [Ask you not after joy! Sorrow is renewed among the people of the Danes. Dead is Æschere.]

No study could hope to pin down the monstrous in terms of physicality, though this is its most obvious marker. That which is “monstrous” in one culture (dark skin according to some medieval Christian texts, light skin according to some medieval Muslim texts, and so on) does not translate to others’ Others. Certainly, hybridity is common, as are giantism and dwarfism, and other forms of excess or lack (too many arms, too few, though these can just as well be markers of divinity), as well as certain activities, like anthropophagia, but the common ought not be substituted for the constitutive. I could not hope to describe the physical, behavioral or geographic parameters of the monstrous, here or anywhere. By definition, the monster is outside of such definitions; it defies the human desire to subjugate through categorization. This is the source, in many ways, of their power. Instead, then, I would look to the impact(s) of the monstrous. This might

15 *Beowulf*, line 1353. All translations are mine.
16 *Beowulf*, line 986.
17 *Beowulf*, line 78.
18 *Beowulf*, line 1372.
19 *Beowulf*, lines 1322–3.
be manifest in the horror of excessive violence, but is rooted in the vertigo of redefining one’s understanding of the world. 20 As Noël Carroll writes: “monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge.” 21 Massimo Leone writes relatedly about the process of religious conversion, arguing that such moments of destabilization draw our attention to the “stability” we thought we had, producing a vertigo that:

reveal that what is called equilibrium is nothing but a zero degree of the presence of the body in a given space. Nevertheless, it is only through a pathological condition, an alteration of normality, that this point of departure of perception can itself be perceived. 22

Above all, the monstrous is that which creates this sense of vertigo, that which calls into question our (their, anyone’s) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us (often with fangs at our throats, with its fire upon our skin, even as we and our stand-ins and body doubles descend the gullet) to acknowledge the failures of our systems of categorization.

The above deals with how cultures define monstrosity from within. As some of our authors remind us, though, monsters are defined from without, as well. Again, there are real impacts, as when external perspectives declared Indian 23 or Maya 24 or African 25 deities to be monstrous. Similar processes are enacted within individual cultures to marginalize segments of their own populace: sexual, gender, 26 ethnic and religious 27 minorities, or the disabled. Monster theory can be, for marginalized groups and cultures, empowering, much as the closely related project of postcolonial theory has been, as a means of understanding and describing the tools used to abject, to reject and exclude people from the warmth of the mead hall.

20 Timothy K. Beal, Religion and its Monsters (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 7, refers to a “vertigo-like” experience resulting from interaction with the mysterious be it religious, monstrous or both.
21 Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror, p. 34.
23 See Mitter’s essay in this collection.
24 See Looper’s essay in this collection.
25 See Drewal’s essay in this collection.
26 See Oswald’s essay in this collection.
27 See Strickland’s essay in this collection.
Inclusion and Exclusion

In a volume on monsters and the monstrous, inclusion and exclusion are vital, reoccurring themes. Location inside, at the heart of a culture, is predicated on the banishment of others. Peter Dendle and I were sharply aware of this issue, as we considered how to construct and frame this collection, since any act of framing is, in a sense, an establishment of boundaries, an act of violence. As John Gillies writes of Heidegger, “the act of enframing ruptures as much as it encloses.” With the acknowledgement that total inclusivity would not be possible, we nonetheless aimed, in defining our subject, to cast as broad a net as we could, striving to find scholars working on monsters and monstrous subjects throughout global history. Sometimes, there was an embarrassment of riches (as with the European Middle Ages and the nineteenth century), sometimes a small number of scholars working boldly, without a large network of monster-focused colleagues (Middle Eastern Studies, China), and in a few cases, we were simply unable to find scholars working on the subject (South-East Asia, Australia). This may well be our failings and language limitations; perhaps there is good work out there, in local and regional languages, that does not appear in our databases, that is not turned up by our searches. And perhaps in some areas, the term “monster” is simply not very meaningful, or even is a rejected term of colonial imperialism (India, as discussed elegantly by Partha Mitter here and elsewhere).

Frequently, we negotiated with our authors as we came to understand the role of the monstrous in their geo-historical periods of study. In some cases, the monster is all body, in others, disembodied spirit. In some cases, the “monsters” are quite real in the conventional sense, even if amplified, and in others, clearly fictional or mythical. In some cases, they very closely mirror their creators, while in others they are non-anthropomorphous. Again, the defining features cannot be considered essential, as it were, as the sources are too varied, too wonderfully divergent to be summarized or contained by such characteristics. We have therefore encouraged contributors to find their own definitions, rather than to ascribe to our preconceptions. It is through my reading of these excellent essays that the present thesis regarding monstrous impact was derived, rather than from a pre-existing mandate.

The volume is divided into two halves, “Part I: History of Monstrosity” and “Part II: Critical Approaches to Monstrosity.” Part I seeks to contextualize monsters, seeing how they function within individual cultures. Part II strives to find theories by which we might understand them, and also to use the monsters themselves as theoretical constructs by which we might gain greater understanding of the cultures by which they are produced. Part II should also serve to extend the coverage beyond the geo-historical periods we were able to cover in Part I, as

29 See Mitter’s essay in this collection.
The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous

these broad themes can be found in monsters, wherever and whenever they arise. There is, of course, a great deal of productive overlap between these sections, and among essays within them. Ordering such material presents challenges. Cohen, in his preface to *Monster Theory*, notes:

*The most obvious organization for a book of this kind would perhaps be a chronological ordering of the contents, but such a valorization of time as the primary determinant of meaning goes against what much of this collection asserts. The monster as a category that is not bound by classificatory structurations, least of all one as messy and inadequate as time. To order the contents of the volume diachronically would implicitly argue for a progress narrative that ... does not—cannot—exist.*

As our collection ranges across the globe (East Asia, South Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, the Middle East, North America, Africa) as well as across time (ancient civilizations to the contemporary world), and with some essays treating very particular historical moments, while others cover many centuries, and all of them with start- and stop-points that cannot be linked up one after another or neatly placed in parallel, a simple chronological arrangement—desirable or inappropriate—simply would not be possible. We might have presented loose groupings (the ancient world, the Middle Ages), but to do so would be to superimpose Western chronological divisions—arbitrary enough in the context for which they were designed—upon the rest of the world in a way that does not arise organically from each culture’s internal history and progression.

We have therefore arranged the geo-historical essays alphabetically by author name, which will impose on them an order no more arbitrary, and hopefully less embedded in traditional narratives, than other systems we might have chosen. We have designed the collection to be read as a whole, as each essay bears implications for the others, and we invite our readers to seek out associations that are individual, idiosyncratic, and speculative. To order them by period or group them by geography would be to discourage readers to look beyond their own research areas. As editor of the collection, reading the full range of essays has been a pleasure and, at times, a thrill.

Though it has remained largely peripheral in the broader context of most humanities, the monstrous has not been wholly ignored. In the past two decades, some scholars have begun the critical work of understanding the monstrous in a number of disciplines and for a number of periods, especially the Middle Ages. Medieval monstrosity has received great attention in the past two decades, including Cohen’s several publications, but also Bettina Bildhauer and Robert

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31 Among numerous articles and other related books, see: Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain; Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000); and *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle*
The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies

Mills’s collection on The Monstrous Middle Ages (2003)\textsuperscript{32} and Andy Orchard’s Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript (1995).\textsuperscript{33} It also serves as the focus of a few earlier, highly influential texts that have proven seminal, such as John Block Friedman’s The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought (1981),\textsuperscript{34} Rudolf Wittkower’s “Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters” (1942),\textsuperscript{35} and even J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” (1936).\textsuperscript{36} Arguably, the Middle Ages represented an especially fertile period for the forging of cultural constructions in recognizably modern formulations. But this important approach has much to tell us, potentially, about many other periods and cultures, and it is my hope that the scope, the insights, and the promise of the current collection can help spur fresh research and stimulate further discussion on this challenging yet crucial topic. My hope is that these essays cohere enough for the volume as a whole to maintain some measure of integrity, rather than for it to become a straightforward and harmonious whole. As Cohen writes, “hybridity is a fusion and a disjunction, a conjoining of differences that cannot simply harmonize.”\textsuperscript{37} Such should be the nature of a collection on monsters and the monstrous.

Conclusion

I would like to close with another anecdote, this one darker than the one with which I began. Last year, toward the end of my extended unit on monsters in my medieval survey, we covered depictions of Jews. We read the relevant chapter of Debra Strickland’s compelling Demons, Saracens and Jews,\textsuperscript{38} and were discussing the images of the twelfth-century Winchester Psalter. This is a work that appears in the major global art historical survey textbooks, which showcase the striking Hellmouth scene, rather than the shockingly anti-Semitic images of the Passion. Here, the Jews are literal monsters, with sharp fangs and distorted, grimacing faces, savages with great, hooked noses carrying not only rough clubs but even weapons

\textsuperscript{32} Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (eds), The Monstrous Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{34} Friedman, Monstrous Races.
\textsuperscript{37} Cohen, Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain, p. 2.
made of giant bones (see Figure 17.7). Having set the Psalter in the context of the Wonders of the East and related monster texts, I believed that I had set the stage for a thoughtful discussion of the careful manner in which illuminators, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, subtly altered the narrative of the Passion by substituting grotesquely caricatured Jews in the place of the Romans throughout the story. Through the use of images, since the scriptural text could not be altered, Pontius Pilate becomes a Jew, and Roman soldiers become Jews; according to the Gospel of John, Jesus was arrested by a group consisting of both Roman soldiers and Jewish temple police, but all figures here are caricatured Jews. Moreover, through the frequent use of contemporary clothing, the figures become contemporary Jews, rather than those of over a thousand years earlier. This fostered the narrative that the Jews were, and remained, the killers of Christ, a very important pillar in anti-Jewish rhetoric and action throughout the Middle Ages and well beyond, leading to the claims of Blood Libel, host desecration, and other entirely fictional acts of defamation that suggested that, in the medieval present, Jews carried ceaselessly on, killing Christ through ritual re-enactments of the crucifixion.

One of my students raised her hand after this discussion, with a look of confusion and anger on her face. She said that she did not understand what I was “trying to get at,” what my point was, since, she said, with a quaver of emotion in her voice, with the Winchester Psalter’s image of the Arrest of Christ on the screen (see Figure 17.7), that I was making too much out of nothing, since this is what Jews look like, more or less. And anyway, she continued, the Jews are Christ-killers. She then screamed out the text of John 19:15, saying “the Jews shouted, ‘Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!’” She was quoting, interestingly, from the “God’s Word Translation,” the most violent English translation I have been able to find, since most read “take him” or “away with him,” where this one version reads “kill him.” The comparative accuracy of translation from the Greek is irrelevant, here, since she was not inspired by reading the original, but rather a modern English version. David Burke, former Director of Translations


41 God’s Word to the Nations Bible Mission Society, God’s Word (Grand Rapids: World Publisher, 1995).
for the American Bible Society, has critiqued this translation, noting that “‘poorly informed’ readers are likely to interpret the polemic against ‘the Jews’ in the New Testament as if ‘Jews of all time are somehow implicated.’” In this way, the modern translation and the medieval image are in concert with one another, and the resulting impression, conveyed by my student, was that the Jewish monster was real. The impact of these imagined monsters has been all too real, from the Middle Ages onward.

I was struck temporarily speechless, but as I soundlessly worked my jaw in an effort to formulate a reply, I saw in the eyes of all the other students a shocked recognition that, in essence, answers the question posed at the outset, here: all of this matters. All of this is relevant. I was trying to show how medieval images were designed to allow medievals to confuse one group of Jews from the first century with all Jews in their own day, and here, in twenty-first-century America, my students saw this same notion quite alive. Their horror at the spectacle served to demonstrate that images of monsters from another time and place are not just curios, dead relics of a lost age. And that it was images of Jews that brought this out ought not be given too much weight. We could have had the same sort of outburst based on images of Muslims, or of “Africans” or “Indians.” Indeed, it is the latter two groups that are most often depicted as deeply monstrous, since all of the Wonders of the East, covered at length by Felton, Davies, and Van Duzer—the lying, homophagic Donestre, giant-eared Panotii, ass-bodied Onocentaur, and on—are all peoples who are supposed to dwell in India and Africa.

I close with an account of this very disturbing classroom episode, not because contemporary racism, often rooted in millennium-old bigotry, is the only or even the most important relevance for our study of monsters. Rather, it should serve to demonstrate the vast spread of the aftershocks that follow the arrival of the monstrous, the power and durability of its impact and import. In their distorted aping of their creators and their world, monsters show us how a culture delimits its own boundaries, how it sees itself; what it respects and desires is revealed in these portraits of scorn and disgust. This classroom moment of hate and fear, uncomfortable as it was for my students and me, should also remind us that when we study the monsters of the past, we study our own demons as well.

How might we begin to move beyond the demonization of one another? MacCormack turns the lens back on the reader, writing: “in the most reduced sense then, through concepts of adaptability and evolution itself, all organisms are unlike—we are all, and must be monsters because nothing is ever like another thing, nor like itself from one moment to the next.” Perhaps, in answer to the question above, we might begin with an examination of the monstrous, which time and

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43 MacCormack’s chapter in this collection, p. 204, emphasis added.
again highlights the porous nature of the boundary that ought separate “us” from “them.”

Whatever one can say about monsters past and present, one thing is certain: this field is a renewable and self-sustaining one, and the subject of our study will be available for a long time to come. The monster has shown its enduring importance within a wide range of cultural landscapes, from the Ancient Near East to the contemporary Digital Age, and though it is hunted over and over again, shows no danger of being hunted to extinction. The protean nature of the monstrous is among its key traits, and no doubt our contemporary societies—whether we know it or not—hold the nascent, embryonic kernels of monsters for future generations.