MONSTERS AND THE EXOTIC IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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Introduction

Societies, medieval as well as modern, define themselves not only through introspection but through an outward gaze to what they perceive as other cultures, other races, other genders, or other species. Through representation of and comparison to these 'other' societies and the subjects who comprise them, they attempt to establish those qualities by which they wish to be defined. 1

In the English Middle Ages, the producers of dominant culture—male, European, and Christian—often represented themselves through comparison to exotic, fantastical beings, monsters, and monstrous humans. So pervasive was this fascination with and reflexive identification through the literally monstrous other that when experi-

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1 See Cohen (note ch. 1), 'Acts of Separation: Shaping Global Bodies'.
ewoked in Christian European literature, they were often rendered in precisely the language of the monstrous.

In the use of the language of the monstrous in the depiction of medieval Jews and Muslims, but also in the use of such language at the very heart of constructions of the medieval hero, or the Christian saint, we can see clearly the contradiction integral to the construction of the monstrous ‘other’ in the English Middle Ages: the monstrous ‘other’ is not absolute, stable, or firmly outside the boundaries of the normative; on the contrary, the ‘other’, like the monsters who so often embody it, remains recognizable, strange yet familiar, a possible version of oneself.

In this chapter, we will discuss some of the textual sources relied upon by medieval English authors and artists, and we will survey some of the most widely read medieval texts dealing with the monstrous.

THE LITERATURE OF THE MONSTROUS AND EXOTIC?

Before our discussion of backgrounds, sources, texts, and readings, we begin with the question: why a literature of the monstrous and exotic in the English Middle Ages?

That is, we ask why such a literature might have developed, but also how that development is distinctive: how, that is, the literature of the monstrous in the Middle Ages is different from that of the present day.

Among possible reasons for the development of what we might call a genre of the monstrous and exotic we locate first a body of mythological material we can assume is, in broad strokes, shared among Germanic peoples, among them the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians. This mythological material, articulated, for example, in Snorri Sturluson’s Gylfaginning, contains not only a vast array of giants and hybrid creatures, but also a cosmology in which the human world is created from the spectacular dismemberment of the body of the giant Ymir. The literature of the monstrous develops in medieval literature thus in part as a reflection of this native body of tradition. This tradition also perhaps gives at least the early medieval literature of the monstrous some aspects of its distinctive character: as the broken body of Ymir creates the world, the monstrous in medieval literature is associated not simply with that which threatens human civilization, but also with that which creates and sustains it.

Because the medieval West is dominantly Christian, however, and because, especially in the early period, textual production occurs in a monastic context, this body of native tradition can be summoned via allusion, but remains associated with a repudiated paganism. As Jacques Le Goff has argued with respect to the broad European context, ‘[t]he roots of the marvellous are almost always pre-Christian. The traditions in question being continuous, medieval Christianity was obliged to confront them throughout its history.’

This confrontation can take the form of repression or erasure, but also can include incorporation. Of course, Christianity has its own monstrous, the beasts and giants we will discuss below. Hence we find in some early medieval explicidy Christian texts at once extension of Christian monstrous figures and striking incorporations of the pagan monstrous figure-in, for example, the Old English Life of St Christopher, a giant with the head of a dog.

The dominance of Christianity in the production of texts provides yet another motivation for the development and persistence of literature of the monstrous and exotic. Anglo-Saxon England is converted to Roman Christianity through the mission of Augustine of Canterbury at the end of the sixth century. In the narrative he provides of Augustine’s journey to convert the Anglo-Saxons, the Venerable Bede explains that Augustine, setting out from cosmopolitan Rome, becomes overwhelmed with fear at the idea of a journey to a barbarous people at the edges of the known world. In Augustine’s fear, at that originary moment for Christianity in England, we can see clearly how the position of Anglo-Saxoniterate Christians might lend itself to the development of a literature of the monstrous: literate, Christian. Anglo-Saxon found themselves at once part of a powerful Christian culture, and also identified as those dwellers at the very fringes, margins, or borderlands of that culture, against whom Christian culture defined itself; that is, literate Christian Anglo-Saxons found themselves within that culture, in the position of the monstrous.

In addition, from the first migrations, England was a territory of dramatically shifting and contested borders from the instability of the early kingdoms to the Scandinavian invasions, settlement in the Dane-law, West Saxon expansion, renewed hostilities, and Danish rule, the Norman Conquest, and the dramatic changes of the Hundred Years War, territorial borders, and with them conceptions of what it means to dwell within them, as ‘English’ men, are under nearly constant renegotiation. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued for the early period, ‘[b]ecause of its diversity and because of its permeable, perpetually transgressed borders, Anglo-Saxon England was relentlessly pondering what it means to be a warrior, a Christian, a hero, a saint, an outlaw, a king, a seduced and gendered being.’

Hence, Cohen concludes, ‘It is not surprising, then, that the monster became a kind of cultural shorthand for the problems of identity construction, for the irreducible difference that lurks deep within the culture-bound self.’

It is conventional to divide the medieval period in England into two periods, the Anglo-Saxon period and the later medieval, or post-Conquest period. In the

1 Le Goff (1975: 26).
2 Bede (965), 1. 23. *Qi√c tunc loquere pontificibus aequatres exemplar rerum opus adregi

3 Quisque tertius in loco est, et veneti sunt regni quinquenni qui cum in loco regis in loco regis

4 Cohen (1990: 45).
5 Ibid, 5.
literature of the monstrous, the period following the Conquest reflects the dramatic social and linguistic changes that justify such a division, changes brought about in part by the establishment of Norman rule. The literature in the generations immediately following the Conquest also reflects changes in the broader Western self-understanding brought about by the institution of the Crusades.

As George Garnett has articulated, the Normans, '[l]ike many totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, ... seem to have realized that control of the past was a prerequisite for mastery of the present, and set about propagating an official version of history.\textsuperscript{8} Garnett is concerned with 'official' histories, like the Bayeux Tapestry, but the post-Conquest emphasis on the reinvention of the past extends to other forms of history, including texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of the Kings of Britain, which provide the framework for the reintroduction of yet another body of tradition for the literature of the monstrous: the Celtic mythologies, here focused in Arthurian narratives.\textsuperscript{9} This post-Conquest association of Arthurian texts with the 'matter of Britain' rewrites the history of England, constructing a continuity between Anglo-Norman and continental dynasties and a Celtic prehistory, and eliding the Anglo-Saxon period. Yet the giants, dragons, and transformed humans in the new Arthurian narratives remain strikingly familiar; if they appear to confirm rupture from the Anglo-Saxon past, they also provide continuity with that past within thirty years of the Conquest, Urban II's call for the First Crusade established the possibility for Western contact with an East which had, until then, appeared in Christian texts, and pilgrimage narratives, and in fictional stories of exotic lands and monstrous races. This contact was explicitly hostile: early Crusaders slaughtered indigenous populations as they carved out the Ostroge states. The Ostroge states were relatively short-lived, but the impact of the violence of Crusader incursions in the East resonates throughout the later Middle Ages and afterward. In the literature of the monstrous, we are not surprisingly the introduction of the figure of the vilified yet often problematically chivalrous Saracen, a new hostility in the representation of Jews, and a new and explicit anxiety about the proximity of such figures to Christian Europeans, anxiety articulated in the Fourth Lateran Council's requirement of marked clothing for Jews, Saracens, and prostitutes, and represented in courtly literature perhaps most clearly in the generic cloaking of the body of the courtly lady in 'Saracen' silk.\textsuperscript{10}

'Real' Western contact with the 'exotic' East becomes increasingly possible, not only with the ongoing Crusades, but also in the expansion of Western trade and travel routes, as evidenced both by the eastern journeys documented in the late thirteenth century, and by the literary narratives of those journeys, the most famous among them being Marco Polo's Travels (Diversamente du Monde). Yet the durability of the literature of the monstrous and exotic remains so pervasive that as late as the mid-fourteenth century, texts like The Book of Sir John Manville reproduce many of the narratives of earlier, clearly fictional texts. Dramatic evidence of the real power of these texts, and the truths their readers believed they contained is provided by the role of these texts in subsequent exploration: explorers like Columbus and Froilach consulted not only navigational charts and maps, but also The Book of Sir John Manville.

Why a medieval literature of the monstrous and exotic? Because the foundational cultures of medieval England—Germanic, Celtic, and Christian—rested on such figures; because the conditions of literacy made such figures intensely relevant; because, throughout the period, political and social conditions warranted the representation both of a hybrid 'body' of the state and of an externalized embodiment of what that state excluded; and because, in the course of this period, these fabulous narratives acquired the status of truth, truth as least as powerful as empirical observation.

\textbf{THE MONSTERS AND "THE EAST"}

While many cultures in the Middle Ages believed that there were monsters of various sorts living in the forests and fens just outside of their towns, medieval texts tend to focus their attention on a semi-mythical region referred to as 'the East.' In the Middle Ages, particularly in the early portion of the period, the concepts of the East did not extend into East Asia, but rather, encompassed the so-called Near East. Although geographically closer to England, this territory was distant enough to ensure that few European travelers would visit it. This distance thus provided a certain measure of safety for the readers of such texts. An uncrossable distance protected the reader or viewer from direct contact with the monstrous, and protected accounts of the monstrous from debunking by first-hand observation. Although the location of the wonders was not likely chosen to dissuade empirical verification, their remoteness did serve to assist in the persistence of these accounts.

However, the wonders were not as tied to their locations as their geographically focused texts might lead us to believe. As the so-called Age of Exploration began, and European contact with the Near East and North Africa became more routine, the wonders moved. Accounts returned to Europe from the first expeditions to the Americas, claiming that this land was peopled with the very beings once claimed to exist in the exotic East.\textsuperscript{11} Christopher Columbus reported, for example, that the island of Bohio was said to be inhabited by people with 'but one eye and the face of a dog.'\textsuperscript{12}

The mobility of the wonders (and the free blending thereof, such as the fusion of the Cyclops and the Cyclopes (in Columbus's account) tells us a great deal about

\textsuperscript{8} Garnett (1997: 61-3).
\textsuperscript{10} See Burns (2007: 61).
\textsuperscript{11} De las Casas and Columbus (1498: 24).
\textsuperscript{12} MacKie (1981: 125).
their function. Their importance often lies not in their specific location, but rather, in their position at the very edge of our knowledge. Less vital than that they were said to be found in ‘the East’ was their location on the periphery, beyond the pale, at the edge of the world. When this edge shifted westward in the fifteenth century, the wonders shifted with it.

**SOURCES: BIBLICAL MONSTERS**

**Biblical Giants**

In the Middle Ages, the Bible was taken to be literally accurate in its details. Jerusalem, for example, is identified as being in the centre of the world, and so it was literally believed to be, as represented on many medieval maps of the world. This biblical worldview is essential to an understanding of monsters in medieval culture. Unlike in most modern readings, the Bible in medieval readings is brimming with monsters, and thereby lent the most powerful authority to medieval beliefs about such beings.

Perhaps the most common of biblical monsters are giants, the most famous of which is Goliath. However, in addition to the Philistine champion, we find a host of antediluvian giants, appearing as early as Genesis 6: 4: ‘There were giants on the earth in those days’. In addition, we read of races of giants, such as the Anakim:

and they have subdued the land they had examined, saying to the sons of the house of Israel, ‘The land which we have inspected devours its inhabitants. Its people, whom we have seen, are of great stature. There we have seen certain monsters who are the sons of Anak, of the race of Giants, by whom we were as if we were locusts.'

There are also other named giants, such as Og, King of Bashan, who ‘remained from the stock of the giants. Has it not been seen that his bed is of iron, which is in Rabbath, of the sons of Ammon?’ It is nine cubits long and four wide by the measure of a human cubit.”

13 Vulgate, Psalm 75 and Ezek. 5: 2: ‘Thy Lord God said: I have placed Jerusalem in the middle of the people, and around her the lands;’

14 For a selection of giants from the Jewish Bible, see the following Vulgate passages: Gen 6: 4; Num 13: 33; Deut. 2: 11, 2: 20, 3: 16, 13: 33; Judg. 1: 6, 7: 15, 13: 5, 8, 17: 18; Josh. 2 Sam. 21: 16, 26, 20: 21; Chron. 20: 6, 4, 8.

15 Vulgate, Num. 13: 33: ‘Dextraeque erecta terre quam impugnaverant apud filios Israhel dicentes terram quam habitavisse devenerat habitabere non populum quem apudparum proceres stantur et. Hui vidamus monstra quasdam filiorum Enoch de genere gigantum quibus corporis quasi lacertae videbamus.’

16 Deut. 3: 11: ‘Seu ad oppidis Och, et Bacum remotissimis a rupibus gigantum montosindicant locum etiam feritas quae est in Rabbath filiorum Ammon novem cubitis habentis longitutudinis et quattuor latitudinis ad montes suos cubiti viribus manu.’

Modern readers might be tempted to read these passages as either metaphorical or, if literal, as if referring to humans of moderately large stature, though based on the size of his bed, Og would easily be somewhere around twelve feet tall. St Augustine, bishop of Hippo, one of the leading authorities of the Middle Ages, confirmed the veracity of these accounts, noting in The City of God.

Following the canonical scripture, Jewish and Christian, there is no doubt many giants existed before the flood, and were citizens of the earthly society of men, while the sons of God, who are descended from the flesh of Seth, having deserted righteousness, declined into this society. Nor is it to be marvelled at, that those [descended] from the same were able to be born giants. Augustine lent the authority of personal experience to this scriptural argument, describing not only a giant Gath he had heard was recently living in Rome, but also a relic of a giant:

I have seen, myself, not alone, but with several others with me, on the beach at Ulica, the molar tooth of a man, so huge that, if it were cut up into small pieces, it could be seen to be able to make one hundred of our standard teeth. Indeed, I would believe it to have been from a giant, for, the giants of old escaped by far the bodies of all the others back when others were bigger than we are.

In these three instances, one of the foremost authorities of the Middle Ages verified the existence of antediluvian giants through scriptural commentary, second-hand, and first-hand accounts. We can also note that at least the giants of old were not moderately larger than ordinary humans, but a hundred times their size.

Contemporary giants come, owing to their outlandish size, to frequently stand for excess in all its forms. Their unnatural size—which was according to Augustine owing to their ‘having deserted righteousness’—came to be associated with sinful behaviour. As will be common for medieval monsters, a flawed or deviant body was assumed to be the result of a flawed or deviant mind and soul. Indeed, Gerald of Wales, writing around 1200, informs his readers that Ireland contained ‘so many born blind, so many lame, so many with imperfect bodies, deprived of the beneficence of nature’ because the Irish are ‘an adulterous race, an incestuous
race, a race of illegitimate birth and conception, a race outside of the law, foully ravishing nature herself with hateful and hostile craft.17 In this case, genuine human beings living with what modern sensibilities would define as medical conditions, are blamed and condemned based on the assumption that outer difference matches inner deformity, a notion that bears ramifications for all of the monstrous beings discussed here.

Other Biblical Monsters

In addition to the Bible's giants, we also find a number of references to dragons, basilisks, unicorns, Behemoth, Leviathan and, of course, the Beasts of the Apocalypse.18 There was and is a considerable debate over the meaning of many of these passages, and of the nature of the creatures they describe, but their very profusion makes an implicit argument about the nature of God's world: it is, at least in part, monstrous. That such creatures were not only present in the Middle Ages (considered to be long after humanity's golden age in the distant past), but also in the days of the prophets, indicated that they were, in fact, part of God's divine plan.

Some of the most well-respected exegetes and scholars of the Middle Ages treated this notion. The two most widely cited are Augustine and Isidore, bishop of Seville. Both verified at least the possibility of the reality of monsters, though they came to different conclusions about their origins and functions. Augustine traced the Latin monstrua, 'monster', to monstrare, 'to show' declaring that monsters were a demonstration of God's powers. Isidore also traced it to monere, 'to warn', suggesting that they were a warning from God against deviant and from righteousness.19 While there are differences between these accounts, as Lisa Verner writes, for both Augustine and Isidore monsters served the overarching purpose of allowing the contemplation of the glorious superabundance of God's creation, in a word, wonder. Blommeys and Pygmeys and all the other monstrous races signify His power, wisdom and presence in all of creation.20 In the medieval worldview, therefore, while monsters and other marvels were exotic, nonetheless they were natural parts of creation.

17 Gerald of Wales (1092–1159).
20 These passages are widely cited. See e.g. Cohen (1991: p. 697); Verner (2005: 2–5).
21 Witkower (1942: 95). Witkower provides the earliest serious discussion of this tradition, and includes extensive commentary on the earlier sources and their transmission into the Middle Ages. His text will be relied on here. Also invaluable to the study of the medieval monstrous is Friereman (1991).
22 Witkower (1942: 86–93).
23 Play the Elder (1995, reprinted 1990), 3, 2, 39–40; 76:5 'extreme lines India ab oriente circa Fonten Gastrium trium gemmam sitae, corporis totius haemiarum, vetusti frontiuni longissime trahantur; multas illas citrum nullumque partem, radicum taurum fluminosum varius odor ex alveolis aut horrens iniurias, quae assumunt nullum flavescentes nec dens dilatationi; graviores paulo sobole haer difficiliter examinantis'.

**Sources**

**Classical Monsters**

The presence of so many monsters in the Bible, a text considered to be the word of God, lent veracity to accounts of such creatures found in other texts. Most notable among these were a series of classical texts containing accounts of the wondrous sites, plants, animals, and peoples of India and Ethiopia—two regions often viewed as somewhat analogous in classical and medieval sources and grouped together more generally as 'the East'. These works would eventually serve at the models for one of the most noteworthy monster- compilations of the Middle Ages, the Wonders or Marvels of the East, discussed below. Each of the classical texts draws heavily on the preceding work, with authors excising and embellishing freely. The earliest of the surviving passages are found in Herodotus' History of the fifth century BCE.21 Herodotus was influential in two works which would, in turn, impact many others, Ktesias' Indika of 400 BCE, which caused India to be 'stamped as the land of marvels' and a now-fragmentary treatise by Megasthenes of 300 BCE which survives in the works of Strabo, Aelian, and Pliny, among others.22

This body of classical knowledge would be transmitted to the patriarchal period largely though Pliny's Natural History, completed in 77 CE, and Solinus' Collectanea rerum memorabilium, 200, and then onward into the Middle Ages by Isidore's encyclopedic Etymologiae, 662. These works vary in their style and approach to monsters, but share common features. Most present the monsters and other marvels in the form of a list, in which each entry provides the same stock information: name, location, size, brief physical description and, for some, behaviour. For example, we read in book 7 of Pliny's Natural History:

At the extreme boundary of India to the East near the source of the Ganges, [Megathenes] put the Astomi tribe, that has no mouth and a body hairy all over; they dress in cottonwood and live only on the air they breathe and the scent they inhale through their nostrils; they have no food or drink except the different odours of the roots and flowers and wild apples, which they carry with them on their longer journeys so as not to lack a supply of scent; they says they can easily be killed by a rather stronger odour than usual.23

In this highly typical passage we learn the marvel's name (Astomi, from the Greek for 'Without Mouth'), their location (eastern India), their appearance (mouthless, hairy), and behaviour (sniffing food). This basic pattern is followed throughout,

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and repeated in most of the sources. Embedded as these passages are amidst more mundane accounts of the natural world, these beings were considered as part of the natural world.

**MEDIEVAL INCARNATIONS**

**The Wonders of the East**

The *Wonders of the East* is among the most striking of the early medieval English works on monstrousity as a theme. The earliest copy survives in the same codex as *Beowulf*, a poem also deeply concerned with monstrousness (*London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A. vii, the Beowulf manuscript, ca. 900*). Unlike its sources, outlined above, and related texts to be covered below, the Wonders does not contain any narrative framework for its discussion of the monsters and marvels of 'the East'. Instead, it presents a series of texts and images, loosely connected through vague geographic references ('At the beginning of the land', 'as you go towards the Red Sea', 'between these two rivers', 'in the same place', etc.). Each discrete section informs the reader, generally in imprecise or otherwise baffling terms, of the location, appearance, and habits of the wonders. While these wonders include the oil-producing baban tree and vines that grow enormous berries and jewels, most of the accounts focus on wondrous animals and peoples, though the line dividing these categories is most pointedly blurred by their physical composition. Many of the wonders are hybrids, consisting of the parts of disparate creatures. The Lycophates, for example, has a horse's mane, a boar's tusks, and a dog's head (from which it derives its name). Likewise, the Littine are 'wild beasts' possessing donkey's ears and sheep's wool and bird's feet. While the Lycophates is explicitly bestial, the Cynocephalus is more transgressive, not clearly fitting into one category or another. Indeed, in the Old English text they are called `healhundredings' or `half-houndre', emphasizing their equally divided nature.

Other wonders, though, are not cobbled together from the parts of multiple known creatures. Rather, they deviate from the norm through excess or lack. The Bletternes, for example, are men without heads, but with their eyes and mouths on their chests. Similarly, the Scopod (not found in the earlist *Wonders* manuscript, but common in subsequent versions and related texts) has only one foot. On the other hand, the Horshubrit are fifteen feet tall and have two faces on one head, and the Panoti have ears so large that they use them to cover themselves at night. In all of these cases, the wonders are not hybrid beings, but rather, are composed exclusively of human parts, though they deviate from normative standards in their arrangements thereof.

Finally, there are human wonders whose mark of difference is not bodily, at all, but rather, a matter of behavior, such as the *`generous men'* who give women to passing travellers and the people who live on raw meat and honey. These people are, according to the accounts, no different, except in these matters of diet and custom, from 'normal' people (in this case, the English readers). As a result, this final category underscores the destabilizing notion that these wonders are possible versions of the views and readers of the text. Both the hybrid monsters and the human composites are wonders because they displace, castigate, and strangely juxtapose categories of species, anatomy, and culture, but their very strangeness is comprehensible because they are constructed from familiar elements. We recognize the bird's feet, the ass's hindquarters, the man's features, even if we do not expect these elements to be so conjoined. This familiarity in strangeness is further emphasized by wonders like the *`generous men'*; these wonders, even as they seem to mark off a boundary of the normative (the exchange of women between men in Western Europe is subject to aggressive cultural regulation), also represent the permeability of any such boundary. If the monstrous cannot be simply a matter of being elsewhere, or possessing a monstrous body, anyone has the potential to become one of the monsters.

**Liber monstrorum**

Like the *Wonders of the East* discussed above, the *Liber monstrorum* contains a series of accounts describing distant monsters.24 The earliest of the four surviving manuscripts of the *Liber monstrorum* can be dated to the early tenth century, but like the somewhat later *Wonders*, the *Liber monstrorum* draws from a range of materials available in Pliny, Augustine, and Isidore.25 As L.G. Whitbread has observed, twenty-one of the sections of the *Wonders*, including the descriptions of the half-bounds, the Donestre, and the giant women with ox tails, clearly overlap with materials in the *Liber*.26 The *Liber monstrorum* differs from the *Wonders*, however, in that it contains framing devices indicating authorship and audience. The narrator introduces himself, and the materials he describes, and justifies his project:

You have asked about the hidden parts of the orb of the earth, and if so many races of monsters ought to be believed in which are shown in the hidden parts of the world, throughout the deserts and the islands of the ocean, and are sustained in the most distant mountains...and that I ought to describe the monstrous parts of humans and the most horrible wild animals and innumerable forms of beasts and the most dreadful types of dragons and serpents and vipers.27

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24 Battrell (1986).
25 Whitbread (1974: 434-72). Whitbread acknowledges that *the range of genres* about the dating of the *Liber* 'extends from the sixth through the tenth century', but notes, 'Of the four known manuscripts, London, Brit. Lib. Cotton Vit. Alex. No. iv in a hand of ca. 1090, is the earliest; the others belong to the tenth century' (p. 448-50).
26 Ibid. 446-7.
The author casts doubt on some of the accounts, claiming to organize book i in descending order of commonness and verifiability, and later writing "if it were possible to fly with wings, exploring, one might prove [these tales] to be seen as fictions, despite much talk." This measure of scepticism is not found in the frameless Wonders text.

The Liber monstraorum also presents more directly the concept that an 'ordinary' person might become 'monstrous' through actions. The first of the common and verifiable human monsters it describes, for example, is a person who looks like a man from the waist up, but 'loves feminine occupations'. The narrator concludes, 'but this has happened often among men'. By introducing this catalogue of monsters with a figure the narrator himself considers not monstrously strange, but proximate and familiar, the Liber monstraorum, like the Wonders, reminds us that the very categories by which we read these texts and the worlds we inhabit—male/female, self/other—are blurred and crossed even as we employ them.

Beowulf

The Liber monstraorum intersects not only with the Wonders of the East, but also with perhaps the most famous of early English poems, Beowulf. In the Liber appears a King Higlacus, ruler of the Geats. Although this king is a sort of giant, a man so big that no horse can carry him, he is also perhaps recognizable as the Hygelac of the Geats, of the epic poem, unde to the great hero Beowulf.

Beowulf is in obvious ways concerned with monsters and the cosmic: in the poem, the hero fights the first giant when Grendel's mother, two ambiguously human monsters, and then a dragon. Less obviously, perhaps, Beowulf also presents the inseparability of the monstrous from human life. Grendel, the first of the monsters, is described in terms strikingly equivalent to those which describe Beowulf: Grendel kills thirty men in a single stroke. Beowulf has the strength of thirty men in his handgrips: both Beowulf and Grendel are larger than other men; Grendel has no known father; Beowulf is anomalous among Germanic heroes in the fact that his name does not alliterate with his father's. As several critics have noted, in Beowulf's physical fight with Grendel, the bodies of hero and monster, joined by their handgrips, become indistinguishable to the readers during the climactic struggle, the text renders it impossible to tell who is doing what to whom.

Similarly, when Beowulf departs to Grendel's mother to kill Grendel's mother, he travels to place 'not far in miles' from Hrothgar's court. The possibility of literality in that description suggests that Grendel's mere can be understood in some sense as a version of Hrothgar's court, at an arbitrary distance from the hall. Certainly, both Grendel and the monster are creatures of the mean: the borderland, contiguous to but just outside the world of Hrothgar. Beowulf's struggle with these monsters is thus also a struggle against the duplicity of those borders. Hence the final triumph of the poem, after the slaying of the dragon, is the posthumous erection of the tomb of Beowulf at the headland, the border, a final stand in which Beowulf, as hero, marks off, and reinforces with his body, a difference from the monstrous which the poem itself has demonstrated to be an impossibility.

The monsters of Beowulf explicitly evoke those of the Old Testament: Grendel occupies the 'feklyneus gerd', the 'place of the race of giants', who are the 'kin of Cain', a place from which 'all the evil broad arose, giants and elves, and monsters, and likewise giants, who fought against God.' Yet as many critics have argued, these monsters also link Beowulf to the body of Norse literature and mythology, a link which is unsurprising, given the shared Germanic linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but which also emphasizes the strong pre-Christian traditions and mythologies informing the poem. Andy Orchard, in his chapter, 'Grettir and Grendel Again', surveys the structural and thematic similarities between the Norse saga, Grettis saga Arnarsonar, and Beowulf. In both texts, the hero's fights against a series of monsters end with the hero both victorious against those monsters and identified with them. Orchard concludes: "This is the shared tragedy of such essentially heathen heroes whose tales are retold in a Christian world, who must begin with proud hope and bravado, and end haunted with melancholy, defeated but not diminished." Seth Lerner has argued that perhaps less obvious connections between Beowulf and Norse literature may bespeak equal powers of commonalities. In 'Grendel's Glove', Lerner reminds us that Beowulf's reference—in his own account of his fight—to the magical dragon-skin glove is an innovation in the story; we have no mention of the glove at any point in the narrator's description of the action. This innovation alludes at once to Norse mythological material, presented in Snorri Sturluson's Gylfaginning, in which Thor and Loki themselves become lost in the giant Sigmirnir's glove, and to the function of narratives of monstrosity and dismemberment in both Beowulf and Norse mythology.

Lerner suggests that, "[o]ne more a relic of a Northern legend, and more than a piece of narrative erotica, Grendel's glove comes to symbolize the very meaning of the monster and the very resources of literary making that articulate that meaning." For

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28 Beowulf, II. 1149-1152: 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd' = 'feklyneus gerd'.
29 Ibid., I. 17.
Alexander

Such self-consciousness in literary performance as Lerer argues for in Beowulf is the premise of the fictional Letter of Alexander to Aristotle with which Beowulf, as well as the Wonders of the East, is bound, in Cotton Vitellius A, xx. The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle takes the form of a fictional letter written by Alexander the Great to his teacher, Aristotle, detailing Alexander’s journeys through the East, a penetrative exploration, in Alexander’s terms, “lest anything in that land was hidden or concealed from me.” Its narrative is given in the first person, and the encounters with the monstrous and exotic (many of the figures of which—jeweled vines, pestilential serpents, water monsters—are familiar from the Liber Monstrorum and the Wonders) are represented directly as phenomena encountered or witnessed by the narrator, and crafted by the narrator for reading by his intended audience, his teacher, Aristotle. Alexander’s description of the exotic East thus becomes inextricable from his epistolary self-presentation. It is for this reason that Orchard, for example, reads Alexander, through this self-presentation of his conquest of the East, as a monstrous figure of pride. The context of Beowulf and the Wonders of the East, as well as the Liber Monstrorum, suggests that whatever moral condemnation might accompany the figure of Alexander, the Letter picks up a consistent thread in the early literature of the monstrous: the troublesome relationship between the representation of the self through movement through or conquest of monstrous and exotic worlds, but at the same time the recognition of the threat that the monstrous or exotic worlds pose to any self thus represented. If in Beowulf we can read the hero’s transformation of the horror of violence into a heroic affirming narrative, in the Letter of Alexander, which ends with the promise of Alexander’s death in Babylon, the heroic narrator closes his text with the promise that he himself, for all his glory, will be absorbed by the East against which he has battled.

Monstrous Saints

Given that the monstrous embodies the ‘other’, it is to be expected that many of the lives of the saints depict the saint in conflict with, and victorious over, a monstrous figure. St Margaret, for example, battles a dragon in her prison cell, bursting him from within by making the sign of the cross on his belly; St George, in later legends, famously battles a similar dragon. As we have been arguing, secular literature of the monstrous often dwells on the problem that the figure which opposes the monstrous again and again becomes identified with it. As Friedrich Nietzsche writes in Beyond Good and Evil, ‘Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself.’ While one might read Margaret, swallowed into the belly of the dragon, literarily incorporated within it, as in that moment congruent with the monstrous, we need not work so hard: in the figure of another saint, Christopher, we find the explicit embodiment at once of the figure of the saint and the representation of the monstrous. The St Christopher of the later Middle Ages was a giant, and the saint known to the Anglo-Saxons was, even more dramatically, a giant with the head of a dog. The literal monstrosity of St Christopher emphasizes the resonance between the literature of the monstrous and the lives of the saints: the saints, like the monsters, have extraordinary bodies, and extraordinary relationships to those bodies. The saint, as the bridge between heaven and earth for man, at once body, material, human, and spirit, an extension of the divine, also like the monster, is in a sense both a hybrid creature and, as such, a kind of border-dweller. If, as in the case of Margaret or George, the saint evidences sanctity in the possession of miraculous power against a fabulous beast like the dragon, at the same time, the positioning of the saint beside or within the body of the beast reminds us of the similarity the saint bears to that creature.

The Exotic and the Matter of Britain

The Arthurian literature which in many ways has come to represent all of medieval literature in the contemporary imaginary comes late into English. There are no Anglo-Saxon stories of Arthur and his knights, despite the fact that, if any historical Arthur existed, he would have lived at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period, Arthuriana enters into English literature only after the Conquest, as part of a re-invention of the idea of England, with roots in the Classical past, continuity through Celtic Britain, and re-emergence, after the Anglo-Saxon period, in Norman England. The twelfth-century Geoffrey of Monmouth, one of the earliest chroniclers of the history of the Britons, writes that ‘Britain is inhabited by five races of people, the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, and the Picts and Scots. Of these the Britons once occupied the land from sea to sea, before the others came.’ Geoffrey’s historical project is thus to present the history of the Britons, retrieving it from obscurity and Welsh sources, and granting force to the Norman appropriation of that history in its own.
It is in Geoffrey's Latin History of the Kings of Britain that we encounter some of the earliest depictions of Arthur and Merlin, and hence of the monsters against whom Arthur fights, and the dragons and other fabulous beasts of Merlin's prophecies. Among the giants whom Arthur fights, perhaps most memorable are the monster of Mont-Saint-Michel and, because his narrative is embedded in that of the monster of Mont-Saint-Michel, the giant Ritho. The giant Ritho, who collects men's beards and wears a cloak sewn from sea to sea, but whom Arthur brains and then orders beheaded. Yet for all that, Geoffrey's Arthur, fighting Romans and monsters and thereby making the world safe for the Britons, embodies the prehistory of England; Geoffrey does not include the now-famous references to Arthur's return after his death. Instead, Arthur, for Geoffrey, is "mortaly wounded" and taken to have his wounds treated, and then vanishes from the history.  

Of course, Arthuriana remains, in the Lais of Marie de France, in romances like Helid of Cornwall's Silence; and, later in English, in Gawayn and the Green Knight, and Chaucerian texts like the Wife of Bath's Tale. And, even in these later texts, Arthur's court, while it epitomizes chivalry and civilization, continues to be associated with marvels, monsters, and the very exotic against which it defends itself. In Gawayn and the Green Knight, for example, the giant green who challenges Arthur to the beheading game appears in the midst of the young Arthur's court, summoned as if part of the courtly feasting ritual.

Gerald of Wales

Gerald of Wales likewise dwells on the exotic nature of the British Isles, though his perspective differs from that of the other authors discussed here, and so his interpretations likewise vary. His most remarkable work is the Topographia Hiberniae (Topography of Ireland), composed, expanded and edited from around 1185 until the end of his life some forty years later.  

The text is primarily historical and geographical in nature, but woven all throughout its accounts of natural features and rulers are miracle stories and marvels, ranging from omen, bearded ladies, and werewolves, to speaking crosses and eternally burning hedges. Perhaps owing to its exotic tales, the Topographia was quite popular, and survives in dozens of manuscripts. Several of these are richly illuminated with a series of direct illustrations of the text that may have been designed by Gerald himself.

While much Arthuriana places the emphasis on the monstrousity of Britain, formerly the land of giants, Gerald pushes that monstrousity further outward from the normative centre of the world. In moving outward from the perfection of Jerusalem, one risked increasing dangers and horrors, as shown on many medieval world maps, such as the thirteenth-century Hereford Map (London, British Library Add. 28688, folios 5, figures 4 and 6). Here, along the left (or southern) edge of the world, we find a host of marvels and monsters, each carefully bound by a tight-fitting frame. Let us assume such monstrousity to be a southern characteristic; the map balances out this concentration with the prominent depiction to the north of the world enclosing the monstrous hordes of Gog and Magog.  

On this map, and many others, England appears at the edge of the ecumene, the inhabitable world. This border region is the land of monsters, but also for many English writers and artists, it is home. Gerald, though, was not English, at least by medieval standards. He was the son of a Welshman, William de Barri, and a Norman, Angharad (daughter of a mistress of Henry I). As a result, he was an outsider to the power structure of England, but also to Wales. As he wrote, "Each people considers me to be a stranger to them and not one of their own, always looking at me with eye of a stepmother, the one harboring suspicion against me and the other hating me." Perhaps as a consequence of his hybrid identity, and the resultant prejudice he experienced, Gerald turned his fertile imagination to the only land more marginal than England: Ireland. Here, his attention is focused on its exoticism, expressed through physical, religious, cultural, and dietary oddities.  

Gerald's descriptions of the wonders he claims to have observed in Ireland are varied not only in the nature of their exoticism, but also in his attitude toward them. The population of Ireland, he tells us, includes "so many born blind, so many lame, so many with imperfect bodies, deprived of the beneficence of nature." In this case, Gerald concludes that the Irish are deforeamed because they are "an adulatory race, an incontinent race, a race of illegitimate birth and conception, a race outside of the law, foully ravishing nature herself with hateful and hostile craft." This outlook, in which individuals are blamed for their condition, was characteristic of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Gerald shows surprising sympathy for the Osman, who:

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45 This popular map has been discussed in most publications on medieval cartography, including Harvey (1991: 30); Millman (2006: 12–18). 46 Campbell (1986: 61); Lorenzo (1990: 15). 47 Gerald of Wales (1188: p. 111): "Ut utique populus me sibi turquis alienus reputaret et non asseveraverit quas verberarum nostrarum, alio habere mexituribus et alio eremitam." 48 Gerald of Wales (1187: 403): "non careas naturas, tu cladenses, tu corporeuis vitiis, et suarnae beneficam desinturam." 49 Ibid.

50: "Haec miraculae si de gentes adultera, gente incecta, gente illigerrata nata et copulata, gente iagnata, arte turca et invisa ipsum captivorum adulterarum nostrarum, tales extirpat contra naturam legem "naturalis producet."
had the complete body of a human, except for the extremities, which were those of an ox. From the joint where the hand meets the arm, and where the feet meet the legs, extending out, he exhibited the hooves of an ox. His head was completely without hair, deformed by baldness, more so in the back of the head than in the front part. Here and there in places, he merely had soft down instead of hair. He had swollen eyes, which were round, and like an ox’s in roundness and colour. His face down to his mouth was flat; for a nose, instead of nostrils he had two holes, but no projection.

This emotive and sensitive description, which evokes images of human deformity as much or more than the monsters of fantasy, is accompanied in several manuscripts by images equally poignant. The episode concludes grizzly: the Osmany was killed by a group of youths living in the Norman castle of none other than Gerald’s own relatives, the FitzGeralds. Gerald tells us that ‘he did not deserve their wickedness and envy’.

For Gerald, Ireland is a land of deeply conflicted emotions. Its position further from the centre of the world allowed him to describe it as a land of even greater monstrosity than England, and thereby to render England as more central and normative than is common in previous works. On the other hand, perhaps resulting from his own status as a ‘self-conscious hybrid’, Gerald seems to feel an uncommon sympathy with these monsters. Through his Topography, then, Gerald’s outsider view moves England closer to the world’s center, while he simultaneously identifies with the marginal.

Sir Gawain and Blisclarev

While Gerald’s sometimes sensitive depictions bespeak self-consciousness and identification not only against, but also with the monstrous, increasingly, depictions of the monstrous and exotic in later medieval literature explore the intimacy of the monstrous with the human, the exotic with the emergency of proto-national identity. Marie de France’s Blesclarev, and the later anonymous Sir Gower, both explore notions of monstrosity as it appears in the very centre of court life. In Blesclarev, a werewolf, trapped by his wife’s deception in his wolf body, after a marvellous performance of courtly obeisance, lives submissively at the court of the king. In Sir Gower, the monstrous giant, in an act of penance, lives like a dog under the table of the emperor, eating only food from the mouths of hounds and forsaking speech. In

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The much anthologised late-fourteenth-century Sir Gawain and the Green Knight demonstrates continuity both with Geoffrey’s association of Arthuriana and its monsters with narratives of proto-national identity and with the significant shift in the literary representation of monstrosity articulated in Blesclarev and Sir Gower. Gawain and the Green Knight focuses on the adventures of one of the knights of the Round Table in the youth of Arthur’s court, but it begins not with the court itself, but with the founding of Britain by Brutus. The subsequent confrontation between Gawain and the green giant thus emerges in the immediate context of foundational myth. The association of the confrontation with the giant with both the narrative of proto-national origin and the representation of the monstrous with developing masculinity becomes all the more striking given the insistent description of Arthur and his court as ‘young’ in ‘boyish’, in ‘the flower of life’. The giant appears most literally in answer to Arthur’s demand for a marvel before his supper. That is, it is the young Arthur who seems to summon the giant’s presence. But it is the giant, with his fall, and aggressively adult male body, who issues the challenge to the identity of Arthur—’Where is the noblest of all this crew? ’—and who seems to control the subsequent events. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, ‘[t]he Green Knight plays the role of the traditional giant of romance, that catalyst to the formation of an adult identity, but with some important modification to that monstrous body.’

For Cohen, the Green Knight, the giant in this romance, has moved significantly from the realms of the exterior, the wilderness, the conquerable ‘other’ to the interior, the domestic spaces of court life. Hence, the challenge to the beholding game, in which the Green Knight voes to stand still for a single blow with an axe from one of Arthur’s knights, in exchange for the opportunity to return the blow in a year’s time, is issued within the court, and Gawain’s trials a year later, on the way to receive the
'nick' on his own neck occur in oppressively internal space—not only inside Bercilak's castle, but in a curtained bed, in an inner chamber of that castle.

The contracts in this romance appear to be between men, or between men and monsters between the Green Knight, Arthur, and Gawain, between Bercilak and Gawain. Yet in the central episodes of the romance, the contract, that Gawain and Bercilak will exchange what they gain during the day, Gawain lying in Bercilak's home, in bed, and Bercilak out hunting, replaces a direct and physical confrontation between man and giant (like the exchange of axe blows) with prolonged testing, over three days, of a man by a courteously lady, in this case Bercilak's wife.39 While Bercilak hunts for animals, that is, Bercilak's wife invites Gawain to respond to her sexualized advances with at least a kiss, and finally by accepting a token, a green silk girdle, both a love token and a magical defense against the impending axe blow. When Bercilak returns from the hunt each day, he gives Gawain his catch; Gawain, in exchange, kisses Bercilak as many times as the lady has kissed him. The poem brilliantly emphasizes the substitution of the lady for the giant by framing the seduction scenes with graphically violent depictions of hunting and butchery, scenes which both echo and amplify the violence of the decapitation of the Green Knight. Not surprisingly, when Gawain goes finally to receive the axe blow from the Green Knight, he discovers that Morgana, not the Green Knight himself, has set the plot in motion, and that the threat is directed not against Arthur so much as against Guenevere, whom Morgan wished to terrify. What Cohen has recognized as 'important modification to [the] monstrous body' of the figure of the giant we might also consider as articulated here in the possibility of the substitution of the 'courteous lady' for that monstrous body, or at least the supplementation of the courteous lady to the monstrous body of the giant.40

As E. Jane Burns has argued, the courteous lady in medieval literature, increasingly recognizable by her costly silk clothing, signifies at once male aristocratic dominance, and an alterity, or hybridization, at the very focal point of that dominance.41 As Burns argues, given that high-quality silk is not produced in Europe until the end of the Middle Ages, the ostentatious clothing of aristocratic bodies and spaces in silk in courtly literature marks those spaces and bodies with the evidence of European conquest of the East, from which all high-quality silk is imported. But at the same time, by bringing the exoticized East, in textiles still identified with places like Constantinople, or Damascus, into the very centre of European aristocratic domestic space, and in particular, by marking the body of the courteous lady by her clothing of 'Saracen silk,' this literature creates at its centre a figure both European and Eastern, both normative and exotic, both intimate and strange.42 In Gawain and the Green Knight, as the green silk girdle passes from the lady's body to Gawain's, and, as we

Alexander and 'The Book of Sir John Mandeville'

Medieval interest in the figure of Alexander, evident in the early Letter of Alexander to Aristotle, continues after the Conquest. As Gerrit H. V. Brunt notes, as early as 1270 the Anglo-Norman poem, Le roman de tout chevalier, written by Thomas of Kent, details the life of Alexander, incorporating materials from the continental Alexander romance as well as familiar source materials such as Salomonis Collectanea rerum when Gawain goes finally to receive the axe blow from the Green Knight, he discovers that Morgana, not the Green Knight himself, has set the plot in motion, and that the threat is directed not against Arthur so much as against Guenevere, whom Morgan wished to terrify. What Cohen has recognized as 'important modification to [the] monstrous body' of the figure of the giant we might also consider as articulated here in the possibility of the substitution of the courteous lady for that monstrous body, or at least the supplementation of the courteous lady to the monstrous body of the giant.40

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later burn, has passed already from Bercilak's to the lady's, the dangerous ductility of this association of the aristocratic body with its silk clothing becomes all the more transparent: if the body marked by this clothing is at once normative and exotic, it is also at once possibly male and female. As Gawain and the Green Knight plays with homosexual desires, kissing games, and the underlying violence between men, this late romance also draws the figure of the monster all the more inextricably into its innermost spaces, representing alterity, and with it not tact but controlling power, at the pivotal point in male aristocratic European culture, in the figure of the courteous lady.

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values, Alexander remains so inextricably bound up with the territories he has conquered that the reversal of fortune which makes his death tragic in the medieval sense is not that he is oppressed by those he has oppressed, but rather that he is killed by his own people: in his death Alexander, the 'flourisher of knighthood', is memorialized, in the East, as a victim of his own conquering power.

It is not surprising, then, both that the Alexander materials are substantial sources for The Book of Sir John Mandeville and that the figure of Alexander appears in episodes of Mandeville's re-examination of the exoticized East as a critique of Western practices and values. The Book of Sir John Mandeville, written as early as the mid-fourteenth century, becomes quickly and widely popular in Europe, appearing in vernaculars including English, Spanish, and Dutch, and remaining an authoritative source of information on the East for at least two centuries. Although it clearly relies on sources familiar to readers of the literature of the monstrous and the medieval exotic—the Alexander materials, Isidore, Orosius, the Bible—The Book of Sir John Mandeville represents a significant departure from most of the literature in that it presents itself as a first-person narrative of actual observation, not by a legendary hero but by a real traveler. The identity of Sir John Mandeville, however, has not been confirmed, and especially given the familiarity of many descriptions from extant sources, the likelihood that the narrative reflects much actual travel is extremely low. Yet, as Suzanne Conklin Akbari has noted, the 'extraordinary popularity' of the text over several centuries, and reception not as fiction or legend, but as a narrative with significant truth value well into the Age of Exploration shifts the generic identity of this text: it is both literature of the monstrous and exotic, and travel literature. It is perhaps then less striking that, as Iain Macleod Higgins observes, among the many sources located and cited for The Book of Sir John Mandeville, 'conspicuously absent' is the book of Marco Polo's travels, The Description de Monde. Macleod suggests that Mandeville may function as a 'critical response' to Polo's representations, at once extending and correcting, recontextualizing and revising.

The reception of The Book of Sir John Mandeville thus underscores a significant tension between contemporary and medieval understandings of the literature of the monstrous. Caroline Walker Bynum has demonstrated clearly that the medieval literature of wonder is predicated on belief, or an assumption of truth: 'You can only marvel at something that is at least in some sense, there.' One might extend Bynum's insight to much medieval literature of the monstrous. Hence, discussions of the monstrous races in Isidore are part of an encyclopedic description and explanation of the earth and its inhabitants, not a fictional aside, and, similarly, depictions of these monstrous beings appear on the mappa mundi with claims to reality equal to those of Adam and Eve, Noah, or the English. If one contemporary reader is to read the literature of the monstrous as an explicitly fictional mirror to a medieval reality, the reception of The Travels reminds us that for the medieval and even early modern reader, this literature was not only significant because it provided real insights into the nature of the world, and one's place within it: much of the literature of the monstrous was significant also because it was understood to be true.

Encountering Others: Jews and Saracens

Real and true as the representations of the monstrous in much of the literature we have surveyed were understood to be, such representations also extended to language and images used to describe experientially real religious and cultural 'others' in the dominantly Christian West, perhaps most clearly the communities of Jews within Europe, and the Islamic peoples who occupied much of Spain and against whom European Crusaders fought throughout much of the High Middle Ages. As Mary B. Campbell has noted, 'curiously charming' as many literary representations of the monstrous may be, the power of those representations can also be articulated in their extension to living people, and to real violence done to those people. Jews formed a distinct subaltern group in Medieval Europe, separated from their Christian neighbours by 'ethical, bodily, and cultural deviance that would be so well established by the close of the Middle Ages.' In England, the presence of a Jewish community was restricted to the period between the Norman Conquest and the Expulsion in 1290, allowing Jews to be somewhat more mythical before and after that they were on the Continent. The newness of the Jews to England may have been a factor in the locality of the origin of the Blood Libel claims, and the ignominious and persistent claims of an international Jewish conspiracy 'every year [to] sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in scorn and contempt of Christ.' The earliest extant tale clearly working to constitute these claims is the twelfth-century Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth. In this account, the ritual murder of a young boy sets the Jews in willful and violent opposition to the Christian community, and thereby allows this exotic group to serve the same function fulfilled by the monsters discussed above, helping the dominant culture to define itself at its explicit expense. It should therefore not be surprising to find Jews depicted in texts and images as distorted and caricatured to the point of monstrousity. Perhaps the most famous visual example is the image of Isaac of Norwich from the Rolls of the Issues of the Exchequers, depicting Isaac, the wealthiest Jew in England, with three faces. He is surrounded by Jews with caricatured profiles and devils. While in this case the
monstrous figure is an identifiable individual, in most cases the Jew is simply that—an iconic representation of a people.

Although anti-Semitism is integral to much medieval Christian thinking, an escalation of violence, both literal and figurative, against European Jews parallels the onset of the crusading movements at the end of the eleventh century. While the motivations for such violence are extremely complex, it cannot be coincidental that large-scale military mobilization against peoples identified as religiously and culturally dangerous to Christianity in the Holy Lands is accompanied by violence to peoples identified as religiously and culturally dangerous to Christianity also within Europe.  

Cruising literature, from historical accounts to romances, establishes the Islamic peoples of both Islamic Spain and the Holy Lands, referred to as Saracens, as not only enemies to European Christianity, but enemies depicted explicitly in the language of the monstrous. John Block Friedman has detailed "a fairly widespread connection of Saracens and Cynocephali in the Middle Ages, in both East and West, as the Muslims were often described by Christians as a 'race of dogs' and argues for the popularity of the figure of the 'dog-headed Saracen' in its appearance in both literary and visual contexts." Of course, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out, this literature also contains images of Saracens, like images of Jews, which are not necessarily monstrous, and which, in episodes of 'passing' for example, emphasize not difference but a permeability of identity for Europeans and Saracen alike, a permeability which haunts English medieval literature at some of its very foundations. Certainly vilified figures persist in the literature; consider, for example, the treacherous Sultana in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale, or the blood-drinking and violence in The Sultan of Babylon. Yet, as Cohen observes, foundational texts like Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain contain narratives that imagine that the Saxons act in league with and merge with African or Saracen forces to defeat the Britons, thus justifying Anglo-Norman claims to difference and superiority but also positioning the figure of the Saracen at the moment of the origin, however denied, of an idea of England.

Visual Counterparts

Monstrosity is not only a prevalent literary theme, but a rather a theme that appears frequently in all aspects of medieval culture. Medieval art is overflowing with images of monsters. They appear all throughout the period, in every sort of manuscript and architecture. Among the most significant early images of monstrosity are those which appear in manuscripts of the Wonders or Marvels of the East. The three English

Wonders of the East in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. vi, known as the Cotton or Anglo-Saxon map (figure 2). This manuscript, c.1090, is a miscellany of scientific materials including charts for the dating of Easter, astrological materials such as the Aratea, a zonal map, and Priscian’s verse translation of Dionysius Periegetes’ geographical poem, Periplus.

The Cotton map contains a series of wonders or marvels, some monstrous and all exotic. They reside, in this case, exclusively at the outer edge of the continents of the world, forming a ring in this liminal zone. The wonders included here are: monstrous people (the Cynocephalas, the ‘Barbaric People’, the Ethiopians—often included in accounts of the Wonders of the East, and described alternately as burned black by the hot African sun or having the snouts of pigs—and the Griffin People, perhaps derived from Hecatius Ister’s Cosmographia), as well as the biblical hordes of Gog and Magog; exotic animals (lions, the only marble to have an image on this map); geographical features (the Pillars of Hercules, the Mountains of Gold and of Extreme Heat); and wonder-filled regions (Zeus and Africa, described as ‘wild... full of beasts and plentiful of serpents’). The location of these wonders is not incidental. Rather, it is intricately tied to their basic definition as figures of the exotic. They are, in their bodies and habits, strange and different from their readers, and so their location is outlandish, in the most literal way. They serve to mark the boundaries of humanity, in their bodies and their cultural norms, and so they are relegated to the periphery of the world. Since this world was considered to be the reflection of a divine plan and order, their location was purposive; these liminal creatures served to elucidate the meaning of the universe, and so their inclusion on world maps and elsewhere was far from incidental and though images of monsters are often mischaracterized as drooleries, they are far from dull.

Critical Approaches to Monstrosity

The study of medieval monstrosity has been ongoing at least since J. R. R. Tolkien’s study ‘Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics’, published in the Proceedings of the British Academy, in 1936, followed by Rudolf Wittkower’s seminal article, ‘Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters’. The former was a call, in essence, to acknowledge the monsters rolling throughout Old English literature. The latter is a masterful articulation of the sources that lie behind medieval accounts and images of monsters, tracing these stories back well beyond the usual citations to classical authors such as Pliny and Herodotus to more ancient sources such as the Mahabharata. This influential and often cited article was typical of the approaches that dominated the study of monsters in the twentieth century.

In more recent years, the study of monstrosity has made increasing use of theoretical approaches. Perhaps the most common of these have been rooted in psychoanalytical and post-colonial theories, with their stresses on abjection (as explored by Julia Kristeva48) and disgust (articulated by William Ian Miller49), and on the power relations between central and marginal groups (most clearly indebted to Michel Foucault46, but also to Edward Said47 and more recently to Homi Bhabha50). The range of approaches brought to medieval monsters indicates their complexity as subjects of inquiry, their difficulty but also their richness. The majority of these recent efforts have been directed not at figuring out the origins of these creatures, literary or ‘real’, but rather, at determining what they can tell us about the cultures that produced, reproduced, and consumed them in texts and images.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

As we have surveyed medieval literature of the monstrous, we have emphasized the function of the monstrous and exotic in the definition of the normative, even as that definition shifts, and shifts dramatically in the roughly eight hundred years that make up the long Middle Ages. We have also argued that medieval depictions of giants, dog-headed men, and other monstrous creatures explore not only the ways in which these creatures are not men, but also the ways in which the strangeness of the monstrous is intrinsically part of the English, the Christian, the human experience.

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CHAPTER 35

SPIRITUAL QUEST
AND SOCIAL SPACE

TEXTS OF HARD TRAVEL
FOR GOD ON EARTH
AND IN THE HEART

MARY BAIN CAMPBELL

Thanks to protracted international attention to travel of many kinds, travel writing, and ‘boundaries’ over the last quarter century or so, not to mention new theoretical models for examining space both geographical and social, critical interest in pilgrim-
gages on the part of literary scholars, social historians, and anthropologists has crossed the boundaries of history of religion and Church history to which it was once ‘proper’ (1). In particular, historical work in English on Islamic and Jewish pilgrimage is now more available, though most (not all) relevant original texts in Arabic and

(1) The literature in this is vast; see for a start the journals Studies in Travel Writing, Journeys and Space, Journal of World Studies, and the inaugural contemporary classics of Sahl (1997; Smith (1998); Appadurai, ed.), and the special issues (Fall, 2005) ‘Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory’ of Cultural Anthropology; Said (1995); Clifford and Marcus (1986); Turner and Turner (1985). The field of the history of pilgrimage and travel writing has been exceptionally lively across the world, with international conferences on locations from UNESCO (1984 to 2007), and the International Tourist Writers Association, as well as in France by the Centre de Recherches sur la Littérature des Voyages at the Sorbonne, and numerous other institutions. See also Felsler and Young (2002); Friedmann and Hogg (2006).