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AUGUSTAN MONSTERS. D. Lowe *Monsters and Monstrosity in Augustan Poetry*. Pp. x + 274. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Cased, US\$75. ISBN: 978-0-472-11951-6.

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AUGUSTAN MONSTERS

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Part cabinet of curiosities, part literary-historical critique, this book makes a strong case that the socio-cultural, intertextual, scientific and political complexity of certain misanthropic hybridised hominid monsters helped Augustan poets discuss poetry and its ends. Through a rich succession of innovative, intricate readings of monsters in the poetry of Virgil, Horace and Ovid, L. further clarifies, often with greater textual and historical nuance than ever before, the sense that Augustan ‘monstrosity’ reflected and innovated very specific gendered (and often medicalised) stereotypes, with male monsters like the Cyclops and Hundred-Handers generally typified by their strength and epic scale, female monsters like the Harpies and Scylla, by contrast, by their (grotesquely sexualised) miasmic ooze of liquids and emotions. Taken as a whole, this book represents an extensive, if not exhaustive, Roman teratypology that will prove a valuable resource for the study of Augustan culture and pre-medieval monster-theory, even as it falls short of making the stronger case that there might be something monstrous not only *within*, but *about*, Augustan poetry itself.

L. predicates the symbolic strength of his literary taxonomy on a historic scheme: having shed their public and religious divinatory functions in the late Republic and gained admission to a variety of physical, environmental and topographic theories (i.e. ‘monstriferous mires’), monsters could now, L. argues, fully reflect the character and rhetorical colours of ‘Augustan Rome as a late Hellenistic culture’ (p. 233). L.’s historical survey thus shows a fall in the religious use of *monstra* proportionately inverted to prodigies’ increased usefulness as impressive curios for the well-to-do, ammunition for philosophers’ admonitory salvos and, the book’s focus, a newly dynamic symbolic cum generic vocabulary for poets seeking to explain the purpose of their works in political (rational, imperial) and aesthetic (sublime) terms.

Whether one agrees that monsters’ symbolic dilations were necessarily tied to prodigies’ increased autonomy from socio-religious practices, this book’s structure – it moves from ancient and modern monster theory (Chapter 1) to monsters in Roman historical life (Chapter 2) to monsters female (Chapters 3–4) and male (Chapters 5–6) – allows L. to draw out how close readings of literature can contribute to our understanding of a unique cultural moment. Aside from its excessive (and apparently voluntary) shadow-boxing with the Bakhtinian grotesque (pp. 121–4), and whatever one’s final take on whether Celaeno is a Fury or simply a straw-man ‘fraud’ (p. 138), her curses frightening and justified or too obviously a comic foil, L.’s treatment of the Harpies’ complex position at the crossroads of Greek, Roman, archaic, Hellenistic, neoteric and Augustan literary, material and medical culture is exemplary for its bold handling of eclectic, unwieldy and otherwise quite distant traditions. Similarly rich are L.’s close readings of monsters with ‘feminine exteriors’ (Chapter 3, Scylla, Sirens, Medusa) and with ‘feminine interiors’ (Chapter 4, Harpies, Furies), of epicene ‘beast-men’ (Chapter 5, Centaurs, Minotaur) and of epic ‘hyperbolic monsters’ (Chapter 6, Giants, Cyclopes): each monster is subject to detailed literary, historical, artistic and scientific study, combining diachronic studies of their development with synchronic analysis of their uses in the Augustan period, making L.’s work required reading for future treatments of these figures.

A few missed opportunities: while L.'s taxonomies help bring productive order to monsters' moral and aesthetic confusion, they also prevent monsters from being very, well, monstrous; hence L.'s tendency to avoid or explain away cases that seem to elide gender boundaries or, even more insidiously, subvert the rational, ordered and imperial ends of Augustan poetry – the 'exception proves the rule' quality of L.'s otherwise excellent treatment of Ovid's centaurs (pp. 164–82) is only part of the problem. With reference only to examples from Virgil, had the volume been more open to a wider range of beasts, L. would certainly have been able to tell us a great deal about, for example, the Trojan Horse: if female monsters, as L. notes, tend intimately to leak poison while male monsters exude sublimely massive force, then what does one do with the case of a *monstrum* (*Aen.* 2.245) *instar montis* (*Aen.* 2.15), at whose size Trojans marvel (*moles mirantur* – *Aen.* 2.32), and in whose womb (*Aen.* 2.20, 52, 401, cf. N. Horsfall, *Aeneid* 2 [2008], p. 64) crouch Greek spearmen whose insinuation into Troy's otherwise hermetic walls permits Danaan success? A finer balancing act for Laocoon's monstrous snakes (cf. B. Knox, 'The Serpent and the Flame', *AJPh* 71.4 [1950]), slithering from the (male) Neptune to (female) Minerva, could hardly have been found, and L. would have been its ideal interpreter.

L.'s omission of the Trojan Horse, of gigantomachic *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis* (*Aen.* 8.698), and of a host of other possible figures is, perhaps, excused by a self-limitation to misanthropic hominid hybrids; more problematic is the tendency to put the brakes on monsters' interpretative momentum before they disrupt a poem's moral logic. So, when Aeneas is compared to Aegaeon (*Aen.* 10.565–70), L., citing P. Hardie's gigantomachic reading of the scene (P. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium* [1986], p. 212), usefully shows how hundred-handers serve, at least since the *Argonautica*, as generic markers of 'failed epic sublimity [against] Callimachean delicacy' (p. 205), but fails to wrestle earnestly with those aspects of the comparison that Hardie himself had admitted made the simile 'difficult to fit . . . into a wider thematic context' (op. cit. p. 156), i.e. the intimation that Aeneas' violence is that of a heaven-storming, order-crashing *monster*.

Similarly, following fifteen exemplary pages on the 'Feminine Interiors' of *Furiae/Erinyes* from Homer on (pp. 145–60), L. turns to Virgil's final description of Aeneas – *accensus furiiis* (sic, p. 159, cf. *Aen.* 12.946) – as 'a Fury figure'. Because Aeneas' acts simply *must* be 'in the service of justice' (p. 161), Aeneas' Furies must also constitute 'a legitimately male trait' (p. 161), even if this particular use is, as even L. admits, (problematically) unique to Virgil (cf. R. Tarrant, *Aeneid Book XII* [2012], pp. 20–1). So although in each of these cases L. marshals rich data from disparate sources – and much to the reader's delight and advantage – the work of keeping taxonomies clean and at the service of pre-established critical frameworks forecloses the adaptation of this data to fresh ends. If, as L. asserts, monsters 'represent established norms in conflict with new thinking' (p. 1) and if, as the bold monster-theses of A. Weiss suggest, monsters' 'conflation of genders and genres' help them 'manifest the plasticity of the imagination and the catastrophes of the flesh' (A. Weiss, 'Ten Theses on Monsters and Monstrosity', *TDR* 48.1 [2004], 124–5), then why should monster theory wish incessantly to divide categories into subcategories to preclude precisely the riotous reflections these beasts inspire?

Monster criticism, like all literary criticism, is at its best when it essays to interpret the content and critique the critics of an entire myth (e.g. the sphinx as '*un condensato dell'intero mito di Edipo*' in M. Bettini, 'I mostri sono buoni per pensare', in R. Paris [ed.] et al., *Mostri* [2013], p. 29) or, more broadly, an entire work or corpus (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', *PBA* 22 [1936], 245–95; M. Goth, *Monsters and the Poetic Imagination in The Faerie Queene* [2015]; W.R. Johnson, *Momentary Monsters* [1987]). But while this book's Pitt-Rivers organisation – by monster-type, rather than by poem, author, or genre – keeps L. from clearly presenting new total interpretations

of any of the book's fascinating subjects, its nuanced treatments of individual monsters' many and varied instantiations, its innovative enrolling of these monsters in the casts of broader cultural vocabularies, and its serious attempt to make literary sense of these otherwise challenging classical aberrations, will prove useful reading for specialists of classical literature and, we can only hope, for the broader world of monster-studies, whose rough beasts slouch so often from the poems of L.'s welcome study.

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