

The Uses of the Monstrous in Greek and Roman Epic

Recent work in the social sciences (e.g., Asma, Gilmore, Sheehan and Sosna) and Classics (e.g., Atherton, Baglioni, Felton, Lowe), has explored the monstrous as a category of representation that authors and artists use to explore human experience and the boundaries of human society. Work has been done on the artistic representation of monsters in Near Eastern art and culture, archaic Greek poetry (e.g., Clay) and art examining both the evolution of specific monsters, such as dragons (Ogden) or folklore traditions about monsters, like the Lamia or Empousa, for the fears they evoke and explain (Johnston). Recent work on Latin literature (Lowe) has emphasized the greater role that monstrous beings, such as the Furies and Harpies, play in epic contexts. For all its value, such work leaves myriad questions about the uses of the monstrous in antiquity: how and why are monsters gendered; what anxieties do they explore or exploit; how are they used in the dynamics of literary history and criticism?

This panel consists of papers that examine the ways in which monsters are used in Greek and Roman epic to probe a variety of literary and social issues. An Introduction will introduce the study of monsters and what is to be gained from it, providing a context for the papers that follow. Paper #1 focuses on the *Iliad*; while some have ascribed the imagery of the monstrous to Cyclic epic rather than the *Iliad*, Book 2 does twice use monstrous imagery to describe epic of an Iliadic sort. Thus the poem, while not monstrous in its poetics like Chaeremon's *Centaur*, does not in fact conform to Aristotle's dictum about monsters too vast to be grasped by the eye all at once. The *Iliad* is an epic on that very scale. Paper #2 looks at examples in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, a poem that manages to include numerous monsters while still moving toward a kind of literary naturalism. The various categories of monsters here correspond to categories that make sense in a Hellenistic worldview rather than from the point of view of sheer fantasy. Paper

#3 examines heroic encounters with the monstrous in Ovid's narrative of Jason and Medea for the ways that monsters and confrontation with them can be used to figure poetics as well as to suggest the monstrous potential within human behavior, especially forms of war. Paper #4 turns to the Furies as modified by Vergil (and in contrast to similar post-Classical figures): no longer simply policing taboos and boundaries, the Furies now incite human beings to the violations of those things, autonomous agents rather than strictly subordinate functionaries. In fact, in Ovid and Statius the Furies may be said to reign rather than serve.

After the four central papers, a commentary will bring together the issues discussed in the different texts.

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