



Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript

Andy Orchard

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This series of detailed studies reconsiders the monsters of "Beowulf" against the background of early medieval and patristic teratology in general, and other Anglo-Saxon texts in particular, in order to demonstrate the changing range of Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the monstrous. The immediate manuscript context of the monsters in "Beowulf" is analyzed, as it sheds light on the poet's treatment of the theme of the monstrous and its integration into his work, and a series of parallel discussions consider a range of medieval treatments of the same theme in a variety of analogous texts (all provided with translation), in Latin, Old English, Middle Irish, and Old Icelandic. Changing attitudes towards the concept of pride, at first a positive social and heroic value finally tainted by a Christian sense of moral corruption, are reviewed. A close link is established between the depiction in Christian tradition of proud pagan warriors and the monsters they fight, and with whom they become increasingly identified. Different perspectives are clearly offered by considering "Beowulf" in isolation, or by comparison with the other texts in the manuscript, or against other medieval reworkings of the same themes. Such views are argued to be essentially complementary; in "Beowulf", as in so much other medieval teratological material, we can see working a closely-linked interest in twin themes: pride and prodigies. An appendix contains editions and translations of several of the main texts considered, namely the "Liber Monstrorum", the "Letter of Alexander to Aristotle" (in Latin and Old English), and the "Wonders of the East" (in Latin and Old English).

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