

*Des monstres et prodiges*. Ambroise Paré.

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Ambroise Paré's *Des monstres et prodiges*, originally introduced as the second part of a two-fold work on surgery (*On Generation* and *On Monsters* [1573]), stands at an epistemological crossroads that might be puzzling for a modern reader. On the one hand, Paré (1510–90)—the barber surgeon who revolutionized the art of medicine by inventing the ligature of blood vessels—attempts to demonstrate the physiological and psychological causes of monstrosity, whether excessive, deficient, or hybrid, such as an excess of semen or a narrow uterus. But on the other hand, he defines monsters in the first chapter as products of the almighty power of God, signaling (from the etymon

*monstrare*) human sin. This work follows the natural philosophy tradition, yet it ends with Psalm 104, in Clément Marot's translation.

This epistemic complexity has impaired Paré's reception through time. It took several centuries and Jean Céard's critical edition of *Des monstres et prodiges* (1971), as well as his groundbreaking study *La nature et les prodiges: L'insolite au XVIIe siècle* (1977), to rehabilitate the medical writer who had been seen by the historian P. F. Percy (1754–1825) as preventing intellectual progress. The excellent new paperback edition by Michel Jeanneret discussed here goes one step further in this reevaluation and definitively establishes Paré's analysis of monsters as an indispensable reference for sixteenth-century scholars and teachers. The monster and the monstrous are now an integral part of contemporary early modern studies (as shown by Wes Williams's *Monsters and Their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* [2011]) challenging key concepts such as categorization, hybridity, or the Other. Disruptive and disturbing, the monster is also now recognized as a privileged pedagogical device to approach sixteenth-century hybrid thought, as shown by the proliferation of monsters syllabi in literature departments. Paré's work on monsters has consequently gained interest on both sides of the Atlantic (*On Monsters and Marvels*, Janis L. Pallister [1982]; *Monstres et Prodiges*, Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani [1996]). But a modern, accessible, practical, yet critical edition in French was still to come and it is finally offered by Jeanneret with the present volume.

Jeanneret's edition is based on the 1585 edition of the text, the last to be published during Paré's lifetime, which Céard established as the most complete and accurate one. Divided in thirty-eight chapters, it starts with the depiction of human monsters, continues with a denunciation of beggars' monstrous deceits, followed by a consideration of demons, and ends with an enumeration of sea, land, and celestial monsters. Jeanneret's introduction focuses on Paré the man: a war and court surgeon, a prolific writer, a collector of curiosities, and a father of ten. He paints a subtle and moving portrait of this doctor who did not know Latin and defied the Parisian faculty, concerned about the emancipation of surgeons, by writing his medical treatises in vernacular French. In line with Paré's initial concern for vulgarization, the orthography of the present edition has been modernized. Jeanneret excels at highlighting the fascinating contradictions of this hybrid work: starting as a didactic treatise, it gradually takes on the shape of a curiosity cabinet catalogue, listing incredible examples of human deformation or marvelous anecdotes, collected by hearsay or from other sources of the time (such as Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires Prodigieuses*). The visual power of the seventy-seven original engravings, taken from contemporary travel narratives or natural history collections by Guillaume Rondelet or André Thévet, fuels the readers' imagination and the fascination for these creatures, which, as Paré admits, the human mind can sometimes not comprehend. Jeanneret shows how the programmatic shift from etiology to curiosity, from order to disorder, and from explanation to collection, points more broadly to the "epistemological void" in which Paré finds himself before the scientific revolution led by Galileo and Newton. The editor qualifies this work as "a hymn to life," in which the surgeon accomplishes a "disenchantment of the monster." Naturalizing and secularizing the monstrous, Paré sets it at the heart of human preoccupations. This edition,

accompanied by a chronology, a detailed bibliography, and endnotes, reaffirms the central position of Paré's text for a whole set of important problems in early modern studies today. It will be the point of reference going forward.

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