

Lecture: Tuesday, February 3rd
Apollonian and Dionysiac Beauty
The Greek World and Horror
The Beauty of Monsters
Monsters and Portents

Apollonian and Dionysiac Beauty

Zeus- assigned appropriate measure to all beings

This harmony expressed in four mottos:

1. "The most beautiful is the most just."
2. "Observe the limit."
3. "Shun hubris" (arrogance)
4. "Nothing in excess"

Temple at Delphi- co-presence of two antithetical divinities is not accidental

Apollo-western facade

Dionysus-eastern side

Expresses the possibility of an irruption of chaos into the beauty of harmony.

Complicates the Greek concept of beauty (Renaissance and Neoclassicism often neglected)

1. Antithesis- between Beauty and sensible perception.
divide between appearance and beauty

Beauty is partially perceivable- not always expressed in sensible forms-
(*Kalon- It is not merely perceivable with the senses. Plato felt that not everyone could grasp it.*)

2. Antithesis- between sound and vision (two forms preferred by Greeks)
visible forms- could be defined as kalon
music- expressed the soul,
chaos and music was part of the darker side of Apollonian Beauty, and therefore associated with Dionysus
 - a. things heard and seen can be measured
 - b. a statue represented an idea (and serene contemplation), but sound aroused the passions

Further aspect of the Apollo/Dionysus antithesis:

Eastern Art- physical proximity

1. Japanese sculpture meant to be touched
2. Japanese teabowls meant to be held and experienced tactilly
3. Tibetan sand madalla- requires interaction

Greek and Western Art- favor distance

Sight and hearing rather than touch, taste and smell

Anything that evokes the soul is suspect

Serene harmony, order and measure- Nietzsche- Apollonian Beauty

Appolonian Beauty screened the disquieting Dionysiac beauty

Dionysiac Beauty- joyous and dangerous, antithetical to reason, nocturnal

Beauty possessed with madness (think of the affects of wine).

(Can this be linked to the Sublime?) (Simultaneous, Symbiotic)

sublime, fabulous, fantastic, magical: apply to ugliness and to beauty

The Greek World and Horror

Full of ugliness and wickedness- no need to fall back on the

Apollo/Dionysus antithesis

Classical Mythology is a catalogue of indescribable cruelty:

Terrifying creatures- hybrids that violate the laws of natural forms

(William of Auvergne. Treatise on Good and Evil.

1.) Lacking a body part or having one too many.

Thus, hybrids of the animal kingdom who appear to share the characteristics of two different types of species.)

Homer:

1. Sirens (not attractive women with fish tail as later described) but
“nasty, rapacious birds”
2. Scylla and Charybdis
3. Chimaera

Virgil:

1. Cerberus
2. Harpies
3. Gorgons
4. Sphinx
5. Furies

6. Centaurs
7. Minotaur

The Beauty of Monsters

1. A Beautiful Portrayal of Ugliness

Every culture has an idea of Beauty and Ugliness- Relativism, Universality
Greek monsters- Satyrs and Priapus (part of the Dionysus antitheses)

Ugliness as a lack- (*viewed as opposite of Beauty*)

Art can portray ugliness in a beautiful way- “the beauty of this imitation
makes ugliness acceptable” this is clear from Aristotle to Kant

Ugliness becomes more complex:

Late Classical period

Christian period

Beginning to think outside of Greece:

Eco paraphrases Hegel: “with the advent of the Christian sensibility and of the art that conveyed it, central importance is reserved (especially as far as Christ and his persecutors are concerned) for pain, suffering, death, torture, Hell and the physical deformations suffered both by victims and their tormentors.”

2. Legendary and Marvelous Beings- Pliny the Elder’s Natural History- Encyclopedia- compilation of reports from various travelers- monstrous men and animals- Medieval people fascinated with marvels. Travel became popular, Marco Polo

Androgynes, Pygmies, Serpents with legs, rats the size of greyhounds, Sciapods (one leg and foot), Unicorns, Manticore, Flat faced people, large lower lip people,

3. Ugliness in Universal Symbolism- Monsters needed to be justified.

a. Universal Symbolism- St. Paul’s maxim- we see supernatural things in allusive and symbolic form

b. Moral Significance- every thing, animal, vegetable, mineral

1.) monsters included in the providential design of God

2.) medieval mystics, theologians, philosophers- monsters

contribute to the beauty of the whole. Chiaroscuro. Not against nature.

Portenta- come into being to signify something superior

Portentuosas- bearers of minor and accidental mutations
(material defect, but not of obedience to divine plan) hazy?

4. Ugliness as a Requirement for Beauty-

- a. Summa- Alexander of Hales (shadows make the light shine more)
monstrosity contributes to equilibrium
- b. radical rigorists complained that artists portrayed monsters, but were unable to resist them
 - 1.) St. Bernard- condemnation but descriptive
 - 2.) Finally, Romantacism- decadently portrayed the horrendous without hypocrisy

5. Ugliness as a Natural Curiosity- Attitude toward monsters changed from the Middle Ages to modern times.

- a. doctors, collectors of marvels and curiosities, naturalists
- b. monsters lost their symbolic power and it was no matter an issue as wether to view them as ugly or beautiful but to study form and anatomy, “scientific” interest. Myth/fact often confused.

Monsters and Portents

1. Prodigies and Monsters

- 4th century, Julius Obsequens, *Book of Prodigies*
recorded marvels- blood raining from the sky, flames, abnormal births, hermaphrodites
 - a. Anomolies (Plato first wrote about androgyne)
 - b. Travelers (hippopotami, elephants, giraffes, crocodiles- Job Leviathan) *Pliny's Natural History*

2. An Aesthetic of the Immeasurable

- a. “Hisperic Aesthetic” Classic Latinists and the Fathers of the Church condemned it. “verbal witchcraft”
- b. Between 7th and 8th centuries- change in tastes
Europe is going through its “Dark Ages” – decline in agriculture, abandonment of the cities, collapse of great Roman aqueducts and roads. A climate of general barbarity. No proportion or harmony.
- c. Between 7th and 9th centuries in England and Ireland
Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus- described and commented on the variety of monsters

3. The Moralization of Monsters- Not only in the illuminated pages, but on the capital of Romanesque churches.

St. Bernard's critique (similar to Vitruvius)

Christian world proceeded to an authentic "redemption" of monsters

Augustine- they are beautiful because they are creatures of God

Moralized bestiaries- every creature mentioned (real or imaginary) was associated with a moral teaching

Physiologus- the first of these texts to enter the Christian world (written in Greek) 2nd and 3rd centuries (lion/Christ)

4. The Mirabilia

Physiologus- the model for the bestiaries and encyclopaedias conceived (like the one by Pliny)

They include- *On the Nature of Things, The Image of the World, On the Property of Things, Mirror of Nature, The Book of the Treasure, The Little Treasure, Travels, On the Composition of the World*

Like Pliny's they tell of terrifying creatures

5. The Fate of Monsters

Monsters of our own time- Dracula, Frankenstein Mr. Hyde, King Kong, the living dead, aliens... We do not see them as messengers of God.