

Manlike Monsters On Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence

Edited by Marjorie M. Halpin and Michael M. Ames
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Reviewed by Robert E. Walls

The pervasiveness of manlike monster traditions has long presented fertile ground for folkloristic study. Yet, with the notable exception of Richard Bernheimer's classic **Wild Men in the Middle Ages**, the subject has largely escaped scholarly attention. Instead, most discussion has focused on the possible biological reality of such beings, despite the enduring consensus that all evidence, short of corporeal, adduced in favor of that reality will never satisfy the rigorous canons of scientific proof.

More recently, the strident calls of the Sasquatch-North America's own wonderfully elusive version of the wild man- have the attention of scholars whose interests lie in the undeniable **cultural** reality of monstrous humanoids. Why the apparent ubiquity of manlike monster myths? Can we elucidate the formative and functional dynamics of such traditions in different cultures? How does culture influence our perception of the world and those strange events we occasionally experience? Can linguistic evidence or judicious scientific analysis possibly answer the question of whether creatures like the Sasquatch, the Yeti, or anything akin, physically exist? These were the questions addressed by scholars at an unusual conference entitled "Anthropology of the Unknown: Sasquatch and Similar Phenomena," convened in May, 1978, by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. The ensuing conference volume, **Manlike Monsters On Trial**, is an enlightening, provocative, and surprisingly successful book.

Twenty-three articles, including an epilogue and an elaborate bibliography, comprise the body of this work. With two exceptions, the editors have confined discussion to the North American continent. Otherwise, each paper varies considerably in both scope and topic. Detailed examinations of Sasquatch-like phenomena are furnished by contributors representing the humanities and both the social and natural sciences. Indeed, so diverse are this

volume's perspectives that the only certain underlying thread of thematic unity is a peripheral interest in humanoid beings, believed real or chimerical. While some readers may be dissatisfied with such a loose interdisciplinary approach, for many others it will be one of the book's chief allurements.

The collection is divided into three sections. The first, "Monsters in the Forests of the Mind," contains seven papers which explore the nature of monsters in our society. Co-editor and conference organizer Marjorie Halpin's paper serves as a remarkably perceptive introduction as she considers the problems which must be recognized when delving into the contemporary "Goblin Universe." When she touches on the universal function which manlike monsters might serve-- helping to define what is, or is not, distinctly human-- she strikes a chord echoed throughout the volume. A similar, but less insightful paper by Ron Westrum follows, giving a sociological perspective of anomaly reportage. The third article, by Wilfreda Ann Mully, reviews the origin and purpose of monsters from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis. Utilizing the literature and art of medieval Europe, David Jeffrey provides a comprehensive look at wild men in the Middle Ages, placing Augustine's *genera homina monstrosa* aside Grendel and his dam in light of the two existing attitudes of the times; monsters were either "part of the deliberate diversity of creation," or they were veritable "embodiments of evil forces." The latter view prevailed into the Renaissance. The following article by Olive Dickason is a splendid complement to Jeffrey's. She traces the concept of *l'homme sauvage* from its incipient forms in the Old World to its strong influence upon French in the New World, fashioning attitudes which dehumanized Amerindians and resulted in their denial of aboriginal rights.

The first section concludes with papers by two folklorists. In a study of the relationship between belief, perception, and reportage in regard to Sasquatch-like beings in Newfoundland, Michael Yaft points out that while there are no well-articulated local traditions which distinctly identify a "Sasquatch", people do occasionally describe encounters with hirsute humanoids in the forests. They prefer to place such creatures in more culturally accessible

categories such as "an Indian, spirit, devil, fairy, or as nothing more than a bear." Finally, Carol Carpenter examines Canadian monster tales and, by considering their recurring features, suggests what roles extraordinary beings play in contemporary Canadian society, and how they express certain Canadian themes and preoccupations, particularly those relating to the imposing land itself.

The perspective of the next section, "Manlike Monsters of the Native New World," is anthropological in scope. Eight papers are divided into two equal parts; the first is concerned with monsters found in Native American mythologies, while the second inspects such traditions manifested in native art. Those familiar with Algonkian cultures will welcome Richard Preston's incisive look at the Witiko (or Windigo), that cannibalistic, monstrous humanoid so often discussed in the literature of anthropology. Previous efforts to interpret the Witiko phenomenon as a psychosis or, in terms of structural theory as a metaphor for Algonkian social structure, do not convince Preston. Instead, he sees Witiko as "an imputed or imagined quality of mind" which, as a tradition, clearly defines human and non-human competencies. Raymond Fogelson comes to a similar conclusion in the next paper, which analyzes the myths and beliefs surrounding Stoneclad, Cherokee culture's petrous analogue to the Witiko. He also notes that these beings seem to embody the potentially devastating effects of winter, as do other giant humanoids known to Iriquois-speaking peoples. Surveying the native cultures of northwest California, primarily the Yurok, Thomas Buckley provides a detailed taxonomy of monsters in light of Yurok cosmology. Inhabiting liminal regions of the world, these anomalies are "pure potential" since they represent both a viable source of power and all that is inimical and negative. Through the incorporation and control of these monsters, the Yurok can perceive their world as a balanced, stable, and total reality. Robin Rindington's article explains how the Wechuge phenomenon, similar to the Witiko, helps an Athabascan Dunne-za individual maintain a personal relationship with a spirit animal acquired through a visionary experience. Of equal importance to a cross-cultural understanding of monster beliefs is his discussion of the phenomenological differences between the Dunne-za culture and that of the

anthropologists, evinced in their relationships-- one experiential and the other institutional-- to the surrounding physical environment.

The manufacture of anomalous creatures in folk and tourist art is the focus of the next two papers. Julius Kassovic briefly explores the roots of monster-making in a Mexican Indian village, describing the growing production of grotesque ceramic figurines for the local tourist market and also explaining how the process has become a source of local conflict. Since regional folklore and religious beliefs reveal devilish beings practically everywhere, their explicit representation in greater numbers is thought by many villagers as a way to intensify the already present evil powers. In a similar vein, Nelson Graburn supplies an impressive article characterizing commercial art forms (carvings and prints) recently established by Canadian Inuit. Numerous creatures, humanoid and non-human, were recognized in traditional Inuit mythology, which was an "open-ended suggestive" system of communication in the oral mode. The past century, however, with its impact of literacy upon the Inuit, has refashioned that system into one which is "pictorial with closure," delimiting the conceptualization of mythological entities. Inspired by a putative "monkey" mask, collected about 1914 from the Tsimshian of northern British Columbia, Halpin's second contribution is an engaging discussion of manlike beings in Tsimshian mythology, their symbolic functions, and the ritual importance of Tsimshian masks in general. Archaeologist Roderick Sprague concludes the section with an intriguing look at the prehistoric Columbia River carved stone heads, all of which share features characteristic of non-human primates. These features show a strong correlation with those reported for the modern Sasquatch, Sprague notes, though the resemblance in no way verifies the creature's existence.

The potentiality of that existence is precisely the focus of the book's third and final part. John Green, a journalist partly responsible for the genesis and continuation of contemporary Sasquatch research, begins with a statistical survey of the anatomical and behavioral traits attributed to our North American Bigfoot. With the magisterial knowledge of his subject, Green renders a concise

ecological portrait of his presumed primate, noting the apparent parallels between North American and Russian wild men, averring that Sasquatch are not dangerous, do not constitute an endangered species and, phylogenetically speaking, are no closer to *Homo sapiens* than any of the great apes. Wayne Suttles' contribution, in what serves as an addendum to a paper published eight years previously, examines linguistic evidence for manlike monsters known to native cultures on the Pacific Northwest coast, discussing the relevancy of physical reality questions for both Western science and anthropology. John Colarusso furnishes some fascinating new ethnographic information about a wild man of the Caucasus and compares it with existing knowledge of modern Sasquatch/ Bigfoot beliefs. There is no mystique around the Caucasian wild man. Instead, the Russian creature is a very mundane and plausible part of the local fauna, which this reviewer has found closely parallels Bigfoot beliefs among logging peoples in northwestern North America.

The succeeding three papers, all written by physical scientists, represent sophisticated attempts to analyze purported material evidence of Sasquatch. Applying established zoological principles to reports of tracks and eyewitness sightings, George Gill determines Sasquatch population clines; R. Lynn Kirilin and Lasse Hertel, electrical engineers, estimate the pitch and vocal tract of a length of a tape recorded Bigfoot; lastly, alleged Sasquatch hair and feces samples are scrutinized by Vaughn Bryant, Jr. and Burleigh Trevor-Deutsch. Not Surprisingly, all results are inconclusive and certainly will not reconcile the conflicting views of the bio-realists and the grand debunkers. While each analysis is presented in the proper scientific idiom, the methods employed serve only too well as vivid reminders of Preston's earlier lament: we can easily overpower a poorly known phenomenon by imposing complex means of inquiry upon scanty and dubious data. The volume concludes on a high note with a fine epilogue by co-editor Michael Ames and a useful bibliography of Sasquatch-related materials compiled by L.G.M. Ruus.

The collection is well-written, expertly edited and nicely illustrated. Had several topics been broached its value would have been considerably enhanced. There is

nothing on the widespread Northern Athabascan "Bushmen" beliefs, or any discussion on the role humanoid monsters play in American popular culture, although an excellent paper addressing that topic was given at the conference. Finally, the most glaring, and in my opinion most significant, lacuna in this broad panorama of North American manlike monsters is the original Bigfoot tradition itself, so much a prominent and meaningful aspect of Pacific Northwest folklore. Green's dismemberment of the phenomenon virtually ignores the human element-- the eyewitness.

As both editors note, the subject can still be profitably studied, especially if one expands the contexts within which Sasquatch-like beings are considered. For the time being, this rather special inquiry into the nature and function of manlike monsters is a welcome and important work, relevant to the study of folklore.

Israeli Humor: The Content and Structure of the Chizbat of the Palmah. By Elliot Oring. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981. Pp. ix+295, appendix of texts, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Guy H. Haskell.

On May 19, 1941, seven years before the founding of the State of Israel, the National Council of the Haganah, the underground defence force of the Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate (the **Yishuv**), ordered the creation of a permanently mobilized striking force. The immediate reason for this order was the need to be prepared in the event of a Nazi takeover of Palestine by Rommel's Africa Corps, which was surging undefeated across the deserts of North Africa. This striking force was called the Palmah (acronym for **peluggot mahaz**, "assault companies") and through its role in the Allied invasion of Syria and Lebanon and Israel's War of Independence, it won a prominent place in the history of Israel's struggle for statehood. The force also entered Israeli consciousness and folklore as the symbolic embodiment of Israeli character and sacrifice during the heady years leading up to independence and the struggle for national survival thereafter. Yet it was not the Palmah's military