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Epilogue to *Manlike Monsters On Trial*

If monsters did not exist we would invent them, because we need them. And there lies the problem regarding the Sasquatch and other humanoid monsters. It is easy to make a case for monsters being inventions of culture; it is more difficult to demonstrate that they might also exist as creatures of nature, roaming real forests as well as the forests of the human mind. However, the urge to “prove” the natural existence of these anonymous creatures is a persisting one. Though neither the U.B.C. Conference on Humanoid Monsters nor this publication that resulted from it will likely satisfy that urge, the papers and discussions do suggest directions for further research and, the editors hope, will also help to establish parameters within which that work can be carried out.

Probably the strongest point established at the conference was the ubiquity of humanoid monsters through both time and space, from ancient times to the present, from the Wild Man of Europe to the little people of Newfoundland, from wood sprites to hairy giants, from little fox people to stone-clad ogres, and, of course, the Sasquatch in its various manifestations. Most of these creatures share in common wilderness habitats threatened by the expansion of human settlements or resource industries; but they also differ from one another in many ways. Anthropologists attending the conference were quick to emphasize that the principle of cultural relativity applied equally to monsters. Humanoid monsters, or at least beliefs in them, may be widespread, but we are advised that their meaning is determined by specific cultural contexts.

Even whether or not they can be recognized seems to be dictated by cultural categories of perception. The Wild Man of the Woods means one thing to the Salish Indian on the Pacific coast of North America, and something else to white man, though we now customarily refer to both by the terms Sasquatch or Bigfoot. But applying the same label to disparate phenomenon does not make them more alike. On the other hand, as John Green pointed out at the conference, whether an Indian said he saw a Sasquatch, he is at least saying that he saw something; whatever the meaning the Indian

ascribed to the sighting, it nevertheless remains a report of an anomaly from the point of view of the investigator. And yet, to go one step further, what one considers to be anomalous may also be culturally conditioned. Since the Newfoundland world view does not include the Sasquatch as a possibility, Michael Taft writes, unusual sightings are more likely to be reported as bears or wild Indians. The Sasquatch may very well be lurking in the forests of Newfoundland, but people are unable to recognize it because of their perceptual categories. People, Taft argues, are inclined to view most phenomena in those conceptual terms which seem most logical to them. If we accept that possibility, however, then we must also grant another: that the Sasquatch may not be lurking in the western forests, but people nevertheless “see it” because of their perceptual expectations. “The instrument of the search will determine the nature of what is found,” Graburn asserts, “and the instrument is the human mind, in its particular cultural milieu, with all the technical equipment that the culture puts at its command.”

Most anthropologists, then, readily accept the proposition that humanoid monsters are cultural creations. But might they also be creatures of nature, actual living beings? This question was asked over and over again at the conference, and though participants, and representatives of the media reporting the event, took sides, most agreed that no generally acceptable answer was available. And though some expressed cautious interest in footprints and in the Patterson film, most of the participants concurred with Grover Krantz’s statement that only an actual specimen would resolve the debate. I suspect it will take more than one specimen to satisfy the skeptics—preferably a tribe of them for anthropologists to study at their leisure.

One of the nicest things about monsters is that they lend themselves to interesting debates, and one of the more enlightening discussions during the conference concerned the role of evidence and the nature of the scientific method. How are we to deal with anomalous creatures? What are the proper relations between the scientific establishment and those amateurs, like the Sasquatch investigators, who toil on the frontiers of knowledge? How can members of the scholarly establishment resolve the contradiction between their commitment to the fundamental importance of free inquiry and the intellectual conservatism that derives from their scientific skepticism? To what extent should a scholar risk his or her professional reputation by pursuing non-respectable topics? Are amateur investigators denied research support because they lack professional credentials or because they, too, pursue illicit topics? Once again, none of the questions were answered very clearly or to the satisfaction of many people, and it is doubtful that anyone changed his or her opinions on the major issues. The debates nevertheless did serve to highlight the important problems.

One useful point made was the need to appreciate the necessary limita-

tions of science: its inherent skepticism, its conservative attitude towards evidence, its concentration on the known and knowable, and its dealing with probabilities rather than certainties. Normal science is most efficiently pursued by ignoring anomalies and by mistrusting circumstantial evidence.

The conference also engendered a greater respect for the role of amateur investigators, those individuals who, for whatever reasons, feel impelled to go beyond the boundaries of established knowledge and to stretch their investigations beyond the limits of established scientific methods. It is not suggested here, however, that professional scientists and the amateur investigators should accept one another's standards and interests, as some advocated during the debates. To turn one perspective into the other, either by expanding the limits of science or by limiting the freedom of amateurs, would destroy the potentially creative contradictions that exist between the two. The urge to probe beyond the realm of established knowledge and certainty, to explore the anomalous and unknown worlds, and to criticize the scientific establishment for its self-interested motivation is no less important than the practice of science itself. At the same time, however, it is important to reaffirm the value of a scientific establishment that is conservative about the rule of evidence, respects its own theories, and pursues its own intellectual interests rather than those of outsiders. Both perspectives are needed, each doing what it alone can do best, though each should be continuously exposed to the other, with their contradictions expressed through creative criticism. The professionals and the amateurs can help to keep one another honest. Possibly the greatest success of the Monster Conference was that it brought professional scientists and amateur investigators together in a setting where they were able to talk to one another rationally and with good humour. People actually listened to one another, a major achievement for any conference.

How, then, are we to account for these human/animal-like Sasquatch monsters? Do they actually exist as a part of nature; or, if not, how do we account for widespread beliefs in them? The evidence for existence is scattered, circumstantial, and heavily laden with mythology, so discussions of existence usually devolve into epistemological debates regarding the nature of evidence, the origin of perceptions, the reliability of witnesses, and the need for physical specimens. The few scientific analyses of "physical evidence" presented were considerably more sophisticated than the data on which they were based. There is always the danger, Richard Preston observed on one occasion, that we may overwhelm little known phenomena by our elaborate methodologies and interpretations. And indeed, this may very well be the destiny of the Lonely Sasquatch, to be perpetually obscured by those who try hardest to discover it. Anthropologists are more at ease dealing with the realm of beliefs, with the cultural rather than the natural existence of anomalous creatures. Majorie Halpin noted in her introduction how Durk-

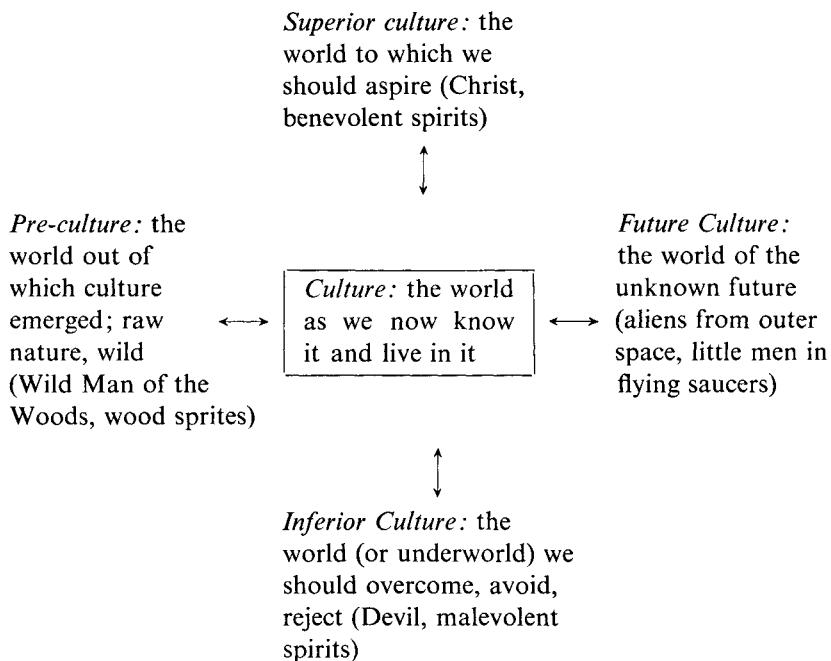
heim has taught us that beliefs would not persist over so wide an area and through so deep a period of time without them serving some existential purpose. What purpose, then, is served by beliefs in humanoid monsters? How do we explain the persistence of beliefs in monsters, even if we cannot account for the monsters themselves?

Two general types of explanation are offered in this book, one psychological in nature and the other structural. On the psychological side, it is suggested that beliefs in monsters are metaphors or projections for sublimated feelings of hostility, aggression, or other deep-seated emotions or sentiments. Alternatively, Halpin herself has suggested that monster beliefs may be the product of the mind's cognitive functions, "the action of the brain upon the environment." Monsters provide explanations. Structuralist explanations are different only in degree, for they too rest upon certain assumptions regarding the operations and needs of the human mind. Monsters, structuralists say, serve as transformations, reflections, or resolutions of contradictions prevalent in beliefs and action; or they may be seen as markers that help to draw the line between nature and culture, wild and domesticated, savagery and civilization. "Monsters, as anomalous creatures," Buckley writes, "constitute ruptures in the fabric of ordinary classification." These ruptures are the boundary markers. According to the marker theory, one I personally find congenial though not always convincing, a culture must symbolically define its boundaries or spheres of concern in relation to what it is not—the pre-cultural, the past, the future, and what is not ordinary or proper. Ambiguous creatures, like monsters and gods, that combine cultural with non-cultural traits, serve to mark these boundaries. The Wild Man of the Woods or Sasquatch, of course, marks the transition from nature to culture, from our wilderness past to our domesticated present, from savagery to civilization. Aliens from outer space presumably symbolize the contrast between present culture and an unknown, technologically dominated future. And for Christians, at least, the Devil and Christ divide us from, and link us to, the worlds below and the heavens above. These propositions are summarized in the accompanying chart, which can be adjusted to fit any cultural content. Readers may wish to add their own favorite humanoid monsters.

We could speculate about several interesting parallels between the Sasquatch and Christ, to pursue the structuralist perspective a little further. Both are monstrous, in size and power; both are anomalous, part human and part animal or god; both serve basic human needs, presumably; and the existence of both are matters of some dispute. Both the example and the chart demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of structuralist and psychological approaches. As theories they stretch our credulity; they are no less speculative or interpretive than theories regarding the natural existence of the Sasquatch. As such, they belong more on the frontiers of normal science than in

The Symbolic Boundaries of Modern Society

(Anomalous beings, part cultural and part non-cultural, mark the boundaries.)



the centre, as parallels to the theories of the amateur investigators. And they are heavily mentalistic in orientation, ignoring, by and large, the role of social or economic factors that influence emotions and beliefs. (The papers by Kasovic and Graburn, though also structuralist to some degree, are exceptions to this generalization.)

Speculative theories also serve to enliven our imaginations and to stretch our minds by allowing us to see things differently (to make the familiar strange again, as Halpin likes to say), and by helping us to place specific phenomena in wider contexts of discourse and discovery. What we must do, Halpin argues, is to expand the context within which the Sasquatch is considered: “we should examine the full context within which the creature is seen, rather than continue to dwell almost exclusively on *what* is seen.” I agree, especially if we expand the context to include consideration of the social and

material basis of beliefs and sightings. The brain does not simply act upon the environment, it *reworks* it, just as it is itself constantly being reworked in return. The context is one of forces—physical, social, economic and cultural—locked in interaction. The structuralist model of contradictions and mediations, supplemented by recognition of the importance of concrete real and ideal interests, is what I have in mind.

I can think of no more fitting way to conclude this epilogue than by calling upon the poetic imagination of one of Canada's leading writers, Margaret Atwood. In a poem she wrote some years ago, long before this book was thought of, she captured in her own compelling language the very essence of the monster quest. It is all there in her poem, "Oratorio for Sasquatch, Man, and Two Androids."¹

The man and the two androids set out to find the elusive Sasquatch, talking about it as they go.

Man:

Here there are no maps,
 here there are no trails;
 the treetrunks you slashed
 to show you the way back
 have already healed themselves behind you.

Android 1:

It has been lurking
 blurred near the edges of jerky
 films, of damaged photographs
 for too long; its deep footprints dissolve
 in the rain as soon as they are
 seen. It slides away
 from us into caves of air, into burrows
 made by treeshadows, takes refuge
 in the eye's confusions.

I want it to be seen,
 want it placed
 among the mind's white
 lists of things;

it is my

past, it must be known,
 it must be legible.

Man:
 He cannot be read,
 he can only be heard;
 because he has no language.
 He speaks to each man in his own language.
 The syllables are within you.
 Once you have been to his land
 you may enter and leave at will,
 though few return from that journey
 unchanged.

The man sees traces of the Sasquatch, but the androids do not. "I see only fallen leaves, I see only ferns," one android says. And the man replies:

That is because you have not yet learned
 to use your true eyes.
 Your eyes are locked,
 your eyes are frozen:
 you have used them too long as lenses.

You must discard these failed eyes,
 these pieces of dead glass
 that come between you and the world.
 Let your hard sight melt:
 then you will see as I do.

"Then tell us how to find it," the second android says, and he continues:

Android 2:
 How do we recognize it?
 Does it lie in wait?
 Does it howl?
 Does it leave signs, scratches
 in soft earth? Does it walk in snow?
 How do we recognize it?
 Tell us how to find it.

Man:

I came to know him first
when I was young;
I wanted to learn wisdom.
He met me in a dream,
we struggled and I named him.
He ran towards me
and disappeared into my head.
Since then I have talked with him many times.
Some say he is an animal: he has fur
like an animal's, and sharp teeth;
others say he is a man, or something
that was once a man; his hands are a man's,
his eyes face forward.

To me he is neither,
what he is for you
will depend on what he wishes to show you,
what he is for you
will depend on what you want from him.

Android 1:

I want to drain the
shade cast by its furred
history across my clean
rubberskin body,
delete its growled hog
sounds, its rancid
armpit smell.

I want to explain
it: fit it
in; pin it; label
its separate parts, its habits;
with the small blades of my
fingers trace its outline.

I want to turn it to
plastic, to metal;
clear, functional
as I am.
I want to forget.

Android 2:

I have hunted in other jungles,
 each one pushed me closer.
 I have hunted other animals:
 behind the brown mask
 of the bear, the yellow
 mask of the lion, the
 horned mask of the deer,
 I expected always to see it,
 the beast no-one acknowledges,

the final mask: the animal
 who is a man covered with fur.
 It tracks me, it walks
 at night over the lawn,
 in through the neo-
 colonial door, over
 the walls of my room.

Soon I must kill the last fear,
 nail it to the wall,
 a neat hole marked on its forehead.

Man:

I have not understood.
 I thought the guns were to shoot food.
 I thought you wanted to learn from him
 as I learn; now I see
 you want to know, to control him
 in your hands, pick him apart,
 number and separate
 his lungs, his arteries, his brain
 so you can call the pieces
 by your names, not by his own.

But you are wrong: he can never
 be known: he can teach you only
 about yourself.

I must go alone to ask his forgiveness
 for having brought you; and to ask him
 what must be done with you.

The man disappears into the bush, and the two androids continue their learned discussion of the Sasquatch's importance to knowledge.

Android 1: (*rapidly*) (*in almost a prose voice*)
My aim is knowledge,
to know a thing I must probe it.

First I will capture it
with nets traps helicopters dogs pieces
of string holes dug in the ground doped food
tranquilizer guns buckshot thrown stones
bows and arrows

Then I will name the species
after myself

Then I will examine it
with pins tweezers flashlights microscopes telescopes
envelopes statistics elastics
scalpels scissors razors lasers cleavers axes
rotary saws incisors osterizers pulverizers and fertilizers.

I will publish the results
in learned journals.

Then I will place a specimen
in each of the principle zoos
and a stuffed skin
in each of the principle museums
of the western world.

When the breed nears extinction due to
hunters trappers loggers miners farmers
directors collectors inspectors

I will set aside a preserve consisting of:
1 mountain
1 lake
1 river
1 tree

1 flower
 1 rock
 and 1 tall electric fence.

Android 2:
 The things I want from it are:

- 1) power
- 2) fame
- 3) money

I will get these things
 pardon me, achieve these goals
 by:

- 1) shooting it, thus proving it can be killed
 but only by one with skill and courage
 such as myself
- 2) posing for a front-page picture and/or a
 TV documentary with my boot on its neck and
 one hand casually on my hip
- 3) exhibiting, for a fee, the remains
 which will have been preserved by:
 - a) stuffing
 - b) formaldehyde
 - c) freezing in ice

I will then make replicas from
 —fur coats
 —leather gloves
 —putty
 —inner tubes
 —piano keys
 —modelling clay
 —human hair

I will open a nationwide chain of man-monsters
 I will retire at forty
 and go fishing

The forest suddenly begins to stir, the androids hear strange sounds. Is it a Sasquatch? The androids fire their guns.

Android 1:
My eyes hurt. What
was it? What did we hit?

Android 2:
It was a thing like a grizzly bear
walking on its hind legs;
I saw its teeth, it had
pig's eyes, tiny and brute
with the thought of slaughter

Android 1:
It was
a giant man, his eyes thundered, his hair
was standing up all over his head
like red fire; his fingers were
sharp claws; but he was smiling,
he was looking through my face and smiling,
he lifted one hand. . . .

But it was the man they shot, as he was returning from his encounter with
the Sasquatch.

Man:
There was no animal,
there was no man with claws.
It was my body you shot at.

When I had spoken with him
I turned back to find you;
I heard his owl's voice calling my name;
it was noon; I knew then I would die.

At the edge of the clearing
I paused; you were sitting down;
by your eyes I could tell
that he was near.

Suddenly he came upon me,

the crash of a tree falling;
 for an instant I felt his strength, his power
 within me; the god
 and I were one;
 through me he was speaking to you.

Android 2:
 It was a bear

Android 1:
 It was
 a giant man, his hair
 was flames

Man:
 You were not used to seeing
 You could see only through your fear
 which blurs vision.

But the god has not denied you.
 It is you who have denied the god.

He would have given you knowledge of life,
 you chose instead the knowledge
 of death. He has shown you what you are.

He has gone out of my body,
 he leaves me here for you,
 a husk, a trophy,
 an animal skin,
 a memory to take back with you
 from the dark forest
 to your lighted cities.

Now you have killed the god;
 you have what you wanted.

In this tale composed by Margaret Atwood, the Sasquatch is given the final word.

Sasquatch:
A wound has been made in me,
a hole opens in my green flesh;
I see that I can be broken.

Two are moving away,
the third remains.

Come, my brother,
your blood runs into the earth,
at last I can hear you clearly;

you are telling me
that those who have destroyed you
will return in other bodies
to destroy me also;
already their saws, their axes
hack at my borders;
to murder my pines, my cedars
is to murder me.

Their straight roads diminish
my space, my kingdom.

We will go to the other country.
Under the mountains there is a sea,

it is summer here, there
it is winter. We will sit

together by that frozen shore

until the killers have been changed
to roots, to birds

until the killers have become
the guardians and have learned
our language

waiting to be delivered,
waiting to be made whole.

“When dreams come true,” Kenelm Burridge mused during the conference, “what happens to the truth?” Indeed, but more important, what then will become of our dreams?

Notes

1. Margaret Atwood, “Oratorio for Sasquatch, Man, and Two Androids,” in *Poems for Voices* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1970), pp. 14–28.