

Book Reviews

Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence, edited by Marjorie Halpin and Michael Ames. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980. xiv + 370. Comprehensive bibliography and illustrations. \$24.95 (cloth).

"I played a Dr. John Rollason, the sole survivor of a party that went searching for the Yeti, and he *escaped death* because he was more anxious to learn *the truth* about the creature than capturing it for commercial gain."

Peter Cushing on his role in the 1957 commercial film, *The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas*.

This book is an impressive, unique cultural artifact; an inquiry into possibility. It is a well-framed, multidisciplinary "bookprint" that questions not only the monstrous and the anomalous in nature and culture, but also the human as well as the areas that make knowledge possible. The book is a giant double-take in both form and content, from the outside covers through the inside essays. Looking at the front dust jacket one is reminded of a fossil skull; opening the dust jacket flat reveals a "footprint." The first section of the book deals directly with human inquiry into manlike monsters, necessarily generated from the human mind; yet John Green reminds us in his statistical and straightforward presentation of over 1,000 human eyewitness accounts of "hairy bipeds in North America" (pp. 237-38) that from the neck down their features are described as more humanlike in resemblance. Mully states: "As a psychoanalyst I entertain little doubt about the existence of certain monster types. Clinical sightings are frequent. The evidence for their existence is confirmed daily, though I can produce no plaster casts of giant footprints, no hair samples, no fuzzy photographs" (p. 37); Gill, based on his study of footprints and reports of hair colour, tentatively asserts that "the preliminary results of our study support the hypothesis

that the Sasquatch actually exists, in that population clines in reported body size and track lengths (and apparently coat colour) not only seem to exist but conform to ecogeographical rules" (p. 272); and yet the scientists who dealt with physical remains are compelled to conclude that "as scientists, we remain open-minded about the possibility of the existence of Sasquatch. . . . However, from our studies there remains no conclusive evidence for or against the existence of Sasquatch, and as such, its existence remains an open question" (Bryant, Jr. and Trevor-Deutsch, p. 299).

What is on trial in this book are not the manlike monsters, for nowhere in the free world would we conduct a trial without the principal defendant present or at least represented by counsel, but rather human inquiry into and representations of reality in science, art and myth. This trial brings forth fascinating, well-documented evidence grounded in various human pursuits of truth (technologically based measurement of feet, hair, shit and voice; written accounts of encounters; written versions of "myths"; masks, sculptures, manuscript drawings; photographs and previous inquiries) and reasoned by a wide variety of cultural beings wearing various guises (scientists, anthropologists, art historians, native people, journalists and the like). The editors of the book have skilfully constructed the case through the ordering of the essays and framing the inquiry with the opening and concluding essays, yet I am left unable to decide what the verdict in this human trial is, or "who will bring it down." Will it be we, the readers, or the manlike monsters, when we have learned their forms of communication?

The book is a cultural artifact in another way: it is the material remains of an exciting, provocative conference, sponsored by the Museum of Anthropology and other agencies at the University of British Columbia in May 1978. It is not a "proceedings," however, but a carefully edited selection from the conference. Those who were present at the event no doubt will use this book as both a record of and a spur to remembering all the fruitful exchanges and dialogue that cannot be a part of this kind of document; the rest of us will be fortunate enough to engage the issues presented through this disciplined selection of papers. The book is divided into three main sections: (I) Monsters in the Forest of the Mind; (II) Manlike Monsters in the Native New World; (III) Contemporary Sasquatch Investigation. Within the twenty-two articles and comprehensive bibliography of manlike monster inquiry, the reality of the phenomena is explored in a variety of times and places. For readers of *BC Studies* who have this regional interest, nine articles deal with manlike monsters

in Canada, seven deal with British Columbia primarily, and an additional six deal with the Pacific Northwest. Other articles deal with the Medieval European world of wildmen and monsters, monster-making for tourists in Mexico, ethnography of wildmen in the Caucasus, and Windigo spirits among the Cherokee. Several additional articles present more general inquiries into science, psychoanalysis and anthropological perception in encountering the anomalous and its cultural manifestations.

Throughout the book, however, there is an uneasy balance struck and a tightrope walked between positivistic and measurement-oriented approaches and non-positivistic interpretive approaches, often within the same essay. There is, necessarily, a great deal of scientific couching of arguments in the limitations of the data, and a great deal of anthropological couching of arguments in the "native's" phenomenology and relativity. After all, in the final analysis books *are* cultural productions, and for Western science "Seeing is Believing," for Western ethnology "Believing is in the Native's Speaking and Doing"; both leave the specialists and experts without having to commit themselves to the question of reality (or perhaps leave them still in awe of its possibility).

While there is a unity among the essays, each one asks its penetrating questions from a different point of view. It would not be possible to discuss each essay individually, but I will single out a few that serve as particularly good examples of the range of inquiry contained within the book. Carpenter's essay on *The Cultural Role of Monsters in Canada* revolves around a not so veiled jab at Canadians who are looking for a "National Identity" or single official Canadian culture. She suggests, through a pan-Canadian inquiry into monster folklore, that what is Canadian is that "monster tales and beliefs express the feelings many Canadians have towards their country, in particular, the mixture of fear and fascination they possess towards the land, the prime source of imagery in Canada" (p. 106). The essay creates a confusion, however, over what is Canadian culture and how to find it — whether in monsters or social values. She states that "Canadians might far more profitably look for that which is quantitatively rather than qualitatively Canadian in order to define and understand their culture" (p. 97), and that "Canadian monsters are a means to understand the Canadian mind and the real Canadian culture" (p. 106). That concluding sentence makes the reader think that there is one real Canadian culture, and that the one that is being created by officials is somehow unreal. While her point is well taken, anyone studying ideologies knows to look deeper and suspect when the word "real" is asserted. The confusion notwithstanding, Car-

penter's article is a good spur to thinking about the importance of nature and the beings we assign to the natural and supernatural world.

Perhaps the most stable blend of approaches is presented in the fine piece by Halpin on *The Tsimshian Monkey Mask and Sasquatch*. The essay demonstrates a well-documented inquiry into the historical ethnography and material representation of monkey and Sasquatch among the Nishga, beginning with an attempt to locate the representation in a potential zoological taxonomy and ethological context. She goes on to discuss the mask in its ritual context, along with the semantic and logical field the *ba'wis* inhabits in order to articulate that "The Tsimshian have a quite different conceptualization of intermediate human-animal beings than the one we embody in Sasquatch" (p. 226). We learn not only that masks are powerful and meaningful in special ways, but also how much material can be cogently reasoned by tracing the meaning and context of one piece of "material cultural remains" — it is an archaeology of an idea as well as the history of a mask.

The analysis of alleged Sasquatch actual remains presents another facet of the book. Bryant Jr. and Trevor-Deutsch attempt to use the techniques developed for the "identification and evaluation of fossil and modern mammal hairs and to the analysis of mammalian fecal samples" (p. 291) in order to analyze some suspected Sasquatch samples. They present a history of coprolite (prehistoric fecal specimens) research, identifying the Canadian contribution to this work. On the basis of the tests they found that the coprolite analysis did not allow them to confirm whether the samples were of Sasquatch origin or of any other undescribed mammal and that the hair specimens were not conducive to conclusive assertions either. As scientists, they reached the end of their study little wiser than when they began, but still willing to believe.

A book with such a wide range of expertise and conclusion will not likely appear again. Both the conference organizers and the editors of the book are to be commended for the wisdom of the frame they place around the phenomena and the book. It is a frame that is meant to contain the ambiguity of both — an ambiguity that enhances the power of manlike monsters. W. B. Yeats captures this power when he says:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

(The Second Coming — 1921)