

Culture



Marjorie HALPIN and Michael AMES, eds., *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980, xiv + 370 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Comprehensive Bibliography, Illustrations, Photographs

Carole Farber

Volume 2, numéro 2, 1982

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078261ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078261ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Farber, C. (1982). Compte rendu de [Marjorie HALPIN and Michael AMES, eds., *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980, xiv + 370 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Comprehensive Bibliography, Illustrations, Photographs]. *Culture*, 2(2), 122–123. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078261ar>

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Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1982

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Marjorie HALPIN and Michael AMES, eds., *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980, xiv + 370 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Comprehensive Bibliography, Illustrations, Photographs.

By Carole Farber
The University of Western Ontario

There is a saying among the Sherpa bearers in the Himalayas that whoever goes in the tracks of the Yeti never returns. As with all sayings, it contains a truth that is encountered and entertained in many different ways depending on the cultural and disciplinary context in which it is being interpreted. When people embedded in Western procedures of verifying beliefs "follow the track" of manlike monsters (missing links, wildmen, Grendel, Sasquatch and the like) they do so culturally, both reproducing the dilemmas that generate the phenomena for us and displaying the range of competing theoretical and methodological allegiances in their interpretive spectacles. This book is such a cultural document, containing articles by anthropologists, art historians, folklorists, psychoanalysts, engineers, journalists, and historians, all aimed at exploring the reality of manlike monsters and other anomalous phenomena. What is actually "on trial" here are the various interpretations of the phenomena that are found throughout the 22 articles included in the volume. For this reason alone, this book is an anthropological must: it constitutes a cultural performance of inquiry at the boundaries of our known universe and our tried and true methods of knowledge.

The various articles in the book are arranged within the following sections: I. Monsters in the Forest of the Mind; II. Manlike Monsters of the Native New World (in myth and art); and III. Contemporary Sasquatch Investigation. The authors approach their subject matter using non-positivist and positivist methods, often maintaining a precarious balance between the two and/or replicating these competing paradigms.

Appropriately, the book is published by the University of British Columbia Press: It is the outcome of a unique conference on Humanoid Monsters that was sponsored by the Museum of Anthropology and other agencies at the University of British Columbia in May, 1978, and British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest has the most consistent history of sightings and confrontations with Sasquatch — one of the major manlike monsters. While it is not, strictly speaking, a "proceedings" of the conference, the book contains a carefully selected compilation of some of the papers given. Since the

book contains so many articles from different perspectives, it is impossible to discuss each one carefully and critically, consequently I will discuss only a few of the contributions, and hope that this spurs others into reading the entire collection.

Thirteen articles are written by self-identified anthropologists, five of them working in Canadian universities (Ames, Colarusso, Halpin, Preston and Ridington). Most of the anthropological articles are located in the second section which focuses on native art and myth, and are presented from a predominantly phenomenological or critical perspective, whether they are dealing with historical or contemporary material. The papers by Preston, Ridington and Graburn all explicitly question the relationship between Western (our) and native (their) conceptions of manlike monsters or anomalous beings, and the papers by Halpin, Fogelson, and Buckley treat this relationship implicitly. For all the anthropologists, however, the reality of manlike monsters resides in the fact that they are within the native belief system and that they have consequences in that system; most of the anthropologists (here as well as in other inquiries) are then relieved from having to commit themselves on the topic (a possible exception here is the paper by Suttles).

Preston, in his article on Algonkian and White-man's knowledge of Witiko behaviour and personality, critically assesses the material on what has been labelled, by non-natives, the "Witiko psychosis" and the psychodynamic position from which this complex has been generated. In Preston's analysis, however, the Witiko is (1) a cannibalistic transformation that operates on a metaphor of incorporation whether the basis is actual kinship relationships or attributes of non-human carnivores; (2) exhibited by a variety of persons, monsters and less human-like beings; (3) and occurs in event-specific contexts. The Witiko person demonstrates a different set of attitudes, appearances, and competencies in social behaviour than a "normal person" does: at the same time powerful and threatening. Once transformed, however, the Witiko person is beastly, essentially anti-social and anti-cultural at all levels. Ridington also picks up on the difference between native reality and that of the persons investigating it. He sets up a "straw-anthropologist" — one without the kinds of sensibilities and commitments that most of us would like to believe we have — in order to examine the interaction between native and anthropologist. In this attempt we learn a lot about this anthropologist, one who wishes to combine ecology and experience and to reconcile adaptive strategies with phenomenology. Graburn, using examples from Inuit art and culture and its interaction with Euro-Canadians, cogently argues for an understanding of humanoid and non-human creations that is sensitive to differences in modes and media of communication and existential and inter-subjective

realities, within and between cultures. He reminds us, again, of our Western predilections to control the unknown and maintain order in the creation of closed systems and to accumulate knowledge within tightly drawn boundaries. Inuit reality and knowledge is opposed to both principles; the primacy of visual and oral modes of communication and the sculptural and print forms of execution emphasise imagination, open systems and permeable boundaries. Halpin's article on the Sasquatch and the Tsimshian monkey mask is one of the most solid contributions to the volume; she is doing an archaeology of Tsimshian knowledge as well as a translation of Tsimshian conceptions. Through meticulous reading of the historical material, a sensitive rendering of the symbolic importance of the mask and an impressive analogic exploration, she concludes that the "Tsimshian have a quite different conceptualization of intermediate human-animal beings than the one we embody in Sasquatch" (p. 226), once again confirming that our knowledge, belief and action are different from theirs.

While the anthropologists are all concerned with locating monsters in the native's language and experience, art and myth, the scientists and journalists are interested in locating the reality of manlike monsters in a more empirical and measurable way. John Green, author of *Sasquatch: The Apes Among Us*, is a journalist dedicated to compiling and examining the accounts of those who have encountered Sasquatch. His contribution to the book is a careful reading of over 1,000 human accounts of eyewitness encounters. The scientists' contributions to the book, Gill's "Population Clines of the North American Sasquatch as Evidenced by Track Lengths and Estimated Statures", Kirilin and Hertel's "Estimates of Pitch and Vocal Tract Length from Recorded Vocalizations of Purported Bigfoot", and Bryant Jr. and Trevor-Deutsch's "Analysis of Feces and Hair Suspected to be of Sasquatch Origin", all perform spectacles of scientific measurement and analysis. These "estimations", "suspicions", and "purportions" leave us no wiser about the Sasquatch, but invite us to marvel at our human forms of analysis. For them, Sasquatch's reality can only be confirmed by examining a specimen, dead or alive.

All of the investigations in the book leave us wondering and give us marvelous food for thought. Are manlike monsters the most current victims of colonialism —where they are appropriated for our ends and not their own? In his thought-provoking Epilogue, Ames asserts "If monsters did not exist we would invent them, because we need them" (p. 301). Fogelson suggests that manlike monsters may be indeed the location of the much sought-after "universal"; that which functions to define what is essentially human by contrast and opposition with what is not. Until we learn their modes and media of communication, their lives and tracks will continue to

be grist for our competitive academic mill. Will the last battle for democracy and freedom be fought on their ground? It is a poet, Margaret Atwood, who explores this question and gives these last words to the Sasquatch, "We will go to another country... until the killers have become the guardians and have learned our language" (p. 314). Is this the next task for the apocalyptic anthropologist?

This book has been well-framed by the editors, leaving the power and ambiguity of manlike monsters intact. It is an anthropological must because it is good reading and good pondering; it is a journey from which one does return, albeit not quite the same.

Marshall SAHLINS, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1981. 96 pp., US \$5.95 (paper).

By Pamela Peck
University of British Columbia

Sahlins' new book on structure in the early history of the Sandwich Islands kingdom (Special Publication No. 1 of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) is part of a larger research project designed to culminate in a three volume publication entitled *The Dying God or the History of the Sandwich Islands as Culture* of which volume one is currently in preparation. The present monograph is, in Sahlins' words, a way of looking culturally at history. Its presentation consists of four chapters, the introductory and concluding ones devoted to the theoretical perspective while the data in the remaining two illustrate his ideas about history and structure. The historical example is, as Sahlins allows, an exotic one, having to do with the response of indigenous Hawaiian culture to circumstances wrought by the appearance of Captain Cook as well as later European explorers, traders and missionaries.

Sahlins' stated aim is to demonstrate "historical uses of structural theory". In so doing, he examines the interplay between "structures of the conjecture" and the received cultural order. He also writes about "structures of the long run" and about "reproduction" and "transformation", and just when the theoretical language gets to be too much, he reminds us: "Basically, the idea is very simple. People act upon circumstances according to their own cultural pre-suppositions..." (67).

From a theoretical stance, Sahlins' concern seems to be that structural theory continues in its opposition to history. In his view, structuralism, based on Saussure's model of language, favours synchrony over diachrony and system over event.