Bigfeet: Spiritual Impressions of a Sasquatch

If we speak of footprints, there aren't many pop culture icons that leave an impression quite like the Bigfoot. Stomping its way from backwater myth to popular culture since the Patterson-Gimlin film of 1967, it has made appearances on television, movies, advertisements, and books. Bigfoot is the eponymous inspiration for conferences, music festivals, and book publishers and is the alleged father of many tabloid children. But, aside from his beloved presence on the pop culture landscape, he is viewed by many as a living, breathing hirsute anthropomorphic ape stalking not just our imaginations but our wildernesses. Websites and organizations such as the Bigfoot Field Research Organization (BFRO) and www.BigfootEncounters.com allow enthusiasts and witnesses to bring forward their own stories regarding the creature. While anthropologists, ethnographers, and folklorists have latched onto the Bigfoot or Sasquatch as an Americanized wild-man legend (Bernheimer 3, Stevens 125), I propose that Sasquatch\(^1\) narratives have specific, typical thematic rhetorics that are utilized to convey specific messages about the witness, the creature, and often the witnesses' perceptions of the world around them. The study of Sasquatch narratives as sub-genres of a larger literary context or contexts could prove useful in integrating anthropological, ethnographic, and folklore within a literary environment in which we can analyze the rhetorical concerns of Sasquatch narratives.

\(^1\) I will use the term “Sasquatch” to identify the creature observed, specifically in an American or Canadian context. I avoid the term “Bigfoot” primarily for its colloquial nature. Though the “experts” often cite it as “Bigfoot” in their narratives, I believe they use this term for accessibility for an outside audience.
The perceptions of these writers, who only seek to express their experiences, obfuscates these composers from entering a realm of criticism regarding a regional, class-based literature. Rather than stereotyping these authors as pseudoscientific crackpots, they must be viewed as individuals utilizing rhetorical devices to share a unique experience. It is an unfortunate generalization of these individuals as fools, hillbillies, or lunatics, and I feel that understanding the literature itself helps us to re-conceptualize these authors as people speaking out of culture, race, colonialism, and frontier mentality. The Sasquatch himself represents, specifically for American Bigfoot enthusiasts in an idealized sense, a wild and untamed side of nature, a ghost that stalks both our fears and our desires (Berheimer 3). The Sasquatch is a literary and social representation of freedom from social constraints. Rather than other cryptids, whose lack of anthropomorphism distances them from idealistic mirroring by its advocates, the Sasquatch’s anthropoid nature allows him to easily step into the human psyche, and the language used to represent the Sasquatch, as an archetype of the free man set amongst nature easily integrates into American frontier mentality. The Sasquatch as such is a specifically American legend, having origins in early colonial lore, steadily following the march westwards with settlers as they appropriate Indian images of “bogeymen” into the final hirsute hominid we “see” today.

Literature studies have unfortunately overlooked Sasquatch narratives as valid modes of expression by rural populations. Often the more refined Sasquatch stories, such as those by published authors, Bigfoot researchers, and “experts” constitute a literature very much concerned with ideas of conversion, reaffirmation of belief,  

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2 Including but not limited to the popular examples of the Loch Ness Monster, the Chupacabra, or the Jersey Devil
environmentalism, perception by outsiders, and legitimacy. Even examples of stories published anonymously on internet forums or databases maintained by individuals at www.OregonBigfoot.com or www.BFRO.net contain elements of conversion literature. Effectively, they create a new naturalistic religion based around this hominid. The Sasquatch carries the burden of their own social and cultural pressures (Taft 84). In many cases, these writers, often anonymously, describe their encounter or encounters as a spiritual experience in which their understanding of the world, the wilderness, and nature changes dramatically. As an introduction to a larger discussion on Sasquatch literature on the American scene, I propose to analyze major publications and websites within the field of Sasquatch research for its spiritual aspects. I hope to use this initial study to introduce Sasquatch literature as a unique mode of literary expression of the country's rural populations, who are often sidelined by mainstream literary and folk studies. Within these narratives I expect to find a common theme of spirituality including skepticism, conversion, belief, and affirmation and will analyze how narrators commonly express these experiences utilizing religious language. I will also use the paper to argue for more research into the literature of the Sasquatch, including but certainly not limited to: regionalism, Native American studies, racial and class prejudices, ethnography, colonialism, environmentalism, and concerns with modernism and urbanization.
Works Cited:


