

Bigfoot on the Fringe: Do Cryptids Fit in a Biblical Worldview?

Excerpt from *God and the Paranormal*
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“I think [Bigfoot] is a kind of husband of Unk-ksa, the earth... Sometimes we say this One is kind of a reptile from ancient times who can take a big hairy form. I think he can also change into a coyote.” Joe Fly By¹

“Paranormal people like Sasquatch and ET-types have social contact with humans in this world when they choose to be seen; otherwise, they go about their business.”
Kewaunee Lapsertis²

Once I had a bright idea for teaching seventh graders about moon phases. I brought a package of large round cookies to class. As I described what the various phases looked like, I gnawed the cookies into the basic shapes. There was a “no food” rule in force and I was instantly a rogue hero—but it was for science. I was so proud of my demo until exam day...

“A half-moon occurs when gravity tears out one side of the moon...”
“In the lunar cycle, sometimes pieces of rock fall away leaving a crescent shape...”
“Phases are when part of the moon is like, eaten away...”

This is a dangerous article. Good teachers warn never to associate two superficially similar yet unrelated (non-analogous) ideas. Simply referencing ideas in the same lesson may indelibly link them in the minds of students.

However, my strategy here is strictly damage control. The deed is done. I believe the idea of true *biological cryptids* has been so merged with *paranoid cryptids* that our collective paradigms are hopelessly confused.³ Invariably, most *History* and *Trvl* channel features about cryptids begin with flesh-and-bone beasts and end up somewhere in the twilight zone...

Popular interest in mysterious phenomena is high, creating an image problem for cryptozoology. Cryptids are often sandwiched between ghosts and UFOs within documentary-style programming, creating the perception that they are unearthly or

¹ Quoted in Keller & Knapp, *Hunt for Skinwalker*, (NY: Paraview, 2005), 158.

² Kewaunee Lapsertis, *The Psychic Sasquatch and their UFO Connection*, (Blue Water Publishing, 1998)

³ Even referring to both groups as cryptids is probably misleading, but I'll do so here for simplicity.

paranormal... The need for entertaining or suspenseful devices creates the false impression that cryptozoology is just about hunting monsters...⁴

I urge the reader to maintain a clear separation as we consider biological and paranormal cryptids. A corollary to the Pickle Principle might be appropriate: *The existence or non-existence of one group has no bearing on the existence or non-existence of the other.* A biological cryptid may be reasonable—a paranormal cryptid is a whole different animal.

Sasquatch Hops the Fence

As previously stated, cryptids in and of themselves aren't paranormal. However, Bigfoot sometimes takes on quite a different persona. "Parasquatch" has moved far beyond a flesh-and-bone primate. Later, we'll explore some links to other paranormal phenomena. For now, let's consider the supernatural side of Bigfoot encounters.

Obviously, with the popularity of Bigfoot and the large number of sightings, a few outlandish outliers could be expected. However, a growing number of reports involve abilities beyond a natural wild animal. Several Native American groups, for example, consider Bigfoot and kin to be spiritual phenomena. Depending on the specific tribal tradition, the creature's role ranges from a sacred and revered wild animal to a wise and powerful spirit entity.

Since the earliest modern sightings, some have sided with the tribes who view Bigfoot as highly intelligent—perhaps superior to humans. Although based on the *absence* of evidence, they point to the fact that Bigfoot has successfully eluded us for centuries. If Bigfoot is real, he certainly has "outwitted, outlasted, and outplayed" us—the less-hairy primates—always staying one step ahead. Proponents say that would be expected from an intelligent being, well-camouflaged and on his own turf. Could there be an advanced civilization of the creatures who prefer to live in secluded underground habitats (and who also prefer not to bathe)? Some have suggested Sasquatch is actually studying us. Several squatch-hunters have begun wearing backward-facing cameras for that very reason. As Keel might say: "You noticed them, and they noticed that you noticed them."

Kicking it up a notch paranormally, there have been consistent reports of Bigfoot fading in and out of sight, similar to ghostly apparitions. There are stories of the beast disappearing into a cliff face or materializing in a beam of light. Those who accept the incidents theorize that either the creatures are "cloaking" themselves in some way or are moving through dimensional portals. Both of these notions are often used to explain the elusive history of Bigfoot—they are not normal, physical entities.

Disturbing to the cryptozoology purist, a significant number of Bigfoot accounts include a mystic, psychological element. Witnesses list a variety of psychic phenomena such as mental "mind-melds" with the creature and telepathic messages. Some attribute our failure to verify Bigfoots to their ability to alter the perceptions of humans. This *woo effect* has become a popular topic among many crypto-enthusiasts.

⁴ Chad Arment, *Cryptozoology: Science and Speculation*, (Landisville, PA: Coachwhip Publications, 2004), 11.

If Native American traditions are correct, these abilities are expected of a mystical *skinwalker*, a spirit able to take any form and to behave in noncorporeal ways. Should Bigfoot creatures be shapeshifter/mind-controllers, we may as well hang up our cameras, sit back, and wait for them to contact us. But while we're waiting, let's look at some other media stars...

The Monsters on Maple Street

Small-town America cherishes its neighborhood monsters. Some are whimsical; others are quite menacing. The mere possibility of their existence is influencing people's major life decisions. Whether a story is based on fact or fiction, once the tale grows legs (or paws) of its own there's no stopping it.

In 1893, surveyor Eugene Shepard claimed to have captured a strange beast known as a *hodag* near Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Shepard displayed the animal at the first Oneida County Fair shortly after. The public was mesmerized by the "fearsome critter" with the head of a frog bearing huge teeth, the spiny back of a dinosaur, and an ominous spiked tail. Not until a group of Smithsonian scientists came to visit did Shepard admit the hoax. The taxidermic chimera of teeth, skins, horns, and clawed legs (operated by wires) had fooled almost everyone.

Yet still, the hodag accounts live on. The Rhinelander school mascot is a hodag. Statues abound from one end of town to the other. Thousands come to pay respects to the beast at annual festivals and the local hodag museum. Many level-headed citizens claim to have seen living hodags over the past century, crawling through its natural habitat, the bogs of Oneida County. Some of these are even bigger and fiercer than Shepard's beast, supposedly attacking and devouring the unwary. Was Shepard's hoax based on a real animal? Will a living specimen ever be found? Two scenarios are possible: If a hodag is discovered, the town will continue the rich heritage of the hodag tradition. Or if it's never found—the town will continue the rich heritage of the hodag tradition.

Before the hodag began its prowlings, another monster was haunting the pine barrens of southern New Jersey. In the 18th century, a woman remembered as Mother Leeds was struggling with twelve hungry kids and an alcoholic husband. Upon learning of her thirteen pregnancy, she cursed her unborn and thus was born the *Jersey Devil*. The deformed offspring developed a horse-like body, horned head, and bat wings. Eventually, it found its purpose, roaming the region and wreaking havoc on the population. Thousands of eye-witness accounts of the Jersey Devil have been recorded since then.

Shapeshifters and Skinwalkers

Millennia before Lon Chaney Jr. perfected the art, Enkidu of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was able to appear as a ferocious wolf-like creature. Shapeshifters make excellent villains. How can you deal with a threat that may look like your mailman most of the time? Modern morphing technology in videos makes the phenomenon look believable yet imagine the anatomical problems. Werewolf movies bother me. Not from terror, but from wondering where the fur goes when he turns back

into a man. I know it doesn't fall off. Does it suck back into his follicles? Does it magically fade away?

I think the fur thing pretty much establishes that shapeshifting (*therianthropy*) is a supernatural event with no comparable physical counterpart.⁵ Shapeshifters in mythology and fairy tales usually change back and forth into animals or other people. Also, witches and magicians can change a regular human into an object or animal. (How many frogs have been kissed in hopeful expectation?)

Wolves seem to be a good choice for a new shape. If I had my choice, it certainly beats a swan or frog. Medieval European myths eventually morphed into wolves having more of their humanoid features still intact. Peasants feared these beasts whom they believed to be demons or servants of witches. To make matters worse, you never knew if your neighbor was a werewolf (*lycanthrope*). Some have suggested that the legends are based on a medical or psychological condition, or perhaps just a really stressful day. Haven't we all wanted to howl at the moon at some point?

Therianthropic concepts are common in many Native American traditions. The name "skinwalker" is derived from the Navajo belief in entities with the ability to appear in different forms, usually animal or animal-human composites. These shapeshifters are generally malevolent and greatly feared by some. Navajo shamans avoid using the name *yeenaldlooshii* which translates as "because of this it walks on four feet."

The Bray Road beast of Wisconsin is a wolf legend that refuses to die. Residents around Elkhorn's Bray Road have been reporting the werewolf-like creatures since the 1930s. A flurry of new sightings in the 80s and 90s brought worldwide attention.⁶ Unlike the reclusive primate cryptids, this aggressive beast is more of a canine, yet still said to run bipedally like a human. The public was quick to note the similarity to the werewolves of movie fame. Alleged to be a relative of the Michigan Dogman, this 7-foot creature has a propensity for chasing cars (perhaps not surprising for a canine). Explanations include bears, deformed bears, mangey bears, and hoaxers. As with similar phenomena, eyewitnesses "know what they saw!" and many are said to be quite reputable citizens with nothing to gain by deception.⁷

More Humanoid Haints

It does seem that some of the most disturbing cryptid reports are those involving creatures with human-like forms such as the Bray Road beast. Giant reptiles and fierce four-legged predators are certainly alarming, but beasts with a semi-human form are nightmarish. Perhaps these creatures represent archetypes of what we fear we ourselves might become under some extreme circumstance. Or do we have a hard-wired abhorrence of humanoids who don't appropriately bear God's image.

Another humanoid beast has more "goatly" traits and is said to lurk under the Pope Lick Creek train trestle near Fisherville, Kentucky. The Pope Lick monster, a beast with a terrifying, horned

⁵ No, not regular body growth or insect metamorphosis.

⁶ Linda S. Godfrey, *The Beast of Bray Road: Tailing Wisconsin's Werewolf*, (Black Earth, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 2003).

⁷ As with other large cryptids, I believe we can dismiss most hoaxers in costume because of what I call the "just plain stupid principle." That's what it would take to put on fur and run through the woods in much of the well-armed country.

goat/sheep head and manly body allegedly lures unsuspecting teens hypnotically to the train tracks to kill them. Several young people have, indeed, died over the past forty years, either falling from the trestle or being hit by trains. Explanations for Sheepsquatch include a vengeful circus freaks, human-animal hybrids, and visitations by Satan himself.⁸

In the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and surrounding states, residents report a feline cryptid dubbed the Ozark howler. Cat monsters seem a bit more believable than some others since in a face-to-face with a mountain lion, “monster” might be a good description. The howler, however, is alleged to be super-sized and somewhat humanoid, often running on two legs. Once again, reliable witnesses swear by their observations. On the skeptic’s side, if I were being chased by a cougar, I might tend to overestimate the size and wouldn’t likely get a good look at its posture.

Not every cryptid legend remains a mystery. The Loveland frogman is a good case study in cryptid lore. In the early 1970s, people around Loveland, Ohio reported sightings of a 4-foot frog creature. The beast could supposedly stand on two legs to escape when confronted. After decades of storytelling, apparently someone looked at the police report from that time. An officer had shot the animal and carried it away in the trunk of his car. He identified it as a 4-foot iguana (likely someone’s lost pet) missing its tail. On the side of the folklorists, there really was a strange “monster” behind the myth.

One of the most famous paranormal creatures of all times harassed the town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. The first sighting of the Mothman was by several men in 1966 who were digging a new grave. A few days later, more people in the town began reporting a man-like creature with at least a ten-foot, “mothish” wingspan. Many witnesses commented on the beast’s red, glowing eyes.

Most of the encounters were near an eerie, abandoned WWII munitions factory, considered an appropriate hideout for a devilish flying monster. Sightings continued for several months. Some skeptics attributed the phenomenon to a rare crane that had been observed in the area, or to secret night-time paratrooper operations. Paranormal investigator John Keel interviewed the townsfolk and found that some were experiencing random precognitions and visions. There were also reports of mysterious Men in Black (associated with the simultaneous UFO events) who threatened citizens, warning them to cease discussing any paranormal phenomena. The culmination of the Point Pleasant Mothman epic occurred on December 15, 1967. Forty-six people perished when the town’s Silver Bridge collapsed. Many tied the disaster to the visions and Mothman. Subsequently, similar Mothman stories have occurred in other places around the world.

So how far can we push the borders of biological cryptozoology? Will our minds wrap around a cryptid such as a Jersey Devil or other more eccentric paranormal beings? Non-primate humanoids create problems. Paranormal Bigfoot at least had physical, biological counterparts to consider. We know large primates can exist because they *do* exist. Our questions can be narrowed to whether they exist *here* and *now*.

However, *there are no real-world, biological counterparts to werewolves, sheepsquatches, mothepeople, or bipedal cats*. When we propose such creatures, they aren’t simply on a continuum

⁸ Reminiscent of Well’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, there have been suggestions that modern science (mad science?) might be responsible for some of these more bizarre beasts. In a coming chapter, we’ll look at the possibility of human-animal hybrids. A number of paranormal cryptid reports allege secretive intervention by law enforcement or the military in containing or covering up information. In my opinion, this would seem to be more extraordinary than some paranormal explanations.

with biological cryptids—*they are something else*. Some of the creepier cryptid humanoids seem to move completely away from animal-like to just plain demonic (even by secular standards). Ghoulish *wendigos* and *rakes* are more the stuff of nightmares and Halloween than of nature.

Then are we justified in suggesting that the Ephesians Hypothesis might be applied to some of these more esoteric cryptids? Many cryptozoologists, tribal philosophers, and media producers have already taken that quantum leap into another realm for us. And certainly, we must consider the Pickle Principle as well. A significant majority of paranormal cryptid incidents are likely misidentifications or hoaxes, as with other ghostly and demonic phenomena. But now, having connected cryptids, ghosts, and demons, would it be any more difficult or unexpected for a fallen spirit to deceive by means of a strange cryptid than by means of any other ghostly apparition?⁹

Once again, without seeing demons behind every broken twig in the swamp, I believe the biblical worldview allows for fallen spirits that can and will use any deception within their power to lead the unwary astray. This could easily apply to the more “surreal” incidents in which physical laws are alleged to be bypassed. It might also better explain some of the more unlikely physical forms. As with ghost phenomena, close-up cryptid experiencers often relate unique feelings in addition to the sensory data. Obviously, fear and alarm would trigger some hefty emotions, but many victims tell of a more “psychic” contact in which the creature is spiritually communicating or controlling. For instance, many Bigfoot sighters tell of mindspeak, the ability of Squatch to communicate telepathically with humans.

Within the totality of cryptid reports, we would expect a broad range of observations and interpretations. It’s one thing to believe that a stray black jaguar might wander up into Arkansas, yet quite another to seine the Mississippi in hopes of finding a mermaid. Wherever the cryptozoological consensus goes, we most certainly should maintain a clear line between the possible existence of flesh-and-bone, biological cryptids and those that seemingly dip into the paranormal. I believe the common-sense application of the principles we’ve discussed establishes a good boundary for believability.

Merfolk and fairies would probably require a hefty sprinkling of pixie-dust to produce specimens, as would werewolves and goatmen. We’ll see later that many attempt to connect cryptids to UFO phenomena.¹⁰ Is this link due to overactive imaginations or something more supernatural? If Bigfoot turns out to be an extraterrestrial, that would sort of make him a Wookiee, wouldn’t it?

⁹ And adding to the complexity, is it possible that there are flesh-and-blood Bigfoots AND paranormal “copycats” just because Satan uses a mysterious real creature as the base for his paranormal freak shows? Might this also be the case for other mysteries? Could there be real extraterrestrial UFOs as well as demonic, paranormal counterfeits?

¹⁰ Hynek called this phenomenon “high strangeness.”