

sterile and useless for both practical and theoretical purposes. Let us imagine, however, the following experiment. Select a large group of children, all of them afflicted by unmistakably organic illnesses or defects. Let them be prayed over by clergymen chosen for piety and probity, and monitor the results. Suppose that new limbs grow to replace those that were deformed or missing, congenital blindness is cured, and damaged brains become normal. Suppose further that these and other effects are certified through affidavits by a committee of physicians, not all of whom already believe in miracles, and that the experiment, repeated by other observers, continues to yield positive results. In that event, even hardened skeptics would be forced to reconsider their views. Here is an opportunity to deal a

body blow to atheists and infidels, and send the faithful into ecstasies. Is that too much to ask of Omnipotence? Apparently so. "Faith-healers" have never requested such a test, probably because they know what the results would be.

Professor Johnson poses this question, which he refers to as the problem of self-reference: If the materialistic "theory of everything" that some scientists hope to discover is true, then the operations of the human mind are determined, along with all other events, by natural laws. How, in that case, can scientists be confident that their reasoning is correct? But if this is a problem for naturalists, supernaturalists are in no better position. Descartes made the point by imagining a malicious demon, an archdeceiver whose effect upon the

intellect would be to make false propositions appear self-evidently true. If, for any reason, someone considers seriously the hypothesis that his own thought processes are defective, he can decide to dismiss it but cannot, without circularity, refute it by reasoning.

One need not subscribe to Professor Johnson's philosophical views to share his distaste for some features of modern liberal culture. His comments upon society's indulgence and encouragement of irresponsible hedonism, and the transformation of liability law into a means of extortion, are effective and sometimes eloquent. But the belief that religion, any more than science, offers remedies for such social ills is not supported by the history of nations in which a religious worldview was dominant. □

Swift, Boone, and Bigfoot: New Evidence for a Literary Connection

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Are stories about Bigfoot, the mysterious ape-man of North America, grounded in fact, legend, hoax, or something else? In the Fall 1994 SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Hugh H. Trotti speculates in his Forum column "Did Fiction Give Birth to Bigfoot?" that the genesis of Bigfoot (or Sasquatch) may be found in English literature.

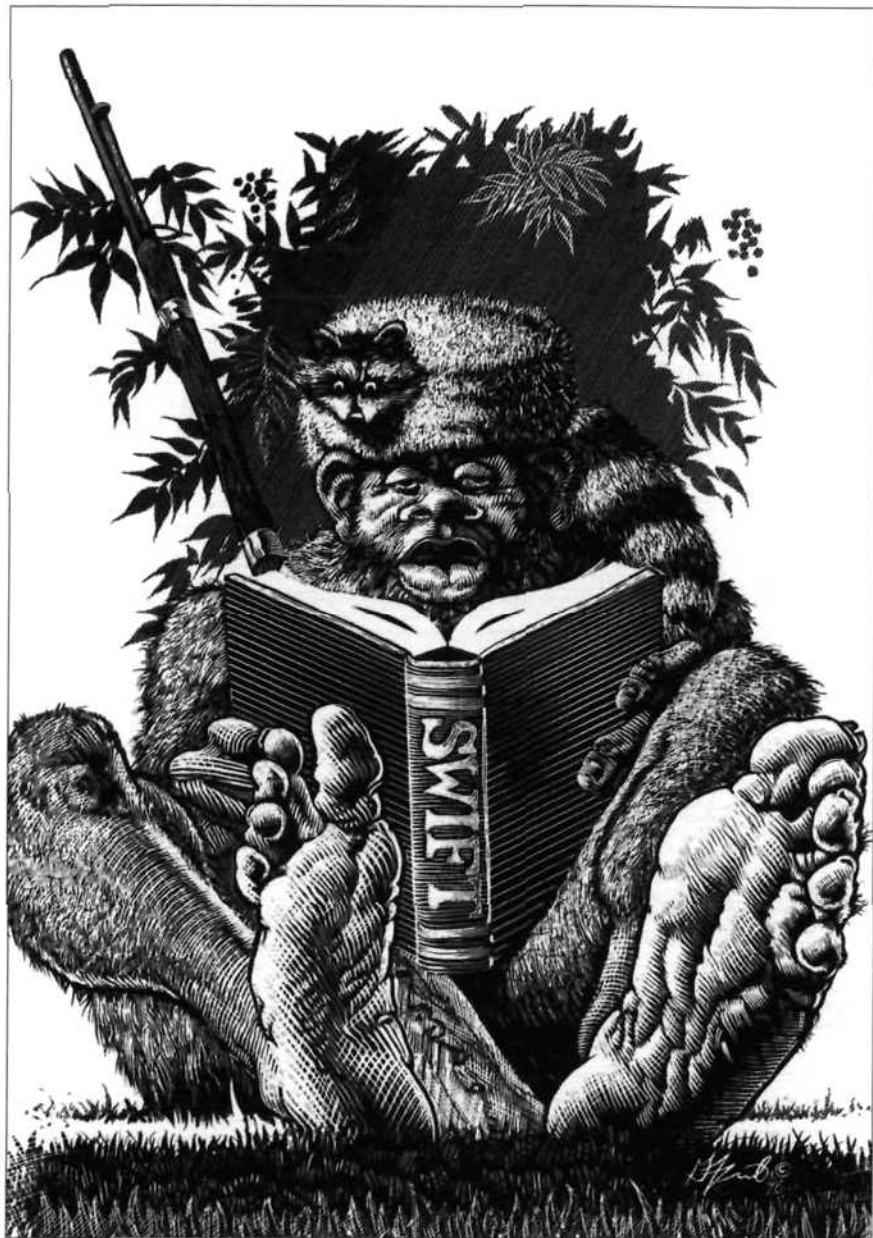
Trotti notes that in John Mack Faragher's biography of Daniel Boone, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (Faragher 1992), Faragher claims Boone told "tall tales" about "killing a ten-foot, hairy giant he called a 'Yahoo.'" Of course, the Yahoos were large, hairy, man-like creatures described in Jonathan Swift's classic of satire and irony *Gulliver's Travels* (see the chapter "A Voyage to the Country of the

Houyhnhnms"). It was further noted by Trotti that Faragher details Boone's familiarity with *Gulliver's Travels*. In fact, Faragher states the book was one of Boone's favorites and that Boone frequently carried the book with him into the woods. These facts fueled Trotti's speculation that the Bigfoot legend actually arose from Boone's retelling of the Swiftian saga as part of his own exploits throughout the American frontier in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

First of all, let me say that although I believe Trotti's hypothesis to be potentially testable, it is insufficient to account for the multitude of ape-man legends (including Bigfoot) in their entirety. The various legends concerning Bigfoot-like creatures come from around the world,

and speculations about them range from the improbable-yet-possible (that Bigfoot is an undiscovered animal or a remnant population of an ancient primate species like *Gigantopithecus*) to the wildly bizarre (that Bigfoot is an extraterrestrial being or an entity that can travel between dimensions). Further, it appears that some of the legends originated in widely dispersed indigenous cultures, and many of their myths apparently predate Swift's Yahoos. And more specific to Trotti's claims, while Bigfoot reports come in from a wide variety of locations within the United States, the Appalachian region that Boone lived in

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produces nowhere near the number of reports that are filed from areas like the Pacific Northwest and the Rocky Mountains.

However, with these caveats in mind, there is some evidence that Trotti's speculation could be right. Consider a research note by Leonard Roberts from the journal *Western Folklore* (Roberts 1957). Roberts reported that he had encountered "four or five versions" of what he called "a curious and strange legend" he collected from an isolated region of the Kentucky mountains. The stories centered around large, hairy wildpeople who lived in the woods. In one version of the story, told by a Mr.

Lee Maggard of Harlan County, Kentucky, the cave-dwelling wildperson is specifically called a "Yeahoh." Could "Yeahoh" be a corruption of Swift's "Yahoo," and could this be evidence that Boone's tall tales survived over one hundred years of retellings in the Kentucky highlands? Aside from the phonetic similarity of the creatures' names, another interesting parallel between the Kentucky Yeahoh and Swift's Yahoo is in the behavior attributed to each. Most notably, Maggard describes the Yeahoh as repeatedly making the sound "yeahoh, yeahoh"; Swift described his Yahoos as uttering their own eponymous sounds in a similar manner.

The idea that the tales of Maggard and the other Kentuckians were orally transmitted (and corrupted) versions of Swift's fiction that have survived the generations since the original and impressive tale-spinning of the folk hero Daniel Boone is only one possibility. Of course, it is also possible that the conversion of the story from written literature to oral folklore did not involve Boone at all, or that the similarities between Swift's writing and the Kentucky folktales are only coincidental. However, I believe the similarities are striking, and the possibility of a Swift-Boone connection is strong in the light of facts from the Faragher biography. Therefore, this anecdotal evidence may, in fact, provide support for Trotti's hypothesis. So while Trotti may not have answered all questions about Bigfoot or the origins of the Bigfoot legend(s), he may have accurately fingered a literary connection that has contributed to the mythos. By the way, there is an emerging legend of a Bigfoot-like creature said to inhabit the Great Dividing Range in Australia. Those who talk about the beast call it the "Yowie."

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Hugh H. Trotti provides this addendum:

If the concept of Bigfoot originates in Swift's literature, there may be a parallel line of belief descending from Carolus Linnaeus's "semi-human," since in 1758 the latter theorized that a form between man and ape existed, which he named Homo troglodytes (see Roger Lewin, Bones of Contention, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 304). Gulliver's Travels was somewhat earlier, but the question arises: Could both authors have been influenced by the tales of African explorers?