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The Narrative Tradition of Kentucky's Mysterious Beasts

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby

(University of Kentucky: 410, Lexington, KY 40506-0032, USA)

Summary. This article studies legends and memorates about Kentucky cryptids and their socio-cultural roles in local and state identity. Kentucky cryptids are classified as one of three types: 1) natural creatures of unusual size or in an unusual habitat; 2) natural creatures as yet undocumented in biological classification systems; 3) creatures of supernatural or otherworldly origins. Built into the conception of Kentucky as a state are its frontier past and the beauty (and possible danger) of its wilderness. The stories about natural cryptids reinforce these core features of Kentucky identity. They emphasize pride in the state and in Kentucky heritage. Narratives about natural and supernatural cryptids also reveal contemporary concerns about environmental issues (pollution from coal mines and factories), United States and Kentucky history (racial policies), government and corporations (abuse of public trust, disrespect for the folk, and environmental degradation), and technology (railroads, dams).

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INTRODUCTION

Legends about mysterious natural or supernatural creatures, often referred to as cryptids, have been documented across the United States. The eminent American folklorist Richard Dorson produced the first comprehensive study of narratives about cryptids in the United States, *Man and Beast in American Comic Legends* [Dorson 1982]. He argues that “All the peoples of the world take seriously certain legendary creatures of a lower mythology which whom they associate on familiar terms. All, that is, save the people of the United States” [Ibid, 1]. Dorson contends that Americans “were born too late to develop a higher or lower mythology and unlike our northern and southern neighbors, we excluded the Native American, erased the Afro-American, and suppressed the ethnic American goblins from our folk-belief system. <...> Instead we

have acquired a comic mythology of ‘fearsome critters’ who perform services and reflect the United States ethos in a manner comparable to the roles of the kappas, jinn, and fairy folk. <...> Belief and dread are not wholly absent, but in contrast to the rest of the world, we engage in hoaxes, pranks, tall tales and tomfoolery with our legendary creatures” [Ibid, 4]. It is certainly true that there are humorous narratives about these creatures, and that many Americans express no little skepticism about them. However, it seems that Dorson underestimates the power of these narratives to inspire belief, at least in the 21st-century United States nearly forty years after his book was released. This article will explore legends and memorates about Kentucky cryptids to demonstrate the role that these stories have in establishing local identity, illustrating Americans’ relationship to nature, history, and the supernatural,

and beliefs about proper behavior. In order to understand the role these narratives play in local folklore, a brief introduction to Kentucky history and cultural perceptions about the state will be necessary.

KENTUCKY HISTORY

Kentucky, originally part of the territory of the commonwealth of Virginia, became a state in 1792 [Harrison, Klotter 1997, 20]. At the time, Kentucky was perceived as the frontier and was the first state established west of the Appalachian Mountains. Kentucky was home to at least 12 Native tribes when European settlers arrived, and the name of the state is derived from a Native American word, although its exact etymology is disputed [Ibid, 5]. Despite frequent clashes with the Chickasaw, Cherokee and Shawnee, explorers and ultimately settlers continued to come to Kentucky, drawn mainly by the rich natural resources to be found there [Ibid, 9]. Particularly important in exploration of Kentucky were the Long Hunters, fur trappers who paved the way for permanent settlement, the most famous being Daniel Boone [Ibid, 10–11]. The frontiersman Boone, himself the subject of many a legend about his hunting prowess, first came to Kentucky in 1769 and moved his family there in 1773. He knew the Kentucky terrain extremely well and, as a result, surveyed one of its earliest permanent settlements, Boonesborough, established in 1775. Thus, Kentucky's history is intertwined the frontier mythos created around western expansion in the United States as well as the belief that this nation was a land of plenty, replete with natural resources bestowed by God to the European settlers. Similarly, it lies at the center to two of the most traumatic historical events in US history: the dispossession of the Native Americans from their ancestral lands and the institution of slavery. While Kentucky was a slave state, it nevertheless remained neutral during the US Civil War. These historical events still play a role in the Kentucky narrative tradition, including in stories about cryptids, as we will see below.

KENTUCKY GEOGRAPHY

Kentucky is divided into five geographic regions, each with distinct environmental characteristics¹: 1) The Cumberland Plateau (part of the Appalachian Plateau that stretches from

New York to Alabama) is known for its forests and coal deposits and lies in the eastern part of the state in the Cumberland and Pine Mountain ranges; 2) The Bluegrass, an area of rolling hills and prime agricultural land, makes up the central part of the state; 3) The Western Coal Fields in the far north west of the state is a hilly area of coal deposits with some farmland along the Ohio River; 4) The Pennyrile, a flat plain located in the south, stretches from the Cumberland Plateau to Kentucky Lake. The northern portion of this region contains some of the most famous caves in the United States, including Mammoth Cave, a national park that is part of the longest known cave system on Earth (over 640 kilometers)²; 5) The Jackson Purchase is a hilly bottom land bordered by the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and Kentucky Lake. Narratives about cryptids associated with the local topography, from water monsters to cave denizens, are found in each region.

APPALACHIA AND KENTUCKY: CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS

Outsiders to Appalachia typically view this region in a negative light [Ulack, Raitz 1982; Cramer 2018]. Ulack and Raitz documented how non-residents describe a Appalachia as beset by poverty, low levels of education, and poor housing [Ulack, Raitz 1982, 735–741]. They also cite demeaning stereotypes such as illegal liquor production by “hill people” in a socially and physically isolated region of the country. The one positive, according to Ulack and Raitz [Ibid., 737], is the natural beauty of the area. This perception of the region and its people has not changed much over the last 40 years, as Cramer [Cramer 2018, 61–63] also demonstrates in her study of attitudes toward Appalachian English. In short, Appalachia is viewed as one plagued by persistent social problems, from drug addiction to inferior education, from backwardness to economic instability, from environmental degradation to racism.

This demeaning view of Appalachia as a whole is so pervasive, that the states associated with the region, particularly those in the southern mountains (Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina) are branded with the same negative stereotypes. Kentuckians (even if not from the eastern part of the state, the Appalachian Plateau) are routinely asked insulting questions about whether they

¹ URL: https://www.netstate.com/states/geography/ky_geography.htm (retrieved: 29.05.2020).

² URL: <https://www.nps.gov/macai/index.htm> (retrieved: 29.05.2020).

wear shoes or are forced to listen to jokes about inbreeding and moonshining (a slang term for illegal liquor production). While parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York also lie within Appalachia, these states largely escape the negative stereotypes of the southern Appalachian states. The latter are more likely to face these offensive stereotypes because of the perceived remoteness as mountain states populated by backwoods hillbillies (a derogatory slang term for southern Appalachian residents) and because of the legacy of the Civil War in the United States. The war over slavery resulted in negative stereotypes about the south as a whole, even southern states (like Kentucky and West Virginia) that were not members of the Confederacy. While it may seem that narratives about mysterious creatures would have no relation to US history or to regional stereotypes, legends and memorates about Kentucky cryptids are in fact closely connected to these cultural tropes, as we will see.

TYPES OF CRYPTIDS

Cryptids are usually one of three types: 1) natural creatures of unusual size or in an unusual habitat; 2) natural creatures that are as yet undocumented in biological classification systems; 3) creatures of supernatural or otherworldly origins. Kentucky has narratives about all three types of cryptids. While there are many examples to choose from, I will focus on some prime examples in each category in my discussion of the cultural role these cryptids play in regional or local identity.

NATURAL CRYPTIDS

Kentucky, as we have seen, is known for its natural environment (mountains, forests, lakes and rivers). Outside of Lexington (population just over 500,000) and Louisville (population 1.25 million), both in Central Kentucky, the state is largely rural. Even in the two most heavily populated cities, farmland and wilderness areas are within easy reach. As a result, the perception of Kentucky's "wildness" prompts narratives about unusual natural creatures that have been seen, even in the most populous areas of the state, or hidden in its unspoiled natural areas.

Sightings of the Monster of Herrington Lake in the Bluegrass region have been reported

since at least the 1970s, when a former professor at the University of Kentucky was interviewed by the Louisville newspaper about a large creature with a pig-like snout moving quickly through the water [Ward 1972]. People also tell of a huge catfish big enough to swallow a Volkswagen Beetle³. Lake Herrington is a manmade lake created in 1925 when the Dix Dam was built as part of a hydroelectric power station and flood control system. It is the deepest lake in the state and, as a result, has only frozen over twice⁴. The lake is a popular fishing site for bass, catfish, crappie and bluegill. However, the lake has been polluted by a coal power plant on its shore that has harmed the fish population. The plant operator was fined by the federal government, which also required a mitigation plan from the company [Peterson 2017]. All of these facts about the lake play into the description of the Lake Herrington monster⁵. Some have hypothesized, including the UK professor who saw the monster in the 70s, that the fish was a prehistoric creature that once lived in a watery cave. Once the dam was created, the creature was free to swim out into the lake from the depths of the cave. Still others have argued that this monster is a fish (an alligator gar or a sturgeon) that had been trapped when the dam was built. The fish had grown to an enormous size in extreme depths of this lake that does not freeze [Michaels 2016, 119]. It is noteworthy that gars, sturgeons and catfish have long life spans, so that they might indeed live 40–80 years (or longer), growing bigger each season.

Far western Kentucky, in the Jackson Purchase area, is known for the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. Like Herrington Lake, the two border lakes (Barkley and Kentucky) were formed by dams built for flood control and power stations on the Cumberland (in 1964) and Tennessee Rivers (in 1944) [Riley 2017]. As Anne Fentress documents in her film *Between the Rivers* [Fentress 2018], the residents of the area were forced to move from their homes, leaving behind their towns where they had lived for seven generations. In their place, the Tennessee Valley Authority, which arranged for their homes to be condemned through the process of eminent domain, created the recreation area thinking

³ URL: <http://www.fishin.com/forums2/showthread.php/60894-Herrington-Monster> (retrieved: 03.06.2020).

⁴ URL: <https://www.hlcl.org/lake-history> (retrieved: 03.06.2020).

⁵ URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzIghewi1Ks> (retrieved: 02.06.2020).

to capitalize on tourism. However, the remoteness of the Land Between the Lakes worked against it, and it was never particularly popular outside the region. Ultimately, the land was turned over to the US Forest Service in 1998, which is harvesting the timber and has closed many of the public camping and recreation areas. Former residents have had many disputes with the forest service about access to their family cemeteries, which had been promised to them when they were forced off their land.

The remote wilderness area of the Land Between the Lakes is home to the Dogman (or Kentucky Booger). The Dogman is described as a 2-meter tall wolf that walks on its hind legs, striking fear into campers and hikers with its terrible howls and amazing speed and strength. According to local legend, the Dogman killed a family of four camping in the Land Between the Lakes in the 1980s. The police were instructed not to spread the word of the killing, which would harm tourism, so that the case supposedly has never been solved. As a result, the murders have not been documented in the press. According to the legend, police determined that a large animal with huge claws had killed the family, leaving behind the half-eaten remains of one child⁶.

Stories about this cryptid are said to have circulated in the area since in the 1800s, when hunters told stories of a massive beast that would kill bison and humans. One view of its origin is that this is a natural creature, like Bigfoot, that has yet to be scientifically identified. Another story tells of a disease that resulted in a man and his family having “wolf-like” characteristics. Yet a third argues that the beast is of supernatural origin, purportedly a Shawnee shaman that was killed in his animal form and now haunts the region seeking revenge. In the present day, memorates of frightening encounters with the Dogman ending in narrow escapes as well as legends about the murdered family have been documented [Powell 2018]⁷.

While Western Kentucky is home to a wolven cryptid, Eastern and Central Kentucky have their own mysterious creature, a Black Panther. Memorates about encounters with this black wildcat have been documented in

the Cumberland Plateau and in the Bluegrass regions [Holland 2008; Adams 2014; Voices of Versailles 2020]. The eastern US was once home to mountain lions (also called cougars or pumas), but they were eliminated by the early years of the 20th century. As a result, today lions are largely restricted to the far West of the country with some few documented sightings in the Midwest and only very rarely in the Eastern states [LaRue 2018]. While LaRue argues that the big cats are moving back eastward, there has only been one documented sighting of a puma in Kentucky in this century (in 2017). Despite this fact, stories abound of the large black cat killing farm animals and pets in Kentucky. While this animal is not supernatural in origin, it is classified as a cryptid for several reasons. First, it has an unusual range, since big cats died out in Kentucky over 100 years ago; the eastern cougar was declared extinct in 2018 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service [Gibbens 2018]. In addition, cougars are usually a tawny brown color. There has never been a documented black puma in the United States [Forrester 2015]. Thus, if this cat is a mountain lion, it is the only one of its kind; if it is a jaguar (a black cat found in South America), it is especially far from its range. Stories documented in 2009 about a black panther in a Lexington neighborhood are particularly striking, since this is the second largest city in the state [Black Panther 2009a; Black Panther 2009b; Adams 2014]. All the other narratives about the black panther were collected in mountainous or farming regions, where finding such a cat might be less surprising. However, to discover a dangerous big cat in one’s suburban backyard promotes the view of Kentucky as a wild place known for its flora and fauna.

In fact, all three narrative cycles reinforce beliefs documented by Raitz and Ulack [Raitz, Ulack 1982] about Kentucky’s “wildness.” Kentucky’s forests, lakes and caves promote a sense of mystery that emerged from the history of Kentucky as the frontier. Even today, Kentucky is defined by an environment where animals of all types can thrive. In addition to highlighting Kentucky nature, these stories also bring to the fore the dangers of human interference in the

⁶ URL: https://cryptidz.fandom.com/wiki/Beast_of_the_Land_Between_the_Lakes (retrieved: 04.06.2020).

⁷ Note that there have been wolfmen sightings in Kentucky in other regions as well. Quaid Adams collected a memorate about a wolfman in Central Kentucky (Jessamine County) in 2010 as well as a report from Erlanger, in Northern Kentucky; a sighting by Chris Cooper in Bowling Green (a city in Western Kentucky) was published in 2008 [Holland 2008, 85].

environment. While the power stations and flood control from the dams certainly might benefit locals, the stories make clear that they have also disrupted the natural order. Strange and dangerous creatures emerge from these manmade realms to threaten people who have taken up residence in or near their domains. In addition, awareness of toxins in the lake, said to harm fish [Peterson 2017], may also be enhanced by folk beliefs about pollution (or radiation) causing creatures to grow to unusual sizes and become a threat⁸. Certainly, human negligence and disrespect for the natural environment (Kentucky's wildness) lies at the center of these narratives as well. In the black panther narratives, we see similar mention of concern about human interference in nature; Charlotte J. Strunk posted "Back in the late 60s early 70s I remember my grandparents telling stories about panther encounters and as the old saying goes the more we build the more we drive them from there (sic) natural habitat" [Voices of Versailles 2020]. In sum, these stories criticize the greed of power companies and developers, who have been responsible both for reshaping the environment and, in some cases, for polluting it and harming both animals and people.

This theme is particularly clear in the Land Between the Lakes context. People who had a long connection to the land, living in harmony with the rivers, were removed to line a company's pockets. In fact, the grand plans to make money from tourism failed, and the power company abandoned the site to the federal government. The company caused suffering for the local people that lost their homes for the sake of a futile profit scheme. In the process, as Fentress [Fentress 2018] discusses, representatives of the Tennessee Valley Authority reinforced the common stereotype of rural Kentuckians as poor people in need of improvement. Residents would be removed from their "rural slum... with... a promise that their land would only be used for 'recreation, education and demonstration.' The TVA saw the plan as positive for all concerned: the residents would receive a windfall of money, be lifted out of a poverty-stricken area and at the

same time, the eastern half of America would be given an idyllic natural playground to get back in touch with the spirit of the American frontier" [Fentress 2018]. Not surprisingly, the Dogman, who emerged out of the most painful historical events of these three legend cycles, is the most dangerous of these natural cryptids. It is telling as well that his attacks are on outsiders, campers and hikers, who come to the region to enjoy the amenities Land Between the Lakes offers them, amenities established at the expense of their fellow citizens.

These stories deal with fears about powerful, social institutions as well, namely science and the government. In the case of the two lake cryptids (Herrington Monster and Dogman), some variants of the stories hint that they are purportedly ancient creatures not yet documented by biologists. In other words, the "folk" know the truth better than scientists do. The narratives cast doubt on formal, institutional knowledge in favor of local legends and memorates. The black panther stories also make frequent reference to the narrator's own knowledge of local fauna, claiming an expertise denied by scientists. They describe how they reported the encounter to the Fish and Wildlife Service (a state agency staffed by biologists) only to be told they much be mistaken, since there is no documented evidence of the existence of these cryptids. As a result of this dismissive attitude toward personal experience, tellers often criticize the government agency. For example, in the discussion of the sightings of the black panther in Woodford County (my home county) in May, William B. posted, "I've known too many other people in Kentucky who have seen things like this to doubt you, however skeptical the official Fish and Wildlife line may be. There are still natural mysteries out there." In response, Bill Epperson wrote, "Fish and Wildlife don't want you to know due to the panic factor! Remember they killed a mountain lion some time ago somewhere around Harrison co I think. Then they couldn't deny!" [Voices of Versailles 2020]⁹. The news reports on the videos about the Black Panther of Winburn (in Lexington) also feature interviews with Fish and Wildlife

⁸ In March 2020, some of my Kentucky students shared memes with me about how swimming in polluted Kentucky lakes had "inoculated" them against COVID 19. The essence of these memes was that exposure to serious microbes and toxins as children in Kentucky lake water would protect them from this virulent strain of the Corona virus.

⁹ This latter reference is to the confirmed sighting in 2017 of a mountain lion in Kentucky that was shot and killed.

employees, who report that the people mistook a black coyote or a large house cat for a black panther. The locals take umbrage at this dismissal of their (folk) expertise and the evidence they provided of the encounter [Black Panther 2009a; Black Panther 2009b]¹⁰.

Narratives about natural cryptids bring to the fore common perceptions, positive and negative, about Kentucky and its residents. Kentucky's wilderness results in pride, but also is tied to the idea of rural backwardness. People's local knowledge is dismissed in favor of expert opinion, but the stories allow for criticism of these formal institutions. Institutional venality, in turn, results in disregard for Kentucky's true riches as well as significant harm to the people who love the state and its natural beauty. As Dorson [Dorson 1982] claimed, there are certainly doubters and comedic hoaxers among the populace that shares and hears these stories. However, the conviction with which many people tell and retell them (and seek out the cryptids in legend trips) supports my claim that belief in these narratives conveys an important part of Kentucky identity, even if people do not believe them. They likewise serve to grapple with controversial issues in the state past and present. As we will see below, narratives about supernatural cryptids are no exception in this regard.

SUPERNATURAL OR OTHERWORLDLY CRYPTIDS

Supernatural or otherworldly cryptids are typically associated with wilderness areas, like the natural cryptids (creeks, forests, and caves). However, there are also stories associating cryptids with railroads, a manmade structure that disrupts nature like the dams discussed above in the section "Natural Cryptids". The supernatural cryptids are said to emerge from one of two sources: 1) alien visitors from other planets or 2) supernatural events often related to violent death. One of the latter type is found in my city of Versailles. Natives tell the story of Scaly Man, who travels along Clear Creek

near the Old Paul's Mill in the town of Nonesuch. The Scaly Man legend was born out of Kentucky's history as a slave state. The story goes that an enslaved African American man fought with his owner, and both men died from their wounds. In the form of a human covered in scales, perhaps from the association of dying near the creek, they still haunt the banks trying to drown others¹¹.

Another monster that emerged from an act of violence is the Pope Lick Monster of Louisville. Also known as the Goatman of Louisville, he is half man, half goat and lives under the railroad trestle bridge over Pope Lick Creek¹². Locals say that the monster vowed revenge on people after being mistreated. In the most common version, the Goatman was captured by a circus owner in Canada to be put on display in its freak show. He escaped after a train derailed, killing all the other performers, on the Pope Lick trestle, which he has haunted ever since [Gravatte 2020]. Another version claims that the monster is actually the reincarnated form of a farmer who sacrificed his goats in exchange for satanic powers [Ibid]. The creature uses either hypnotic powers or mimicry to lure people onto the bridge to their death before an oncoming train. Other stories claim the monster jumps down from the trestle onto the roofs of cars passing beneath it. Still others tell how the Goatman attacks its victims with a bloodstained axe. The very sight of this creature with his huge axe is so unsettling that people leap off the trestle to their deaths [Adams 2020, 21–22].

The narrow 27-meter high trestle, built in the 1800s, runs through a Pope Lick Park in Big Beech Woods, an old growth forest and wilderness area [Special Places 2020]. The Pope Lick trestle is the destination of many a legend trip, particularly by teenagers seeking out the monster. This practice has resulted in many deaths, most recently of a 15-year-old girl hit by a train in May 2019 [Kobin 2020]. The owners of the trestle, Norfolk Southern Corporation, have installed fences and

¹⁰ In response to these memorates, people will often also hypothesize that these are escaped big cats who had been kept as "pets." Those people generally criticize those who maltreat these wild animals by keeping them in captivity and also by putting their neighbors in jeopardy. This theme parallels that of companies that have "unleashed" these creatures on the community due to their greed and disregard for nature.

¹¹ Concerns about the racial and ethnic history of the United States are also indicated in the version of the Dogman legend that attributes a supernatural origin to a Shawnee shaman seeking revenge for his people's treatment as the hands of the United States government and European American settlers.

¹² As Puglia [Puglia 2013, 75] discusses the goatman legend is not limited to Kentucky. There are legends about goatmen across the United States.

warning signs, but the trestle is still accessible, given the difficulty of securing the bridge in the terrain surrounding it¹³.

However, Louisville is not the only town in Kentucky with a goatman. Railroad Tunnel Nine in East Bernstadt, Kentucky is said to be home to a similar creature. East Bernstadt is located in Laurel County, in the Cumberland Plateau, not far from the Daniel Boone National Forest. Although the cryptid is often described as a goatman, others say he is half horse/half man or she is half horse/half cougar. No matter what the combination of human and animal, all descriptions focus on its red glowing eyes. The Bernstadt Goatman is said to appear at midnight and to chase (and attack) people that are in the tunnel or in its vicinity camping or hiking in the forest. Like the Louisville Goatman, one origin legend also relates to circus history. In September 1882, only two months after the first train arrived in London, Kentucky, a train bringing a circus to town wrecked, killing three men, including one supposedly named Calebs¹⁴, who now haunts the spot [Railway Disaster 1882]. In other versions, the goatman was a railroad worker out checking the tracks. He broke his neck after a cougar jumped on his horse. As a result, he has either become a beast that is half horse or half lion with a distinctive scream (similar to a horse's panicked whinny or a lion's roar). As with Scaly Man, one variant about how this cryptid came into existence connects to Kentucky's racist history. This version tells of two white men who killed a black railroad worker in the tunnel. Another more mundane version is that the goatman was an alcoholic killed by a train in the tunnel [Hicks 2008; Haunted Places in Kentucky 2010].

Hopkinsville, a town in the southwestern Pennyrile Region, is known for a 1955 UFO invasion by creatures called the Hopkinsville Goblins [Story of Space-Ship 1955]. That evening, the families of Cecil Sutton and Billy Ray Taylor (who was visiting from another state) reported to police that a dozen one-meter tall aliens had emerged from a spacecraft behind the home and had attacked the farmhouse. They had been shooting at the aliens for about four hours and asked the police for help.

The farm occupants reported that they had shot several of the aliens, but they appeared to be unharmed, floating to the ground and disappearing into the forest. When the police arrived, they found no evidence of alien beings or any visible tracks. The goblins were not seen again in the area for many years. However, in 2014 a Hopkinsville native in my Introduction to Folklore class collected a variant of the legend [Oldfather 2014]. In this version, the goblins are not aliens (or at least there was no reference to them in those terms). Rather, locals claim that these small beings emerge from abandoned coalmines and attack people and animals near to mine entrances. In essence, in this narrative, they have taken on the characteristics of cave-dwelling supernatural creatures of the European folk tradition rather than their original alien origin story.

Once in the mines and caves, according to this legend tradition, the "goblins" have been free to move across the state undiscovered, emerging at various locations, including in the far east of the state in Hellier, a small town in mountains of the Cumberland Plateau. A group of paranormal researchers (Greg and Dana Newkirk, Karl Pfeifer and Connor Randall) investigated the claims about the Hellier sightings and produced a documentary series *Hellier* [Pfeiffer 2019] to share their findings. They argue that these cryptids (whether alien in origin or not) have indeed moved through the cave system across Kentucky. Recall that Kentucky is home to Mammoth Cave, a connected system of caves over 600 kilometers in length. While they began their investigation in Eastern Kentucky, the filmmakers conclude that the epicenter of the "goblin phenomenon" is to be found in Somerset, a town at the edge of the Cumberland Plateau and Pennyrile Regions. Importantly, Somerset (like Hellier, Hopkinsville and Mammoth Cave) is located on the 37th Parallel. In UFO circles, the 37th Parallel is said to be the site of the majority of alien encounters in the United States [Mezrich 2016]. Somerset is also believed to be the site of significant geomagnetic anomalies due to the huge quartz deposits beneath it. This town has a living and active narrative tradition about mysterious happenings in the cave system and

¹³ A video of a train crossing the track taken by park visitors in May 2020 (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcWaxxe4kFk> (retrieved: 08.06.2020)) demonstrates the risks of both the trestle's height and of being caught on the track while a train crosses it. While a train killed the girl in 2019, others have fallen to their deaths while exploring the narrow, old bridge.

¹⁴ Because of this belief, locals often refer to the cryptid as Caleb.

in the area in general. Legends and memorates tell of enigmatic deaths and murders purportedly perpetrated by a Satanic cult as well as hauntings and cryptid sightings, including goblins and others [Pfeiffer 2019, Season 2 Episode 8; Bodie 2020]¹⁵.

In the discussion of natural cryptids, we saw that narratives about them reflect both positive and negative stereotypes about Kentucky. In particular, the natural beauty of the state and the perception that it is a “wild” frontier are common motifs. The same is certainly true of legends and memorates about supernatural cryptids. They live in Kentucky’s vast cave system or in its lush forests (even appearing, like the Pope Lick Monster, in the middle of the largest city in the state in a preserved old growth forest area). We see concern over human interference in the environment, as discussed in the “Natural Cryptids” section. The legends cast a critical eye on the pollution that results from mining and the environmental changes from railroad construction. As it has become more clear how dangerous mining is to people’s health and to the natural environment (pollution of groundwater and soil, mountain top removal destroying entire ecosystems), the Hopkinsville Goblins have shifted from a space alien to a creature that emerges from Mother Earth out of abandoned mines. In this sense, they personify the harm that coal mines have done to Kentucky’s natural world and its people. They have been released to terrorize people and their animals, like an avenging spirit from the earth itself.

The railroad is also a particularly evocative symbol for the “taming” of the frontier regions. If the narratives offer debate on human relationships to the environment, the railroad allows the audience to consider the beneficial and detrimental effects of westward expansion on the nation and on its terrain. More significantly, it is not the railroad alone that is at issue, but liminal spaces within the railroad system — namely tunnels and bridges. The European folk tradition abounds with stories of trolls living under bridges or monsters in caves (the tunnel being its manmade equivalent). American lore continues that tradition in these legends. The shadowy cryptids associated with these spaces demonstrate that immoral human actions have resulted in supernatural creatures bent on harming us. We are punished because we did

not respect nature, a gift from God, or because we violated core cultural taboos.

The latter distinguishes narratives about supernatural cryptids from stories about natural ones. These legends and memorates grapple with social sins such as racism and slavery, mistreatment of “nonconformists,” and violation of religious proscriptions. In this narrative tradition, the sufferer (or perpetrator) lives on, in a kind of half-life, attacking people to bring forth a perverse repentance. The stories allow us to grapple with these violations of the social code and to debate people’s (including our own) culpability in these situations. It is not surprising that race and slavery are often at the core of American legends (see [Fine, Turner 2004; de Caro 2015] for a discussion). This historical moment illustrates the hypocrisy at the heart of the American experiment: a nation supposedly dedicated to human rights that allowed a barbaric institution to persist and is still grappling with the legacy. These narratives expose this contradiction and allow people to condemn this past within the framework of a folk narrative. The audience sympathizes with the African Americans (Scaly Man and the Bernstadt Goatman) or Native Americans (Dogman) killed at the hands of white people and is able to appreciate (and even applaud) their desire for revenge. In some small measure, the audience’s guilt is assuaged through the punitive actions of these ancestors who suffered unjust treatment at the hands of their fellow citizens. Likewise, narratives criticize maltreatment of those that are “abnormal” in some way, like the Canadian “man-beast,” who was trapped to serve as a circus attraction. The stories tackle a barbaric past in which the disabled, minorities (especially Natives) or foreigners were put on display as though they were inhuman. These legends allow us to reflect on our inhumanity then (and now) in the treatment of those who are different or seen as “other.” Within the framework of a largely Christian nation, these behaviors certainly merit censure, and the legends offer a space to do so without directly raising controversial issues that are usually avoided among Americans.

The US Christian heritage also results in stories featuring heretical behavior. As a result, the Pope Lick Monster worshipped

¹⁵ The town is also home to the International Paranormal Museum, which has exhibits about unexplained (and potentially supernatural or otherworldly) events in the local caves.

Satan, and the Satanic cult in Somerset is said to be connected to the goblins in the local caves in some way. Bill Ellis [Ellis 2003] has documented the rich narrative tradition about Satanic cults in the United States. These cryptid narratives, collected over 15 years later, illustrate that the fears of Satanism have not abated, despite a paucity of evidence for such cults in rural America. Narratives about Satanic cults, as Victor [Victor 1989] and Ellis [Ellis 2003] have argued, is the result of economic crises and a perception of the decline of the nuclear family. In the face of these concerns, narratives about Satanism allow people to criticize the social ills they see in their communities. They can blame their woes on an immoral practice that results in an inhuman monster bent on destroying them, particularly their children. Note that in both Somerset and Louisville, the recorded deaths associated with the monsters or the cult are of young people. The hope for the future is gone if the youngest generation is either morally corrupt or physically harmed, and these stories bring this debate about the moral status of US society into the open.

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While not every community member believes that the cryptids in these narratives exist, as Dorson [Dorson 1982] demonstrated, I disagree with his contention that joking and pranks are the primary goal of the American cryptid legend tradition. As this study has documented, there are true believers who go in search of these creatures and also insist that they have seen them. In addition, the serious issues raised in these stories expose social ills, past and present, and, as Goldstein argues [Goldstein 2004, xv], “provide an index to what intrigues us, concerns us, frightens us, and puzzles us about quotidian reality.” The stories highlight conflicts about how cultural institutions mistreat people as well as debates about morality and our behavior toward others, both humans and animals. They also reveal how stereotypes, positive and negative, persist and frame our understanding of people and their region of origin. This tradition merits serious consideration by folklorists, since it is not just aimed at “a good scare” (although it certainly can provide one), but uncovers how locals define their community and explore contradictions in their values.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4272-7411>

E-mail: j.rouhier@uky.edu

Tel.: +1 (859) 257-1756

410, Lexington, KY 40506–0032, USA

PhD, Professor, University of Kentucky

Традиция нарративов о таинственных существах Кентукки

Джинмари Руей-Уиллоби

(Университет Кентукки: 410, Лексингтон, Кентукки 40506-0032, США)

Аннотация. Данная статья рассматривает легенды и былички о таинственных существах (криптидах) в штате Кентукки и их социокультурные роли в формировании местной идентичности и идентичности штата. Криптиды из Кентукки можно разделить на три типа: 1) природные существа необычного размера или живущие в необычной среде обитания; 2) природные существа, до сих пор незафиксированные в биологической классификации; 3) существа сверхъестественного или потустороннего происхождения. Образ Кентукки строится на основе его прошлого как пограничного штата, а также на основе красоты (и возможной опасности) его дикой природы. Рассказы о криптидах подкрепляют основные черты идентичности Кентукки. В них чувствуется гордость за штат и наследие Кентукки. В нарративах о природных и сверхъестественных существах также присутствует современная озабоченность, связанная с экологическими проблемами (загрязнением от угольных шахт и заводов), историей США и Кентукки (равовой политикой), правительством и корпорациями (злоупотреблением общественным доверием, неуважением к народу и ухудшением окружающей среды) и технологиями (железными дорогами, плотинами).

Ключевые слова: криптиды, легенды, былички, штат Кентукки.

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КРАТКОЕ СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

Легенды о таинственных природных или сверхъестественных существах, часто называемых криптидами, были записаны по всей территории Соединенных Штатов. В данной статье мы рассматриваем некоторые легенды и былички о криптидах Кентукки, чтобы продемонстрировать ту роль, которую они играют в формировании местной идентичности.

В 1792 г. Кентукки стал первым штатом, созданным к западу от Аппалачей. История Кентукки переплетается с пограничными мифами, созданными вокруг западной экспансии в США, а также с верой в то, что богатая природа этой земли была дарована Богом европейским поселенцам. В истории штата также нашли отражение два самых травмирующих эпизода в истории страны: лишение коренных американцев их исконных земель и институт рабства. Эти события все еще играют определенную роль в нарративной традиции Кентукки, в том числе в рассказах о криптидах.

Кентукки известен своей природой: горами, лесами, озерами и реками. За пределами г. Лексингтона (с населением чуть более 500 тыс. человек) и г. Луисвилла

(с населением 1,25 млн человек) штат представляет собой в основном сельскую местность. В результате он воспринимается как «дикое» место. Неслучайно появляются нарративы о том, что здесь обитают необычные природные существа.

О Монстре озера Херрингтон в районе Блуграсс сообщается по крайней мере с 1970-х гг. Его описывают как большое существо со свиноподобной мордой или как огромного сома. Озеро Херрингтон — искусственное, созданное в 1925 г. при строительстве плотины Дикс. Оно было популярным местом для рыбной ловли, однако было загрязнено угольной электростанцией. Некоторые предполагают, что Монстр был доисторическим существом, которое когда-то жило в водной пещере. Когда появилась плотина, оно стало свободно выплывать оттуда в озеро. Вторые утверждают, что это чудовище (панцирная щука или осетр) было поймано в ловушку, когда была построена плотина, и выросло до огромных размеров.

На западе Кентукки, в районе Джексон-Пай, есть Земля между озерами. Как и в случае с озером Херрингтон, два местных озера — Баркли и Кентукки — были образованы плотинами, построенными

для борьбы с наводнениями на реках Камберленд (в 1964 г.) и Теннесси (в 1944 г.). В результате обитатели этого района были вынуждены покинуть свои дома, где они жили на протяжении семи поколений. В этой отдаленной местности обитает Человек-собака. Он описывается как двухметровый волк, который ходит на задних лапах, жутко воет и отличается удивительной скоростью и силой. Согласно местной легенде, в 1980-х гг. Человек-собака убил семью из четырех человек. Нарративы об этом криптиде, говорят, циркулируют здесь с 1800-х гг. Одни считают, что это природное существо, которое еще предстоит идентифицировать ученым. Другие рассказывают, что в этих краях жили мужчина и его семья, которые были поражены болезнью и поэтому приобрели «волчьи» черты. А третьи утверждают, что зверь имеет сверхъестественное происхождение: это был шаман шауни, который был убит в своей животной форме и теперь бродит по региону, желая отомстить.

В Восточном и Центральном Кентукки есть свое таинственное существо — Черная пантера. На востоке США когда-то обитали горные львы (также называемые пумами), но они были уничтожены в начале XX в. Тем не менее существует множество историй о большой черной кошке, убивающей скот и домашних животных в Кентукки. Рассказы о Черной пантере, задокументированные в 2009 г. в районе Лексингтона, особенно поразительны, поскольку это второй по величине город в штате.

Нарративы о природных криптидах выдвигают на первый план общие представления, положительные и отрицательные, о Кентукки и его жителях. Дикая природа Кентукки вызывает гордость, но также связана с идеей сельской отсталости. Все три повествовательных цикла также поднимают проблему вмешательства человека

в окружающую среду, отражают обеспокоенность людей загрязнением природы и показывают страх рассказчиков перед мощными социальными институтами, а именно наукой и правительством. В случае с Монстром озера Херрингтон и Человеком-собакой некоторые варианты историй намекают на то, что эти криптиды являются древними существами, еще не описанными биологами, а в нарративах о Черной пантере рассказчики часто упоминают о том, что ученые отрицают их знания о местной фауне.

Что касается сверхъестественных криптидов, то у них, говорят, есть две причины появления: 1) инопланетные гости; 2) сверхъестественные события, часто вызванные насильственной смертью. Со вторым типом связаны нарративы в г. Версале. Местные жители рассказывают историю Чешуйчатого человека, который путешествует по Чистому ручью в г. Нонсуч. Легенда родилась из рабовладельческой истории Кентукки. Она гласит, что раб-афроамериканец подрался со своим хозяином, и оба мужчины умерли от ран. В виде людей, покрытых чешуей (возможно, из-за того, что погибли у ручья), они все еще бродят по берегам, пытаясь утопить других.

Автор не согласна с утверждением Ричарда Дорсона [Dorson 1982], что шутки и розыгрыши являются основной целью американской традиции легенд о криптидах. Как показало ее исследование, есть те, кто по-настоящему верит в существование таинственных животных. Кроме того, серьезные темы, поднятые в этих историях, разоблачают социальные проблемы, прошлые и настоящие, и, как утверждает Гольдштейн, «дают представление о том, что нас интригует, беспокоит, пугает и озадачивает в повседневной реальности» [Goldstein 2004, xv].

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СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

Руей-Уиллоби Д. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4272-7411>

PhD, профессор, Университет Кентукки: США, Кентукки 40506-0032, Лексингтон, 410; тел.: +1 (859) 257-1756; e-mail: j.rouhier@uky.edu



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