

THE HONEY ISLAND SWAMP MONSTER:
THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF A
FOLK AND COMMODIFIED BELIEF TRADITION

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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FRANCES LEARY

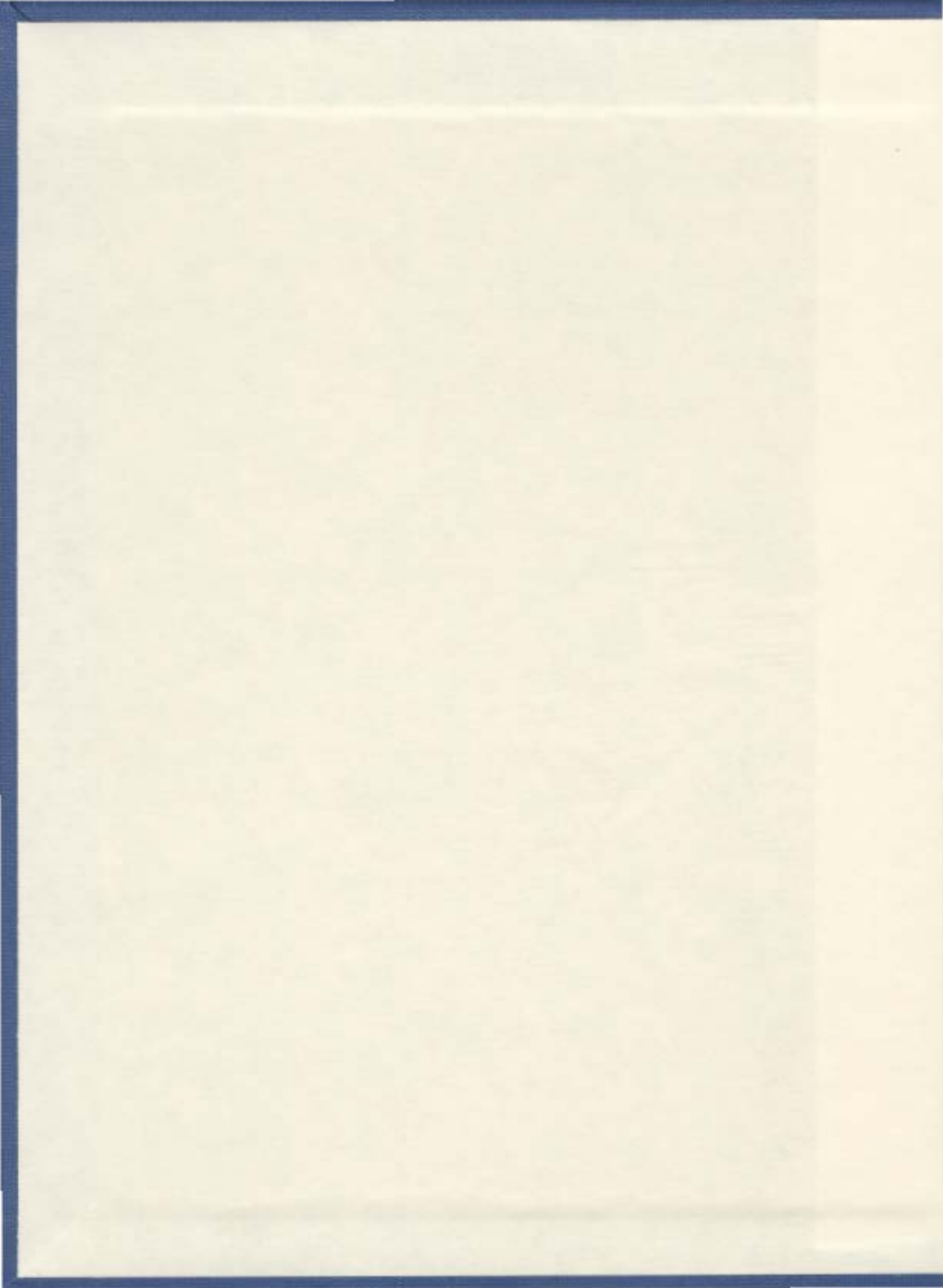
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AND COMMODIFIED BELIEF TRADITION**

by

© Frances Leary

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Abstract

Over the past twenty years folklorists have looked seriously at the relationships between narrative and the development and maintenance of belief traditions. More recently belief studies have focused on tourism, commercialization and the commodification of belief phenomena. Within this context a few folklorists have examined cryptozoological traditions, most notably the Sasquatch, studied by Carpenter and Taft, and the Giant Squid, explored by Aldrich. In Louisiana there have been reports of a creature that has come to be known as the Honey Island Swamp Monster, and its home is the 250 acre Honey Island Swamp that lies on the border of Louisiana and Mississippi. In the past 27 years, this creature has evolved into a folk and commercial belief tradition, and this thesis will explore the development and maintenance of these two divergent narrative corpuses.

Chapter One examines past and present theoretical arguments surrounding monsters, specifically focusing on the hairy monster tradition. Chapter Two identifies the features that define the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk belief tradition as unique. Chapter Three investigates the genres utilized to perpetuate the folk and commodified belief traditions and introduces the divergent paths of the two traditions. Chapter Four examines the commodified tradition in a more detailed fashion by investigating the influences of the academic world, the media, the tourism industry, and the enthusiast tradition. Chapter Five explores the explanatory traditions employed by believers and nonbelievers to attempt to explain the existence of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition.

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Critical to this thesis were my informants, who provided insight into this belief tradition. I would like to extend my gratitude to the following: Harvey Hood, Larry Buehler, Danny White, Ed Marten, Claude Bellows, Denty Crawford, Ben Aiken, George Billiot, Cyrus Blanchard, Michael Hahn, Joey Hatty, Nolan Trasclair, Denny Holmberg, Dana Holyfield, Loren Coleman, Bill Asmussen, Lee Murphy, M. K. Davis, Barry Jean Ancelet, Matt DeLuca, Kenneth Joholske, Diana Jones, Julia Price, Dr. Paul Wagner, Sue Wagner, Craig Woolheater, and Nancy Burris.

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Introduction

The Mystery Begins

Every part of the world holds secrets, mysteries that cannot be explained by means of conventional science. Cryptozoological phenomena serve as one group of these unsolved mysteries. Bille asserts that “despite all the scientific progress of the twentieth century, some creatures remain in the shadowlands of zoology. These are the animals just being discovered, the presumed-extinct animals that may not really be gone, and the mysterious creatures which are not yet recognized as ‘official’ inhabitants of the animal kingdom” (9). Tales of these creatures pervade local folklore and, in some cases, have spread throughout the world. Known by locals as “Wookie,” “Rugaru,” and “The Thing,” the Honey Island Swamp Monster is one such creature, an as-of-yet-unidentified humanoid primate that roams the territory on the border of Louisiana and Mississippi that is known as the Honey Island Swamp.

The Honey Island Swamp

The Honey Island Swamp covers 250 square miles and is located near the mouth of the Pearl River that divides the southeasternmost portion of Louisiana from Mississippi. Honey Island, an expanse of grassland forest, lies in the swamp between the East Pearl and West Pearl rivers and stretches from three to seven miles wide and fifteen to twenty miles long (see Photograph 1). According to Dr. Paul Wagner, “This swamp is unique because it’s one of the least-altered river swamps in the country. It’s pretty much in its original condition, almost a pristine wilderness” (“Honey”). Honey Island Swamp serves as home for a vast array of wildlife, and 70,000 acres of the swamp is a

Photograph 1: The Honey Island Swamp



permanently-protected wildlife area, the Nature Conservancy's first Louisiana nature preserve. Inhabitants include alligators, red wolves, deer, black bears, black panthers, wild boar and many species of exotic birds, including the bald eagle. The swamp also lives up to Louisiana's nickname, Fisherman's Paradise. It provides local fishermen with such treats as bluegill, largemouth bass, redear sunfish, warmouth, alligator gar, freshwater drum, buffalo fish, flathead catfish, and crawfish ("Honey"). In addition to its many forms of wildlife, the Honey Island Swamp has given birth to several local legends. Tales reveal that Jean Lafitte, "the noted pirate and hero of the Battle of New Orleans, made a living off of pirate booty worth millions buried in the marshes" ("The Swamps"). The most famous local lore, however, regards reported sightings of a Bigfoot-like creature in the Honey Island Swamp.

Meeting the Honey Island Swamp Monster

It is interesting to note that my personal introduction to the Honey Island Swamp Monster occurred in the one place in Louisiana that differs most greatly from the swamps of Honey Island: New Orleans. On a January afternoon while strolling through the tourist-filled French Quarter, surrounded by a fusion of Spanish and French architecture and with iron balconies looming above me, I first became acquainted with what would become the subject of this passionate research endeavor. Dana Holyfield's book caught my eye, and that was the beginning. Although the decision to pursue this topic as the focus of my thesis was not reached immediately, looking back it seems as if the Honey Island Swamp Monster and I were destined to meet.

My pursuit began as an attempt to study a new “legend-in-the-making.” Under the guidance of Diane Goldstein, what resulted was an examination of the belief traditions surrounding this supernatural phenomenon. In the midst of this, two belief traditions emerged: folk and commodified. Thus, this thesis became an exploration of the development and maintenance of these two traditions, containing investigations of beliefs stemming from personal experiences and those that have evolved through the influences of commodification.

What Is the Honey Island Swamp Monster?

Those who have personally encountered the Honey Island Swamp Monster have reported various physical and behavioral characteristics of the creature. The details of these reports will be investigated later, but before proceeding, it is important to understand the basic characteristics of the creature, as revealed in the accounts of individual experiences. This is a humanoid primate, a hairy bipedal creature, which reportedly stands about seven feet tall and weighs approximately 400 pounds when full-grown. Its body is covered with grayish fur, and its eyes, one of its most notable characteristics, are yellowish or amber in color. The creature leaves footprints of webbed feet that are considered to have three or four toes. Some regard the smaller imprint to the right of the track as an appendage; others do not.

I will continue to refer to this creature as a humanoid primate, which is simply a primate that exhibits human characteristics. Everyone with whom I engaged in dialogue about this creature can agree that it is, indeed, a humanoid primate. Further distinctions call for debate. Some believe this creature is a hominid, defined as “any of the modern or

extinct bipedal primates of the family Hominidae, including all species of the genera *Homo* and *Australopithecus*” (“Hominid”). Some consider it to be a hominoid, defined less specifically as “a member of the biological superfamily Hominoidea, including all modern great apes and humans and a number of their extinct ancestors and relatives” (“Hominoid”). Others believe it to be a wider variety of primate that does not fall into either of these two categories. Loren Coleman explains the delineation in this way: “All hominids and anthropoids can be called hominoids. Primates are, of course, an even larger umbrella” (“Re: Honey”). As to avoid the debate, I will utilize a term with which all can agree: humanoid primate.

What Is a Rugaru?

Rugaru comes from the French word for werewolf, *loup garou*. However, its usage often has nothing to do with the werewolf tradition. Many of my informants employed this term when referring to the Honey Island Swamp Monster as a humanoid primate, and a plethora of spellings were used. For the purpose of maintaining clarity, I have used the spelling “Rugaru” whenever references to the creature are in my own words or have been transcribed by me. However, I preserved additional spellings, such as “Rue-Ga-Rue” and “Roux-ga-Roux,” and included them when necessary as they appeared in other printed sources.

Theoretical Scope of This Thesis

In this thesis, I integrate both cryptozoological and folkloric perspectives into my research. Cryptozoology provides a platform for comparative analysis of beliefs based on research about monsters that are physically and behaviorally similar to the Honey

Island Swamp Monster. I also examine cryptozoological explanatory theories, such as the Bigfoot-Giganto Theory, and their influence on and interaction with folk explanatory traditions. For a portion of this thesis, I implement the experience-centered approach proposed by David Hufford, exploring the role of experience in the belief tradition. Hufford's model helped me to identify the primary and secondary features of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition and to investigate the similarities and differences between the characteristics of this tradition and other traditions (such as the Sasquatch, the Florida Skunk Ape and the Mississippi Swamp Ape) that are possibly linked. I also utilize Hufford's model as a basis for categorizing those explanatory theories that follow the cultural source hypothesis, which asserts that culture creates the experience, and those that follow the experiential source hypothesis, which argues that the tradition is based on experience and then expanded in culture. I identify and explore the genres employed to perpetuate Honey Island Swamp Monster folk and commodified traditions. I also examine writings on commercialization and commodification and apply that scholarship to belief traditions.

Methodology

My fieldwork took place in the state of Louisiana, primarily in Slidell and New Orleans, in the summer of 2001. Information was collected predominantly with analog tape records, photographs, and field notes. I conducted interviews with individuals who have had encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster and individuals who have heard stories about the creature told by others. I also participated as an audience member on a number of tours of the Honey Island Swamp in order to research the ways in which

narratives of the creature are presented in the tourism industry. I documented the interviews and the tours in which I participated on tape, whenever possible. I also took photographs of informants, the Honey Island Swamp, and any visual elements that displayed artistic interpretations of the creature. In addition, I collected further sources of information from newspaper and magazine articles, books and other published academic materials, radio and television programs containing features on the Honey Island Swamp monster, and promotional material used by tour companies. I also participated in Internet discussion groups related to this tradition. My informants included scientists, cryptozoologists, folklorists, monster enthusiasts, tour guides, reporters, and individuals willing to share their experiences.

Chapter One

Chapter One introduces the Honey Island Swamp Monster as a belief tradition. I identify the beginnings of the tradition and the primary influences on its development as a belief tradition. Harlan Ford is introduced as the first person to come forward and report a sighting of the creature in 1974. The plaster casts he made at that time of the creature's footprints led to scientific investigations of the Honey Island Swamp and eventually helped to establish the creature as part of Louisiana folklore. In this chapter I also review the significant literature on monster theory, including cryptozoological, folkloric and native references.

Chapter Two

In chapter Two I conduct an experience-centered study of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, based on the model proposed by David Hufford. I

examine the thirty-two swamp monster narratives I collected, exploring the primary and secondary features of the folk tradition. On a smaller scale, I also consider the characteristics of creatures that informants have identified as possibly related to the Honey Island Swamp Monster. I compare and contrast features of the belief traditions in order to examine the elements that are similar and different between them. Other traditions involved in this process are those which surround the Florida Skunk Ape, the Mississippi Swamp Ape, the Arkansas Fouke Monster, the Sasquatch, and the Merbeing.

Chapter Three

In Chapter Three I examine the various belief genres that informants utilize to perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk and commodified belief traditions. Familiar belief genres, especially memorates and fabulates, appear frequently as part of the folk belief tradition. Memorates, related most frequently by those who have personally encountered the creature, reveal first-hand experiences that are almost always accompanied by an adamant belief in the existence of the creature. Fabulates are shared by those with an intimate link to someone who has encountered the creature and, like memorates, almost always coincide with a strong belief in the tradition. My collection of memorates and fabulates includes ones that I personally recorded, narratives published in other researchers' materials, and experiences shared via e-mail discussion groups and forums on the World Wide Web. The genres found in the commodified belief tradition are less identifiable by the characteristics of recognized narrative genres. Short, defining statements of the belief tradition, which I label belief definitions, and informative non-narratives, which I define as belief reports, are employed to generate the interest of

tourists in Louisiana, Slidell, the Honey Island Swamp, and a variety of swamp tours. They are found in published materials and various e-mail discussion groups and are vocalized by numerous swamp tour guides. This chapter exposes the strong divergence in content and transmission of the folk and commodified traditions.

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four I examine the commodification of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. In this case, the “marketing of tradition” occurs not only for financial purposes, but to achieve some direct or indirect secondary objective, such as to inform, to educate, to entertain, or to disseminate. I investigate the media, academic influences, the tourism industry, and monster enthusiasts as proponents of the commodified tradition. The influences of commodification are revealed through news articles, films, academic publications, brochures, websites, guidebooks, and tourist attractions. In addition, I consider the personal use of the Honey Island Swamp Monster by individuals intending to commemorate an experience or perpetuate the belief tradition for financial gain. I also reflect on my own role in the commodification process.

Chapter Five

In Chapter Five I explore the explanatory traditions of belief and disbelief about the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Included are investigations of both folk and commodified explanatory traditions. Many informants who have encountered the creature personally believe it to be some kind of creature that has yet to be scientifically identified by man, perhaps the “missing link” between man and ape (similar to the Bigfoot-Giganto Theory). Other eyewitnesses believe it might be a descendant of a

monkey that escaped from a circus train in the 1940s. Those who have not personally encountered the creature suggest that it might be a wild man, a drunk playing a hoax, the result of a voodoo spell, the invention of tour companies, or the creation of parents who warn their children not to enter the swamp alone. All these explanations and others are considered.

An Invitation

It is not my intent in this thesis to argue for the existence or nonexistence of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Rather, I hope to present the information as objectively as possible and demonstrate that this is a living, breathing belief tradition with two very distinct faces. Whether you are a believer or a skeptic, a scientist or an enthusiast, I invite you to explore this tradition with me.

Chapter One: Monster Theory

Introduction

Enthusiasts argue that monsters are everywhere. As a child I feared the existence of monsters hiding under my bed and in my closet, and my hero was St. George, who seemed in my young eyes able to conquer any monster that might harm me. Children's writer Mercer Mayer capitalized on the common childhood fear of monsters with his books *There's a Nightmare in my Closet* and *There's Something in my Attic*. Since childhood my vision of monsters has changed. While the term still refers to those scary creatures that thrived during my youth, it has come to symbolize my fears in a much more general way. Within the realm of monster belief tradition, debate continues over whether monsters exist in a tangible sense or whether they are simply figments of human imagination utilized to explain our fears. This deliberation is much too broad to be considered in an all-encompassing manner, even by those who wish to wrestle with such challenges. Instead it must be approached by seeking to determine the nature of one monster "tradition" at a time. In the upcoming chapter, we will discover that many monsters thought to live solely in the oral traditions of man have been identified and labeled as actual scientific members of the animal kingdom dwelling on earth. This fact does not, however, prove or disprove the existence of monsters that continue to elude scientific proof. The Honey Island Swamp Monster provides one example of this, and an exploration of past theoretical discussions of monsters serves as an introduction to the more in-depth study of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition.

Monster Definitions

Scientists define monster in many ways. Monsters are understood within scientific paradigms as real or imagined or lying somewhere in the liminal space between the two worlds. Some monster theorists focus on the fantastical elements while others emphasize the more realistic. Cohen, for instance, captures the more fantastical elements when he defines a monster as “a possibly mythical animal, large enough or lethal enough to inspire terror.” He further elaborates that “the key characteristic of a monster is, therefore, mystery and menace” (1). Napier takes a different approach and attempts to identify characteristics of monsters: remoteness, an ugly appearance, a large stature, and lack of discovery. He explains:

Usually monsters have certain basic characteristics apart from size. First, they hail from uncharted territory: inaccessible mountains, impenetrable forests, remote Pacific islands, the depths of loch or ocean – even the centre of a maze. Whether they are called Abominable Snowmen, Sasquatches, Kaptars, Dzu-tehs, Meh-tehs, Yetis, Almas, Cyclopes, Minotaurs or just plain ogres, is immaterial; the essential element of the monster myth is remoteness. (Napier 22)

Baumann concurs with Napier’s assertion that remoteness is significant:

The monsters . . . are only temporary visitors to the heavily populated areas. They’re shy creatures by nature and ordinarily try to stay as far away from man as possible. Once in a great while, though, their curiosity gets the better of them, and it’s at such times that they wander off to have a good look around. After their curiosity has been satisfied, they again return home to their dense forest or dark swamp. (8)

Napier elaborates further on additional characteristics and ponders the significance of size:

Monsters are usually ugly. Monsters are always big. We are constantly being persuaded (by big men, of course) that bigness is strength, bigness is fitness and it is the big that survive; that bigness is power, influence, and

value for money. The Western world is enjoined to respect Bigness and ignore quality. But for all this, our attitude towards bigness is ambivalent; we both fear and admire it. . . . We both love and hate large size, depending on whether or not it constitutes a threat to our survival. If we are confused, it is because the choice between loving and hating is not subject to absolute rules, but is purely a value judgment. I believe our attitude towards legendary monsters is equally ambivalent. We laugh at them and we fear them, we love them and we hate them, but overall, in a curious way, we respect them simply for being monstrously big. (22-24)

Napier continues and comments on the influences of discovery on monster traditions:

Finally, monsters must be ‘undiscovered’. Discovery seems to ruin their piquancy. The case of the gorilla is a good example. It has been said that if someone hadn’t found the gorilla, mankind would have had to invent it. Actually, of course, the gorilla was invented long before it was discovered; it is the prototype of all man-like monsters. (22-24)

We will further explore types of “real” monsters in later parts of this chapter.

Baumann contributes an additional characteristic of nocturnal behavior to Napier’s list. “Only on rare occasions have monsters been seen during the daylight hours. The overwhelming majority of sightings have taken place at night, and a few have occurred at dawn or dusk . . .” (7). For the purpose of this thesis, then, we will consider a monster to be a combination of these elements: a large, ugly, nocturnal creature that subsides in remote areas and is, as of yet, undiscovered.

Monster Discoveries

That brings us to the issue of creatures that were once labeled as monsters but have since been officially discovered to be inhabitants of the animal kingdom. The gorilla, as referred to previously, exemplifies this. According to Napier, the gorilla is the “folk figure come to life” (30). The giant squid provides another example. For years the folklore of seamen had contained stories of the Sea Bishop, which according to legend

fused “human and fish form in a curious way” (Aldrich 56). Unlike typical merman images, folklorists and scientists alike labeled this monster as a mythological creature. It was through the research of Fred Aldrich, however, that connections were drawn between the representations of the Sea Bishop and the body of a squid with its head pointed downwards. By applying an experiential model of research, Aldrich was able to prove the existence of the giant squid and its role in marine folklore (Aldrich 56-58). Other creatures considered to be mythical have also been “discovered” existing in various forms in real life. Some would argue that we can see the legendary unicorn in the Arabian oryx and the magical dragon in the Komodo lizard (Napier 30). Their argument extends to suggest the possibility that monsters considered to be solely mythical in today’s world might be proven to exist in reality. Opponents of this belief contend that by this point in time we have discovered all the creatures that abide on this planet. Many discrepancies in monster belief traditions stem from this debate.

In the last one hundred and fifty years, many “new” animals have been discovered. Steiger phrases this fact a different way: “In recent decades we have witnessed the official ‘discovery’ of a number of large animals, previously unrecognized by the authorities, although well known to the natives of the locales that were the creatures’ natural habitat” (33). “The pigmy hippopotamus, the okapi and the mountain gorilla, the Komodo lizard, the giant panda, Gee’s golden langur, *Rhinopithecus*, the snub-nosed langur of China, and *Pan paniscus*, the pigmy chimpanzee of Africa, are examples . . .” (Napier 30). Steiger contributes to this list the gigantic carnivorous brown

bear, the white rhinoceros, and the royal hepard (33). However, many scientists now believe that at present all existing creatures have been identified. Heuvelmans disagrees:

Most zoologists are skeptical about the possibilities of discovering new species of large animals, and some of them do not, with legitimate scientific skepticism, keep an open mind until the species is proved to exist, but categorically deny that it can possibly do so until they have been forcibly proved wrong. Their obstinacy is based on three propositions: the world has now been completely explored; no new animals have been discovered for a long time – at least not since the okapi; and many of the animals alleged to exist are fossil species and therefore long extinct. All three propositions are fallacies. . . . (25-26)

Heuvelmans elaborates further to support his argument:

The world is by no means thoroughly explored. It is true that we know almost all of its geography, there are no more large islands or continents to be discovered. But because a country is on the map it does not mean that we know all about its inhabitants. There are still more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy. (25-26)

Heuvelmans continues to explain what he foresees for the future:

I think it safe to prophesy that it is in the most remote places that the strangest creatures will be found, creatures ill-adapted to the struggle for existence which have taken refuge in inhospitable and almost impenetrable country, creatures which are relics of once-flourishing groups which have been driven there by newer and more successful species. If there is any chance of finding really extraordinary animals on the earth, it will be in those very places where we have not looked – not exactly 'lost worlds,' but in those worlds almost all over the earth, which we have not yet found or not thoroughly searched. (37)

Lorenz Hagenbeck, director of Hamburg Zoo, concurred with Heuvelmans' assertion when he reported the following to a journalist:

I think it is arrogant from a scientific point of view to deny the existence of things one does not know. I am not one of those scientists – respectable ones at that – who decree from their studies that the surprising stories of seeing unknown giant animals are mere fables. I maintain that the world still hides numerous species of giant and monstrous animals. (Heuvelmans 25)

Joseph Delmont, “the great animal-catcher” also agrees: “Even to-day there are in every part of the world inaccessible areas where there certainly exist wild creatures unknown to naturalists” (Heuvelmans 25). Baumann brings the argument closer to home:

Those who say that monsters couldn’t possibly survive in a country as densely populated as the United States really don’t have a leg to stand on. There are still vast areas of wilderness left in our country. Monsters most likely hide out during the day and do their traveling at night. This wouldn’t present much of a problem to a creature of the wild. Even a very large animal can hide itself very effectively in a relatively small patch of brush. (7)

If these assertions are true, then the real existence of officially undiscovered monsters on this earth is a possibility. After all, throughout history monsters have served various purposes and appeared in the oral traditions and literatures of most peoples, perhaps suggesting representations of reality, not solely fiction.

Monsters throughout History

Baumann asserts that monsters have intrigued people throughout all ages.

Fire-breathing dragons, man-eating giants, and huge winged serpents figured strongly in many ancient legends. Greek mythology described nine-headed water serpents, flying horses, a beast that was half lion and half eagle, hairy giants who had one eye in the middle of their foreheads, and a host of other weird creatures. Cave paintings of giants and strange beasts have been discovered in many parts of the world. (4)

Belief traditions have arisen from this interest. In various cultures throughout history, identification has lived at the core of many monster traditions. Peoples in various eras have approached the task of distinguishing real versus imaginary creatures in different ways. Early Greek and Roman societies, for instance, emphasized the accuracy of separating the real animals from the unreal, and although scientists now know that some of the creatures believed to be real by the Greeks and Romans were, in actuality, entirely

mythical, Cohen asserts that “they were basically practical people, who put their faith in what they could see and touch” (3). Early Christians relied on more than that which was directly observed and utilized material not only from the Bible, but also from classical authors, old legends and travelers’ tales to develop Bestiaries that would help teach Christianity. According to Cohen, “the average man must have regarded the Bestiary as a reputable and accurate description of animal life” (4). The Renaissance focused people on authenticity rather than significance, and by the sixteenth century Konrad Gesner of Zurich had developed a reasonably accurate encyclopedia of the world’s animals. At this point naturalists began to eliminate suspected unreal animals from the lists of acknowledged creatures (Cohen 5). Perhaps this practice was the beginning of scientific skepticism about creatures not yet proven to be real. Cohen explains:

But as the monsters were heartlessly consigned to the dust-bin of myth and superstition, a small but interesting counter-reformation began, and continues today. While paying due homage to the advances in zoological knowledge over the last few centuries, the thesis of the counter-reformation is that the purging of monsters has gone too far, and that there are still many large, unknown, and truly monstrous creatures alive in the world that are not recognized by science. Today people who hold such views are called monster buffs. (5)

Despite the reformation’s focus on eliminating suspected imaginary creatures from accepted lists, monsters survived civilization’s move west and continued to thrive in North American folklore. Blackman describes the development and expansion of monster beliefs in the new world:

Because humans have the ability to find monsters virtually everywhere and in every shape, the world is replete with intricate monster stories from all eras. In North America, monsters were first encountered by the Native American and Inuit Indians, who discovered a host of terrifying creatures in lakes, caves, forests, and mountains, and even in the sky above. A

quickly moving shadow followed by a clap of thunder became the ominous Thunderbird, while the howl of the winter wind became the Wendigo's fearsome cry. Such encounters were integrated into Native American artwork, song, and oral tradition, forming the foundation of North America's modern monster folklore. (xi)

Blackman continues:

As European settlers began to arrive in the New World, they too found monsters in the hills and fields. Diseases, plagues, unsolved homicides, and mysterious disappearances all pointed toward a legion of invisible ghosts, man-eating monstrosities, and enigmatic entities haunting the continent. Settlers migrating into the wild lands in the western part of the continent found monsters behind every bush and tree, and these fearsome beasts also became an integral part of early American folklore.

Lumberjacks and explorers added to this folklore, preserving encounters with a host of horrible monsters through songs and hair-raising campfire stories. African slaves, pirates, cowboys, prospectors, farmers, and immigrants from all parts of the world also spread similar legends throughout the continent. (xi)

Regarding contemporary monster beliefs, Blackman offers the following observations:

And, just as our ancestors did, we continue to find monsters everywhere. Some are preserved in modern monster myths, often known as urban legends or campfire tales, which relate the exploits of the Bogeyman, the notorious Hook, and an assortment of vengeful ghosts. More surprising, in modern times, many people are actually encountering monsters as well. Some witnesses are even filming or photographing horrifying and inexplicable creatures in the woods and lakes of North America. (xi)

So, as is argued by many contemporary monster belief traditions, perhaps some of these monsters do exist hidden somewhere in the modern world. Even if this is so, monsters continue to fill many additional roles within their respective traditions.

Functionalism and the Monster

Monsters are argued to serve an array of purposes, both in past traditions and in those of contemporary culture. Wyman argues that the need for explanation could provide a purpose for the existence of monsters.

One of the greatest needs of all pioneers was to explain some happening, some noise, something unusual. “What makes limbs fall on people?” Since all things have to have an explanation, the lumberjacks attributed this fact of life to the Agropelter. This little ape-like creature would fling down dead limbs on unsuspecting lumberjacks, and hasten on its way through the tree tops where it was never seen. What makes the splashing sound at the edge of a lake in the evening? The Billdad, of course, smacks a trout on the surface as it feeds, and takes it away to the woods to devour. Nobody ever sees these creatures very clearly, usually not at all. The need for explaining something, along with an imagination, can describe the behavior of a mythical creature. (2)

The need for entertainment might also offer an opportunity for monsters to serve a purpose. Wyman elaborates:

It is common to give the Great Lakes region’s lumberjacks credit for creating mythical creatures, but it is certain that other story-tellers also had a hand in creating them. To be sure, bunkhouses in the long winter months and in the days before the radio and television came along provided a good setting for the storyteller with an imagination. But so did the farm home and the isolated cowcamp, for there were also mysteries of life in other places than the big woods. (2)

Sometimes beliefs about monsters stemmed from incorrect information, creating creatures which temporarily filled the role of real animals within a culture.

Some creatures, such as the Horse-hair Snake, were honestly created by mistaken observation or incomplete evidence. No doubt there are many mythical creatures that had their humble beginning through mistaken observation before imaginations seized upon them. (Wyman 2)

Within various monster belief systems, scientists today continue to contribute many monster sightings to mistaken observation. Perhaps some of these sightings are based on misinterpretation, but history has proven that the a priori assumption of misinterpretation is not always valid.

A variety of belief systems have also enabled monsters to serve cultures in many symbolic ways. Some believe monsters to be evil servants of the devil; to them monsters

might further represent the fear of dying in a state of sin. Hunger, sexuality, and cannibalism are also frequently associated with monsters. (Hill and Williams 277, 281, 289). In her research on Canadian monsters, Carole Carpenter concluded that evil is a primary characteristic (if not the primary characteristic) of many monster traditions. “Either they bring or do evil or they appear as a result of evil having been done” (Carpenter 102). One hypothesis suggests that monsters “were first spawned not in the conscious imagination of ancient man (though certainly the tales were elaborated there) but in his inner world, his unconscious – that they grew out of the symbolic monsters that peopled his dreams and fantasies. And they still appear, as potent as ever, in humanity’s dreams today” (Hill and Williams 302). This theory seems to dismiss the possibility of monsters existing within the tangible world, and monster enthusiasts would argue that the symbolic role of monsters is not their only form of existence.

Steiger has developed a list of theories about the purposes that monsters serve within a variety of belief traditions. Steiger considers himself open to the possible existence of monsters on earth, but he has included in his list theories proposed by believers and nonbelievers. Some believe monsters to be archetypes, “quasi-real creatures that are manufactured by the collective unconscious” (9). Others consider that monsters as “players from the magic theater” are “members of a parapsychical tribe who have coexisted with us on Earth as a companion species” (9). Monsters might be supernatural beings, such as demons or messengers of Satan, or perhaps they are forms of “unknown terrestrial life” that is “unrecognized and unidentified life indigenous to Earth. They could be plasmic, electrical, nearly pure energy forms which possess the ability to

assume a variety of guises. Or they may be exactly what they appear to be – bizarre animals” (10). One theory suggests that monsters are “inhabitants of the Hollow Earth,” Earth’s interior, and another hypothesis asserts that they are “creatures out of time and space” (10). Other theories suggest that monsters are beings from other dimensions, manifestations of planetary poltergeists, answers to psychic needs, the result of extraterrestrial experiments, the manifestations of programmed deceit and delusion, genetic misfits from Atlantis, and teaching mechanisms created to warn children of dangers (Steiger 9-11). We will return to some of these theories when examining the explanatory traditions utilized in reference to the beliefs surrounding the Honey Island Swamp Monster.

Hairy Monsters

One category of monsters around which many belief traditions have formed is the hairy monster. Hairy monsters, which can most broadly be categorized as humanoid primates, now go by names such as Abominable Snowman and Bigfoot, but similar monsters can be identified throughout history and literature by looking for certain characteristics. According to Cohen, “he is wild, hairy, very strong, inhabits mountainous or at least deserted places, and is nearly but not quite human” (128). Enkidu, in the Gilgamesh Epic probably recorded by the Sumerians, is “a wild man covered with hair, who grew up in the desert among the beasts” (Cohen 128). The Bible presents us with Esau, whose birth is described in the following way: “And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau” (Gen. 25:25). Jacob, Esau’s brother, later observes the following: “Behold, Esau my brother is

a hairy man, and I am a smooth man” (Gen. 27:11). Saint Jerome’s translation of the Bible from Hebrew to Latin includes the word *pilosi*, “hairy one,” as the Latin equivalent of the Hebrew word meaning demon. In Saint Jerome’s translation, Isaiah prophesies a scene of Babylonian ruins by saying “and the hairy ones shall dance there” and describes another setting of destruction with “and one hairy creature will shout to the other” (Isaiah 13:21; Isaiah 34:14). According to Cohen, although Isaiah’s actual meaning cannot be known, “some scholars believe that the Hebrew demon was, as Jerome implied, a hairy creature who lived in deserted and mined places” (128). In Greek mythology, the god Silenus is often depicted as having a hairy body and being wild, as is the Roman god Silvanus. Beowulf provides us with the monster Grendel, who along with his kinfolk had been cast out by God to live in the swamps and marshes. “Drooling with pist, stinking and hairy,” Grendel was, according to Cohen, “basically a wild man” (128).

In addition to appearing in many literary pieces, belief traditions cause some to argue that hairy monsters serve certain psychological human needs. Richard Bernheimer, in his study of wild man mythology of the Middle Ages, asserts that the idea of the wild man has been caused by and continues to respond to some “persistent psychological urge”:

We may define this urge as the need to give external expression and symbolically valid form to the impulses of reckless physical self-assertion which are hidden in all of us, but are normally kept under control. These impulses, which are strongest and most aggressive in the very young, are restricted slowly, as the child learns to come to terms with a civilized environment which will not tolerate senseless noise, wanton destruction, and uncalled for interference with its activities. But the repressed desire for such unhampered self-assertion persists and may finally be projected outward as the image of a man who is free as the beasts, able and ready to try his strength without regard for the consequences to others, and

therefore able to call up forces which his civilized brother has repressed in his effort at self-control. (Cohen 169)

Additionally Bernheimer suggests that “in contrast to civilized man, the wild man is a child of nature, upon whose hidden resources he can depend, since he has not removed himself from its guidance and tutelage” (Cohen 169). Cohen argues further:

The wild man, Abominable Snowman, Yeti, Sasquatch, Bigfoot, or what have you is a profoundly anti-establishment figure today. His very existence is an affront to science, indeed to civilization itself. To everyone who resents the rigid rules of science and civilization (and in some ways, who doesn't?) the hairy monster has enormous appeal. He is also a shining goal for the frustrated adventurer. One time a man could prove his masculinity by big game hunting. But there is precious little big game left, and more and more people regard big game hunting as a barbarous anachronism. But to shoot or capture the abominable Snowman, and to do it in the name of science – now there would be a feat. (169-170)

Cohen believes that “these psychological reasons, rather than any weight of evidence, are . . . the reasons for the Abominable Snowman's eternal popularity” (169-170). Believers in hairy monster traditions might not agree. Michael Taft proposes this question:

Is a large, hairy, manlike biped a natural and universal symbol of fear among human beings of different cultures – an “archetype of the collective unconscious” in Jungian terms? Or does the image of the bogey man stem from some natural phenomenon . . . ? (93)

According to believers in hairy monster traditions, this query is not one-sided. For them, the psychological associations of Bigfoot do not negate the evidence of personal experience.

Cryptozoologists, those who study creatures whose existence has not yet been proven, have proposed many different theories about the realities of hairy monsters, creating their own belief traditions in the process. Although Bigfoot has become the generic label for all hairy creatures, many scientists now believe it possible that many

different species of humanoid primates might inhabit the earth simultaneously (Coleman and Huyghe 2). Ivan T. Sanderson, in his 1961 publication of *Abominable Snowmen: Legend Come to Life*, suggested the existence of multiple species of hominids (bipedal primates of the family Hominidae) on the earth. He classified his collected reports of sightings based on location and creature characteristics, ultimately developing a system with four species of hominids, categorized from most human-like to most apelike. Since the publication of Sanderson's pinnacle work, other scientists have suggested further classification systems for humanoid primates. In later chapters we will further examine these taxonomies as they relate to the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. While each of these classification systems differs, the theory that binds them centers around the belief that not one but many species of humanoid primates exist on the earth. Perhaps Coleman and Huyghe summarize it best in the introduction to their book, *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other mystery Primates Worldwide*:

The concept of Bigfoot, in other words, hides a larger truth, lumps considerable differences and just plain confuses the picture. In our global natural history culture, "Bigfoot" throws into a blender any notion of the many differences in behavior, footprints, hair color, height, physique, family units, diet, living arrangements, daily cycle, and other unique overall patterns that exist from one group of these beings to another. This field guide addresses this problem by looking at the great diversity in reports and how they naturally group into zoologically logical collections of similar animals. We have created a classification system that delivers thoughtful, biologically-based groupings for the great number of different kinds of unknown primates that are apparently out there. Of course, we were not the first to do so. (6-7)

The Honey Island Swamp Monster

According to folk and cryptozoological belief traditions, one North American humanoid primate is the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Contemporary interest in the

Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition was set in motion by the first reported sighting of the creature. This occurred in 1974 when Harlan Ford returned from the swamp with plaster casts of unusual footprints (see Photograph 2). Ford first encountered the creature with Billy Mills in 1963, but it was not until the plaster casts were made that the story came to light (Holyfield, *Encounters* 3, 6). At the present time, the authenticity of the plaster casts is being debated. Nonetheless, Harlan Ford's experiences have contributed significantly to the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, and his two sightings are the most referred to by others attempting to describe the creature. Dana Holyfield, Harlan Ford's granddaughter, retells Ford's 1963 and 1974 experiences in her book *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster*. According to Holyfield, his first encounter in 1963 occurred like this:

In 1963, Harlan Ford and Billy Mills were on foot deep in the Honey Island Swamp looking for an old abandoned camp they had spotted while flying over the 70,000 acres of wilderness in a twin-engine airplane. The two skilled hunters maneuvered their way through thick overgrown swampland where few men have ever stepped foot. When they broke out of the dense vegetation, they stopped in awe of a massive creature that was on all fours in a clearing adjacent to a heavily wooded area. Billy said, "What is that thing?" The creature heard their voices and stood on two feet to face them. After a few seconds of eye contact, it fled into the thicket. (*Encounters* 3-4)

Holyfield continues:

Harlan and Billy got their hunting rifles ready just in case and ran to the edge of the woods hoping to get another look at it. All they found were its tracks that were washed away in a rainstorm that came that afternoon before they could return. When the men got home that evening, they told their families about the mysterious creature. (*Encounters* 3-4)

Ford's second encounter in 1974 resulted in plaster casts being made of the creature's footprints, and this began the dissemination of the belief tradition. Holyfield also retells

Ford's second experience. She introduces the encounter in this way:

There was one other time Harlan sighted the creature on a fishing trip that he and Billy conjured up for a group of work buddies from the air-traffic control center. But that night, Harlan and Billy weren't the only ones who got a look at the creature. Their buddy, Jim Hartsog had a hair-raising story to tell around the campfire. (*Encounters* 13)

Holyfield begins the account:

At nightfall, Billy's motor had ran hot because of a busted water pump, so Harlan began boating the men back up the rapid area of the Pearl River to the campsite. After he dropped off the first two men so they could start a fire, he went back for the others. While guiding the boat through swift water, his headlight spotted the creature standing on a bluff overlooking the river. The water was too swift and full of snags for Harlan to lose focus ahead. But each time he would flash his light up there on the bluff, he could see the creature brazenly watching him. When he reached the men waiting on the sandbar, he told them what he had seen. That's when Jim Hartsog hollered, "Let me see that gun of yours. I'm going up there and shoot that booger for you boys!" (*Encounters* 13-14)

Holyfield continues:

He grabbed Harlan's rifle and headed out. The men thought Jim was kidding around and he probably was at first, so they didn't think he'd go too far. Harlan went on and carried another load of men to the campsite. As they reached land, they heard the rifle fire off a couple of times. One friend commented that Jim was going to race back to the camp claiming the boogie man got away. Harlan and Billy weren't so sure because they had seen that thing up close in '63 and were worried about their buddy. They headed downstream to look for him and saw a flashlight waving and found Jim standing in waist-level water at the river's edge below the bluff he had jumped off. He was wide-eyed and trembling. Billy and Harlan got him in the boat and brought him back to the campsite. (*Encounters* 14-15)

Holyfield concludes her narrative in this way:

When Jim was able to talk sense, he said, "I spotted that thing in the woods and I shot at it. I thought I got it, so I went into the woods to find it dead, but instead I saw big yellow looking eyes and whatever it was, was taller than me. It growled at me so I shot at it again. I realized I only had one shot left, so I ran and jumped off the bluff."

Needless to say, it was a sleepless night for the fishermen who stayed awake around the campfire wondering if that thing would come for them. (*Encounters* 13-15)

Since 1974, the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition has expanded. Other individuals have come forward to report their encounters with the creature, and various experts have been consulted about the findings. Frank Davis, employed by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, first examined the plaster casts and then contacted zoologists from Louisiana State University (Baumann 67; Holyfield, *Encounters* 9). Archeologists from Washington's Smithsonian also came to examine the tracks. According to scientists, "the webbed toe imprints appeared to be a cross between a primate and a large alligator," but the archaeologists and zoologists recognized the impossibility of this combination (Holyfield, *Encounters* 9). Upon first look the imprints seem to reveal three toes, but a "stubby knob slightly lower than the toes" suggests the possible presence of a fourth appendage (Baumann 69). Regardless of the number of toes, the footprint has not been identified as any known animal. The discovery of multiple footprints of varying size at a later date and the plaster casts molded from those prints suggest that more than one such creature might exist within the realms of the Honey Island Swamp (Holyfield, *Encounters* 10). Prior to July 2003 the only doubts expressed in regards to the authenticity of the plaster casts suggested a likeness to alligator footprints. New data acquired by M. K. Davis and Jay Michael suggests that a shoe was created and utilized to create fake footprints. This is still under investigation. Because of this new information, skeptics and those who put credence only in "scientific" evidence are beginning to question the legitimacy of beliefs surrounding the Honey

Island Swamp Monster. Those who believe in personal experiences of the people, however, do not need the footprints to prove what they believe so many people have witnessed first-hand.

Native Belief Traditions

Although reports of a humanoid primate existing in areas surrounding the Honey Island Swamp of Louisiana and Mississippi did not come to light until the 1970s, Native American peoples from the area have told stories of Bigfoot-type creatures for many, many years. The Choctaw and Chickasaw nations both had tribes of people existing in the area at various times throughout history. In part eleven of his series entitled “Origins of the Choctaw People Retold from Old Legends,” Len Green writes about the “hattak chito” of Choctaw history:

Another of the mythical (perhaps) beings from ancient Choctaw history is one called simply “hattak chito” or “big man.” In other American cultures, he seems to be known as “Sasquatch” or “Manbeast.” Hattak Chito is said to be a huge manlike beast which lives in the swamps or tangled creek bottoms. The being is covered with coarse gray or brown hair, with long arms and a stooped walk which appears shambling but is deceptively speedy. Even today, we still receive reports that one or more of these beasts still live in what is known as the Boklawá (many waters) area in Little River bottoms between the mouths of Yashau Creek and Mountain Fork River, in what is now McCurtain County. (Green, Len)

Another discussion of the Choctaw Bigfoot was posted on the Mississippi Swamp Ape Forum with the title “Choctaw/Chickasaw name for Swamp Ape/Bigfoot” and introduced as having come from an e-mail from “Redhawk”:

. . . the only legend I know of is of the (Shasta-Karuk) which is of the Animal People. They believe that after the Great Creator made mother earth, he took some of her flesh and rolled it into small balls, just like you see some people do with mud. It was from the first mud balls that humans were created, and they were considered the first human beings. In

physical form, some were half human and the other half animal. That is why some of them could fly like birds, run like the fox, hide like the deer, or swim like a fish. And they all have special powers and could communicate via telepathy. Because of their special powers they are more powerful and cunning than either animals or humans. This is what we believe the big foot creature is. So he is respected and honored among our people. (“Choctaw/Chickasaw”)

Additionally, information on the Western New York Bigfoot Investigation Center website explains that the Louisiana Choctaw referred to Bigfoot as Kashehotapalo, Nalusa Falaya and Hattak Offi (“WNYBIC”).

Various Cherokee tribes also inhabited regions of Louisiana and Mississippi near the Honey Island Swamp. Diana Jones confirmed reports in many sources when she listed Cherokee names for Bigfoot as “Nun Yunu Wi,” meaning “The Stone Man” and “Kecleh kudleh,” meaning “Hairy Savage” (Jones). Jones also shared with me the story of a Cherokee woman’s Bigfoot sighting that is posted on the Gulf Coast Bigfoot Research Organization Web Site Forum. The great-grandchild of the informant relates the experience. The sighting took place in the morning sometime close to the month of June of 1885 while the informant was gathering food. The experience occurred in Watauga County, North Carolina, northwest of Seven Devils, North Carolina and roughly 15 to 20 miles northwest of Grandfather Mountain. According to the storyteller, the terrain there is “mountainous, with deep thickly wooded hollows.” Although this encounter did not take place in the Honey Island Swamp, it is significant because of its connection to the beliefs of the Cherokee people. The narrative was introduced in the following way:

My Great-Grandmother told me this story. She was a Cherokee Indian and they lived in the mountains in western Watauga County in the late

1800's. She was 13 years old and had gone to gather some food along a creek in the bottom of a deep hollow. While she was there she heard some shooting up on the ridge to the north. A few seconds later she heard someone running down the side of the ridge towards her from the direction she had heard the shots. She was scared since at that time it still wasn't a good idea for an Indian girl to be caught out by herself by a white man, so she hid under some bushes and watched where she heard the running steps coming from. ("Wounded Bigfoot")

The informant reported the events as follows:

Instead of seeing a man come down the side of the ridge, she saw a tall hairy creature about 6 1/2 to 7 feet tall, covered with light reddish brown hair. She said that she knew it was a "nun yunu wi" (one of the Cherokee names for Bigfoot) and that it was a male. She said the hair on its head and shoulders was a lot longer than on the rest of its body.

It went over to the edge of the creek about 60 feet from her, where there was a big pile of leaves, sticks, dirt and debris washed up from when the creek had been up out of its banks. She said it laid down in the edge of the debris on the side next to the creek and started covering himself up with leaves and sticks and stuff. She said he covered himself up and completely hid himself. ("Wounded Bigfoot")

The narrative was concluded in this way:

About that time she heard some men coming down the side of the ridge from the direction the [bigfoot] and the shots had come. She decided then that she needed to get out of there before they got there, so she got up and sneaked away back to home.

She said she couldn't see any blood on it but the bigfoot acted like it was wounded. She said it was on two legs but hunched over a lot. She also said that she didn't smell anything like they did other times the "nun yunu wi" were very close by. ("Wounded Bigfoot")

The storyteller further clarified her grandmother's description of the creature with this:

It was about 6 1/2 to 7 feet tall, covered with light reddish brown hair and it was a male. The hair on its head and shoulders was a lot longer than on the rest of its body. She said the skin on its face and hands appeared gray and that it looked a lot like a man in the face. ("Wounded Bigfoot")

The great-grandchild of the informant then provided these additional notes about the experience:

Yes, she [my grandmother] said they planted extra food to give to the “nun yunu wi” to keep them happy. She also said they (the Cherokees) knew what part of the forest was theirs (the bigfoot's) and didn't hunt there or go there. After marrying my Great-Grandfather in 1890, they moved out of the area in 1892. (“Wounded Bigfoot”)

In addition to Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee belief traditions surrounding Bigfoot-type creatures, there is one more native group that must be mentioned. Although the Kwakwaka’wakw People did not to my knowledge live in areas surrounding the Honey Island Swamp, I want to incorporate their names for Bigfoot, Bukwas and Tsonaqua, because one of my informants referred to the Bukwas as living in the Honey Island Swamp (“WNYBIC”).

Some monster enthusiasts argue that Native American reports of Bigfoot serve as proof that such humanoid creatures do exist:

Native American legends are rich in Bigfoot content. Why wouldn't they be? There can't be any creature walking this Earth that the Native Americans hadn't encountered at least once in a while. Think about it, these people lived as one with the Earth 24/7 365 days a year. Even the most "outdoorsy" of we "civilized" people can only claim a few weeks (or days or hours in most cases) a year of really being in the bush. (“WNYBIC”)

The inclusion of these Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee references demonstrates that a humanoid primate belief tradition was alive in the cultures of peoples native to areas surrounding the Honey Island Swamp. Whether these reports refer to one creature or creatures of many species we do not know. However, further exploration of reported experiences with the Honey Island Swamp Monster will shape our understanding of the belief tradition.

Chapter Two: An Experience-centered Study

The Role of Experience

In order to understand the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition as completely as possible, it is necessary to investigate the reported experience narratives. The events that occur during personal experiences often have a very strong influence on individual belief systems and can significantly affect the growth of a belief tradition. In her writings about memorate, Gillian Bennett asserts that the study of personal experience narratives is key to understanding a living tradition.

Each [experience narrative] may be ephemeral (because it has not found its way into print) and each one is personal and individual (because it is the teller's story and no one else's), but together they are, nevertheless, communal, cultural, and enduring. They are so because they are the embodiments of received attitudes and beliefs – tradition in action. . . . They are for folklorists, therefore, the best possible evidence for the existence of an on-going tradition. (*Traditions* 19)

In his research on the Sasquatch, John Green relied heavily on the role of experience to compile a list of characteristics of the creature. He argues that “if such a creature does exist, then a substantial proportion of the reports involve genuine observations of it, and from them, if they prove consistent, an accurate picture of it can be drawn” (237). It is the goal of this chapter to draw such an “accurate picture” of the Honey Island Swamp Monster.

The Experience-centered Approach

To conduct a thorough examination of personal experience narratives, I have employed the experience-centered approach developed by David Hufford during his study of the Old Hag phenomenon in Newfoundland. Although the applications and

outcome here are different, the method remains the same. This approach examines personal experience and relies on personal testimony as the most significant data for understanding a supernatural belief tradition. Its purpose is to detect and classify features that commonly occur within experience narratives across the tradition. Theoretically, this process leads to a group of characteristics that define the tradition and separate it from others, and the identified features can then serve as more specific evidence for understanding the tradition. Hufford describes the experience-centered approach in this way:

The [experience-centered] approach recognizes the epistemological difficulties of focusing on experience, especially when dealing with the materials of greatest interest in the folkloristic study of supernatural belief. Another's experience is always a reconstruction to be inferred rather than a "fact" to be directly observed. The data the folklorist relies on for this reconstruction consist largely of verbal accounts, and these are well known to be loaded with sources of error: faulty memories; the creative processes of oral tradition; the very processes of perception, which are generally recognized to be influenced by expectation. But the folklorist cannot consider such factors to be merely sources of error, for they are themselves important subjects of study, and the changed material is recognized as having its own integrity and authenticity. (*Terror x*)

Thus, every part of an experience narrative has value and cannot be dismissed as insignificant based on the expectations of any other belief tradition.

There are five basic assumptions stemming from experience-centered study that can be applied to the study of the Honey Island Swamp Monster:

1. Some significant portion of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observations interpreted rationally.
2. Events which are accurately observed and reasoning which is properly carried out are central to the development and maintenance of folk belief, even if those beliefs appear fantastic.

3. The experience-centered approach can be a useful means for determining when and under what circumstances observations might be accurate.
4. We commonly assume that belief influences experience. The experience-centered approach allows for the possibility that experiences influence belief.
5. It is necessary to have a thorough description of the experience before looking at interpretation. (Goldstein, Lecture 12 September)

These five assumptions serve as a platform to commence examination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster Belief Tradition.

Primary Characteristics of the Honey Island Swamp Monster Belief Tradition

In order to identify the features of this tradition, I examined all of the thirty-two narratives looking for patterns and repetition. (See Table 1 for a list of narratives and their sources.) I identified sixty-two characteristics of the tradition that occur within two or more narratives. (See Table 3 at the end of the chapter for a list of all of the features and the narratives in which they appear.) Two features of the tradition occur in all narratives, complete and incomplete. Another two characteristics appear in all of the complete narratives, of which there are twenty-one. Two additional features appear in over 75% of the complete narratives. I have identified these six characteristics as the primary features of the tradition:

1. Experience occurs in the Honey Island Swamp or surrounding area (all narratives)
2. Experience occurs while witness is intentionally involved in an outdoor activity in the swamp (all narratives)
3. Experience includes a sighting (25 narratives)

Table 1: List of Narratives and Sources

Narrative	Genre	Source	Person(s) Having Experience	Complete/ Incomplete
1	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Harlan, Billy	<i>complete</i>
2	fabulate	ElwoodBaumann	Harlan	<i>complete</i>
3	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Harlan, Billy, Jim	<i>complete</i>
4	memorate	ISO video	Harlan, Jim	<i>complete</i>
5	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Old Man Williams	<i>incomplete</i>
6	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Denty	<i>complete</i>
7	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Dan	<i>incomplete</i>
8	fabulate	Elwood Baumann	Fishing guide & client	<i>incomplete</i>
9	fabulate	Elwood Baumann	three fishermen	<i>complete</i>
10	memorate within	Dana Holyfield	Freddy	<i>complete</i>
11	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Bessy	<i>complete</i>
12	memorate	ISO video	Ted Wiliams	<i>complete</i>
13	memorate	ISO video	Ted Williams	<i>complete</i>
14	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	unnamed girl's brother	<i>complete</i>
15	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Harlan, Billy	<i>incomplete</i>
16	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Perry and Angie	<i>incomplete</i>
17	memorate	ISO video	Perry and Angie	<i>incomplete</i>
18	memorate within	Dana Holyfield	Mr. Dave	<i>incomplete</i>
19	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Mississippi hunters	<i>incomplete</i>
20	memorate	BFRO website	anonymous	<i>complete</i>
21	memorate	Harvey Hood	Harvey Hood	<i>complete</i>
22	fabulate	Harvey Hood	Jimmy Bufkin	<i>complete</i>
23	fabulate	Harvey Hood	conservationists	<i>incomplete</i>
24	memorate	Larry Buehler	Larry Buehler	<i>complete</i>
25	memorate	Danny White	Danny White	<i>complete</i>
26	memorate	GCBRO website	anonymous	<i>complete</i>
27	fabulate	Davis/Michael web	Harlan, Billy	<i>complete</i>
28	fabulate	Davis/Michael web	Harlan, Billy	<i>incomplete</i>
29	memorate	GCBRO website	anonymous	<i>complete</i>
30	fabulate	BFRO website	anonymous	<i>complete</i>
31	fabulate	Dana Holyfield	Harlan	<i>incomplete</i>
32	fabulate	GCBRO website	anonymous	<i>complete</i>

4. Experience includes the impression of a humanoid primate (21 narratives)

4.1 bipedal creature

4.2 hairy creature

5. Experience includes the impression of a sizable creature (19 narratives)

5.1 height

5.2 body massiveness

5.3 weight

6. Experience causes fear (16 narratives)

Upon completing his research on the Old Hag, Hufford concluded the following in regard to primary characteristics:

The primary features of this outline are definitive, that is, based on my initial findings I concluded that if one of these were absent I was not dealing with the Old Hag phenomenon. The conclusion that these criteria define a coherent and distinct event has been upheld by my continuing research. (*Terror* 26)

For the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, primary features one and four are truly definitive; the tradition can in no way be present without an encounter with a humanoid primate in the Honey Island Swamp. However, I have allowed for flexibility while identifying the primary characteristics. Unlike Hufford, I did not utilize a questionnaire that asked each informant the same questions. Thus, I am compensating for the possibility that although fear, for example, is specifically referred to by informants in 16 narratives, it may well have been experienced in more.

Experience Occurs in the Honey Island Swamp or Surrounding Areas

The first primary characteristic of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition is where the experience takes place. This characteristic is crucial to identifying the tradition. In order for the experience to be recognized as part of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition, it must have occurred in the Honey Island Swamp region. References to the Honey Island Swamp or the Pearl River identify this locale. All of the narratives, complete and incomplete, include this feature. Some witnesses refer to even more specific locations within the Honey Island Swamp. For instance, Harvey Hood mentions camping near the Fury place in Napoleon, Larry Buehler includes Nancy Flats, and Danny White refers to Opossum Walk. All of these locations are within the Honey Island Swamp territory, and the informants make this clear. Although some include this type of detailed location, the necessary identifying element is a reference to the Honey Island Swamp or Pearl River. Location is essential in order to distinguish a narrative as part of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition.

A narrative device that many of the storytellers employ is the use of detail to describe the location of the experience. These details provide authenticity and contribute to the realistic scope of the narrative. Seventeen narratives include such descriptions. For instance, Dana Holyfield describes Ford's first encounter as occurring in the 70,000 acres of wilderness that make up the Honey Island Swamp. She further characterizes the area as having "dense vegetation" and as "thick, overgrown swampland where few men have ever stepped foot" (Holyfield, *Encounters* 3-4). Also according to Holyfield, Denty's experience occurred "deep in the holler" (*Encounters* 20-22). Equally

descriptively, Jay Michael reports Ford's second encounter as having transpired "near a maze of backwater sloughs" (Davis and Michael). Like these examples, most of the descriptions refer to the remote or unknown nature of the swamp areas in which the experiences took place and employ descriptive adjectives to characterize the surroundings more thoroughly.

Experience Occurs During Intentional Involvement in Outdoor Activities

The secondary primary feature is the fact that every experience occurs while the informant is intentionally involved in an outdoor activity in or around the Honey Island Swamp. This is significant because no experience occurs in which the creature occupies more developed territory away from the swamp; the creature does not invade human space. Instead, each experience involves humans consciously exploring and taking part in activities in predominantly unknown territories; thus, perhaps humans are invading creature habitat. In sixteen of the narratives, the witnesses are hunting, and three of these experiences specifically refer to bow hunting. Fishing and camping each occur in five narratives, and looking for a camp and trapping each occur in two. In only one narrative, the informant is patrolling the Pearl River. Without the intentional and invasive nature of these activities, perhaps the tradition might look very different.

Incomplete vs. Complete Narratives

In order to identify an experience as part of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition, it must include enough information to specify that the experience is referring to an encounter with a humanoid primate. The fact that experiences occur in the Honey Island Swamp during intentional outdoor activities cannot accomplish this alone. The

occurrence of a sighting and the impression of a humanoid primate are absolutely necessary to define the tradition. Along with the impression of a sizable creature and a fearful emotional response, these remaining primary features work together to identify this tradition and separate it from others.

Sighting

A sighting must be present in order for an informant to be able to describe the experience to such an extent as to identify the creature as some type of bipedal humanoid primate. Therefore, only experiences that include sightings can be considered complete narratives. Twenty-six of the thirty-two narratives I located contain sightings. Experiences that do not include sightings should not be regarded as insignificant, however. They simply cannot be classified in the same way. Important contributions, especially regarding physical evidence, have come from incomplete narratives, and these will be examined as secondary features of this tradition.

Impression of a Humanoid Primate

In order for an experience narrative to be classified as a complete narrative, the experience must include an encounter with a humanoid primate. Therefore, descriptions must depict a human-like, bipedal, hairy creature. Twenty-one of the twenty-six narratives that include a sighting reveal sufficient data to be considered complete narratives.

A bipedal creature is one that is capable of standing on two feet and using two feet for the purposes of locomotion. Six narratives describe the creature initially in

different stances, such as squatting down are “on all fours,” but in each case the creature eventually stands. Harlan Ford’s first encounter provides an example of this:

When they broke out of the dense vegetation, they stopped in awe of a massive creature that was on all fours in a clearing adjacent to a heavily wooded area. Billy said, “What is that thing?” The creature heard their voices and stood on two feet to face them. (Holyfield, *Encounters* 4)

While some narratives allude to the creature’s bipedal abilities by describing running or walking, sixteen of the narratives specifically include references to a “two-legged monster” or a creature standing on two legs.

In addition to being bipedal in nature, a humanoid primate is also covered with hair. The two most noted aspects of the hairy body covering are length and color. Fourteen narratives provide informants’ impressions of color. Of these fourteen, nine depict a grayish color, and six portray a brownish color. Four simply describe the creature’s hair as generically dark. Twelve narratives include specific impressions of hair length and/or texture. Most notably, five describe “short fur,” three depict the creature as having longer hair on its head, and two portray the fur as “shaggy.” Only one refers to a lack of hair around its nose and eyes.

Impression of a Sizable Creature

Nineteen narratives (90.47% of complete narratives) include the informant’s impression of seeing a sizable creature. This includes references to height, weight and general body size. Twelve narratives specifically refer to height, and eight (67%) of them depict a creature standing approximately seven feet tall. Three narratives describe a creature between five and six feet tall, and one prefaces that description by labeling the five-foot sighting as “little Bigfoot.” Many believers in the tradition explain the height

differences with the belief that more than one Honey Island Swamp creature exists; the multiple-sized footprints also support this theory.

General impressions of a massive body build are included by informants in twelve of the narratives. Seven narratives refer to the body build as considerable; informants employ adjectives such as massive, large, monstrous, solid and muscular to illustrate their perceptions. Four narratives specifically describe chest and shoulders with adjectives such as tremendous, large and broad.

Impressions of the creature's weight are provided in only six narratives. Two narratives (33%) describe a weight of 400 pounds, one depicts a weight of 250-300 pounds, one estimates the creature's weight at 200 pounds, and one simply utilizes the descriptor "very heavy." Of the six narratives, then, 83% include impressions that the creature's weight is probably between 200 and 400 pounds. The one remaining narrative describes the "little Bigfoot" as weighing over 100 pounds.

Narrative Examples of Informant Impressions

The following excerpts from narratives will demonstrate the informant's impressions of size and of bipedal and hairy qualities. Dana Holyfield writes about Harlan Ford's very comprehensive description of the creature in this way:

Harlan said, "It was like nothing I'd ever seen before. Ugly and sinister and looking like something out of a horror movie." . . . Harlan and Billy described it as standing about seven feet tall. [Its] loins were slender, but [its] chest and shoulders were tremendous and it had long grayish hair on [its] head and short dingy gray hair on [its] body. (*Encounters* 4)

Larry Buehler described the creature he encountered as having grayish-brown coarse hair and standing about five feet tall (Buehler). Ted Williams reported seeing more than one

human-like creature that was grayish in color and about seven feet tall with broad shoulders (*In Search*). Another anonymous internet Informant described the creature in this way:

I began walking and observed a large brown (humanlike) creature several hundred yards in front of me. . . . It was comparable to a large human (in size and shape, but solid in frame) and appeared to be hairy, but I cannot be sure. It was brown from head to foot and was about 250-300 pounds. (“Man Sees Bigfoot”)

Experiences Cause Fear

The final primary characteristic, present in 76% of the complete narratives, is the emotion of fear in the informant. Although informants did have other emotional responses, which will be examined as secondary characteristics, fear is the most common reaction. Perry Ford describes his apprehension in the following way: “That was one of the scariest nights of our lives. I don’t get spooked easily, but I was that night” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 25). Similarly, according to Jay Michaels, Harlan Ford reported, “I want you to know it scared the heck out of me” (Davis and Michael).

Denial of fear was present as a narrative device in only one narrative I collected. While Larry Buehler related his story to me, he stated, “And I wasn’t really scared, you know, because I used to stay in the woods long after dark. I’d come walking out of there; I don’t even use a flashlight.” Later in the same narrative he repeated, “I, I can’t say we was really scared. It was just a different experience” (Buehler). However, despite his repeated denials of fear, when speaking about his reaction to the encounter, he states, “Everybody said, ‘You didn’t go down there and look for tracks?’ And I said, ‘No!’ The only thing I had in my mind was getting my deer stand up, putting it in the truck, and

going on to the house and hunt another day” (Buehler). He followed this statement with laughter.

Secondary Characteristics of the Honey Island Swamp Monster Belief Tradition

In addition to the five primary features, fifty-four other characteristics appear in the narratives and contribute to the depth and breadth of this tradition. Each of the features I have included occurs in at least two narratives. Some secondary features have contributed significantly to distinguishing this tradition from others, while others serve more simply to broaden the scope of beliefs. All of the secondary characteristics fall into one of the following categories: witnesses’ reactions; witnesses’ impressions; creature’s actions; witnesses’ emotional responses; time of experience; conscious comparison/contrast to another creature; physical evidence; and prior knowledge of tradition. For identification purposes I have numbered the features consecutively.

Witnesses’ Reactions

Seventeen of the secondary characteristics of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition involve informants’ reactions to their experiences:

1. reports experience to others (12)
2. follows creature (9)
3. retreats (9)
4. prepares weapon (8)
5. watches creature (8)
6. returns the next day to look (5)
7. fires gun (4)

8. remains still and silent (4)
9. unable to go to sleep (3)
10. screams (3)
11. examines prints (3)
12. collides with the creature while in a boat (3)
13. never returns to the spot (2)
14. calls out to creature (2)
15. jumps back (2)
16. makes plaster casts (2)
17. builds fire (2)

Although reporting the experience to others is the most common informant reaction, I will save that to address at the end of this section. Nine informants report following the creature as part of their experience. They often linger to watch, most often remaining silent, and then pursue the creature further. It was often these curious witnesses who chose to return to the location of their experience the following day to search for further evidence. Typically, the pursuit response was accompanied by the preparation of a weapon for protection, but in only four cases was a weapon fired. For instance, after their first encounter with the creature, Harlan Ford and Billy Mills reacted in this way: “Harlan and Billy got their hunting rifles ready just in case and ran to the edge of the woods hoping to get another look at it” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 3-4). Jim Hartzog responded in similar fashion: “Let me see that gun of yours. I’m going up there to shoot that booger for your boys” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 13-15).

In contrast to pursuing the creature, eight informants report that a quick retreat from their location was part of their experiences. Denty Crawford describes his departure in this way:

That was one swamp critter that I didn't want to take a chance and shoot at it in case I missed or my bullet didn't faze him. I quietly backed out of its territory before it spotted me. When the weeds closed in and blocked my view of that big thing, I turned and ran as fast as I could. When I got to my three-wheeler on the other side of that slough, I jumped on and took off out of there. (Holyfield, *Encounters* 20-22)

Reports of three fishermen reveal similar reactions:

The three fishermen were in an unhappy situation. They didn't like the idea of trying to find their way out of the swamp at night. Neither did they like the idea of staying where they were. Their visitor might decide to return, and a hatchet was their only protection.

After a discussion they decided that getting lost was the lesser of the two dangers. Everything was quickly stashed back in the boat, and the fishermen set off for home. They had seen enough of the Honey Island Swamp to last them for a long time. (Baumann 72-73)

Nine secondary features of less significance to the tradition also depict witnesses' reactions to their experiences. These features include: the inability to go to sleep, screaming, examining prints, colliding with the creature while in a boat, never returning to the location of the experience, jumping back, making plaster casts, and building fires. Although these secondary features certainly are not necessary for the tradition to be present, they do broaden the spectrum of the creature's possible activities and shed light on possible informant reactions to the situation.

In twelve narratives informants report that they returned home and shared their stories with family members and friends. Others, like Ted Williams, kept the experience mostly to themselves for fear of being ridiculed: "And I don't like to talk about it because

people don't believe what you say, what you seen, and I don't like to be called a liar. Nobody does" (*In Search*).

One narrative device employed by informants as a form of validation is describing the reactions of others with whom they share their experiences. In some cases, this seems to provide humor for the informants' situations and to help strengthen their beliefs in the experiences. Harvey Hood describes his friends' reactions in this way: "So I went back to camp, and when everybody come back I told my story. They thought I was crazy, made fun of me all night. But they noticed I did sleep with my shotgun that night" (Hood). By alluding to their reactions when he slept with his gun, Hood employs this statement to validate his story. Larry Buehler also relates that he found himself on the receiving end of many jokes and utilizes the reactions to generate proof for his story:

And there's a few people around town they joked and laughed at us and everything. There was some other boys that camped down there in log town, I must say 30 years old, some of them right in their 50s. And they love catfish and to drink. And they reported seeing this creature running through the swamp down there, and everybody said, "Oh, don't worry about those boys. They're nothing but a bunch of drunks, a bunch of winos. They be drinking that beer, they don't know what they seen. They just know some rumors and all kinds of stuff. Well you see, they can't say that about me or Danny because neither one of us drink. You know what I'm saying? So we saw something, and them people said, "Well, that's so and so running around there with a damn suit on." (Buehler)

Buehler employs the laughter of others to allow himself to laugh about the situation.

However, he also treats their reactions as authentication for his own story.

In contrast to the use of humor, some informants utilize the responses of others to explain why they do not like to discuss their experiences. For instance, according to Holyfield, "Dan hadn't told too many people about that night. Word spreads in a small

town. He won't deny it if you [ask] him, but he's not the type to go around making up tall tales just for the impact" (Holyfield, *Encounters* 23-24).

Witnesses' Impressions

Eight secondary features involve informants' impressions of their experience:

18. Impressions of sounds in nature (8)
19. Impressions of creature's behavior (6)
20. Impressions of creature's eyes (6)
21. Impressions of an odor (3)
22. Impressions of creature's arms (3)
23. Impressions of creature's legs (3)
24. Impressions of creature's hands (2)
25. Sense of presence (2)

Nine of the narratives include impressions of sounds that describe elements of nature. For instance, a group of fishermen report that "the only sounds were the croaking of frogs and the occasional hoot of an owl" (Baumann 72). Two describe the sounds made by a red squirrel, and three involve dogs barking. Three mention the absence of noise. One website informant very simply reports, "I did not hear any strange noises" ("Man Sees Bigfoot"). Larry Buehler describes the lack of noise more descriptively:

And I was there for maybe 30 to 40 minutes, maybe a little longer, and I noticed all the birds got real, real quiet. There was a lot of birds; you got birds making noise and stuff, you know, and it's usually when someone walks in the area or something of that nature, animals hush up, you know. And I got to looking around, thought if I could see somebody maybe I'd whistle at them, let them know I was deer hunting, whatever. And I just noticed it got awful quiet. (Buehler)

When informants describe sounds of nature at the time of the experience, this serves to authenticate their experiences. It demonstrates that they are coherent and aware of what is occurring around them.

Six informants reveal their perceptions of the creature's behavior during their encounter. Two describe the creature as being unafraid, while mysterious, bizarre, unfriendly, non-aggressive, and intelligent are each employed in one narrative. Since only one narrative out of six specifically depicts the creature as unfriendly, it might be safe to assume that the creature is generally reported as not threatening to humans.

The eyes have come to be one of the most recognized features about the Honey Island Swamp Monster, probably due to Harlan Ford's emphasis on them during his reports. However, impressions of eyes are included in only six narratives, and four of these are retellings of Ford's first or second experiences. According to Dana Holyfield, Ford's description of the eyes was as follows: "They claimed the thing that startled them most was [its] eyes. 'They were very large and amber color and looked hard at us before running off' (Holyfield, *Encounters* 4). The remaining two narratives that describe eyes are also two versions of the same experience, one memorate and one fabulate. In the memorate, the informant describes the eyes as follows: ". . . when it looked up at us as we stood in the window its eyes glowed white in the darkness" ("Report #1341"). The fabulate words the description in this way: "The creature looked up at them and she noted that the face was visible and the eyes reflected the light with a silver/white tint" ("Hancock").

Description of an odor associated with the tradition occurs in only three narratives. Harvey Hood remembers smelling a foul odor similar to that of a water moccasin during his experience: “So, and I did notice that it had a bad smell, similar to like a moccasin. You can smell that musky smell usually before you see them” (Hood). Larry Buehler recognized a similar pungency during his encounter:

And as it got a little piece away from me, about 70 yards, the wind was blowing right, I noticed I could smell a funny smell. I thought it was a water moccasin or a snake around there, you know. And I think, you know, that smells just like a water moccasin. I got to looking around and I got to thinking, well, you know, that whatever that was come walking through here a while ago, maybe it was it stinking, you know. I don't know for sure. (Buehler)

The only other narrative with a reference to odor describes the foul stench of dead boars. Many descriptions of the Honey Island Swamp Monster in published materials include reference to a foul smell. Blackman, for instance, describes the Honey Island Swamp Monster as having an “incredibly foul stench” (16). However, I have found only two out of thirty-two narratives that mention this characteristic.

Impressions of the creature's arms and legs are presented in three narratives each, and impressions of the creature's hands are described in two. Each informant who includes a description of arms depicts them as being proportionally longer than human arms and describes them as hanging down. Leg descriptions are more varied and include references to a visible kneecap, a slender build, and a length that is proportionally shorter than human legs. Informants describe hands as large in one narrative and human-like in another.

The final secondary feature involving informant impressions occurs in two narratives when informants describe sensing a presence of something. Baumann relates the perceptions of three fishermen in this way:

. . . For no reason that they could understand, they began to feel uneasy. Although they had heard nothing out of the ordinary, they sensed that they were no longer alone. They all felt as though someone – or something – was watching them.

It was an eerie sensation. (Baumann 72)

For a group of Mississippi hunters, it was their dogs that seemingly perceived a presence. “Right about midnight the dogs got nervous about something and stood up and sniffed the air. The Mississippi boys didn’t pay no mind at first until the dogs started barking towards the dark woods” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 33-34). Although this secondary feature does add suspense, it is not a common characteristic of the belief tradition.

Creature’s Actions

Every narrative includes some description of creature actions as perceived by the informant:

26. Creature makes sounds (13)
27. Creature retreats (13)
28. Creature makes eye contact (9)
29. Creature swims (5)
30. Creature runs (5)
31. Creature jumps (3)
32. Creature crosses a slough (2)
33. Creature eats vegetables (2)

Retreating, making eye contact, and making sounds are perceived creature actions that serve as significant secondary features.

In thirteen of the narratives, the informant describes sounds that he or she attributes to the creature that was encountered. Four of these contain screams, one includes growls, two reveal chewing sounds, and six involve noises (lack of noise, in one account) that were credited to the creature as it moved through the swamp. For example, according to Dana Holyfield, the sounds that Perry and Angie heard during their adventure in the woods could be characterized as “spine shivering territorial howls” (*Encounters* 25). Freddy reveals that he heard a “shrieking scream that raised the hair on [his] neck” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 26-28). Several of the witnesses who have reported similar screams describe the cries as continuously moving closer to them. For example, Holyfield characterizes the sounds heard by a group of Mississippi hunters and their dogs in this way: “When they heard a loud bellow in the swamp that almost sounded like a mule, they got a little more curious. . . . The bellowing noise started to get irate and much closer. The dogs would bark one direction, then the other, as the roaring cries circled them” (*Encounters* 33-34). Growls were also reported by Jim Hartzog to his friends Harlan Ford and Billy Mills during their shared encounter: “It growled at me so I shot at it again” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 13-15). Other sounds attributed to the creature include tearing tree bark, a smacking noise, movement through the woods, heavy walking, tree limbs snapping, and the audible sound made after running into a tree. Because of this secondary feature, it has come to be accepted that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is capable of communicating vocally.

Retreating and making eye contact also serve as significant secondary features. The Honey Island Swamp Monster retreats in thirteen narratives. Informants describe the creature as fleeing into the thicket, walking off, turning around and leaving, and walking out of water into woods. This does not also happen immediately, however. In nine of the narratives, the informant describes the creature as making eye contact. This is not typically elaborated, but it is significant because it demonstrates the creature's lack of fear. Part of a report posted on the Bigfoot Field Research Organization website demonstrates these two features:

A moment later we all screamed in surprise and shock at what we saw. It looked up at us and kept right on eating. I remember that, by its mannerism, it had no fear of us what-so-ever and made no attempt to leave the area or hide in any way. . . . We continued to watch out of the window and then saw the creature stand up and run off on two legs into the woods toward the river. I remember it ran so fast that I could hardly believe it. (“Report #1341”)

The remaining secondary features demonstrate the scope of the creature's perceived abilities. Swimming, running, jumping, crossing a slough, and eating each occur in two or more narratives. However, it is also interesting to note some of the actions reportedly witnessed by informants in isolated occurrences. Denty Crawford explained the creature's actions in this way: “The creature apparently was ripping apart the tree bark and eating bugs” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 20-22). One informant hunting near Bogachita reported that the creature “got on all fours” to intimidate him and then jumped out at him (Holyfield, Interview). On the Gulf Coast Bigfoot Research Organization website, an anonymous informant shared an encounter in which the creature ran into a tree as it was making its quick departure (“Bow Hunter”). A final example of

the variety of actions can be seen in the experience of a father and son whose story was submitted to the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization website:

They were walking up to the river when they heard a splash. They turned to see a dark hairy creature, very muscular, standing with its back to them at the [river's] edge. The creature then pulled a cypress stump out of the mud and threw it into the river. They froze and were dumb-struck. They guessed it caught wind of them because it turned to look directly at them and then walked briskly away down the [river's] edge. ("Report #1498")

Witnesses' Emotional Responses

In addition to the emotional response of fear, which is a primary characteristic of the tradition, three other emotional responses are reported by informants:

- 34. Awe (6)
- 35. Nervousness (4)
- 36. Disbelief (2)

Awe appears as an emotional response in eight of the narratives. Dana Holyfield describes Ford's and Mill's reactions after their first encounter in this way: "When they broke out of the dense vegetation, they stopped in awe of the massive creature that was on all fours in a clearing adjacent to a heavily wooded area. Billy said, 'What is that thing?'" (*Encounters* 3-4). While describing another hunter's encounter, Harvey Hood reveals, "He said he was amazed" (Hood). A father and son hunting in the Honey Island Swamp were similarly amazed. The source reporting their encounter relates that "they froze and were dumb-struck" ("Report #1498").

Other emotional responses include disbelief and nervousness. Two narratives include disbelief. For example, Harlan Ford describes his reaction in this way: "We both stood and stared. Neither of us had ever seen anything like it before, and we had trouble

believing our eyes” (Baumann 67). Danny White reveals his own disbelief when he begins his story to a friend by saying, “Larry, you ain’t going to believe what I saw” (White). Nervousness appears in three narratives. Like Danny White, Freddy also introduces emotional response by voicing it as a reaction of another individual: “That gal I was with got real nervous and asked me to take her back to civilization” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 26-28). In another narrative, it is not the humans but their canine companions that initially demonstrate what seems to be an emotional reaction: “Right around midnight the dogs got nervous about something and stood up and sniffed the air” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 33-34). Although not present in every narrative, these emotional responses are significant secondary features of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. These features have added to the commodified portrayal of the creature as having an “evil aura” and “sinister presence” (Blackman 16). In a way, the presence of these emotional responses makes the creature more interesting and easier to sell. It also makes the human witnesses real in the public eye and adds validation to their stories. In the mind of some monster buffs, if a supernatural experience does not evoke an emotional response, it might not be considered real enough to pursue. Additionally, the source might not be trusted.

Time of Experience

Informants in twenty-six of the narratives I collected referred to the time when their experiences occurred:

- 37. Before 1980 (7)
- 38. After 1980 (5)

39. Dusk (6)
40. Night (6)
41. Afternoon (3)
42. Morning (2)
43. Autumn (4)
44. Summer (3)

This time reference is significant in helping to determine the patterns and habits of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Twelve narratives contain time references to years. Nine describe specific years, and five involve a comparative span of years (twenty years ago, a year later, etc.). From these references we can determine that seven of the experiences occurred before 1980 and five occurred after. Seven narratives refer to the time of year. Three of these mention hunting season, one specifically in October, and the three other narratives describe it being summer. Certainly it is feasible that the opportunities for seasonal work and activities, such as hunting and camping, may affect the times of year in which humans are in the swamp and thus in positions to possibly see or hear the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Additional time references in the narratives are to the time of day. Three include specific time references (9:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., and 4:00 p.m.), but the remaining descriptions are more general. According to the details of the narratives, eight of the experiences occurred at night, four transpired at dusk or just before dark, three happened in the afternoon, and two took place in the morning. Two narratives also specifically mention that the experience occurred on nights with full moons. This feature contributes to the tradition by providing those who study the creature with more

information about its habits. The information supplied by the narratives suggests that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is diurnal and nocturnal and resides in the same basic region throughout the year.

Conscious Comparison/Contrast to Other Creatures

In eighteen of the narratives, the informant compares the creature to some other type of more recognized creature:

- 45. Comparisons to mystery primates (7)
- 46. Comparison to what Harlan Ford reported seeing (6)
- 47. Contrasts to known animals (5)
- 48. Comparisons/contrasts to humans (5)
- 49. Comparisons to known primates (4)
- 50. Sound comparisons (3)
- 51. Smell comparisons (2)

Often these comparisons involve likening the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition to parallel monster traditions. Many of those who were familiar with the tradition equate the creature they encountered with the one reported by Harlan Ford. Two specifically apply the name Honey Island Swamp Monster to identify the creature in their experiences. Three informants describe the creature as being like a Bigfoot. One makes specific reference to its resemblance to the Skunk Ape that has been reported in Florida, and one employs the terms Rugaru and Sasquatch as a part of identification. These comparisons help clarify that in the eyes of many witnesses, the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition is parallel to other Bigfoot traditions, such as that of the Sasquatch or

the Skunk Ape. Although debate exists in the scientific world about how the creatures in these traditions are related, there is a definite correlation based on experience narratives.

We will examine the correlation at a later point in this chapter.

Returning to examine other comparisons, four informants liken the creature they encountered to some sort of known primate such as a monkey, a baboon, or an ape.

However, all of these comparisons clarify that while the creature they saw is “like” that animal, it is not the same. Bessy’s encounter, as retold by Dana Holyfield, exemplifies this type of comparison:

Bessy was on a camping trip in the Honey Island Swamp with a group of hunters. When morning came, they split up and headed out to get enough meat to fill the freezer for winter. Bessy tromped through the abundant swamp in search of a good meal. Soon she spotted something moving in a tree. It was something real big, but what she seen in that tree didn’t look like anything she wanted to eat. From a distance, it appeared to be a large monkey, but as she got closer, she noticed that its face didn’t look like a monkey. It was monstrous looking. The large beast started to come down the tree and Bessy wasn’t sure it would do her any harm and certainly wasn’t going to wait and find out, so she shot it. When it dropped to the ground, she hurried back to the campsite to get the others. (*Encounters* 29-31)

Bessy’s experience continues:

When the hunters gathered there, she told them that she thought she had shot a monkey. They all had a good laugh, but finally she convinced the men to go and take a look. Sure enough, they found something that was similar to a monkey, but up-close it wasn’t. Whatever it was appeared to be a young one. They dragged it back to the campsite and put it on ice until they could get out of the swamp. When the group got home with Bessy’s prize prey, one of the men called a friend from the Wildlife and Fisheries, who took one look at the strange thing and made a fast phone call. (Holyfield, *Encounters* 29-31)

Five informants make similar comparisons to humans, relating that the creature looked somewhat like a human but definitely was not a human.

The other comparisons are to known animals which live in the swamp, and all of them, except for those comparing sound and smell, use the comparisons for the purpose of showing contrast. Examples include descriptions of the creature as “stronger than an alligator,” “not the right head shape for a bear,” “nose too flat for a bear,” and “hair longer than a hog but bristly like a hog.” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 6-8; Buehler) These informants are aware of what animals exist in the swamp, and they are confident that their experience did not involve one of those animals. The two comparisons involving odor indicate that the creature smelled like a water moccasin. The sound comparisons include descriptions of sounding like a mule, like a hog, and like an armadillo. These features demonstrate that the informants are rationalizing what they have experienced and trying to explain it according to traditions with which they are familiar.

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence is present in eleven of the narratives:

52. Footprints (9)

53. Dead boars (2)

It is this physical evidence which often provides the most solid proof to the scientific and cryptozoological community.

Informants report seeing tracks in nine of the narratives (six three-toed, two five-toed, and one non-specific), and in three of these plaster casts were made of the footprints. These plaster casts have provided for some debate about the feet of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman suggests that perhaps these casts are really made from alligator tracks (Coleman, “Re: Honey”). M. K. Davis, on the

other hand, depicts photographs of both casts (alligator and copies of Ford's Honey Island Swamp Monster) on his website and argues that they are, most definitely, different (Davis, "The Honey Island Monster"). However, Davis and his associate Jay Michael are currently arguing that they can prove the three-toed footprints to be hoaxes. For now, the three/four-toed casts have come to be recognized as being those of the Honey Island Swamp Monster.

Additional forms of physical evidence include blood, the bodies of dead boars, broken tree limbs, a large hole in a tree, and scattered dirt. Although this evidence adds necessary validation for the scientific community, for those who experience an encounter, the physical evidence is not essential for proving what to them is very real. Their own experience is enough.

Prior Knowledge of Tradition

Prior knowledge of the tradition is secondary feature #54. Informants in eleven of the thirty-two narratives express familiarity with the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition prior to their experiences. Five of these narratives are versions of Harlan Ford's additional encounters, so excluding Harlan Ford, only six informants report familiarity with the tradition. This awareness of the tradition seems to influence most highly the identification process. If informants are conscious of the tradition, they have an easier time labeling the experience and comparing the creature to something else (i.e., "what Harlan Ford saw" or "the Honey Island Swamp Monster"). However, it is clear that prior knowledge does not have to be present in order for the tradition to continue.

A Portrait of the Honey Island Swamp Monster Based on Features of the Tradition

Interpreting experience is a very complex task. According to Hufford,

. . . such explanatory efforts should demonstrate a high degree of correspondence with the details of the tradition in question. Explanations that require the omission of substantial quantities of traditional features or the attribution of poor observation and faulty reasoning in the development of the tradition are more speculative. (*Terror* xiii)

In an attempt to develop a basic portrait of the tradition and of the creature around which the tradition is centered, I have relied on the primary and secondary characteristics as I uncovered them directly from the narratives. Although some details in the features vary, the repeated commonalities demonstrate a group of physical and behavioral characteristics that identify this creature and distinguish it from others. The creature is massive, with a broad chest, immense shoulders and large hands. Its hair is generally reported as being gray or grayish-brown and covering its entire body, except possibly for regions on its face. The hair on its head is said to hang longer than the hair on the rest of its body. A full-grown creature stands about seven feet tall and weighs in the neighborhood of 400 pounds, while younger ones have been reported at only five feet, weighing not less than 190 pounds. Its eyes are yellowish or amber in color, and they are usually described as being set wide apart. The footprint left by this creature shows three or possibly four toes, depending on one's interpretation of the print (since the possible fourth appendage is much smaller). The toes are clawed and webbed. Actions observed by informants indicate that this creature is capable of standing upright and getting down on "all fours." It can also walk, run, jump, climb, and swim. Some narratives reveal its ability to growl or scream, and a few informants describe a foul smell. Reports describe

only rare aggression, but the creature could definitely be considered bold and unafraid of humans, based on its repeated eye contact. It is diurnal and nocturnal, since it has been seen during the day and at night.

Comparisons to Information Provided by Science

Although from a folkloric perspective experience is the most significant element to be studied in order to understand a tradition, the scientists and cryptozoologists who perpetuate this tradition utilize a wider variety of evidence. Information provided by informants in their experience narratives has been supported by some scientific and cryptozoological research but contradicted by others. Early scientific analysis of the footprints was conducted soon after Ford's second sighting in 1974 by members of the Louisiana Wildlife Commission, zoologists from Louisiana State University, and archaeologists from the Smithsonian Institution (Holyfield, *Encounters* 9; Baumann 74). Their analyses concur with most observations, suggesting that the full-grown male weighs approximately 400 pounds, stands between seven and eight feet tall, and is almost completely covered with hair (Holyfield, *Encounters* 9; *In Search*). During the same time period, Major Gavin, an army ranger and specialist in swamp survival, was hired by the *In Search of Swamp Monsters* production team to evaluate the elements in the Honey Island Swamp in order to ascertain necessary survival skills of a creature in that environment. His findings support information found in experience narratives and suggest that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is probably omnivorous, eating everything including plants, insects and animals. According to the major, only with great strength

and cunning could a large animal survive very long in the swamp environment (*In Search*).

This concordance between informants' accounts and scientific reports is not always the case. This is especially true when it comes to comparing the Honey Island Swamp Monster with other humanoid creatures. Many informants commented on a parallel between the Honey Island Swamp Monster and other more famous humanoids such as Bigfoot or Sasquatch. Some cryptozoologists do not concur with these correlations. We will explore this further when we look at explanatory traditions, but first it is necessary to examine the features of other, possibly related, monster traditions.

Comparative Analysis

A variety of bipedal humanoid primates have reportedly been encountered in North America, and the traditions surrounding many of these creatures overlap in some ways with the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. As it is not possible to include all such traditions in this comparative analysis, I have chosen four: the most well-known tradition and three others which involve creatures that have been encountered in geographical areas close to the Honey Island Swamp. Also, each of these traditions was suggested as possibly connected to the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition by at least one of my informants. I collected these findings from experience narratives assimilated by other collectors and located in various print sources and electronic materials. For the purposes of these comparisons, I will focus on three of the five primary features in the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition: location, description of creature's physical appearance and description of creature's actions. Sighting remains a

primary feature of each of these traditions, but no discussion on this characteristic is necessary. The fifth feature, human reactions to encounters, may well be present in these traditions. However, this characteristic does not serve a role in the upcoming comparative analysis since the feature cannot distinguish each of these traditions from the others. When applicable, I have also included various secondary features in the analysis.

Sasquatch

The most well-known and well-documented humanoid primate tradition is, of course, that which surrounds the traditional Sasquatch, known by most as Bigfoot. This tradition occurs primarily in the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada. That locale distinguishes this tradition from others. Compilations of reports on Sasquatches' physical appearances have led to a recognized general description of the primates. Typical reports indicate that these creatures stand seven to eight feet tall. Short, reddish-brown or black animal-like hair covers their bodies, except for areas on the face around the eyes. The faces of these creatures have been described as flat with sloping foreheads and heavy brow ridges. Their heads are sometimes depicted as being shaped like a cone. Sasquatch creatures reportedly have massive shoulders and chests with arms that are long in proportion to their heights. Most frequently they walk hunched over, possibly due to the absence of a human-like neck. Except for the massive size, the footprints of the Sasquatch resemble human feet with five toes. Descriptions of the creatures' actions reveal that they walk upright on two legs, are capable of swimming, and are able to jump. Some secondary features of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition might also be compared to the Sasquatch tradition. Often these creatures have overpowering, putrid

odors. They have also been reported to make various sounds and screams. Based on times of experiences, numbers of creatures encountered at one time, and various types of physical evidence, Sasquatches are considered solitary, omnivorous, primarily nocturnal, and inactive in cold weather (Eberhart 151-52; Green, John 238-240; Napier 80-82). A film by Roger Patterson that allegedly caught Bigfoot on tape is the most famous piece of documentation regarding this tradition, and experts are still debating the authenticity of the film (Coleman, *Mysterious* 141).

Mississippi Swamp Ape

Several other traditions surround creatures which have been encountered closer to the home of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. One is the Mississippi Bigfoot, also known as the Swamp Ape. The swamps of Mississippi provide the general location of this tradition. Reports of the Swamp Ape's physical appearance indicate that this creature stands seven to eight feet tall and weighs approximately 400 pounds. According to most reports, it is covered with dark brown or black hair (2-3 inches long) all over its body, excepting its face. It exhibits broad shoulders, large hands, and long legs that rest on a three-toed foot. Most reports indicate that the creature has a yellowish eye color. Descriptions of the creature's actions include walking upright and swimming. It has also been seen eating food from gardens, forests, and occasionally trash dumpsters. Informants report aggressive behavior in this creature. Comparisons to Honey Island Swamp Monster secondary traditions reveal further information about sounds, smell, and time of day preferences. Witnesses have described its noises as growls, screams and whistles, and according to informants, the creature often exhibits a foul odor.

Additionally, the Swamp Ape has been seen during both day and night (“Sightings”; “Mississippi”).

Florida Skunk Ape

Another possibly related belief tradition is that which surrounds the Florida Skunk Ape. The location of this tradition is the Florida Everglades. Descriptions of the creature’s physical appearance reveal that the Florida Skunk Ape stands approximately seven to eight feet tall and weighs more than 350 pounds. Dark brown or black hair covers the body of the being, with less or no hair growing on the face. It reportedly has a flat face, flat nose, and eyes that are sunk into their sockets. Additionally, it possesses long arms and glowing eyes, and its footprints reveal five-toed human-like feet. Reports of the creature’s actions reveal that it has been seen walking, running, standing and sitting. Also, in contrast to most of the other creatures, the Florida Skunk Ape is considered peaceful and elusive; there have been no reports of aggressive behavior. Common secondary features include smells, sounds, and physical evidence. Informants commonly attribute a foul odor to the creature, and witnesses have also heard sounds described as yelping, howling, screaming and grunting coming from this primate. Finally, several sets of photographs have been taken of a Skunk Ape creature, and this physical documentation is being debated at present (“What Is”; “Florida”; Otto; “Graphics”; “Photo”).

Fouke Monster

The last belief tradition I will refer to which surrounds a specific primate is that of the Arkansas Fouke Monster, also known as the Boggy Creek Monster. The swampy and

wooded areas surrounding the town of Fouke, Arkansas provide the locale for this tradition. Physical descriptions of the creature reveal that it stands six and a half to seven feet tall and weighs approximately 550 pounds. The footprints have been reported as having three toes, like the Honey Island Swamp Monster but without the webbing. According to witnesses, its hands have claws, and its body is covered with long, dark brown hair. Also, informants have reported seeing red or glowing eyes with no trace of white around them. Accounts of the Fouke Monster's actions demonstrate its ability to walk upright and its apparently aggressive behavior. Secondary features reveal more. Based on physical evidence, the Fouke Monster is associated with the killings and disappearances of pigs, dogs, rabbits, and the occasional deer and cow. Pigs are reportedly its most pursued prey. It has been most often seen at night, and like some others, this creature also brings with it a foul smell. Reports of sounds reveal that the creature can whistle, scream and howl ("Fouke"; Baumann 12, 20).

Possible Connections

Due to the commodification process, which will be explored more later, a definite link exists between the belief traditions which surround these creatures. However, the similarities and differences between the traditions can lead to more specific information about whether there might be a possible connection between the creatures themselves and whether connections are revealed through experience narratives. Some people believe that no connection exists between the Honey Island Swamp Monster and other creatures. Harlan Ford, for example, feels that the creature he saw was in no way related to the well-known Bigfoot or the Fouke Monster (Baumann 69). Another monster buff in

search of the truth about these creatures says he believes that the “aggressive, scary Fouke/Boggy Creek/Honey Island Swamp-type animals are entirely different from the Bigfoot/Skunk Ape” (Fordham). However, there are similarities found in experience narratives that suggest some sort of possible link between these creatures. All of the adult creatures have been described as standing around seven feet tall, and they all range in weight from 350 to 550 pounds, most weighing approximately 400 pounds. All are massively built with expansive shoulders, and all are capable of standing upright. Two of the creatures are primarily passive (Sasquatch and Fouke Monster) while the other three have exhibited some aggressive behavior. Three of the creatures are thought to be omnivorous; the other two might be as well, but their eating behaviors have not been thoroughly analyzed or observed. All the animals are capable of screaming to communicate, and all but the Honey Island Swamp Monster (except for the reports in two narratives) exhibit foul odors. Three of the creatures, which live primarily in swampy areas, leave footprints that have three toes. According to some monster enthusiasts, these similarities demonstrate that a relationship between these creatures is at least possible (see Table 2). More specific explanatory traditions into the possible links between these humanoid primates will be examined in a later chapter.

Merbeing

In addition to comparing the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition to the traditions surrounding these four specific primates, there is one last comparison that must be examined. The belief tradition surrounding this type of creature is not a folk one but from cryptozoological belief tradition. Many cryptozoologists have attempted to create

Table 2: Comparative Analysis

	Honey Island Monster	Freshwater Merbeing
Location	LA/MS Honey Island Swamp	worldwide
Environment	swamp	coastlines/aquatic areas
Height	7-8 feet	dwarf to man-sized
Weight	400 lbs.	not specifically reported
Body	massive	strong/not stocky or bulky
Hands	large	not specifically reported
Eyes	yellowish/amber, wide apart	oval or almond-shaped
Body Cover	grayish-brown hair, longer on head	maned hair like leaves or scales; spikes
Footprints	three-toed (possibly four)	three-toed
Actions	walk, swim, climb, jump	walk upright, swim
Behavior	passive and aggressive	aggressive
Eating Habits	omnivorous	carnivorous
Noise	screams, growls	singsong vocalization
Smell	2 reports indicate foul	not specifically reported
Time of Day	diurnal/nocturnal	primarily nocturnal
	Sasquatch	Mississippi Swamp Ape
Location	Pacific Northwest	Mississippi swamp
Environment	forest	swamp/forest
Height	7-8 feet	7-8 ft
Weight	400 lbs.	400 lbs.
Body	massive	massive
Hands	not reported specifically	large
Eyes	not reported specifically	greenish/yellow
Body Cover	reddish-brown/black hair, not on face	dark brown or black hair, not on face
Footprints	five-toed, human-like	three-toed
Actions	walk upright, swim	walk upright, swim
Behavior	primarily passive	sometimes aggressive
Eating Habits	omnivorous	uncertain/definitely eats veg.
Noise	screams	screams, growls, whistles
Smell	foul	foul
Time of Day	primarily nocturnal	diurnal/nocturnal
	Florida Skunk Ape	Arkansas Fouke Monster
Location	Florida Everglades	Boggy Creek - Fouke, AR
Environment	marsh/swamp/savanna/forest	swamp
Height	7-8 feet	6 1/2 - 7 feet
Weight	350+ lbs.	550 lbs.
Body	massive	massive
Hands	not reported specifically	with claws
Eyes	glowing, sunk into face	red/glowing
Body Cover	dark brown/black hair, less on face	dark brown or black long hair
Footprints	five-toed, human-like	three-toed
Actions	walk upright, run, sit	walk upright
Behavior	peaceful and elusive	aggressive
Eating Habits	not reported specifically	uncertain/kills animals
Noise	yelps, howls, screams, grunts	screams, whistles, howls
Smell	foul	foul
Time of Day	diurnal/nocturnal	primarily nocturnal

classification systems for humanoid primates. These will be discussed more thoroughly in a later chapter, but at present one category of classification demands attention.

According to Loren Coleman and Patrick Huyghe, based on initial ideas expressed by Mark A. Hall, the Merbeing is the category of primate which encompasses the Honey Island Swamp Monster (158-9). Further examination of the Merbeing characteristics will demonstrate to what extent features stemming from Honey Island Swamp Monster personal experience narratives coincide with cryptozoological conclusions. According to Coleman and Huyghe, two subclasses of Merbeings exist: marine and freshwater. The Honey Island Swamp Monster would fall into the freshwater category. Freshwater Merbeings are characterized most predominantly by “an angular foot with a high instep and three pointed toes.” The freshwater Merbeings are also often discovered “venturing onto land and are far more aggressive and dangerous, being carnivorous, than their calmer marine cousins” (Coleman and Huyghe 37). Coleman and Huyghe provide this comparison between the two subclasses of Merbeings:

Merbeings vary in height from dwarf to man-sized. Their bodies are strong, but not stocky or bulky. The marine variety has very smooth skin, sometimes very short “fur,” while the freshwater variety occasionally has patchy hair growths that appear “like leaves” or “scaly.” In both subclasses, the hair is often maned, though some exhibit almost complete hair cover . . . Merbeings in general have eyes that are usually oval or almond-shaped, perhaps due to their watery origins. These mostly nocturnal creatures have a singsong vocalization, which has been reported almost universally from Eurasia to Africa. (37-38)

Additionally, freshwater Merbeings “often display a row of spikes down along the back, a rather uncommon but not unknown feature among primates. When threatened, the

spikes stand up so a predator can't bite the [Merbeing] on the neck. . . . So much for primates not having weird digits and spines on their backs" (Coleman and Huyghe 39).

These findings have been assimilated based on a wide range of materials including "footprint finds, physical evidence, and eyewitness sightings, of course, but also native traditions, native art, old news accounts, as well as folklore and legend" (Coleman and Huyghe 14). Interesting and significant to the experience-centered study of the Honey Island Swamp Monster are the similarities and differences between these characteristics and those identified through examination of personal experience narratives (see Table 2).

Comparison Between Merbeing and Honey Island Swamp Monster

The Merbeing as explained by Coleman and Huyghe and the Honey Island Swamp Monster as characterized by personal experience narratives do exhibit similarities. Both inhabit regions near the water. Although a swampy environment is not included as significant to the Merbeing, the freshwater varieties are reported to venture onto land. The second significant similarity is the footprint. Both the Merbeing and Honey Island Swamp Monster leave three-toed footprints. The commonalities end there.

Based on the information collected from personal experience narratives, there are many differences between informants' reports of the Honey Island Swamp Monster and the Merbeing as described by Coleman and Huyghe. The freshwater Merbeing is described as "aggressive and dangerous," but the Honey Island Swamp Monster exhibits only occasional aggression, according to informants (Coleman and Huyghe 37). The conclusion that the Merbeing is carnivorous also differs from informant opinions that the

Honey Island Swamp Monster is omnivorous. While Merbeings “vary in height from dwarf to man-sized,” the Honey Island Swamp Monster has been reported to stand from five to eight feet tall (Coleman and Huyghe 37). Coleman and Huyghe describe Merbeings as having strong bodies but “not stocky or bulky” (37). This contrasts informants’ reports that the Honey Island Swamp Monster exhibits massive physical features. No narrative I located described the Honey Island Swamp Monster as having “patchy hair growths that appear ‘like leaves’ or ‘scaly,’” but these are characteristics attributed to the Merbeing (Coleman and Huyghe 37). Similarly, no informant described the Honey Island Swamp Monster as having hair that was maned. However, several informants did depict the creature as having longer hair on its head. The eyes also provide a topic of dissension. None of the narratives I collected included a description of oval or almond-shaped eyes. Their portrayals included amber eyes set wide apart. Reports of the creatures’ vocal sounds also differ. Screams and howls are attributed to the Honey Island Swamp Monster, but not a “singsong vocalization” (Coleman and Huyghe 39). Finally, I have located no reports that depict the Honey Island Swamp Monster as having “a row of spikes down along the back” (Coleman and Huyghe 39). So, it seems as if, at least partially, cryptozoological conclusions and experience-centered ones are at odds.

Table 3: List of Primary and Secondary Features with Corresponding Narratives**Primary Features**

1. **Experience occurs in the Honey Island Swamp region – all narratives**
 - A. Honey Island/Honey Island Swamp – 1, 2, 4-6, 10-12, 14, 15-19, 23, 25-28, 30, 31
 - B. Pearl River – 3, 7-9, 13, 20, 24, 26, 29, 32
 - C. near Bogachita – 14
 - D. Fury place – 21
 - E. river going to Honey Island Swamp – 21, 22
 - F. Perlington, Mississippi
 - G. Napoleon – 21, 22
 - H. Nancy Flats – 24
 - I. Opossum Walk – 25

2. **Experience occurs while witness is intentionally involved in an outdoor activity in the swamp – 1-3, 5-12, 14-32**
 - A. hunting – 2, 6, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31
 1. bow hunting – 24, 25, 29
 - B. camping – 10, 11, 16, 19, 21
 - C. fishing – 3, 7, 8, 9, 17
 - D. trapping – 5, 12
 - E. sleeping – 20, 32
 - F. looking for camp – 1, 27
 - G. patrolling rivers – 23

3. **Sighting – 1-14, 20, 22-27, 29, 30, 32, partial 21**

4. **Experience includes the impression of a humanoid primate – 1-4, 6, 9-14, 20-22, 24-27, 29, 30, 32**
 - 4.1 Bipedal creature - 1-4, 6, 9-14, 20-22, 24-27, 29, 30, 32
 - A. stands on two feet – 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 20, 21, 28, 32
 - B. on two legs – 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 14, 20-24, 26, 28, 29, 32
 - 4.2 Hairy creature - 1-4, 6, 9-14, 20-22, 24-27, 29, 30, 32
 - A. color – 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32
 1. gray/grayish – 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 26, 27, 29
 2. brownish-black – 21, 26, 29
 3. grayish/brown – 24
 4. dark colored, like a black man – 25
 5. dark – 20, 30, 32
 6. brown – 20, 32

- B. hair – 2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 30, 32
 - 1. short fur – 2, 6, 10, 12, 27
 - 2. hairy – 9, 21, 24, 26, 30
 - 3. longer hair on head – 1, 2, 27
 - a. hair on head hung two feet – 2, 27
 - b. long hair on head – 1
 - 4. shaggy fur – 20, 32
 - 5. bristly and coarse, longer than a hog – 24
 - 6. no hair around nose and eyes - 30

5. **Experience includes the impression of a sizable creature** – 1-4, 6, 9, 11-14, 20, 22, 24-30, 32

- A. build – 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 13, 20, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32
 - 1. big – 1, 9, 11, 20, 26, 27, 32
 - a. massive – 1, 27
 - b. large – 9, 11, 26, 32
 - c. monstrous – 11
 - d. solid frame – 26
 - e. very big – 29
 - f. muscular - 30
 - 2. broad shoulders – 1, 2, 6, 13
 - a. tremendous chest and shoulders – 1, 2
 - b. large, man-like shoulders – 6
 - c. broad shoulders - 13
 - 3. slender loins – 1
- B. height – 1-4, 12, 14, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30
 - 1. 7 feet – 1, 2, 4, 12, 27
 - 2. taller than me (him) – 3, 14
 - 3. 5 feet – 24, 29
 - 4. 5-6 feet – 25
 - 5. 6-7 feet – 30
 - 6. 4 feet (little Bigfoot) – 22
- C. weight – 2, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30
 - 1. 400 pounds – 2, 28
 - 2. 250-300 pounds - 26
 - 3. 190-200 pounds – 24
 - 4. over 100 pounds – 25
 - 5. heavy - 30

6. **Experiences causes fear in the witness** – 1, 3, 6-9, 11, 14-18, 21, 27, 28, 30
- A. scared the heck out of me – 1
 - B. trembling - 3
 - C. sleeplessness - 3
 - D. a hair-raising experience – 3, 16
 - E. scariest feeling – 6, 16
 - F. eerie sensation – 9
 - G. unhappy/upset – 9, 21
 - H. shot it – 11
 - I. ran away – 14, 28
 - J. wide-eyed and scared – 27
 - K. dumb-struck – 30
 - L. gut feeling - 7
 - M. jump up – 8
 - N. “on guard” – 15
 - O. spooky – 16, 18

Secondary Features

Witnesses’ reactions to experience

1. report experience to others – 1, 7, 11, 13, 21, 22, 24-29
2. follow creature – 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 23, 26, 27
3. retreat – 3, 6, 7, 14, 19, 21, 24, 25, 29
4. prepare weapon – 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 19, 20, 32
 - A. rifle – 1, 3, 4, 10, 19, 20, 32
 - B. hatchet - 9
5. watch creature – 2, 5, 13, 20, 22, 24, 25, 32
6. return next day – 4, 15, 21, 25, 28
7. fire gun – 3, 4, 10, 11, 20
8. be still and silent – 12, 18, 21, 30
9. do not sleep – 3, 10, 16
10. scream – 10, 20, 32
11. look at prints – 20, 30, 32
12. collides with creature while in boat - 7, 8, 23
13. never return to spot – 6, 10
14. call out to creature – 7, 13
15. jump up/back – 8, 10
16. make plaster casts – 15, 31
17. build fire – 16, 17

Additional reactions that only occurred once

- a. sleep with weapon – 21
- b. get flashlight – 3
- c. turn boat motor off – 7
- d. let dogs loose – 19

Witnesses' Impressions

18. Impressions of sounds in nature – 9, 10, 18, 19, 22, 24-26
 - A. presence of sounds in nature – 9, 10, 19, 22, 24, 25
 1. croaking frogs – 9
 2. hoot of owl – 9
 3. thunder - 10
 4. tin roof trembling - 10
 5. red squirrel – 22, 25
 - a. red squirrel chattering – 22
 - b. red squirrel flew out of tree and ran – 25
 6. dogs barking – 19, 20, 32
 - B. absence of sound – 18, 24, 26
 1. birds got quiet – awful quiet – 24
 2. no strange noises – 26
 3. a loud silence - 18
19. Impressions of creature's behavior - 1, 5, 10, 20, 21, 32
 - A. unafraid – 20, 32
 - B. mysterious – 1
 - C. bizarre – 10
 - D. not friendly – 10
 - E. non-aggressive – 5
 - F. intelligent – 21
20. Impressions of creature's eyes – 1, 3, 4, 20, 27, 32
 - A. large – 1
 - B. amber/yellow in color – 1, 3, 4, 27
 - C. reflected/glowed silver/white in light – 20, 32
 - D. set wide apart - 4
21. Impressions of an odor – 15, 21, 24
 - A. smell of creature like a water moccasin – 21, 24
 - B. smell of dead boars – 15
22. Impressions of creature's arms – 13, 24, 25
 - A. arms hang below knees – 13
 - B. arms hang close to knees – 24
 - C. arms hung down - 25
23. Impressions of creature's legs – 21, 25, 27
 - A. visible kneecap – 21
 - B. too short to be human – 25
 - C. slender - 27
24. Impressions of creature's hands – 10, 13
 - A. large – 10
 - B. human-like hands - 13
25. Sense of Presence – 9, 19

Additional impressions of creature that occurred in only one narrative each:

- a. age: young one - 11
- b. head: different shape
- c. nose: flat nose – 24
- d. clothing: no clothes - 25
- e. shape: comparable to human but large – 26
- f. strength: very strong because pulled stump out of earth – 30
- g. teeth: two rows of teeth – 2
- h. types: more than one kind – 5

Creature's Actions

- 26. makes sounds – 3, 6, 9, 10, 16-21, 24, 29, 32
 - A. growls - 3
 - B. tearing trees – 6, 18
 - 1. tearing tree bark – 6
 - 2. tree limbs snapping - 18
 - C. eating noises – 6, 20, 32
 - 1. smacking – 6
 - 2. chewing/slurping - 32
 - D. movement through woods – 9, 18, 21, 29
 - 1. crashing through brush – 9
 - 2. moving like armadillos or hog – 21
 - 3. ran off – 29
 - 4. heavy walking - 18
 - E. screams – 10, 16, 17, 19
 - 1. shrieking scream – 10
 - 2. wailing cry getting closer – 10, 16, 17, 19
 - 3. “spine shivering territorial howls” – 17
 - 4. “screaming almost shook leaves off trees” – 17
 - 5. irate, loud bellow - 19
 - F. sounds getting closer – 10, 16, 17, 19, 21
 - 1. wailing cry getting closer – 16, 17, 19, 20
 - 2. heard it getting closer – 21
 - 3. cry seeming to circle – 19
 - G. movement without sound – 24, 25
 - H. hit a tree - 29
- 27. retreats – 1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 20, 22-25, 27, 30, 32
 - A. flees into thicket – 1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 27
 - B. walks off – 22, 30
 - C. turns around and leaves – 25
 - D. walks out of water into woods – 23
- 28. makes eye contact – 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 25, 27, 30, 32
- 29. swims – 5, 7, 8, 13, 23
- 30. runs – 9, 12, 20, 29, 32

- 31. jumps – 9, 12, 14
 - A. jumps into water – 8
 - B. jumps over bayou – 12
 - C. jumps out at him – 14
- 32. crosses a slough – 6, 29
- 33. eats vegetables – 20, 32

Additional creature actions that occur in only one narrative each:

- a. makes growling noise – 4
- b. rips tree bark – 6
- c. eats bugs - 6
- d. hits a tree while running - 29
- e. smashes fist through window – 10
- f. roams in rain – 10
- g. climbs in tree – 11
- h. dies – 11
- i. avoids eye contact – 13
- j. gets on “all fours” - 14
- k. stalks person - 21
- l. peeks head around tree – 22
- m. never sees informant – 24
- n. scratches back of neck - 25
- o. walks erratically from right to left – 26
- p. pulls a cypress stump from out of the ground and throws it into the river – 30
- q. limps - 7

Witnesses’ Emotional Responses

- 34. awe – 1, 20, 22, 27, 30, 32
 - A. in awe – 1, 27
 - B. surprised – 20, 32
 - C. amazed – 22
 - D. freeze - 30
- 35. nervousness – 9, 10, 19, 29
 - A. uneasy – 9
 - B. tense – 9
 - C. nervous - 10
 - D. not comfortable - 29
- 36. disbelief – 2, 25

Time of Experience

- 37. Before 1980 – 1, 27, 9, 15, 28, 20, 32
 - A. 1963 – 1, 27
 - B. 1973 – 9
 - C. 1974 – 15, 28
 - D. 1975 – 20, 32

38. After 1980 – 21, 22, 24, 25, 30
 A. 1980-1981 - 30
 B. 1984-1985 - 25
 C. 20 years ago – 21
 D. about a year later – 22
 E. 15-20 years ago – 24
39. dusk - 3, 4, 10, 16, 19, 25
 A. nightfall – 3, 10
 B. dusk – 4
 C. 30 minutes before dark - 25
 D. just before sunset - 19
40. night – 7, 9, 17, 20, 23, 32
 A. 9:00 p. m. – 17
 B. full moon – 7, 9
41. afternoon – 24, 26, 29
 A. 4:00 p. m. – 26
 B. 3:00 p. m. – 29
42. morning – 11, 21
43. Autumn
 A. bow hunting season – 22, 24
 B. October – 24
 C. opening day of deer season – 19
44. Summer – 9, 20, 32

Conscious comparison/contrast to other creature

45. general likenesses to mystery primate – 3, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26
 A. like a Bigfoot – 21, 24
 B. like a little Bigfoot – 22
 C. like a Rugaru – 24
 D. like a Sasquatch – 24
 E. like the Skunk Ape in Florida – 24
 F. a booger – 3
 G. some type of Bigfoot - 21
 H. comparisons to swamp monster – 18, 25, 26
 1. could be the Honey Island Swamp Monster – 18, 25
 2. perhaps not a swamp monster - 26
46. likeness to what Harlan Ford saw – 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 14
47. contrasts to known animals – 15, 24, 25, 28, 29
 A. bear – 24, 25
 1. not right head shape for bear - 24
 2. nose too flat for bear – 24
 3. not a bear - 25

- B. hog – 24, 29
 - 1. hair longer than hog but bristly like hog – 24
 - 2. not a hog – 29
 - C. alligator –stronger than an alligator – 15, 28
 - 48. comparisons/contrasts to human – 13, 20, 25, 26, 32
 - A. looks human-like – 13, 20, 26, 32
 - B. swam like human - 13
 - C. like a black man – 25
 - D. legs too short to be human – 25
 - E. definitely not human
 - 49. general comparisons to known primates – 4, 10, 21
 - A. like an ape – 4
 - B. different species than ape - 21
 - C. like a baboon – 10
 - D. like a monkey – 11
 - 50. sound comparisons – 10, 19, 21
 - A. sounds different from any other animal – 10
 - B. sounds like armadillo – 21
 - C. sounds like hog – 21
 - D. sounds like a mule - 19
 - 51. smell comparisons –like water moccasin – 21, 24
- Additional comparison that occurred in only one narrative:*
- a. Unable to compare – “like nothing we’d ever seen before” - 2

Physical evidence

- 52. footprints – 1, 7, 15, 20, 23, 28, 30-32
 - A. three-toed - 7, 15, 23, 28, 31
 - B. five-toed very large, human-like prints – 20, 30
 - C. washed away next day – 1, 7
 - D. made plaster casts – 15, 28
 - E. different sizes – 31
 - F. tracks like Harlan Ford had seen before – 7, 15, 28
 - 53. two dead boars – 15, 28
- Additional physical evidence reported in only one narrative each:*
- a. oak tree with huge hole – 21
 - b. blood - 7
 - c. broken limbs - 15
 - d. scattered dirt – 15
 - e. body of dead humanoid primate - 11
- 54. **Prior knowledge of tradition** – 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15, 18, 25, 28, 31
 - A. Harlan Ford’s second, third, and fourth encounters – 3, 4, 15, 28, 31
 - B. familiar with Ford’s experiences – 6, 7, 10, 14

Chapter Three: Belief Genres

Introduction

Since the beginning of folklore studies, folklorists have attempted to categorize their materials into genres in order to understand their collections more completely. Genre studies of folk beliefs did not gain popularity until much later when folk beliefs came to be accepted as a significant area of study. Since that time, folklorists such as Honko have argued that identifying and characterizing genres substantially contribute to folk belief studies (7, 18). The recognition of genres proves significant because the ways in which beliefs are transmitted often serve as defining elements of the tradition. The Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition exemplifies the importance of genre. In fact, without exploring the belief genres utilized by individuals who maintain the belief tradition, the presence of two distinct strands of this tradition would remain difficult to observe. Examining the genres utilized to perpetuate beliefs about the Honey Island Swamp Monster will help define the folk and commodified traditions.

Folk Tradition vs. Commodified Tradition

Since Harlan Ford's first reported sighting, many individuals have contributed in various ways to the perpetuation of this belief tradition. My fieldwork ultimately led me to the conclusion that the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition has developed into two distinct traditions; I have labeled them folk and commodified. Although these two traditions revolve around beliefs about the same creature, they have evolved in very different ways. Based on my research, I believe the folk tradition arose most directly from individuals who have had experiences with the creature and who believe in its

existence. Thus, the folk tradition is perpetuated primarily by individuals who have personally encountered the creature and others with fairly direct links to those with firsthand experiences, and these persons seem to be at least open to the belief that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is real. Those who maintain the folk tradition employ various types of recognizable belief genres. In contrast, the commodified belief tradition refers to the elements of the tradition that have developed to suit a purpose other than the sharing of experience. The foundation of this tradition is not experience but utility. Books, documentaries, television specials, newspaper articles, tourist attractions, tour companies, scientists, journalists, enthusiasts, and the media all serve to perpetuate this tradition. Many employ the tradition for promotional purposes; some intend simply to inform. Others utilize the Honey Island Swamp Monster in order to entertain. Although the applications are varied, what separates this tradition from that of the folk is use. Additionally, the genres utilized to perpetuate this tradition are less identifiable according to recognized standards of genre definition. Although very different, these two strands continue to develop alongside one another, and a look at the belief genres people employ to perpetuate them will help us understand them further.

Folk Tradition

Memorates

Personal experience serves as the foundation for the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk tradition. Because of this, it is through memorates and fabulates that we can achieve the most accurate portrayal of the folk tradition. Similarly, Milligan asserts that "Bigfoot lore is usually communicated in memorates. But these memorates are only

one part of the communication process . . .” (91). In my own words, memorates are supernatural personal experience narratives told by the person who had the experience. Although there has been much historical debate over the meaning of memorates, most contemporary folklorists agree with this general definition. Von Sydow introduced memorates, originally from the German “memorat,” as “narratives of personal happenings” (87). Degh and Vazsonyi expand this definition to include the fact that “the story in question could be transmitted to another only by the person who had the experience. . . . The classical definition, therefore, would mean in its strictest sense that a memorate can be known only by that single person and respectively by as many people as heard it from him” (“Memorate” 226). Pentikäinen argues further that a memorate cannot be defined by transmission alone, but also by content and style. “Memorate would then be exclusively the account of a supranormal experience” (220-1). According to Honko, “memorates are a valuable source for the study of folk [belief] primarily because they reveal those situations in which supernatural tradition was actualized and began directly to influence behavior” (10).

Folklorists have identified various characteristics of the memorate which can clarify its usage. In “Modern Rationalism and the Structure of Supernatural Experience Narratives,” Diane Goldstein argues that ten features of memorate set it apart as its own genre:

1. excessive detail
2. reality testing
3. not stereotypical
4. contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary
5. experimentation
6. issues of credibility

7. contracted interpretation
8. breakdown in fluency at crucial point in narrative
9. linear stories with very little character elaboration
10. caution indicating the informant did not jump to supernatural conclusions (218-223)

More specific to the hairy monster tradition, Milligan argues that the element of surprise leading to the numinous experience constantly appears in Bigfoot accounts (92). The element of surprise indicates that informants were not expecting or seeking a supernatural experience, and thus it asserts greater credibility to the witness. For now, these elements will provide a point from which to build our understanding of the use of memorate to perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk belief tradition.

These memorates provide the most significant evidence for those who participate in the folk tradition. During my fieldwork, I recorded memorates from three individuals and located seven additional memorates documented by other researchers. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Larry Buehler, and it provides a good example of the stories that live in folk tradition. I have labeled Buehler's voice as LB and my own as FL.

LB: Well, I don't know exact dates. All I know is that it was bow season, so it had to be in October. Me and Danny White, a friend of mine, we were bow hunting down over in Nancy Flats, that's a little area out in the woods not too far from the interstate, I-10 going to Louisiana, [?] the river there. It was an afternoon, kind of late. It wasn't quite dark, and Danny went hunting in this one spot, and I went about 100-150 yards away from him and hunted in another spot called the big flat. And in that flat got them little plants that grew up like a tube with a little hat on it. It catches bugs. And just beyond that flat was a little pin-oak ridge that had a lot of deer tracks and acorn signs there, so I got up in a tree over there. And I was there for maybe 30 to 40 minutes, maybe a little longer, and I noticed all the birds got real, real quiet. There was a lot of birds, you got birds making noise and stuff, you know, and [?] it's usually when someone walks in the area or something of that nature, animals hush up,

you know, and I got to looking around, thought if I could see somebody maybe I'd whistle at them, let them know I was deer hunting, whatever. And I just noticed it got awful quiet. Then some time passed by, and this thing come walking up out of the woods, didn't make no noise. I just, it was already out in that little open area flat, about 45 yards, 50 yards from me. Wasn't far. I'd say it's about five foot tall. It was hairy. Never did see me. And he walked parallel to me but away from me, you know, a right angle away from me. And I never seen nothing like it; I been hunting a long time, and I looked and looked and looked and said, "Man, it's a bear, no it's not a bear, don't have the right head shape, don't have the right move." Now I'm looking at it, the hair don't look right on it, and as it got a little piece away from me, about 70 yards, the wind was blowing right, I noticed I could smell a funny smell. I thought it was a water moccasin or a snake around there, you know. And I think, you know that smells just like a water moccasin. I got to looking around and I got to thinking, well, you know, that whatever that was come walking through here a while ago, maybe it was it stinking, you know. I didn't know for sure. Anyway, that thing got out of sight; I sat there just for a few minutes more. Then I got down out of the tree. And it wasn't even dark yet. And I wasn't really scared, you know, because I used to stay in the woods long after dark. I'd come walking out of there; I don't even carry a flashlight. And by that time I heard some noise. And I looked coming out of the woods, here comes Danny White. And he's a good hunter, too. He stays in the woods late. And I knew it was him; I seen him coming through the trees. And I could hear him, but I never did hear this creature come through the woods or walk up behind me or leave or nothing. And I seen Danny, and I said, "Danny! You seen what I seen?" Because it come basically from his direction, and he said, "Yeah, I did." And me and him both just picked up our deer stands and left, and it wasn't even dark yet, you know. I, I can't say we was really scared. It was just a different experience, I should say, you know. I, we been back hunting in there a couple of times, and I ain't never seen it before. And we come back and told some people, you know, like coon-asses they call them, they don't call it Sasquatch. They call it Rugaru. A swamp monster. Some of them Louisiana people, you know, I heard them called that, and I was telling people I seen a Rugaru or a Bigfoot, you know. Somebody else come by and me and Danny talked about it and asked. I only remember about the interview. They talked to us about it. I don't remember who it was or nothing. It's been a fair piece of good time, you know. It's passing on 15 or 20 years; I don't know how long it's been. Anyway, but they say, "How can you remember this?" Well, it's just like hunting anytime, you know, when you kill your first deer or you kill something that you're really proud of. It plays back in your mind automatically. And I never forgot it, you know? And this fellow called me up last night, and

he asked me the same question. And I was telling him, and he said, "Well, what color was it?" And I said, well, it was kind of grayish-brown. And the hair looks coarse, rough. It wasn't a fine hair like a horse's tail or a horse, or nothing like that. But it was kind of like bristly like a hog, but more coarse, longer, you know. And it had a foul odor to it. That's all I can put that odor with it; you know what I'm saying. After it passed, but see that was just the way the wind was blowing. And I was downwind; of course, I was hunting. From where I sat up at 'til he got out in front of me, I couldn't smell it. And, Danny, you know, Danny talked about that it smelled kind of bad to him, too. And there's a few people around town they joked and laughed at us and everything. There was some other boys that camped down there in log town, I must say 30 years old, some of them right in their 50s. And they love catfish and to drink. And they reported seeing this creature running through the swamp down there, and everybody said, "Oh, don't worry about those boys. They're nothing but a bunch of drunks, a bunch of winos. They be drinking that beer, they don't know what they seen. They just know some rumors and all kinds of stuff. Well you see, they can't say that about me or Danny because neither one of us drink. You know what I'm saying? So we saw something, and them people said well, that's so-and-so running around there with a damn suit on. I said, well, and then I had people ask me, would you have shot it? And I said, no. Not unless he decided he wanted to get up in the same tree with me, and then one of us is going to have to get hurt. [Laughter] I don't know what this was, and it ain't got no business getting up in the same tree with me. That'd be the only way I'd have shot it. You know, just as far as shooting it, saying I killed it and seeing what it was, nah. I wasn't that curious about it . . . It wasn't a bear because its nose was too flat, you see, I had a good look at it. 45 to 50 yards isn't very far, and it wasn't dark. It was early yet, you know. I still had another hour of daylight before it even got late. And I never seen nothing like it, I haven't seen nothing since, you know. Now, I've got to watching TV, and you see different things on TV, yes, and I'd say it looks similar to that one that guy did in Florida. I don't know. Have you ever seen the one that guy taped in Florida? He got a picture of one.

FL: Is it called a skunk ape?

LB: I think so. That's what this guy in Florida does call it, the skunk ape. I believe you're right. And it kind of looked like that. And everybody say, well how tall it was, and I say just estimating from where I was, at ground level from a tree as it passed by, I'm going to say five-foot, five-and-a-half-foot tall. It wasn't very tall because I'm a six-foot person, you see? And what else I noticed about it was its arms were longer than mine. Like mine hit me just about the pockets on my pants. But this one here came closer to its knees. Understand what I'm saying? And estimate its weight? Heck, I don't know. I guess it weighed like me, you know,

190 pounds, 200 pounds, somewhere in that area, you know. And it was just hair because I couldn't really tell body structure because it is hairy. But I'd say it was five foot, in the neighborhood of 180 pounds. Everybody said, "You didn't go down there and look for tracks?" And I said, no, the only thing I had in my mind was getting my deer stand up, putting it in the truck, and going on to the house and hunt another day. [Laughter] I didn't know what it was. You know, you get to talking with different ones who I saw this and I saw this and maybe somebody else saw this, and they got people that coon hunt at nighttime. And I talked to different ones if they ever saw it, you know, and some people make fun of you and that kind of mess. But I don't know, you know. I just let them talk. I say y'all believe what you want to believe and don't believe what you want. I'm just telling you what I saw, and that's just the way it is, you know. I don't drink, so did I see it? I did see it. In my eyes, yes I saw it. And it was real, whatever it was. And if somebody walk up to me and say, "Do you believe they exist?" And I say whatever species of animal this is, yes they exist. How come they don't see no more of them? I don't know, you know. I can't answer those questions, but on that particular day, I definitely saw that one. (Buehler)

This narrative exemplifies many of the elements that are often associated with memorate and that serve to define this folk tradition. Buehler includes an incredible amount of detail while narrating his experience, including vivid descriptions of where and when he was hunting, the plant life around him, various animal actions, and the creature itself. His experience is unique, and while it shares features with other people's experiences, no other encounter has mirrored his own. Buehler consciously compares this creature (the extraordinary) to a bear (the ordinary), insisting it was not any creature he had ever seen before or since but demonstrating that he did not jump to a supernatural conclusion about what he saw. His narration is quite linear, and on several occasions he attempts to demonstrate credibility by calling his lack of alcohol to attention. Buehler's experience and his narration of it exemplify many of the characteristics of the Honey

Island Swamp Monster folk belief tradition, and examining other memorates will further clarify the folk tradition.

Much of the memorate folk tradition has been perpetuated orally by people living near the Honey Island Swamp, and most accounts that have been reported through other forms of media are not in memorate form. However, I have located a few exceptions to this rule. The documentary film *In Search of Swamp Monsters* in many ways perpetuates the commodified tradition, but it also includes interviews with several eyewitnesses that focus on experiential evidence and strengthen the folk tradition. Perry Ford reports his experience with the creature in this way:

My wife and I were on a fishing trip about four years ago, and about nine o'clock that night, I heard this peculiar noise that screamed out down the river, I'd say half a mile away. My wife wanted me to build a fire, so, uh, I was out gathering wood, you know, to build a big fire, and, uh, it screamed again. This time it was closer. I'd say it was, uh, maybe 300 yards from us this time. It really, really scared her. It scared me. I tried not to let her know it scared me, you know, but, uh, so I went ahead and kept on building the fire and less than ten minutes later it squalled again, and this time it was right on top of us. It almost shook the leaves off the trees. (*In Search*)

Like Buehler's excessive use of detail, Ford includes seemingly "unnecessary" detail, which, according to Honko, serves as a significant perceptual feature to memorate narrative (11). Additionally, his narration clearly depicts a numinous encounter. His breakdown in fluency and use of metaphor further demonstrate the ineffable nature of the experience.

The World Wide Web, like the documentary film mentioned above, serves as a tool to disseminate both the commodified and folk traditions. Websites which maintain folk traditions are those that are founded in experience. Groups such as the Bigfoot

Research Organization employ the Internet to share individual experiences and thus perpetuate folk tradition. For example, this memorate of an experience in 1993 was reported by an anonymous source and recorded by a member of the Gulf Coast Bigfoot Research Organization:

I was squirrel hunting the Pearl River (Honey Island Swamp) one evening around 4:00 p.m., when I exited my vehicle and proceeded on the trail. I sat down a few yards off of the trail and did observe another hunter (wearing green camo) walking past me. I hunted here for a short time and began walking the trail. I began walking and observed a large brown (humanlike) creature several hundred yards in front of me. I followed it on the trail for about 3 - 4 minutes and observed this "thing" walking erratically from right to left as it proceeded further onto the trail. It was comparable to a large human (in size and shape, but solid in frame) and appeared to be hairy, but I cannot be sure. It was brown from head to foot and was about 250 – 300 pounds. It definitely was not the other hunter . . . ("Man Sees Bigfoot")

The informant continues:

To my knowledge, there were no other hunters in this particular area, except for the one I mentioned, who was wearing green. I know for a fact this was very odd and definitely out of the ordinary. I tried to dismiss what I saw, but couldn't, because I definitely know what I observed. I don't believe it was a human being from my observations. I told a few people of what I witnessed, but they did not believe it. I did not hear any strange noises, just visual observation and all I observed was the rear of this "thing." If you need any additional information, feel free to contact me. I'm not saying what I saw was a swamp monster, but it was definitely strange, and I mean strange. I am curious to know whether anyone else witnessed a strange occurrence like this in this area. Please let me know. ("Man Sees Bigfoot")

Again, this informant has included a great deal of detail, and he/she has made an effort not to jump to supernatural conclusions. Reasoning is evident, and the informant seems to be quite cautious and refrains from interpreting the experience.

Memorates Within Secondary Narratives

Only two written sources I have located include experience narratives of the Honey Island Swamp Monster: *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster* by Dana Holyfield and *Monsters of North America* by Elwood D. Baumann. Several memorates appear in these sources framed within secondary narratives. In other words, Holyfield and Baumann incorporate memorates into the fabulates they are telling themselves. A fabulate, in my own words, is a third person memorate, told by an individual who heard the memorate from the one who experienced it. We will explore fabulates in detail later. This example is an excerpt entitled “The Rainy Night” from Holyfield’s book and relates the experiences of her informant Freddy:

It was a camping trip never to forget, according to Freddy, who is a true swamp pioneer. Freddy wasn’t trying to gain anything, especially not fame, since he tries to keep a low profile on his little houseboat in the swamp. He took a deep draw from his cigarette and exhaled before saying, “I know there is something out there that’s not like anything you’ll ever see at the zoo. They’re intelligent creatures too.” I asked Freddy if he thought it was the same thing that Harlan and Billy had seen out there, and he scratched his chin in thought and replied, “I’d be willing to bet it was.” (*Encounters* 26-28)

Freddy begins his narrative:

“I had taken this gal out to a friend’s camp in the heart of Honey Island Swamp. Nobody hardly used the place and we thought we’d have a nice quiet vacation in the wilderness. When nightfall came, it wasn’t quiet at all. First we heard a shrieking scream that raised the hair on my head. That gal I was with got real nervous and asked me to take her back to civilization. I told her it wouldn’t be a good idea to leave in the night. I told her the noise was probably a bobcat, hoping she’d calm down. The wailing cry came closer to the camp, and it wasn’t like any animal I’d ever heard in the swamp before. Trying not to alarm the lady, I checked the shells in my shotgun. A storm moved in on us and it started raining real hard. Lightening and thunder trembled the tin roof.” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 26-28)

Freddy continues:

“The animal cries stopped. We thought the rain sent the creature on its way. But suddenly a fist smashed through the glass window. It wasn’t a human fist. It was a large hand covered with grayish fur. We both jumped back. The fist drew back and disappeared into the night woods. That gal began to holler and I told her to keep quiet. I grabbed my shotgun and looked out the broken window and could see a group of baboon looking animals roaming around in the rain. They seemed mad at us for being there. One of the big ones stood up and roared. That’s when I got a look at its face, and it wasn’t a baboon. It was a bizarre looking animal, and it didn’t look too friendly. I stuck my shotgun out the broken window and fired. They scattered.” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 26-28)

Freddy concludes his narrative in this way:

“I opened the door and fired into the darkness all around the camp, then I quickly went back inside to reload my gun. We listened and waited. The big ugly beasts didn’t return the rest of the night, but we didn’t sleep a wink. As soon as day broke, that gal made me take her home. I was pretty much ready to go myself and she never went camping with me again, and I can tell you that I never went to that camp again either.” (Holyfield, *Encounters* 26-28)

Although Holyfield’s introduction provides more entertaining aspects of storytelling, Freddy’s narrative clearly serves as a memorate of his encounter. Again, his narrative reveals detail along with elements of fear and awe, and he utilizes analogies to help him articulate the experience. Freddy consciously compares the creature he sees (the extraordinary) to a baboon (the ordinary) and disregards any equivalency.

Another example of a memorate framed within secondary narrative occurs in Baumann’s *Monsters of North America* and relates Harlan Ford’s first encounter with the Honey Island Swamp Monster:

Few people know the Honey Island Swamp better than Harlan Ford. He is an expert woodsman who has run trap lines, hunted, and fished throughout the entire area. It was while hunting with a friend that he first came face to face with the monster.

The two men were hunting on Honey Island itself. They were on a virtually unexplored part of the island. Ford says he doubts seriously that more than a dozen men have ever been in that section. The vegetation was so dense that they practically had to fight their way forward.

Finally, they broke through into a small clearing. “That’s when we saw the thing,” Ford recalls. “It must have heard us thrashing through the brush, but it was standing with its back to us. We both stood and stared. Neither of us had ever seen anything like it before, and we had trouble believing our eyes.” (67-68)

The narrative continues:

“Then the thing turned around and looked at us,” he went on. “It was ugly and sinister. Sort of like something out of a horror movie. I’m sure it was at least seven feet tall and it must have weighed four hundred pounds. The hair on the head hung down about two feet. The rest of it was covered with short, dingy, gray hair. Its chest and shoulders were massive. The face was square and mean, and I could see two rows of teeth in the powerful jaws. The thing must have stood staring at us for a full minute before it went tearing off into the woods.” (Baumann 67-68)

While serving to launch the narrative, Baumann’s introductory fabulate also lends credibility to Ford. Ford includes details about the creature in his memorate and attempts to describe the experience using various metaphors to articulate what seems to have been a numinous experience.

Fabulates

In addition to serving as framing devices for memorates, fabulates also work alone to perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk belief tradition. Before examining the fabulates themselves, it is necessary to understand more thoroughly the nature of the fabulate as it stands on its own. Von Sydow first identified fabulate, from the German “fabulat,” as a form of *sagn*, “a short, single-episodic tale, built, it is true, upon elements of real happenings and observations, but with this background of reality transformed by the inventive fantasy of the people” (87). He further identified belief

fabulates as being “associated with popular beliefs and often with persons, objects, etc., which as a criterion motive intended to confirm the truth of the story” (87). This original definition held much in common with legend, and folklorists have worked to distinguish the two more specifically. Contemporary definitions of fabulate relate it most directly to the memorate for clarification purposes. According to Degh and Vazsonyi, a memorate ceases to be a memorate when a second person (who originally heard the experience from the first who witnessed it) retells the narrative to a third. “If [the second person] does retell it, the narrative can no longer be called a memorate, even if it otherwise corresponds with the original plot almost to the word” (Degh and Vazsonyi, “Memorates” 226). In this case, “memorates are turned into fabulates: first-person stories become third-person stories” (Degh and Vazsonyi, “Memorates” 228). Goldstein clarifies that since a memorate is told by the person who had the experience, it represents one link in a storytelling chain. A fabulate, then, represents two links in the chain: first person to second person to third person. Goldstein describes a fabulate as “a personal experience narrative that it not told by the person who experienced it but told by someone very close to the person that experienced it” (Lecture 18 September). Therefore, for the purposes of this investigation, the term fabulate refers to a third person memorate which retains many (if not all) features of original memorate.

One of my informants, Harvey Hood, utilizes a fabulate to support and validate his own personal experience:

They was off in Napoleon, about a couple miles, by the way, there’s a river that flows through there that goes directly to the Honey Island Swamp. It was close to the river. They was hunting somewhere else close to the river, about a couple miles away, and it was bow season.

They was up in a tree stand with their bows, and his buddy was down probably about a quarter of a mile down from him in another tree stand. And all of a sudden, he said he was watching this squirrel, this red squirrel, and all of a sudden the red squirrel started chattering, and he looked to see what disturbed him. And he said he looked, and from behind a pine tree he seen two hands on a tree and a little head peeking over looking at him. And from what they said, it was a little Bigfoot. Like maybe four-foot tall or something like that. He said he was amazed. He watched it for a while, and then he seen the little guy turn around and walk through the woods. And right before sunset, his buddy come back, and he was all excited, saying “You ain’t going to believe what I seen.” And his partner said, “Well, I believe you cause I seen it too.” That was pretty wild. (Hood)

Coincidentally, this is a third-person version of the memorate I collected from Larry Buehler’s hunting partner, Danny White. Although the story has changed slightly during the retelling process, it still preserves many of the memorate characteristics. The numinous quality of the experience comes out through the fabulate, and the narrator retains the usage of many details.

Dana Holyfield also relates several fabulates in her book *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster*. One such narrative recounts the experience of her informant Dan. Although Holyfield employs one quote to reveal Dan’s words, the majority of the narrative is told in third-person form. Holyfield begins:

Dan is a swamp settler who had contact with a creature that he believed was the Swamp Monster. He had been out on the main Pearl River running trotlines one night and was heading back to his houseboat to skin the catfish. The moon was full so he wasn’t using his lights. Suddenly his boat hit something in the water that caused his motor to shut off. At first he thought it was a stump until he saw the silhouette of something crawl out of the river. When it stood up on two feet, he thought it might have been a person. He yelled, “Hey, are you okay?” Whatever it was didn’t answer. It just limped into the woods. Dan’s gut was that a human wouldn’t be swimming in that part of the river at dark. (*Encounters* 23-24)

Holyfield continues:

[Dan] turned on his light and shined it on the sand looking for a blood trail. There was some blood, but the footprints alongside it weren't human. They were the same types of tracks that Harlan had found back in 1974. Dan said, "I decided I better not go after it in the dark." He returned to his houseboat and told a friend who stopped by later that night to help him skin fish. They planned to go back in the morning and look for it. Unfortunately it rained that night and washed away any evidence that could have led them to the wounded entity. Dan hadn't told too many people about that night. Word spreads in a small town. He won't deny it if you asked him, but he's not the type to go around making up tall tales just for the impact. (*Encounters* 23-24)

Here again we see the use of detail to punctuate the unique experience, and Holyfield ends the fabulate with an attempt to illustrate Dan's credibility. The mention of the footprints indicates Dan's attempt to contrast between the ordinary and extraordinary and not to jump to supernatural conclusions.

Belief Legends

Legend also plays a role in perpetuating the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk belief tradition, but its role does not appear to be as significant as that of memorate and fabulate. Despite its apparently lesser role, the genre of belief legend has "considerable value as a reflector of folk belief" (Honko 105). Degh defines legend in the most literal sense as "a story that reports on a true occurrence, personally experienced by someone in the real world" (15). However, unlike memorates and fabulates, which report something that is/was experienced, a legend reports something that might have been/might be experienced: "Legends concern matters that touch directly upon the audience's own existence, that is, something they might experience themselves" (Klintberg 72). While memorates and fabulates are transmitted more locally, legends are disseminated on a

wider scale. The “friend of a friend” phenomenon present in legend transmission adds to the broader dissemination. Goldstein explains further that legends are third person narratives about experiences that did not occur to the person telling the story but happened to a person at a distance and could be true. Therefore, legends represent at least three links in the narrative chain (Goldstein, Lecture 18 September). Form (or perhaps formlessness) also distinguishes memorate and fabulate from legend. Klintberg explains that a legend “at first glance seems realistic, but a second look shows that it is in fact very stylized. The action is simple and highly visual, easy to remember and to pass on to third parties” (72). Degh and Vazsonyi agree that legends can be significantly influenced by stylistic narrative methods and complex performance devices (“Legends” 98, 101).

The belief legends that exist as part of the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk tradition, while often exhibiting stylistic features, retain the emphasis on personal experience. They are most often told about individuals who are at least three links away from the narrator and who are not identified by name. They do, however, preserve some elements of memorate, such as large amounts of detail, to a lesser extent. One of my informants, Harvey Hood, relates an experience he heard which somewhat resembles Dan’s account above:

There was an account of two wildlife conservationists that was out there patrolling the rivers through the night looking for people shining and stuff. They had struck something with their prop, and they shined the light and they seen this something come out of the river onto the river bank walking on two legs. It went, went off into the woods, and they went to go check it out, and they seen that it was a three-toed creature, whatever it was. What that was, I don’t know, but the Honey Island Swamp, there’s places out

there where man has never stepped foot in the swamp. It's, I believe it's 100-square miles of swamp, so there could be anything in there. (Hood)

Several of the accounts in Holyfield's and Baumann's books also relate narratives which I have identified as legends because the authors do not connect the experiences with personally known individuals and do not include as many characteristics of memorate. Holyfield, for instance, narrates a story she calls, "Dogs Know Better."

The opening day of deer season, a group of Mississippi boys showed up in Honey Island Swamp with their prize hunting dogs. Just before sunset, they set out in their boat and made camp on a sandbar up river. Their plan was to head into the swamp at daybreak. They tied their dogs to a nearby tree along the edge of the woods so they wouldn't run off in the night. The anxious boys built a fire and sat around it shooting the bull about who was going to get the biggest rack to mount. Right about midnight the dogs got nervous about something and stood up and sniffed the air. The Mississippi boys didn't pay no mind at first until the dogs started barking towards the dark woods. (*Encounters* 33-34)

Holyfield continues the legend narrative:

When they heard a loud bellow in the swamp that almost sounded like a mule, they got a little more curious. They knew by the way the dogs were carrying on, it wasn't a mule, and what would a mule be doing in the swamp anyhow. The bellowing noise started to get irate and much closer. The dogs would bark one direction, then the other as the roaring cries circled them. The hunters got a hold of their rifles and stood up ready to take aim. One of the boys decided to let the dogs loose to chase the creature off. When he released the leashes, the prize hunting dogs leaped into the boat. At that moment, the Mississippi boys elected to hunt in their own woods and they quickly tore down camp and got the heck out of there. (*Encounters* 33-34)

This encounter, while still capturing the numinous quality of the experience, perpetuates the tradition through legend.

All of these experience narratives contain primary features of the tradition. The examples provided demonstrate that the folk tradition is based on experience and is

perpetuated primarily because they are believed by those who recount them and in order to share experiences with others (Bennett, *Traditions* 19). Perhaps these narratives are also transmitted to provide a platform for discussing the plausibility of such supernatural experiences (Bennett, *Traditions* 210-211). Honko asserts that through memorate and, I would argue, through the fabulates and legends that are extensions of memorates in this folk tradition, “we grasp the living essence of folk belief, the supernatural experiences of the people. Belief . . . is founded not upon loose speculation, but upon concrete, personal experiences, the reality of which is reinforced by sensory perception” (10). These are the key factors which differentiate the folk tradition from the commodified.

World Wide Web Conversation

Before turning to the commodified tradition, I want to examine one genre of transmission which seems to serve as a link between the folk and commodified traditions. It is the genre of World Wide Web Conversation. Basically, it involves persons who are interested in the Honey Island Swamp Monster and other related traditions exchanging thoughts and ideas about an enormous range of topics. Most of the individuals who participate in these discussions have knowledge of personal experiences, but while experience is a factor in the conversation, it does not seem to be its foundation. The discussions also seem to entertain and inform. Some conversations align with the folk tradition while others maintain the commodified tradition. Still other conversations do both. Here is a portion from one discussion, entitled “Scary and Violent Bigfoots (Bigfeet),” that involved an aspect of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition. A participant named “Loyal” begins:

I just had a thought. (I try to keep them as few as possible.) Bigfoot sightings in the South almost always seem to end in some sort of terror, i.e. Skunk Apes in Missouri and Florida chasing horny teens, and Boggy Creek creatures attacking folks in Texarkana. However, sightings in the Pacific Northwest seem to paint more of a gentle giant picture of this legendary beast, something more in line with what the Indians thought of him (or her). The only exception I know of is the old story of the miners who shot and killed one Bigfoot and then later in the night were nearly killed in an attack on their cabin. Is the hot climate to blame for all the chasing and rock throwing and dog eating that Bigfoot seems to do in the South, or is the trigger happy Southerner to blame? Any thoughts out there in Cyberspace? (“Scary”)

“Chad” replies:

I believe that the aggressive, scary Fouke/Boggy Creek/Honey Island Swamp-type animals are entirely different from Bigfoot/Skunk Ape. These semi-aquatic bipeds leave bizarre footprints (three functional toes, apparently webbed) and look and behave differently. My guess is that these creatures evolved here in America, from very old Prosimian stock, just as New World monkeys did. As for the aggressiveness in “true” Bigfoots, there may be rogue loner individuals (like in elephants) and the South’s denser population generates more encounters with these wanderers. (“Scary”)

“Laurie” responds:

Yeah, what he said? Denser population, more sightings. Probably too, you only hear about the sightings where the Bigfoot is aggressive. Many people don’t ever report sightings where the Bigfoot is calm and does nothing but look. Most of those people don’t even think of reporting it. As to being a different species. Maybe so. Didn’t Loren Coleman discuss that in his book? Maybe it was someone else. In parts of the south there are creatures we can’t even imagine, living and dying and never come out to show themselves. Isn’t the term “Bigfoot” not plural, like deer or moose? Not deers, mooses, Bigfoots, but deer, moose, Bigfoot? Maybe I am wrong. I would like to read more about this subject. (“Scary”)

The participants in the discussion group seem to be more interested in sharing ideas and obtaining opinions from others than intentionally focusing on experiential aspects. They seem to be attempting to identify characteristics of the tradition, but not based solely on

information from experience narratives. In some conversations, however, the concentration on experience appears more solid. I suppose, then, I can only conclude that this conversational genre can perpetuate both folk and commodified belief traditions.

Commodified Tradition

Commodification denotes the process which something goes through, in this case a belief tradition, in order to serve as a commodity, “something of use, advantage, or value” (“Commodity”). Dissemination of this tradition occurs not to share experiences but in order to serve some other, specific purpose, such as to promote, to inform or to entertain. Examining the belief genres through which the tradition is maintained will demonstrate the utilitarian platform of this commodified tradition.

Attempting to categorize the belief genres utilized to perpetuate the commodified tradition proved to be problematic. Although occasionally participants in the tradition rely on standard belief genres, such as *dite*, *memorate*, *fabulate* and *legend*, they more frequently employ forms of transmission that cannot easily be categorized. Therefore, I have utilized existing belief genres as the basis for identifying new genres that can more accurately describe the ways in which this commodified tradition is transmitted.

Rugaru

One significant difference to note between the commodified and folk traditions is the use of *Rugaru* as a descriptor for the supernatural phenomenon. The French phrase *loup garou* means werewolf, and many argue that the Cajun word *Rugaru* came from *loup garou*. In the folk tradition, *Rugaru* is used interchangeably with Bigfoot, Wookie, and Swamp Monster to refer to the creature that individuals have encountered in the

swamp. One of my informants, Curt Burnette, suggests that the Rugaru in folk tradition is the ape man, wildman of the swamp and the hairy Sasquatch type (Burnette). The word Rugaru also exists as part of a very distinct werewolf tradition. However, within the realm of personal experience narratives, the features of these two traditions (werewolf and Honey Island Swamp Monster) do not overlap in any way. The term Rugaru appears only seldomly in the folk tradition, and all such references are to the humanoid primate that the informant has encountered. In commodified tradition, however, Rugaru connotes a variety of phenomena, and the word has come to have no association with the primary and secondary features of personal experience narratives.

Belief Definitions

I have labeled the first belief genre I identified as part of the Honey Island Swamp Monster commodified belief tradition as “belief definition.” A belief definition is a statement of belief which attempts to define a portion of the tradition. Due to its general nature and lack of specific origin, its closest link is the dite, “which states a matter in the form of a direct and general statement” (Honko 9). Introduced by von Sydow as an equivalent to the Swedish dit, the dite is “used to denote what people have to say about one thing or another without characterizing that which is said as true or false, believed in or fictitious. A dite does not, however, include narrations” (Bodker 70). Belief definitions prove to be more informative in nature. I located belief definitions primarily in sources (such as tourist information guides) which only briefly make reference to the creature. For example, the Strange Phenomena Website presents “oddities [that] give perspective to our workaday world, and enrich our humdrum lives with a test of the

unexpected.” They utilize a belief statement in the following way: “The Triple-toed Honey Island Swamp Monster [is] pretty much your run-of-the-mill swamp monster. It has a more colorful name than its 2-toed cousins, the Wisconsin Werewolf and the Scape Ore Swamp Lizard Man” (“Strange”). Clearly the creators of this website employ the belief definition in an informative but primarily entertaining way. The Audubon Zoo also utilizes belief definitions to describe some of the phenomena which characterize Louisiana swamps. The description of the Honey Island Swamp Monster is as follows:

In the lower Pearl River one hears tales of Black Panthers and the Honey Island Swamp monster. This monster, a large, hairy, upright walking inhabitant of thick woods, is from a well-known family including other beasts such as Sasquatch of the Pacific Northwest, the Abominable Snowman of the polar north, the Yeti of Tibet and Grindell of Medieval England. (“The Swamp Monster”)

As well as informing and entertaining zoo patrons, this belief definition, which accompanies a large Louisiana display, serves to promote tourist interest in Louisiana (see Photograph 3). Many belief definitions, as exemplified by those above, make references to more “known” traditions as part of the defining process. This helps clarify the tradition for unfamiliar parties while simultaneously cashing in on the analogy. To the frustration of many cryptozoologists, making these comparisons also seems to suggest that the tradition at hand could be a localized version of a larger tradition, rather than one that is independent of any other.

Belief Reports

The “belief report,” a second belief genre that perpetuates the commodified tradition, is basically a series of belief definitions put together in report-like fashion.

Belief reports often mimic narrative style, and the speaker uses tools that frame the report

Photograph 3: Audubon Zoo Display



as if it were a narrative. In other words, it feels like a legend, but it does not tell a story. This strategy seems to serve as an entertaining feature. For example, Captain Ben Aiken (BA), a tour guide for Cajun Encounter Swamp Tours, shares the following belief report with his audience:

BA: Anybody here know the difference between a fairy tale and a swamp story? How's a fairy tale start off?

Tour members: Once upon a time . . .

BA: And how does it end?

Tour members: Happily ever after.

BA: Very good. A swamp story always starts off, no kidding, folks, it really happened this way, and it ends in y'all. No kiddin' folks, it really happened this way, y'all. Deep in here in the Honey Island Swamp in the shade of the big cypress trees, we have a creature that's existed for nearly, for hundreds and hundreds of years. It's been featured on a program called "In Search Of" narrated by Leonard Nimoy on the Discovery Channel. Now before the Europeans came to North America, the early Indians out here called this creature Bouquiois. The Indians of the Pacific Northwest called it Sasquatch. Some of y'all might have heard it called Bigfoot. Many stories abound. The Early French that came here called this creature Loup Garou, which literally in French means wolf man. Spain had Louisiana longer than the French. They saw this creature and called it Hombre Lobo, again wolf man. Locals described this creature as being seven foot tall with long, reddish-brown hair similar to that of an orangutan. For that reason, some of the locals call it The Wookie, after Chewbacca in Star Wars. Claimed it has a sloped forehead, eyes set far apart, recess in the head, nose similar to that of an ape, sharp teeth. And they claim that it makes a loud [scream] sound. [Laughter] But no kiddin' folks, it really happened that way, y'all. But I guarantee if I brought y'all out here at night and you saw a 300-pound hog or a 12-foot alligator with reddish-orange eyes, you'd think you done seen that Honey Island Swamp Monster for sure. (Aiken)

Basically, Aiken has strung together a series of statements (belief definitions) which attempt to define some aspect of the belief tradition. It seems as if he has consciously made reference to narrative elements and employed them to entertain his audience, but the information itself is not presented in narrative form.

Denny Holmberg of Mr. Denny's Voyageur Swamp Tours employs belief reports in the same way:

Loup Garou is a female werewolf. Loup Garou. It waits on dead-end roads. It eats young lovers. And during the daylight, it turns into a cockroach. That's about all I know about it. There was a . . . they found footprints of a Sasquatch or a Bigfoot back in here in the late 60s. And it's just a myth, but some people think it's true. They found footprints back in here in about the late 60s, and the local papers picked it up, and the international papers picked it up. And then there was all kinds of scientists that came here looking for la loup garou. Some people call it the Wookie monster. Other people, they call it the Bigfoot. (Holmberg)

Here he has presented a report which intertwines the features of werewolf and Bigfoot traditions. When I heard Holmberg relate this belief report, his performance reminded me of that of a storyteller. The beginning, especially, attempts to lure the listener with entertaining elements of narrative. However, no elements of narrative are present.

Sources like those above employ belief reports to be primarily entertaining. Others, however, lack the narrative frame and serve more to inform and advertise. For example, Gay Martin, in his book *Louisiana, Off the Beaten Path: A Guide to Unique Places*, promotes the Honey Island Swamp in the following way:

One of America's least explored swamps, this area is home to a large variety of plants and wildlife – and maybe even the mysterious swamp monster, Wookie. Some hunters and anglers swear that they've seen the creature, which they consistently describe as about 7 feet tall and covered with short hair, longer at the scalp. Wookie supposedly walks upright and leaves four-toed tracks. So far nobody on the tours has spotted said creature, but if it exists, then this wild and dense area seems an appropriate environment. (138)

Here again we see the series of defining statements positioned together in report-like fashion. In this case, Martin utilizes the belief report as a tool to interest potential tourists.

Kernel Narratives

A third genre utilized to perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster commodified belief tradition is the kernel narrative. Susan Kalčik first identified these types of narratives as gendered references to full narratives and defined them in the following way:

Most often the kernel story is a brief reference to the subject, the central action, or an important piece of dialogue from a longer story. In this form one might say it is a kind of potential story, especially if the details are not known to the audience. It might be clearer to call this brief reference the kernel and what develops from it the kernel story, keeping in mind, however, that many of these kernels do not develop beyond the first stage into kernel stories. (7)

In the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition, kernel narratives are small references to the belief tradition that do not elaborate. Tour companies employ kernel narratives extensively as advertising tools on their websites or pamphlets. For instance, the Cajun Encounters website makes the following reference: “Learn how Cajuns spend their days and hear about the Honey Island Swamp Monster” (“Tour”). Similarly, the website belonging to Dr. Wagner’s Honey Island Swamp Tours employs the following as a part of its advertisement: “With swamp tales of pirates and sightings of Bigfoot in the back of your mind, you may be just a little bit nervous at first, but after your first boat ride you’ll want to go back again and again” (“Honey”). This example also takes the form of a coda in Labov’s model, which is “a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment” (Nicolaison 65). It bridges the gap between past and present and between narrative and individual, making the story potentially part of the individual’s experience. The tour companies seem to employ kernel narratives in this way to help

gain the interest of potential customers. Thus, the references serve primarily as advertising devices.

Kernel narratives can also be utilized as tools of entertainment. Tour guides often employ kernel narratives in this way. For example, Captain Cyrus Blanchard of Lil' Cajun Swamp Tours exclaimed while traveling through a dense area of swamp, "This is where the Rugaru is at," and then laughed (Blanchard, Cyrus). Similarly, Captain George Billiot of Cajun Pride Swamp Tours pointed to a deserted cabin in the middle of the swamp and said, "This would be a great place to meet the Rugaru" (Billiot). He also made another reference during the course of his tour:

I always tell a joke that the only time I've ever seen one in the daytime, 'cause they're usually out at night, was on Bourbon street during Mardi Gras; I seen a whole family coming my way. [Laughter] A whole family. You never know what you're going to see. But it's eerie out here at night, it really is. (Billiot)

Kernel narratives do not have to be spoken references to the creature. In fact, Cajun Pride Swamp Tours posts a large, wooden depiction of a hairy creature labeled "Rue-ga-rue: Legend or Myth" (*Rue-ga-rue*). Without any spoken words, this poster serves as an entertaining kernel narrative of the belief tradition (see Photograph 4).

Ficts

Ficts are also employed to maintain this Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. The term *fict* was introduced by von Sydow from the German "fiktion" to "denote a fictive notion or a 'fictive saying' which, like a popular belief, has the form of an assertion, but is an expression of a mere fictive belief, even though in certain circumstances it may develop into secondary belief" (Bodker 100). Von Sydow

Photograph 4: Rue-Ga-Rue Display, Cajun Pride Swamp Tours



distinguished children's ficts, among others, and it is this category of ficts which is employed to perpetuate the tradition at hand (Bodker 100). As Honko explains, ficts function as warning tools to frighten children (13). In this case, parents employ ficts to keep their children away from the bayou. They are not associated with personal experience, and they often differ greatly from other references to the creature. I am not certain whether parents today still utilize this tool, but tour guides do pass on ficts to their audiences. For example, Captain James Camardelle of the Cypress Swamp Tours describes the usefulness of the Rugaru in this way:

They also used [the Rugaru] for one other reason: to scare the living heck out of you when you was a young boy. It was also called the boogie man. And it used to work because the first thing they'd tell you was, boy, if you go over there, the Rugaru's going to get you. (Camardelle)

Captain Cyrus Blanchard of Lil' Cajun Swamp Tours describes the Rugaru tradition serving as a fict in this way: "A Rugaru is a fictional, spiritual thing of the past that parents used to use to tell their kids not to go in places" (Blanchard, Cyrus). It seems, then, that the fict was at one time a significant genre for transmitting the tradition.

Song

Although music does not play a significant role in the transmission of this belief tradition, one song has been written about the Honey Island Swamp Monster. The song was written by Perry Ford, who has personally encountered the creature, and it serves to perpetuate the commodified tradition. The lyrics of the song demonstrate no direct connection to personal experience, and the song has been used as an entertaining and advertising device. Dana Holyfield included the lyrics of the song in two of her books: *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster* and *More Swamp Cookin'*.

Way down south, close to New Orleans,
 'Bout forty-five miles from town,
 Where the swampland meets the hard woods,
 There's a legend going 'round,
 Some folks say it's evil,
 Cast from a voodoo spell,
 It walks upright when it screams at night,
 You'd swear it came from hell,
 They call it the Honey Island Monster,
 Some say he's just an old wanted man,
 Who walks in the shadows of the Cypress Trees,
 Way down in Louisiann'
 In the swamp there came old trappers,
 Tough and rugged old hands,
 Claimed they'd seen him many of times,
 When they hunted and trapped the land,
 Late at night by a dim fire light,
 You people best beware,
 He's standing in the shadows,
 Lurking around out there,
 They call him the Honey Island Monster,
 Believe in him if you can,
 'Cauz if you spend one night,
 When the moon is right,
 I swear you'll understand,
 He walks in the shadows of the Cypress trees,
 Way down in Louisiann'. (Holyfield, *Encounters* 35-36)

This song and its uses demonstrate that the commodified tradition is defined not only by the characteristics of belief that are transmitted but also by the ways in which the beliefs are used.

Reasons for Distinct Forms of Transmission

The genres utilized to perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk and commodified traditions exhibit differences in content and in transmission. The reasons for these variations, however, are not entirely clear. The folk tradition stems from a tradition of belief which accepts as true the experiences at hand. Memorates, fabulates

and legends reflect this belief and are told in such a way as to reveal that the experiences are (or at least might be) true. The most significant evidence for proponents of the folk tradition is the experience itself. For most of the individuals who perpetuate the commodified tradition, experience is not enough. They need some type of scientific evidence to prove that these experiences are true. Therefore, perhaps employing traditional genres, which intentionally serve to argue for possible truth, does not cater to the commodified traditions of disbelief. It might be that an element of distance is necessary to separate them (the perpetrators of the commodified tradition) from the possibility of truth in the experiences. Belief definitions, belief reports, kernel narratives and ficts all present information that is not too detailed and not too personal. They are only references to experiences, not the experiences themselves. If, as Bennett argues, experience narratives “are told because the narrator believes them to be true, because they ‘really happened’, because they are ‘the one thing that made me really believe,’” then perhaps avoiding experiential narratives allows the proponents of the commodified tradition to escape the issue of truth altogether (*Traditions* 19). In this case, there is no uncertainty, no question of reality, and no fear.

Chapter Four: Commodification

Introduction

For many years folklorists have engaged in the debate over the extent to which folklore can be commodified and still be regarded as folklore (Bird; Brewer; Narváez and Laba; Niles; Smith; Wells). In economic circles, commodification refers to “the subordination of both private and public realms to the logic of capitalism. In this logic, such things as friendship, knowledge, women, etc. are understood only in terms of their monetary value” (Felluga). Commodification, however, need not solely refer to financial aspects but can signify the process through which something becomes a commodity, “something of use, advantage, or value” (“Commodity”). For our purposes, commodification stems from a “marketing of tradition” and is the process resulting in direct or indirect secondary gain for academic or commercial purposes. The Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition provides an example of one phenomenon that has been commodified by the marketing of tradition. However, the dissemination and popularization of the belief tradition has not halted the development of the folk tradition. According to Brewer, “when folklore or traditional behaviors become part of the stock-in-trade for . . . industries, whether as processes or as products, change in attitudes to folklore over time inevitably effects a kind of contextual shift of scale” (5). In the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, this “shift of scale” has led to the simultaneous development of a differing but parallel commodified tradition.

The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum

As the Honey Island Swamp Monster folk and commodified traditions expand alongside each other, the interplay between folk culture and popular culture increases. The idea of a folklore–popular culture continuum, discussed by Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, asserts that no line exists which can simply and decisively divide folklore from popular culture. Instead, there is a graduated plane in which the two counterparts interact with and influence one another. “Artistic communication within small groups (folklore) and mass societies (popular culture) may be understood as polar types spanned by a complex continuum of different sized groups in which communications are transmitted via various configurations of sensory and technological media” (Narváez and Laba 1).

Laba expands:

The essential connection between folklore and popular culture is in the social sphere – the impulse to, and ways in which meaning is made by people in relation to the more or less determining material conditions of life in modern society. The social practice of folkloric communication is structured by symbolic forms in popular culture and serves as a means by which individuals and groups ritualize, organize and make sense of those forms of their day-to-day experience. (16-17)

One cannot study the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition without accepting this relationship between folk culture and popular culture. Recognizing this association between the two aspects of culture allows for the direct inclusion of a tradition’s commodified components that are disseminated on a mass level primarily through popular channels of communication.

Content and Transmission in Commodified Tradition

As we discovered in chapter three, the commodified tradition diverges from the folk tradition in content and transmission. These two components of deviation influence each other. The commodified tradition often perpetuates itself through mass forms of communication, instead of through the primarily smaller forums which help to disseminate the folk tradition. The mass communication leads to a change in the content being transmitted, and as the content evolves it simultaneously alters the forms of transmission. Brewer explains:

Folklore is an intimate synchronic practice, but not one necessarily requiring geographical intimacy. . . . It can be transmitted through time, but seldom remains static in transmission.

When it becomes popular culture it moves beyond the network of origin through the deliberate agency of individuals who may not themselves be part of the originating group. . . . Resonances rather than specific meanings become most important.

. . . The agenda is increasingly impersonal and political. Information or behavior is used as a tool to extenuate the impact of agendas which may have little to do with the material promoted. . . . It is here where commodification really begins to develop. (9)

Folk traditions and those disseminated on a mass level can play equally significant roles in people's beliefs and cultures. Bird agrees that "people construct a view of reality from all the cultural embedded messages they encounter, whether these are oral, written, or electronic" (165). The development of a tradition through one form of social communication does not lessen the validity of the other. In fact, as we see in the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, the two are closely intertwined. An exploration of various cryptozoological phenomena will demonstrate further.

Commodification and Cryptozoology

At one time the “hidden animals” that serve as subjects of cryptozoological study were just that: hidden. The “civilized” world had no knowledge of their existence, and the only discussion of such creatures occurred by word of mouth. Now, however, curiosity abounds about such creatures, due to their popularization. Coleman and Clark elaborate:

Today, from the Internet to the corner newsstand, cryptozoology has become an integral part of our culture. Mainstream magazines such as *BBC Wildlife* now regularly carry articles on hidden animals, and numerous documentaries on PBS, Discovery, A&E, and other television networks treat the subject seriously. (20)

Even an episode of the *X-Files* has addressed the issue of possible monsters living hidden within the world. Perhaps no other creature in North America has entered popular culture as significantly as the Sasquatch of the Pacific Northwest. The Sasquatch lived for years in the lore of the native peoples of the region. However, twentieth-century reports that have been followed by plaster casts of footprints, newspaper articles, photographs, and documentaries have served to disseminate knowledge of the Sasquatch throughout the world. Now any interested party can find T-shirts, coffee mugs, magnets, plastic figures, and many other items reflecting some artistic portrayal of the Sasquatch. A Canadian stamp even displays the creature. As Wylie points out, a case can be made that the media and other aspects of popular culture have, in fact, created what has come to be the Bigfoot phenomenon (39). However, I assert that what has happened is this: commodification has not destroyed the folk belief tradition, which is still alive and carries

on in the personal experiences of the people. Commodification has simply created a new avenue of development for aspects of the tradition.

The Honey Island Swamp Monster Commodified Tradition

As we discovered in chapter three, in the past twenty-five years the Honey Island Swamp Monster has developed into two distinct belief traditions: the folk belief tradition and the commodified belief tradition. The folk tradition is transmitted by individuals who wish to believe in or dialogue about their or others' experiences, and the commodified tradition is perpetuated in order to serve some other purpose, such as to promote, to inform and to entertain. These two strands, the folk and the commodified, though very different, continue to develop alongside one another.

In order to understand the commodified tradition, we must identify the producers of the tradition, the material they contribute, and their purposes for contribution. The producers are those who knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate and popularize the tradition for the purpose of acquiring some indirect or direct secondary gain. Producers of the tradition, who frequently are not participants in the folk tradition, primarily include members of the academic community, the tourism industry, and the media, as well as monster enthusiasts. Of course in some cases, producers occupy more than one role. Motivated by desires to inform, entertain, obtain profits, and seek truths, producers perpetuate the tradition by writing books and articles, advertising, creating television and movie specials, and interacting on the World Wide Web. Thus, they obtain their desired secondary gain through mass dissemination geared towards academic or commercial

purposes. Before exploring other contributors to the tradition, we must turn to the first producer, with whom it all began.

Origins of Honey Island Swamp Monster Commodification

Dissemination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition commenced with Harlan Ford after he returned from the swamp with plaster casts of the creature's footprints. His claims led to investigations by officials from the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, as well as by scientists and anthropologists associated with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. According to Ed Marten, a friend of Harlan Ford, Ford began the popularization of the creature without any remuneration (Marten). However, Marten further explains that once Ford began to share his story, it became bigger, and he began to accept money to tell it.

After he got involved in this, whatever it was, there may have been some embellishment at that point. And it obviously, you know, he didn't produce these segments for these production companies for no cost at all. He was smart enough to know that if you want my story, you're going to pay for it, and they paid for it. Now, as soon as the combination of imagination and finances get together, one or both grow. . . . I think Harlan would sell his story, but I don't know if Harlan would sell T-shirts. (Marten)

In the beginning it seemed as if Ford spread his story because he believed in what he experienced and was not afraid to share it; later he began to utilize his experience as a commodity for financial gain. However, he never ventured beyond the selling of his own experience. Because of Ford's willingness to communicate his story, the details of his encounters have become the prototype to which people refer when recounting information about the Honey Island Swamp Monster. His stories or pieces of his stories have been told by members of the academic community, reporters, journalists, tour

guides, and enthusiasts through various forms of media. His is the story that is recognized above all others to distinguish sightings of the Honey Island Swamp Monster from those of other creatures.

Media

Popularization stemmed from Ford's encounter with the immediate aid of the media. Here I am utilizing the word media to refer to those in the communication industry, especially utilizing such forms as newspaper, television, and film. Degh's and Vaszonyi's assertion that the media contributes significantly to the distribution of modern legends applies well to the dissemination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition:

It is not enough to acknowledge that mass media has a "role" in modern legend-transmission. It is closer to the truth that the mass media are part of folklore – maybe the greater part. The legend makes a part of its way – presumably the lesser – on foot and continues on the longer trail through the speedy modern vehicle. ("Dialects" 37)

The media's handling of this tradition is an example of cultural appropriation – "the use of traditional concepts, forms and symbols to create an association with traditional ideas and values usually for commercial, political or ideological purposes" (Wells 54). While I am not arguing that the contributions of the mass media to this belief tradition are more significant than those of any other producer, I am asserting that much of the dissemination of the commodified tradition has occurred due to efforts of the media.

The goal of the media producers appears to be to inform the public through various stories about this new phenomenon. For the media, the Honey Island Swamp Monster serves as a commodity of groundbreaking news, a story waiting to be told.

Many folklorists have argued the parallels between the mass media and storytelling, pointing out the ways in which the media draws on preexisting structures and narratives to relate the news and ways in which the text in turn enters into the oral tradition of the consumers (Smith 42; Bird 165). Undoubtedly, interplay of this kind has occurred in the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. Information transmitted by the media has affected oral tradition, just as the media has employed elements of oral tradition to tell good stories. Despite the media's desire to entertain and inform the public with their storytelling abilities, their primary goal is to sell papers and gain an audience. Over time, the Honey Island Swamp Monster has served this purpose, and thus the media became an instrument of mass dissemination. However, like all parties that play a role in the popularization of this tradition, the media chose its items of inclusion based on its goals and neglected to include other aspects because they were deemed insignificant to the needs of the media. For the most part, reports were based on experiences (especially those of Harlan Ford) and the opinions of scientists and wildlife specialists, but headlines were created to capitalize on the creature and sell the story.

Media sources in Louisiana were the earliest contributors to the popularization of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. Newspapers in the Slidell area of Louisiana, especially the *St. Bernard News*, picked up the story and publicized it with headlines such as "The Monster of Honey Island Swamp" accompanied by photographs of Ford and his plaster casts (Baumann 69). Subsequent articles included comments by zoologists and employees of Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries. Television stations also

contributed to the dissemination of Ford's story and the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. Ed Marten explains:

Harlan Ford was a friend of my family's. He was also a personal friend of mine. He had related this story to my dad, to me. At the same time, I was in television as a news reporter, and I liked doing feature stories. And this was a hell of a feature story. The feature was so interesting, as a matter of fact, that we did a five-part series, which is Monday through Friday during the rating period, and it became really interesting for people. The station I worked for had rather good ratings, and consequently, doing a story like this which would have gotten a lot of interest anyway, it helped promote more interest in the story. (Marten)

Soon the tradition spread to be included in various forms of media that stretched beyond the Louisiana area. In the 1970s the *In Search Of* series produced a video on the Honey Island Swamp Monster entitled *In Search of Swamp Monsters*, directed by Alan Landsberg and narrated by Leonard Nimoy. Niles argues the following about the relationship between film and folk traditions:

Film, by its nature, is an expensive medium that depends for its existence on rather complex marketing factors. Whereas folklore itself, as a general rule, is free, a film that takes as its subject some aspect of folk tradition requires big money to produce. In its early stages it needs sponsors, and when complete it needs to attract consumers as well, whether through commercial movie theatres or through educational television networks, schools, or universities. (25)

In order to fulfill these needs, the media's purpose here begins to change. Entertainment becomes a more significant component in the popularization of the tradition, and the documentary, while intending to inform, serves to entertain in such a way as to gain interest from a wide viewing public.

Since the 1970s the media has slowly but steadily continued to help popularize the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition. Newspapers, magazines, and journals have

published pieces such as “Legends Dominate Primordial Swamp” by John N. Felsher, “Tales of Bigfoot Common in South” by Chester Moore Jr., and “Bigfoot Busy in Louisiana” by Andrew Griffin. On April 1, 2001 the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans published a piece entitled “This Just In: Survivor Goes South” (Walker). This article described the prospect of the television program *Survivor* coming to the Honey Island Swamp and eluded to possible encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster there. An April Fool’s Day hoax, this article undoubtedly popularized the tradition further. The World Wide Web has also played a role in disseminating various media publications. Several of the articles above were printed as links on the Web. Also, a website entitled “Strange Phenomena” provides information “culled from the pages of magazines like *FATE*, *Fortean Times*, and *Strange*, [and] these oddities give perspective to our workaday world, and enrich our humdrum lives with a taste of the unexpected.” The website includes a belief definition of the Honey Island Swamp Monster which was originally published in the *Fortean Times* (“Strange”).

Academics

The academic world has also contributed to the popularization of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. My intent in utilizing the phrase “academic world” is to refer to those whose purpose is principally to educate others.

Cryptozoologists, anthropologists, and journalists (those dedicated to educating, as opposed to those whose purpose is primarily to communicate news) especially have supplied materials to further disseminate the tradition. These producers contributing to the commodified tradition have studied the Honey Island Swamp Monster for their own

academic purposes, and their inclusions of the creature in the publications of their work have served to educate and inform the public about their findings. For them the Honey Island Swamp Monster seems to be an educational commodity, while also serving as a tool to help sell publications. Thus, those in the academic arena tend to focus on the more “factual” and “scientific” elements of the tradition, such as the experiences of “credible” witnesses and the analyses of the creature conducted by what they consider to be respected scientific sources. However, many producers from the academic world employ humor to interest and entertain their audiences. Kenneth Wylie has argued that the contributions to the Bigfoot phenomenon made by those studying it have been significant, and this holds true for the Honey Island Swamp Monster commodified tradition (26).

Publications have served as the primary medium through which these individuals have popularized their work and subsequently the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. Educator and writer Elwood D. Baumann includes the Honey Island Swamp Monster in his book *Monsters of North America*, written in 1978, only four years after Ford’s first report of the creature. He summarizes Ford’s findings and includes quotes made by Ford and others who have studied the creature. He also paraphrases several other reported encounters with the creature and explores the ways in which the media participated in the creature’s popularization in the 1970s. Although Baumann’s primary goal seems to be to inform the public about the Honey Island Swamp Monster, his book is not without humorous slants that ultimately serve to entertain readers and sell more books. He begins his first chapter on the Honey Island Swamp Monster, entitled “That

Thing in the Swamp,” with the following introduction: “The Honey Island Swamp Monster has received far less publicity than any of the other unidentified creatures on our continent. This isn’t really too surprising. The swamp is almost as frightening as the monster itself” (Baumann 66). Clearly the creature does serve a specific purpose here for the author.

The Honey Island Swamp Monster seemed to elude scholarly study for many years after that, but it appeared again in freelance writer W. Haden Blackman’s *The Field Guide to North American Monsters* in 1998. Blackman focuses on the creature’s physical and behavioral characteristics as surmised by other cryptozoological sources based on people’s reports. He also retells Harlan Ford’s experience and addresses the issue of the three-toed footprints. Blackman’s book seems to be geared towards enthusiasts and “monsterologists” and is not without elements of entertainment. For instance, when attempting to describe the creature’s diet, Blackman suggests the following: “It’s possible that the creature may dine on humans, given the number of people who have never returned from a trip into the swamp” (16). Similarly, when concluding his piece on the Honey Island Swamp Monster, Blackman warns readers that although the creature has “thus far failed to live up to its fearsome reputation and is not likely to injure witnesses . . . if it does appear aggressive, flee immediately” (18).

Other researchers have also contributed to the dissemination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition in recent years. Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman has played a role in this popularization process. In addition to his classification work with Patrick Huyghe in *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide*,

Coleman has discussed the Honey Island Swamp Monster in *Mothman and Other Curious Encounters* and in *Cryptozoology A to Z*, written with Jerome Clark. The reference to the creature in *Cryptozoology A to Z* is short and based on scientific and experiential evidence. Coleman and Clark write that the creature is “a swamp monster, a unique bipedal animal that leaves pointed three-toed footprints,” quickly describe its location, and attribute popularization of the creature to the *In Search Of* film produced in the 1970s (109-10). Although the authors concede that those who see the creature do sometimes describe it as looking like Bigfoot, Coleman and Clark assert that “most descriptions and tracks do not link the creature to Bigfoot” (109-10). Coleman’s most recent publication, *Mothman and Other Curious Encounters*, delves into the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition more thoroughly. In the book Coleman shares some of his experiences in the swamp, discusses Harlan Ford and his plaster casts, and theorizes about explanations for such a creature. Next to Coleman’s *Mothman*, the most recent published study of the Honey Island Swamp Monster was conducted by Joe Nickel, who produced his findings in the 2001 *Skeptical Inquirer* article entitled “Investigative Files: Tracking Swamp Monsters.”

Corey Edic, a student of cryptozoology, maintains a website entitled “The Honey Island Swamp Monster,” which attaches to his homepage about cryptozoology. On his homepage he provides a classification of cryptids, as outlined by Chad Arment. On his Honey Island Swamp Monster page, he describes the Honey Island Swamp and then introduces the creature with this:

In the early 1960's people began seeing a large bigfoot type creature as they were pushing their way into the swamp. Several sightings have

occurred and casts, of the tracks of this creature, have been made. The tracks do not match the tracks of a bigfoot but it is definitely that of a bipedal creature. (Edic)

He follows with a paraphrasing of Harlan Ford's encounter and concludes by saying that "as with a lot of cryptids the existence of the Honey Island Swamp Monster has never been proven or disproven" (Edic).

Bill Asmussen is an artist who has spent years studying hominid creatures in order to portray them in his art. I classify Asmussen as an academic producer of this commodified tradition because he has studied many types of humanoid creatures in order to illustrate them and utilize his images to educate others. In the "Legends" section of his website, he shares an illustration of the Honey Island Swamp Monster alongside the following description:

The Honey Island Swamp is located in the southern-most part of Louisiana. It is full of all kinds of wild life, alligators, snakes, turtles, birds, bugs, etc. There is one other animal that is supposed to inhabit the area also.

This is an animal that weighs anywhere from 300 to 400 pounds. It stands from 7 to 8 feet tall. It is said that it looks like Bigfoot. It leaves three toed sharp clawed tracks wherever it goes. The fur or hair is usually a gray color. There is more than one Bigfoot creature in the swamp. (Asmussen)

Asmussen was kind enough to depict his version of the Honey Island Swamp Monster on a T-shirt for me (see Photograph 5). Other than a replica of Ford's plaster cast (and copies of books, articles and the *In Search Of* video), this is the only example of Honey Island Swamp Monster memorabilia that I have been able to obtain.

Most significantly influenced by academic contributions are enthusiasts and other academics. However, the widespread dissemination of certain academic works (Loren

Photograph 5: Honey Island Swamp Monster T-Shirt Designed by Bill Asmussen



Coleman's research, for example) ensures that members of the general public also have access to the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. The tradition, despite this access, has not expanded much beyond the belief systems of swamp locals, enthusiasts, and academics. Nonetheless, academic contributions remain vital to the continuation of the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition. Through these producers we gain the most "scientific" information. While for some it is the personal experiences that speak absolute truth, many believe it is science that could one day provide real proof of the creature's existence.

Enthusiasts

Paul Smith argues that "little difference exists between the transmission of a tradition and any other type of communicable information. For in the real world, not just a single oral medium of transmission is utilized to communicate folklore, but any available and relevant media is employed" (42). In recent decades the explosion of the World Wide Web has created a new media forum for transmitting folklore. With the popularization of the World Wide Web, the enthusiast tradition has grown, and this growth has contributed to the dissemination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. Enthusiasts are the monster buffs, the non-academics (meaning those who do not study the creature for academic purposes) who have become exceedingly interested in the tradition and perpetuate it through discussion and interaction with other enthusiasts. They participate because of their own interest and perpetuate the tradition for their own individual purposes. According to Diane Goldstein, enthusiasts often seek to debunk and are constantly in search of new information and new stories ("Please" 23-25). For them,

the Honey Island Swamp Monster becomes a commodity of diverse uses. It entertains, informs, and educates; primarily it is an interest, a hobby in which they can become involved for no one other than themselves. They chat with each other online, share new information, debunk new and old information, argue about the validity of evidence, and assert and dispute various theories. These are the fans that buy the books, read the articles and watch the documentaries. It is because of these enthusiasts that the popular tradition really grows.

Forums such as the Tennessee Bigfoot Lady's Message Board, Bigfoot Encounters, Bigfoot Research Center (and regional centers such as the Texas Bigfoot Research Center and the Gulf Coast Research Center), the Hominid Message Board, the Mississippi Swamp Apes Forum, and the In Search Of Discussion Board cultivate the involvement of enthusiasts. Participants can communicate their experiences and opinions and ask questions of other participants. For example, Craig Woolheater imparts a memorate that he entitled "Alexandria, Louisiana, 1994 - The Honey Island Swamp Monster?" on the Bigfoot Encounters Website:

My story is not very exciting (although at the time it was). We were coming back to Dallas from New Orleans. It was about midnight on a dark moonless night. It was Memorial Day Weekend 1994. We were traveling on a 2 lane highway, my wife (girlfriend at the time) in the passenger seat and a friend sleeping in the back seat.

To our right, in the bar ditch was a tall, hairy figure. The glare from my headlights lit it up as we passed. It was walking in the same direction as we were traveling, so we only saw the back of the creature. My wife did not want to turn around and go back as I was driving an Isuzu Amigo with a soft canvas top that was rolled up at the time. As we saw it, we both looked at each other and said "Did you just see that?" (Woolheater)

Sharing personal experiences is only one way in which enthusiasts participate in perpetuating the belief tradition. Those involved might also reveal stories they have heard from others. For example, this excerpt comes from an entry to the Mississippi Swamp Ape Forum entitled “Honey Island Swamp,” submitted on December 1, 2000:

About six years ago, I was told a story of a hunter who was hunting down there in the swamp and came upon and shot some sort of creature. As I recall, the guy cut the head of the creature, took it with him and went to find some buddies to come back and help him load the rest of the "body" into the bed of his truck. Upon returning, they were unable to find said body. I saw a picture this guy drew of the supposed creature. My question is, have you heard anything about this? (“Honey Island Swamp”)

I have also had the opportunity to interact with enthusiasts through various forums. In response to an inquiry about the Honey Island Swamp Monster that I made on the In Search Of Discussion Group, one participant, Matt DeLuca, responded with the following:

The Honey Island swamp creature has always fascinated me. I haven't heard anything new on the creature in a long time. From descriptions of the creature and the similarities to the creature from "the legend of boggy creek" movie, I would say that it is a Bigfoot. The only problem is whereas bigfeet have 5 toes, this creature seems to have 2 or 3 toes. Three toed footprints have been found concerning the boggy creek creature as well as the skunk ape in the Florida everglades. Who knows, there could be 2 different species of bigfeet one with 2 or 3 toes, the other with 5. I know this, the area in Louisiana where the honey island swamp creature is said to live is still largely unexplored, and the creature could hide there for a LONG time. (DeLuca)

DeLuca then suggests several other sources of information. I posted a similar query on the Tennessee Bigfoot Lady's Message Board, and one participant offered this in response along with two website addresses, one belonging to Dana Holyfield, the other to Bill Asmussen:

Howdy Miss Frances! The following is a good place to start ma'm. I'm looking through my archives and will post more as I find them, so keep checking back! Bill Asmussen, a very good friend and fellow GCBRO member, has a super drawing of this legendary creature on his web-site. The site is the first one listed and you need to click on "Legends" off of the front page to view it. (Bear)

Other sites on the World Wide Web offer information and opportunities for enthusiasts. For example, one "Multimedia" website includes items such as photographs of various hominid footprints, sound bites from audio recordings of humanoid creatures, video clips from documentaries, and footage of Bigfoot films. The site offers photographs of the footprints of the Honey Island Swamp Monster and a recording of Ted Williams telling about his encounters with the creature. The recording is taken from the *In Search of Swamp Monsters* film. Another website polled enthusiasts about various supernatural phenomena "concerning U.F.O.'s, cults, conspiracies, and general high weirdness as we begin this new millennium. . . ." One poll entitled "Apocalypse Culture" on the Mister Poll website provides the following: "There have been many reports of zoological curiosities over the ages. Pick your favorite." The Honey Island Swamp Monster is listed as one choice, but it received only 1% of the vote as favorite. The Lochness Monster won with 25%, and Bigfoot came in second with 17%. As long as monster enthusiasts remain interested in this phenomenon, the Honey Island Swamp Monster commodified tradition will continue to develop.

Tourism

The tourism industry has played a significant role in the dissemination of the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition. According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Edward M. Bruner, tourism is "a form of travel for pleasure or edification

that is also a particularly complex communicative system” within which “tourist productions – the settings, events, and artifacts created for tourists – and their marketing constitute the most elaborated and expressive mode of communication” (300, 302).

Cultural tourism, however, can be defined as follows:

Cultural or heritage tourism [is] selling a community or region through its tradition culture, which may involve stimulating interest in a community or area by inviting outsiders to view traditional performance, the creation of traditional objects, and/or structures of architectural or historic importance, or to participate in indigenous customs or rituals. (Wells 55)

Within this spectrum commodification appears more noticeably because more than other tools of dissemination, the tourism industry utilizes the Honey Island Swamp Monster as a financial commodity. Tours, promotional materials and attractions employ the creature to entertain and inform about Louisiana culture, but the bottom line is attracting tourists and making money.

Since the 1970s many swamp tours have come to life in Louisiana. While the tours focus primarily on the wildlife and plant development of the Honey Island Swamp, many include references to the Honey Island Swamp Monster in their tours and as a portion of their advertisement. The most obvious example of this is the company Swamp Monster Tours, which makes reference to the creature in its name. This company is no longer in business, but many websites and tourist information resources still list it as being in operation, thus disseminating the tradition without the existence of the tour itself. Gator Swamp Tours, located in Slidell, Louisiana, refers to the swamp monster in two different ways on varying pamphlets: “We’ll even give you a chance to see the legendary Honey Island Swamp Monster” and “We’ll even explore pirate haunts and

hidden places where the legendary swamp monster is said to make his home.” On the “Legends and Lore” section of the Gator Swamp Tours website, the same opportunity is asserted, that participants will have the opportunity to see the creature. That enticement is followed by further explanation: “Some of our passengers say they thought they caught a glimpse of IT . . . Or was it just swamp mist drifting slowly across the blooming water hyacinths, just beyond the clump of cypress knees back in the shadows of the gum trees. Who knows” (*Gator*). Despite what seems like an attempt to attract tourists, one Gator Swamp employee refutes the assertion that the company employs the creature as a financial commodity:

I don't think, that anybody - not us and not the other Swamp Tours like Dr. Wagner's or Cajun Encounters, uses the Swamp Monster for financial gain.

True, all of us mention the Swamp Monster every once in a while, but it's really just being mentioned, not talked about in detail (except [when] somebody like you asks many questions), or advertised in any form as one of the highlights.

People who visit our tours, come to see alligators and other wildlife and the nature. The Honey Island Swamp is the only protected Swamp in the US, and that is our main point for advertisement.

When we get tourist leads, we never even mention the Swamp Monster in order to attract somebody.

On the website it's another deal, since people like to hear about the Swamp as a whole and the monster is part of the legend, it's mentioned there.

. . . I want to be truthful to you, and the truth is, that the monster is not a big deal here. (Price)

Certainly I cannot argue that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is the primary attraction utilized by this or any other company to advertise tours. However, I assert that the references to the creature are significant enough to the tour companies to demonstrate their use of the creature as a commodity, albeit a lesser financial commodity than that of

the swamp itself. Exploration of ways in which other tour companies refer to the creature will reveal this further.

Cypress Swamp Tours offers a “Swamp Tales” section on its website and mentions the swamp monster by one of its other names, the Roux-Ga-Roux.

One of our favorite bayou stories is the legend of the Roux-Ga-Roux. The locals believe that if the Roux-Ga-Roux finds you (or you find it), you’ll never be seen again . . . because you become the Roux-Ga-Roux. Obviously we can’t show you a picture of the Roux-Ga-Roux!

Don’t worry, cher, we haven’t lost anyone to the Roux-Ga-Roux yet. And you’re sure to hear many more swamp tales when you join us for a Cypress Swamp Tour. (*Cypress*)

Cajun Encounters Swamp Tours also employs the Honey Island Swamp Monster as an advertising device on the Virtual Tour section of its website: “Learn how Cajuns spend their days and make their livelihoods, and hear about the legendary Honey Island Swamp Monster” (“Tour”).

Dr. Wagner’s Honey Island Swamp Tour has contributed more to the commodification of the belief tradition than any other tour company in the area. Sue Wagner asserts the following: “We do not either believe nor disbelieve in the existence of a ‘swamp monster’ per se....our philosophy has been to answer questions as necessary with what is available...not to promote the creature's existence” (Wagner, Sue). Dr. Paul Wagner adds to this by saying that they use the Honey Island Swamp Monster to further knowledge of Louisiana culture and folklore, but he does admit that mentions of the creatures on the tour are usually very “tongue-in-cheek” (Wagner, Paul). The tour company has, however, promoted the creature’s popularity, especially through its website. The Honey Island Swamp Tours website begins with a page entitled “Honey

Island Swamp: Journey into the Pristine Wilderness with Dr. Paul Wagner.” Its first reference to the creature comes during the mention of evening explorations in the swamp: “Night tours are a completely different experience. Dr. Wagner explains, ‘There’s a different set of sounds. It can get kind of spooky because sometimes you don’t know what you’re hearing.’ Could it be a *Wookiee*? Whatever you do, don’t forget your camera” (*Honey*). From there the page links to another entitled “The Legend of Bigfoot at Honey Island Swamp” which provides the following information about the creature:

Honey Island has become one of the most well-known swamps because of the real or imagined presence of a creature similar to what others have called *Big Foot*. Sometimes known as *The Thing* by area fishermen, Dr. Wagner simply calls it *Wookiee*!

“I have an open mind about it. I don’t say it does or doesn’t exist. But there is certainly a remote and impenetrable area in this swamp, so if a creature exists, that is the place for it!” He recognizes that most of the stories are hearsay, but he talked to a commercial fisherman who claims to have seen *Wookiee* firsthand. “He says it was about 7 feet tall and weighed 300 or 350 pounds, with long, orange-brown hair and big, wide-set eyes. Sounds like some kind of giant orangutan!” added Wagner. It is reported that when the creature saw the fisherman, he gave a loud shriek and disappeared into the underbrush. . . . (*Honey*)

The website continues:

Wagner adds, “It can get kind of spooky, though, at night. Sometimes you don’t know what you are hearing.” Although the swamp abounds with birdcalls of great blue herons, white ibis, snowy egrets, and others; maybe some of those mysterious sounds are from *Wookiee*!

“It could be,” he admits. “Actually, I was fishing near a canebrake one night and I heard some footsteps. Whatever it was, it sounded big. I turned to see the cane spreading apart, so I got out of there! Maybe it was *Wookiee*, but I sure didn’t hang around to find out!” (*Honey*)

Tour companies have also helped to disseminate the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition by making references to and telling stories about the creature during their tours. In doing so, the belief tradition has acquired distance from the

personal experiences to blend with other local traditions, such as the Loup Garou (French for werewolf) and the Feufolay (a marsh gas). It is this distance that has solidified the continuance of the commodified belief tradition. Captain George Billiot of Cajun Pride Swamp Tours spoke about the Rugaru during his tour, and his purpose seemed to be to entertain and inform.

We have something in Louisiana, they called it a Rugaru. It's spelled wrong. Actually it's a Loup Garou, which in French means a werewolf. That's the Cajun version of Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Yeti, you know different lands have different territories, and our creatures go out at night. And, uh, I've talked to a lot about certain things. Out here in the swamp, you'd see some amazing things at night come out here. You really do. Uh, this creature's supposed to have a red, glowing eye. If you look into the eyes of the creature, you become one. And there's all kind of anecdotes, things to, if you don't talk about the creature, if you don't talk about the Rugaru in a year and a day, you won't become a creature. That's the only way to stop yourself from becoming one. There's a few tales. There's a few stories about that. I've heard my grandmother tell stories. We used to go to oak trees, there's an old oak tree we used to go chase after the Rugaru. And that's the way I was brought up, calling it that – the Rugaru. I didn't know until later on in life that it was a Loup Garou. And it's just a werewolf, it's almost like a vampire. If you get bitten by one, you turn into one. (Billiot)

Here, Billiot connects the Rugaru with the traditions of Bigfoot, werewolves, and vampires. This association with differing phenomena (primarily employed by tour companies) diversifies the belief tradition in such a way that links to original personal experiences are often entirely lacking, thus further ensuring the development of the commodified tradition. Cajun Pride Swamp Tours also has on exhibit a painted replica of the swamp monster that states: "Rue-ga-rue: Legend or Myth" (*Rue-Ga-Rue*). Without elaboration, this kernel narrative further commodifies the tradition.

On two instances I became a part of the tradition's dissemination while attending tours. According to Sheets, "fieldwork is a dialogue between subject and observer wherein each will feel the effects of the other's presence, in place, in word and in print, to degrees that will impact the most quantifiable of results" (79). Through my fieldwork on the swamp tours, I was able to experience this first-hand. While participating in the Gator Swamp Tours led by Captain Michael Hahn, I was asked questions by fellow tour participants after verbally seeking information from Hahn. By passing on to the other tour members my knowledge of the belief tradition, I was actively serving to distribute it further. This experience was repeated while attending one of Mr. Denny's Voyageur Tours. The tour in which I participated resulted in the most humorous and entertaining example of dissemination that I witnessed. Mr. Denny Holmberg, accompanied by guest guide Harvey Hood, led an evening tour of the Honey Island Swamp. Holmberg began the tour by suggesting, "Maybe we'll even see Bigfoot." Then, while in what seemed to me to be a remote portion of the swamp, known as Eagle Slough, Harvey Hood related his encounter with the Honey Island Swamp Monster, followed by retellings of other stories he had heard. At the conclusion of his oration, Holmberg shouted, "Wooh," after which the majority of the twelve tour participants screamed. One commented about being "scared to death." At that point we left the slough, and tour participants began to ask me further questions. I shared some basic information about the belief tradition as I knew it, thus again becoming a part of the tradition's dissemination.

Tourist books and websites play a role in commodification by making reference to the creature as a Louisiana attraction. In *Louisiana Off the Beaten Path: A Guide to*

Unique Places, Gay Martin discusses the Honey Island Swamp and its interests to tourists in this way:

Because it attracted large swarms of honey bees, early settlers called the place Honey Island. One of America's least explored swamps, this area is home to a large variety of plants and wildlife – and maybe even the mysterious swamp monster, Wookie. Some hunters and anglers swear that they've seen the creature, which they consistently describe as about 7 feet tall and covered with short hair, longer at the scalp. Wookie supposedly walks upright and leaves four-toed tracks. So far nobody on the tours has spotted said creature, but if it exists, then this wild and dense area seems an appropriate environment.

Although you may miss Wookie, you'll see some of the swamp's resident and migratory birds: herons, ibis, egrets, bald eagles, owls, and wild turkeys. Crawfish, turtles, alligators, wild boar, deer, and otter also live here. (138)

John V. Dennis also refers to the creature in his book, *The Great Cypress Swamps*:

Honey Island has achieved fame of sorts because of the real or imagined presence of a creature that fits the description of the Big foot of movie renown. Known as the Thing, the creature is sometimes seen by fishermen. Paul R. Wagner, a biologist who lives at the edge of the swamp and conducts guided tours, provided me with details of a recent sighting. A fisherman told him that he had encountered a creature six and a half feet tall, weighing somewhere between three hundred and four hundred pounds, and having long hair, large teeth, and white eyes. The odor of the unknown creature permeated the air. When the creature saw the fisherman, it let out a loud shriek and disappeared into the underbrush. Since then, whenever Wagner visits the remote part of the swamp where the sighting was made, he has an uncomfortable feeling verging upon fear. (108)

Dennis continues:

In many cases, sightings such as this one are inspired by traditions that go back as far as Indian days. If a region is wild and inaccessible and has a history of encounters with strange forms of life, chances are that similar encounters will occur again – or at least be reported. For my part . . . I have never obtained a glimpse of anything vaguely resembling Big Foot, nor have I ever seen suspicious-looking footprints. I have, however, heard sounds that I could not identify. On one occasion, returning from visiting an Indian mound deep within a swamp in South Carolina, I had barely

reached the edge of the woods when I heard a piercing, unearthly scream that lasted several seconds. My dog pricked up its ears, and I felt a chill down my spine. No one was in sight, and the nearest house was over a mile away. (108)

A search for Louisiana tourist sites on the World Wide Web will also lead to the Honey Island Swamp Monster. One site run by geocities.com and entitled “Louisiana’s Honey Island Swamp” helps disseminate the belief tradition in this way:

. . . Honey Island has become one of the most well known swamps because of the real or imagined presence of a creature similar to what others have called Big Foot, sometimes known as THE THING.

A commercial fisherman who claims to have seen THE THING firsthand, ‘he says it was about 7 feet tall and weighed 300 to 350 pounds, with long, orange-brown hair and big wide-set eyes. Sounds like some kind of orangutan!’ It is reported that when the creature saw the fisherman, he gave a loud shriek and disappeared into the underbrush. . . .

Although the swamp abounds with birdcalls of great blue herons, white ibis, snowy egrets, and others, maybe some of the other mysterious sounds are from the THING! (“Louisiana’s”)

A New Orleans information site, neworleansweb.org, contains a link to a page about “The Swamps of Louisiana.” This website, which is also listed as a link by Dr. Wagner’s Honey Island Swamp Tours, helps to popularize the creature in the following way:

The most famous of all swamp lore are the reported sightings of the legendary Big Foot in the *Honey Island Swamp* of Pearl River. Sightings of Big Foot crop up regularly in this wild-life packed swamp east of the city. The sightings have been reported as far back as the earliest reported contact with native Indians. (“Swamps of Louisiana”)

Another Louisiana travel site entitled “Greater New Orleans – Southeast Louisiana Overview” utilizes the Honey Island Swamp Monster to attract tourists in this way: “In the largest city on the northshore, Slidell, you can stay at the historic Salmen-Fritchie house and shop the antique stores of Olde town. If you’re brave, take a swamp tour and hear the legend of the Honey Island Swamp Monster” (“Greater”). A similar search of

the World Wide Web might lead to a listing of “Oddities and Strange Things” in Louisiana, which lists a link to Dr. Wagner’s “Louisiana Swamp Wookie” site and describes it as providing “information on the monster in the Honey Island Swamp” (“Oddities”). See Louisiana.com, which claims to be the “unofficial tourist guide to Louisiana,” provides a listing of “Louisiana Swamp Tours.” While describing the Swamp Monster Tours, the site provides this warning: “Don’t miss seeing the footprint of the Honey Island Swamp Monster in the gift shop!” (“Louisiana Swamp Tours”).

The Audubon Zoo also participates in the commodification of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. In its Louisiana Swamp section, the zoo offers a swamp monster exhibit along with this description:

You got the good spirits, and then you got the weevil sprits.
 Louisiana, with her murky waters and dark Cypress swamps has had her share of swamp monsters throughout history. Legends are told even today of mysterious apparitions inhabiting the more remote swamps. The Loup Garou, also known as the Rou garu or Lou Can, is perhaps the most notorious stalker of moonlit nights. It is the French version of the werewolf, brought by French pilgrims from the old world. Legend has it that a Loup Garou peels off its human skin to become a blood-thirsty wolf monster, hunting dark swamp roads for human blood. Cajun children are still warned by their grandparents not to go out at night for fear of the Loup Garou. In Haiti, a kindred Loup Garou still persists as a real threat.
(Swamp Monster)

The description continues:

In the lower Pearl River, one hears tales of black panthers and the Honey Island Swamp Monster. This monster, a large, hairy, upright walking inhabitant of thick woods, is from a well-known family including other beasts such as the Sasquatch of the Pacific Northwest, the Abominable Snowman of the polar north, the Yeti of Tibet, and Grindell of Medieval England. Although rarely seen, these beasts persist in folklore throughout the world.

Still another, yet seldom seen, ghost of the Louisiana swamps is the Feufolay. This monster is a greenish, phosphorescent mist occurring only

in the darkest of nights, and it has been known to chase people unfortunate enough to be bull-eying, spot-lighting, at night.

Whether or not you choose to believe, the swamp monsters are an important part of the folk history of the Louisiana swamp, so be careful at night. (*Swamp Monster*)

For the tourism industry, the Honey Island Swamp Monster is an entertaining and informative commodity. Above all the creature serves as a means to attract tourists for financial gain.

The Influences of Dana Holyfield

In the past five years the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition has gained renewed interest, primarily due to the efforts of one person, Dana Holyfield. Holyfield is Harlan Ford's granddaughter, and for her the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition serves not only as an informative and cultural commodity through which she can share the experiences of her grandfather, but also and primarily as a financial commodity she utilizes to promote her business interests. Not only does she publicize the creature and retell stories about it in her cookbooks; she also put together the one book solely devoted to *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster* and developed a website to sell her books and replicas of the plaster casts made by her grandfather. She focuses on the personal encounters of her grandfather and other individuals, thus preserving people's experiences in memorate and fabulate form. However, she has seemingly developed a way to capitalize on the tradition by attempting to entertain potential customers. For example, Holyfield's collection of *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster* begins like this:

There is a legend in South Louisiana known as the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Some say he's just an old man who's hiding out from

civilization. A few bayou people claim the monster was created by a voodoo spell. Some say there's no such thing. Then there are those who believe the stories told by swamp natives and hunters who have trekked through the vast swampland and came face to face with the mysterious creature.

My grandfather, Harlan E. Ford, was the first man to report a sighting of the creature in 1974. He was the first to come out of the swamp with plaster casts of the unusual footprints. But it was in 1963 that Harlan and his hunting first spotted the swamp thing. (*Encounters 2*)

Holyfield's Honey Island Swamp Monster website further demonstrates her use of the tradition as a financial commodity. Following the subtitle, "Where the Legend Began," Holyfield briefly retells the story of her grandfather and shows pictures of a plaster cast and the book *Encounters*, both for sale online (Holyfield, "Where").

In her cookbook, *Swamp Cookin' with the River People*, Holyfield includes a picture of the plaster cast accompanying a retelling of her grandfather's story. She also refers to the story of Old Man Williams and concludes with this: "The legend of the swamp monster lives on in Louisiana. There are those that think it's a hoax, but there are also those who believe – because they have seen it too" (Holyfield, *Swamp Cookin'* 75-6). Her website that advertises the cookbook utilizes the following: - "Special section on crawfish boilin', alligator huntin', and legendary Honey Island Swamp Monster" (Holyfield, *Swamp Cooking*, Website). Holyfield's second cookbook, *More Swamp Cookin': Another Batch of Recipes from the Louisiana Bayou* also makes reference to the Honey Island Swamp Monster. In this book Holyfield includes a copy of a song written by Perry Ford, entitled "The Honey Island Swamp Monster" (122). Through this song, the same one included in Holyfield's *Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster*,

Perry Ford has also done his part to popularize the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition.

Holyfield continues to develop new ways to help spread the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition. She is currently working on two screenplays about the creature: one is to be a type of horror film, the other geared more for children. Holyfield is not alone in her endeavors to employ the tradition creatively. Lee Murphy, author of two novels in a fiction series about a cryptozoologist, plans to make the Honey Island Swamp Monster the subject of his next book.

Closing

Elizabeth Bird argues that “in a world where mass media and oral transmission go hand in hand, people’s perceptions derive from communication processes of all kinds” (199). The Honey Island Swamp Monster commodified belief tradition exhibits the interplay of many forms of communication contributing to the dissemination of this tradition. Although the Honey Island Swamp Monster has not reached the heights of fame of Bigfoot and the Lochness Monster, it has clearly grown beyond the experiences of those who have encountered it. Academics, enthusiasts, the tourism industry, and the media have all contributed to this dispersion, and my own fieldwork, in a way, could be considered the next installment of the commodification process. My purpose is also one of secondary gain (my degree), albeit one that I hope is honorable. While I do not plan to utilize my research for financial gain or to belittle the belief systems of my informants in any way, my goal is an academic one. Sheets elaborates further on this process:

By definition, fieldwork within a local culture will accumulate information about the history and traditions of that community in a manner often

beyond the subjects' interests, ambitions and resources. Yet, such information when published may enter the self-definition of local people as their currency of image and boundary for the external world. (79)

Thus, as occurred in small ways on the swamp tours, perhaps my own contributions to the understanding of this belief tradition will serve to perpetuate it.

Chapter Five: Explanatory Traditions

Introduction

Part of human nature is the need to explain that which appears to defy explanation. As society has developed, science has driven that need in order to clarify what was previously rationalized with unscientific explanations. With the dissemination of various hairy monster belief traditions, more theories have come to light that attempt to explain the origins of hairy monsters. Some of these explanations support traditions of belief while others endorse traditions of disbelief (Hufford, "Traditions" 20). All explanations prove equally significant when attempting to understand thoroughly the belief tradition at hand. Examining the explanatory traditions surrounding the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition will help clarify what this creature is in the eyes of believers and disbelievers.

Traditions of Belief vs. Traditions of Disbelief

Before proceeding it is necessary to understand and accept the validity of explanations of belief and explanations of disbelief. David Hufford proposed two traditions that examine explanations on each side of the spectrum: traditions of belief and traditions of disbelief ("Traditions" 20). Traditions of belief follow the convictions of those who accept as true or possible the supernatural phenomenon at hand. In this case, that phenomenon is the Honey Island Swamp Monster, and for these individuals personal experience serves as significant evidence of a phenomenon's existence. Traditions of disbelief present the viewpoints of those on the opposite end of the spectrum who do not recognize the Honey Island Swamp Monster as a real entity, who rely primarily on

scientific evidence as proof of existence and who discount one entire category of explanation – the explanation that accepts the experience as truth. For many years the study of folk beliefs began with the attitude that the supernatural beliefs followed by the folk were false, stemming from some type of error and independently incorrect. Collectors considered folk beliefs to be “irrational notions,” “old human quirks,” and “mental errors,” to name a few (Hand xiv-xx). This approach seems to dictate that the beliefs of the collector are true, while the beliefs of the informant are not true, but only believed. To understand a belief tradition, it is necessary also to explore the world view of the people involved in the tradition, whether they support the tradition as true or not. Hufford suggests this in the following way:

. . . we should sometimes instead [of assuming the folk beliefs are false] take a truly external point of view when considering folk belief and folk religion, a view that is naïve as would be that of an ethnographer from, for example, the planet Mars. Upon stepping outside our own academic streams of tradition in this way we immediately find two parallel sets of traditions about the supernatural where we had thought there was only one: traditions of belief on the one hand and “traditions of disbelief” on the other. (“Traditions” 20)

Hufford goes on to explain that believers and disbelievers are equally and resolutely unswerving in their views. To provide an example, Hufford states that “from this perspective atheists are believers as much as the faithful are” (“Traditions” 20).

Exploring the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition unearths traditions of belief and of disbelief. Each of these perspectives is necessary for compiling as complete a picture as possible of the tradition at hand, and each perspective must be treated equally.

Rational Thinking

Understanding the process of rational thinking is necessary in order to study supernatural belief traditions. Hufford elaborates:

. . . events accurately observed and reasoning properly carried out are in some cases central in the development and maintenance of folk belief, even when beliefs appear fantastic. And, in such cases, folk knowledge is sometimes well in advance of scientific knowledge. Furthermore, an awareness of the roles of observation and reason can be essential in answering important folklore questions. (*Terror* xiii)

Both traditions of belief and traditions of disbelief can be supported by rational thought processes. According to Hufford, rational thought is a process of “logical deduction and inductive reasoning” which does not have to produce a correct result (*Terror* xviii).

Similarly, “volumes could be filled with correct conclusions that have at times been supported by inaccurate observations and faulty reasoning” (Hufford, *Terror* xviii).

Therefore, the rational explanations of two individuals with differing belief systems could be equally and logically reasoned but entirely different. Believers and disbelievers in the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition offer evidence to support their beliefs.

Goldstein suggests that “what is evidence for one differs from evidence for another,” and it is therefore necessary to examine the evidence supporting the beliefs on both sides of the argument (Lecture 5 September).

Model for the Provisions of Constructing Facts

Realizing, then, that rational thought can lead to differing conclusions about what is truth, one must examine processes of rational thought and the “criteria” for determining what is factual and what is not, within belief systems. Although all belief systems contain different elements, Bonnie O’Connor suggests that “belief systems (including

official systems) have a common basic structure, regardless of the details of their content or the ultimate differences in the specific conclusions they reach and claims they advance” (9). Her proposed structural model, entitled “Provisions for Constructing Facts,” describes six components “related in multiple, complex interconnections” which “cross-reference each other and are mutually modifying and mutually reinforcing within the system” (9-10). The six provisions are: 1) “Criteria for admissibility of evidence” (In folk traditions, personal experience is most significant while in scientific traditions, replicability is most valid.); 2) “Rules for reasoning and testing reasoning”; 3) “Definitions of acceptable ways of knowing”; 4) “Legitimation structures”; 5) “Definitions of kinds and weight of evidence required to establish proof”; and 6) “Validation and verification procedures” (O’Conner 10). Each of these provisions is also related to givens which exist in the belief system. Givens are accepted as truth within a belief system and do not need to be proven. Some provisions “may be derived from givens,” and others “may ratify givens” (O’Conner 10). Applying her structural model leads to the conclusion that although believers and disbelievers reach different truths, logic has taken them through the same patterns of thought to reach their decisions. The same holds true for the search for evidence about the Honey Island Swamp Monster.

Cultural Source Hypothesis vs. Experiential Source Hypothesis

In an attempt to identify the types of explanations people give for supernatural phenomena after subjecting their thoughts to a rational line of thinking, David Hufford proposed two differing approaches to explaining supernatural occurrences: the cultural source hypothesis and the experiential source hypothesis. The cultural source hypothesis

argues that some facet of culture is responsible for creating a supernatural experience; there was, in fact, no experience, but cultural influences caused people to believe in its existence. Hufford suggests six most common explanations employed by individuals arguing that culture has in some way created the supernatural phenomenon at hand:

1. No first-person account exists for many such narratives in their present form, the current stories having developed during oral transmission.
2. Others are misinterpretations of ordinary events caused by the action of tradition on the imagination of the one reporting the experience.
3. Some are either outright lies or errors of memory in which the one claiming the experience has placed himself in an account he at first heard involving another person.
4. Some are the experiences of those who have been victims of a hoax by someone who has used the tradition as a model.
5. Some are actual experiences caused, often intentionally, by fasting, use of hallucinogens, or other methods known to produce powerful subjective experiences that vary cross-culturally and are shaped by expectation.
6. Some are the experiences of abnormal individuals whose psychotic episodes are shaped by their cultural repertoire. (*Terror* 13, 14)

Diane Goldstein proposes three additional explanations commonly associated with the cultural source hypothesis:

7. Experiences are based on unconscious pressures, repressed needs, or projection.
8. Stories arise out of efforts toward social control.
9. There is a confusion of naming traditions and origin traditions.
(Lecture 12 September)

Hufford clarifies that each of the possible explanations presents the same connection between personal experience and explanations of supernatural experiences: “The experiences are either fictitious products of tradition or imaginary subjective experiences shaped (or occasionally even caused) by tradition” (*Terror* 14). In the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, the cultural source hypothesis is applied to

propose the following possibilities about personal experience: 1) The stories have developed from oral tradition, and no personal encounters have occurred (Hufford explanation 1). 2) Encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster are actually mistaken encounters with misperceived animals or humans (Hufford explanation 2). 3) Stories about the Honey Island Swamp Monster are lies that have evolved from attempts to frighten or guide children (Hufford explanation 3 and Goldstein explanation 8). 4) Those who report experiences with the Honey Island Swamp Monster are victims of hoaxes (Hufford explanation 4). 5) Those who report sightings of the Honey Island Swamp Monster are under the influence of alcohol (Hufford explanation 5). We will examine these cultural source hypothesis applications later in this chapter.

David Hufford presents an alternative to the cultural source hypothesis and labels it the experiential source hypothesis. This hypothesis argues that a tradition “contains elements of experience that are independent of culture” (Hufford, *Terror* 15). Applying the hypothetical predictions to the Honey Island Swamp Monster tradition as Hufford did to the Old Hag in Newfoundland results in the following assertions: “The experiential source hypothesis predicts that recognizable [Honey Island Swamp Monster] experiences [can] occur with some regularity without contact with the tradition” (i.e. reporting an encounter with the creature without being aware of the existence of any others). “The cultural source hypothesis predicts instead that, in the absence of a cultural source, recognizable [Honey Island Swamp Monster experiences] will not occur any more frequently than any other dream, misperception, or hallucination” (Hufford, *Terror* 15-16). In the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition, the experiential source

hypothesis is applied in the following ways: 1) The Honey Island Swamp Monster is some sort of unidentified creature, such as a Merbeing or other primate; 2) The Honey Island Swamp Monster is a prehistoric survivor of creatures believed to be extinct; 3) The Honey Island Swamp Monster is some adapted species of a known animal; 4) The Honey Island Swamp Monster is an alien; and 5) The Honey Island Swamp Monster is the result of a voodoo spell. Each of these beliefs will be examined further in the chapter.

In order to study these explanations most effectively, I have organized them into explanations which follow the cultural source hypothesis and those which follow the experiential source hypothesis. Those explanations which lie in the former category are characterized by traditions of disbelief, while those in the latter connect with traditions of belief. I have further grouped the explanations stemming from the cultural source hypothesis into categories based on those identified by Hufford and Goldstein. I have included in this analysis only explanations which relate to the Honey Island Swamp Monster. While they might also apply to other humanoid creatures, there is a connection that makes each explanation relevant to the Honey Island Swamp Monster.

Cultural Source Hypothesis

No First-person Accounts Exist

Some of those individuals who are familiar with the Honey Island Swamp Monster belief tradition believe that, in actuality, there have been no encounters. For them, beliefs stem from the stories told by people over the course of many years. They are the product of oral tradition. According to Denny Holmberg, the Honey Island Swamp Monster is “just a myth, but some people think it’s true” (Holmberg). Dr. Paul

Wagner also does not believe in the existence of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. He rationalizes his beliefs with knowledge that “remote areas lead to stories of phenomena, perhaps to keep other people away.” Again there is the reference to oral tradition.

However, although he provides no further examples of this, he also alludes in the previous quote to the possible use of the tradition for social control. He believes this tradition can be explained rationally, and he further argues his point with the fact that he is unaware of any recent reports of supposed sightings. Dr. Wagner uses the Honey Island Swamp Monster on his tour to talk about folklore and culture, but his use of it is “tongue-in-cheek” (Wagner). For these disbelievers, the Honey Island Swamp Monster lies only in the storytelling traditions of native peoples. Their rationality stems from the knowledge that no scientific evidence has proven the existence of such a creature.

However, more important than lack of scientific knowledge in their search for evidence is the clear consideration and personal knowledge of other, equally “fictional” stories (such as those of Jean Lafitte’s treasure, the honey bear and the legendary black panther) that have been passed down orally for years by natives of the Louisiana swamps. Perhaps Curt Burnette, a wildlife biologist in southern Louisiana, clarified it best when he asserted that without proper documentation, “the Rugaru, the apeman, the Wildman of the swamp” can be considered only legend (Burnette).

Misperception

The belief that personal experiences with the Honey Island Swamp Monster can be explained as misperceptions remains prevalent among those familiar with the tradition. Disbelievers argue that eyewitnesses confuse the imaginary Honey Island Swamp

Monster with real animals or humans. They assert that this type of confusion is undoubtedly possible within the environment that creates the Honey Island Swamp. Environmental misperception arguments include the following two explanations.

1. Mistaken for Another Animal

Given the plethora of wild animals that exist in the Honey Island Swamp, it is a wide-spread belief that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is simply a known animal that people have mistaken for some unknown creature. Captain Ben Aiken asserts that the swamp at night provides the perfect environment for eyewitnesses mistakenly to see a Honey Island Swamp Monster: “But I guarantee if I brought y’all out here at night and you saw a 300-pound hog or a 12-foot alligator with reddish-orange eyes, you’d think you done seen that Honey Island Swamp Monster for sure” (Aiken).

On his tour Captain Cyrus argued emphatically, “We don’t have no Bigfoot. We don’t have no swamp monster.” He proceeded to relate a story about bringing a group of female tourists out at night. The passengers heard a noise, and Captain Cyrus told them it was “him.” They asked, “Him who?” He responded, “Him, the swamp monster. Yeah, boy – he’s big, he’s bad, and he’s ugly” (Blanchard). He told our tour group that the noise had been that of a hoot owl. Whether they utilize a hoot owl, an alligator, or a hog, these disbelievers rationalize experiences with the Honey Island Swamp Monster as simple misperceptions of known aspects of animal nature. They rely on their own knowledge of swamp life to verify the plausibility of these misperceptions.

2. Mistaken for Human

Others who embrace the tradition of disbelief assert that encounters with the Honey Island Swamp Monster are actually mistaken encounters with humans. Dana Holyfield reveals that some believe the creature to be “an old man hiding from civilization” (*Encounters 2*). Others argue more specifically that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is an escaped prisoner or perhaps one suffering from a medical condition. My interview with Claude Bellows revealed the following rationalization that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is actually an escaped prisoner:

I think it was escaped from the prison in Angola and just lived in the swamp to keep his name clear and eventually lived off the land so long he just grew to it, you know, hair grew to him. There was a couple sightings, you know, that seen him. . . . Yeah, there was a couple friends that seen him up in Napoleon, in Logtown. Said he was really hairy, real tall man, you know. Maybe lost his speech, you know, because he didn't have any speech. Tried to communicate with his hands, you know. . . . [He] never was [aggressive]. Tried to communicate with a couple of campers and hunters and stuff like that but never was attacked anybody or anything like that. (Bellows)

Several other informants also made reference to the escaped prisoner theory, supported by their reasoning that discovering an old man hiding from civilization is more logical than believing in the existence of a creature that has no scientific proof of existence. They know emphatically that man exists; therefore an encounter with an unidentified and wild-looking man remains tangible within their belief systems.

The prevalent interlacing of Honey Island Swamp Monster and Loup Garou (werewolf) traditions suggests another possible argument of misperception. This assertion contends that the Honey Island Swamp Monster, along with other humanoid creatures, could be mistaken for a human with hypertrichosis, a disease associated with

both the wild man tradition and the werewolf tradition (Cohen 136; Otten 14). Cohen describes the disease and its connection to the wild man tradition in the following way:

There is a rare medical condition called hypertrichosis in which a person has long hair all over his body, including his face. . . .

Hypertrichosis is so rare, occurring about once in every billion persons, that it seems doubtful it could have had much effect on the origin of the wild man or snowman legends. But occasional appearance of these hairy individuals throughout history probably helped to keep legends alive.

(136)

Those individuals who explain the Honey Island Swamp Monster as the result of various misperceptions demonstrate applications of logic throughout their thinking. Their disbelief is founded in the belief that imaginations of individuals familiar with some sort of humanoid tradition have allowed their cultural awareness to dictate their misconceptions. For them there is nothing extraordinary about the personal experiences, only false impressions of ordinary (although perhaps uncommon) events.

Outright Lies for the Purpose of Social Control

Many individuals who perpetuate the Honey Island Swamp Monster or Rugaru belief tradition do so as advocates of the belief that these stories arose from parents who invented the creature to control their children in some way. Most of my informants asserted that parents utilized these stories to frighten their children and keep them away from the swamp. One informant offered an exception to this. Captain James Camardelle linked the Rugaru tradition with that of a guardian angel:

For the Cajun people, it's just like when you was coming up, your mama might have talked to you about the guardian angel. The guardian angel, when you left your house, the guardian angel would protect you. It was looking over your shoulders at all times. Well, that's what the Rugaru was to the Cajun people. (Camardelle)

His own memory and familiarity with the childhood experiences of others provides the background for presenting the Rugaru belief in this way.

More common in the swamp are assertions that, rather than protecting children, the Rugaru was created by parents to frighten them. These beliefs, too, are founded in the childhood experiences of the storytellers. According to Captain Nolan, parents would tell their children, “The Rugaru will get you!” in order to keep them away from the swamp (Trosclair). Captain James argues further that parents used the Rugaru “to scare the living heck out of you when you was a young boy” (Camardelle). Captain Joey also remembers his parents telling him about the dangers of the swamp monster:

Probably the biggest swamp monster you could find out here would be what was known as a Rugaru. . . . And the Rugaru was supposed to get spirits that weren't, that weren't good. In other words, if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, your parents would bring you out on the levees, out on the marshes, where the Rugarus could get you. . . . I mean from that point, you'd make your bed, you'd put the garbage out, you swept the floor, you'd do whatever your parents told you to do. But that was the Rugaru. (Hatty)

On my tour with Captain Cyrus, he waited until we arrived at a dense area of swamp and then related his belief about the Rugaru: “This is where the Rugaru is at. A Rugaru is a fictional, spiritual thing of the past that parents used to use to tell their kids not to go in places.” He further argued that older people would tell the children that the Rugaru would “get them” if they did not behave well. According to Captain Cyrus, the swamp holds “lots of superstition [and] those kinds of stories thrive” (Blanchard). All of these storytellers remember the Rugaru from their own childhoods, as well as hearing of it from others. Their own experience provides the basis for their logical conclusion that the swamp monster lives only in the reality created by parents to control their children.

They have no evidence otherwise and feel no need to look for any. The evidence of their own childhood experiences provides proof enough.

Hoax

One popular explanation for reported sightings of the Honey Island Swamp Monster is the belief that some individual or individuals have been playing tricks on others by creating fake footprints or dressing up in costumes. Reporter Ed Marten spent a great deal of time interviewing Harlan Ford and familiarizing himself with Ford's accounts. Marten does not believe that Ford, himself, was a hoaxer, but he keeps himself open to the possibility that perhaps Ford fell victim to the hoax of another:

There was something there. Now, whether it was something, someone playing a trick on Harlan and scared the hell out of he and his son or whatever it was, there was something there that bothered him. I don't believe that Harlan stayed at home one night and watched a movie and said, "Hey, this is a great idea. Let's do this." (Marten)

While he considers trickery to be a possibility, he refrains from forming his own opinion until he sees it for himself.

Many believe that hoaxing is a possible explanation for some encounters but perhaps not for all. One of my informants, Larry Buehler, revealed that after he and his hunting partner reported seeing a creature in the woods, they were ridiculed by others and told that they were victims of a hoax: "So we saw something and them people said, 'Well, that's so and so running around there with a damn suit on'" (Buehler). Buehler, while believing that hoaxing provides a possible explanation for some sightings, does not endorse it as an explanation for all reported encounters, including his own. Harvey Hood's beliefs follow the same line of thinking. He does not consider that he fell victim

to a hoax during his own encounter, but he does acknowledge the existence of some trickery:

There had a lot of accounts of people playing tricks on other people. Walking with big feet, casts, shoes on that made bigger footprints. I think that was just people trying to get publicity off of other people that had real accounts. Cause I think somewhere around Boggy Creek, somebody was doing that too, after that. You know once people hear about something, you know, they like to, some people like to, you know, pull tricks on people or stuff like that. . . . I haven't seen any [paraphernalia] to be honest with you. It's more or less just the stories that people have and their accounts that they just pass on, you know. I guess that's what you call folklore. Some of it could be true, some of it may not be. (Hood)

Hoaxing has influenced various humanoid traditions for years, especially to help widely disseminate the tradition. Hood, for instance, became aware of the trickery surrounding the Boggy Creek Monster and associates that with possible motivations for hoaxing in the Honey Island Swamp. The cryptozoological community has recently felt heavy impact from hoaxing. The death of Ray L. Wallace and the subsequent admittance of his family that he used giant man-made foot-shaped carvings to create Bigfoot tracks has led to further debate about the existence of humanoid creatures in North America (Young). Those who embrace traditions of disbelief have found great support for their ways of thinking. They might come to this conclusion: If Ray Wallace, who is responsible for much of the widespread Bigfoot belief in North America, maintained that his evidence was "real" for so many years and yet was only a hoaxer, then it is probable that all evidence is the result of hoaxing. For them, humanoids in North America can simply exist as products of man's trickery; culture has created the experience. The same argument has been made regarding the possible hoaxing of the Honey Island Swamp Monster footprint.

In this case it appears that the Honey Island Swamp Monster may only be myth, but we remain with questions, such as: What did Harlan Ford see? What did Ted Williams see? Does the revelation of this shoe print discredit the entire legend?

We believe we can compare this shoe print to all known and existing casts and photos of legitimate Honey Island Swamp Monster prints and conclude this shoe, with [its] mate did in fact make all of the casts above. If this is true, and we believe it is, then one must question the legend itself in [its] entirety. (“Harlan Ford’s Cast”)

Monster buffs, however, who follow traditions of belief, believe that while hoaxing might be responsible for a number of humanoid sightings, it cannot possibly account for all. To them, culture might shape some, but not all, of the experiences.

Experience Induced While Under the Influence of Alcohol

One of my informants, Larry Buehler, shared with me that he had heard stories of intoxicated men reporting sightings of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Their reports were disregarded, and the explanation came to be applied to many other sightings. According to Buehler, people find it easier to justify that someone was hallucinating from intoxication rather than to believe that the experience was other than that:

There was some other boys that camped down there in log town, I must say 30 years old, some of them right in their 50s. And they love catfish and to drink. And they reported seeing this creature running through the swamp down there, and everybody said, “Oh, don’t worry about those boys. They’re nothing but a bunch of drunks, a bunch of winos. They be drinking that beer, they don’t know what they seen. They just know some rumors and all kinds of stuff.” (Buehler)

Buehler shares this information but repeatedly states that alcohol played no part in his personal experience. He believes that while hallucinating due to alcohol consumption might explain some of the encounters, it undoubtedly cannot be responsible for all.

Experiential Source Hypothesis

Those who subscribe to traditions of belief and follow the assumptions set forth in the experiential source hypothesis begin with the belief that experiences with the Honey Island Swamp Monster are real experiences with a real creature. They do not attempt to explain the experiences in terms that must coincide with scientific fact and cultural truths, as we know them. These individuals accept the personal experiences as truth and rely on information from the experience narratives as evidence.

Before examining the most common explanatory traditions employed by those who follow traditions of belief, it is important also to consider those less popular explanations. One belief asserts that perhaps the Honey Island Swamp Monster is an alien, and this connection brings forward the more prolific link between the Bigfoot tradition and UFO traditions of belief. Although this is a hot topic for many believers in supernatural phenomena, I will not dwell on it due to its small role in my fieldwork. Only one informant, Harvey Hood, mentioned the possible relationship between the Honey Island Swamp Monster and aliens, and his reference to it was one of skepticism: “Oh, somebody had said that they thought that these were aliens, but I don’t believe that” (Hood). Voodoo provides an example of another not-so-popular explanation of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Although not many people agree with this explanation, according to Dana Holyfield, there are natives in the swamp who believe the creature is the creation of a voodoo spell (Holyfield, Interview). Voodoo has been regularly practiced since the mid-nineteenth century in southern parts of Louisiana, and the invocation of such a monster would not be contrary to traditional voodoo beliefs. Despite

the infrequent references to aliens or voodoo, most explanatory traditions revolving around the Honey Island Swamp Monster assert that it exists in the swamp as an animal of one kind or another.

Never-before-identified Animal Species:

In his book *Monsters of North America*, Elwood D. Baumann includes an observation made by Paul Serpas in an article in the *St. Bernard News*:

At a recent convention of the American Anthropological Association, an ancient carved stone head, representing an unknown type of animal, was displayed. The carving is remarkably similar to the descriptions generally given of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. Could it be, then, that such creatures were known hundreds or even thousands of years ago, but have managed to go undetected by modern science? (74)

The belief that the Honey Island Swamp Monster and other humanoid creatures are animals that have not yet been identified and labeled by modern scientists permeates the minds of those who subscribe to traditions of belief and employ the experiential source hypothesis to validate their thinking. Some argue they belong to one species or a variety of species of primates that has never been officially classified. Others consider them survivors of prehistoric relatives that have adapted or perhaps never entered the category of extinct. Additional people believe they might be known species that have adapted in some way to their environments or bred with other species. Individuals who believe that these creatures exist as real, albeit unidentified, animals rely on information from personal experiences, physical evidence (such as footprints and hair samples), and environmental factors to support their beliefs.

1. Primate

Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman states one argument succinctly: “I tend to approach this from the angle that these are animals that just have not been found yet, (“Re: Honey”). Proponents of this belief tend to agree that these creatures are some sort of primate. My informant Harvey Hood follows this tradition of belief:

You know every day they find that we have new species. I think it’s just some species of a lower primate. . . . But, I believe it exists. There’s too many accounts that’s been seen, and all these footprints that’s been cast. I mean, there’s something out there. . . . I just think it’s some kind of primate that we don’t know. Now one day maybe we’ll have a real documented account of one and maybe have it thrown in the books, you know. (Hood)

Hood does not specify what type of primate he believes the Honey Island Swamp Monster to be, and further classification does not seem necessary for him. He saw it with his own eyes, he saw plaster casts of the footprints, and he heard similar corroborating stories. He knows what he knows, and his evidence supports labeling the creature he saw as some type of primate. Other interested parties require further classification.

Writer and cryptozoology researcher Lee Murphy, along with many others, subscribes to the belief that more than one species of humanoid creatures exists. He supports the idea that certain species could be prehistoric survivors of creatures now thought to be extinct, but he believes the Honey Island Swamp Monster is probably a primate, some unknown species of monkey that has adapted to survive in that part of the world. Based on his knowledge of personal experiences, physical documentation, legends of Native Americans, and environmental factors, he advocates that “the evidence

is overwhelming” and asserts emphatically that “the Honey Island Swamp Monster is real” (Murphy).

2. Merbeing

Other cryptozoologists and researchers agree that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is a primate, but their research has led them to assign it a more specific classification under the primate umbrella. In their book *The Field Guide to Bigfoot, Yeti, and Other Mystery Primates Worldwide*, Loren Coleman and Patrick Huyghe restructure classifications done previously by researchers such as Ivan T. Sanderson and Mark A. Hall to suggest a nine-member classificatory system of primates that exist in the world. Based on eyewitness accounts, physical evidence, geographical influences, and folklore, their classification system presents what they consider to be “biologically-based” groupings which reflect differences in “behavior, footprints, hair color, height, physique, family units, diet, living arrangements, daily cycle, and other unique overall patterns that exist from one group of these beings to another” (Coleman and Huyghe 6-7).

As discussed in chapter two, they have classified the Honey Island Swamp Monster as a type of non-human primate called the Merbeing, more specifically part of the freshwater subclass of Merbeings. To review, the following are characteristics of the freshwater Merbeing as explained by Coleman and Huyghe:

1. “angular foot with a high instep and three pointed toes
2. often seen on land
3. carnivorous behavior
4. aggressive and dangerous behavior
5. height that varies from “dwarf to man-sized”
6. occasionally have patch hair growths that appear “like leaves” or “scaly”
7. hair often maned

8. eyes that are usually oval or almond-shaped
9. mostly nocturnal
10. a “singsong vocalization” (37-9)

As previously discovered, these characteristics do not all match those reported by eyewitnesses of the Honey Island Swamp Monster. However, cryptozoologists might argue that the differences can be explained because there are many varieties of Merbeings. Coleman and Huyghe specifically describe five types of freshwater Merbeings, and each type exhibits some different characteristics.

Prehistoric Survivor

Some individuals believe that this unidentified animal, the Honey Island Swamp Monster, is actually the survivor of some prehistoric creature. Knowledge of prehistoric animals known to exist in the past provides evidence for these beliefs, as do personal experiences, physical evidence, and environment factors. Harlan Ford believed that “a prehistoric relative of man may have been isolated here ages ago, developing in its own way, unmolested by the winds of evolutionary change” (*In Search*). His beliefs exemplify the most general of those who support the prehistoric survivor theory.

Other researchers believe more specifically that the Honey Island Swamp Monster, along with other humanoid creatures, is a relic of a specific prehistoric species thought previously to be extinct. Many who subscribe to this line of thinking also hold that only one species of Bigfoot exists, albeit in differing forms, throughout the world. For instance, anthropologist Grover Krantz asserted that there is not “any compelling evidence for more than one type of hairy biped” (Coleman and Huyghe 10). He believed that the humanoid creatures in question are linked to Gigantopithecus and that these

animals exist all over North America and Northern Asia (Coleman and Huyghe 10). The evolutionary pattern of adaptive radiation could offer some validation for this argument, explaining the possibility of physical variations due to environmental changes within a population of animals that remains biologically similar. Adaptive radiation is the “branching out of a population through variation and adaptation to occupy many environments,” and this could provide an explanation for the many differing characteristics exhibited by creatures that, according to Krantz, are all related to each other and to the same prehistoric creature (Otto and Towle 195). More specifically, the Bigfoot-Giganto theory suggests that Bigfoot creatures are surviving relatives of the genus *Gigantopithecus*, a giant cousin of the orangutan, which is now presumed to be extinct (“Bigfoot-Giganto”). Some suggest that, in fact, *Gigantopithecus* never became extinct but continues to exist as the Bigfoot we know today. According to Geoffrey Bourne, reasoning that *Gigantopithecus* could have crossed the Bering Strait, along with humans, provides support for this argument (Pettifor).

During his research, Ivan T. Sanderson suggested a connection to some sort of subhuman being (Steiger 36). Others have narrowed the field to suggest the connection between present-day Bigfoot creatures and another prehistoric ancestor of man - the Neanderthal man. Cohen describes Neanderthals as being “extraordinarily well fitted for survival,” having heavy brow bridges, big teeth, a large brain, and “tools and weapons [that] were equal to or better than those of early ‘modern’ man” (165). Whether Neanderthals began to “die out” on their own or were killed by an early species of modern man, supporters of this theory argue that Neanderthals did not become entirely

extinct. “The surviving Neanderthals succeeded so well in hiding themselves that their very existence was in doubt. They became incorporated in the wild man legends and ultimately into the modern legends of the Abominable Snowman” (Cohen 166).

Proponents of this theory rely on physical evidence and evolutionary processes, along with experience narratives to support their beliefs. For them it is possible that Bigfoot, and thus the Honey Island Swamp Monster, is a “direct descendent of Neanderthal man” (Hill and Williams 296).

Species of Known Animal

Some participants in traditions of belief about the Honey Island Swamp Monster believe it could be some species of a known animal that has simply adapted in one way or another to the environment of the Honey Island Swamp. The natives of the area rely on stories of past carnivals or circuses to provide evidence for this belief. In my interview with Dana Holyfield she referred to “individuals who remember a circus train that crashed in the 1940s and suppose that this creature is the offspring of some escaped animal that bred with native creatures in the swamp” (Holyfield, Interview). More specifically, Harvey Hood makes references to escaped apes. However, almost as quickly as he considers the possibility of the Honey Island Swamp Monster being an ape, he dismisses it:

Well, we had carnivals and all back in the early 1900s and late 1800s. It could just be a family of apes, gorillas that adapted to the climate, like you was talking about earlier. And the apes are very intelligent. I don't know. I think this is a different species than apes 'cause they've got to be more intelligent 'cause apes get captured all the time. Bigfoot ain't never been captured. So, I think they got a very high intelligence, whatever it is. And they don't like people. They like being by themselves. (Hood)

Some Animal – Known or Unknown

While many individuals have processed evidence through their belief systems to conclude that the Honey Island Swamp Monster is one type of creature or another, many others believe whole-heartedly in its existence but have no definite label, beyond Honey Island Swamp Monster, for what it is. Larry Buehler knows without a doubt that, even though he cannot reveal what it was, he saw something in the woods:

I didn't know what it was. You know, you get to talking with different ones who I saw this and I saw this and maybe somebody else saw this, and they got people that coon hunt at night time. And I talked to different ones if they ever saw it, you know, and some people make fun of you and that kind of mess. But I don't know, you know. I just let them talk. I say y'all believe what you want to believe and don't believe what you want. I'm just telling you what I saw, and that's just the way it is, you know. I don't drink, so did I see it? I did see it. In my eyes, yes I saw it. And it was real, whatever it was. And if somebody walk up to me and say do you believe they exist? And I say whatever species of animal this is, yes they exist. How come they don't see no more of them? I don't know, you know. I can't answer those questions, but on that particular day, I definitely saw that one. (Buehler)

For Larry Buehler, his personal experience is the greatest evidence. Danny White's experience occurred on the same day as Buehler's, and he, too, needs no name to identify the creature he saw:

And I had talked to a couple of the older people down there at that time, you know people that lived there way before NASA came in and shut the place down and you know people moved out, and people said, well you know, I heard of that Honey Island Swamp Monster, but I'm not going to say that ain't what it was. I'm not going to say that's what it is, either, you know, but whatever it was, I seen the whole thing. Not just his legs, but I saw the whole thing. . . . You know, from what everybody tells about the Honey Island Swamp Monster, you know, I would say that was probably about the closest that I would ever come to seeing one if that's what it was. (White)

Believers like Larry Buehler and Danny White do not need a name for the creature they encountered to know that it was real. For them, the experience was enough.

Why Hasn't It Been Discovered Yet?

Individuals who subscribe to traditions of disbelief and justify the reports of the Honey Island Swamp Monster using cultural source hypothesis explanations rely on the fact that this and other Bigfoot creatures have not yet been officially identified to support their arguments. Those who follow traditions of belief, however, depend on other forms of evidence to justify and explain why these creatures have not officially been “found.” For many, the environmental conditions of the 70,000-acre Honey Island Swamp supply sufficient justification for lack of discovery. Harlan Ford argued that because of the vast size of the swamp and the fact that there are many areas that have never been explored by man, the creature could “stay in there another 200-300 years and never be located” (*In Search*).

In addition to the swamp's size and lack of exploration, the characteristics attributed to the Honey Island Swamp Monster also play a role. During our interview, Harvey Hood explained his thoughts about lack of discovery:

What that was, I don't know, but the Honey Island Swamp, there's places out there was man has never stepped foot in the swamp. It's, I believe it's 100 square miles of swamp, so there could be anything in there. . . . I think that they're very intelligent. They either bury their dead or they have maybe some type of ceremony or something and they dispose of it. Whatever they do, they do it good, because there ain't nothing, no bones have ever been found, or any, you never hear of even one, I'm sure, of one getting run over or hit or something like that, so these creatures are very intelligent, whatever they are. (Hood)

Similarly, Ivan T. Sanderson suggests that these creatures “may gather up their dead for burial in special caves,” and Dr. Jeanne-Marie-Therese Koffman concurs that they “may bury their dead in secret places” or “throw corpses of the deceased into the rushing water of mountain rivers or into the abysses of rocky caverns” (Steiger 35). Loren Coleman supports these arguments in this way: “These animals are intelligent, secretive, and rare. All endangered species now share little habitat and avoid humans routinely. The fact [that] they are unknown to science does not have any direct bearing on the database that they are known to local peoples” (Coleman, “Re:Honey”).

In addition to environmental conditions of the swamp and habits of the creatures, according to one survival specialist it is “possible to assume that as men encroach upon the swamp, these legendary creatures will be in retreat” (*In Search*). Danny White concurs:

Well, I don't think people hang around the swamp anymore like they used to. I mean, everything's so modernized with roads cut here and there, they could have moved deeper into the swamp, if that, you know, I think just civilization has moved them out. . . . I think, you know, there's probably a little more boat traffic out there now, and the more of them rocket engines and all that they test out at NASA and all that. They could have run these things off, you know, because I've never heard of anybody else, and I still hunt the area down there. (White)

Scientists further suggest that remains have not been found because no serious work has ever been conducted in order to look for them. Considering the vast expanse of territory and the dense environmental conditions in which Bigfoot creatures reside, extensive effort would have to be made in order even to attempt to locate physical remains of these creatures. Fossils are even more unlikely to be found because remains do not become fossilized very often. What does not become fossilized eventually becomes absorbed by

the ecosystem (“Where”). Brad Steiger argues that “even the bones, antlers and hooves of the largest [known] forest creatures are soon eaten or scattered by forest scavengers” (35).

Closing

I want to conclude with a portion of my interview with Ed Marten. Marten is an admitted skeptic, but he remains open to the possibility of being proven wrong:

If I don’t see it, touch it, feel it, smell it, I in an area such as we’re talking right now, I have difficulty in believing it. I wasn’t there, I didn’t hear it, I didn’t see it, it didn’t scare me. Something caught Harlan’s imagination. Something bothered him enough to pursue this. I just, you know, I’m one of the people I would love to believe there’s an abominable snowman, and I’ve seen some of the footage of it, but do I believe it yet? Not until they put one in a cage or until there’s a little more truth, and this falls along the same line. But who knows? Stranger stories have been told. (Marten)

During part of our interview, I asked Marten why he thought more reports have not come to light in the last 20 years. His response touched on many of the philosophical issues that influence our belief systems today.

That’s kind of hard for me to come up with a reason why. . . . I think a lot of people became very excited about it at that time. I think probably we live in a society and in a time right now where there is more skepticism than belief in whether it be God or companies or the government of our country. I don’t want to attempt to lecture you right now, but the word honor, morals, living by your word, a lot of these things don’t exist anymore. As interesting as your question was to me as why haven’t people heard anything in the last 25 years, I don’t know why we don’t have people who have wording. It seems we live in a society where people say and do whatever it takes to accomplish whatever they want. Now, with that being said, we live in a very fearful society, I believe, right now. And I think that people whether there’s anything to this story or not, if someone was in the swamp and they thought they saw something, they might come out and say, “Hey I thought I saw something,” but pushing it, I think people fear ridicule. They fear to stand up and say whatever they feel. Does that mean that I endorse the fact that something is there or not there? I think that’s for the individual to make up his own mind. But I

think that's more or less the reason why you have or haven't heard from someone in the last 25 years. I don't think - when's the last time you heard anything about a UFO, which is one of my favorite subjects. You don't hear very much about it anymore because people are ridiculed for it. Does that mean there are no sightings? Well, I think that same application is here. And as I said, I'm not trying to endorse it, but from an explanation standpoint, that may hold a little water. . . . The people who related their stories to me accepted my skepticism about [them], but I respected them enough that they were willing to come forward and tell me something, and some of them convinced me that they believed, they believed there was something there. Now the interesting aspect of this is that this is 2001, and what are we talking about? The 70s and 80s? If there was something there then, there's something there now. And that's very, very interesting. (Marten)

One of the most common questions heard from the mouth of a toddler is "Why?" As children grow into adults, the desire to understand "why" continues. Throughout our lives we are seeking to comprehend that which is beyond our knowledge, and accepting an "answer" to a question without proper explanation seems to contradict human nature. The pursuit of the truth about the Honey Island Swamp Monster (and other humanoid creatures) exemplifies this search. Proponents of traditions of disbelief and belief suggest explanations to help the world (and themselves) understand the reported presence of humanoid creatures on the earth. With logic supporting each side, one argues that reports are fictitious creations of culture, while the other suggests that at least some of the accounts are based on actual experiences accurately reported. Although believers do not question the authenticity of their experiences, society's acceptance of "real" humanoid creatures will probably necessitate the discovery of some "irrefutable scientific proof." Until then, the debate lives on. Until we are able unequivocally to solve the mystery of the Honey Island Swamp Monster, we continue our quest for the "why."

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Appendix A:
Excerpts from Swamp Tour Transcripts

A.1 Captain Ben Aiken, Cajun Encounters Swamp Tours, July 7, 2001

BA: Anybody here know the difference between a fairy tale and a swamp story? How's a fairy tale start off?

Tour members: Once upon a time . . .

BA: And how does it end?

Tour members: Happily ever after.

BA: Very good. A swamp story always starts off, "No kidding, folks, it really happened this way," and it ends in "y'all."



No kiddin' folks, it really happened this way, y'all. Deep in here in the Honey Island Swamp in the shade of the big Cypress trees, we have a creature that's existed for nearly, for hundreds and hundreds of years. It's been featured on a program called "In Search Of" narrated by Leonard Nimoy on the Discovery Channel. Now before the Europeans came to North America, the early Indians out here called this creature "Bouquiois." The Indians of the Pacific Northwest called it "Sasquatch." Some of y'all might have heard it called "Bigfoot." Many stories abound. The Early French that came here called this creature Loup Garou, which literally in French means wolf man. Spain had Louisiana longer than the French. They saw this creature and called it Hombre Lobo, again Wolf man. Locals described this creature as being seven foot tall with long, reddish-brown hair similar to that of an orangutan. For that reason, some of the locals call it "The Wookiee," after Chewbacca in Star Wars. Claimed it has a sloped forehead,

eyes set far apart, recess in the head, nose similar to that of an ape, sharp teeth. And they claim that it makes a loud [scream] sound. [Laughter] But no kiddin' folks, it really happened that way, y'all. But I guarantee if I brought y'all out here at night and you saw a 300 pound hog or a 12 foot alligator with reddish-orange eyes, you'd think you done see that Honey Island Swamp Monster for sure.

A.2 Denny Holmberg, Mr. Denny's Voyageur Tours - July 8, 2001

DH: Loup Garou is a female werewolf. Loup Garou. It waits on dead-end roads. It eats young lovers. And during the daylight, it turns into a cockroach. That's about all I know about it. There was a . . . they found footprints of a Sasquatch or a Bigfoot back in here in the late 60s. And it's just a myth, but some people think it's true. They found footprints back in here in about the late 60s, and the local papers picked it up, and the international papers picked it up. And then there was all kinds of scientists that came here looking for "la Loup Garou." Some people call it the Wookie monster. Other people, they call it the Bigfoot.

Tour member: Isn't there a program on that?

DH: Mm-hmm. Most of the sightings are in Washington or Oregon.

A.3 Captain Joey Hatty, New Orleans Swamp Tours – July 11, 2001

JH: Stories about marsh monsters, you'll get that today. . . . When I was a young boy, now I'm going back to the late 1950s, I had, there was this old Cajun fella that used to work for my grandfather, and I'd sit down with him and this man would tell stories, and I'm tell you that we just couldn't sleep at night. Probably the biggest swamp



monster you could find out here would be what was known as a Rugaru. Don't ask me how to spell it, I'd have no idea. But a Rugaru was simply a fire monster, a ball of fire. And the Rugaru was supposed to get spirits that weren't, that weren't good. In other words, if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, your parents would bring you out on the levees, out on the marshes, where the Rugarus could get you. Now what the Rugaru really was, and I found this of course as I grew up and found out there's not a monster. Actually it was a gas. See this marsh area like this. There's a lot of swamp gas being released through this marsh, a lot of fuel out there. And in the hot, hot summer nights, sometimes this gas will ignite, not to a huge ball of fire, but the small balls of fire. Because I remember what they used to do is take us out in the swamp areas, the marsh areas, so we could see the little flames. And of course that's all you had to see. I mean from that point, you'd make your bed, you'd put the garbage out, you swept the floor,

you'd do whatever your parents told you to do. But that was the Rugaru. Now the one, my worst nightmare, was the Ogre. Now the ogre, the story goes, there's a legend goes, there was an alligator hunter many, many years ago, the most fierce alligator hunter Louisiana ever had. This man didn't fear alligators. He would hunt them with his hands, that's how powerful he was. Well the story goes this alligator hunter met the most fierce alligator out in the swamp. And there was a big fight, a big, big fight. They fought for days and days, they would only stop to breathe a little bit then fight again. Well it ended up where the alligator was able to swallow this fella, but it couldn't swallow him all the way. In other words, he could only swallow him waist, from the waist down. So the man had his chest and head out of the alligator's mouth. Now as legend has it, for years it was like this, and what happened was they just merged together, creating what is known as the Ogre: half man, half alligator. Now there's the story that was told to me. Of course when I grew up I realized it wasn't true. And I'll never forget in the 1980s, oh let's see, my daughter must have been about five years old back then, we went to the Audubon Zoo. And the Louisiana swamp section back then, they had about maybe 10-12 feet tall, an ogre. And when I saw it, I had goose bumps on my body because here I was always told the story, never would believe it, and all of a sudden, of course the one they had there, I think the head was a head of an owl. But as legend goes, he was half man, half alligator, and they just fought until they couldn't fight anymore and they just ended up merging together. I know several other stories. I don't remember the names of them, but I can remember one was about the hand. I don't know the, an old Creole fella, his last name was Vernon, he was Creole, he was part Indian, from Indian and French

descendents. And the hand was to be found in a swamp among those cypress trees, and if you were paddling your pirogue through these trees, only at night you could feel the hand on your shoulder or your leg. You never would see a body with it. And many, many trappers, of course, were lost. Those that never returned from trapping season, the hand got them. That's how it was written off. The hand got them. Or the Ogre got it. And of course the Rugarus.

A.4 Captain George Billiot, Cajun Pride Swamp Tours - July 12, 2001

GB: Some of the stories, we have what we call in Louisiana, it's just slang, just like the Cajuns were called slang.

Cajuns is a slang word. They were Acadians. They were people that really came from a town called Acadia. At first it was from a poem – Arcadia



turned into Acadia. They came from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, up towards Canada. They were French-speaking people that originally came from France. That's where they originally came from, and they were thrown out, clothes on their back, separated from their families. And I'll tell you more when I get to the cabin. And that's where some of these, the folklore, the tales come from. We have something in Louisiana, they called it a Rugaru. It's spelled wrong. Actually it's a Loup Garou, which in French means a werewolf. That's the Cajun version of Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Yeti, you know different lands have different territories, and our creatures go out at night. And, uh, I've talked to a lot of people about certain things. Out here in the swamp, you'd see some amazing things at night come out here. You really do. Uh, this creature's supposed to have a red glowing eye. If you look into the eyes of the creature, you become one. And there's all kind of anecdotes, things to, if you don't talk about the creature, if you don't talk about the Rugaru in a year and a day, you won't become the creature. That's the only way to stop yourself from becoming one. There's a few tales. There's a few stories about that.

I've heard my grandmother tell stories. We used to go to oak trees, there's an old Oak tree we used to go chase after the Rugaru. And that's the way I was brought up, calling it that – the Rugaru. I didn't know until later on in life that it was a Loup Garou. And it's just a werewolf; it's almost like a vampire. If you get bitten by one, you turn into one. And there's a few other tales that I could probably tell you, I don't know how much you want me to go into detail with this, some of the stories, actually that's why I gave you that paper, some of the stories about the Loup Garou, uh, I always tell a joke that the only time I've ever seen one in the daytime, cause they're usually out at night, was on Bourbon street during Mardi Gras; I seen a whole family coming my way. [Laughter] A whole family. You never know what you're going to see. But it's eerie out here at night, it really is. I tell you what you might want to do. I don't know if any of you have done it yet. The Haunted History Tours. We had the lady, her name is Cathy Smith, she was out here, because we do haunted tours at night. We do haunted Halloween tours out here, riding through the swamp at night. The fireflies light up the sky, kind of eerie. I've never seen more than when I was a young boy. And you hear all kind of strange noises out here at nighttime. Tell you what, the screech owl sends chills down your spine out here. There's a lot more different night sounds.

A.5 Captain James Carmardelle, Cypress Swamp Tours – July 12, 2001

(With grandson in photograph)

JC: For the Cajun people, it's just like when you was coming up, your mama might have talked to you about the guardian angel. The guardian angel, when you left your house, the guardian angel would protect you. It was looking over your shoulders at all times. Well,



that's what the Rugaru was to the Cajun people. When the Cajun people first left the docks with their boats, they're pray to the Rugaru for safe journey, safe return back home, plus good catches. They also used it for one other reason: to scare the living heck out of you when you was a young boy. It was also called the boogie man. And it used to work because the first thing they'd tell you was, boy, if you go over there, the Rugaru's going to get you. So they use it for two reasons. That was one of them. And the other like I say, too, the Cajun guardian angel is what it was.

Appendix B:
Additional Informants' Photographs

B.1 Curt Burnette – July 12, 2001



B.2 Captain Michael Hahn, Gator Swamp Tours – July 7, 2003



B.3 Captain Cyrus Blanchard, Lil' Cajun Swamp Tours – July 11, 2001



B.4 Captain Nolan Trosclair, New Orleans Swamp Tours – July 18, 2001



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