



Research Article

DOES THE YAHOO IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* REPRESENT AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF THE SASQUATCH?

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ABSTRACT. The source for Jonathon Swift's inspiration for the 'Yahoo' in *Gulliver's Travels* continues to challenge and intrigue. This paper suggests that Swift based the Yahoo on a creature now commonly called *sasquatch* that is derived from the ethnography of North American indigenous peoples. Detailed comparison between both creatures shows that their physical and behavioral characteristics closely correlate. Swift's Yahoo could comprise a detailed eighteenth century description of the early accounts of Native American reports about such creatures.

KEY WORDS: Jonathan Swift, Native American.

INTRODUCTION

Gulliver's Travels is a political and social satire by Jonathan Swift, published in 1726. Part IV of this fictional work is an account of Lemuel Gulliver's voyage to the country of the Houyhnhms, in which he discovers two animal populations. One comprises horses, the articulate Houyhnhms, and the other is a subservient humanoid group called Yahoos. These populations are central to Swift's social and political satirical objectives. For more than 60 years researchers have searched for Swift's inspiration for the Yahoo, yet no source for the concept has emerged. Earlier ideas include native peoples encountered during voyages of exploration (Womersley, 2012, footnote 3); the 'Yaios' peoples (Kermode, 1950); and the 'Caffares' of 'Mosambique' (Higgins, 1986).

One possible source for the Yahoo, however, i.e. the Native American traditions about the *sasquatch*, has not been addressed in the literature. The physical characteristics, diet, and behavioral traits of the Yahoo closely correspond with those reported for the *sasquatch*, and it is possible that Swift obtained detailed knowledge of the *sasquatch*, leading him to use this as his model for the Yahoo.

NATIVE AMERICAN NARRATIVES

There are traditions of humanoid-beings in the oral traditions of some indigenous groups of North America. Most of the indigenous stories are from the tribes of the Pacific Northwest: Northern California, western Oregon, Washington State, British Columbia, Alaska and the Yukon.

The being is known by over 200 aboriginal names e.g. *ba'oosh* or *ba'wis* (Tsimshian group); *boqs* (Bella Coola group); *dzozavits* (Shoshoni) (Alley, 2003); *choanito* (Wenatchee); *nalusa falaya* (Choctow) (Newton, 2005); the *dzonokwa* (Kwakiutl people) (Levi-Strauss, 1982); and *ot-ne-yar-hed* (Iroquois tribes) (Orrin and Redfish, 2016). Since the 1920s the term 'sasquatch', a name derived from *suhsq'uhth* of the Coast Salish language (Suttles, 1979) has been popularly adopted for this traditional concept.

The Bella Coola tradition describes a large monster called the *sningq*, that is covered in blue-grey hair and somewhat resembles a man. It walks almost upright on short hind legs, such that the forelegs touch the ground occasionally. These forelegs have sharp talons. It has no tail and great strength (McIlwraith, 1948).

The Haida people who traditionally lived on Haida Gwaii Island off the British Columbia coast have a concept they call *gagiit*, which means 'man on all fours' (Alley, 2003). It is represented as a wild man, whose vocalizations include chuckling, whinnying, screams or yells, and a sound like a crying child. The creatures are the size of people but covered in hair and have the ability to swim powerfully; and dive for shellfish. The Stalo people of the Coast Salish believe the *sasquatch* (McIlwraith, 1948) and the Witiko in Algonkian narratives can swim underwater (Preston, 1980).

The *sasquatch*-like *ba'oosh* of the Tsimshian people is regarded as just another type of humanoid, but hairy, adapted to solitary life and without technology except for rocks and sticks. *Ba'oosh* translates to 'ape, monkey, anything that imitates man' in a recent dictionary of Tsimshian language (Alley, 2003).

The Kwakiutl people traditionally speak of *dzonoq'wa* or *dsonoqua* whose dark face is represented in masks that are dominated by projecting brow ridges, eyes deep set in their

orbits, fat lips pursed in an ape-like manner representing the monster as it emits its characteristic cry, 'uh! uh!' (Levi-Strauss, 1982), hollowed cheeks, and the whole is decorated with black tufts representing hair, beard, and mustache (including females) (Levi-Strauss, 1982). Alley (2003) describes the creatures as giant-sized and as stout; the hands are hairy; their voice is loud; and they are so strong they can tear down large trees. Both males and females are represented with hanging breasts (Levi-Strauss, 1982). Another tradition of the Kwakiutl people is the *buk'wus*. These are man-sized or smaller, covered in hair and can run faster than a normal man. They are shy of man and have frightening countenances (Alley, 2003). Alley suggests they might dig or use caves as they are thought to travel underground. The Nootka have variations of *buk'wus*-like creatures but also traditional stories of the existence of a monstrous hairy giant referred to as *matlox*. These were reported in 1792 by Jose Mariano Mozina, a botanist and naturalist on a voyage of exploration along the present-day coast of British Columbia. He heard stories from the local people that there exists an inhabitant of the mountainous country that is covered in black animal hair, has a human-like head, the eyeteeth are very large and strong like those of a bear; the arms very large and the toes and fingers are armed with large curved nails (Mozino, 1970).

A mid-nineteenth century report about the Chehalis of Washington State by George Gibbs describes a 'race of beings' called 'tsiatko' whom the Chehalis say inhabit 'holes in the ground' in mountainous regions. The 'tsiatko' smell bad, are viewed as partly human and are not considered as spiritual beings; they 'gibber and chatter' excessively. Some say they are covered in hair (Forth, 2009).

The Iroquois believe in a race of 'Stone Coats' that are described as being about twice as tall as humans, with skin as hard as a stone

that repels all normal weapons. They are associated with winter and ice, and they hunt and eat humans. In some narratives, Stone Coats were once human, and became cannibal monsters as a curse punishing them for evil deeds, like the *windigos* of Chippewa narratives. In other narratives, Stone Coats were never human, but were a tribe of primordial man-eating monsters (Orrin and Redfish, 2016). (Table 1).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SWIFT'S YAHOO

The physical characteristics of Swift's Yahoo¹ relate to body shape, feet and hands, facial features, and hair growth and these are summarized in Table 1. The Yahoo is humanoid in form and Swift describes the female body as '... not as large as the males' (334) and that they have pendulous breasts ('Their Dugs [breasts] hung between their fore Feet') (334). The Yahoos have tough and thick skin that is 'of a brown-buff colour' (334). They have an offensive odor ('They smell very rank') (399); '...the Stink was somewhat between a Weasel and a Fox but much more disagreeable' (399). The Yahoo is specifically pronounced as having no tail (334). Swift further describes the Yahoo as an ugly monster (334), odious animals (398), a beast, an abominable animal (342), and deformed (333).

Yahoo feet and hands are described by Swift of a generally modern human form, but with some notable differences 'Fore-feet that differed from my [Gulliver's] hands in nothing else but the Length of Nails, Coarseness and Brownness of the Palms, and hairiness on the Backs. There was the same Resemblance between the Feet, except as to Hairiness and Colour') (343). Rather than nails on the feet and hands, the Yahoo has

hooked and sharp claws ('Strong extended Claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, hooked') (334).

Facial features are mentioned infrequently, but they are nevertheless informative: '...the Face indeed was flat and broad, the Nose depressed, the Lips large, and the mouth wide...' (342).

The Yahoo is undoubtedly hairy and Swift characterizes its hairiness in the following terms: 'Heads and Breasts covered in thick Hair, some frizzled, some lank' 'hair on Fore parts of their legs and feet, but the rest of their bodies were bare' (333-334); 'a long Ridge of Hair down their Backs' (334) 'nor any hair on their buttocks, except about the Anus' (334). Some Yahoos possess beards 'like Goats' (334). Females are distinguished from males in having 'long lank hair on their heads and only a sort of down on the rest of their bodies, except about the Anus, and Pudenda' (334).

Behavioral characteristics of the Yahoo comprise physical abilities and food acquisition. Swift's Yahoos have the following capabilities and were observed by the character of Gulliver behaving in these specific ways. They are strong, agile and hardy; and at ease in trees ('one or two of their kind sitting in trees...' (333); 'They climbed high Trees as nimbly as a Squirrel' 'Several ...leaped up into the Tree' (334). 'They would often spring, bound, and leap with prodigious agility' (334). They can apparently move in a bipedal and quadruped manner: a Houyhnhnm observed that Gulliver walked continually on his two feet, 'differing very much from' (352) the Yahoos in this respect, and Gulliver observed the Yahoos '...often stood on their hind feet' (334) suggesting that they stood on all fours at other times.

Swift conveys Yahoos as possessing non-human facial muscular abilities when Gulliver observes that one 'distorted several Ways every feature of his visage' (334). That they had no capacity for speech is inferred by Swift who describes their vocalizations as howling

¹ The reference for the descriptions is Womersley, 2012; the numbers in brackets refer to the relevant page in that edition of Gulliver's Travels.

and (non-verbal) chattering ('they would howl, and grin, and chatter...' (393); make 'horrible Howlings'; 'she stood gazing and howling' (401); '...stare and chatter and grin' (397).

Yahoos use their limbs for digging ('...dig deep Holes with their Nails on the Side of a rising Ground; wherein they lie themselves...') (400); and are prodigious swimmers with excellent lung capacities ('...swim from Infancy like Frogs, and are able to continue long under Water, where they often take Fish...') (400).

Their diet, as observed by Gulliver when the Yahoos are in their natural environment, comprises herbs, roots, berries, rotting animal flesh, and fish, weasels and a kind of wild rat ('eat Herbs, Roots, Berries, corrupted Flesh of Animals' (393); 'eat several Kinds of herbs, and search about for Carrion, or sometimes catch Weasels and Luhimuhs (a sort of wild Rat)...') (400); and 'they often take Fish which the females carry home to their Young' (400) (Table 1).

YAHOO, YAHUDIS, AND OTHER INSPIRATIONS FOR SWIFT

Inspirations for Swift's Yahoo have long been sought (Crider, 1993; Chance, 1989; Gallagher, 1977; Higgins, 1986; Kermode, 1950; Moore, 1950; Womersley (2012) but none have been embraced. Descriptions of native peoples encountered during voyages of exploration have been considered likely inspirations for the Yahoo but just which group of peoples has not been securely identified (Womersley, 2012: 329, footnote 3). Kermode (1950) alerts us to ethnological information from Robert Harcourt's voyage in 1613 to Guiana in which Harcourt describes one of the peoples called 'Yaios', but this group wears garments and is described as rational, domesticated, and capable of conversation and has a class system. Moore (1950) predicts that Swift might have based the Yahoo on the

Yahudis of northwest Africa to convey the degeneration of a great religious faith and national culture. The language of the Dubliner in which there was a contemptuous term of address 'ya-hoo-er' derived from 'you whore'² has been suggested by Gallagher (1977) to have contributed to Swift's name for the Yahoos as it is a term he believes Swift would have heard in his local environment. Higgins (1986) is the first to approach the problem of the Yahoo by exploring some of its physical and behavioral characteristics to identify a source inspiration. He sees a parallel with a 16th century report in a voyage account by Linschoten, in which this traveler describes 'Caffares' of 'Mosambique' as going naked, having curled or 'singed hayre' on their heads and beards; broad flat noses that are thick at the end, and large lips; they also live like wild beasts or wild men, hunt in the woods, eat elephant flesh and other wild animals.

None of the suggestions for Swift's inspiration for the Yahoo form particularly strong correlations between the proposed inspiration for the Yahoo and Swift's description of it; no one has examined the minutiae Swift provides for the physical appearance and behavioral characteristics of the Yahoo. Nor has the *sasquatch* as a possible source for Swift's Yahoo been noticed in the English Literature scholarship.

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE YAHOO AND THE SASQUATCH

There are correlations between Swift's Yahoos and the American Indian concept of the *sasquatch*. Both represent a large, hairy, tailless, strong and agile humanoid form with tough skin; both have an offensive odor and

² Of interest, Australian Aboriginal groups in Tasmania and New South Wales were reported by early European settlers to use the term 'Yahoo', for a humanoid creature in their traditional knowledge; the name was based on the creature's call 'Yaa-hoo' (D. Argue, *in prep*).

are variously described as an ugly monster. Hands and feet have sharp claws or nails and the skin on their palms is coarse; females have pendulous breasts; both males and females may have beards. Neither has capacity for speech but they vocalize by chattering, howling, grinning, roaring (the sasquatch is said to yell, whinny, scream, gibber and chatter, and make a sound like a crying child). They both eat herbs, roots, berries, carrion, fish, and a wild rat-like (rodent) animal. Both entities ambulate bipedally or in a quadrupedal manner, dig holes in the ground, and are prodigious swimmers, collecting fish (the *sasquatch* is said to collect shellfish) while swimming underwater. Both have large lips, but I have no information for other facial characteristics for the *sasquatch*; and the backs of the hands of both entities are hairy (Table 1).

NATIVE AMERICAN INDIANS IN ENGLAND

The striking concurrence between the Yahoo and the *sasquatch* seems to be beyond that which could happen without a causal connection. It seems unlikely that Swift could conceive of the physical and behavioral characteristics, and dietary preferences, of the Yahoo that so closely correlate with a pre-existing concept, in this case, one that is embodied in Native American narratives.

It is, then, pertinent to investigate if Swift had heard of the Native American creature. Non-indigenous settlement on the North American continent occurred in the 17th century before Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels*. Indeed, solid trading links were well established between England and North America by the 1700s (Clack et al., 2009). By 1690, over a quarter of a million newcomers had arrived and this population doubled every 25 years (Clack et al., 2009).

Trade with the North American Indians was dependent upon establishing and maintaining

relationships with the indigenous populations and conversing with trading partners became a necessity. By 1625, one hundred words in the dialect of the Abenakis had been compiled (Vaughan, 2006). Companies such as the Hudson's Bay Company trained their officers to learn local languages to better facilitate trade in furs and Cree became the dominant language of the trade (Carlos and Lewis, 2011).

Missionaries had been active from at least the mid-1600s and by 1715, several chapters of the Old and New Testament had been translated, for example, into the Mohawk dialect (Pascoe, 1901) which suggests that by this time there were translators with a comprehensive knowledge of English and the Mohawk language, at least.

Moreover, between about 1500 and 1776, American Indian and Inuit men, and occasionally women and children travelled to England where they conducted business, returning home where they influenced their people in Indian-European relations (Vaughan, 2006). Whilst in England they met with royalty and paupers, attended cockfights and operas, and formed a focus of wonderment among the public (Vaughan, 2006).

One of these visits may be of particular significance. In 1710, four American Indian sachems ('sachems' is interpreted as 'Kings' in England) from the Confederacy of five Indian nations, Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca, Onondage, and Cayuga peoples, travelled to England for an audience with Queen Anne. The American Indians, Te Yee Nee Go Ga Prov, Sa Ga Yean Qua Prah Ton, Oh Nee Yeath Ton No prow and Elow Oh Kaom lamented that promised aid to support the Indians, allies of England against the French in Canada in the war of 1709, had not been forthcoming (Bond, 1952).

Accompanying the four Indians to England were Colonel Schuyler and his cousin, Abraham Schuyler, along with Colonel

Francis Nicholson, Lieutenant Governor of New England, Maryland, and Virginia, Colonel Samuel Vetch, and Major Pigeon. Abraham Schuyler acted as interpreter; Colonel Schuyler was also fluent in Iroquois (Bond, 1952). Colonel Peter Schuyler was one of Britain's foremost Indian agents and was the most active of the colonial leaders in the English action against the French in 1709. He kept the Iroquois from fighting with the French; he was the person closest to the Indian Kings who fought alongside him; he knew more about Iroquois affairs than anyone else and was the most admired, trusted and respected by the Iroquois of any white man of his time (Bond, 1952; Johansen and Mann, 2000). He was a prominent landowner, was elected the first mayor of Albany, and had long been on the board of Indian commissioners.

During their visit to England the sachems were entertained at the highest levels of society. On 20 April 1710, they travelled to St James Palace in the Queen's coaches to address the Queen. The Queen commanded the Lord Chamberlain to entertain the sachems at her expense and that they be shown the city; and she provided them with goods amounting to several hundredweight with a value of £200. Colonel Schuyler, too, was much in favor with Queen Anne who also presented him with valuable gifts. The kings were feted for the month of their stay, entering into a strenuous round of official events, attending many diplomatic and social engagements, and become a sensation. They were entertained at Whitehall; visited Hampton Court; and were guests of the Bishop of Canterbury. They were taken to see Greenwich and the mathematical instruments there; heard a sermon at St James's chapel by the Lord Bishop of London; and by the end of their visit they had been to see most of the noblemen's houses. Prior to departure from England (15 July 1710) they had an audience of leave with Queen Anne, and later dined with Admiral Aylmer on his

ship.

Also of interest is that there was potential for social and conversational interaction between the sachems and Swift's friends. The Duke of Ormonde and his wife entertained the Indian visitors to dinner at their countryseat at Richmond on 20 April; the sachems visited the Duke again on 25 April and on the following day the Duke regaled them with a review in Hyde park of the troops of Life Guards. These activities were reported in the *Dublin Intelligence* on 2 May (Bond, 1952). Swift was living in Dublin at this time. As a political satirist and being politically active, we might expect that Swift read the *Dublin Intelligence* as a source for information pertaining to the political and social news from England; that he knew of the sachems visit; and that he noted his friend's attention to the sachems.

On 7 September 1710, soon after his return to England from Ireland, Swift socialized with the Duke of Ormond, who it will be recalled had entertained the sachems during their visit, and Swift mentions several meetings with the Duke over the following months. Also following his return to England, Swift socialized and dined with his friend Addison, essayist and co-founder of *The Spectator*, on 18 occasions between 9 September 1710 and the end of October 1710 (Swift 1901, Letters II-VIII). Indeed, Joseph Addison was very interested in the Indian Kings. During their visit he writes about their activities in *The Spectator*, and, of particular interest, a year after the visit, he writes:

'When the four Indian Kings were in this Country about a Twelvemonth ago I often mixed with the Rabble, and followed them a whole Day together, being wonderfully struck with the Sight of everything that is new or uncommon. *I have, since their departure, employed a Friend to make many Inquiries of their Landlord the Upholsterer, relating to their Manners and Conversation, as also concerning the Remarks which they made in*

this Country: For, next to the forming a right Notion of such Strangers, I should be desirous of learning what Ideas they have conceived of us.' [my italics] (Addison, 1711). We do not know the identity of the friend to whom Addison refers, nor what information was gleaned, but the interest in the many aspects of the sachems is palpable.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DATE 10 APRIL 1710: THE ARRIVAL OF THE FOUR AMERICAN INDIAN SACHEMS

Swift scholars have sought the significance of the dates Swift uses to chronicle the travels of Gulliver in the Land of the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms (Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*). Significant events in Swift's life have been identified for two of the three dates used by Swift in this particular adventure of Gulliver's:

- i) On the 7th Day of September 1710, Gulliver sets sail from Portsmouth. This date corresponds to the date Swift arrived in London from Ireland, the 7th day of September 1710 (Womersley 2012; footnote 8).
- ii) On the 9th Day of May 1711 (Womersley 2012) Gulliver, victim of a rebellion on board the ship *The Captain*, is cast ashore. Swift writes of a fatal duel between Sir Cholmeley Dering, Baronet, and Richard Thornhill occurring on 9 May 1711 (Womersley 2012).

There is, however, one date used by Swift for which no significance has yet been discovered – 10 April 1710. Swift uses this date for the arrival of Gulliver in London following his voyage to Laputa (Womersley 2012) and places it within three sentences of introducing us to the Yahoos. As the other dates in Part IV are identified as significant to Swift we may suppose that 10 April 1710 was also significant to him. 10 April 1710 is the date of arrival of the American Indians in London (as

noted by Bond, 1950).

The close correlation between Swift's Yahoo and the *sasquatch* suggests that Swift had knowledge of this entity. I propose that the importance of the date 10 April 1710 to Swift is the arrival of the people who held knowledge of the *sasquatch*, and that information about this creature was conveyed to any of the people with whom the Indians socialized. At some time, detailed information about this creature came to the attention of Swift. The intermediary source remains unidentified, but the possibilities include: the Schuylers, long-time friends and comrades-in-arms of the sachems; the captain or sailors of the ship in which the sachems came to England; the landlord, from whom Addison sought information about the sachems; other guests at the inn in which the sachems lived for the month of their stay; or any of Swift's friends, including those whom we know were in close contact with Swift following his return to England from Ireland 5 months after the sachem's visit.

SUMMARY

Two lines of evidence for Swift's inspiration for the Yahoos are presented here. The first is the similarity between the *sasquatch* and the Yahoos (Table 1). The second is Swift's use of the date of arrival in London of four American sachems, whose worldview, or that of their compatriots, included the *sasquatch*. It is argued here that there is a connection between these elements, that Swift at sometime heard about the *sasquatch* and this he obtained in minute detail. How he obtained the description of the *sasquatch* is not known, but during their sojourn in London, the sachems moved in the same circles as Swift, and at least two of Swift's close friends, Joseph Addison and The Duke of Ormandy had the opportunity to acquire knowledge from the sachems during and after their visit.

CONCLUSION

While a number of models for Swift's Yahoo have been posed over the past six decades, none have gained acceptance. The physical, dietary and behavioral characteristics of the Native American concept of the *sasquatch* and the Yahoo have not been compared in the literature. The detailed analysis presented here shows that these closely correspond, and demonstrate that Swift could have based his Yahoo on the *sasquatch*. This intriguing position is strengthened when considered in the context of England's involvement with native American Indians in the early 1700s,

and, in particular, the visit of the four American 'kings' who arrived on 10 April 1710, the date that Swift uses for the arrival of Gulliver in London that immediately precedes the introduction of the Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels*. It is possible, therefore, that the *sasquatch* was the original source of inspiration for the Yahoo. We are not privy to how information about the *sasquatch* might have been acquired by Swift, although careful study of the letters and documents pertaining to his friends, such as the Duke of Ormond, his wife and family, and Joseph Addison, might be productive.

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A chance chat with a colleague introduced her to the Australian Aboriginal concept of a Yahoo. She recalled the strange beings called 'yahoo' in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift that she had studied in her high school English Literature class. Wondering about the coincidence of two widely disparate uses of this rather unusual term, she looked into whether Swift could have heard about the Yahoo from English colonisers of Australia who may have heard the term used by Aboriginal people, but the dates did not pan out: Australia was claimed by the English in 1770 and settled soon afterwards. But Swift had published *Gulliver's Travels* 46 years earlier, in 1726. She therefore searched for other possible models for Swift's yahoo among other indigenous cultures. This paper presents a hypothesis for Swift's source concept of his yahoo.

Table 1. Characteristics of Swift's Yahoo and the *sasquatch* entity in the traditions of Native Americans.

Yahoo characteristics	Similar to the <i>sasquatch</i>?
Humanoid form	Yes
Large form	Yes
Males larger than females	?
Females have pendulous breasts	Yes
Tough, thick skin	Yes, if the Iroquios' descriptions of creatures with skin as hard as stone equates with tough, thick skin.
Offensive odor	Yes
Tailless	Yes
'Ugly', 'monster', 'beast', 'Abominable', 'deformed'	Yes
Hands and feet have hooked and sharp claws	Yes
Palms coarse-skinned	Yes
Broad, flat face	?
Depressed nose	?
Large lips	?
Wide mouth	?
Heads and breasts covered in thick hair	Hairy
Long ridge of hair down their backs	?
Females have down on their bodies	?
Some have beards	Yes
Hairiness on the Backs of hands	Yes
No hair on buttocks	?
Strong	Yes
Agile	Yes
At ease in trees	?
Biped and quadruped	Biped and quadruped
No capacity for speech	Yes
Chatter, howl, grin, roar	Yell, whinny, scream, chuckles, makes sound like a crying child, gibber & chatter; Call 'uh! uh!'
Dig holes in the ground	Yes
Prodigious swimmers; swim like frogs; can continue long under water	Prodigious swimmers; dive for shellfish; can travel by water; swim underwater
Eat fish they catch whilst swimming underwater	Collect shellfish underwater
Eat herbs, roots, berries, carrion, fish, wild rat-like (rodent) animal	Eat certain roots, leaves, berries, water weeds, small rodents and fish