

Wild men of Central Asia: A Cryptozoological analysis of Jonathan Swift's 'Yahoo'

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Abstract: The influence of animals in literature is a well-acclaimed phenomenon. Numerous ways have been devised by writers, poets, and artists to use animal references in their works to justify their ideologies. One has to understand that the mythological and fictional species of animals have strong connections with their real-life counterparts. Zoologists and cryptozoologists are researching to understand and unravel those connections. We need to analyze their multidimensional existence. In my paper, I have attempted to create such a connection between the myth of 'Central Asian wildmen' and Jonathan Swift's 'Yahoos'. A cryptozoological evaluation of the relation may unravel the ecological chain which is connecting the two species.

Keywords: Cryptozoology, Myth, Ecological Chain, Species, Animals.

The use of animals in literature has a long and varied history. From ancient mythologies to modern non-fictions animals have been used to serve several symbolical, political, and social purposes. We cannot find any fable, one of the oldest narrative genres, that has not dealt with animal images. Western poetry also has a massive collection of animal imagery and metaphors. Every genre of literature and art deals with life. And when we are dealing with life, we must consider the ecosystem surrounding us. That ecosystem is the source of our daily influences. From ancient times, men have learned to live alongside nature and natural beings. Naturally, they have formed a kind of inseparable bond with the animal species around them within a specific ecosystem. That bond is the main reason for animals to become a part of human psychology leading them to art and literature.

The mythologies from ancient societies have provided much influence to modern literary works to adopt animal images and symbols for various purposes. As those mythologies deal with human culture, both social and psychological, they have integrated the natural animal values in human lives. And this inclusion has been used, modified, manipulated, and exploited by artists and writers throughout ages to create various modes of representation of human nature. Today, even hardcore realistic fictions are using animal images to acquire a wide range of rhetorical effects covering the field of pathos, to bathos, and involving the commonplace.

Every writer and artist has found their animal influence from various spheres ranging from natural to supernatural. Now, in most cases, animals have been an integral part of children's literature as evident in the writings of Lewis Carol. Those writers have tried to bring out the innocence of the animals to influence and also represent the psychology of young minds. But, apart from that, animal images serve some deeper purposes also. Writers like Jonathan Swift and George Orwell have taken the usage towards a more political level. Leading to the exposure of human frailty, and the notable difference between Swift and Orwell is that where Orwell has used animals from the domestic field, Swift has used the fantasy element to serve his purpose.

Jonathan Swift, in his 'Gulliver's Travels', has satirized the contemporary English Society. To be more exact he has criticized the whole of the human race for its irrationality and false pride to rule others. In the first three voyages, the satirical effect is somewhat mild. But in the last voyage of Gulliver to Houyhnhnm Land, the effect is pretty hardcore. Swift, like a master satirist, has used Gulliver to mock the concept of religion and politics making his way to human nature and society. In the fourth voyage, the satirical effect is highest because of Swift's use of two animal species- the intelligent horses representing the master class and degenerated ape-men representing the slaves. Now, Swift has deliberately altered the two positions to mock the humans in the disguise of the ape-men. To Gulliver, Swift's traveler, these ape-men, known as 'yahoos', are the embodiment of everything vile and negative:

"Their shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me, so that I lay down behind a Thicket to observe them better."(Swift, 209)

Swift intended to create a species that will serve his purpose to satirize the human race in general. In this respect, the 'yahoos' became a perfect instrument for him. Now, readers may think that the 'yahoos' are members of a new race created by Swift himself. But, the reality is something different. The 'yahoos' are representations of certain ape-like wildmen found in myths of some portions of Asia and Africa.

The Europeans, during the Middle Ages, often thought that the Central portion of Asia held many secrets deep within its forests. The jungles and mountains were filled with unknown creatures and monsters. The story of wildmen came in front of civilized society through the experience of Johannes Schiltberger; the first westerner who documented it. (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 2)

Schiltbergen served as a slave soldier under some Mongol and Turkish generals after he was taken prisoner in the battle of Nikopolin 1396 (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 2). Though

he never had claimed to see any wildmen with his own eyes, still during his journeys he had heard of savage men like beings roaming the mountains and forests like wild beasts. They ate grass, leaves, and anything edible they could find. Their bodies were covered with fur and only the faces and hands were without hair (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 2). The color of their fur was reddish-black. They had thick head hair that landed down their backs like horse-mane. A flat nose and high cheekbones marked their facial structure. Both males and females had muscular arms and legs. Females had large breasts (Eberhart, 3). The same descriptions can be found in the accounts of Gulliver when he encountered the yahoos in Houyhnhnm Land:

“Their Heads and Breasts were covered with a thick Hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had Beards like Goats, and a Long Ridge of Hair down their Backs, and the fore parts of their skins, which were of a brown Buff colour... The Hair of both sexes was of several colours, brown, red, black and yellow.” (Swift, 209).

The similarities found in both descriptions are very clear. Now, we don't know if Swift knew about the wildmen from Central Asia, but we can't deny the fact that Swift's yahoos are much like the ape-men mentioned by Schiltberger. Some of the researchers have mentioned that these wildmen can run like horses and swim very fast (Eberhart, 12). The same attributes can be found in the yahoos:

“They climbed high Trees, as nimbly as a Squirrel, for they had strong extended Claws before and behind....” (Swift, 209).

According to local myths, the Wildmen from Central Asia and West Asia are known as 'Almas' and 'Abnauaya' respectively. The Almas are mostly known among the inhabitants of Mongolia. Some records are also found in some parts of Siberia. A Russian researcher named Boris Porshnev acknowledged the fact that he had interviewed some people who validated the existence of Almas. (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 3). Now, in most cases, it has been implied that the wildmen were afraid of humans and they avoided contact with them (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 4). They lacked proper language structure for communication and it made them afraid of humans. But, at the same time, there were some reports where some 'Almas' or wildmen abducted some male and female humans for some unknown purpose. Another researcher named Dionizjusz Czubala(1993) has interviewed some Mongols and has found out that some of those kidnappings happened for sex and reproduction. A story about a human woman was becoming pregnant or a human male was being used by Almas for reproduction was heard, but those were rare (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 4). Now, Swift has given his yahoos some attributes of vile nature. Rage, jealousy, greed, and lust for sexual desires are among them. To the novelist, they were

perfect beings that could satirize human beings. The myths and lores about the wildmen, somehow, were subverted and they found their presence in Swift's description:

“For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardly, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel. It is observed that, the Red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and Activity.” (Swift, 248)

The adjective like ‘libidinous’ and ‘Mischievous’ are enough to prove that how Swift's yahoos have drawn their characteristics from the myth of Almas. Now, when I have mentioned the food habit of Almas that they eat nearly anything, the same chart can be found in Swift, but in a little satirical way,

“There was nothing that rendered the yahoos more odious, than their undistinguishing Appetite to devour everything that came in their way, whether herbs, roots, berries, the corrupted flesh of animals, or all mingled together...” (Swift, 243)

This negativity has been further developed when Swift has stated that the yahoos have a strong connection to ‘Nastiness and Dirt’ (Swift, 245). Now, when we come to describe the nature of the Almas, the similarity can be found. According to some researchers, the Almas tend to live in underground holes or caves and they smell a lot (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 3). Gulliver, again and again, has attacked the yahoos for their degraded nature:

“For as to those filthy yahoos, although there were few greater Lovers of Mankind, at that time, than myself; yet I confess I never saw any sensitive Being so detestable on all Account...” (Swift, 215)

Now, if we try to find a rational origin about the Almas, it can be said that they are the remnants of ‘Neanderthal’ or *Homo erectus* as Neanderthal fossils have been found from Central Asian Caucasus eastward region (Stahlberg and Svanberg, 5).

It can be said that the Almas, Neanderthals, and the yahoos, all are parts of the same genetic chain. It cannot be pinpointed that Swift had access to all this information when he wrote Gulliver's Travels. But as we have that information within our grasps, it is easy for us to develop the missing link. This very missing link can serve as a stepping stone for researchers for further studies on the yahoos as well as other animals and myths which are dominantly present in every sphere of world literature.

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