KANCHIOLI
(Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences)
ISSN : 2583-0740 (online)
Volume- V, Issue – I, JUNE-2025

Cryptid Myths in American Literature: The Intersection of Folklore and Cultural Narratives

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ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED 11 DECEMBER 2024

ACCEPTED 11 DECEMBER 2025

PUBLISHED 28 FEBRUARY 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the influence of cryptid myths on American literature, examining how folklore creatures have shaped narratives and themes in literary works. The study highlights the symbolic and cultural significance of these myths, demonstrating their role in reflecting societal fears, environmental concerns, and the human fascination with the unknown. By tracing the historical and cultural origins of cryptid myths and their integration into literature, the paper contributes to an understanding of the dynamic interplay between folklore and literary expression in America..

Keywords:

Symbolism, Thematic Analysis, Native American Folklore, Digital Media, Psychological Underpinnings.

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INTRODUCTION

For generations, Americans have been fascinated by cryptids, or animals whose subsistence cannot be established. These enigmatic creatures have sparked numerous myths, films, and scientific research. These abstruse species have had an impact on American literary works as well. For millennia, legends of weird animals in the forests, marshes, and lakes have been bequeathed, with cryptids frequently appearing as prominent characters.

Bigfoot, an ape-like monster who wanders the Pacific Northwest forests, constitutes one of most famous cryptids in American literary works. Its outlandish and elusive personality has become the topic of several books, articles, and films. Bigfoot's potency and limberness are beyond explication, establishing his position in American legend and inspiring innumerable stories and oeuvres. Another well-known one in American literary works is Chupacabra, a blood-sucking being those lives in the Southwest barren land. This enigmatic monster has been the topic of several novels and films, captivating the imaginations of countless people ecumenically.

Cryptids have significantly influenced American literature, particularly in horror and sci-fi, inspiring creators to craft horrifying monsters and explore the unknowable, tapping into the primal fear that drives literary excellence.

Cryptids, unconfirmed monsters like Sasquatch and sea serpents, are central to American mythology and reflect a shifting cultural environment. They invite exploration of the unknowable, inspiring countless stories, films, and TV shows. With the rise of the internet, interest in cryptids has grown, fostering shared research and offering insights into American perspectives and connections to these myths (Mart & Cabre, 2021).

According to Mullis (2019), Native American tribes have a rich tradition of supernatural myths that connect people to their cultural history and pass down important customs.

These myths offer a unique perspective on nature and human-environment interactions. In the 1800s, European settlers and missionaries popularized these legends. The mid-1900s saw a rise in cryptid sightings, influenced by television and the growth of sci-fi and fantasy culture. Today, cryptid mythology remains a key element of American culture and media.

The cyber era has significantly impacted cryptid research, with social media and online forums enabling the exchange of experiences and stories. This has led to the creation of internet groups and platforms like YouTube and podcasts dedicated to cryptid studies. However, the rise in popularity has also contributed to the spread of fake information, making it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction and leading to potential confusion.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to examine the influence of cryptid myths on American literature by exploring how these myths shape thematic and narrative structures, reflect cultural and environmental concerns, and reveal psychological underpinnings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a multidisciplinary approach to investigate the influence of cryptid myths on American literature. It integrates qualitative textual analysis to examine how cryptid narratives are constructed, interpreted, and disseminated within literary texts and broader cultural contexts. Through close reading and thematic analysis, the study seeks to identify how cryptid narratives function symbolically and thematically within these texts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of cryptid myths and American literature is an area that has garnered increasing scholarly interest, particularly in the context of cultural studies and literary

analysis. This literature review examines existing research on the influence of folklore and mythological creatures on American literary traditions, highlighting key themes and contributions to the field.

Folklore and mythology have long been recognized as fundamental components of literary traditions, providing rich sources of narrative and symbolic content. According to scholars like Alan Dundes and Jan Harold Brunvand, folklore serves as a repository of collective cultural memory, offering insight into societal values, fears, and aspirations (as cited by Bronner,2007).

Research on cryptid myths in American literature is emerging, with works like David J. Puglia's North American Monsters: A Contemporary Legends Casebook offering a thorough analysis. Puglia (2022) argues that these myths are not just relics of pre-modern beliefs but are continually reshaped in modern narratives, reflecting contemporary societal and environmental issues.

Cryptids in literature often symbolize broader cultural and psychological themes. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2014), in his edited volume The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters, explores how monsters, including cryptids, serve as metaphors for the unknown, the feared, and the repressed aspects of human consciousness. This symbolic function is particularly evident in American literature, where cryptids often embody anxieties about wilderness, the limits of human knowledge, and the boundary between civilization and nature.

The United States of Cryptids by J.W. Ocker (2022) explores American myths and monsters, blending folklore, history, and pop culture. It examines famous cryptids like Bigfoot and lesser-known creatures tied to local lore across the U.S. Presented as a "tour," the book combines storytelling, humour, and investigation, showcasing the cultural significance of cryptids while diving into their impact on communities and

tourism. It's a must-read for fans of folklore and the paranormal.

Crazy About Cryptids! by Matthew P. Rowe (2015) uses scientific inquiry to examine cryptids like Nessie. Through a narrative approach, it teaches critical thinking, ecological concepts, and evidence evaluation, emphasizing skepticism and tools like Occam's Razor to assess extraordinary claims.

The X-Files: The Official Archives: Cryptids, Biological Anomalies, and Parapsychic Phenomena (2020) by Terry P. explores the cryptids, biological anomalies, and paranormal phenomena from The X-Files series. Presented as FBI case files, it offers background on these mysteries, blending fact, fiction, and investigative insights from Mulder and Scully.

Freaky Folklore: Terrifying Tales of the World's Most Elusive Monsters and Enigmatic Cryptids by Darkness Prevails and Carman Carrion (2024) explores cryptids and folklore through chilling narratives. It combines cultural insights with eerie storytelling, delving into legends like Bigfoot, Chupacabra, and global mythic creatures, examining their origins and societal impacts.

The influence of cryptid myths on contemporary American literature is evident in a range of genres, from horror and science fiction to literary fiction. Stephen King's works, such as "It" (1986), incorporate elements of folklore and myth, using cryptid-like creatures to explore deeper psychological and social themes. Similarly, Max Brooks' "Devolution" (2020) revisits the Bigfoot legend in the context of a modern ecological thriller, highlighting the enduring appeal and adaptability of these myths.

Native American stories have significantly contributed to the persistence of cryptid beliefs, with GM Eberhart (2002) noting that Native Americans traditionally believed in mythical creatures. These myths often explained events beyond logical understanding, which may help explain the enduring debates over cryptids like Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster. Additionally, Native American legends may have influenced the

interpretation of supernatural phenomena like UFO encounters, playing a key role in the long-standing propagation of cryptid myths.

According to Loxton and Prothero (2013) there is not enough research to substantiate the reality of the Loch Ness Monster, and that other stories may be rooted in genuine creatures but have been inflated over the years. They also examined the likelihood that tales are founded on true sightings of strange species such as Bigfoot or the Yeti. Finally, they determined that these myths and stories do not exist.

Devin Michael Elliott's thesis investigates the influence of West Virginia's urban legends on local and international cultures, examining their historical background, impact on national culture, and portrayal in popular culture, contributing to global folklore. It also explores the social and psychological impacts of these stories on cultural memories and identity (Elliott, 2021).

This research takes an interdisciplinary approach to explore the symbolic and thematic roles of cryptids in literature, blending folklore and literary analysis to reveal how these myths reflect societal fears, environmental concerns, and fascination with the unknown. By tracing the historical and cultural origins of cryptid myths and their evolution in American literature, it situates them within broader cultural trends. The study also highlights the influence of contemporary media and the digital age, showing how modern culture shapes and is shaped by these narratives. Covering various genres, from horror to literary fiction, it demonstrates the adaptability of cryptid myths. The inclusion of Native American folklore adds depth, emphasizing diverse cultural sources often overlooked in Eurocentric studies. Lastly, through an ecocritical lens, the research connects cryptid myths to environmental discourse, illustrating how these narratives respond to ecological concerns and offering a fresh perspective on their impact on American literature and culture.

The research carries substantial implications for future academic inquiry and cultural

understanding. By exploring the symbolic and thematic roles of cryptids within literature, this study sets a precedent for future literary analyses that can delve deeper into how these narratives evolve over time and across genres. Cultural studies stand to benefit by further investigating how cryptid myths reflect and shape societal fears, environmental concerns, and the broader cultural imagination. This could lead to nuanced examinations of how these narratives adapt to contemporary contexts and continue to resonate with audiences today.

Anthropological and sociological research could expand on the study's exploration of Native American folklore and its integration with cryptid myths, providing insights into how these stories preserve cultural heritage and influence community identities. Moreover, an ecocritical approach can inspire future studies that explore how cryptid narratives contribute to environmental discourse, offering new perspectives on how folklore intersects with ecological awareness and activism.

In the realm of media and digital culture, this research underscores the influence of modern platforms on the dissemination and reinterpretation of cryptid myths. Future investigations could explore how digital storytelling and online communities contribute to the perpetuation and transformation of these narratives in the digital age.

Psychologically and socio-politically, further analysis could illuminate why cryptid myths continue to captivate and unsettle audiences, shedding light on the deeper human anxieties and societal tensions these narratives address. Comparative mythology also stands to benefit, as scholars compare American cryptid myths with similar narratives from other cultures, fostering a global dialogue on the universal themes of mystery, fear, and the human quest for understanding the unknown. Overall, this research paves the way for interdisciplinary explorations that promise to enrich our understanding of cryptid myths' enduring significance in literature, culture, and beyond.

ENIGMATIC ENTITIES: THE PORTRAYAL OF CRYPTIDS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

1. Bigfoot- Bigfoot, frequently referred to as Sasquatch, is a well-known cryptid in American literary works, and Native American tribes have told stories about it for years. It is said to live in the Pacific Northwest's deep forests. The scientific ideas regarding Bigfoot's genesis have been the subject of much dispute and controversy, with multiple scholars deriving different conclusions from their investigations of the proof for this creature's existence.

Radford (2013) posited that Bigfoot's origins are a subject of debate, with some researchers suggesting it is a large ape from Asia, prehistoric species, or an extraterrestrial being. Despite these theories, the truth of Bigfoot's origin remains a mystery, and until more concrete evidence is uncovered, the origin of Bigfoot will remain a matter of speculation and debate.

According to Dennet (1989), many occurrences and claims are false or untrustworthy. He observed that notable occurrences, like as the Patterson-Gimlin video, are frauds, and that current proof is generally untrustworthy or difficult to believe. Dennett stated that more solid proof is needed to verify Bigfoot's existence, and until it is found, sightings and stories should be considered sceptically.

According to anthropologist Daegling (2004), the stories revolving around Bigfoot often shows it protecting the environment and can be friendly or fearful. He argues that these myths and legends are crucial for Native Americans to understand natural phenomena and make sense of the unknown.

Renee Askins' Shadow Mountain: A Memoir of Wolves, a Woman, and the Wild details a bizarre encounter with Bigfoot in Yellowstone National Park. Ivan T. Sanderson's The Legend of Bigfoot depicts Bigfoot as a physical creature who is interpreted incorrectly by mankind. Joshua Blu Buhs' Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend investigates the creature's cultural and historical significance, tracing its origins to Native American legends and analysing its presence in current American society. Both books provide

fresh viewpoints on the unusual experiences with Bigfoot.

2. Loch Ness Monster- The Loch Ness Monster, is said to live in Scotland's Loch Ness, has fascinated American authors. The species has been represented in a variety of ways, ranging from charming and elusive to lethal beast. For generations, people have debated the myths and stories surrounding the Loch Ness Monster. Moir (2015) proposes that it is a Jurassic-era plesiosaur, citing evidence and local sightings. Other possibilities include a big salamander, a giant eel, or a fake perpetrated by locals. Despite these beliefs, the Loch Ness Monster remains a mystery, enthralling people throughout the world and becoming part of folklore and legends.

Jylkka (2018) argues that sightings might be attributable to the creature's migratory movements and the murky water serving as concealment. However, there is still much controversy, and additional study is needed to discover its exact origin, leaving the Loch Ness Monster as a modern-day enigma.

Loch Ness Monster has been employed in American literature in various of ways, including children's stories and horror fiction. Steve Alten's novel The Loch, published in 2005, depicts a group of scientists who find that the creature is not a myth. The novel is a thrilling thriller that combines SF and supernatural components to paint a terrifying picture of the mythical monster. Stephen King, the maestro of horror, also included the legendary Loch Ness Monster in his 1983 novel Pet Sematary. In this novel, Louis Creed sees the abomination while on vacation in Scotland. The creature is described as a big, predatory beast with razor-sharp teeth and a ravenous desire for human flesh.

3. Chupacabra- Chupacabra, a peculiar creature, has long piqued people's interest, with several hypotheses circulating about its origins. As per Muzammal & Fatima, (2022) Chupacabra is a huge reptile species that has managed to stay hidden owing to its camouflage and may have acquired a liking for cattle and poultry because of the lack of alternative food sources in its natural environment. This might explain why Chupacabra sightings occur in rural areas and why it feeds on cattle. Another idea argues that Chupacabra is extraterrestrial in origin, although this is not commonly

accepted owing to a lack of proof. Despite these beliefs, the real origin of the Chupacabra is unclear.

The chupacabra, a mythological monster, has been extensively studied and analysed. Its origins have sparked controversy and inquiry, with many folklore traditions claiming it is a demonic entity, a hybrid monster, an alien being, or a type of vampire or werewolf. The monster has been the topic of several novels, films, and television shows, and its popularity continues to increase globally (Radford,2011).

According to Newton (2009), there is frequently conflicting and circumstantial scientific evidence supporting the existence of the Chupacabra. While some researchers think it's a new species, others argue it's a cross between a dog and a coyote. But there isn't any hard data to firmly establish its existence. The only trustworthy sources are eyewitness reports and sporadic images, and there are huge variations in the Chupacabra's physical attributes. Its existence is not supported by rigorous scientific evidence, despite the mystery and conjecture surrounding it.

The Chupacabra, a mysterious creature with terrifying assaults on cattle, has been a recurring theme in American literature and legend. Even though it's not as well-known as the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot, it's nevertheless a terrifying and fascinating creature. There are differences in how it is portrayed in American literature; some writers present it as a fierce monster.

In Stephen Randel's novel The Chupacabra: A Borderline Mad Story of Coyotes, Dollars, and Cartels, the creature is depicted as a terrifying being responsible for gruesome cattle deaths in the Mexican borderlands. The story revolves around a man who, in his quest to uncover the truth behind these Chupacabra attacks, gets caught in a dangerous crime world filled with cartels and illegal migrants.

Raegan Butcher's The Chupacabra Diaries offers a different perspective, presenting the Chupacabra as a misunderstood being hunted and mistreated by humans. The protagonist of the novel attempts to document the creature's existence but ends up forming a deep bond with it. The book explores themes of human greed and the

destructive tendencies of mankind.

In Chupacabra Dreams by James Preller, the creature is portrayed in a mystical light. It is a shamanistic entity capable of shapeshifting and communicating with afterlife. It follows a young boy Danny who discovers the creature and must navigate the supernatural realm it inhabits.

Contrastingly, David Bowles' Chupacabra Vengeance depicts the Chupacabra as a vicious, bloodthirsty predator that hunts living beings. The narrative follows a group of teenagers as they struggle to endure an encounter with the creature and uncover the secrets behind its attacks.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the profound impact of cryptid myths on American literature, revealing how these folklore creatures explore complex social and cultural themes. The study suggests that cryptid myths are not just entertaining tales but deeply embedded in the cultural psyche, influencing literary creativity and expression. It emphasizes the importance of examining folklore within literature to uncover deeper insights into societal values and anxieties. The implications extend beyond literary studies to cultural studies, anthropology, and environmental studies. Understanding how cryptid myths resonate within literature provides a broader understanding of the human experience and its relationship with the mysterious and unknown. Future research could explore the influence of cryptid myths in other media forms, comparative studies between American and other cultures, and further investigation into the socio-political contexts that give rise to these myths.

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