MORGAWR AND THE FOLKLORESQUE

(A study of a whopping fish tale)

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ABSTRACT: The Morgawr is a sea monster that is reputed to swim along the southern coast of Cornwall, Britain's far south west peninsula. It draws on the belief held by many that prehistoric creatures survive, thriving in deep waters. Unlike many cryptids that derive from a foundation of folk tradition, the Morgawr began as a hoax. Originally part of a prank in 1976, stories of the cryptid have evolved, attracting enthusiasts in Cornwall, but also internationally thanks to the Internet. The creation of the Morgawr and then its subsequent development as an expression of folklore allows for a consideration of how it fits into the idea of the folkloresque, a term advanced by Foster and Tolbert to describe cultural expressions that draw on folklore for inspiration, mimicking tradition but representing something that is distinct. While folk traditions are the bedrock of the folkloresque, the two are distinct. In the case of the Morgawr, a faux tradition seems to have inspired genuine belief.

KEYWORDS: Morgawr, Loch Ness Monster, cryptids, folklore, folkloresque

Introduction

The fantastic beast known as the Morgawr[1] swims the waters to the south of Cornwall (Figure 1). What remains in question is the direction it travels; namely, is this cryptid[2] folklore or hoax? It may be more appropriate to ask whether this is a pertinent or useful distinction, since the two genres, hoax and folklore, can be intimately entwined. A fraudulent beginning does not preclude the emergence of a genuine tradition. The sea monster of Falmouth Bay debuted in 1976 when it acquired its name. The creation of the Morgawr affected the way people perceived later events as well as historical documents. In fact, many past and subsequent observations of the extraordinary in the waters around Cornwall would eventually be evaluated against what happened during the crucial period of the mid-1970s. What is not clear is how the Morgawr fits into folk tradition since its roots are deep within the domain of the hoax. The sea creature is perhaps best seen as part of the folkloresque, a recently minted term describing cultural expressions that refer to folklore without necessarily being of that realm (Foster and Tolbert, 2016). Confusion arises because the Morgawr did not stop there; it appears to have transformed into a genuine feature of folk tradition. This is a well-known path taken, for example, by the

[1] While the beast is generally referred to with a Welsh word, *Morgawr*, meaning 'sea creature,' some enthusiasts prefer the Cornish-language spelling, *Morgowr*. Nevertheless, the Welsh was the original and remains the dominant choice; it appears not to have had been documented in the Cornish language before this time. Either way, the name is pronounced with "gawr" as in "power" with equal emphasis on both syllables or slightly more on the second.

[2] A cryptid is an animal whose existence is contended or disputed without scientific recognition.

more recent internet phenomenon of Slenderman and other Creepypasta characters (Tolbert, 2013, 2018).

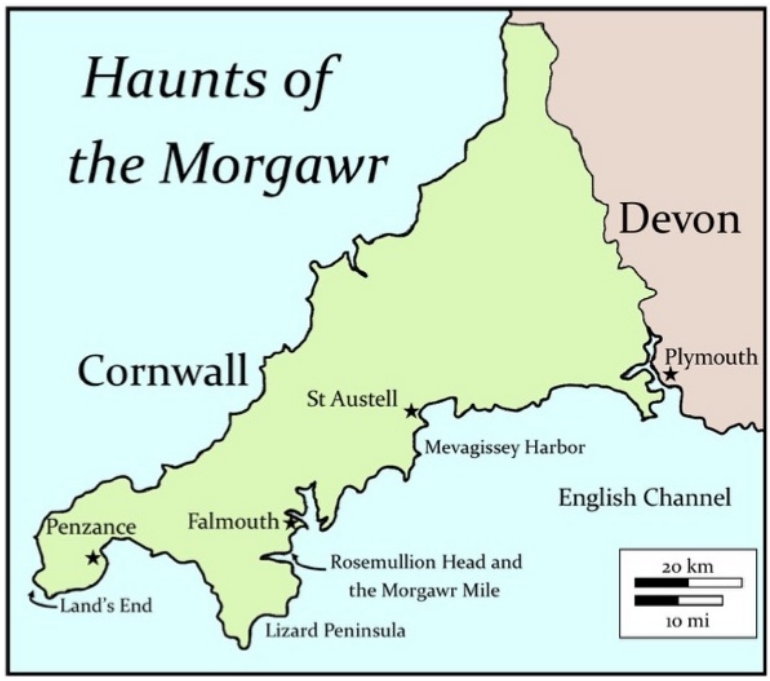

Figure 1 – Cornwall is the farthest south west reach of Britain. Although the Falmouth area is regarded as the center of Morgawr reports, the range of suspected sightings includes places as far away as Land's End and the southern coast of Devon.

In a larger context, the Morgawr is part of a widespread, modern belief that prehistoric survivors exist in the world and especially in deep waters. If 'belief' is too strong a word, 'desire' may be more appropriate: many people hope that somewhere, in some remote location, dinosaurs still live. Because undiscovered places are dwindling in a world that has become so thoroughly explored, deep seas and lakes often become the last refuge of the prehistoric remnants that the popular imagination seeks.

A global perspective aside, the key moment in the history of the Morgawr was the public unveiling of two grainy photographs on March 5th 1976 in the *Falmouth Packet*, a local newspaper (Figure 2). Sightings of the extraordinary just prior to this set the stage for the hoax, leaving in question whether these were part of the deception or if they inspired it. The nature of this preamble is not easily sorted out, but the origin of these earlier accounts means little: at the core of the issue is a sequence of events that set a tradition in motion, first as a fraud and then as something of more substance. The images and the claims of encounters in 1976 inspired a decades-long effort to capture the beast in the water with photographs or on the shore with beached remains. Eventually, the southern Cornish coast near the Bay of Falmouth, from Rosemullion Head to Toll Point became popularly known as 'Morgawr's Mile,' because of that area's propensity for headline-grabbing sightings (Harrison, 2001, pp. 94-104; Downes, 1998). Unravelling the origin of the Morgawr and the effect of the 1976 events on local tradition is central to understanding

the sea monster. What exactly the Morgawr was – or is – has been difficult to ascertain because of a growing suspicion and then the confirmation that much of this was, indeed, a hoax. Thanks to an (unattributed) article published in the *Falmouth Packet* in 2001, it is now clear that the Morgawr began as a prank. Still, the words 'prank' or 'hoax' may carry connotations that are too disparaging. What happened might be better understood as performance art, the creation of Tony 'Doc' Shiels, who was at the birth of this fish story.

Figure 2 – One of the two photographs accompanying a handwritten letter from 'Mary F', who purported to have observed and documented the famed sea serpent of the south Cornish coast published on March 5th 1976 in the *Falmouth Packet*.

Tony 'Doc' Shiels

In July 1975, John Cock and George Vinnicombe, local fishermen on the south coast of Cornwall, claimed to have seen a monstrous creature, raising its head four feet (1.2 m) above the water. Quickly following this report, more sightings allegedly occurred. In September 1975, a man and a woman walking along the coast near Pendennis Point at the entrance to Falmouth Bay described seeing a large creature with a hump on its back and a long bristle-crested neck topped with a head bearing stump-like horns. The beast dove and then re-emerged with a conger eel in its jaws (Becquart, 2020; ITV, 1996). There were also two separate reports that in January 1976 a man and then a woman observed a whale-like creature off the south coast of Cornwall near Falmouth. They both said that the animal had a long neck, which rose out of the water. It is unclear if these events played a role in inspiring what followed or if they were manufactured as part of the unfolding hoax. At the end of January, however, something of more substance occurred: a strange carcass washed onto a beach near Falmouth, enhancing the growing suspicion that the sea was yielding some hidden secret (One Last Soul, 2015). These events were quickly followed by the *Falmouth Packet* unveiling the two photographs, together with the debut of the name Morgawr. What was not understood at the time was how a local trickster, an artist, magician, psychic performer and sometimes puppet master, had masterminded at least some of the events. This odd character, Tony 'Doc' Shiels, was born in Salford, Greater Manchester in England in 1938, He attended art school in London and first came to

Cornwall as early as 1959. There, he pieced together a meagre living as an artist, writer, and street performer, specialising in magic and psychic tricks. Calling himself, 'The Wizard of the West,' he gained a national reputation for the bizarre 'discovery' of two monstrous Cornish creatures, the Owlman and the Morgawr. His counterculture antics included attempts at creature-raising, staging rituals with naked women. With no phantom beasts to their credit, the ceremonies could only boast of capturing newspaper headlines as well as television coverage. The hype earned Shiel's troupe the title of "the weirdest family of the land" (Beveridge, 1978, p. 8). Shiels is best understood as an artist, but the consequences of his performances and escapades reverberate in Cornish culture in ways that are far removed from the artistic world (White, 2015).

At the heart of the hoax was Shiel's claim that sometime before early March 1976 a mysterious woman named 'Mary F' captured two photographs of the beast off Rosemullion Head south of Falmouth. She then allegedly delivered the images to the *Falmouth Packet*, which published them on March 5th 1976, the day of St. Piran, the national saint of Cornwall. The photographs and the benchmark description appeared along with a comment by Noel Wain (1934-2013), a writer for the newspaper, who was the first to publish the name Morgawr (Eberhart, 2002: 354-55). The report created the impression of a prehistoric plesiosaurus, a large aquatic creature with a long neck, a mouth full of sharp teeth, large fins attached to a stocky body and a long flat tail for underwater propulsion.

The 1976 report brought news of the discovery to the world, and the Morgawr quickly became a sensation. The original images apparently no longer exist and doubt hovers over the identity of Mary F, who is likely a fabrication. All this aside, the sighting and, especially, the photographs proved essential to the development of the Morgawr legend. With the images in hand, Anthony Mawnan Peller, a local writer, soon produced an eighteen-page pamphlet, *Morgawr: The Monster of Falmouth Bay*, published in 1976. This further promoted the idea that a sea monster lurked off the Cornish coast. The authenticity of the creature was immediately suspect for many since Shiels lent the discovery no credibility. As indicated, besides claiming to have seen the Morgawr, he was also at the center of 'discovering' the Owlman during the spring of 1976. This terrestrial monstrosity from north Cornwall was described as humanoid with large wings, and it reputedly terrorised locals (Deane & Shaw, 2003, p. 104). Given the pivotal role of Shiels in the accounts of both the Owlman and the Morgawr, suspicions were naturally raised.

In 2001 in recognition of the twenty-five years since the creature had been unveiled, an unattributed article was published in the *Falmouth Packet*, reputedly written by Wain, that
indicated that the hoax had multiple players, asserting that Wain and Shiels were part of a coordinated effort to invent the sea monster. This piece includes the following, which provides insight into the anatomy of the beast itself:

> *As one who remembers that date 25 years ago and if memories serves* [sic] *me right, the monster in 1976 was none other than a huge model, made by the then students of Falmouth School of Art aided and abetted by a reporter from the Falmouth Packet and of course Doc himself. It was all good fun of course, but who was to know that during the following 25 years there would be numerous "sightings" of the "real thing."* (2001, p. 6)

Wain was an appropriate co-conspirator for Shiels. The two shared the calling of art, Wain spending a lifetime devoted to painting, jazz, and writing. Born in Staffordshire, he worked

for newspapers in Britain's south west and retired in 1993 from the *Western Morning News*. His admission about his role in the invention of the Morgawr provided needed evidence for many cryptid hunters to write off the beast as nothing more than a prank. That, however, does not satisfy a need to understand what Wain and Shiels set in motion.

Even though the initial publicity was grounded in fraud, additional sightings followed: in April and May 1976 there were reports of the Morgawr, and Shiels and his wife, Christine, claimed to have seen it again on July 3rd of that year. This was soon followed by a claim from a skindiver who reported seeing three small Morgawrs underwater; the beast was breeding, an indication that its species intended to linger. That summer, there were at least five more reports of the creature (Becquart, 2020). This was followed by another account in November 1976 by Shiels, who this time said he saw stubby horns, a feature previously described in 1975 before the famed newspaper article with the photographs (One Last Soul, 2015).

Subsequent accounts

After the initial sightings, the craze continued. On January 31st 1977, there was an additional report, and then several days later, Shiels attempted another of his rituals to beckon the Morgawr. While the effort failed to summon the monster, it succeeded in keeping the beast in the news. Still, the excitement seemed to be declining. A sighting in the summer of 1977 and then again in 1979 seemed too few to maintain public interest in the elusive Morgawr (One Last Soul, 2015). The concentrated spat of reports in 1975 and 1976 yielded to months and then years of silence. The real test of the effort to invent the Morgawr was in whether it could survive the initial period and become a staple of local tradition. The number of reports declined dramatically after the 1970s, but they did not disappear altogether. On February 19th 1980, a representative of the Lock Ness Monster Association used equipment tested in Scotland to attempt to capture evidence of the Morgawr. The expedition was unsuccessful, but it demonstrated that interest in Cornwall's sea monster persisted (One Last Soul, 2015).

There are two claims of Morgawr sightings dating from 1985. In July of that year, four people on the coast saw a large, slightly mottled creature with two humps, 198 metres from the shore. The beast was moving with a gliding, smooth motion (One Last Soul, 2015). Then in August 1985, Susan Waldron, a tourist from Gloucestershire, was watching Christopher Waldron, her husband, swimming off the Cornish coast near Gerrans. She reported seeing what seemed to be a shadow of a submerged, large animal with a long neck swimming through the water (Rowe, 2015). Two years later, a man claimed to see a similar creature with a long neck rising approximately 0.9 metres from the water. Also, in 1987, a diver near Devil's Point, Plymouth reported observing a wonder with a dog-like head. Another diver's account two years later was vague on details, but it has also been grouped with other Morgawr reports (Anomalien.com, 2020). In 1999, John Holmes claimed to have caught the Morgawr on video tape (Becquart, 2020). He was standing on shore and the creature was estimated to be 250 metres away. One website maintains that "video experts confirmed that the video was 100% genuine" (Tabitca, 2010) Later evaluation of the video by marine biologists concluded that the image was of a sunfish, which Holmes disputed. In May 2002, after Wain's 2001 confession in the *Falmouth Packet*, two men at sea said they saw the Morgawr off the Lizard peninsula on the southern coast of Cornwall, to the west of Falmouth (One Last Soul, 2015).

On February 20th 2017, a carcass washed up on Charlestown Beach near St. Austell, on the southern coast of Cornwall. This was identified as a Morgawr and photographs of the creature appeared in local newspapers, creating renewed interest in the sea monster. Subsequent analysis identified the find as the remains of a whale (Earth Touch News, 2017; Mills, 2017). More importantly, these sightings also followed the debunking 2001 article in the *Falmouth Packet*, and yet the Morgawr remained the explanation of choice when encountering oddities associated with the sea.

Historical accounts

Excitement over the Morgawr also inspired cryptozoologists, beginning in the 1970s, to scour previous records for unusual sightings. The content of the primary sources is not as important as is the way later enthusiasts characterised the documents as evidence of the Cornish sea serpent.[3] Early encounters later attributed to the Morgawr occurred as early as 1837 when the *West Briton* reported on October 20th that John Hicks, a fisherman, captured a "great serpent" weighing 43 kg and brought it into Mevagissey Harbour to the east of Falmouth on the south Cornish coast (Dale, 2016). At that size, it was impressive, but hardly a leviathan In 1876, the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* described two fishermen, in Gerran's Bay east of Falmouth, confronted by a large serpent, which they hit with an oar. They subsequently caught it and brought it ashore to show to others. The fishermen then killed the creature and threw it back into the sea (One Last Soul, 2015).

Bord and Bord (1981: 26-32) relate a number of early 20th Century sightings of sea monsters.
They detail that there was word of a sea monster in West Cornwall near Penzance in 1906, in which a captain described a large dark animal racing with his ship. Its front half eventually rose out of the water, allowing sailors to see what appeared to be a rough coat of hair. With its head reaching above the mast of the boat, it seemed to turn toward the vessel. In 1906, there was a sea serpent observed from a transatlantic ocean liner near Cornwall's Land's End. Reports indicated that it had a 5.5 metre long head, a beast of monstrous proportions. Twenty years later, an account described a fisherman who managed to net a creature that was supposedly 6 metres long with a 2.4 metre long tail. On July 5th 1912, the crew of a German vessel off the southern coast of neighboring Devon spotted a serpent that was about 6 metres long and 45 cm thick. In 1926, two fishermen three miles from Falmouth caught a "beaked" animal that was 6 metres long with four scaley legs and a body covered with armour-like joints and brown hair; unfortunately, it tore through the fishing nets and escaped. The men were able to capture some the hair, but authorities were unable to identify the sample.

In 1933, a decomposed carcass was found washed ashore at Praa Sands just east of Penzance, but it was unidentified. A report from July 4th 1934 documented a sea monster in Whitsand Bay, east of Plymouth near the southern coast separating Cornwall from Devon (Cornwall Alive, 2020). This beast was described as monstrous in size with black skin, a humped back and long tail together with a long goose-like neck. In the early summer of 1937, a woman saw a large serpent-like animal in Falmouth Bay (Cornwall Alive, 2020). There was also another report of a large oddity with a long neck in the sea near Mevagissey

[3] Summaries of the various reports of sea monsters near Cornwall are ubiquitous on the internet. See, for example: Anomalien.com (2020), Dedicated Content Curator (2016), Dale (2016), Rowe (2015), Becquart (2020). See also Bord and Bord (1981: 26-32) and Chorvinsky (1991).

Harbor from 1944 (Boddaert, n.d.). A sighting of a pair of creatures in the summer of 1949 included the description of "two remarkable saurians" some 6 metres long with bottle-green skin (Becquart, 2020).

These historical sightings of sea monsters tend to become folded into the world of the Morgawr, no matter how infrequently details complement the concept of the beast as it emerged in the late 20th Century. It does not matter that less extraordinary explanations can be put forward for these records. One website, for example, points out that the long, serpentine oarfish, which have been recorded to reach over 30 metres in length and presents a plausible explanation for many descriptions of sea monsters (Rowe, October 2015). The issue is not what these or other sightings really represented. What matters here is how people perceive them; whatever truth – or fiction – lurking within the Morgawr, it is a powerful magnet that collects all sorts of accounts of the fantastic.

Discussion

This, then, is the history of how the Morgawr appeared as a subject on the southern Cornish coast after the initial hoax of 1976. With this evidence, it is possible to see how the idea of the sea serpent influenced subsequent observations as well as how people would view historical accounts of strange things in the sea. An explanation of the origin and development of the idea of the Morgawr does not satisfy a need to understand the phenomenon in broader terms. Following the events in 1976, the beast began to swim the Cornish waters under its own volition, and it continues to capture the imagination.

At the outset it is important to address the elephant in the room, or in this case, the monster swimming in the sea. Namely, do observations of the Morgawr – despite the original hoax – indicate that there are some large, unidentified creatures congregating in the waters around Cornwall? From a folklorist's point of view, this question is largely irrelevant. Folklorists study legends about ghosts without ruling on the veracity of accounts about visits from the beyond. Truth does not need to matter; what is important is how people tell these narratives and then react to them. The Morgawr swims in the imagination of those who observe it, and that is the place to begin. Still, there is something decidedly disappointing about uncovering a hoax: it seems to render the beast to be neither flesh and blood from a zoological perspective nor 'genuine' tradition from the point of view of a folklorist. Those who hope for evidence of sea monsters can take consolation in other well-documented reports of the fantastic, but there is no satisfaction in knowing that the key encounter was a fabrication intended to create a stir.

At the same time, some have been inclined to see things like the Morgawr as an expression of 'fakelore,' to employ a term invented in 1950 by the American, Richard Dorson. He hoped to create a means to separate real folklore from fraudulent motifs and stories that some would pass off as having roots among the folk. Dorson saw legitimate folklore as grounded in oral tradition with generations of genealogy, something to be cultivated, cherished, and curated. Subsequently identified fakelore could then be removed from any curation, scorned as fraudulent, and discarded as contaminated cultural detritus. The term, fakelore, was not embraced by all, and many have avoided it as being harsh and applied unevenly. Too often, someone who has taken umbrage over something that seemed like folklore has used the word as a weapon, hoping to silence an offending imitation of popular tradition. Increasingly, folklorists have come to recognise the way fakelore has been applied subjectively. In addition, there has been an emerging concession

that no one should play the role of arbiter of expressions of culture, deciding what is good or bad. Although some have written eloquently against the term, it persists in its application (Bronner, 1998, pp. 363-82; Yolen, 2014).

Dorson would have an end to any folkloristic consideration of the Morgawr immediately after the revelation that it began as a hoax. Indeed, Cornish folklorists, Tony Deane and Tony Shaw looked at both the Morgawr and Owlman, dismissing the latter. They suggested that because of the involvement of Shiels, "the soubriquet 'fakelore', rather than folklore, springs to mind" (2003, p. 55). While Deane and Shaw do not level the charge against the Morgawr, the implication is evident: if Shiels and hoaxes were how this began, it can be dismissed as illegitimate.

Despite Dorson's inclination to eradicate fakelore, there is something about the Morgawr that is not so easily rejected. Fortunately, a recent approach reaches beyond Dorson's judgmental inclinations. Without any hint of condemnation, Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert (2016) have advanced the term, 'folkloresque' to describe cultural expressions that draw from folklore in some way but lack roots in oral tradition. These can include literary and other adaptations of folklore itself, but also inventions that simply seem *like* folklore. When Shiels created the idea of the Morgawr and passed off photographs of a sighting, he appears to have been mimicking the stories about that most famous of aquatic beasts, the Loch Ness monster. His subsequent use of an invented ritual to summon the creature was an additional adaptation of what he perceived to be traditional practices, creating a ceremony that seemed genuine, but which was really his own artistic creation. While Dorson would have us discard all of this, viewing the Morgawr as removed from the domain of the folklorist, Foster and Tolbert provide a means to reconsider it. At the outset, we can view the events in 1976 as a curious expression of the way folklore was perceived. Shiels appears to have addressed a gap in local culture: the immediate popularity of the creature demonstrates that Cornwall seemed to need a sea monster, a counterpart of the beast of Loch Ness. For some, this may have served an economic agenda by enhancing tourism, but that is by no means clear. More importantly, people with no apparent financial motivation reported seeing the Morgawr and then identified it in historical documents, and this suggests that the idea of the sea serpent filled a broader niche in local culture.

One of the problems with attempting to quarantine fakelore is that people do not recognise boundaries when it comes to their traditions. If an invention suits them, they often incorporate it into their worldview. This process has been playing out for millennia as exhibited by the relationship between literature and folklore: beliefs and oral narratives have manifested in writing for nearly as long as people have been literate. Similarly, the written word affects folklore. The folkloresque may exhibit an inspiration taken from folklore, but it can just as easily work its way back into tradition. Folklore and the invented are often entwined with abundant opportunity for cross pollination. This has been made clear recently with the internet sensation of Slenderman and other Creepypasta characters: these self-conscious creations fit the moment so well that they have become the focus of their own modern tradition (Tolbert, 2013, 2015). It is consequently not surprising that the Morgawr, a fictional character crafted in imitation of folklore, was embraced by the Cornish and became part of their beliefs and narratives.

Scouring of historical records is a modern exercise, an aspect of folk belief that maintains that evidence of the extraordinary, as perceived and defined today, can be found in old documents. Whether it is to uncover historical proof of visitation by ancient aliens,

bigfoot, or other cryptids, part of contemporary folklore includes this exercise. Belief also influences the way new encounters with the unusual are interpreted. The technical term for this is *pareidolia* in which an observer's perception is affected by what is known or believed. Others have explored this notion, which is best expressed in simpler terms: we perceive the world with the vocabulary and ideas that we possess (Foster, 2009; Schneider, 1993).

Two hundred years ago, an unusual event in the Cornish night sky could be interpreted as pixies, angels or anything else available in the belief system, but it would not likely be seen as an expression of extra-terrestrial visitation because that element was not present in their folklore of the time. Similarly, the sighting of something unusual in the Cornish sea might be seen to be one of the merfolk or perhaps a sea monster, but the specific interpretation of the Morgawr was unavailable until 1976 (James, 2018). The introduction of this element of the folkloresque provided a new lens through which to consider a variety of events and historical documents. Popular fascination has focused on the southern Cornish coast, revealing a great deal about how a tradition can take root and thrive. The Morgawr became part of Cornish folklore, and because of the power of the Internet, it has also been added to a worldwide traditional legacy.

The Morgawr hoax recalls a similar event one hundred and fifty years earlier. Cornish native, Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-1875) was an antiquarian who collected local traditions. His *Echoes from Old Cornwall* (1846) and *Footprints of Former Men in Cornwall* (1870) are of note, but despite his serious contributions, Hawker was also reputed to have invented a mermaid hoax. The prank demonstrates that Shiels and his fabrications had antecedents in waters around Cornwall. The Anglican priest and folklore collector, Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924), describes how a young Hawker in the 1820s swam out to a rock off the shore of Bude on the north-east Cornish coast. There, he wore a plaited seaweed wig and an oilskin wrap to mimic a fish's tail. He combed his 'hair' and sang, wailing to the amazement of residents (Baring-Gould, 1888).[4] While there is dispute about how it happened, it is also possible that the hoax never occurred. Nevertheless, the anecdote underscores the inclination to enjoy these sorts of deceptions. In the case of the mermaid, there was an existing bedrock tradition of belief and narrative. For the Morgawr, Shiels was present at the birth of a new concept, and the tradition took hold after the fact, an indication of how the allure of the sea can serve as an incubator for folklore. It is equally clear, however, that salt water is not required. In the case of Loch Ness, the setting is fresh water, and so it seems the mysterious quality of any deep aquatic environment is sufficient to inspire belief and narratives about these types of creatures. The example of 'Nessie' provides even more opportunity to understand a process that is conducive to this concept. Without initiating an in-depth discussion of the Scottish example of folklore, the persistent international popularity of the Loch Ness Monster indicates how such a cryptid can occupy an important place in modern belief and tradition, even on a global scale (Nickell, 2006).

A world is also necessary regarding tourism: the importance of this economic force cannot be discounted when considering the adoption and promotion of the folkloresque. This was one of Dorson's primary concerns that inspired his condemnation of fakelore, namely, that economic interests frequently invented and promoted a supposed tradition as a form of advertisement or otherwise to be of service commercially. Dorson did not wish to see

[4] An alternative ending appears in Brendon (2002, p. 42), as quoted by Young (2011); see also James (2018, pp. 104-105).

folklore exploited, and he feared that fakelore could outcompete and destroy existing traditions. The Morgawr brought attention to Cornwall, which has long depended on visitors for its economy. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Shiels was motivated by the financial advancement of Cornwall, and the Morgawr did not extinguish any other tradition. Instead, given his interest in art, it seems more likely that the simple act of being creative was what he hoped to achieve. In this regard, Shiels and the Morgawr recall another example. Financial interests appear to have been behind the creation of Tahoe Tessie, the Nessie-like monster of Lake Tahoe in the American West. Here, Bob McCormick, a local resident, claims to have arrived at the idea in 1979, but unlike Shiels, McCormick did not engage in the creation of evidence to promote the hoax, nor did he enact invented rituals to summon it. Instead, McCormick wrote a children's book, which was published by a local tourism board. There was a similar situation with the mystery of a deep aquatic world, which became the perfect environment to support a cryptid, but here there was no hoax. Nevertheless, Tahoe-based enthusiasts followed a Morgawr-like pattern of looking for older evidence, in this case, incorporating Native American folklore, and a tradition was born – or nearly so: there have been subsequent sightings of Tahoe Tessie, but the beast has been less successful than the Morgawr in becoming a local legend. Instead, it has remained largely a marketing ploy, providing a playful mascot for a place that, like Cornwall, is largely dependent on funds brought by visitors (McCormick, 1985). Tahoe Tessie remains in the realm of the folkloresque.[5]

Conclusion

The Morgawr presents a situation where the idea of a maritime cryptid was invented as a hoax apparently for the sake of performance art. It was the inspiration of Shiels working with Noel Wain, a local reporter. Because the descriptions of the creature imitated traditions like those associated with the Loch Ness Monster, the events of 1976 can be best viewed as examples of the folkloresque, expressions of culture that imitate or incorporate aspects of folklore. Although the Morgawr lacked the deep cultural roots of 'Nessie,' which from the start had its fins swimming in local tradition, the Cornish monster seeped back into folklore. This process is not surprising since tradition and invented tradition are frequently entangled: the folkloresque feeds from folklore, which in turn often draws from the folkloresque (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Hugoson, 2006).

The initial hype of the Morgawr was strong enough and presented in a sufficiently serious manner so that the idea of the creature inspired others to search the waves, and they were not disappointed: sightings of the extraordinary were interpreted within this new framework, feeding into local – and even international – belief that there was, indeed, something remarkable swimming in the murky waters off the southern Cornish coast. At the same time, enthusiasts examined historical records for further evidence that the beast was real. Again, these efforts yielded what many interpreted to be confirmation that the Morgawr had been there all along.

At the foundation of the Morgawr stories is an international aspect of folklore. This is a belief for some and a desire for others, a collective hope that some remnant of the great dinosaurs survives in some forgotten place. Reports of sea monsters strike a chord, shared across the world, shaping how oddities in nature are interpreted. A study of the Morgawr

[5] See also, Sluder (2001) and Powers (2005).

in its restricted range in the English Channel along the south west British coast only hints at a larger tradition, the widespread nature of comparable beliefs, which collectively warrant investigation. Besides being integrated into local folklore with ongoing sightings and documentary evidence, the legacy of the sea monster found expression in 2010 when Crealy Adventure Park in Wadebridge, Cornwall, added a rollercoaster named Morgawr (Cornwall Guide, 2021). The following year, there was an unveiling of a "monstrous bench" in Falmouth (Unattributed, 2011). The public seating includes metal backs designed to portray the creature in silhouette. The Morgawr (in this case employing the Cornish spelling of Morgowr) also inspired children's books by Judy Scrimshaw (e.g., 2015). In addition, the Morgawr serves as a player option in the fantasy game, *Endless Legend*, produced by Amplitude Studios in 2014. The hoax, which became folklore, has found expression in popular culture in fiction and fantasy gaming, manifesting in ways that can be regarded as a new chapter of the Morgawr and the folkloresque.

The tale of the Morgawr demonstrates the strength of an idea, particularly when the concept draws on the power of folklore. This beast was initially a prank, but the mystery of the sea and the potency of the initial 'evidence' proved sufficient to spawn a genuine tradition. Added to this was the widespread desire for something like the Morgawr, a magnificent remnant of a prehistoric past, to be real. What began as the folkloresque, an attempt to invent a sea monster, fed back into local culture, inspiring a body of folklore that is not likely to fade away soon.

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