I have always felt uneasy about the complacency with which ufologists repeat the assertion that 90% (or 95%) of UFO sightings are misidentifications of ordinary aerial objects such as stars, planets, birds, clouds, aircraft, etc. (I don’t believe in weather balloons); or else of natural phenomena such as patches of light, optical reflections etc. (whatever they are). I don’t like the superior air which creeps into reports of UFOs which turn out to have one of these simple explanations. It reminds me of a school seniority system: the scientists look down on the ufologists for believing in UFOs, and the ufologists, who want to become (of all things) scientists, look down on poor benighted passers-by who mistake simple weather balloons (or whatever) for what they are pleased to call genuine UFOs.

At a Magonia conference in Mortlake some years ago, we listened briefly to a radio phone-in on UFOs which happened to coincide with the conference. How we all hooted when Val of Peckham rang in to say that she had been disturbed by a weird light in the sky! It had seemed to be watching her, it was definitely intelligent, she had come over all funny, etc. It was obvious from her description that the light in question was a planet. John Rimmer, our kindly host, quelled the derision by reminding us that Val’s experience was in a sense the very stuff of ufology — indeed, that many of the eminent ufologists present had been seized by the subject through just such an encounter, mistaken or not. We were suitably chastened.

And so we should be. After all, if I may lapse for a moment into fancy existentialist talk, Val had been confronted in her fallen inauthentic condition with a sense of the uncanny. This idea plays a key part in Heidegger’s philosophy, for uncanniness is the hallmark of those moments in one’s life when, as he says, angst brings Dasein (being-there) face to face with its terrible freedom — either to dwell in inauthenticity or to make a bid for self-possession. (More particularly, the uncanny is the summons of conscience, at which we experience a primal guilt — Schuld— at the fact that the source of our being is a nothingness or, rather, that our being necessarily implies the possibility of non-being. Guilt, then, may play a part in people’s reluctance to report uncanny experiences, usually put down to simple fear of ridicule…)

However, I didn’t get you here to show off my profound grasp of existentialism. I just want to suggest that Val had the kind of experience we all have at some time, especially as children: that of seeing a world we had been told was dead, as alive, intelligent, watchful (we all remember the sinister dressing-gown, up to no good on the back of the bedroom door). In other words, that way of seeing the world, and being seen by it, which has been derisively labelled ‘animism’, is not the prerogative of poor benighted primitives (or even of children), but an experience of reality which can strike at any time, just as it struck a couple (one of whom was, of all things, a scientist) who were driving from Shropshire to Cheshire one night in October 1983. They were lengthily and systematically hounded by an aerial object which shone menacing beams of light into their car, terrifying them. In a state of shock, and after much thought, they reported it to (of all things) the Jodrell Bank radio telescope, who passed the report on to Jenny Randles, who kindly wrote it down for us. It turned out that the couple had misperceived the moon.

Perhaps ufology should be less concerned with the nature of the object than with the nature of perception. Here, for instance, is another well-known case of misidentification:

“...do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea? No, no, I see an Innumerable Company of the Heavenly Host crying ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.’”

The percipient is of course the visionary poet and artist William Blake. The ‘disk of fire’ is the sun. Blake insisted that his poems were not mere figures of speech but true accounts of the natural world, transformed (invariably personified) by the power of the creative imagination. He could see the sun perfectly well as everyone else does, as a golden Guinea; but he could also see its deeper reality as a heavenly host. He distinguished between seeing with the eye and seeing through it.
I'm not saying that there are no such things as visual errors. We've all seen lights in the sky which might have been UFOs, but which on closer inspection turned out to be aircraft lights or whatever. But even such simple misidentifications are not wholly neutral or without significance. They are like visual equivalents of Freudian or, more accurately, Jungian slips: they point for a moment to the Unknown which lies both in our depths and in the heights of the sky. Even when we see with and not through the eye, as it were, we are already imagining what we see. Blake's description of the normal sun is already embroidered by a simile, 'like a Guinea'. The whole world is an imaginative construct. There's no such thing as a simple unadorned perception, nor a simple misperception — let alone Val of Peckham's sighting, charged as it was with potentially frightful significance.

Was Val satisfied with the explanation that her sighting was 'only a planet'? Was she not made to feel a little foolish, even a little cheated? And what of 'Mrs A' of Hollington, West Sussex, who was watching television on 4 October 1981, when she felt 'compelled' to go to the window, only to see a large bright yellow object in the sky? Joined by her daughter-in-law Janette, the two women watched astonished for half an hour as the object wobbled, pulsed and repeatedly changed shape. Several times, as an aircraft passes nearby, the object emitted smoke and hid itself behind a cloud. Janette saw lights on, and structural sides to, the object. Both women suffered severe recurrent headaches over the following weeks — a sure sign of a close encounter — and Mrs A experienced a 14-hour blackout four days after the sighting. The witnesses were convinced they had seen a spacecraft piloted by aliens. Investigation revealed that the object had been the moon.

If Blake had been running the phone-in when Val of Peckham rang in, he would not have told her that she had misidentified a planet; he would have said she was privileged to have glimpsed the awesome form of foam-born Venus rising in splendour from the sea of night.

The usual 'explanation' for such lunatic experiences is 'projection'. The term, derived from Freud and the early Jung, is taken to mean that images from the unconscious are thrown forward, by-passing consciousness, on to the world or on to objects in the world (the night sky makes a particularly handy screen) where they are perceived as something external. This has come to mean that the images are 'only subjective' but are wrongly seen as objective. (Jung became much more equivocal about projection as a result of his alchemical studies.)

However, as Lee Worth Bailey, among others, has argued (in ‘Skull’s Lantern: psychological projection and the Magic Lantern’, Spring, 1986), the idea of ‘projection’ is a metaphor drawn from the model of the magic lanterns which caused so much excitement in the 19th century. While the common people were astounded and terrified by the slide-shows which tended to project images of ghosts and demons, experts and debunkers delighted in exposing the 'fraudulence' of these images. Scientists like David Brewster (d. 1868) published widely read descriptions of how the magic lanterns worked and went on to claim that all so-called visions and apparitions were attributable to them. He asserted that ancient priestcraft employed similar devices to trick people into believing that gods and daemons exist when they were, in fact, only projected delusions.

This notion was to influence Freud who deprecated visions as ‘nothing but projections’. And, naturally, just as we tend to model the psyche on our own machines (it’s computers now), so it was not long before the magic lantern became the model for our own heads out of which subjective images were projected on a soulless world of objects. The psyche became restricted to the skull, and any of its images encountered outside became delusions which had to be withdrawn back inside. Thus the autonomous myth-making imagination was reduced to a kind of cine-projector which mechanically threw out fraudulent visual, images — and to hell with the powerful affecting visions of poor benighted bystanders.

I suggest that the idea of projection won't wash. It's simply the corollary of Locke's equally erroneous description of the mind as a 'blank sheet of paper' which passively receives the stamp of external sense impressions. We should rethink our epistemology along the lines of
a Blake, understanding that our primary mode of perception is imaginative. We simultaneously see and transform the world. As the ancients knew, the moon is not just a barren planet but a dangerous goddess liable to induce delusions or revelations, madness or mystical experience; and if my two examples are anything to go by, she potentially still is.

We have been brought up with a literal-minded world-view. We demand that objects have only a single identity or meaning. We are educated to see with the eye only, in single vision. When the preternatural breaks in upon us, transforming the profane into something sacred, amazing, we are unequipped for it. Instead of seizing on the vision, reflecting on it — writing poetry if necessary — we react with fright and panic. Instead of countering like with like, that is, assimilating through imagination the complexity of the image presented to us, we feebly phone scientists for reassurance. We are told we are only ‘seeing things’ and so we miss the opportunity to grasp that different, more primordial order of reality which lies behind the merely literal.

I’m not suggesting that we strive only to see the world as visionaries. To perceive all aerial objects as angels — to see only the heavenly host sun and not the guinea sun — leads to the madhouse. It is just as literal-minded as seeing a light in the sky as only a ball of hot gas or a barren planet, or an extraterrestrial spacecraft. This, too, is a kind of madness, albeit established and called normal. The remedy is to cultivate a sense of metaphor which, as its etymology suggests, is the ability to ‘carry across’ — to translate one view of the world in terms of another. Sanity is the possession of what Blake called ‘double vision’, which allowed him, for example, to see “with my inward eye … an old man grey / With my outward a thistle across the way.”

If Blake had been running the phone-in when Val of Peckham rang in, he would not have told her that she had misidentified a planet; he would have said she was privileged to have glimpsed the awesome form of foam-born Venus rising in splendour from the sea of night. She might then have been emboldened to prise wider that momentary crack in literal reality and to enter that other, imaginative Reality which alone infuses the world with beauty and terror. We don’t need to see UFOs in order to enter that Reality because, to the poetic imagination, everything in the sky — stars, birds, clouds, balloons — is a UFO whose final reality can never be known.

Deep Secrets: Reviewing the Conspiracy Literature. Peter Rogerson

Posted on 16/03/2009 by johnr

FROM MAGONIA 60, AUGUST 1997

Shortly before his untimely death our colleague Roger Sandell had planned to write a major article on the growing influence of conspiracy theories and fusion paranoia. If anything, since his death conspiracy theories have come in even further from their ancient home on the wilder shores of politics, into the cultural mainstream. They form the core of such cult television series as The X-Files and Dark Skies, to say nothing of the numerous commercial spin-offs. Recent issues of both Fortean Times and Big Issue, the magazine sold by the homeless, have featured articles ‘proving’ that the Apollo moon landings were faked.

Peter Rogerson looks at some recent books that point to disturbing trends below this recent wave of interest.

While I am not in a position to write that major article that Roger would have done, I am taking the opportunity of commenting on a series of books about conspiracy theories and related topics which have recently been published or reissued. Vankin’s is a reissue with a new introduction and comprises a general review of the topic. The compilation edited by Thomas consists of reprints from back issues of the conspiracy-oriented magazine Steamshovel/Press. Lamy’s and Parfrey’s are analyses of the cultural and political milieu in which conspiracy theories flourish; Cohn’s is a long-awaited reprint of his critique of one particularly malignant conspiracy theory, and the rest present individual theories.

Vankin’s subtitle, ‘From Dallas to Oklahoma’, points to the American origin of most contemporary conspiracy theories. While there is a long tradition in American politics of what the historian Richard Hofstadter calls ‘the paranoid style’, it was the Kennedy assassination which in the mid-twentieth century brought conspiracy theories out from the fringes of the radical right. While some of these theories clearly involved ‘realistic’ notions of actions by small groups of political malcontents, many showed the classic hallmarks of Manichean conspiracy theories. A contributor to Popular Alienation sums these up well:

“The need at the root of all conspiracy questing is to find the root of human pain and suffering… which is held to flow out of some central fountain running in rivulets throughout the world. In most conspiracy theories evil is seen as a metaphysical absolute, almost a substance which can poison life through viral contamination”.

I would summarise the essence of such Manichean theories as the belief that ‘history as we know it is a lie’ (as the opening titles to Dark Skies puts it), a delusion imposed upon us by a malevolent ‘other’. The real history is very different: there is nothing random in history, all is controlled by ‘them’, and all the pain and suffering in the world is caused by the terrible others, who are the incarnation of cosmic evil. They are simultaneously subhuman and superhuman, possessed of preternatural powers and largely undefeatable. The conspiracy theorist is an illumino, who can penetrate the maze of deception and see ‘them’ for what they are. The theorist is a soldier in the army of the righteous, filled with what Lamy calls millennial rage.

This line of thought can be seen in the writings of many who present the Kennedy assassination in essentially religious terms; as an
American crucifixion, the slaying of the civic saviour by the incarnate forces of evil who have since usurped the land. The powers of the slayers is immense. They can fix all the evidence – the Zapruder film, the body, the autopsy reports – and wipe away all traces of their own guilt because they control everything. Their identity varies according to time and place: witches, Christians, Moslems, Jews, communists, capitalists, liberals, humanists, Catholics, Freemasons, homosexuals, scientists, child-abusers, illuminati, Grays, Nazis, multinationals. Sometimes they are protean creatures merging elements, and flowing into each other: Jewish-communist Freemasons, American bankers in the Vatican.

This protean nature extends to the conspiracies themselves. Kerry Thornley served with Lee Harvey Oswald in the Marines and wrote a novel in which the central character was based on Oswald before the assassination. He now claims that both he and Oswald were the products of a Nazi breeding experiment, and that he has been bugged by an implant since birth allowing strangers to know of his sexual experiences. Thus the Kennedy assassination merges with stories of mind control and abuse. Another veteran figure on the fringes of the assassination field, Mae Brussel, daughter of celebrity rabbi Edgar Maggin, shortly before her death in 1988, began to link the Kennedy assassination to an international Nazi-Satanist conspiracy associated with CIA mind control. This point of view is shared by an anonymous Popular Alienation contributor who alleged that the false memory hypothesis was being promoted by the CIA to hide their mind control experiments.

Mind control and child abuse form the central allegations of Transformation of America, in which the former wife of a country music entertainer claims to have been sold into CIA slavery by her paedophile father, and been the sexual playingly of several US presidents, the mistress of a senator, and abused by several foreign leaders, whilst also acting as a CIA courier. This collection of allegations is known as Project Monarch, and no doubt we will be hearing more of it. Mind Control is fast becoming central to conspiracy theories, and Jim Keith mentions the rumours surrounding Timothy McVey. The point being emphasised here is that people do bad things because ‘they’ make them do it. This concept forms a sort of secular possession, with Nazi-Satanists and so forth replacing the devils and demons of former centuries.

There are other trends, and Vankin and Popular Alienation have them to meet all tastes. Vankin notes, for example, William Bromley, who has linked conspiracy theories with ancient astronaut speculation. There is the ubiquitous Lyndon LaRouche who lies at the heart of about half the conspiracy theories going and who has a particular fixation with the wicked British, who are the heirs to a conspiracy launched by a group of renegade Templars led by Robert the Bruce! Then there are the Collier brothers who believe that the press agency joint election reporting service in the USA just makes up the figures.

The volume of Popular Alienation I have reviewed is a re-print of the bulk of the contents of issues 4 to 11 of the journal Steamshovel Press, along with a selection of extra material. This magazine was originally started by people who saw themselves as part of the Beat Generation, disciples of Alan Ginsberg and William Burroughs. It is now a strangely eclectic conspiracy source and I can give no better description of its contents than by quoting from the rear blurb:

“Abbie Hofman’s death seen as an assassination; the role of President Nixon and George Bush in the death of JFK; Black Holes and the Trilateral Commission… Danny Casolaro and the INSLAW octopus; Mothman, Roswell, Area 51; Bill Clinton and Carol Quigley; the Gemstone File [which claimed that Aristotle Onassis was responsible for the JFK assassination, amongst other things]; anti-gravity; Ezra Pound; Holocaust revisionism; Bob Dylan and mind control…”

Well, you get the picture. Some of this stuff is possibly true, some of it quite loopy, and quite a lot of it rather sinister. Increasingly those conspiracy theories which used to have a more or less left-wing perspective have become dominated by the agendas of the groups associated with the American freelance militias, which in turn reflect the mixture of macho armed anarchism, anti-feminism and racism associated with the nineteenth century anarchist Proudhon, with a dash of Christian fundamentalism thrown in.

The conspiracy theories are part of the apocalyptic tradition, they are the signs indicating that the Enemy is on the verge of total victory and only the ‘Saving Remnant’ can stand against it. The general theme of these theories is that the free people of the United States are about to be sold out to UN dominated slavery in the New World Order (an infelicitous phrase used by George Bush, meant to refer to the Pax Americana, but given quite a new meaning by conspiracy theorists). Behind this plot is a mysterious conspiracy, usually referred to as the Illuminati. The original Illuminati were a small, pseudo-Masonic group set up in eighteenth-century Bavaria, dedicated to radical Enlightenment views; a sort of vague populism mixed with sexual liberation. They entered into American politics when they were used as a code word for the Federalist to attack Thomas Jefferson, and others thought to be too friendly towards the French Revolution. Today the term seems to be used as little more than a synonym for any sort of vague elite, or, more sinisterly, as a code word for Jews.

Jim Keith began his conspiratorial career promoting the Gemstone Files, but has now become a major spokesman for the militias. Black Helicopters over America is a remarkable example of political paranoia. It starts with UFO-like sightings of mysterious black helicopters which first entered the American consciousness at 1973 at the time of the cattle mutilations panic. They have since become a part of UFO lore, and feature as a mysterious, brooding, spying presence in the experiences of abductees like Debbie Jordan and Katarina Wilson. From the late 1980s the helicopters became politicised, as the carriers of the shock troops of the UN invasion; another old fantasy which began in the fevered imaginations of 1960s segregationists who assured their audiences that the UN troops would be Congolese. [For further discussion of the significance and power of the image of the helicopter, see 'The Curious Connection Between Helicopters and UFOs', by Dennis Stilling, in Magonia 25, March 1987]
Both Keith and Grant Jeffrey display one of the classic signs of paranoia: the inability to accept any kind of evidence which would contradict their views. Both see the UN as being dominated by the communists, rhetoric from the Red-baiting years which has surely been overtaken by events. Probably Cuba is the only country left in the world with a believing communist government, the Confucian regimes of China, Vietnam and Laos merely use communism as a nostalgic slogan. Keith and Jeffrey’s answer to that is that the Reds have not been defeated, they are simply playing possum and just waiting to pounce. The death of devils is surely as hard as the death of gods. (Gordon Creighton’s Flying Saucer Review promotes a similar theory in Britain.)

For Jeffery the ‘Evil Empire’ is not just a secular enemy, but the very domain of the Antichrist, and he has plenty of Biblical passages – all torn out of context – to prove his point. Like most apocalyptic Biblical interpreters he is unable to grasp the fact that Biblical writers were writing about the events and concerns of their own time, and not some inconceivably remote future. The apocalypticism typified by Grant Jeffrey, born from the imagination of Hal Lindsey and others of that ilk, crops up everywhere. Near-death experience prophet Dannion Brinkley had visions of the Antichrist inaugurating the New World Order, although fundamentalist surgeon Maurice Rawlings sees the NDE itself as part of Satan’s wily attempts to lure us into the New World Order.

This is the sort of atmosphere in which the militias and survivalist move. Philip Lamy describes their world view as ‘Millennium Rage’, the notion as summarised by Keith in Black Helicopters... and OK Bomb, that the evil Clinton is about to inaugurate the reign of terror, and all that stands against him are “Conservative pro-Constitutionalists, Christian religious fundamentalists, the second American militia movement...” etc. Lamy, in his important book, argues that these images appeal primarily to those whose lives have been upturned or threatened by social change.

The conspiracy theories are part of the apocalyptic tradition. They are the end signs, indicating that the enemy is on the verge of total victory and only the ‘saving remnant’ can stand against it. This siege mentality clearly links groups such as the Branch Davidians with the wider militia and radical right community. The survivalists studied by Lamy saw themselves as the remnant in the wilderness. There is an eagerness for a catastrophe which would cleanse the world: a great simplification, the kind of purification extolled in the disaster movies, in which the wicked are thrown down and the righteous exalted in some suburban apocalypse. Lamy places the contemporary apocalyptic tradition in the context of the millennialist currents in American history. This encompassed a range of historical precedents from the benign, meliorative visions of those who saw the American republic itself as a new beginning; the lore of the wilderness (surely a factor in survivalism); the millennialist movements of the Native Americans, such as the Ghost Dance; up to its reappearance in such forms as the Unabomber manifesto and the X-Files.

This brings us back to the visions which I reviewed in ‘Blood, Vision and Brimstone’ (Magonia 53, August 1995), and testifies to the real social power of the rejected folk culture of the ‘New Age’, which, like the term New World Order, itself has clear millennialist overtones. Whether the likes of John Mack or Kenneth Ring might ever be the focus of a millennialist cult such as that of Herb Applewhite, we shall just have to wait and see.

The Oklahoma bomb was a product of this culture. Jim Keith in OkBomb reviews the rumours surrounding it. Much of the time he raises what seem like sensible points, but eventually falls into paranoid traps. For conspiracy theorists the notion of terrorists from their own tradition is unthinkable, and alternatives were suggested ranging from the claim of one militia leader that it was the work of the Japanese acting in revenge for the Tokyo subway gassing which itself was the work of the CIA. Others suggested it was a government act of provocation, a sort of modern Reichstag fire which could trigger the great UN crackdown; or our old friend mind control, as outlined by Mark Pilkington in Magonia 58. In passing, it has to be pointed out that while in some sense minds are being controlled all the time – by parents, schools, public authority, the media, etc. – there is no evidence of the sort of superhuman mind control as envisaged by conspiracy theorists ever having been, or possibly being, successful.

If I were to speculate on the motives of the Oklahoma bombers it would be to suggest a compound of propaganda by the deed, and an act of provocation with the intent of trying to provoke the authorities into some ill-judged overreaction and act of repression which would confirm their views and radicalise their followers.

The post-Oklahoma scene is also discussed in Adam Parfrey’s collection of writings. Although not endorsing the militias, he concludes they have been made the subject of a great deal of hysteria, and that they are no match for the powers of the corporate state. Here he echoes the views of some commentators on Waco: with the old Red Empire gone the American state needs new enemies against which to define itself; whereas for many groups of citizens the state itself has become the enemy.

The line between tragedy and farce is very fine, and one of the most surreal images in Cult Rapture must be the meeting between the survivalist, ‘identity-Christian’ (and that means is the subject of a future review) and Presidential candidate for the far-right Populist Party, James Bob Gritz (the model for Rambo), and a little old lady in tennis shoes who channels an alarming, nine-foot tall fascist reptilian called Hartoon. Rambo meets Reptilian. Strange days indeed!

Behind much of today’s conspiracy theories lies the old Big Lie of antisemitism, symbolised by that notorious fraud, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It is a sad thought that when Norman Cohr’s masterful tracings of its origins, and the strange Russian rightists who manufactured it by plagiarising Joly’s Dialogues in Hell, was first published thirty years ago, it was a dissection of a long dead literary corpse. This new edition must be seen more as a stake to be driven through the heart of a newly risen vampire, which I have seen on the shelves of the New Age section of Manchester’s Waterstones’, its nakedness hidden by the covers of Behold a Pale Horse or hiding in the work of David Icke.

The necromancers who have disinterred this foul thing are behind many of today’s conspiracy theories, using them as bait to trawl the
youngsters who follow The X-Files and the like. Conspiracy theories throw a film of confusion over history, about which many people are not terribly informed anyway. If you can persuade people that Marilyn Monroe was murdered by the CIA, or if you can persuade them that the Apollo astronauts never really landed on the Moon, then perhaps you can persuade them that there was no Holocaust, and that maybe Adolph Hitler wasn’t as bad as they say after all.

By working their way into the fears and prejudices of people whose minds have already been prepared by a diet of conspiracy theories, these hate-mongers are likely to find a more rewarding way of spreading their ideas than trawling a few thuggish football fans. We must not let them.

Books reviewed in text:

- Jonathan Vankin, Conspiracies, Cover-up and Crimes from Dallas to Waco. Illuminet Press, 1996.

The Case of the Vanishing X-15 Pilot. Curtis Peebles

Posted on 15/03/2009 by johnr

The publication of Ann Druffel’s book, Firestorm: Dr. James M. McDonald’s Fight For UFO Science, was met with a mixed reception
among believers and skeptics alike. The book gave an inside account of the highly respected atmospheric physicist’s involvement with UFOs. At the same time, many readers objected to Druffel’s attempts to include Roswell and MJ-12 in the account, as well as the book’s technical and historical errors. McDonald’s notebooks, in which he recorded his day-to-day activities, formed the basis of the book. These notebooks included summaries of numerous phone calls, notes on trips, events in his struggle with the University of Colorado UFO study, headed by Dr. Edward U. Condon, and McDonald’s efforts to arrange congressional hearings on UFOs. [1]

In reading Firestorm, I was surprised to discover an account of a UFO incident involving an X-15 flight. I had long been interested in the history of this research aircraft. With a maximum altitude above 350,000 feet, the X-15 was the first attempt by the U.S. to build a vehicle able to reach the edge of space. I also knew of UFO sightings involving the X-15. I had not heard of this story, however, and was astonished by the alleged details of the case. This was not simply a claim that an X-15 pilot had seen a UFO, but rather that he had been abducted in flight. [2]

The story grew out of McDonald’s involvement with the congressional UFO hearings. He was politically ambitious, and was skilled at influencing men of power. As a result McDonald stage managed the hearings, to the extent that he actually selected the five individuals who would testify. McDonald called them on July 8, 1968, to confirm they could be available. They were: Dr. Robert L. Hall, Dr. Robert M. Wood, Dr. Carl Sagan, Dr. Robert M.L. Baker, and Dr. J. Allen Hynek. [3]

Dr. Wood indicated there might be problems with his attending. (In fact Dr. Wood eventually had to bow out.) During the conversation, however, Wood told McDonald a remarkable abduction story. McDonald’s handwritten text, as best as can be determined, read:

“Said heard of Gene May an X-15 pilot 5-8 years 15 min flight, yet came back 3 hours later. Said he was taken aboard UFO. Was examined by psychologist Edwards AFB Fellow at Vandenberg whom Bob knows, also knows Gene May. Douglas test pilot checking out X-15, 5-8 years [So I recounted Piccard. Urged he look for him…..]” [4]

Wood was the Deputy Director for Research and Development at the Douglas Missile and Space Division at the time of the conversation. The source of the abduction story was a colleague who worked at Vandenberg AFB. Wood considered him to be “very reliable.” In Firestorm, Wood also said that his source knew May very well, who was described as having been involved with the X-15 program for several years. From the date of the conversation, and Wood’s account, the abduction supposedly took place between 1960 and 1963. Although McDonald made a note of the story for future reference, he apparently never followed up on the case of the vanishing X-15 pilot.

Initially, the X-15 abduction story was nothing more than an amusing anecdote. The flaws in the tale were apparent to anyone familiar with the X-15 program. I told several individuals the story. They all recognized the flaws, and were amused by the story. Then, during a conversation, I mentioned the tale to a retired X-15 engineer, and was surprised to learn that Wood’s account was not the first time this story of an X-15 pilot being taken aboard a UFO had been told.

AN ENGINEER AT GIANT ROCK

During the early 1960s, Kenneth W. Iliff was a young NASA engineer working on the X-15 project at what was then called the NASA Flight Research Center (now the Dryden Flight Research Center). He would subsequently have a forty-year career with NASA, earned a PhD, and retiring as the Chief Scientist at Dryden. The NASA facility was a relatively short distance from Giant Rock, where annual UFO conventions were held. These events attracted the interest of some of the NASA engineers, and they made the pilgrimage to the site. Iliff went to Giant Rock in two consecutive years. As best he can remember after four decades, these were in 1963 and 1964. Both times he was accompanied by Lowell Greenfield, who was a fellow NASA engineer.

Iliff recalled that Giant Rock was at the end of a long and poorly-maintained dirt road. Parking was somewhat disorganized, and several light airplanes had landed at the dirt airstrip. The crowd numbered at least several hundred in Iliff’s estimation. Most were UFO believers, many with family members. However, there were a significant number of people who were merely curious, and who, like Iliff, did not have strong opinions about UFOs. There were also quite a few “promoters,” as Iliff called them, selling various UFO items, such as books that they had written and published. George Van Tassel, who organized the yearly conventions, was asking for large donations of over $100 to complete the “Integratron.” (This was a significant sum in the early 1960s.) The money was also to be used to buy a road grader. Iliff recalled that the Integratron was described as duplicating the “jawbone of the ass” in the Bible.
The Giant Rock conventions were legendary because of the speakers recounting their UFO adventures, and Iliff and Greenfield attended several of their presentations, which were given in a large tent. The account which Iliff most vividly recalled was by a speaker who claimed to have been involved with the X-15 program for the past several years, and that he was on active duty with the Air Force at Edwards AFB. Greenfield was aware of his presentation, and made sure that he and Iliff were there for his talk. Iliff recalled there were about 70 or 80 people on hand. As with the other speakers, he had books for sale at the back of the tent.

The main part of his talk dealt with his experiences during an X-15 flight. The man said that he had been in the NASA control room, with an important function to perform. His story was that on this particular flight, the X-15 had been successfully launched from the B-52, fired its engine, and began the initial part of the flight plan. Suddenly, all communication with the X-15 and its pilot were lost, including telemetry, voice transmissions, and radar tracking. The X-15 had vanished without any warning.

A search operation was immediately launched, the speaker said, using both the regular chase planes and additional aircraft. Despite the search, no trace of the X-15 or its pilot could be found. Everyone at Edwards was very shocked and despondent. The speaker then said that after a long period of time, several hours as Iliff recalled, the X-15 suddenly reappeared on its planned flight trajectory. The aircraft was intact and the pilot was fine. The X-15 made its normal landing approach, and touched down on the lakebed at Edwards.

The speaker said that everybody involved in the control room and the search operation were elated at the safe landing, and that an impromptu celebration began. It was at this point that the speaker pointed out to the other people in the control room that something extraordinary had occurred. The X-15 could not fly for more than 15 minutes, and there was no way that it could have stayed aloft for as long as it had. He said the others in the control room abruptly realized that he was right.

He claimed that all the participants were sworn to secrecy about what had happened. The speaker said that, despite the security oath, he had to tell the truth about what had happened on the flight. The X-15 and its pilot had been taken aboard a UFO intact, examined for several hours, and then returned to where the aircraft had been flying.

Dr. Iliff is not certain that the speaker said that the X-15 story was in the book he had for sale at the back of the tent. This was Iliff's impression, however. He recalled later, “I was so shocked by his bald-faced lie that I left immediately and did not actually open the book.”

After returning to the Flight Research Center, both Iliff and Greenfield told the story to co-workers, and they enjoyed “many good chuckles.” It was clear to all that the incident never happened. Some checking was done to see if the person ever had actually been at Edwards or had been associated with the X-15. Dr. Iliff’s recollection was that he had said that he was an officer, but after so many years he cannot be sure. Iliff also cannot now recall his name, or the name of his book. Iliff does recall that he and Greenfield were able to find some evidence that the person had been stationed at Edwards at one time. Iliff pointed out that this did not mean he ever had had any official capacity with the X-15 program. [5]

The 'survivor story' of the X-15 pilot has more to do with traditional melodrama than early flying saucer myth

There remain a number of unknowns regarding both the Giant Rock story that Dr. Iliff heard, and the similar story that Dr. Wood told Dr. McDonald several years later. The author’s attempts to identify the speaker and the title of the book were unsuccessful. Another open issue is the development of the story. By the early 1960s the idea that flying saucers were responsible for the disappearances of aircraft and their crews was already part of flying saucer mythology. The implications were that these disappearances were indications of the aliens’ hostile intent, and that the abductions were carried out to gain samples of both human technology and humans themselves. There were no claims that individuals or aircraft which had “disappeared” ever came back, however.

The “survivor story” of the X-15 pilot has more to do with traditional melodrama than early flying saucer mythology. Given this, another possibility is that it was influenced by popular culture. The 1960s was a golden age of television science fiction. Shows such as The Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits, and Star Trek were in first run at this time. All three programs had an episode with elements similar to the X-15 abduction story, but any direct connection is, at best, tentative.

In The Twilight Zone episode “And When the Sky Opened,” the X-20 and its three man crew were put into orbit, but disappeared from radar for 24 hours. After landing, each of the crewmen disappears one by one, with not even the memory of their existence or that of the X-20 remaining. The only hint of aliens is in the final narration, which says that “something or someone took them somewhere.” The episode was first telecast on December 11, 1959. The Outer Limits had an episode involving the X-15 as a plot element, titled “The Premonition.” In the story, the X-15, its pilot, and his wife are caught in a time warp. There is no hint that aliens are involved. A bigger problem with this being an inspiration for the abduction story is that the episode was first telecast on January 9, 1965. This was after Iliff recalled attending the Giant Rock convention.

The closest match is the “Tomorrow is Yesterday” episode of Star Trek. The Enterprise travels back in time to the 20th century, and is intercepted by an F-104. The aircraft is damaged during the encounter, and its pilot is then beamed aboard. However, there is the same problem in timing, as this Star Trek episode was not telecast until January 26, 1967. Again, this is several years too late. [6]

Another possibility is that the story was based on the events of a real X-15 flight, which was then embellished with a bogus UFO encounter. There was an X-15 flight during which the control room abruptly lost all telemetry, voice transmissions, and radar tracking data from the vehicle. The X-15 seemed to have vanished. It was eight minutes before a chase plane pilot spotted the X-15 as it made an emergency landing on Mud Lake. No flying saucers were involved in the incident, however. Capt. William J. Knight had experienced a failure of both Auxiliary Power Units (APUs), which supplied electrical and hydraulic power to the vehicle. This failure was caused by
of Robert Lazar's claims of seeing captured alien flying saucers. In a reply to a posting by Dr. Bruce Maccabee, Dr. Salla wrote:

A possible reason for the uncritical acceptance of such eyewitness accounts was made clear in unguarded comments by several figures

The Gene May abduction story makes clear the role of the “sighting” in the flying saucer myth. In the 1940s and 1950s, when the belief system originated, Air Force reports and documents from other agencies were classified. As a result, the sighting reports collected by the believers were the only evidence available. These testimonials of what the witnesses had seen and experienced had to be judged on subjective grounds, such as the witnesses’ status, perceived reliability, and “sincerity.” Those sightings judged to be “real” flying saucers were then collected, and published in the believers’ books as “proof” that flying saucers were interplanetary spaceships. This was the standard format of the flying saucer books published beginning in the 1950s, and continuing into the 1970s.

When documentary evidence indicated that the sighting was in error, did not occur as described, or was totally false, it was ignored or dismissed by the believers. If proof was lacking, the writers could claim that this was because of the “cover-up” by the Air Force. The cover-up also meant that believers also had an excuse for not fully investigating a sighting. The Air Force had removed all the evidence, and silenced all the witnesses. As a result, there was no use in making follow-up investigations of a report.

Both of these effects can be seen in the case of the vanishing X-15 pilot. Dr. Wood was told the story of Gene May’s abduction by a colleague at Vandenberg AFB. Dr. Wood judged the source to be “very reliable,” as he said that he knew Gene May well. Dr. Wood was employed by Douglas, as was May. Dr. Wood could have followed up the abduction story by making a phone call to company headquarters, and asking about May’s involvement with the X-15 program. He could have also called the NASA Flight Research Center or Edwards AFB, and inquired about any records of May’s X-15 flights. Dr. Wood, it appears, did none of these things. He simply accepted the source’s account, and told Dr. McDonald about it.

More than half a century after the birth of the flying saucer myth, both the world and beliefs about flying saucers are very different. The UFO related documents in the Blue Book files, as well as those of the FBI, CIA, NSA, and other government agencies, are now available. The Freedom of Information Act has been in effect for some thirty years, while the 25-year rule allows anyone to simply ask for the release of old classified material. The end of the Cold War also means that many subjects once considered too sensitive to be discussed can now be openly talked about, by both sides. [8]

The same fundamental changes are also true of the flying saucer myth. In the mid to late 1970s, the traditional mythology began to be replaced by stories of crashed saucers, cattle mutilations, underground bases, secret treaties, reverse-engineered alien technology, abductions and hybrids, disinformation, free energy, and the whistleblowers. The Roswell incident became the center of the flying saucer belief system, while the Air Force cover up was replaced by MJ-12 and the secret government. Dr. Wood himself was representative of this change, as he is now one of the primary supporters of the bogus MJ-12 documents.

Despite this fundamental change in the mythology, for the believers, the eyewitness is still the primary evidence. Indeed, in many cases, it is the only acceptable evidence. If the eyewitnesses are contradicted by scientific analysis, historical records, or other factual evidence, it is the eyewitnesses who should be believed. The “truth” of the sighting is thus preserved in the face of mere facts. Such sighting reports thus become a secular version of religious miracle stories. [9]

Without Roswell, not only claims of a secret government, but the whole basis for the exopolitics myth no longer exists.

This mindset continues over three decades after Dr. Wood told Dr. McDonald about the X-15 abduction. When Druffel was researching her book, she talked to Dr. Wood. He provided more information about the case, but Druffel apparently never made any efforts to check the story. Again, it seems, the source was considered very reliable, the incident had been covered up, and so there was no point in further research.

A possible reason for the uncritical acceptance of such eyewitness accounts was made clear in unguarded comments by several figures involved in “exopolitics.” The first of these was by Dr. Michael Salla, during a debate on the UFO Updates web site regarding the validity of Robert Lazar’s claims of seeing captured alien flying saucers. In a reply to a posting by Dr. Bruce Maccabee, Dr. Salla wrote:
May was born on September 28, 1904, less that a year after the first powered flights by the Wright Brothers. May subsequently became an experienced airline pilot. May then joined Douglas Aircraft Co. as a test pilot in 1941. Over the next five years, he test flew the A-20, A-26, and XB-42 light bombers, the AD-1 Navy attack aircraft, the C-74 and C-54 military transports, and the DC-6 airliner. [14] He had a reputation of being able to note the subtle features of an aircraft’s behavior, and then communicate this to the engineers in terms they could understand. He also had the wisdom to know when to back off. By the late 1940s, he had accumulated some 10,000 hours of flight time.

When the X-15 program started in 1954, it was simply the latest in a series of research aircraft. This changed with the launch of the first satellite, Sputnik 1, by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957. In the post-Sputnik political environment, the X-15 became “America’s first spaceship,” and the program engineers found themselves working in a fishbowl of press attention. The rollout of the first X-15 on October 15, 1958 was a press event. On hand were Vice President Richard M. Nixon, senior Air Force, NASA, and North American Aviation officials, as well as X-15 pilots A. Scott Crossfield (North American), Capt. Robert White (Air Force) and Joe Walker (NASA). [12] When X-15 flights began in June of 1959, the press was on hand at Edwards AFB to report the events. In addition to newspaper and television coverage, there were also books published during the early 1960s on the program. One of these was X-15 Diary, written by Richard Tregaskis. Published in 1961, the book describes Tregaskis’ day-by-day, first-hand observations and experiences covering the X-15. He had access to the pilots, engineers, and other personnel. He described the goals, achievements, and problems they experienced. [13]

This was a remarkable degree of access for a reporter, but it highlighted the fact that the X-15 program was being conducted in the open. The flight plans, flight transcripts, pilot debriefings, flight maps, and other internal documents for each flight were unclassified. As Dr. Iliff later noted, only some of the aeronautical data from the flights was actually classified at the time. This material has subsequently been declassified; there are no classifications or export control restrictions on X-15 program information.

In the years since the X-15 program ended in 1968, additional books have been published. These include X-15 pilot Milton O. Thompson’s book At The Edge Of Space, as well as Robert Godwin’s X-15 The NASA Mission Reports, and Dennis R. Jenkins and Tony R. Landis’ Hypersonic: The Story of the North American X-15. These and the other later books on the X-15 also include flight logs of its 199 missions. These provide such information as dates, pilot names, as well as the speeds and altitudes reached by the X-15 for each flight. Hypersonic lists not only this information, but also the names of the B-52 pilots and launch panel operators, the chase plane pilots, and the NASA 1 ground controller for each X-15 flight.

Had Dr. Wood, Druffel or the readers of Firestorm checked any of these sources, they would have discovered that Gene May is never once mentioned in any of them as having any connection with the X-15 program. May never appeared at any press conferences; he never gave a speech or interview, never flew a chase plane, was never aboard the B-52 launch aircraft, never served as NASA 1, and never, ever, flew the X-15.

Gene May was born on September 28, 1904, less that a year after the first powered flights by the Wright Brothers. May subsequently became an experienced airline pilot. May then joined Douglas Aircraft Co. as a test pilot in 1941. Over the next five years, he test flew the A-20, A-26, and XB-42 light bombers, the AD-1 Navy attack aircraft, the C-74 and C-54 military transports, and the DC-6 airliner. [14] He had a reputation of being able to note the subtle features of an aircraft’s behavior, and then communicate this to the engineers in terms they could understand. He also had the wisdom to know when to back off. By the late 1940s, he had accumulated some 10,000 hours of flight time.

May was then selected as the test pilot for the Douglas D-558-I Skystreak. This was a Navy-sponsored jet-powered research aircraft designed to fly at speeds approaching Mach 1. May was now 42 years old, and a grandfather. In all, he made a total of 121 flights in the Skystreak, including the airplane’s only supersonic flight, on September 29, 1948. This was the day after his 44th birthday.
He was also involved in the initial test flights of the Douglas D-558-II Skyrocket. This aircraft used both a jet engine and a rocket engine, and was designed to fly above Mach 1. Although both aircraft shared the same designation, they were completely different designs. The Skyrocket had straight wings and a stubby, cylindrical fuselage. The Skyrocket had an elongated bullet-shaped fuselage with swept-back wings, tail and stabilizers. May made a total of 133 flights in the Skyrocket. His last test flight was made on December 1, 1949, in a D-558-II.

Accounts vary as to why May, who was then 45-years old, left flight testing. The popular consensus was that he failed his flight physical, and was removed from the program. Another suggestion made was that May had done a great many very dangerous things while at Douglas, and he felt that his luck had about run out. May continued to work for Douglas Aircraft Co. for several more years. He was named the Chief of Flight Operations at Douglas’ Tulsa Oklahoma plant, where B-47s were being built under license from Boeing. According to a magazine article, May was checked out in the B-47 in 1951. However, this did not apparently involve any test work, but rather was simply a check ride in an aircraft.

May left Douglas in about 1953, becoming a vice president at Superior Cutter Co., which made cutting tools. In 1957, May was working at R.L. Polk. He left Polk in about 1959, and returned to flying. May was hired as a pilot for Alamo Airways in Las Vegas, Nevada. He flew Cessna 310s, which were small twin-piston engine light aircraft. Gene May died on December 5, 1966, at 62 years of age. [15]

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REFERENCES

1. Ann Druffel, Firestorm Dr. James M. McDonald’s Fight For UFO Science (Columbus, North Carolina: Wild Flower Press, 2003).
4. McDonald notes on a conversation with Dr. Robert M. Wood, July 8, 1968. The “Piccard” mentioned in the notes is Don Piccard, who was a famous balloonist in the 1950s. It is not clear why McDonald was suggesting Wood try to find him.
5. Handwritten notes provided by Dr. Kenneth W. Iliff. In trying to recall the events of more than forty years before, Iliff also made a list of the important details that he was sure the speaker had said: He was in the control room for the X-15 flight; the X-15 mysteriously disappeared during the flight he was monitoring; the X-15 reappeared in flight, hours after it had disappeared; he was the first (and perhaps only) person to notice that the X-15 could not have stayed aloft for over 15 minutes. He also emphasized that the X-1, the first aircraft to fly Mach 1, was originally called the “XS-1” (for “experimental supersonic”). Iliff though that the speaker made such a big point of this, for no obvious reason, in order to establish his credibility. Greenfield and Iliff satisfied themselves that he had at one time been stationed at Edwards. He was selling a book at the Giant Rock convention.
6. Information on the details and air dates of these episodes was tracked down by Sue Henderson. When Dr. Iliff was asked about these shows, he said that in the 1960s he had been a regular viewer of these programs, and that if the Giant Rock story had any similarities to these episodes, he would have recognized it.
8. In September 1998, I attended a historical seminar on the U-2 overflight program. The speakers included a former CIA U-2 pilot, CIA, Air Force, and Lockheed personnel involved with the program, and a retired Colonel of the Soviet Air Defense Forces.
9. “Conspiracy? Kecksburg UFO” The History Channel, March 6, 2005. In the show, a scientific paper was noted in which the path of the object was calculated from a pair of photographs. The photos and calculations not only showed the sighting was of a meteor, but also allowed its orbit to be calculated. This scientific evidence was dismissed by the believers, as it contradicted the 40-year-old eyewitness accounts.
14. This alone should have been a giveaway that the Gene May abduction story was false. May had been a Douglas test pilot. The X-15 was built by North American Aviation.
Although there have been no recent high profile cases like Rochdale or Orkney, the Satanism hunters have not gone away.

**BASIL HUMPHREYS** reports on recent activity.

FROM MAGONIA 59, APRIL 1997

The claims of Satanic Child Abuse hunters are seldom given space in the press nowadays, yet they are as busy as ever. The RAINS (Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support) conference at Warwick University on 13-14 September 1996 had an attendance of two hundred (two-thirds of them women), mostly professional carers of some kind, along with a few vicars, some survivors of Ritual Abuse, and a couple of sceptics who were careful to keep their views to themselves. An informal survey conducted by one of the lecturers revealed that all but about ten of those present claimed to have first hand experience of a Ritual Abuse case, and most said they had several. The speakers included Catherine Could, an American therapist who had had patients recalling Satanic rituals ever since the McMartin case was first publicised in 1984; Valerie Sinason, editor of *Treating Survivals of Satanist Abuse*; and Tim Tate, who was the researcher for the notorious Cook Report on Satanism in 1989.

No doubt for security reasons, tape recorders were forbidden, and the only journalist allowed was believer Andrew Boyd. Sceptical Mail on Sunday reporters were given a press conference in a room away from the rest, mainly rhetoric from Valerie Sinason.

The words ‘Satanic’ and ‘Satanism’ were not actually used, rather, people tended to refer ominously to ‘them’, leaving it tacit who ‘they’ were. One woman explained the necessity for RAINS like this: “They’re networked to one another, so we have to fight them with their own weapons.” Just how far does she intend to take this principle?

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The emphasis is now on ‘Multiple Personality Disorder’. This condition was not even recognised until fairly recently, and was at first assumed to be a reaction to extreme trauma. Yet it is now assumed that it is deliberately induced by the cults as a form of mind control. So far as one could tell, it was usually taken for granted that survivors of Satanism would not remember their experiences until they recalled them under therapy or hypnosis.

That the Satanists can wield mind control to this extent is used to explain away the lack of evidence. Valerie Sinason mentioned a case where police searched for evidence to back a survivor’s story, and found none: she said they had “interviewed the wrong alter
recovered memories which proved false was low, "but we don't know what 'low' means. It could be tens, hundreds or even thousands."

them of the dangers of creating false memories in therapy. Chairman Alex McGuire is quoted as saying that the number of people with

Telegraph

Some recent developments:

shown. They were Guatemalan 'Worry Dolls', as sold at charity shops all over the country.

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Finally, it may be remarked that one piece of actual physical evidence was produced in the course of the weekend. A woman who was in

Satanic rituals (during which devils and humans flew about in the air), hence by the time of this conference she was herself an authority

University presented by Valerie Sinason: 'Ritual Abuse: Does it Exist.' At first she felt "total disbelief" at what she was hearing, but by the

It is likely that such conferences as this are self-propagating. One presenter related how in 1994 she went to a study day at Southampton

Curiously, some of the patients supposedly continue in Satanism even while in therapy. Joan Coleman's first survivor once had to

This talk won a minute's standing ovation. In response to a question from the audience, she said she was given the surname Stardancer twenty years ago by an Indian medicine man she met at a conference on adolescent schizophrenia.

Sinar also stated that certain crimes are committed at the full moon, mentioning the horse mutilations of a few years ago. Presumably this is meant to prove that they occur on cult holy days, yet the same observation has also been taken as proof that astrology is true. The first thing that ought to be investigated is whether or not some crimes really are committed more often at the full moon.

The weekend was rounded off by Marjorie Orr, the astrologer and founder of 'Accuracy About Abuse', who devoted her talk to attacking belief in 'false memory syndrome', which she says has led to the silencing of adult survivors, and is in danger of wrecking psychotherapy. There may be a 'little exaggeration' on the part of survivors (those who describe mass murder, perhaps), but no more. The British False Memory Society, she considers, is an umbrella group for organised paedophile rings.

It is a myth, Stardancer said, that "survivors are neurotic people with empty lives who invent stories to get attention"; in fact, they haven't got the attention that False Memory Syndrome has (everyone in this field thinks that it is only their opponents who are getting the media attention). She knows it is a myth because she herself suffered, back in the 1940s and 1950s when she was a small child, and the hands of an inter-generational, multi-perpetrator cult, actually at least five cults who were conspiring together. These included: a Satanic Cabal hiding under the cover of a Fundamentalist church; a Dionysiac group (who had survived underground ever since the days of ancient Rome) who "specialise in political manipulation through crime and blackmail"; a feminist Pagan coven; a youth gang who used Satanic imagery; and military mind-control experts who were affiliated with the Masons. She was able to bring in several other favourite conspiracy theories by giving them as part of the alleged cult's teachings: she says they claim the cult hierarchy dates back to Hermes Trismegistus, an early Grand Master, they built the pyramids, and they are in touch with extra-terrestrials, as is proved by the eye in the pyramid on the US dollar bill. Many survivors, she says, are programmed to believe that social unrest at the turn of the millennium will enable the group they are in to take control.

This is meant to prove that they occur on cult holy days, yet the same observation has also been taken as proof that astrology is true. The first thing that ought to be investigated is whether or not some crimes really are committed more often at the full moon.

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It is likely that such conferences as this are self-propagating. One presenter related how in 1994 she went to a study day at Southampton University presented by Valerie Sinason: 'Ritual Abuse: Does it Exist.' At first she felt "total disbelief" at what she was hearing, but by the end of the day she believed in ritual abuse. The following years one of her patients started 'disclosing' having been made to take part in Satanic rituals (during which devils and humans flew about in the air), hence by the time of this conference she was herself an authority on the subject.

Finally, it may be remarked that one piece of actual physical evidence was produced in the course of the weekend. A woman who was in the process of remembering the Satanic rituals she had been made to attend as a child awoke one morning, so she said, to find a box of voodoo dolls on her doorstep, obviously a curse placed there by the Satanists to warn her to keep her mouth shut. The voodoo dolls were shown, They were Guatemalan 'Worry Dolls', as sold at charity shops all over the country.

Some recent developments:

Several recent news items have shown that the debate over ‘Satanic’ abuse and ‘False Memory’ is no closer to resolution. The Daily Telegraph (March 25, 1997, p.6) reports that the British Association of Counselling has issued guidelines to its 14,000 members warning them of the dangers of creating false memories in therapy. Chairman Alex McGuire is quoted as saying that the number of people with recovered memories which proved false was low, ‘but we don’t know what ‘low’ means. It could be tens, hundreds or even thousands.
There is no doubt that it is a genuine hazard.”

The Observer, (March 2, 1997) reports on a case where a 38 year old woman, Susan Lees, is sung the NSPCC and Birmingham Social Services for withholding evidence of abuse she suffered as a very young child at the hands of her father. She was taken into care and adopted at the age of five, and claims that memories of the abuse returned after hearing news reports of torture in Bosnia, then obtained Social Services records which confirm much of her story. Critics of False Memory Syndrome are claiming that this demonstrates that victims can forget their abuse then recover the memories much later, However this case seems to have little in common with others reported. The abuse happened when Ms Lees was a baby, stopped when she was adopted, and did not continue over many years, even into adulthood, as is alleged in SRA claims.

In the Guardian’s Saturday magazine section (March 15, 1997) a writer who appears to have links with the relevant Social Services department mounts a criticism of the action taken by a judge in Scotland in dismissing a ritual abuse prosecution in Ayrshire. Not having seen court reports it is difficult to know what happened in the case, and to what extent ‘recovered memory’ played a part. The implication in the article is that serious abuse did occur (an allegation which would presumably be impossible to make without the anonymity of individuals in such cases) but that prosecutors and judges were unwilling to accept the ‘Ritual’ elements, so the case fell. As in the conference reported above, mention of ‘Satanic’ abuse is carefully avoided. It is also apparent that the Guardian’s writer disapproves of the lifestyle of the family concerned – ‘travellers’ who can afford a large house through exporting expensive cars to Thailand and the Far East, The fact that Thailand is a centre for paedophile pornography is carefully pointed out.

The recurrence of cases like these serves to emphasise the concerns expressed in Magonia by John Harney and Kevin McClure about the dangers of involving children in alien abduction stories. – John Rimmer

He Can remember It For You Wholesale:

Thoughts on Budd Hopkins’ ‘Witnessed’.

John Harney

Posted on 15/03/2009 by johnr

FROM MAGONIA 59, APRIL 1997
Over the years a number of thoughtful articles on the subject have been published in Magonia. Martin Kottmeyer discussed the types of people who report such experiences and their possible subconscious motivations. (1) Kevin McClure expressed his concerns about the effects of the techniques and lines of questioning and speculations indulged in by investigators on children involved in abduction cases. (2) John Rimmer wrote a book in which he showed, amongst other things, how UFO abduction experiences were related to similar, but more traditional, experiences and beliefs, (3) People certainly do have subjective experiences which often seem to involve being abducted by aliens, demons, fairies, or whatever. Such experiences can seem very real to the percipients. They therefore should be heard sympathetically, and if they suffer continuing distress it is perfectly reasonable that some suitably qualified person should attempt to alleviate it.

If Hopkins were advocating counselling or psychotherapy for people troubled in this way and sought to place the notion of abduction by aliens in flying saucers in its social and historical context then we could only applaud his efforts. However, as you all no doubt know, that is not his position at all. He insists that people are really being abducted by real aliens and token aboard real flying saucers.

Now if he were the sort of wild-eyed person who goes around spouting incoherent nonsense – you know, the sort of fellow who persecutes librarians or who comes and sits next to you in an almost-empty bus – then we could safely ignore him. But he is not like that at all. He is well educated, highly intelligent and can call on a wide circle of experts to help him with his investigations. He it was who introduced Dr John Mack to UFO abductions. (4) He has demonstrated, over the years, that he is capable of persuading other highly intelligent professional people that UFO abductions are a physical reality, as well as persuading many people, directly or indirectly, that they really have been and are being abducted. Thus he cannot be safely ignored.

It is therefore advisable to take a close look at his assertions, arguments and working methods, as they are presented in his latest book. The case he discusses caused a great deal of comment and controversy before the book was published, so it is advisable to look at some of the other publications on the subject also.

It is easy to get bogged down in the complexities of the story presented by Hopkins, and to be diverted by the mud-slinging between believers and sceptics which has appeared in various UFO journals, so I propose to concentrate on the two central issues. These are: Hopkins’ assertion that the abduction of Linda from her New York apartment was a physically real event, seen by independent witnesses; and the methods used by Hopkins to enable abductees to “remember” their experiences.

Anyone who had not read the book might assume that Linda contacted Hopkins and told him about being abducted from her bedroom by aliens and taken into a saucer, and that Hopkins then conducted a detailed investigation. But it was not like that. Linda wrote a letter to Hopkins, dated 26 April 1989, which expressed her anxieties about what are obviously not unusual sleep disturbances – waking up, or seeming to wake up, with the feeling that there is some other person present in the room, and not being able to move. The familiar ‘sleep paralysis’ routine.

Linda begins the letter by saying that she has never seen a UFO, but that she has read part of Hopkins’ book Intruders. She also said that she had consulted a doctor about a small bump on her nose and was told that it was cartilage caused by a surgical scar. She become even more worried about this as she insisted that she had never had any operation on her nose. (Not surprisingly, to anyone who has read any abduction stories, this bump on the nose, which Hopkins admitted was “almost invisible” soon become evidence of an alien implant.)

Only a few days after receiving the letter Hopkins interviewed her. He explains that he keeps his interviews informal initially, to put his subjects at ease. Only “when an atmosphere of calm and trust has been established” does he conduct more formal interviews, taking notes or using a tape recorder.

This is all very well, but it means that there is no record of what was said. When Linda first met Hopkins she was obviously aware of his obsession with UFOs and aliens, and it seems not unlikely that he took the opportunity to inform her in more detail of his ideas and theories. Only a few days passed before he conducted his first hypnotic regression session with her. This unearthed a memory of her seeing a strange bright figure or object on a roof outside her bedroom window one night when she was eight years old.

Now we come to the momentous events of 30 November 1989, Linda phoned Hopkins to tell him what happened to her earlier that morning and a meeting was arranged for 2 December during which she told him of being abducted through her window and up into a saucer where there was a table… But wait. Let us look at Linda’s own account of this event, which was published in MUFON UFO Journal. (5)

Linda describes how a “peculiar feeling” came over her as she prepared for bed. “There was a strong presence in the room. Steve [her husband] was snoring away, so it wasn’t him.” When Linda had these peculiar feelings previously she didn’t know what to make of them. But this time -

“I began to feel the familiar sensation of numbness that I’d felt periodically over my lifetime, creeping up slowly from my toes. Only this time, having known Budd and the abductees for some seven months, I knew what it meant.” (emphasis added)

She claims to have seen a strange being, but she does not describe it; she merely says: “...it was there, standing at the foot of my bed, staring at me!” She goes on to say that she remembered white fabric flowing up over her eyes and a sensation of something pounding on
It does not seem to occur to him that if we take this idea to its logical conclusion, then our whole world could be an illusion created by the aliens. (5)

See what and who remembers what and when they remember it. Thus all apparent inconsistencies can be dealt with by attributing them to the amazing powers of the aliens.

Hopkins has answers for those awkward persons who ask why only some people had their cars stopped near Brooklyn Bridge and others were left unexplained. Richard and Dan were allegedly accompanying another person, referred to as the “Third Man” when they had their amazing and unlikely experience, (It is widely believed that this person was Javier Perez de Cuellar and Hopkins refuses to confirm or deny this.) However, they were supposed to be independent witnesses, but it was revealed, in a letter purporting to be from Dan, that they also were abducted. It seems they were instantly transported to a beach where they were confronted by Linda and a group of Greys (the “Lady of the Sands” episode). Hopkins claims to have confirmed this story by subjecting Linda to another dose of hypnotic regression during which (of course) she managed to remember it.

So this left Hopkins without independent witnesses, but in November he received a letter from a woman, referring to an earlier letter which she had sent him in July, This he retrieved from his “box of unopened correspondence” (!). This woman claimed to have witnessed the abduction from her car on Brooklyn Bridge. Hopkins interviewed her but apparently without any hypnosis business, presumably because he didn’t want to find she had also been abducted and lose his only independent witness. Dr John Mack remarks: “This is, to my knowledge, the only documented case where an individual, who was not him or herself abducted, reported witnessing an abduction as it was actually taking place.” (7) It is not true, however. Abductions are sometimes witnessed, in a sense, by others, but they are usually rather unspectacular. For instance, in a case investigated by BUFORA, described by Nigel Watson: “Mr L had no known psychiatric history. The psychiatrist thought that he had been experiencing hypnagogic hallucinations. This was partly based on the testimony of Mr L’s wife who was present during these alleged events, and confirmed that he appeared to be asleep during his ‘contacts’”, (8)

If we take this idea to its logical conclusion, then our whole world could be an illusion created by the aliens

Hopkins has answers for those awkward persons who ask why only some people had their cars stopped near Brooklyn Bridge and witnessed the abduction whereas others either apparently saw nothing or remembered nothing. He tells us that the aliens control who sees what and who remembers what and when they remember it. Thus all apparent inconsistencies can be dealt with by attributing them to the amazing powers of the aliens.

It does not seem to occur to him that if we take this idea to its logical conclusion, then our whole world could be an illusion created by the aliens.

When she retells this episode to Hopkins under hypnosis, the number of beings increases to four or five, but she still seems unable to describe them in any detail, despite prompting
Hopkins points out what will be obvious to most readers – the highly theatrical nature of the events described. He is referring to the abduction scene, but there are a number of others, mainly scenes involving Linda, Dan and/or Richard.

Hopkins wants us to believe that the theatricality is provided by the aliens, but others take the more plausible view that it is provided by the abductees, witnesses and investigators. George Hansen, Joseph Stefula and Richard Butler, in a paper circulated among ufologists a few years ago, likened the whole business to a kind of role-playing fantasy game. If we look at it that way, then we don’t have to go along with Hopkins’ assertion that either the story is literally true or that Linda has organised – and paid for – a gang of conspirators to aid her in perpetrating an extremely elaborate hoax. Both of these alternatives are equally absurd, of course, but Hopkins thinks only the latter one is.

Hopkins was somewhat annoyed by this paper and he wrote a reply to it in which he devoted much space to character assassinations of the trio, with sideswipes at “such dubious personages as Philip Klass and James Moseley”. Apparently anyone who doesn’t go along with Hopkins’ absurd abduction theories, and says so bluntly, is a “fanatic”. (9)

The principal “fanatic” is Philip Klass. Hopkins obviously loathes him. He quotes him as saying to the media that abductees are “little nobodies, people seeking celebrity status” and that this had discouraged some of them from coming forward to tell the world about their traumatic experiences at the hands of the aliens. He also remarks; “Science can only be damaged by the present level of McCarthyite intimidation.” (10) Science? What do the activities and ludicrous speculations of Hopkins and the other abduction enthusiasts have to do with science?

What does Klass, this “…dinosaur in the evolution of public awareness” who “…bares his hatred for UFO witnesses ever more nakedly” (according to Hopkins), really think about the abductees? His views are set out clearly in his book on the subject, published in 1988, (11)

Klass is not concerned with criticising the witnesses, apart from a few of them who are obviously seeking money or notoriety, but with the techniques used by Hopkins and the other abduction investigators. He points out how they have ignored the opinions of professionals concerning the limitations of hypnosis as a method of establishing the truth about past experiences. He discusses their technique of repeatedly hypnotising UFO witnesses until they get the abduction stories they are hoping for. He gives examples of abductees who later insist that they really did see a UFO but they have no good reason to believe that they were abducted.

Hopkins was particularly annoyed by Klass’s challenges to him that if he really believed that people were being abducted and had any reliable evidence to support these claims then he should inform the FBI. Klass and other sceptics continue to pose awkward questions whenever they get the opportunity.

One of the most disturbing features of the work of Hopkins and his followers is the tendency for children to get caught up in the fantasies. Hopkins seemingly makes no attempts to exclude them from his investigations in order to protect them from ideas and beliefs that could cause them alarm and distress. He is quick to seize any opportunity, Take the case of the nosebleeds, for example.

Nosebleeds? Yes, I’m afraid it’s all rather complicated; perhaps Hopkins thinks that if we are sufficiently bemused and baffled by the complexities we will give up trying to unravel the story and just accept what he reports at his own evaluation.

We are told that Linda woke up with a bad nosebleed in the early morning of 24 May 1992, and was soon joined by the other four persons present in the apartment; her husband, her sons Steven and Johnny, and Steven’s friend “Brian”, who all sat around the living room trying to stem the flow from their bleeding noses. The next day, Linda phoned Budd, who reassured her that “…this was no one’s fault, that if it was UFO-related it was outside her control.” According to Budd, this sort of thing is not unusual: it seems it was one of those things that abductees just have to learn to live with.

Ufologists should spread the word that the UFO abduction game, like certain other activities, is definitely unsuitable for children.

A few days later, Budd called Linda back to question her in more detail about the incident. He reports: “Since she said she still remembered virtually nothing but waking up with a bloody nose, I asked about Steve and her sons.” (emphasis added) She then handed the phone over to her six-year-old son Johnny.

Johnny ‘remembered’ the nosebleed incident all right, but of course Budd could not know what Linda had said to the others about the night in question, And there is no testimony on this incredible event from Linda’s husband Steve. It should be noted that there is very little mention of Steve in the book, One gets the impression that he thinks Linda is somewhat neurotic and that Budd is some sort of psychiatrist.

Budd went on to question Johnny about his dreams that night and found that he was dreaming about his imaginary sister, Naturally Budd seized on that and, to cut out the endless details, it developed that this girl was not imaginary after all, but Johnny was constantly being abducted by the Greys and brought to meet this girl, also an abductee.

I find it difficult to read such stuff without becoming nauseated. When I was a small child I suffered from nightmares, but my parents comforted me and reassured me that the monsters in them were not real and that they were only dreams. I believe that most children are treated in this way. Imagine the effects, then, of making it plain to children that not only are the dream-creatures real, but that there is no
escape from them. Such an approach hardly seems therapeutic, to put it mildly, but this is the line taken by Hopkins and company. If they can persuade intelligent and more or less sane adults to believe such nonsense, the long-term effects on children hardly bear thinking about.

John Mack goes even further in this respect. Some of his subjects ‘remembered’ not only their abductions right back to early childhood but even in previous incarnations. Thus there is no escape from the Greys, even in death!

What is at issue here is not the sincerity and good intentions or otherwise of the abduction enthusiasts. It is the long-term effects of their work on the people they deal with.

The important question is: What can be done about it? Well, persons active in ufology can do a great deal. They should spread the word that the UFO abduction game, like certain other activities, is definitely unsuitable for children. Magazine editors should eschew the practice of giving fawning interviews to abductee researchers. A particularly sickening example appeared in MUFON UFO Journal where the interviewer of Hopkins takes the attitude of one sitting at the feet of a Master; there is not a single probing or critical question. (12) If abduction believers take part in UFO conferences they should be balanced by others who take a more rational and scientific view of these stories.

Sceptics are not always helpful in the fight against the irrational, ego-boosting activities of abduction enthusiasts. They tend to pursue trivialities, to criticise matters on which scepticism is inappropriate or meaningless, or to carefully dissect writings which were never meant to be taken literally. On the issue of abductions, they should focus on the main point, which is the harm being done to impressionable people by the likes of Hopkins, Mack and Jacobs, egged on by cheering crowds of supporters (most of them sufficiently educated and intelligent to know better) at UFO conferences.

However, until the abduction game results in some tragedy which gains widespread publicity, I doubt if anything much will happen.

REFERENCES:
7. Mack, op. cit., p. 20

Witnessed, The True Story of the Brooklyn Bridge UFO Abductions is published in the USA by Pocket Books, and in the UK by Bloomsbury. You may order a copy from Amazon by clicking this cover image:

..
They are reported to carry ‘oriental-looking’ people; their passage sometimes ‘blisters’ the dead and mutilated animals; they direct
abnormal brilliant beams of light; the hover over missile sites and military bases; often they are heard distinctly and very loudly but not
seen; sometimes they look like helicopters but sound like airplanes; they sometimes flash multi-coloured lights; they are observed in
association with nocturnal lights; they are sometimes seen flying at abnormally high rates of speed.

All of this sounds very much like the sorts of behaviour typically reported of flying saucers. Strangest of all is that UFOs are occasionally
reported to change into helicopters, or the helicopters are seen shortly before or after sightings of UFOs.

It was my hypothesis that, if there was a deep-rooted psychological connection between helicopters and UFOs, evidence of this
connection would appear in the experience and activities of individuals preoccupied – not with UFOs necessarily – but with helicopters.
Since the work of these individuals predates the so-called modern era of UFO sightings, reliable naive material could be expected.

It so happens that one of the engineers most involved in early helicopter design was Arthur Young and, as luck would have it, Arthur
Young published in a book called The Bell Notes, the record of his thoughts and activities during the time of his most intense efforts to
design the Bell Model 47 helicopter.

In Peter Dreyer’s forward to the book, and in the very first paragraph he states that Arthur Young “had come to see the helicopter chiefly
as a metaphor for the evolving spirit – the winged self which he now began to call the ‘psychopter’.” In Young’s own words “the many
headed dragon of the helicopter seemed to be growing more heads all the time, and “I am working on the psychopter within the
helicopter. I experimented with the self instead of with the machine.” Using an image borrowed from alchemy he writes: “Bell has become
a laboratory in which I try to distil myself. The helicopter is only the vessel … I am constantly directing myself towards attainment of the
psychopter”. Arthur Young went on to become intensely involved in psychic phenomena and metaphysics.

I also checked on Igor Sikorski. In 1900, at the age of 11, Sikorski had a dream that affected him deeply. The details of the dream are
very much like a Jules Verne conception of being aboard a UFO:

“I saw myself walking along a narrow, luxuriously decorated passageway. On both sides were walnut doors, similar to the state rooms of a
steamer. A spherical electric light from the ceiling produced a pleasant bluish illumination. Walking slowly, I felt a slight vibration under my feet
and was not surprised to find that the feeling was different from that experienced on a steamer or on a railway train. I took this for granted
because in my dream I knew that I was onboard a large flying ship in the air.”

Sikorski wrote several books of a theological and metaphysical nature. In 1947 he published The Invisible Encounter, a rather despairing
book on the morals and fate of the twentieth century.

Another, very suggestive, dream illustration of the connection between UFOs and helicopters may be found in a letter to C.G. Jung in
1959. The writer was not, as far as I know, deeply involved with helicopters, but this is not certain. The dream is as follows:

“An aeroplane appeared from clouds of smoke or fog [The appearance of smoke or fog is often reported to be seen prior to encounters with UFOs
and UFO abductions]. Then a contraption like a helicopter descended towards the dreamer to fetch him [There is an apparent transformation of
the aeroplane into a helicopter, a type of phenomenon also reported in the UFO literature]. He saw shadowy figures which he knew to be higher
types of man, with greater knowledge and absolutely just, visitors from another world”.

The years 1946 and 1947 were notable for other events of relevance to this discussion. On March 8, 1946, Arthur Young’s machine, the
Bell Model 47 helicopter, was awarded the world’s first commercial helicopter licence. The helicopter thus became part of the general
culture.

Considerable speculation was given to the possibility that everyone might own their own device for “genuine three-dimensional travel”. In
the very next year, 1947, atmospheric straight-line flight achieved another sort of freedom: the sound barrier (sometimes referred to as a
demon in the sky) was broken by a Bell X-15 rocket plane. In addition the world groundspeed record was established in 1947. Following
Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ speech of the previous year, 1947 was termed the ‘Year of Division’. And 1946 – 1947 marks the beginning of
the modern era of flying saucers.

The theme of splitting was not only a feature of post-war science and politics, but manifested in the technology of the time as well. It
seems as though the flight characteristics of the UFO – enormous straight line velocities combined with the ability to hover and move at
right-angles and in all directions – were reproduced by us in the best way we could, by means of our rockets and helicopters. Unable to
combine the astounding performance characteristics of the UFO in a single device, we produced two quite different technologies, each of
which mimicked only one set of UFO flight characteristics.
One is tempted here to view the UFO as the visible representation of a background dynamic that is stimulating us to produce technologies that are partial representations of something that is, in its essence, irrepresentable and paradoxical.

This is reminiscent of the behaviour of the hero in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* who feels compelled to reproduce in material form a vague and elusive unconscious image. One may further speculate that the level of accomplishment achieved by the production of supersonic rocket planes and reliable helicopters in some sense caused this background dynamics to reveal itself in the form of the irrational and myth provoking UFO. It was as if this hidden element were saying "No, that is not exactly it, that is not the whole picture. A merely technological representation is not ultimately satisfactory, so here is something for you really to think about!". The UFO thus emerges as a sort of *tertium quid*, a transformative element of the mind related to human creativity.

Arthur Young addresses himself to this point several times in his book. He writes:

“What is the psychopter? The psychopter is the winged self. It is that which the helicopter usurped – and what the helicopter was finally revealed not to be. Fundamentally, I am trying to get out of the helicopter not because of what it is but because I believe in the psychopter. The construction of the psychopter is not advanced by plunging again into the helicopter. It is advanced by trying to distil the helicopter. So that from the point of view of the psychopter, which is the important one, the only commitments toward the helicopter which should presently, be stressed are indirect ones”.

Young refers to *The Bell Notes* as:

“[A] notebook on [a] machine that is much more complicated and subtle than the helicopter. The machine is my mind and body, with which I experiment every day, through which I will eventually achieve the end I seek, for I always knew it was not the helicopter. Here is a great experiment indeed.”

From these quotations we rather gather that this individual, Arthur Young, who was deeply involved in the problems of designing the helicopter, felt machine to be an inadequate external representation of an inner driving force to which he was totally committed. He saw the psychopter/helicopter problem as related to the nature of his own mind and body. It is of interest here that Jule Eisenbud has referred to the UFO phenomenon as an “into-the-body-experience”.

The biophysicist Otto Schmitt asks us to consider such experiences as apports, and, by extension, the phenomena of UFOs, to be considered as examples of what he terms “matrix-inversion” – i.e., that instead of arising from the action of an external object on the *sensorium*, the ‘perception’ event may be primary, with the external object arising as a secondary phenomenon – a point of view not inconsistent with traditional teachings of Eastern philosophy.

We already know that certain forms of mental disorder are accompanied by the loss of the sense of bodily boundaries. Often this condition is accompanied by a view of the body as an extended machine or as being invaded by a machine. This condition has been well conceived by the UFO-naive artist who produced this lithograph.
This UFO-like image has clear resemblances to a machine, yet it is obviously of a very organic nature. It is composed of sinews and skeletal tissues that strongly suggest the parts of one or more human bodies. This ‘flask’ or vas hermeticum of tissue is surmounted by a pair of wings in the position of the rotors of a helicopter. The whole of the object seems to be emerging out of the metaphysical background of existence. The work was done in 1973, and is entitled Air Machine.

A very interesting mythology has been built up around the helicopter in popular culture. Recently a surrealist novel has been published called God’s Helicopter in which a demonic god terrorises the main character by means of a helicopter and its disembodied noise. Ron Westrum reports an ‘abduction case’ in which the sound of a helicopter figures as a fear-provoking element.

The helicopter has taken on near-mythological proportions in television and movies. Blue Thunder and the spin-off TV series Airwolf come immediately to mind. In these shows the helicopters possess such advanced technology that they take on a kind of personality. In the movie Apocalypse Now! helicopters are portrayed as Valkyries who attack the Viet Cong to the music of Wagner. In this film a cow is hoisted by helicopter to supply a barbecue held by the fliers of the machines, clearly mimicking reports of cattle abductions and mutilations. I doubt if this was the conscious intent of the film makers.

Perhaps the most outstanding of the many examples of modern helicopter mythology comes from the movie Iceman. In this, a resuscitated Neanderthal shaman sees the helicopter as a divine being. The consulting anthropologist in the movie attempts to explain the relationship of a helicopter to the Neanderthal as follows:

“The helicopter is the bird, the messenger of the gods, but also a Trickster – supposed to take you to heaven, but if you’ve done wrong, it takes you somewhere else, where you’re judged for your sins.”

Here the helicopter is given the alternate roles of devil or angel as expressed in the Trickster figure, prominent in the folklore of North American Indians for his considerable ability to change into many forms. In this way he is analogous to the alchemical figure of Mercurius, who may be said to stand for the collective unconscious itself. Trickster/Mercurius is the source of both creative activity and gross deception.

I am not claiming a complete solution to the problem of UFOs or cattle mutilations. The UFO problem is far too rich to be encompassed by one solution. I am suggesting that there are fruitful areas of investigation, not usually explored, that may give us a different perspective on what we are trying to see. The peculiar relationship between UFOs and helicopters may well provide such a different perspective.

REFERENCE: Arthur Young. The Bell Notes: A Journey from Physics to Metaphysics, Delacourt Press, 1979. (Click on the title to
Still Seeking Satan, Part 1. Roger Sandell

First published in Magonia 51, February 1995.

Part One

Among several recent books on the subject of Satanism, Lawrence Wright’s Remembering Satan fills a notable gap by giving a detailed account of one particular Satanism case, the Olympia, Washington State, case of 1988-89.

Even by the standards of such cases the story he has to tell is bizarre and grotesque. The two teenage daughters of Sheriff Paul Ingram, an evangelical Christian, attend a church summer-camp where a speaker ‘prophecies’ that someone in the audience has been a victim of child sex abuse. The daughters respond by having flash-back memories of abuse by their father. When arrested, Ingram has his own flashbacks where he sees himself sexually abusing his children, and immediately confesses.

The charges escalate until Ingram is no longer merely a sexual pervert but the leader of a gang of Satanists carrying out human sacrifices. Two other police officers are arrested as cult members, but protest their innocence.

Throughout all of this Ingram continues to supply flashback memories of any suggestion put to him, including deliberately false ones put by a sceptical psychologist to test the validity of his confessions. The bottomless credulity of the investigating officers survives this revelation, as it does a claim by one of his daughters to have been raped by police dogs and the discovery that she has forged a letter to herself purporting to be a threat from Satanists. Finally Ingram, now repudiating his confessions, is sentenced to life imprisonment while his co-accused are acquitted.

Lawrence Wright tells this story with the help of transcripts of police interviews which reveal a series of abuses that make it extremely surprising that they were ever accepted as evidence. Leading questions are asked; Ingram is told that if he does not make a full confession his daughters may kill themselves, and a potential witness is told he will be able to take out a profitable claim for compensation.

Interestingly there are hints at some points of tales that might have been interpreted in a completely different way. Ingram’s son when first interviewed by police remembers no abuse, but when pressed further to recall odd happenings in his childhood tells of a dream of little men floating through his bedroom window and standing round his bed. This story, which would have immediately been seized on by UFO abduction believers, is interpreted by police as a cover memory disguising child abuse.

The problems of ‘flashback memories’, ‘cover memories’ and ‘false memories’, which Wright also explores, have in the last few months been the subject of a number of reports in the British press and television. The False Memory Society, a US group of parents who claim to be the victims of false memories of abuse planted in adult offspring by dubious therapists, now has a British branch. Although none of the British cases have yet ended up in court, some of them also involve tales of Satanism and human sacrifices. Another British group recently founded is Accuracy About Abuse, which champions the validity of work done by therapists to recover memories of abuse. However, Marjorie Orr, the founder of this organisation is scarcely likely to dispel doubts about therapists since, although described as one, she is better known as the writer of the Daily Express’s horoscope column and the voice on a recorded message fortune-telling by phone service – activities which some evangelical Christian promoters of the Satanism scare would regard as ‘Satanic’ themselves.

Wright shows that both sides in the memory controversy can point to evidence in their favour. Loftus and Ganaway, two sceptical psychologists, have conducted experiments claiming to show that children will endorse and elaborate on totally imaginary events which they are told happened to them in the past. A survey conducted at an American school where a deranged gunman had fired on children showed that several months after children who were absent on that day gave accounts of allegedly seeing the gunman.

On the other hand a recent survey of adults who were child victims of sex offenders allegedly showed that up to 38% had no memory of the incident. However, this survey has come under attack for including former victims who were very young at the time of the assault. One
wonders also whether in some cases ‘don’t remember’ actually means ‘don’t want to discuss with a complete stranger after twenty years’. And did the survey make any distinction between former victims of systematic, long-term abuse and those where the abuse had been a single incident? The distinction is a vital one since there is a very big difference between repressing the memory of a brief trauma – which is known to happen after involvement in accidents or disasters – and the alleged repression of memories of long passages of one’s life.

There are wider questions, too, than can easily be settled by surveys and experiments. Is the model of the human memory propounded by the therapists who gradually uncover memories of Satanism one that is simply based on the not uncommon film plot device in which the audience is initially shown a brief unexplained flashback to a character’s memory which is gradually expanded on as the narrative progresses? (A well-known example is Dennis Potter’s The Singing Detective, shown on BBC-TV) [3]

Another aspect of the controversy which deserves more sceptical scrutiny than it has received is the use by both sides of the term ‘brainwashing’, which is variously depicted as a means whereby evil Satanists force victims to forget their abuse or commit crimes, or as a means whereby evil therapists force sinister memories on unsuspecting patients.

In each case the model for explanation is a dubious one. The term first appeared during the Korean War, when it was used to explain why large numbers of US prisoners of the Chinese and North Koreans were prepared to collaborate and publicly denounce US policy. According to the brainwashing model of explanation they had been the victims of a combination of advanced and sinister mind-control techniques devised by Soviet psychologists, and fiendish Oriental tortures. This belief was partly responsible for setting off a mind-control arms race between Soviet and US intelligence services in which innocent people suffered as unknowing guinea-pigs, and – like the rather similar ESP race – exaggerated reports of each side’s capabilities led the other to make frantic attempts to catch up. The film The Manchurian Candidate depicted some of the alleged capabilities of brainwashing to plant memories of imaginary events, and transform people into robot assassins, to be activated at a given signal. [4]

FRANK SINATRA AND LAURENCE HARVEY IN THE 'MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE', THE FILM THAT HELPED TO ESTABLISH THE POPULAR CONCEPTION IF BRAINWASHING. HARVEY (RIGHT) WHO IS BEING PROGRAMMED AS AN ASSASSIN, IS SHOWN SHOOTING A FELLOW POW.

Little of this stands up to scrutiny. The mysterious and sinister techniques allegedly used somehow failed to re-surface in Vietnam. The lower rate of collaboration amongst British POWs in Korea and its total absence among the Turks (the next largest UN contingent) suggests that low US army morale and motivation had more of an influence on the behaviour of American troops in captivity. However the belief in the existence of sinister techniques to control directly the human mind has been an enduring one.

Equally suspect is the idea implied by some sceptics that it might be possible to isolate some kind of ‘False Memory Syndrome’ as a specific medical condition that might explain claimed memories of bizarre and highly improbable events. This would indeed be convenient portmanteau explanation but it is probably more accurate to see these tales emerging as part of a wider interaction involving both social and psychological factors as well as group dynamics, and no more have one single explanation than all false confessions to the police or all false claims to be the victims of crimes. Individual Satanist cases probably have a variety of roots, including family tensions (which can be glimpsed in Wright’s account of the Ingram case), the very existence of ‘survivor’ groups that foster a climate of self-reinforcing fantasy, and the subconscious desire of those who have paid large amounts of money to therapists to come up with recovered memories sensational enough to justify the expense.

The fact remains, however, that the ranks of American therapists include many bizarre and sinister practitioners. Just how bizarre can be seen by reading Daniel Ryder’s Breaking the Circle of Satanic Abuse, a book so eccentric that one might dismiss it as a product of the lunatic fringe were it not for the fact that its author is a licensed social worker, and the cover contains endorsements from police officers, psychologists and child welfare groups. It appears to be a product of the so-called ‘Christian Counselling’ movement, a synthesis that makes clear the similarities between evangelical Christianity and ‘recovery therapy’. Notably their common emphasis on confession and
rebout, and emphasis on individual evil rather than social factors as an explanation for people's problems. Thus Ryder's accounts of work with alleged ritual abuse victims alternate between exhortations to remember that Jesus has been victorious over Satan, and passages of psychobabble that defy parody:

Tim, who's a 37 year old computer programmer guesses that his inner child is six. Tim’s next task was to do some activities appropriate for a six year old. He got some coloring books for his inner child. He was also doing daily affirmations holding a teddy-bear and talking into a mirror. Bianca, a 40 year old manager was doing some experimental inner-child work. She was skeptical until she found herself too late for a corporate conference because she had found herself engrossed with a dolls house she was playing with.

If these methods fail to produce memories of Satanic abuse, apparently the therapist should go on a fishing expedition through any memories that are the slightest bit out of the ordinary:

If the client is ready there are other ways to jog memories. One is to go back to the neighbourhood one grew up in. Walk around if possible, remembering the adults, remembering the children. What were their personalities like? Did anything ever seem odd? Do you remember any adults who seemed especially sadistic or overtly sexual? What's happened to some of the children who lived in the neighbourhood? Did some develop psychiatric disorders?

Ryder's therapy produces Satanic cult tales that one might think would test the credulity of the most gullible believers (but to judge by the book’s endorsements have not done so). His Satanists have paranormal powers and, it seems, that they may use these to make evidence vanish. Thus neatly explaining why no-one ever finds any. Demons and non-human monsters are present at ceremonies, according to Ryder.

Tales like this underline another problem that the Satanic cult memories share with memories of alien abductions and past lives. Not only do different therapists not only keep on finding lots of whichever of the above is their speciality but never anything else, but also each finds a particular sub-type of their speciality unique to themselves. Thus Budd Hopkins’ alien abductors are rather different from John Mack’s, and reincarnation researchers tell tales about the process which completely contradict each other. Similarly, Ryder’s cult stories are very different from those found by more secular investigators. But Ryder also reports a new type of abuse which he claims to find emerging:

A certified therapist who requested anonymity for safety reasons said that some clients had memories of being abused in laboratory type settings. This laboratory abuse is seen as experimental. This therapist said survivors have remembered being hooked on to electrodes. [Another therapist] said survivors report having memories of surgical procedures. [She] also reported more than one of these survivors claim they remember being programmed to assassinate powerful people if cued.

Such stories seem to be becoming more common, and Ryder’s version of them is not the most bizarre. Cary Hammond is the producer of a video on Satanic abuse used by various American police departments, who, according to Lawrence Wright, claims:

Such cults were developed by Satanic Nazi scientists who were captured by the CIA after the war and brought to the US. The main figure was a Hasidic Jew, Dr. Greenbaum who saved himself from the gas chambers by assisting his Nazi captors and instructing them in the secrets of the Cabala.

Dr Hammond is quoted as saying:

People say what’s the purpose of it? My best guess is they want an army of Manchurian Candidates, tens of thousands of mental robots who will smuggle drugs, engage in arms smuggling, very lucrative things, and eventually, the megalomaniacs at the top believe, create a Satanic order that will rule the world.

For writers like Bill Cooper and John Lear, UFO retrieval tales have linked with themes such as drug barons and ‘treason in high places’, now the Satanic cult stories are linking up with abductee-type medical experiments, political assassinations, Nazis-in-America conspiracy theories and Jewish ritual murder tales.

NOTES:
1. A historical equivalent of Sheriff Ingram might be major weir, the former Cromwellian officer, who in 1670 made an unprompted confession to a lifetime of witchcraft and bizarre sex crimes.

2. A recent case involving demonstrably false memories is that of Roald Dahl who claimed in his autobiography to have been beaten by Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, the future Archbishop of Canterbury whilst attending Repton school. In fact Dr. Fisher was not a Repton master at the time Dahl was there. [See also The Strange Case of Mr Esther Rantzen and the Demon Headmaster ]

3. Similarly, the current image of ghosts as transparent figures seems to rest not on witness accounts, but early cinema trick photography.

4. Tim Tate, the leading British journalistic proponent of the Satanic abuse scare also scripted the 1994 Channel 4 documentary claiming that Sirhan Sirhan had been brainwashed by the CIA

For Part Two, and bibliographical notes continue HERE
Two new collections of essays on Satanist abuse, mostly by health professionals, are Out of Darkness from the USA, and Treating Survivors of Satanic Abuse from Britain. Since their formats are similar, it is easiest to deal with the together, using their initials to locate individual essays. Most of the contributors to both books work in the public sector and so avoid some of the more extreme claims that come from therapists in private practice. However each book contains one essay indicating clearly that impressive qualifications and prestige jobs are no guarantee against writing total absurdities.

Catherine Gould of the Los Angeles Ritual Abuse Task Force writes on ‘Diagnosis and Treatment of Ritualy Abused Children’ (OOD), a large part of which consists of a quite ludicrous checklist of symptoms of Satanic abuse which includes items such as ‘child refuses to worship God’, ‘child resists authority’ and ‘child is extremely controlling with other children, constantly playing chase games’. A notable feature of this catalogue is that it includes a large number of contradictory items, which cause practically any type of behaviour to become evidence of Satanic abuse, including both ‘child is afraid to separate from parents, cannot be alone and clings’, as well as ‘child seems distant from parents avoiding close physical contact’.

‘Satanic Cult Practices’ (TSSA) by Dr Joan Coleman, a psychiatrist, relates uncritically the most extreme claims. Satanists include ‘police, politicians, ambassadors and aristocrats’. They carry out human sacrifices, burying bodies on the country estates of wealthy cultists. Their leaders hold regular meetings at a national level to plan activities such as gun-running and drug dealing. They are divided into local groups of eighty or so members which are run by a group of officials whose titles include Scribe, High Priestess and Thane. (In fact the word thane has no connection with any form of magic or supernatural belief but was simply the title of a village headman in Anglo-Saxon England. Has Dr Coleman become confused by Macbeth which has both thanes and witches?)

One authority which she cites for all of this is Satan’s Underground by Laurel Stratford, a US ‘survivor’ story which has been proved to be a hoax. Apart from this she cites alleged testimonies from her own patients. The first patient to describe apparent Satanic abuse told of witnessing the sacrifice of three Vietnamese children around 1976 “brought to Southampton from the USA, among the first Boat People”. Readers may remember that Boat People were initially housed in centres such as disused army camps and were closely supervised by the social services. That the disappearance of three such children could have gone un-noticed by the authorities seems very unlikely. Did the parents report it, or were they Satanists too?

Dr Coleman is impressed, like many abduction researchers with the apparent unanimity of the witnesses. One example is that apparently witnesses agree that the altar used in ceremonies will have a sword, a skull, a chalice or a book on it. Given that one would expect a Satanist altar to have something sinister and suitably archaic on it one would hardly expect claims that the altar was decorated with a mobile phone or a pop-up toaster!

Equally credulous is a piece by a member of the team responsible for the 1992 Channel 4 programme, Blasphemous Rumours (TSSA). This programme featured irrelevant, manipulative images such as shots of an empty children’s playground filmed in polarised light and accompanied by discordant music. It gave credence to manifestly absurd claims such as one interviewee who recounted seeing human sacrifices at a ceremony in a specially constructed underground chamber where hundreds of people were present. The documentary makers made no attempt to check out matters which could have been investigated, such as a claim to have been in a Satanic temple that was a windowless building in London’s Docklands.

It is enlightening to compare this programme with one broadcast on Channel 4 in 1994 in which a woman claimed that she and her children had been sexually abused while members of the Children of God group. While flawed in some respects – notably its use of the dubious ‘brainwashing cult’ model of explanation – it centred on witnesses who told their stories directly to camera, showed photographs of themselves with other cult members, and produced old letters and internal documentation: the kinds of details which are conspicuously absent from the Satanism cases.

The producers of the Satanism documentary seemed impressed by the nearly two hundred calls Channel 4’s switchboard received after transmission, telling tales of Satanist abuse. One wonders what they would have made of the several hundred calls received after the recent British radio appearance of UFO abduction writer John Mack.

Both books attempt to take some kind of historical perspective. Brett Kahr, a psychotherapy lecturer, contributes an essay ‘The Historical Foundation of Ritual Abuse’ (TSSA) which argues that modern Satanism cases are a continuation of child sacrifice which he contends was widespread in ancient times. He can point to the Tophet cult in the ancient middle east as a genuine example of such practices. Beyond this he shows how little historical understanding he has. He cites the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, and the Greek legend...
of Medea as evidence for widespread child sacrifices. In each case the story was set about a thousand years before it was written down, at an era which even the original audience would consider remote and barbarous. Moreover, the tone of each tale is evidence, not for the popularity of human sacrifice, but for the universal abhorrence it inspired.

Kahr's ignorance is also clearly indicated by the fact that he seems impressed by the ridiculous and misleading 'historical survey' in Tim Tate's Children for the Devil which I analysed in detail in an earlier review.

Martin Katchen's ‘History of Satanic Religions’ (OOD) is no better. Most of his historical ‘evidence’ relates to tales told about medieval heretics by their enemies, and allegations made by the clerical anti-Masonic movement in the nineteenth century. Both these essays share certain characteristics with most historical writings on Satanism by believers: there is no reference to works on witchcraft by mainstream historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper, Keith Thomas and most particularly Norman Cohn. Cohn has discussed in detail how medieval heretics became associated with tales of orgies and human sacrifice. There is no attempt to analyse the main legend of human sacrifice, that even the writers here would presumably agree to be baseless, that of Jewish ritual murder (the US book devotes on throw-away sentence to this point in its introduction, while the British one’s silence is surprising since its editor, Valerie Sinason, is Jewish).

Moreover, one wonders exactly what point these essays are supposed to be making? By exactly what process were grim ancient rituals transmitted to proprietors of Californian day-care centres and semi-literate families on British council estates? Did they exist underground for centuries unsuspected by contemporary social commentators or later historians? Ryder claims that “various forms of occult practices, including Satanism”, were brought to America from “European countries, Africa and Australia” (Australia??) but beyond this there is no explanation.

A second essay by Katchen, ‘Satanic Belief and Practices’ (OOD) attempts to make sense of Satanic cults in terms of sociology, anthropology and comparative religion. He sees the brutalities allegedly inflicted by such groups as analogous to US Marine Corps training in which abuse and harshness is used to form group loyalties. This attempt is unconvincing. there are certainly cultures, both amongst tribal peoples and in advanced societies in which initiation into the group is a brutal process, but in all of these the brutality leads up to a final initiation – like a coming-of-age or a passing out ceremony – when it stops and the newcomer is recognised as a member of the group. At what point does this happen with the Satanists? No survivor tale gives us any clue. Once again, there are many cultures and sub cultures that practice and reward extreme brutality against outsiders. What is inexplicable about the Satanic cult stories is the way cults that are alleged to be trans-generational supposedly practice, on those who are to be the carriers of the tradition, grotesque and meaningless brutalities that could hardly be endured without total traumatisation that would make normal functioning, even within the cult, very difficult.

Any attempt to apply any sociological analysis to these groups also breaks down in the total failure of those telling the stories to give any account of their day to day functioning – something which might be comprehensible in the case of children but not with adults. Do different groups choose their own leaders, or are the imposed from Satanist National Headquarters? Are there ever any internal disagreements of schisms? What impact has AIDS had on Satanism? Have the cults been devastated as one would expect from groups whose rituals involve sex orgies and drinking blood? Have they changed any rituals as a result? On all of these points there is silence, and in fact on any description of the minutiae of day to day life there is silence. Lawrence Wright’s book illustrates this very well. At one point Sheriff Ingrain is providing his interrogators with a detailed description of a horrific Satanist rite. However a sceptical psychiatrists intervenes to ask what sort of things the cultists talked about when the ritual was over. This reduces Ingram to incoherence, totally unable to provide a reply to this sort of mundane query.

The contents of the two books under consideration are not wholly credulous. There is a contribution by Kenneth Lanning, an FBI...
specialist in child abuse cases (OOD) that makes an impressive and informed sceptical case, not denying the possibility of satanic abuse, but pointing out the many problems involved in the evidence so far presented (18th-century magistrates' manuals recommended a similar strategy, saying that magistrates faced with accusations of witchcraft should not deny the existence of witches, but point out the problems involved in proving an allegation). Lanning points out the complete discontinuity of Satanism cases with other cases of child sex rings, where features such as the involvement of women and allegations of the victimisation of adults as well as children, are practically unknown.

An interesting comparison which Lanning does not explore is with the other wave of child sex allegations currently rife in the US – those against Roman Catholic priests, some of which, like the day-care cases, involve allegations of whole institutions incorporating cultures of child sex abuse. However the similarity stops here. The cases involving priests have resulted in many guilty pleas and supporting evidence in the form of long histories of allegations against individuals before action was taken. There are no tales of the involvement of women (in spite of many institutions where nuns look after children) or of murder, or of paraphernalia that is never found in searches. Recovered memories rarely form the basis for such allegations and there are certainly no 'experts' alleging these cases validate anti-Catholic tales of past centuries. [5]

Another writer, George B. Greaves, a forensic psychologist, contributes an essay 'Alternative Hypotheses Regarding Claims of Satanic Cult Activity' (OOD). While faulting believers for their methodology, he ultimately argues for the reality of Satanic cults, rejecting folklore-bases explanations on grounds very similar to those advanced by Eddie Bullard for rejecting folklore explanations of UFO abduction tales. He argues that Satanic cult stories are not like urban legends – structured narratives leading to a climax in the same manner as jokes.

This is however to take an over-restrictive view of the nature of urban legends. To illustrate urban legends to his readers he gives the example of a cat killed by being placed in a microwave cooker. In fact, just such tales of babies being killed in microwaves have appeared in Satanism allegations!

Valerie Sinason, the editor of the British book, seems to take a rather ambiguous position. In spite of accepting the reality of Satanist abuse she contributes an introduction to the Lawrence Wright book, accepting, somewhat grudgingly, that a miscarriage of justice occurred. Her introduction thanks for her suggestions, Dr Sherrill Mulhearn, the anthropologist and leading Satanism sceptic, although any input by Dr Mulhearn into the book is not evident.

Her own essay, ‘Internal and External Evidence’ at least has the merit of being frank about the fantastic content of some survivor stories:

Malcolm, aged 27, a lawyer, could clearly describe the expensive furnishings in the place where he was ritually abused. However, whilst in a trance state he spoke about being in a huge palace where everyone, including some famous people, could fly.

However, she concludes that the Satanist may use drugs to implant false memories in their victims, and, bizarrely, that these stories are the fault of investigators who do not believe everything they are told. [6]

Where patients correctly experience another’s response as irrational disbelief they can then unconsciously fabricate to a point where everything is disbelieved: this makes them angrily in control of further rejection. By the same action they have also protected their allegiance to the cult.

The one first-hand survivor account she includes in her book is hard to assess. the author claims to have been abused in a residential centre, a setting which is easily exploited for sexual abuse. He claims to have been the victim of a child sex ring whose members were Freemasons, who chose his as their boy god, and made him the centre of their rituals: a procedure which bears no relation to other survivor tales. There is a reference to human sacrifice, but the claimant states that his abusers gave him drugs, and as a result he is uncertain about what was and was not real. A puzzling and inconclusive story made even more so by the absence of any information about whether any attempt has been made to report it to the police or other authorities.

It is a relief to turn from these books to the official report The Extent and Nature of Ritual Abuse, by Professor Jean La Fontaine. The version currently available is merely a 35-page summary of main findings, with a more detailed report to follow. Even so its summing up of some eighty British allegations, few of which were reported in the press, is full of interest. First of all the claim made by many believers that there are a large number of separate cases with similar details supporting each other is shown to be false; many allegations are unique to individual cases. Even basic features of the image of ritual abuse, such as the use of robes or costumes only feature in about a third of the allegations.

A particularly significant section of the report is 'The Class Context of Allegations of Ritual Abuse', which looks at the people who face these charges.

There were 203 adults (111 men and 92 women) reported. Of the men only 35 were reported as being in work. Six had casual labouring jobs, eight had more skilled manual jobs, and three had middle-class jobs. The work of the other 18 employed men was not specified in the files but there were indications that they were low paid. Few women were working, all but one in manual work. In 12 out of 38 cases the poverty of the children's parents was referred to. Only one man owned the house he lived in. Run-down urban estates were mentioned in twelve cases.

A similar picture is given in an essay in the Sinason book; 'A Systematic Approach', by Aaron Ben-tovim and Marianne Tranter, which gives the case history of a family accused of taking their children to a 'Satanic Church' to be abused by figures:
The details of the case reports indicated the children had always been subject to poor standards of hygiene and the results of poor financial management. Clothing was poor and inappropriate to prevailing climatic conditions. Diet was adequate but of poor quality... It was extremely difficult for the social worker to describe the chaos within the household. Children as they grew older became more unruly, left to fend for themselves beyond the mother's control. The mother yelled rather than talked, school attendance became poorer, social isolation became marked... Dental and personal hygiene was non-existent. The children were left unsupervised on the estate and there was regular concern and complaints from other families... acts of vandalism, bullying, stoning elderly people begging and burglary, although always unproven, [Note the way the writers solemnly record allegations of vandalism as unproven while accepting allegations of Satanic abuse.]

In Britain allegations of Satanic abuse have become part of a wider social issue, where housing estates inhabited by Rab C. Nesbitt 'underclass' figures are now seen as a 'Dark Continent' awash with idolatry and witchcraft.

Here we are clearly a world away from Joan Coleman’s fantasies of wealthy Satanists burying their victims on private estates, or from the US cases featuring expensive therapists or middle-class day care centres. What seems to be happening in Britain is that allegations of Satanism have become part of a wider social image, that of the 'underclass'. As employment has collapsed in many communities there are arguments amongst policy-makers as to whether or not the poor are a violent, threatening rabble, responding only to authoritarian measures. Images of the underclass move from such discussions to mass audience images including TV characters such as the Jackson family on EastEnders, Rab C. Nesbitt, and Harry Enfield's Wayne Slob. Now it seems housing estates are seen as a 1990's equivalent of a 'Dark Continent' awash with idolatry and witchcraft.

Writers such as Tim Tate have attacked the Fontaine Report for allegedly making light of the eight or so cases of ritual abuse that have resulted in convictions. Fontaine argues that these have all involved either an individual or a group of at the most four, and that they have not involved any of the bizarre features such as human sacrifice. However it seems to me that she is on less secure ground in arguing that the rituals were only incidental to the abuse, as a means to intimidate the children.

Motives are not always easy to assess, and to see how the cases she mentions fit in it is useful to adopt the typology of the believers in satanic abuse. Several of them divide types of Satanists as follows:

- 1- Public Satanists. These are followers of groups such as Anton LeVey's Church of Satan, who, as even the anti-Satanist concede, are rarely involved in criminal offences.
- 2- Teenage Dabblers. Young people with an interest in the occult derived from such sources as heavy-metal music and horror films. In Britain few of these have been involved in any crimes more serious than minor church vandalism, but in the US, anti-Satanists can point to dabblers involved in more serious crimes including murder. However when these cases are examined drugs and the wide availability of firearms seem to be more significant causes than occultism. Ironically some of those involved in such cases have been from evangelical Christian households, and have adopted Satanist symbols as a sign of rebellion. [7]
- 3- Psychopathic Satanists. Unbalanced individuals obsessed with the idea of Satan either acting alone or with a small number of accomplices. Here again there is a well-authenticated history of such cases with the most famous being the Manson gang.
- 4- Transgenerational Satanist – Satanic Cults. This is the category on which the controversy centres: the existence of large, highly organised and well-equipped groups, including groups carrying out elaborate ceremonies involving crimes such as murder, and involved in a variety of criminal conspiracies to support their activities.

When these categories are adopted it becomes clear that all of the authenticated cases discussed by Fontaine fall into the third category. By contrast, Valerie Sinason, who has also responded critically to the Fontaine Report, cites as examples of Satanism, cases that have little to do with any of the categories. Thus her book includes a case of a girl sexually abused by an elder brother who claimed to be possessed by spirits, and a case where an abused child states “Daddy eats poo”, a very different matter from allegations that children are being forced to eat excrement as part of ceremonies where they are tortured.

It may well be wise to bear this typology in mind while considering both recent press coverage of Satanism allegations, and possible coverage in the near future. When these allegations first surfaced in Britain in 1989-1990 they were for a time treated uncritically by the press, a position which soon moved to general disbelief, unaccompanied by detailed investigations (except in the cases of the Independent on Sunday and Mail on Sunday) and this attitude was reflected in coverage of the Fontaine report. However some tabloid
However this would explain little, since many of the survivor stories relate to Satanic activities allegedly occurring in the 1960s, 1950s and even earlier. Logically one should consider the possibility that by now a real cult might have merged deliberately aping the stereotype that has become so familiar in popular culture. Metal fanzines have recently appeared – Harsh reality, an ugly publication combining music reviews with occultism and Holocaust revisionism. A piece of fiction anticipated many of the details that were to occur in real life: Arianna Stassinopolus-Huffington, wife of Michael Huffington, the right-wing Republican candidate in recent US elections.

It also looks at various occult groups which formed part of the ‘sixties underground, such as the Process Church of the Final Judgement. Such groups were certainly involved in some nasty activities, as sections of the underground declined into a drug-laced morass of squalor, irrationality, violence and sexual exploitation, just as fringe political groups such as the Symbionese Liberation Army did. However the claim that they gave birth to Satanist cults now stalking America is unconvincing.

What this book does suggest is that rumours and urban legends concerning sinister occultists were a part of the underground culture and later spread to the wider American scare. Another example of the same process is the way ‘sixties tales about great secrets hidden in the music or designs of Beatles albums have been transmuted into tales of sinister Satanic messages in rock songs.

One interesting feature of Newton’s book is that it makes clear the origins of the anti-Satanist panic in the cattle mutilation scare of the early seventies. Sixties films such as Rosemary’s Baby and The Devil Rides Out had established the image of Satanism. As a result of the US release of the latter film, the original novel appeared as a US paperback, the first Dennis Wheatley title ever to be published in America, giving the image further visibility. Consequently Satanism was seen as one frame of reference for the cattle mutilation reports. Tales were told, similar to UFO occupant stories, of mysterious hooded figures seen by night-time motorists in the Southern states (like aliens, Satanists, with a whole desert to choose from, seem always to stand where they will be seen). Kenneth Bankston, a Kansas convict, told a widely reported hoax tale of his membership of a cult of Satanic cattle mutilators.

The film Race With the Devil demonstrates that the main components of the Satanism scare were already in place in 1975. In this film the heroes, played by Peter Fonda and Warren Oates, stumble on robed figures carrying out open-air nocturnal rituals. As the cultists pursue them, apparently respectable individuals turn out to be secret Satanists. Thus a piece of fiction anticipated many of the details that were to reappear in subsequent, allegedly factual, stories, just as many elements from UFO abduction accounts appear in earlier fictions. 8

The cattle mutilation panic did not merely provide the origins of the Satanism myth; attempts to link the mutilations with UFOs were a major factor in the dominance of US ufology by abduction and conspiracy theories. A process which has now gone so far that actual unidentified flying objects seem hardly to figure in most American UFO publications at all. The mutilation panic also coincided with the Watergate scandal and a new interest in the JFK assassination on its tenth anniversary. This coincidence influenced theories of the mutilations as being the result of sinister government experiments, setting the pattern for many subsequent government conspiracy tales.

Seen in isolation the Satanism panic is one of the most extraordinary events in late twentieth century US social history. In a wider context it forms part of a more prevalent and alarming abandonment of rationality.

NOTES:

5. One exception is the allegations of child abuse against Cardinal Bernardine of Chicago, a cleric who has been active in ending the cover-up on these matters. These allegations were made by a complainant undergoing regression therapy and who later withdrew them. The therapist involved had no qualifications except one awarded by ‘John-Roger’, the New Age guru who has been accused by the American press of influencing Arianna Stassinopolus-Huffington, wife of Michael Huffington, the right-wing Republican candidate in recent US elections.

6. Although administration of drugs as part of sex abuse is not improbable, mystery drinks feature both in Satanic abuse and UFO abduction stories. Peter Rogerson has reminded me that in some reincarnation accounts the claimants state that between lives they were given a ‘drink of forgetting’ by a supernatural figure but somehow avoided taking it.

7. The use of Satanic imagery by heavy-metal bands seems to have increased following the evangelical anti-heavy-metal campaign. A new development has been the appearance in Scandinavia of ‘Death Metal’, a sub-genre linked with a skinhead-style racism. Britain’s first death Metal fanzine has recently appeared – Harsh reality, an ugly publication combining music reviews with occultism and Holocaust revisionism.

8. Logically one should consider the possibility that by now a real cult might have merged deliberately aping the stereotype that has become established, just as groups like Anton LaVey’s ‘Church of Satan’ were influenced by films like Rosemary’s Baby and The Devil Rides Out. However this would explain little, since many of the survivor stories relate to Satanic activities allegedly occurring in the 1960s, 1950s and even earlier.
1940s

**BOOKS REVIEWED IN TEXT:**

LaFontaine, Jean. The Extent and Nature of Ritual Abuse: Research Findings. HMSO, 1994


Sinason, Valerie. Treating Survivors of Satanic Abuse. Routledge, 1994

Wright, Lawrence. Remembering Satan. Serpents Tail, 1994

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**Catflaps. John Harney and John Rimmer**

Posted on **09/03/2009** by johnr

FROM MAGONIA 43, JULY 1992

JOHN HARNEY WRITES:

You've probably heard stories about dogs, rats and cats disappearing through the back doors of Chinese or Indian restaurants, and being slaughtered, stewed, and served with curry and rice. Police and RSPCA inspectors have wasted a great deal of time investigating such allegations and, so far as I am aware, not a shred of worthwhile evidence has ever been found to support them.

But have you heard that there is a foreign country where cat fur is the height of fashion? I don't mean big cats, such as leopards, but ordinary household moggies. This country is ……….. [Fill in the name of your least-favourite country.]

You don't believe it? Well, that’s what it says in my local paper (Bracknell News, 21 May 1992). It’s the lead story, under the banner headline: ‘Fur Traders Target Cats’.

Some weeks previously, a resident of Bracknell, Berkshire had called the police after seeing two men trying to entice a cat into a black plastic bag. Since then “the number of cats going missing locally has soared”. It is rather irritating, though, that we are not given any indication of the number of cats involved. The matter is being pursued by an organisation calling itself Bracknell Petsearch, which has uncovered some startling ‘facts’.

The ‘massive increase in the number of cats going missing’ is ‘easily explained as a blip on the statistics until’ – I really like this detail – “it is noticed that each month the colour of the eats going missing changes. Last month tabbies and tortoiseshell animals were being reported lost. So far this month black cats are in the majority.”

Yes, but how do we know they are being captured by fur traders? The main evidence is a black plastic bag full of skinned cats found at the local junction with the M4 motorway. This revelation came from Bracknell Petsearch co-ordinator Lynda Martin who said the discovery had been made by ‘a local RSPCA volunteer’.

“That information came from a very good source,” she said: “Nothing was officially reported because it is difficult to do anything with a bag of dead animals.” Mrs Martin believes the traders have targeted Bracknell recently, stealing the cats, skinning them inside a van, and then fleeing with the pelts to their base in London along the M4. “Those pelts would then be smuggled out of the country to dealers abroad.”

There are other curious details in this story. The reporter alleges that “Scotland Yard reckons a trade in cat skins is raging in London, with the pelts being flown out to unscrupulous fur traders abroad.” If this were true, the tabloids would be full of it, but they don’t seem to have noticed. Local police and RSPCA officials have received no evidence of skinned cats and made the usual non-committal statements when approached by the paper.

It will be interesting to see if this story spreads to other areas. Keep an eye on your local paper — and don’t believe everything you read in it.

JOHN RIMMER CONTINUES:

But surely we can believe everything we read in the Barnes Mortlake and Sheen Times, after all it is owned by one of our most respected media dynasties, the Dimblebys, no less. Well judge for yourself. The 19 June 1992 edition carried the front page headline “Cat Snatch Fear After ‘Spate’ of Missing Pets” accompanied by a photograph of local pet-owner Victor Schwanberg holding an appealing looking cat who is not otherwise identified.

The story conforms to the Bracknell pattern, complete with a mysterious ‘woman who was seen stroking a cat and then snatching it and putting it in a bag’, according to vet Donald Cameron, “someone has also reported seeing five dead cats laid out on the pavement”. The vet declares: “Cat fur fetches a high price abroad,” – in those mysterious countries which have no cats of their own? – “it is used to make
The only real fact of the story seems, as in the Bracknell case, to be some alarm about the number of cats going missing in the area. Now I can confirm that there are often small, sad notices attached to trees in this neighbourhood appealing for the return of lost pets (including dogs), but I have always assumed that this was due to the number of very busy roads and the amount of open spaces, parks and commons in the area. Mr Schwanberg, one of whose cats went missing, lives on the Upper Richmond Road, part of London’s notoriously dangerous and grossly over-used South Circular Road.

The item concludes with a quote from a Mrs Joan Wearne of an organisation called Petwatch (it is not clear whether this has anything to do with Bracknell’s Petsearch) who claims that the cats are skinned and their fur sold in Italy and Germany, but the police ‘do not want to know’. As if to confirm her claim a police spokesman commented ‘we would not record stolen cats, but we are not aware of a problem’. Obviously evidence of a cover-up!

Shortly after reading this I discovered that the latest issue of *Folklore Frontiers* discussed a report which appeared in the 24 April 1992 issue of The Mail, Hartlepool, where Mrs Wearne also puts in an appearance. Warning of the dangers of the catnappers she reverts to an older, racist, theme. She announces that a ‘Yorkshire printer’ found the remains of several cats next to a mincing machine in the basement of a building which used to be an Indian restaurant, while a ‘Manchester policeman’ (highly specific these descriptions) found 200 dead cats in a skip.

So what is going on here? I rang the Barnes and Mortlake paper and spoke to the reporter who had written the story. I was particularly concerned, because in the following week’s paper there were letters from obviously distressed pet-owners in the area. Unfortunately she seemed unimpressed by the thought that she may have been sold a pup (sorry!) on her front page scoop. ‘I was only reporting what people told me’ she explained. I had always thought that journalists considered ‘printing things people told you’ mere public relations, and journalism involved going out and finding the facts. I pointed out the startling coincidence of a virtually identical story appearing in three local papers in different parts of the country and the unlikelihood of catnappers in both Barnes and Bracknell leaving dead cats neatly lined up at the sides of the road. “Maybe that’s how they operate”, she said. Well maybe, but didn’t she think that in view of this extra information she might consider taking the story a little further, if only to reassure anxious local cat-lovers? No, but if I wanted to write a letter to the editor, they would publish it on their correspondence page.

I find it disturbing that after playing on many local peoples’ fears with a front page lead story presented with all the authority of Dimbleby Newspapers, the reporter was not prepared to do any further checking when presented with new evidence that made the story look decidedly dubious, and was prepared to leave any further coverage to the vagaries of the letters column.

So what is going on? Why do cats in the North-East end up in the curry, whilst cats in the South-East are skinned and their pelts flown hundreds of miles across Europe? Could it be because these alarmists feel that traditional racist slurs about Indian restaurants are unlikely to be taken seriously in the liberal climate of Richmond and Barnes, whereas concern about the fur-trade and ‘animal rights’ might produce a greater sense of shock? And in how many more local papers have variants of this story appeared?

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1. *Folklore Frontiers*, edited by Paul Screeton, 5 Egton drive, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, TS25 2AT

More on catnapping HERE

Posted in 1990s, Harney, John, Rimmer, John | Tagged folklore, hoax, urban legends | 1 Reply

More Catflaps. John Rimmer

Posted on 09/03/2009 by johnr

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN MAGONIA 51, FEBRUARY 1995.

At one of the seminars at a recent conference on ‘Moral Panics’ I raised the topic of the cat-skinning rumours that we have touched on from time to time in Magonia. They seem to be an example of the way an urban legend can be turned into a moral panic. It has many of the features of both genres, Implicit in it is xenophobia: the phantom villains are usually foreigners or other outsider groups like gypsies. The fact that the British rumours so often seem to identify the culprits as being from other European nations, perhaps links in with current ‘Europhobe’ attitudes and fears — worry over loss of British identity in the European Union, and continuing concern over perceived cruel attitudes to animals in other European nations. Current campaigns over the transport of live farm animals, bullfighting and hunting of songbirds are helping to reinforce this stereotype in the minds of many British people.

One way in which this fear and suspicion has fed into discussion over public policy has been the current debate over British quarantine laws ostensibly intended to keep rabies out of the country. The Channel Tunnel incorporates the most elaborate system of fences, traps and electrified sections to prevent French wildlife making it under the Channel. However, a recent Parliamentary committee has recommended that the laws should be revised or scrapped altogether. This suggestion has produced a hostile reaction from animal
protection groups in Britain, despite the fact that rabies cases in Western Europe are now very rare indeed. Many critics feel that the quarantine laws are now less a practical defence against animal disease than a symbolic attempt to prevent ‘infection from less happy lands’ to misquote John of Gaunt, and maintain Britain’s island status against such intrusions as the Channel Tunnel itself, and the threatened European super-state.

“We have had a few complaints since we started stocking it. It’s all down to your sense of humour”.

Indeed, the catnapping scare does now seem to be on the verge of transformation into a fully-fledged moral panic. A participant at the conference told of recent events in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Here a local shop was selling small toys made of fake-fur which looked like a cat’s tail popping out of a paper bag. Some sort of balancing mechanism made the tail wag about when the bag was moved. Soon, after press attention was called to this novelty by the sight of children standing outside the shop laughing at the ‘cat in the bag’, a campaign was started by the local paper to ‘ban this cruel toy’. Amazingly, the shop complied and the item was withdrawn from the shop window and from sale.

Amazing coincidence department: Literally minutes after typing the above paragraph, a copy of my local free-sheet, the Richmond and Twickenham Informer dropped through my letterbox, and there on page 18 was a story headed ‘Fur flies over sick moggy toy’. [1] The ‘cat in a bag’ had arrived at Mayfair Cards, Kingston-upon-Thames, where it was spotted by ‘Teddington window cleaner Doug Petts, 62, browsing for some early Christmas gifts’. “It's disgusting” the appositely named Mr Petts said, “If this is someone’s idea of a joke they must have a sick sense of humour. I found it offensive”. An RSPCA spokeswoman contacted by the Informer claimed that the animal charity had received a ‘flood of complaints from all parts of the country’. “We are particularly upset because there has even been a suggestion that this toy was actually approved by the RSPCA. That is completely ridiculous”. The manageress of Mayfair Cards has responded to the complaints by putting up a sign saying ‘This is not a real cat – please don’t do it at home with your pet’. Concludes Wendy Bragg, 25: “We have had a few complaints since we started stocking it. It’s all down to your sense of humour”.

When we started writing about the cat scare – after it featured in our local paper in Richmond-upon-Thames, we had no idea of its long history. Now Gareth Medway, has sent us photocopies from a book published in the 1930s, which recounts the legend-panic in its most extreme form.

Elliott O’Donnell is better known for his books of classic ghost stories, but in 1934 he published Strange Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London. [2]

In assessing the credibility of the book, Gareth Medway comments: “The interesting thing about this book generally is that whilst almost everything in it is over the top, those societies and events that O’Donnell claims to have been personally involved with are far more implausible than those where he invokes some witness. The only reason I can think of for this is that when he had been told a story by a witness, they would know if he altered it too much; whereas when he himself was the witness he could let his imagination run wild. Thus a Pagan Lesbian sect, the Gorgons, are described in such a way that they might have been real, his informant having been a woman, of course. ‘The Gots’, whom he had investigated personally (he says) break the boggle-barrier for me. Anyway, I think the skinned cats stories are probably narrated much as they were told to him.”

“Police protection is of little use against these organisations, because they are so subtle and secretive, and they number amongst them some persons who are outwardly thoroughly respectable and law-abiding”

Here then, in O’Donnell’s own words, is his account, compare it to the stories from Richmond and Bracknell reported in Magonia 43:

Some years ago a shocking case of cruelty to cats was reported in the Press. Somewhere in the East End, of the exact locality I cannot be quite sure, a man saw a sack lying on the ground, and noticing it move he opened it. To his horror it was full of skinned cats, some of whom were still alive. The man told the police, but the culprits were never caught. It was surmised at first that they were a gang of foreign East Enders, who made a living out of flaying cats alive, for the sake of their skins; the skins being of more value when taken off a living, healthy animal. Afterwards, however, it was mooted that these cat-skinners belonged to a cult out to get thrills from any and every kind of cruelty; and that they
were responsible for the skinned dogs that had, from time to time, been found floating in the Thames. It was said, by the way, that they had meant to throw the sack of cats they had skinned into the Thames, but were prevented.

Soon after reading about all this in the Press, I met, quite by chance, a school teacher in the East End who was able to confirm it. She told me she had learned, from some of her pupils, that secret societies existed by the riverside in the City, and as far east as Dagenham, who made a practice of stealing cats and skinning them alive. If the cats were fine and healthy, they sold the skins to foreign Jewish fur merchants for a few pence a skin; and if they were poorly nourished they skinned them alive all the same, just for the fun of it.

“Bodies of cats and dogs are constantly to be seen floating in the Thames,” she informed me, “and no one ever queries how they got there or thinks of examining them. If they were examined a large percentage of the cats would be found to be minus their skins… Dogs are often stolen from the humble homes and sold to doctors, medical schools and vets. I have been told these things as facts,” she went on, “but there it ends. It is impossible to discover any details about the secret societies, because of intimidation. The children, who tell me about them, make me promise I will never give them away. They say if it leaked out they had told me about the cats, they would go about in fear of their lives. Police protection is of little use against these organisations, because they are so subtle and secretive, and they number amongst them some persons who are outwardly thoroughly respectable and law-abiding. The police probably know of their existence, but they find it as difficult to prove anything against them as they do to lay hands on the people who smuggle dope into the Port of London.”

“And the various societies for the protection of animals, can’t they do anything?” I asked.

“The same applies to them,” the schoolmistress responded. “I have told some of them about the skinning of cats, and they want to know names which I cannot give them. It is useless for them to send officials to make enquiries, because the societies are always on the alert. They spot strangers at once and take very good care that they discover nothing. After all, the majority of people do not trouble about their cats because they are of no monetary value. They would rather say nothing about the loss of their cat and enjoy immunity from malice than take any action that might antagonise the secret organisations.”

Later, describing a case of cruelty to children, O’Donnell reports that a woman living in the King’s Cross district of London (nowadays notorious for drugs and prostitution) told him of secret societies of young people:

“Theyir chief delight was in being cruel to children and animals”. The woman, who was the caretaker in a house O’Donnell was considering renting, told him of a recent court case, in which a nurse maid employed by a West End doctor was charged with cruelty towards the doctor’s children. This had caused a great deal of interest in the King’s Cross area because “the girl belonged to a secret society of young people whose homes were mostly in this neighbourhood, and who were known to do all sorts of wild and savage things”. Apparently many members of these societies were in service with wealthy families in the West End, “I know that they always very much resent taking their employers’ Pekinese dogs out for constitutionals, and hate having to clean up after them”.

What is most remarkable about O’Donnell’s account is the way it mirrors exactly the preoccupations of modern legends and panics. The ‘secret societies’ which contain ‘outwardly respectable and law-abiding’ people corresponds exactly to Joan Coleman’s description of Satanic cults sheltering wealthy aristocrats who are the main organisers and instigators of the groups’ atrocities. Here too we see the alleged indifference of the police and the impotence of animal protection societies in the face of a lack of evidence and a wall of silence.

The cat-skinning culprits are, of course, foreigners, or even ‘foreign Jewish fur merchants’. I have no idea how practical cat-fur would be for clothing – not very, I think – but the modern catnapping tales also point the finger of suspicion to fur traders. It is perhaps relevant that concern has been expressed that the present day anti-fur trade campaign has attracted some unwelcome anti-Semitic elements.
Elliott O'Donnell was reporting from the East End of London. An area which to most of his readers would have a remote, violent and sinister reputation, and which in many people’s minds would still be over-shadowed by the memory of Jack the Ripper.

Even as late as the 1930’s it bore scars of terrible poverty, and was dominated by immigrant communities: Chinese, Jews, ‘Lascars’, a frightening ‘underclass’ which, to quote Roger Sandell earlier in this magazine, would seem like “a modern ‘Dark Continent’ awash with idolatry and witchcraft”. No wonder respectable West End matrons worried about their little Pekinese when they were entrusted to servants who had emerged from this urban hell! (All this youthful torture and mayhem was taking place, it is worth pointing out, without the influence of television or video nasties.)

It was doubtless the case that some domestic servants did feel resentment against their wealthy employers, and perhaps occasionally took out their anger against a pampered pet – understandable if, as may have been the case, the pet was costing almost as much to keep as the servant was earning to maintain a family. What is interesting is that such acts, if they were taking place, were ascribed to a secret society organising random acts of cruelty, rather than to a possible combination of personal resentment and class hostility. After all, a violent East End secret society the wealthy West End lady could not do much about apart from whisper about in shocked and muted tones; acknowledging the personal hostilities and resentments of her staff might involve paying them more money and treating them better. Far easier to blame it on the mysterious men in the shadows of Limehouse or Whitechapel!

The June 1994 issue of that excellent magazine Foxtale News has a round-up of stories of birds of prey attacking and/or carrying away domestic animals and even children. It describes reports from the Northcliff suburb of Johannesburg, where residents were convinced that cats were being caught and eaten by spotted eagle-owls living in the area. Although an ornithologist claimed that the owls would be incapable of picking-off anything bigger than a rat, one Northcliff resident was adamant that she saw “an owl in our driveway stalking our cat”. The bird was chased away but next day the cat had vanished. Another resident tied two great panics together with the comment “at least it’s nature taking its course and not something sinister like Satanists who steal and torture cats”. It is perhaps no coincidence that this report should also be coming from a society still divided rigidly along lines of class and race, but undergoing massive social and political change.

As we read more about the Cat Flap, it seems what we first thought of as a few mildly amusing examples of silly-season stories in local papers are turning out to be symptoms of something very significant. There are clear links to other topics which we have looked at in the past, from Satanism to animal mutilations and secret cults. It seems like our society – perhaps any society – needs monsters within. In many cases this is as a form of social control: “look at the terrors that are going on outside your front door, aren’t you lucky to have us (police, secret police, KGB, Gestapo or any other oppressive control system you care to name) looking after you”. But in other cases we create the monsters to explain worrying random events. Is it easier to believe that acts of cruelty and violence are random separate
incidents caused by a complex of unknowable social and personal stimuli, or that they are organised in a rational way by secret organisations that control their members with ruthless efficiency? In the latter case we may feel that there is the hope – remote but always there – that these master criminals, or whatever, will actually be caught, and the evil they are orchestrating will end. Paradoxically we may be creating monsters of uncontrollable violence to control the frighteningly random and chaotic universe we see around us.

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References:


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