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## Saucers and the Sacred: The Folklore of UFO Narratives

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SAUCERS AND THE SACRED: THE FOLKLORE OF UFO  
NARRATIVES

By

Preston C. Copeland

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

Of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In

AMERICAN STUDIES

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah  
2012

PRESTON COPELAND

RATIONAL UFOLOGY: THE RITES OF PASSAGE IN ALIEN ABDUCTION  
NARRATIVES.

In 1973, nineteen year old Calvin Parker and forty two year old Charles Hickson, both of Gauter, Mississippi were fishing in the Pascagoula river when they heard a buzzing noise behind them. Both turned and were terrified to see a ten-foot wide, eight-foot- high, glowing egg-shaped object with blue lights at its front hovering just above the ground about forty feet from the riverbank. As the men, frozen with fright, watched, a door appeared in the object, and three strange Beings floated just above the river toward them. The beings had legs but did not use them. They were about five feet tall, had bullet-shaped heads without necks, slits for mouths; and where their noses or ears should be, they had thin, conical objects sticking out, like carrots from a snowman's head. They had no eyes, gray, wrinkled skin, round feet, and claw-like hands. Two of the Beings seized Hickson; when the third grabbed Parker, the teenager fainted with fright. Hickson claimed that when the Beings placed their hands under his arms, his body became numb, and that then they floated him into a brightly lit room in the UFO's interior, where he was subjected to a medical examination with an eyelike device which, like Hickson himself, was floating in midair. At the end of the examination, the Beings simply left Hickson floating, paralyzed but for his eyes, and went to examine Parker, who, Hickson believed, was in another room. Twenty minutes after Hickson had first observed the UFO, he was floated back outside and released. He found Parker weeping and praying on the ground near him. Moments later, the object rose straight up and shot out of sight. (Bryan 1995: 115)

This supernatural abduction narrative is called the Pascagoula incident and is one of the most famous accounts of supposed extraterrestrial interaction with human beings. Known as a close encounter of the fourth kind, the abduction narrative is ripe with terrifying accounts of regular people being accosted by otherworldly beings that subject their captives to torturous ordeals. According to UFO mythos, a close encounter of the first kind involves a UFO sighting that is reported at close range. The second type of encounter is when there is physical evidence of the UFO. Some of this trace evidence might include burned vegetation, frightened animals, and loss of electricity. An encounter of the third kind is characterized by 'contact' with an extraterrestrial Being. But the fourth is clearly the most disturbing because it involves an actual abduction. These

stories of supernatural abduction have a clear structure and fit into consistent themes. Typically, the episode begins with an initial capture, which is followed by a sort of medical examination and otherworldly journey. In many cases, interaction with the Being produces a theophany in the abductee. The sequence usually culminates with the return of the victim, but the aftermath of the ordeal lingers sometimes for years after the event.

My own interest in UFO narratives stems largely from my fascination with the esoteric and arcane. From as far back as I can remember, I've had a profound interest in all things occult and/or mysterious. In terms of the UFO abduction, I've always found it fascinating how somebody could experience something largely indefinable and have their world-view changed forever. I often wonder what it is about anomalous experiences that have the potential to spark a life-changing shift in a person's ethos or societal niche. Also, popular culture has had an influence on why UFO narratives hold my interest. Television programs such as the *X-Files* and *Roswell* were popular when I was in high school, and I think that their story-lines, coupled with the fact that I was at an impressionable age, instilled a fascination with the UFO in me. To this day, I try to draw correlations between the occult and UFO narratives. As something as mysterious to me now as it was when I was younger, these stories of the unknown spark my imagination and inspire me to delve deeper into their structural nuances.

Of all the imaginings the human mind can produce, those of the supernatural may hold the most proclivity for individual expression. As part of our unusual psyche, ideas of the paranormal or supernatural manifest in a variety of ways. Throughout human history, ideas of otherworldly or inherently inhuman beings have been used to explain pervasive or otherwise frightening occurrences. The supernatural abduction, whether by witches,

ghosts, or goblins, is a common staple in all civilizations and is a structural part of a community's social organization. According to Jodi Dean, "abduction stories describe the interventions of non-human folk in human lives. They are stories of border crossings, of everyday transgressions of the boundaries demarcating the limits of that define reality" (Dean 1998:163). The idea of abductions by fairies, for example, is a type of assault narrative. As described in Western European folklore, a changeling was the offspring of a fairy or some other supernatural entity that was put in place of a normal human child. People believed that the abductee could only be returned if the changeling was made to laugh.

Nowadays, UFO abductions are perhaps the most popular supernatural assault tradition to saturate popular media. Due to the plethora of science fiction movies and television programs, the appropriateness of the UFO abduction as material for academic study can easily be questioned. Many academic disciplines dismiss the UFO narrative as pure science fiction. Nevertheless, Thomas Bullard is correct when he states that "the question before us is not whether UFOs are folklore. They certainly are, and just as certainly resemble other folklore in forms and function. The coherency of abduction reports stands out as the most unequivocal piece of evidence that folklore scholarship contributes to the UFO mystery" (Bullard 1981: 48). In fact, Bullard himself conducted a study of 270 abduction cases and concluded that the narratives hold structural similarities regardless of who the abductee was or who the researcher was (Jacobs 2000). Drawing on Bullard's notion that UFO abductions are folklore, in this paper I suggest that UFO abduction narratives can be interpreted productively by using Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage. I will be utilizing what I have come to call "rational liminality" to show that

after the abduction sequence, an ultimate reincorporation into society is achieved by the abductees' rational acceptance of his/her liminal experiences that occurred during the initial event.

Arnold van Gennep was instrumental in recognizing and discussing the rites of passage that accompany specific life stages. A French anthropologist and folklorist, van Gennep coined the idea of rites of passage and used this schema to address various transitory events in a person's life. In his book Rites Of Passage, he identified three distinct steps that make up a typical rite of passage. The first involves a separation from society. This separation is followed by a complex set of events that are liminal in nature. The term liminal refers to an in-between state. Something on a threshold or ethereal, the liminal is an intermediate phase of the event. After the separation and liminal experiences, a period of consummation or reincorporation into society occurs. Van Gennep utilized these three gradated steps to explain everything from puberty rites to secret society membership.

In order to thoroughly examine the rites of passage apparent in UFO abduction narratives, I draw on various abduction accounts. Drawing on information from published interviews conducted by Budd Hopkins and C.D.B. Bryan at the 1992 Abduction Study Conference at M.I.T., I will show how most abduction stories have similar morphology and thematic structuring. Some of the most compelling testimonies involve abductees named Carol Dedham and Alice Bartlett. These women have been friends since childhood and both have reportedly been abducted multiple times. I will also refer to a group meeting taken at Budd Hopkin's studio that had abductees Brenda, Erica, Terry, and Linda Cortile in attendance. Brenda, Erica, and Terry are

multiple experiencers who prefer not to divulge their last names for reasons of anonymity. These four women have undergone hypnotic regression a number of times and provide valuable insights into UFO abduction narratives.

The study of UFO narratives has become more commonplace in academic circles over the years. One discipline that takes narratives of abductions seriously is psychotherapy. Many therapeutic psychologists interpret the supernatural assault tradition as a means to express other ailments. According to Newman and Baumeister, “a handful of mental health professionals are arguing that psychotherapists should be educated about the UFO abduction phenomenon so that they will recognize the symptoms and be able to help the victims. Abductees, they argue, are suffering from post traumatic stress disorder” (1996:100). For many abductees who exhibit post-traumatic stress, certain ailments such as disassociation and depression are prevalent in the victims. Sharps, Mathews, and Astin state that “depressed individuals might be more likely to believe in ghosts, for example, because ghosts provide evidence for an after-life in which present stress would be eliminated. We expect that belief in UFO’s would be another avenue of escape for depressed individuals” (2006:583).

Disassociation and the UFO abduction scenario have even been studied scientifically in order to find correlations and/or disparities as uncovered through structured interviewing and questionnaires. The results have overwhelmingly shown that the abduction sequence does indeed correspond to depressive tendencies. In fact, “belief in UFO yielded an overall significance ( $P=.003$ ) regression coefficient against psychological characteristics, with both depression and hyperactivity yielding significant associations” (Sharps, Mathews, and Astin 2006). Psychologists also assert that after

victims speak to a neutral listener, the symptoms of PTSD are alleviated. This is often why abductees choose to seek out others that have had similar experiences. By congregating with other victims, the UFO abductee can return to a sense of normalcy.

Studies of religion and religious anthropology also are relevant to UFO abduction narratives. More often than not, the extraterrestrial being is imbued with the god-like powers of omniscience and omnipotence by the abductee, making these narratives quasi-religious. Aliens are thought to exert complete control over their human captives and subject them to capricious whims or impulses. In regards to aliens being equated with the divine, Jacques Arnauld notes “the characteristics of extraterrestrials that are usually associated with heavenly divinities: transcendence, omniscience, perfection, the power of redemption. Do they not come from heaven? Do they not claimed to have created us? Are they not constantly watching us, our actions, our thoughts, with what the ancient called the all-seeing eyes of gods” (Arnauld 2008:444)? Like most qualities that are attributed to a divine being, the extraterrestrial being carries connotations of immortality and sacred knowledge.

Additionally, the idea of ‘being chosen’ is a prevalent quasi-religious theme in UFO abduction narratives. For abductees that experience this form of theophany, the alien shows a beneficence towards the human race. Robert E. Bartholomew has written about the spiritual dimensions of UFOs in America, stating that, “functionally and symbolically, these contemporary accounts of otherworldly contact have more in common with Biblical revelations than profane airship inventors. For instance, the experience of having been chosen as an intermediary between otherworldly inhabitants and humanity to impart a vital message is a classic close encounter percipient report

which typically advocates a particular moral position” (Bartholomew 1991:7). In many abduction narratives, the victim reports the extraterrestrial relaying cautionary warnings about the future of humanity. In this sense, the aliens can be equated to angels and prophets of the past.

Finally, the idea of prophesy and apocalypticism is a prevalent in abduction scenarios. In many cases, the “chosen” abductees return with visions of the future. It is these characteristics that spark New Age or quasi-religious movements within UFO milieus. Anthropologists Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart explored the phenomenon of “optimistic apocalypticism” in detail and remarked that, “From their studies of present-day New Age healing and the ufological prophesy of the Heaven’s Gate movement, we come to understand both movements in terms of their negotiations of polarized cultural values in which future events, which are fixed in the known, determine the shape, the content, and the significance of present events and actions” (Harding and Stewart 1999:270). These anthropologists of religion have identified a common theme in UFO abduction narratives. After an initial capture, the victim is sometimes returned with ideas about the fate of the human race. In fact, many informants report that the aliens themselves address the need for environmental preservation and global peace.

Folkloristics also has contributed to the study of UFO stories. Studying the components that make up these experiences elucidates the similarities of the phenomenon with more traditional folkloric forms, illustrating that these are traditional experiences. According to Thomas Bullard, “what matters here is not the ultimate nature of the reports but their status as narratives, their form, content, and relationship to comparable accounts of supernatural encounter” (Bullard 1989:148). Bullard identified

eight episodes that usually characterize the alien abduction story. These include the capture, examination, conference, tour, otherworldly journey, theophany, return, and aftermath, all of which have structural similarities to other supernatural assault traditions. Bullard published a study the same year as Whitley Strieber released his bestselling book Communion in 1988 and cited “a bewildering array of alien abductors, with the typical grey only one species among a panoply that included mummies, trolls, sasquatches, and robots” (239). Whitley Strieber is an author who purportedly was captured and taken aboard an alien craft. In Communion, he relays a personal narrative of being examined and probed by extraterrestrial “greys.” These greys are the prototypical and most popular alien being in popular culture. Strieber suggests that he experienced supernatural assaults similar to what we find in Hufford’s Old Hag phenomenon. He states that, “In the wee hours of the night I abruptly woke up. There was somebody quite close to the bed, but the room seemed so unnaturally dark that I couldn’t see much at all. I caught a glimpse of someone crouching just beside the bedside table. I could see by the huge, dark eyes who it was. It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, couldn’t get away. I lay as still as death, suffering inner agonies.” (Strieber 1997:190). The release of the book made Strieber an instant celebrity and millionaire.

David Hufford also asserts that UFO abductions are a modern version of more traditional assault traditions. He states that, “UFO legends display a continuity of described features because the narrators are drawing from a common language and otherwise share a frame of reference which enables them to appropriately set up similar narrative structures combining similar contents” (1985:119). Like more traditional folkloric forms, UFO narratives utilize a common language with which they can be

identified. These continuities were apparent in Hufford's study of sleep paralysis and the Old Hag phenomenon. His study used a methodology largely based upon verbal accounts and survey techniques to document the consistencies of supernatural assaults across different cultural contexts. In many of the narratives, victims describe waking up from a sound sleep and "feeling as if someone is holding you down. You can do nothing but cry out. People believe that you will die if you are not awakened" (Hufford 1982). Much like the UFO abduction, paralysis is a common feature of the Old Hag assault. Also, cultural models determine the way the experience is interpreted. As context changes, the interpretation of these experiences adapt to meet current cultural settings. Hufford concluded that Old Hag phenomenon occurs independent of cultural conditioning and regardless of whether or not the victim is aware of this type of supernatural attack. Hufford states that, "The Old Hag, then, can be as easily assimilated to UFO beliefs as it can to Vampirism, witchcraft, or anxiety neurosis" (1982, 234).

As noted earlier, Van Gennep's formula for rites of passage include rites of separation, rites of liminal experience, and rites of reincorporation. Rites of separation largely mark a transition in somebody's life. In most cases, the separation stage is a preparatory period that readies the initiate for rites of transition. These separation rites manifest in a number of ways. For example, most initiatory systems involve separation from what is comfortable, or the ordinary surroundings. Van Gennep uses the example of the Hindu Brahman to show the tripartite structure of a rite of passage. He says that, "within the sacred world which the Brahman inhabits from birth there are three compartments: a preliminal one lasting until the Upanayana (beginning of a relationship

with a teacher), a liminal one (novitiate), and a post liminal one (priesthood)” (Van Genep 1960:105). In this circumstance, the separation prepares the Brahman for novitiatory status that ultimately leads to the priesthood.

Lisa Gilman has applied Van Genep’s tripartite model to physical assault. She considers the actual physical assault a rite of separation because this horrific event proved to be the catalyst that separated her from society. The details of her assault “clearly demonstrate how I was separated from all my previous conceptions of self and my social and physical worlds. Faced with my own weakness and mortality, how could I return to my social group and continue functioning as before if somehow I did not know that that accepted me, that they still liked me, recognized my strength, my beauty despite the fact some man had been able to control me, brutally beat me, almost kill me?” (Gilman 1996:101-102). Through the isolation that occurred as part of her trauma, Gilman suffered a clear separation from society. She remarks how aside from telling a few of her close friends what had happened, none one else in her social group mentioned the experience. Gilman attributed this silence to their discomfort with her transformation. By suffering the terror of an actual assault, Gilman was separated from what she had become accustomed to. The event removed her from what the world she inhabited and crossed all social boundaries.

Within UFO abduction narratives, which are supernatural assaults rather than actual, physical assaults, the rite of separation occurs in a number of ways. The preliminal rites of separation begin well before the actual abduction, yet, as in Gilman’s example, some form of trauma separates the victim from his or her environment in many cases. Newman and Baumeister state that, “One reviewer of UFO abductions noted that

calamities are often preceded by some sort of personal crisis, such as a breakup of a marriage” (Newman and Baumeister 1996:117). Situations like this are common in both UFO literature and in Van Gennep’s schema of separation. In cases such as rape or divorce, the victim experiences a clear separation from normalcy and in many circumstances, the liminal state and ultimate reincorporation can only be achieved by confronting the trauma of the attack and working through it by means of a group or some other therapy. An example of personal crisis preceding a UFO abduction can be found in the interview of Alice Bartlett conducted by C. D. B Bryan. When asked if she was as happy child, Alice states:

“No, I felt abandoned as a child. I was convinced my parents didn’t love me. My father was very authoritarian. We always had more fun when he was gone, because he’d be abroad for a year or so. But then it was always ‘wait until your father gets home.’”

“So it was primarily physical abuse?” I ask. (Bryan)

Alice starts to say “Yes,” then hesitates. She glances at Carol and then back at me. I go the impression she is deciding how far she should go. What follows next is a confusing account of a fishing trip Alice took in Florida with her father when she was twelve and her suspicions that he raped her on the banks of a canal. (Bryan 1995: 224)

Alice Bartlett experiences a sexual trauma that forces a separation from society. Her subsequent abduction by extraterrestrials follows this initial crisis event.

Along with child abuse, unplanned or inexplicable pregnancies also can be considered as traumatic events that separate the victim from her social system. In many cases, a UFO abduction occurs either directly before or after one of these traumatic experiences. In abduction literature, the phenomenon is called “missing embryo/missing fetus” syndrome and according to David M. Jacobs, “the problem of unplanned or inexplicable pregnancy is one of the most frequent physical after-effects of abduction

experiences. Usually the woman feels pregnant and has all the outward signs of being pregnant. She is puzzled and disturbed because she has either not engaged in sex or has been very careful with birth control. She has blood tests and the gynecologist positively verifies the pregnancy. Typically, between the discovery of the pregnancy and the end of the first trimester, the woman suddenly finds herself not pregnant” (Jacobs 2000:78). For a woman who experiences either an unplanned pregnancy or miscarriage, the trauma of the experience separates her from society. Although pregnancy occurs after the abduction experience, her rite of separation occurs with the pregnancy itself. Whether or not she attributes the pregnancy to extraterrestrial influence doesn’t deter from the fact that it is a event that separates her from ordinary surroundings.

Problematic race relations can also serve as a means of separation from society. Betty and Barney Hill were a mixed race couple in the Civil Rights Era. According to their testimony, the Hills were driving from Quebec to New Hampshire on September 19, 1961. An African-American postal worker, Barney and his Caucasian social worker wife Betty reported to have witnessed a strange glowing light outside of their car. Confronted by what appeared to be a uniformed man at a road block, the Hills experienced a period of missing time, developed amnesia, and suffered nightmares for reasons neither could accurately explain. Upon returning home, the couple decided to consult a therapist and underwent hypnotic regression by an army psychiatrist. What was revealed through the regression were nearly every abduction motif in UFO narratives. Details included a thorough medical examination as well as a pregnancy test administered by the alien beings. The idea of race plays an obvious role in the Hills narrative. For example, Barney recalled stopping at a diner and being waited on by a rude, African-American waitress.

Also, during the stop at the roadblock, they were accosted by what appeared to be a “red-headed Irishman” and a German Nazi. Curiously, all manners of race were included in the narrative, yet the Hills had difficulty identifying the perceived aliens’ race. Wrought by racial anxieties of the 1960s, they experienced a separation from society and then an abduction. Although the Hills sparked the modern UFO abduction craze, the emphasis on race in their case is not unique in the literature. Christopher F. Roth states that “put simply, Ufology is in one sense all about race, and it has more to do with terrestrial racial schemes in social and cultural constructs than most UFO believers are aware” (Roth 2005:41). What is unclear from this example is whether or not the Hills could ever achieve complete reintegration into society until mixed-race tolerance became more mainstream in American culture.

To sum up, rites of separation can occur for a UFO abductee well before the actual abduction experience. It’s likely that Alice Bartlett could just as easily have experienced an Old Hag episode or demonic possession instead of UFO abduction. Race relations can also correspond to a victim’s rite of separation. Being a mixed-race couple in the 1960s, the Hills’ separation occurred long before their experience with extraterrestrials. It has become apparent that both contextual circumstances, and personal crisis delineate how the rite of separation will manifest and what measures must be taken in order to ultimately reincorporate into society.

Rites of transition are the second stage in the overall structure of rites of passage. Van Gennep states that, “for every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined” (Van Gennep 1960:3). These rites are a means to move

from one social status to another. In many cases, some form of initiation accompanies the change of condition that a neophyte experiences. For example, Van Gennep discusses the puberty rites of the Kurnai tribe of Australia. He remarks that, “in some tribes the novice is considered dead, and he remains dead for the duration of his novitiate. It lasts for a fairly long time and consists of a physical and mental weakening which is undoubtedly intended to make him lose all recollection of his childhood existence” (Van Gennep 1960:75). After being separated from his mother and childhood games, the young man is instructed in his duties as a man and his responsibilities in the community. These rites of transition prepare the person for his change in status and help to define his position in society. Another common example of rites of transition involve pregnancy and childbirth. For example, “in the ceremonies of the Muskwaki (commonly known as Fox) the sex group also plays a part; the pregnant woman is separated from other women and, after delivery, is reintegrated into their midst by a special rite. A particular woman who is important in other ceremonies acts as intermediary” (Van Gennep 1960:44). In this circumstance, the rite of transition is facilitated by an intermediary agent that helps to achieve the change in status. By inducing a gradual removal of barriers, the young mother is eventually reintegrated into social settings thus completing the rite of transition.

The quality of liminality characterizes rites of transition. Commonly understood as in-betweenness, people in the liminal state experience a vulnerability that can produce both terror and spiritual elation. Turner states that “the attributes of liminality or of liminal presence (threshold people) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate status and positions in cultural space” (Turner 1969:95). The nuances of social status are

blurred during this transitory stage, and it is difficult to outline a specific taxonomy of liminal characteristics. By being “betwixt and between” the social norm, a person in a liminal state holds a status of non-identity. They are outside of society and therefore outside of normal categorization. This is important because somebody experiencing liminality frequently is perceived as dangerous to society and needs to be controlled. This perceived dangerousness explains the taboos or prohibitions of those undergoing the rite of transition. However, there is also creative potential for somebody in the liminal state. At the culmination of the transitory rite, the initiate emerges with a new sense of Self and status. Holding a new position in society, the person emerges as different from who they were before the initial separation.

In her analysis, Lisa Gilman considers the liminal phase of a physical assault as the period after assault, which was marked by emotional turmoil and uncertainty. She makes the point that silence can characterize the liminal stage because of the uncertainties about with whom somebody should tell their story. She states that “During the liminal phase (especially if one doesn’t see a therapist), a person may become overwhelmed with the experience as she has no outlet for her emotions or for working out her problems. Though she may think that by not talking about the trauma, she will eventually stop thinking about it and the feelings will go away, she may find that the opposite is true” (Gilman 1996:109). Gilman understood silence may be detrimental to the reincorporation process. By not sharing her traumatic experiences with others, she would ultimately remain in a liminal stage. Narration became an integral part of her healing process. However, the narrating of the story is also a rite of liminality because the teller has no idea how the audience will react to the narrative. Not knowing what the

result of telling her story will be, the victim risks personal embarrassment as well as a failure to reincorporate by sharing her experience.

UFO abductees typically “cross a threshold” into the liminal state. This threshold is frequently marked by strange lights. Most abduction narratives begin by seeing anomalous lights in the sky. Oftentimes, the victim watches the lights for an unspecified duration of time only to “awaken” aboard the craft. The presence of the lights mark the beginning of liminality; or in-betweenness. C.D.B. Bryan narrates how Carol Dedham:

Put on the car’s warning blinkers, rolled down the side window the rest of the way, and leaned out to get an unobstructed look across the road at the lights. Even though it was wintertime and the leaves of the deciduous trees had fallen, there were enough pines in the grove to prevent an unimpeded view. Still, the lights were so bright the whole area was lit up. Carol decided to leave the car to get closer. (Bryan 1995:205)

This aspect of anomalous lights is so common in UFO narratives that it appears in nearly every abduction account. The lights mark a transition between reality and the supernatural, as well a transition into the liminal state.

Strange weather also may function as a boundary between the profane and the liminal. Again C.D.B Bryan narrates how abductee Richard J. Boylan witnessed a kind of strange fog while driving the New Mexico desert. He states that, “The air was crystal-clear; there was no moisture to make fog out of. There was no body of water around. The road he had been driving was gradually rising, so he wasn’t in any sort of pocket where moisture could collect. And there he was at a dead stop in the right-hand lane of a two-lane blacktop highway crossing a desert enveloped in what, in his car’s headlights, appeared to be a grayish-white odorless cloud. Boylan got out of his car to investigate” (1995:246). In both Carol and Boylan’s experiences, they leave the safety

of the car in order to investigate the phenomenon. Much like their initiatory counterparts, they are separated from their previous environment and enter a state of liminality.

Accounts/motifs of body mutilation and dismemberment are common UFO abduction narratives. Many victims endure forced medical examination. For example, Bryan narrates how Boylan, was “led into the next room and placed him in what felt, he thought, like an astronaut’s chair in a pulled-back position, so that he was reclining but not quite flat. His ankles seemed held in place as if by a force field, and then Boylan felt an intense pressure as though something was being pushed far up into his nose. As soon as the object had been implanted, Boylan’s ankles were released and he was free to go” (1995:247). Carol Dedham is another person who claims to have endured a forced medical exam. During a hypnotic regression with Budd Hopkins, she recounts how the aliens,

“...want me to go over to those tables...to get on the table,”  
Carol says, “I don’t do that anymore...It has things for the feet...I don’t  
Want to turn my head.”

“They want you to turn your head?”

“No, they just said *they* want to turn my head...No, I don’t really want  
to do that.”

“Do what?” Budd asks.

“Because he’s going to” – sharp inhale “Put that thing-“ another sharp inhale  
“in my ear. Please don’t put that thing in my ear!” Carol cries out in pain.  
“They put something in my ear!” She whimpers, near tears. (Bryan 1995: 206)

The significance of a medical examination amongst UFO narratives is important for several reasons. First, the medical examination parallels more traditional rites of transition. When describing a ritual of the Congo tribe, Van Gennep writes that “The novice is separated from his previous environment, in relation to which he is dead, in

order to be reincorporated in his new one. He is taken into the forest, where he is submitted to seclusion, lustration, flagellation, and intoxication with palm wine resulting in anesthesia. Then comes the transition rites, including body mutilations and painting of the body” (Van Gennep 1960:89). In both cases, the body is invaded, mutilated, or otherwise transformed. Second, like all rites of transition, during medical procedures the abductee loses complete control.

Implicit in the forced medical procedures and paralysis that occurs as part of the liminal stage of an abduction sequence is a continuity of narrative. This continuity of narrative showcases the temporary disintegration of status that marks the UFO abduction narrative. As a person’s status is defined both by the self and how others interact with that person, by suffering an event that jeopardizes that status, the victim is left in a kind of ontological limbo. By questioning the nature of existence and their relation to it, the alien abductee loses his sense of self and struggles with normal societal processes. Also, many UFO victims report being taken multiple times throughout their life. This is problematic because if we attribute temporary differentiation or status loss as an event that is repeated, then the multiple alien abductee would be forced to reconcile these losses of status a number of times. This could explain the ontological crisis and fantasy prone conjectures of the UFO abductee. By constantly being forced to reaffirm their status both to themselves and to society at large, the victim never really knows who he is or how to cope with the experience. This is the continuity that characterizes UFO narratives. Each of the abductees struggle with interpretation of the self and status as part of the liminal experience.

UFO abductees report that it is difficult deciding whether or not to narrate their

experiences to others in society. Oftentimes explaining the event leads to further trauma because of how the story is received. Alice Bartlett remarks that, “What’s happening is a lot of strange things we can’t explain. A lot of things that just seem to make no sense in what we know as reality. It’s very hard to tell whether what we’re seeing, what we’re feeling, what we’ve experienced, is something normal. Especially when you know in the back of your mind that it’s *not* normal! That there’s something going on that you just *can’t* explain” (Bryan 1995:201). The reluctance to share the narrative of UFO abduction places the victim in a social limbo. This inability to relay the experience forces the abductee to stay in a liminal phase of transition and makes the rite of incorporation all the more difficult.

Self-narrating can prove to be a catalyst that will eventually lead to narrating within the victim’s social milieu. Gilman mentions that self-narrating can help the victim “come to an understanding of the details of the incident and come to understand their role in it” (Gilman 1996:106). This is the tone that Strieber uses in his book Transformation. Written in first-person, the tale reads almost like a series of journal entries. Throughout the course of the novel, the author slowly comes to a realization about his abduction experiences and finds solace at the end. Strieber states that, “I do believe, that behind all the strange experiences and perceptions, behind the lights in the sky and the beings in the bedroom, there lies a very important, valuable, and genuine unknown, my hope is that we will eventually face the fact that it is there, and begin a calm, objective, and intellectually sound effort to understand it” (Strieber 1997:265). This self-narrating helped Strieber come to terms with the experience and paved the way for sharing the story with others.

When UFO abductees come to the realization that what they experienced was a traumatic event that led to a change in identity, they begin the process of reincorporation. This step involves the identification of the self and its relation to the anomalous Other. Jacques Arnauld states that, “the first encounter with the other is the origin of the knowledge of the Self” (Arnauld 2008:441). If we loosely define the self as the cognitive processes and distinct representations of one’s identity, then knowledge of the non-Self or Other can be therapeutic when dealing with traumatic events. When realizing that the supernatural Other facilitated a status change in the abductee, the victim shows a rationality that begins the rite of reincorporation. This is what I call “rational liminality.” It is a liminal logic that comes from social acumen and personal discernment of a transitional period. By realizing that the traumatic event has changed the victim’s identification of his or her Self and his/her place in social settings, the UFO abductee exhibits reason in their interpretation of the event. This is important because supernatural assault narratives are considered as irrational by nature. There is nothing reasonable in believing that alien beings capture people for exploratory purposes. However, even if people perceive their traumatic experiences in supernatural terms, they may come to realize that their experience with an anomalous Other sparked a change in Self and status. When this occurs they are in a state of rational liminality.

Many UFO abductees show evidence of being in a state of rational liminality immediately before beginning the rite of reincorporation. For example, UFO abductee Pat, who is described by ufologist Budd Hopkins as being a pretty blonde Midwesterner, has been abducted multiple times and states that, “You know the person. Every bit of them. So you feel perfectly comfortable around these people--I call them

'people' instead of 'aliens', Pat exclaims, "because that is something I want to get across... I don't want nonexperiencers to be afraid. I'd say be cautious, but don't turn away from the experience" (Bryan 1995:253). Her remark shows a certain rationality when discussing supernatural assault narratives. When Pat makes the conscious decision to equate the aliens to people, she has moved her perceptions of the experience from something purely irrational to something more based on reason. This mental shift from the supernatural to the more familiar shows that the abductee is beginning a rite of reincorporation. After all, it's much easier to reenter social systems if your own belief about the traumatic experience is based on something more earthly than in an extraterrestrial Other. Pat refers to her aggressors as "people" and in doing so, leaves the realm of the irrational in favor of more typical social settings.

Whitley Strieber also shows a certain amount of rationality in describing his abduction experiences when he describes the entire process as a symbolic death and rebirth, which is exactly how Van Gennep and Victor Turner describe rites of passage. Joyce Bynum states that, "Throughout the world we also find many rites of passage, especially at puberty, during which the initiate endures a form of death involving a journey to the otherworld, followed by rebirth and return" (Bynum 1993:93). This is exactly what we find in Strieber's abduction narrative. He is physically taken, suffers the initiations associated with being in a liminal state and experiences the change in status that accompanies symbolic rebirth. Upon reflecting on the night of his abduction sequence, he remarks that, "On that night I was freed from something that haunts us all. How will death feel? What will I do? How will I be as I die? I know how I will be. I have already died a little. The visitors have had the courage and wisdom to give me this gift,

this singular liberty. Love at its most true is not afraid to be hard” (Strieber 1997:182). This is a very rational perspective of the liminal stage of a rite of passage. Strieber shows the optimism and hopefulness that is clear evidence of social reincorporation.

Rites of reincorporation can be achieved in a variety of ways. As noted earlier, many abductees seek out a credible psychologist in order to come to terms with what they experienced. Victims may explore various disorders to define the ordeal. David Jacobs states that “from the academic critics’ point of view, recovered abduction narratives are produced by following a vague cue of ‘missing time’ plus feelings of distress that drive the narrator to consult a credulous therapist” (Jacobs 2000:62). It should be noted that the word credulous might not be appropriate when describing all therapists who treat alien abductees. Although there are negative connotations associated with psychologists and psychiatrists who deal with alien encounters, the point should be made that what is addressed by therapists is a traumatic event. The event need not necessarily be supernatural in origin. Any traumatic event would suffice to generate a liminal experience. The fact that the ordeal does include alien visitors shows that some therapists are simply treating abductions as a class of traumatic event.

Another way in which UFO abductees can reincorporate into society is through socio-religious activities. Many abductees use their experience to find a cathartic resurgence of their own spirituality. In many cases, the victim loses his or her own faith in the divine due to the trauma of the supernatural assault. Believing that no god would reasonably subject them to torturous experimentation, some people fault organized religion or even stop attending religious services altogether. These abductees may join quasi-religious UFO groups, whose focus lies on imbuing religious terminology in

extraterrestrial context. It would be these groups that find camaraderie under a charismatic figure. According to William Dewan, “the contents of narrative performance, as well the interpretations of these experiences, reflect the growing spiritual yearning among some individuals that are satisfied by neither traditional religious ideals nor scientific skepticism toward the supernatural” (Dewan 2006:184). That’s not to imply that all these groups are nefarious or motivated by greed but the recent past has shown the potentiality for catastrophic outcomes when conjoining spiritualism and UFO propaganda. For example, in March 1997, a doomsday cult called Heaven’s Gate took part in a group suicide in San Diego, California. Following their cult leader named ‘Do’, 21 men and 18 women drank poison in an effort to join a perceived space craft that was thought to be hidden in the tail of the Halle Bopp comet. In this circumstance, the group proved to be detrimental by promoting asocial behavior. Therein lies one danger of religious ufology. What could be beneficial in group settings can prove to be disastrous in the wrong contextual surroundings.

A certain amount of religious attribution can be beneficial to the reincorporation process. Some abductees attribute god-like powers to their extraterrestrial abductors. Qualities of omniscience and superhuman strength are all characteristics of the abduction sequence. For example, Whitley Strieber describes how many alien beings are similar to angels. He states that “the being sat down on the beside. She seemed almost angelic to me, so pure and so full of knowledge. As she bent close to me I felt all the tension go out of my muscles. The being said: “In three months’ time you will take one of two journeys on behalf of your mother. If you take one journey, you will die. If you take the other, you will live” (Strieber 1997:66). Along with the idea of all-knowing, there are other qualities

associated with the alien being that are no less rare. Ideas of perfection, transcendence, and redemption are also sometimes associated with the alien abduction. These ethereal correlations to the esoteric or occult serve to place the extraterrestrial in the role of mediator with the divine. Many UFO narratives include dire warnings about the ecological stability of the planet and/or fears about polluting the human body. According to C.D.B Bryan, “virtually all of Mack’s abductees have demonstrated a commitment to changing their relationship to the earth, of living more gently or in harmony with the other creatures that live here” (Bryan 1995:421). For these abductees, the promise of return and the purported warnings about conservation lend credence to feelings of redemption on account of the abduction.

Ironically, many abductees begin their rite of reincorporation with conciliatory remarks from their captors. In what could be described as a ufological version of Stockholm and Lima syndrome, the abductee begins to identify with the extraterrestrial. Traditionally, Stockholm syndrome occurs when an abduction victim feels sympathy for his captors. Likewise, Lima syndrome is characteristic of an abductor developing sympathetic feelings for his captors. This curious dichotomy of captor and captive is prevalent in UFO literature. In much of the informant data, victims describe almost gentle exchanges between alien and abductee. Sometimes assurances are made of eventual release or no further harm. In these circumstances, the reincorporation begins while still in the liminal realm. By identifying with their captors, the victim has already begun the process of societal reintegration. Whether or not this identification is itself a symptom of pathology is open to debate. Nevertheless, evidence does indicate that in some circumstances, consummation of the rite of passage can begin through the

interactions the abductee has with his captor.

Maybe the most important aspect of reincorporation for a UFO abductee are the social connections created as a way of consummating the rite of passage.

Since reincorporation is the most important aspect of rites of passage, many UFO abductees actively seek out other people who can relate to their transitory event. Because of this, alien abductees, like ritual abuse survivors, join support groups in order to share their experience. According to Newman and Bausmeister, “among the factors that allow abductees to maintain their beliefs, one of the most important might be the support groups they often seek out and join” (1996:110). These support groups serve as a way of confronting the traumatizing event. For an alien abductee to seek out a support group illustrates that he/she realizes the need for social interaction. The fact that the Self innately knows that a communicative event would be beneficial is to actively participate in the reincorporation into society. This puts control back in the hands of the victim. After the helplessness and vulnerability that characterizes the initial separation and liminal ordeals, gaining control over one’s body and mind is an important aspect of the healing process. By identifying with others that have been through a similar ordeal, the UFO abductee can achieve normalcy and rejoin the social order.

Lisa Gilman experienced the beneficial aspects of reintegration through the loving care of her own social group. By feeling comfortable enough to share her narratives, Gilman facilitated the reincorporation process. She states that, “Despite my pain, my anger, the feelings of chaos which consumed me, I knew that I was not alone, isolated in my own mind, alone with the images that streamed continuously through my mind. Because of my friends’ response and support, I was able to begin processing and

healing from the assault faster and more effectively than a lot of other survivors of sexual violence I have known” (Gilman 1996:115). Gilman utilized her personal support system to quell the anxieties of sharing her experience. Regaining a sense of security, she was able to reenter social settings.

Finally, attending a conference such as the one at M.I.T. in 1992 may prove to be central to the reincorporation process. Finding safety in numbers, this environment provides a place where the UFO abductee can meet others who have had similar traumatic occurrences. An informant named Mary remarked at the end of the conference that, “I have nothing to fear because we are all alike. Knowing this has helped me to control my fear” (Bryan 1995:199). This tends to be the general consensus of all the abductees that were present. As a viable support group, this milieu of alien abductees was able to help each other reincorporate into larger social settings. Bryan also remarks that at the conclusion of the five-day conference, “We begin to file out; little groups gather together in the hallway or outside in the sunshine on the lawn. I search out Alice and Carol. They seem hesitant to leave, unwilling to separate from the support and understanding they have found here” (Bryan 1995:200). The support received by loved ones and friends is incredibly important to the rite of reincorporation. By finding others that have had similar experiences, the narrating of stories becomes possible and the abductees are finally able to leave the state of liminality and rejoin the social norm, with a new identity with which they have come to terms.

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## SAUCERS AND THE SACRED: RELIGION AND THE UFO EXPERIENCE

On the evening of July 14, a Pan American airliner, flying at 8000 feet, was approaching Norfolk, Virginia, en route to Miami from New York. Except for a few thin cirrus clouds above 12,000 feet, the night was clear and visibility unlimited. Shortly after 8 pm, Captain William B. Nash caught sight of a red brilliance in the sky, apparently beyond and to the east of Newport News. "Almost immediately," they later reported, "We perceived...six bright objects streaking toward us at tremendous speed...they had the fiery aspect of hot coals, but of much greater glow-perhaps twenty times more brilliant (than city lights below)...their shape was clearly outlined and evidently circular; the edges were well defined, not phosphorescent or fuzzy...the red orange was uniform over the upper surface of each craft. All together, they flipped on edge, the sides to the left of us going up and the glowing surfaces facing right...they were much like coins...then, without an arc or swerve at all, they flipped back together to the flat altitude and darted off in a direction that formed a sharp angle with their first course...the change...was acute...like a ball ricocheting off a wall." Captain Nash estimated that the unlighted exposed edges of each craft were about fifteen feet thick and their top surfaces flat. As two additional craft suddenly joined the six, the lights of all eight blinked off, then back on. Remaining in a straight line, the UFOs zoomed westward, climbing in a grateful arc as their lights blinked out...one by one. The entire display lasted fifteen seconds. (Bryan 1995: 137)

This account of a UFO sighting is a common staple in UFO legendry. As a form supernatural narrative, the UFO legend has become a popular piece of modern culture. Similar to stories about heavenly beings or demonic entities, the modern UFO legend is both shaped and interpreted by cultural context.

UFO narratives are instilled with numinous qualities typically found in religious studies and the occult. The numinous is a way of describing the power or presence of a numen or supernatural. Usually the numinous is something that is beyond

comprehension or is spiritually elevated. People have borrowed from religion to interpret UFOs. Keith Thompson remarks that, “classical theologians who adhered to the great chain/hierarchy of angels model of the universe, and modern-day Ufologists who catalog various types of aliens, can be viewed as detectives following the same scent” (Thompson 1991, 228). The modern UFO contactee encounters something much like visions of angels or the terrors of hell.

Mythological themes are also prevalent in UFO sightings. Much like the use of angels in religion, ufology touches upon very important myth-motifs in its explanation. For example, the use of halos, demonology, and apocalypse are all common motifs in the narratives. Thomas Bullard states that, “UFO stories echo unmistakable leitmotifs of the great mythological themes: culture bearers and saucers from the sky, supernatural enemies and the end of the world, ritual as initiation and transformation, interbreeding with otherworld entities, magical events, and trickster figures like Men In Black” (Bullard 2010, 277). Using the occult and traditional religious visions, the UFO employs mythological paradigms as a template for understanding.

It is my contention that images of the alien have taken the place of angels and demons in traditional folklore, fulfilling a need for the sacred in scientific or technological guise. Building upon the work of Linda Degh, I will examine the religious symbols and imagery of UFO legendry. Degh has remarked that, “when prestigious authorities such as Harvard psychiatry professor John E. Mack became serious about UFO aliens, they are actually joining theologians in the endorsement of the popular spiritualist belief in guardian angels among us, and are lending a hand to the evolution of a new complex of age-old traditional legendry” (Degh 2001: 262). By better

understanding the imagery of UFO narratives as religious images, we are afforded a signpost for what the symbols mean and what kind of reality they conjure up. As part of my research for this paper, I will examine UFOlore, newspapers, and the internet, which are excellent platforms for legend dissemination.

The supernatural has become very powerful recently. Between television programs such as *Ghosthunters* and Hollywood films like *The Blair Witch Project*, the occult and supernatural have saturated modern culture with a variety of ghosts, UFOs, and monsters. The news-media has also printed many articles about the supernatural. These stories frequently employ religious imagery or theological motifs. Bill Ellis remarks that, “Satan is alive and well, and the local newspaper regularly prints petitions to various saints and divine beings” (Ellis 2001:101). Made popular by the mass media, supernatural occurrences have become commodified and are easily assessable to the public.

Newspapers and tabloids are a valuable source for studying folkloric material. As a vehicle for consumption and distribution, the news-presses provide scholars with the very latest in legend formation. Degh states that, “the repertoire of the tabloids is large and comfortably familiar-variants of classic texts, revivals of old stories, or retellings of those currently in distribution. In other words, the repertoire of tabloids is representative of living legends” (Degh 2001:175). Through the popularity and dissemination of news-stories and tabloids, we see the human need to find meaning in the unexplainable.

Academia has studied the prevalence of the supernatural in modern culture. In fact, many folklorists devote entire books to supernatural narratives and legend formation. Jeannie Thomas states that, “Like any form of folklore, supernatural narratives

directly or indirectly tell us about culture. However, one of the characteristics that distinguishes supernatural narratives is that they emphasize mystery and the indeterminate, which overtly invites interpretation of various kinds” (Thomas 2007: 30). This is what makes the supernatural so enjoyable as an area of study. One person’s ghost or UFO sighting is a true event whereas to another person, the experience is a figment of the imagination or daydream. The supernatural invites discussion and in so doing becomes a popular part of tradition.

One way that legends teach about culture is because they are related to belief. According to Degh, all legends are based on belief. She asserts that, “belief makes its presence felt in any kind of legend” (Degh 1976: 306). Suggesting that legends are stories about belief, the degrees of belief do not alter this quality of the genre. Degh and her proponents suggest that belief is not a narrative but the symbolic core of a legend and because of this, all legends are necessarily “belief legends” (Ward 1991).

Largely differing only in semantics or subtle discrepancies on the importance of the word “belief” when discussing legendary, folklorists such as Gillian Bennett and Otto Blehr prefer to use “story” instead of “belief” when discussing this subcategory of legend. Their reasoning lays in the argument that “belief legends” represent “antiquated traditions about beliefs that have been handed down in relatively fixed form. “Belief stories,” by contrast, were narrative illustrations of still living belief traditions” (Ward 1991: 360). Bennett’s “belief story” addresses the current community beliefs whereas the “belief legend” is a fixed narrative that belongs solely to the past. Gabbert on the other hand, suggests that legend scholars focus “too much time on content and not enough on contextual “everyday” or general belief” (Gabbert 2000).

UFO-lore offers numerous examples that show how belief has changed due to a changing cultural context. Traditional legendry of heavenly beings has shifted into our perception of extraterrestrial visitors due to changes in context. What was once the domain of angelic beings has now become the realm of otherworldly space-men. Tumminia states that “flying saucers have postmodern myths. With the dawning of the rational technological age, social settings expected secularization and science to wipe out supernatural and magical religions. Instead, a magical enchanted worldview subverted the scientific paradigm into an animistic account of space beings what was readily available for our mass consumption” (Tumminia 1998: 115).

The ongoing need for the sacred promotes changes in legendry. Lindahl has remarked about these changes in tradition when he states that, “modern society has shed a good deal of its reliance on the divine, and replaced it with faith in technology. The sky, once invoked as the home of the gods, was now filled with aircraft” (Lindahl 1986: 7). As times change, legends adapt to fit the needs of society. Carl Jung studied religion and legendry, and, with regards to UFOs, called the phenomenon a visionary rumor. He states that, “it is closely akin to the collective visions of, say, the crusaders during the siege of Jerusalem, the troops at Mons in the First World War, and the faithful followers of Pope at Fatima” (Jung 1979: 8). In other words, UFO legendry fills the human need for the sacred. Fulfilling a spiritual role in society, the otherworldly visitor provides an avenue for the numinous in its various manifestations.

UFO narratives are full of religious imagery. Biblical allegories frequently function as a template for modern UFO narratives. For example, the Bible tells us that the prophet Ezekiel saw a burning wheel in the sky. The narrator of the sacred story states,

“The appearance of the wheels and their work [was] like unto the color of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work [was] as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (Ezekiel 1:16). This wheel is very similar to the saucers made famous by Kenneth Arnold in 1947. Arnold was a pilot who witnessed nine disk-like objects flying near Mount Rainier. Based on his description of the UFOs seeming to skip like saucers on water, the media coined the term “flying saucer” and this term remains popular today in describing UFO sightings. Whether perceived as a wheel or saucer, both of these narratives describe a round object emitting a supernatural light and performing unconventional maneuvers in the sky.

UFO folklore also makes use of the wheel or halo symbol in its literature. For example, the UK tabloid *The Sun* published an account of a circular formation in the Moscow sky (October 11, 2009). The article describes:

This glowing halo in clouds over Moscow looks like an Independence Day style of attack.

This astonishing ring was spotted over the city and captured on video by stunned locals. It has been described as a “true mystery” by a UFO expert. Scores of supernatural enthusiasts have been gripped by the astonishing footage and speculated it could be an ALIEN MOTHERSHIP. The sighting in the clouds is reminiscent of scenes from the 1996 Hollywood blockbuster Independence Day.

“Whatever it is, its one of the most beautiful and spectacular things I’ve ever seen.”

“Speculation is fever pitch on the internet.”

“This is being discussed in forums, blogs, and email lists all over the world. Some people say it’s a bizarre meteorological effect. Theories range from it being an alien mothership, proof of Russian weather modification technology or a weather weapon-even a sign of the end of the world”. (Vince Soodin. *The Sun*, October 11, 2009)

This account of a round, seemingly supernatural formation is very similar to what we read in Biblical scriptures. Both describe inexplicable objects that are spectacularly

beautiful. There is also a sense of mystery attached to both the Biblical wheel and the halo-like cloud formation that resembled an “alien mothership.” Both narratives make use of preexisting cultural information to assess what the object is and how it should be interpreted.

Furthermore, the Bible also describes how Elijah left the earth in a chariot of fire. In 2 Kings 2:11, the Bible reads, “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, [there appeared] a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” This chariot of fire is explained by proponents of the ancient astronaut theory as being a UFO narrative. Ancient astronaut theory is the idea that extraterrestrials visited Earth in antiquity and made contact with humanity. Those people that adhere to ancient astronaut theory propose that ancient aliens influenced the development of premodern technologies and religion. Some of the proponents of ancient astronaut theory include writers David Icke, Robert Temple and Zecharia Sitchin. For example, Sitchin attributed the creation of ancient Sumerian civilization to an extraterrestrial race called the Anunnaki. These aliens come from a planet past Neptune called Nibiru and influenced mankind thousands of years ago (Sitchin 1976). To proponents of the ancient astronaut theory, Elijah’s chariot is equated to a mechanized saucer based upon information borrowed from already established cultural knowledge. Thomas Bullard states that, “UFOs are coded into schemes of cultural knowledge, they acquire meanings borrowed from traditional cultural themes like a threatening outsider, a coming apocalypse, or saviors from the sky” (Bullard 2010: 11). By making use of already established traditional themes, ancient astronaut theorists interpret Biblical stories in a way that supports their own ideas.

UFO “contactees” also find their place in Biblical settings. Oftentimes, descriptions of supernatural experiences found in the Bible mirror descriptions of experiences of contemporary UFO folklore. For example, Biblical legend states that St. Theresa of Avila experienced levitation, and St. Joseph of Cupertino is said to have not only levitated but experienced mystical rapture over one hundred times. Such tales of the supernatural are found in many of the Bible stories. Keith Thompson states that, “we should note certain parallels between the lives of contactees and the lives of the prophets. The old testament prophet Moses had an unusual birth and childhood experiences, and later journeyed to a remote area where he received a supernatural calling. Saul of Tarsus, through a profound epiphany on the road to Damascus, converted to the very Christian faith that he had persecuted” (Thompson 1991: 145). Much like UFO contactees today, people of the Bible experienced the numinous in a variety of ways. Although the imagery is different, the cognitive processes used to interpret these experiences are both based upon already established contextual knowledge.

Many UFO contactees find continuity between extraterrestrials and religious figures. Rojcewicz states that in UFO folklore, “the conjunction of anomalous factors can take the form of a “spirit guide” or “etheric master” possessing an extraterrestrial connection” (Rojcewicz 1986: 136). These extraterrestrial visitors sometimes touch upon the sacred when they talk to contactees. This was the occasion in 1978 when Rex Allred relayed a UFO narrative that occurred to his friend and fellow LDS church member.

He remarks:

“This guy, just before getting married, was working in a remote mine for a company to earn money for his upcoming marriage. While he was inside the mine, he heard a noise much like you’d expect a UFO to make. His

curiosity was aroused so he went to the cave entrance and saw a spaceship settling to earth with landing legs and pods extended. The guy got up enough nerve finally to go down and investigate. There were men down there that looked just like us and one spoke in English. They wore silver-type suits and the guys started talking to the spacemen. The guy asked questions about Christ and the gospel and the priesthood, but the spaceman said he couldn't talk about that-it was against the rules. He said it with a twinkle in his eye like he knew all about it but also knew that there had already been enough witnesses set up by Christ for earth and he wasn't supposed to meddle with that situation" (Allred 1978).

Such accounts of extraterrestrial knowledge of the divine is prevalent in much UFO literature. Often times, the alien visitor exhibits behavior traditionally associated with angels. Thompson states that, "we begin to glimpse common ground between the modern imagination of aliens and the traditional imagination of angels and demons" (Thompson 1991:150). By associating aliens with the divine, modern contactees reaffirm their spiritual beliefs. Because both angels and aliens are imbued with otherworldly qualities, it is easy for contactees to reference the sacred when in contact with these beings.

The Stith Thompson motif-index of folk literature includes a motif called the "Heavenly Messenger" (F403.2.0) that has characteristics reminiscent of modern UFO narratives. Many traditional "Heavenly Messengers" take the form of angels, fairies, or the Japanese Tennin. Oftentimes, they relay information about future events and a World Savior. This "Heavenly Messenger" motif also appears in the guise of extraterrestrial beings. In many contactee narratives, mention is made of aliens deliberately saving the planet from catastrophic destruction. We see this aspect of UFO-lore in the May 27, 2009 issue of "The Sun." The tabloid reports:

A Scientist is claiming a UFO deliberately crashed into a meteor to save Earth from destruction 100 years ago!

Dr. Yuri Libuin, President of the Tunguska Spatial Phenomenon Foundation, insists an alien spacecraft sacrificed itself to prevent a

gigantic meteor from slamming into us above Siberia on June 30, 1908. He claims the result was the Tunguska event—a massive blast estimated at 15 megatons that downed 80 million trees over nearly 100 square miles. Eyewitnesses reported a bright light and a huge shockwave, but the area was so sparsely populated no one was killed. (*The Sun*, May 27, 2009.)

This classic account of extraterrestrials interacting for the benefit of mankind is a common staple in UFO narratives. Taking on the persona of “guardian angels,” the alien being works on behalf of humanity to preserve the earth and its occupants.

The “Heavenly Messenger” in UFO narratives also takes the form of environmental conservation. According to Thomas Bullard, many contactees “see a devastated or underground environment and perhaps experience a religious or mystical ceremony underscoring the preciousness of life” (Bullard 2010: 74). Here the contactee experiences dire portents of the future of mankind. Many narratives warn of pollution and/or thermonuclear disaster. Harvard professor John Mack interviewed an abductee named Susan at the Abduction Study Conference held at Cambridge in 1992. He asked her:

Q- Is the contents of your abduction related to ecology?

A- These particular events were. I did notice a parallel concern for the environment from the beginning of my abduction experiences, and I really prefer not to call them abductions...

Q- On the part of these...

A- No, I had the underlying sense of environmental importance that was growing. It's these particular events that seemed high in importance to me, related to environmental concerns” (Bryan 1995:153).

As a way to raise ecological awareness, the alien delivers warnings about the future of the planet.

Extraterrestrials also relay overtly religious messages in many UFO contact

narratives. This idea of aliens delivering religious lingo can be seen in a Weekly World News article authored by Ragan Dunn. According to Dunn, a French Journalist named Vincent Black conducted a 25 minute interview with an extraterrestrial named Barten. The manuscript states that, “the creature had blonde hair and blue eyes and looked like a three-year-old child. He spoke in a high pitched monotone and answered a series of questions before he glowed bright blue and disappeared” (*Weekly World News*, July 19, 2004).

The interviewer asks:

Q- Have you come to steal from us, to plunder the earth?

A- We have come to share with you, to cure your illnesses, to relieve your strife, to bring you heaven on earth. We also bring you the wrath of hell. The choice is yours to make.

Q- Why haven't you contacted us before?

A- Your leaders are aware of our presence and we have engaged them in negotiations. I emphasize that we come in peace. We ask you to prepare for us.

The concept of heavenly figures coming to alleviate illnesses or share knowledge is very prevalent in UFO literature. Like the curing power of saints and prophets, these otherworldly beings are infused with powers of healing. Moreover, the alien visitors reiterate time after time that their presence is one of beneficence. Again we see this idea of supernatural healing in a Weekly World News article. According to Ann Victoria,

Andorra Spain- Space Aliens are appearing in the hospital rooms of dying children, gently touching their foreheads- and curing them of terminal cancer!

That's the incredible conclusion of 14 highly respected doctors and staff members at Pyrenees Hospital de Los Ninos who have seen the 4-foot-tall extraterrestrials work their magic on four terminally ill youngsters in the course of a month.

When the creatures entered the room of 7-year-old, terminally ill cancer patient Juan Guijarro, nurse Montoya alerted security guards and Dr. Thomas Ruiz. “Little Juan’s room was bathed in a bright golden light when I got there,” Dr. Ruiz recalled. “The aliens were standing by his bedside. There seemed to be a mystical bond between them and the boy. (*Weekly World News*, July, 29 2004)

The article goes on to state that the young patient went into spontaneous remission and all traces of cancer disappeared. Much like the behavior of heavenly persona, the extraterrestrial becomes a conduit for healing human illnesses.

Another characteristic that UFO contactees display after meeting with extraterrestrial beings are psychic or otherwise supernormal powers. Much like prophets and saints in Biblical times, these stories speak of extra-human abilities. According to Fuller, “the fact is that many people who have been abducted do subsequently have psychic and sometimes psychokinetic ability. In many instances, it seems to have preceded the UFO sightings but also seems to have been enhanced afterward” (Fuller 1983: 354). In these cases, the extraterrestrial imparts mystical talents or insight. This supposedly occurred in 1908 when writer and mountain climber Aleister Crowley came into contact with a being that dictated a book to him. Called The Book Of The Law, this tome is used by various religious groups that assert it to be of divine origin. Allen Greenfield remarks that, “when Crowley engaged in magical working, these praeterhuman intelligences would consistently arrive on the scene. One of them, calling itself Lam, was sketched by Crowley and is the prototype of the current alien types seen in present-day abduction cases” (Greenfield 1994: 24). Much like the knowledge related to Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, and Ron Hubbard, the inventor of Dianetics, a “spiritual being” provided the inspiration for a new religious movement. This

new religion was called Thelema and included aspects of occultism, kaballah, yoga, and Western mysticism. Thelema emphasizes the ethical code of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law' and relies on identifying with one's Holy Guardian Angel to achieve the True Will.

Although many reports of contact with extraterrestrial accentuate the loving actions of angelic beings, there is also a darker side to UFO folklore. Adopting religious axioms, for there to be angels full of god's light, there must also be devils that represent the wrath of hell. These more sinister motifs find their way into legends about Men In Black and UFO abductions. Greenfield states that, "Men In Black terrify people, and the Heaven's Gate cult lured its followers to commit suicide. Such efforts betray the classic tactics of demons as they confuse and mislead their victims to win their souls for hell" (Greenfield 1994: 216). Most accounts of Men In Black occur after a UFO sighting or contact. Men In Black are a prevalent part of UFO conspiracy theory. Most often, they appear as clandestine government agents who appear to contactees and demand absolute silence about what they experienced. Sometimes they appear alien themselves and move in awkward or discomfited ways. Rojcewicz states that, "MIB have on occasion displayed a very unusual walking motion, moving about as if their hips were swivel joints, producing a gliding or rocking affect, often with the torso and legs seemingly moving into opposite directions" (Rojcewicz 1987: 151). Reminiscent of traditional demon-lore, the MIB are a class of supernatural entity apart from the usual extraterrestrial narrative.

Aside from the MIB phenomenon, the UFO abduction experience also conjures images of hellish beings. In many cases, the abductee awakens in the middle of the night,

paralyzed and stricken with fear. Sometimes they are transported to a saucer where torturous medical experiments are conducted on them. These accounts are suggestive of Old Hag narratives that have been studied by folklorist David Hufford. In the classic Old-Hag experience, the victim wakes up paralyzed and deeply afraid. Many times there is pressure on his/her chest and a feeling of helplessness. According to an informant interviewed by Hufford, “You are dreaming and you feel as if someone is holding you down. You can do nothing only cry out. People believe that you will die if you are not awakened” (Hufford 1982: 2). Hufford found Old Hag experiences bleed into UFO abductions. Hufford remarks that “the Old Hag, can be as easily assimilated to UFO belief as it can to Vampirism, witchcraft, or anxiety neurosis” (Hufford 1982: 234).

UFO abduction examinations are also similar to the descriptions of hell that are illustrated by Renaissance artists. For example, Hieronymus Bosch’s triptych of ‘The Last Judgment’ (1482- See Appendix) shows the demons of hell torturing sinners in Hell. Much like people in UFO abduction narratives, the victims are forced to undergo tormenting procedures. Thompson remarks that, “the piercing instruments used by aliens in their examination bear a similarity, albeit genteel, to the piercing tortures which devils inflict on sinners in Christian art and fundamentalist belief” (Thompson 1991: 147). Borrowed from religious imagery of hell, the UFO abduction illustrates the suffering that occurs as part of the supernatural assault. *Weekly World News* correspondent Michael Forsyth reported a supposed abduction caught on film. According to the article:

Convincing new proof of UFOs has finally surfaced: The first verified photo of an alien abduction in progress.

The bone chilling image, captured by a home security camera in the bedroom of victim Catherine Nuburn, clearly shows the New Mexico woman being hauled screaming from her bed by a bald,

bulbous-headed “gray-type” alien. The 31 year old divorcee hasn’t been seen since August 7-the date recorded in the videotape-and relatives fear the worst. The tape has since vanished, and the missing woman’s loved ones say it was taken by operatives from an unnamed agency, the notorious Men In Black. The attractive Canadian-born Nuburn first reported she was abducted by aliens in November 2002.

“She said it was simply terrifying,” recalls sister Dana, who still lives in Toronto. “Cathy told me she was stripped nude and suspended in midair by powerful rays. These robotic sensors that look like vacuum hoses probed every orifice of her body while small electrodes attached to her head seemed to be monitoring her brain” (*Weekly World News*, August 26 2003).

Verifying all our terrors of the supernatural, this account is very similar to attacks by demons or the devil. Within the UFO abduction is a pattern of motifs and themes that have long been associated with religious ideas of hell.

Finally, many accounts in UFO folklore have apocalyptic themes. Just like the horror and devastation of the Bible’s book of Revelation, UFO-lore carries fears of the end of the world. This has been very popular in recent years with films such as *Skyline* and *Battle LA*. Both of these films imagine what it would be like if aliens came to take over the planet. As a way to address the fears about the apocalypse, the UFO attack is similar to the idea of angels coming to earth in order to exact retribution and divine punishment. Tabloids also make use such ideas. On February 18, 2011, Frank Lake reported that:

Alien spaceships to attack earth in 2011!

Three giant alien spaceships are heading for earth. Scientists predict they will arrive in early 2011. UFO encounters continue to increase as documented in WWN. And today scientists at SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), an independent non-commercial organization made a major announcement:

“Three giant spaceships are heading toward Earth. The largest one of them is 200 miles wide. Two others are slightly smaller. At present, the objects are just moving past Jupiter. Judging by their

speed, they should be on earth by early 2011,” said John Malley, the lead extraterrestrial expert at Seti. (*Weekly World News*, February 18, 2011)

Religions all around the globe have described The End coming in some catastrophic occurrence from the heavens. The mystery of what exists outside of our little terrestrial planet has always fascinated theologians and philosophers. In the past, the apocalypse was described as coming in the form of fire and brimstone. Today, the UFO has taken the place of angels as arbiter of Earth’s destruction.

To sum up, UFO narratives are replete with religious and occult imagery. As disseminated through tabloids, the UFO legend complex shows evidence of millennialism, angel and demon lore, and even apocalyptic awareness. Utilizing traditional supernatural folklore forms, the UFO has attributes of religion but in technological guise. Fulfilling a need for the sacred in modern times, these legends perpetuate the motifs long associated with traditional belief and make them assessable to modern society. These motifs include halos, heavenly messengers, and demonic abductions. A popular piece of world culture, the tabloid disseminates UFO-lore and through its distribution ensures that this form of folklore will stay viable for years to come. Folklorists should pay more attention to tabloid newspapers. Generally, these publications are thought to be a poor source for scholarly material because they are not considered to be “true.” However, throughout this paper I have illustrated how tabloids draw on very traditional folklore forms. It is important for scholars of legendry to reference these fantastic periodicals because although they seem too far-fetched to take seriously, they are an excellent source for supernatural narratives and should be of interest to folklorists.

There are a myriad of avenues future UFO research could take. Perhaps the most compelling would entail a study of the networks and mediations UFO narratives utilize. For example, philosopher of science Bruno Latour has done extensive work on actor-network theory and how it pertains to scientific study and epistemology. According to Luckhurst, “Latour sees value in the productive tension between the centered actor and the de-centered network, enabling the critic to move across different scales of explanation” (8). These ideas of multiple arenas to achieve better scientific understanding could be applied to folklore study as well. For example, by examining the folklore narrative, cultural reactions to ufology, archaeological evidence of alien craft, soil samples at purported alien sites, UFO conferences, science-fiction, and the media, we have a plethora of mediations with which to study ufology. These many areas provide movement in a circulating reference of study and provide keen insights into the UFO experience.

Another place where UFO discussion would be welcomed is in philosophical milieus. A study of metaphysics and phenomenology is essential to understanding the mindset of the UFO abductee. In a thorough look at studies of perception, ontology, and first-person experiential accounts of the UFO experience, there is real opportunity to grasp the many philosophical nuances that accompany UFO narratives. I would also suggest further study involving the question “What is real” as it pertains to Freedom and Deterministic frameworks. Perhaps by discussing UFO-lore and the philosophical implications of non-human agency, we may grasp a better understanding of what it means to be human.

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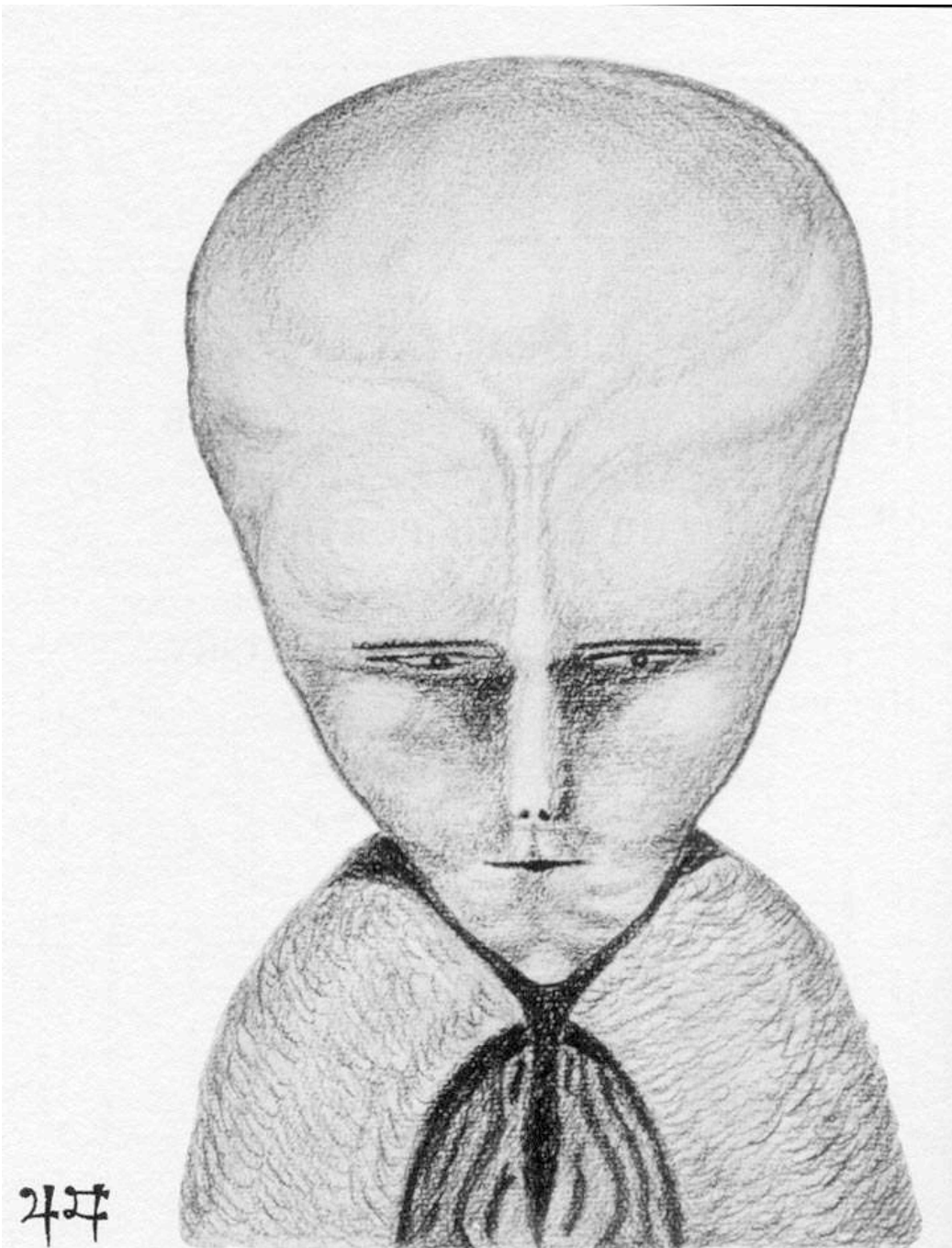
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### THE WAY

LAM is the Tibetan word for Way or Path, and LAMA is He who Goeth, the specific title of the Gods of Egypt, the Treader of the Path, in Buddhistic phraseology. Its numerical value is 71, the number of this book.

