

FLIGHT AND ABDUCTION IN WITCHCRAFT AND UFO LORE¹

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Summary.—The lore surrounding the mythical Witches' Sabbat and contemporary reports of UFO abductions share three main characteristics: the use of masks, the appearance of "Men in Black," and references to flight and abduction. We review these three commonalities with particular focus on the aspect of flight and abduction. We argue that narratives of the Witches' Sabbat and UFO abductions share the same basic structure, common symbolism, and serve the same psychological needs of providing a coherent explanation for anomalous (ambiguous) experiences while simultaneously giving the experient a sense of freedom, release, and escape from the self. This pattern of similarities suggests the possibility that UFO abductions are a modern version of tales of flight to the Sabbat.

The Witches' Sabbat—the periodic gathering of Satan and his disciples, witches and warlocks, for the ceremonial renewal of their pacts, sacrifices and carnal knowledge—is central to understanding the history of European witchcraft (for an overview see Musgrave & Houran, submitted). Disputes as to whether the Sabbat was an illusion or a reality parallel the evolution of witchcraft and in the final analysis hit at the fundamental problem of the essence of witchcraft in the history of Christianity. Similar disputes are taking place today over a contemporary phenomenon, specifically the reality and meaning of world-wide reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and most especially reports of alleged abductions into "craft" (for pertinent commentaries see: Pritchard, Pritchard, Mack, Kasey, & Yapp, 1994; Appelle, 1995-1996; *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 7, 1996). Although UFO abductions have been discussed as being contemporary versions of a ubiquitous form of folklore—narratives of capture by supernatural beings (Bullard, 1989), we believe UFO abductions are most strongly connected to the myth of the Witches' Sabbat. The purpose of this paper, therefore, was to outline the case histories of flight and abduction to Witches' Sabbats and UFOs and to then compare the two types of stories for possible parallels and differences. We also speculated on the possible historical, social, and psychological factors underpinning these narratives wherever appropriate.

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Motifs Common to Witchcraft and UFO Lore

In reviewing the literature, three related motifs appear to be common to witchcraft and UFO lore:

The use of masks.—According to some investigators (e.g., Murray, 1921; Thompson, 1929), the devil/warlock of the Sabbat ritual was usually hidden behind a mask that represented primitive gods and animal spirits. UFO abductees, of varying reliability, have also reported that “masks” are worn by the abductors. With respect to the popular conceptualization of the “gray” extraterrestrial, i.e., pear-shaped head with large black eyes, some abductees claim that eyes seemingly move behind the large black expanse as though the large eyes were covering for the real eyes (personal communications, Harder, 1984; Bullard, 1998).

Dr. James Harder (personal communication, 1984) informed us that in many cases the abductees remember under hypnosis that the occupants were wearing masks and that they could only see the eyes behind the slits. The abductees do not remember this crucial fact during normal consciousness. Other times, however, abductees consciously remember mask-like coverings such as the Halloween-type masks reported by Whitney Strieber (1987) in his best-selling book, *Communion: A True Story*. Consequently, it is difficult to know if the use of masks is an underestimated or overestimated feature of UFO abduction experiences. Nevertheless, a variety of masks have been mentioned in the UFO lore, including a lens-like window (Creighton, 1969); helmets with dark plates across the eyes (Janosh, 1979), faceplates (Randles & Whetnall, 1981), or metallic helmets with eyeholes (Clark & Coleman, 1975), shields like welders wear (Druffel, 1980), oxygen masks (Druffel & Rogo, 1980; Granchi, 1983), a mask with a tube like an elephant’s trunk (Creighton, 1957), goggles (Anonymous, 1976) or visors (Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, 1982; Fowler, 1983), surgical masks (Collins, 1978a, 1978b), bandage wrappings (Clark, 1980b), transparent coverings over the faces (Macer-Story, 1980), overalls with holes for eyes and mouth (Granchi, 1984), ski masks with eyeholes—with the eyes themselves apparently moving behind a membrane (Druffel & Rogo, 1980), and even a reference in which the beings themselves had mask-like faces (Lorenzen & Lorenzen, 1977).

“Men in black” (or other “evil” color).—In witchcraft tradition, the devil and/or his attendants would sometimes visit potential converts dressed conservatively, usually black clothes and hats, and would behave in a cold and awkward manner that frightened anyone unfortunate enough to be in the neighborhood (Hughes, 1973; Randles, 1997). The UFO tradition also includes ominous visits by cold and socially awkward men, e.g., reportedly eat Jello with a fork, have to be shown how to open doors, dressed in conservative black suits and often driven in large black automobiles. The “MIB”

reportedly deliver overt or covert messages that the UFO investigators should desist in their UFO investigations or else terrible consequences (almost always unspecified) will follow (Clark, 1980a; Rojcewicz, 1987; Keith, 1997; Randles, 1997).

Flights/Teleportations.—Henry Lea (1957) documented a number of alleged incidents in which witches and strangers are encountered by “innocent” men, who then find themselves teleported to the Sabbat involuntarily. After uttering an oath to God, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary, the “innocents” find themselves stranded hundreds of miles from home. These stories have a modern parallel in UFO literature where individuals, or even entire families including children, have found themselves (and sometimes even the vehicle they were driving) hundreds or even thousands of miles from home after allegedly being taken aboard a UFO (Creighton, 1977). Many, but not all, UFO abductees report that they were “beamed” aboard the craft by a ray of light or floated into the craft after being touched or exposed to some instrument. In some cases, the UFO occupants first came to the percipients in a light beam. Once the witches or the involuntary abductees to the Sabbat or to the UFO reach the point of destination there also appear to be similarities in the physical rituals and cathartic episodes surrounding both encounters. In particular, both emphasize riding through the air, transportation to an exotic place, a ceremony on an “altar,” sexual undertones, and implicit rebellion against authority. These similarities appear to be more than coincidental.

We will concentrate on the third set of similarities, namely, those surrounding alleged flight or teleportation in the two myths. Attention will also be paid to some of the fundamental similarities that seem to exist in the meaning and social context of flight experiences. A basic assumption is that both kinds of episode fulfill similar psychological needs and make use of parallel symbols. In other words, we propose that UFO abduction narratives are a modern version of flights to the Sabbat.

Flight and Abduction to the Sabbat

By the beginning of the 10th century some isolated elements of the Witches’ Sabbat, such as the idea of nocturnal flight, sexual debauchery, and pacts with the devil, became significant (Russell, 1972; Zacharias, 1980). According to Robbins (1978, pp. 42-45) the classical Sabbat consisted of five distinguishable parts: (1) the assembly by foot, beast, or flight; (2) homage to Satan; (3) a banquet; (4) dancing and cavorting; and (5) sexual intercourse, yet this formal ritual of the Sabbat only took shape in the 14th and 15th centuries. Further, it was not until the 16th century that the Sabbat became a permanent feature of witchcraft. The concept of Sabbat is central to witchcraft and some authors (e.g., Sergeant, 1936/1974) have argued that

without the existence of the Sabbat and its attendant ceremonies, the evidence against witches was not very strong. For this reason the Inquisition placed particular importance on extracting admissions of attendance at the Sabbat.

Even at the height of belief in witchcraft, at least three trains of thought on the essence of witchcraft and of the Sabbat were argued violently in the literature (Baroja, 1964). First, the view expressed in the *Canon Episcopi* (c. 906 a.d.) that the Sabbat are rituals presided over by a pagan divinity—that it is a reversion to paganism and that reports of flight to the Sabbat are merely the reports of deluded women who believe their dreams to be real. Second, that the Sabbat is quite real, with Satan in attendance along with the pacts, sexual debauchery, and the like. Third, that the Sabbat does not and never did exist, but rather was the result of either judicial procedure, torture, or the result of imagination brought on by drugs such as those used in the flying ointment, or perhaps the result of mental deficiency.

Within these three broad classifications there can be wide variation and even a difference of opinion depending on circumstances with the same author. For instance the *Malleus Maleficarum* took a very common stance of arguing that some flights to Sabbat are bodily while others are imaginary (Kramer & Sprenger, 1486/1951). But the stories of flights to Sabbat, whether they are identified as real or imaginary, are quite similar. Many of these are summarized by Lea (1957) in his *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft* and in the absence of extensive original documents available for this study are a major source for actual case histories. From comments by Lea and other authors, it appears that the flight/abduction stories in fact originate from a handful of authors and that in few, if any, cases did the original authors actually investigate the flight stories—they merely were content to record hearsay.

In addition to the obligatory references to the thousands of patent confessions that include an avowal of having flown to the Sabbat, the following case histories of flight/abduction are documented in the literature available for this study.

(1) Johannes Nider, in his *Formicarius* written 1435-1437, wrote that his preceptor told him of a Dominican who found a village woman so demented that she imagined herself to fly by night with Diana. The Dominican, and a witness, spent the night by her side. She rubbed herself with the flying ointment while muttering spells and then fell asleep. When she awoke she claimed to have been with Diana again that night even though the witnesses saw she had not left the room (Lea, 1957).

(2) Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola, in his *Strix, sive de Ludificatione Daemonum* (1523), told a story of a priest of the Grisons who encountered a stranger as he was riding on horseback. The stranger asked the priest

if he would like to see something wonderful, and when the priest dismounted, he found himself suddenly carried through the air to a vast plain on the summit of a lofty mountain where a multitude were dancing and feasting. His guide asked him if he would adore "la Signora" like the rest, and offer her a gift. The priest, thinking her to be the Virgin Mary, knelt before her. All at once the spectacle disappeared, and he found himself alone. Climbing down from the mountain, he found himself to be hundreds of miles from home (Lea, 1957).

(3) Paulus Grillandi, in his *Tractatus de Sortilegiis* written in 1525, related a story that allegedly occurred about 20 years earlier to a peasant living in a village near Rome. He suspected that his wife was flying to the Sabbat. One night he saw her use the flying ointment and fly from the house. After beating her the next day, she confessed she had gone to the Sabbat and agreed to teach him how to go to Sabbat as well. On the next night they anointed themselves and were carried on goats to the Sabbat. She warned him while there, and in going and returning, not to make the sign of the cross or utter the name of God or of Christ. On arriving, she left him to pay homage to Satan, while he gaped in wonder at the multitude of men and women cavorting about. At the feast he found the food tasteless and continually asked for salt. When it was finally brought he uttered thanks to God, at which instant the whole assemblage disappeared and he found himself naked and shivering 100 miles from home. It took him 12 days to get back whereupon he then denounced his wife and some other women that he had recognized at the Sabbat. All finally confessed and were properly burnt (Lea, 1957)

(4) Again, Paulus Grillandi tells a story that happened two years earlier to a 16-yr.-old village girl. She had been seduced by a witch and was carried off to the Sabbat with a warning not to utter the name of God or Christ. She too made the mistake of praising Jesus and instantly everything disappeared. She was found in the field the next day. Later she repented and entered a Franciscan convent. The witch who had misled her was denounced and justice served, for she too was roasted (Lea, 1957).

(5) Jean Bodin, in his *De Magorum Daemonomania* written in 1579, repeated Grillandi's tale of the husband and wife who attend the Sabbat. Lea quoted Bodin as saying a similar case occurred recently in France. In addition, a case in Spoleto was reported in 1535, another related by Torquemada where the party had to travel three years to get home (Lea, 1957). Bodin (1580) also repeated the cases from Grillandi in his *De La Demonomanie des Sorciers*.

(6) Pierre de Lancre, in his *Tableau de l'Inconstance des mauvais Anges* published in 1613, claimed that witches are often transported to Newfoundland to hold the Sabbat (Lea, 1957, p. 1296). Judging from remarks by Lea

(1957) and McGowan (1977), de Lancre apparently includes a number of examples of flight to the Sabbat in this work.

(7) Reginal Scot (1584/1964, p. 60) quoted from Bodin, cited an alleged flight that occurred at Lyon. A noble Gentlewoman being in bed with a lover arose in the middle of the night, anointed herself with the flying ointment and then flew off. Her companion saw this and anointed himself with the same ointment. He then found himself instantly conveyed to Lorraine in the midst of an assembly of Witches. When he uttered the name of God, the whole assembly vanished and he found himself naked and alone. When he arrived back at Lyon, he denounced his lover as a witch. She was properly burnt; he apparently got off free. Unlike Bodin, Scot did not believe such tales to be based in historical fact.

(8) A number of secondary sources point out that the Swedish village of Mora, at the end of the 17th century, went through a panic. The children claimed that hundreds of them had been given flying ointment by the Devil and had gone to the Sabbat (Hueffer, 1908/1973).

(9) The *Records of Salem Witchcraft* contain a few references to flight to witches' meetings, but the details are sketchy (Sergeant, 1936/1974).

Flight and Abduction to UFOs

UFO reports are associated in popular culture with the idea of extraterrestrial life and visits by space people or space creatures of one form or another. Consistent with this idea, and highly controversial even among UFO devotees, are the thousands of reports that claim one or more occupants were observed to have been in, on, or near a "flying saucer" or UFO. Such cases are in fact not rare and have been reported from every continent. But UFO occupant cases are probably generated by different phenomena, and, according to at least one study (Musgrave, 1979), there appear to be different, but identifiable, patterns in the kinds of occupant cases that have been recorded. The same can also be said for "entity encounter experiences" in general (Houran, in press).

Most occupant cases are ephemeral and on face value appear to be accidental; often they are no more than mere shadows seen "through portholes" that are taken to be the faces of extraterrestrials. But whatever the sources of the phenomena may be, since the inception of the modern phase of UFO reports in the mid-1940s, there has been a significant subset of reports that claim extended contact with the pilots of the craft. The 1950s was a decade of contactees—people who claimed to have met and "spoken" orally or telepathically with beautiful, peaceful, space brothers and sisters (for an outline of some of the better known cases, see Gibbons, 1957). The contactees developed a small, but highly devoted, following that continues a quarter century later (Ellwood & Partin, 1988). It may be tempting to attribute con-

tactee and abductee experiences to psychopathology; however, psychological studies have not borne out this belief (Bloecher, Clamar, & Hopkins, 1985; Zimmer, 1985; Bartholomew, Basterfield, & Howard, 1991; Rodeghier, Goodpaster, & Blatterbauer, 1991; Ring, 1992; Spanos, Cross, Dickson, & Dubreuil, 1993; Don & Moura, 1997). Instead, it appears that those who claim UFO-related beliefs and experiences have propensities toward schizotypy (Parnell, 1988; Chequers, Stephen, & Diduca, 1997) and dissociation (Powers, 1994). Further, alleged abductees tend to endorse more unusual feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and to be more suspicious or distrustful, as well as creative and imaginative (Parnell, 1988; Nickell, 1996). As such, these types of individuals may be particularly susceptible to delusional thinking (Houran & Williams, 1998; Lange & Houran, 1998, 1999; Leonhard & Brugger, 1998). But the fact remains that in a number of significant cases, including one we will outline below, the distinction between contactee and abductee is sometimes fuzzy and artificial.

Similar to contactee's tales have been reports of humanoids often engaging in bizarre activities such as exchanging "space buckwheat cakes" for a glass of water, or small elfish looking critters dancing about their spacecraft. The odd behavior of some UFO occupants, and the apparent parallel with folklore tales of elves, fairies, ghosts, and religious visions (Clark & Coleman, 1975; Vallee, 1975; Rogo, 1977; Evans, 1984, 1987; Ellwood & Partin, 1988; Hansen, 1992; Randles, 1997) has suggested to some authors that UFO occupants are of the same universe as gnomes and fairies (Vallee, 1969; Keel, 1970; Sanarov, 1981; Craft, 1997). A still different kind of UFO report involves *forced* abduction into craft with the apparent intention of performing physical scientific or medical examinations of earth specimens, or in some cases, of engaging in sexual intercourse. And, such reports are the focus of our paper.

Modern UFO abduction reports are taken at face value by some investigators and are considered by them to be the key to proving that some UFO reports are in fact observations of extraterrestrial technology. Abduction reports have evolved from being an embarrassment to being a popular fad. To what extent this reflects the frustration of impatient investigators who wish to find the answers before their time expires is beyond the scope of this paper, but the result has been the publication of hundreds of cases involving alleged abductions. They come from every country, including eastern European countries. And they range in quality from pulp articles, such as a *National Enquirer* contribution entitled "Abducted by UFOs—4 Times," to detailed and lengthy studies by psychiatrists and scientists.

A sample of "typical" abduction cases is summarized below:

(1) On January 4, 1975 Carlos Alberto Diaz, a 28-yr.-old married man was returning to his home in suburb of Bahia Blanca, Argentina. He was

returning from a part-time job catering, and it was already 3:30 in the morning. As he walked through a railroad yard, he was momentarily blinded by a brilliant flash of light. At 8:05 a.m. that same morning Diaz was found lying about 30 meters from a major highway in Buenos Aires (about 785 kilometers south of Bahia Blanca). His valise with work clothes and the morning paper he had purchased in Bahia Blanca were beside him. He told a strange tale to the passing motorist who stopped because he thought Diaz had been struck by a car. The motorist did not believe Diaz. And, because of Diaz' condition he took him to a nearby hospital. Diaz' watch had stopped at 3:50 a.m. When he noticed that fact, he became convinced that what he remembered of the previous hours was true, and he had been aboard an aircraft of unknown origin and in the company of extraterrestrials.

For the next four days Diaz was confined to hospital and examined by no less than 46 doctors. He was also examined by federal police. His story was maintained through all examinations and questioning. He claimed that after he saw the flash of light he became frightened and wanted to run home but was unable to move—he was paralyzed. He then heard a humming sound like rushing air or wind and he was pulled off the ground about 3 meters before he fainted.

When he regained consciousness, he was inside a smooth bright sphere which appeared to be semitransparent plastic. He saw *no furniture*. He then noticed three creatures about 1.80 meters tall with small heads completely devoid of features—no ears, nose, mouth, or eyes. The creatures floated into the room. Their heads were mossy green in color. Their arms were almost straight and very flexible, and ended in stumps rather than hands.

When the creatures entered the sphere, they immediately began to pull tufts of hair from Diaz' head. He tried without success to resist. Soon after this ordeal, Diaz began to lose sight and then fainted, only to wake up by the side of the road in Buenos Aires. According to UFO investigators (including one of the examining physicians) Diaz did not fly (at least not by airplane) from Bahia Blanca to Buenos Aires, and it is impossible to drive a car between the two cities in so short a time (Lorenzen & Lorenzen, 1976).

(2) As a result of hundreds of articles and interviews, in addition to many books and at least one feature television movie, the best-known abduction case is that of Betty and Barney Hill. On the morning of September 19, 1961, the couple was driving home to Portsmouth, New Hampshire after a weekend holiday in Montreal. Shortly before midnight they noticed a bright starlike object in the sky which seemed unusual so they stopped the car several times to observe it through binoculars. The strange object came closer, and the couple got the impression they were looking at an illuminated flattened circular disk. The object then came around in front of the car and stopped in midair approximately 30 meters above the ground. The Hills

could see a row of windows through which a cold bluish-white fluorescent glow could be seen. Barney claimed to have observed from five to 11 separate figures watching him as he was watching them through the binoculars. The occupants were humanoid in appearance and were dressed in shiny black uniforms. As the object got closer, Barney panicked and jumped into the car and took off down the highway. Within 10 days after the sightings both Betty and Barney began to suffer from nightmares. Betty in particular dreamed that she and Barney were taken aboard the craft they had observed that morning. While aboard, the occupants performed physical examinations on both of them including taking samples of hair, skin, and fingernails.

Personal stress, including the nightmares, caused Betty and Barney to seek professional help. After being treated for over a year by a local physician for anxiety and stress apparently set off by the experience, the Hills began seeing a prominent Boston psychiatrist specializing in hypnotic therapy. Under independent hypnosis both Betty and Barney described being taken aboard an alien ship and having been given extensive physical examinations. After the examinations, Betty "spoke" with the leader who said they were on an exploratory mission, searching for other life forms and mapping this part of the galaxy. Both Betty and Barney were told they would not remember the incident, but the event apparently remained in their unconscious, if we are to believe their story (Fuller, 1966).

(3) On November 5, 1975, seven men were cutting down trees near the northern Arizona city of Heber. At 6:10 p.m. as they were driving home, one of them spotted a gold-coloured glow ahead of them. As they rounded a turn in the road they saw a structured object hovering approximately 5 meters above a clearing and less than 35 meters from them. Travis Walton, one of the passengers, asked the driver to stop the truck. He then got out and approached the object to get a better look. The object, which was described by the witnesses as like two pie pans stuck together, was making a "beeping" sound. As Walton stood in front of the group of men, they saw a blue-green light come from the bottom of the craft. The light seemed to lift Walton off the ground. At that point the driver panicked and sped away leaving Travis Walton alone. As the group of men looked back, they saw a light rise from the ground and streak to the northeast. Thinking it was the object they had just spotted close up, they returned to the clearing but could not find Walton.

Five days later, on November 10th, Travis Walton appeared again near the spot where he had last been seen by his companions. He was stunned and dazed, and only recalled an hour or two of his five-day ordeal. He claimed to have regained consciousness on a table surrounded by three strange creatures, less than 1.5 meters tall, very pale, with large domed heads, large eyes, small noses, mouths, and ears. All were dressed in tannish-

orange seamless jumpsuits. Walton struggled to his feet and started to fight off the creatures. They then fled the room, and Travis was able to leave the room and enter a curved corridor which led him to a circular room with a small chair with a "screen" on each arm. He began to play with some of the levers, when a "man" approximately 1.85 meters tall appeared at the door through which Travis had entered. Walton followed him into a large enclosure where three or four oval-shaped metallic objects were parked. They appeared to be similar to the object Walton and his comrades had spotted above the clearing. He was then led by the man into another room where there were other human-appearing occupants. They gestured to him to get up on the table. He again resisted but eventually they succeeded. The next thing Travis remembered he was lying on his stomach on the ground watching the curved, metallic hull of an aircraft taking off straight up (Barry, 1978; Walton, 1978).

(4) On October 15, 1957, Antonio Villas-Boas, an uneducated 23-yr.-old Brazilian farmer living near the town of Francisco de Sales was alone plowing the field with his tractor about 1 a.m. He saw a luminous egg shaped object come from the sky, hover near him, and then land nearby. As three metal legs emerged beneath the machine to support it, the lights and power to his tractor went dead. He jumped down from the tractor, but was grabbed by four helmeted occupants who dragged him up a ladder into the craft. He eventually was taken into a small room furnished only by a large couch covered with a thick gray material. The occupants, who were the same height as Villas-Boas (1.65 meters), then applied thick rubber tubes to his chin. The tubes led to a flask, and they extracted some blood. They left him alone for a while and he noticed a number of small metallic tubes in a wall which were emitting a gray smoke that disappeared.

He was then forcibly stripped naked and sponged with a liquid. Then a nude "woman" entered the room. Villas-Boas described her as much more beautiful than any woman he had ever known before. The door closed, leaving them alone, and after the woman began embracing and rubbing against Villas-Boas, he enjoyed intercourse with her. Before leaving, the woman pointed to her stomach, then to Villas-Boas and then toward the sky. He took it to be a reference to their future infant. He was then given back his clothes and given a guided tour of the craft. After about four hours he left the craft and watched it take off out of sight. Later he was examined by physicians and psychiatrists, but Villas-Boas remained firm in his story. Physical marks consistent with his story were found on his body (Fontes & Martins, 1976).

Comparisons and Parallel Problems

Based on the case histories documented by Bodin, as well as those of

Grillandi and de Lancre (via Lea), flights to Sabbat may be arbitrarily divided into at least three categories: (1) the apparently voluntary and ardent flight of witches (normally women) to Sabbat—complete with the ritual of flying ointment, magic incantations, etc.; (2) the voluntary or involuntary flight to Sabbat by the companion or relative, e.g., daughter, of a witch. Judging by the case histories examined for this paper, this would more often than not involve a male “victim” seduced by a woman; and (3) the involuntary flight by a traveler (usually male) after confronting a stranger. Story lines within the three categories sometimes overlap (for instance, the abandonment some distance from home), but the degree of culpability ranges from avid participation in Category 1 to “innocent” victimization in Category 3.

If contactee cases are included under the rubric of flights/abductions to UFOs,² these modern day travels can also be broken into three arbitrary categories: (1) the contactee who voluntarily and consciously communicates with space people aboard their craft (flying saucers) and who learns special and secret wisdom from them; (2) the forced abductions, sometimes unconscious, into UFO for sexual purposes; and (3) the forced abduction, usually unconscious, into a UFO for physical examination.³ Frequently the experience only comes to consciousness after nightmares or hypnotic regressions. In more than one incident the notion that anything beyond a dream experience was involved was suggested and accepted by the eager investigator or reporter who made the case public.

While there are differences in detail, e.g., flight on a beast or broomstick versus flight in a UFO; ceremonies in the open versus ceremonies inside a “spacecraft,” between tales of flight and abduction to Sabbat and tales of contact and abduction to UFOs, these differences are far less than the variations between individual Sabbat or individual UFO case histories. In both we have at one extreme the voluntary trip to another world (the magical world of the witches with their own laws or nature or the magical world of the space people with their otherworldly science and technology). At the other extreme the forced abduction to the same (or similar) world for spiritual or physical seduction or violation. Both categories include in their literary traditions a spectrum of personal involvement; both include carnal

²UFOlogists typically make a clear distinction between contactee, i.e., charlatan, cases and abduction, i.e., victim, cases. But, as the subsequent activities of the most famous abductees have shown, this distinction may ultimately be illusory. Schwarz (1977a, 1977b, 1978) illustrated in his three articles “Talks with Betty Hill” that Betty now displays many of the characteristics normally associated with contactees, such as the professed ability to see UFOs regularly and the leadership of a following devoted to establishing contact with the “space brothers and sisters.”

³While these examinations may on the surface resemble scientific/medical procedures, they have sexual undertones as well (see Newman & Baumeister, 1996). For example, in private conversation with Betty Hill in 1976 she said that Barney was yelling and fighting because the UFO occupants were examining his genitals. Betty was told, when these occupants painfully inserted a cold needle into her “stomach,” that it was a “pregnancy test.”

knowledge at one level or another; and both include tales of teleportations to strange worlds and abandonment at remote far away places. Even many details, such as the ritual of incense and sponging before sexual intercourse reported by Villas-Boas, appear to parallel rituals normally associated with the Sabbat.

Both the UFO and Sabbat lore describe willing and unwilling flights and abductions. It is only possible to conjecture why almost all documented voluntary flights to Sabbat were by female witches, and why "involuntary" flights were primarily by men. There are, of course, the reasons expressed in the *Malleus Maleficarum* and similar documents and accepted by almost all, that women are the weaker sex and are more susceptible to Satan; and man, almost by definition, must have been seduced by a woman into witchcraft or into a flight to the Sabbat. But documentary evidence of this sort still leaves open the question of how much the flight experience was in fact a female versus a male experience. Even the documentary evidence available suggests that many such experiences by men were covered up or were likely to be attributed to a female witch who was the major focus of attention. As historical, political, and religious phenomena, the preponderance of female flights has been documented. But the distribution by sex of modern day flights suggests that far more men experienced flight to Sabbat than the tales would suggest. Modern day contactees are more frequently men, and contemporary abductions seem to be fairly equally distributed among males and females.

Both UFO and witchcraft abductions and flight have been reported by children as well as by adults. Recent investigations of alleged abduction in UFOs have included whole families who only recall the experience after independent hypnotic regression (Harder, personal communication, 1984). Apparently UFO and Sabbat flights (Russell, 1972) have been experienced by all classes of people, and it has been pointed out that experiences of "wonder tales" are more common than is usually recognized (Jung, 1979). In fact, recent surveys indicate that experiences of the paranormal are universal (Hay & Morisy, 1978; Haraldsson, 1985; Bigelow Holding Corporation, 1992; Ross & Joshi, 1992). The depth and scope of such experiences would suggest that modern day abduction cases are far more frequent than the published accounts would suggest (a conclusion shared by anyone who has done field work) and further that the common pool of imagination/psychical energy generating such experiences may be more or less common today than it was in the time of the Sabbat. This is just as true if we wish to accept the archetypal interpretations of Jung (1975) or more quantitative interpretations of reported otherworldly experiences including flights to Sabbat or within UFOs.

Tales of flight to the Sabbat and within UFOs suggest a common psychical dimension. In addition, both traditions, and the witchcraft or UFO

corpus of which they are a part, have been perceived as a threat to established authority, to religious orthodoxy in the case of witchcraft, and to scientific orthodoxy in the case of UFOlogy. They have been perceived as heresies by both the percipients or practitioners and by the broader society. Whether one believes Sabbats or UFOs have real physical existence or not, the experience of either if known publicly involves potential social and political consequences. Today's social stigma are tame compared to the stake, but they are no less real.

In both the Sabbat and UFO literature the popular notions of the nature of the phenomenon and its publicity are closely related to the methods and personalities of the investigators or interrogators who have chosen to take an interest. Just as it has been argued by scholars such as Robbins (1978) that the whole Sabbat phenomenon was created by the methods of interrogation, e.g., leading questions, torture, etc., it has been argued (e.g., Newman & Baumeister, 1996) that the UFO abduction phenomenon is largely, if not entirely, an invention created by the methods of investigation, e.g., naive literal acceptance of stories that come out of hypnotic regressions often conducted by amateurs who use leading questions.⁴

Even the categories of explanations of the two phenomena have an interesting parallel. Both have been argued to be real physical events that prove the reality of a wider phenomenon (witchcraft as Satan's handicraft/UFOs as extraterrestrial spacecraft); both have been argued as proof of "other worlds" which are themselves real; both have been argued to be manifestations of some social, psychological, or medical deficiency (not to speak of

⁴Lawson (1977) has pointed out that it is difficult if not impossible to separate "real" abduction stories from "imaginary" abduction stories implanted by suggestion. Under hypnosis the stories and emotions are similar. Moreover, it has been shown by Meheust (1978) that many alleged encounters with extraterrestrial beings replicate in detail incidents which can be found in science fiction stories, often from another country and another era. These comments are directly related to the research on eyewitness testimony. For example, it has long been known that memories are not carbon copies of past experiences. Rather, they are constructed at the time of recall (Loftus, 1980; Loftus & Loftus, 1980). Accordingly, we reconstruct our memory of events from fragments of information and therefore we can easily, although unwittingly, revise our memories to suit our current knowledge. For example, Ross, McFarland, and Fletcher (1981) exposed some university students to a message that emphasized the importance of tooth-brushing. Later, in a supposedly different experiment, these students recalled brushing their teeth more often during the preceding two weeks than did other students who had not heard the message. This is similar to the experimental procedure popularized by Roediger and McDermott (1995) in which people learn a list of words that are all semantically related to a particular word that is never given. For example, the words "glass," "shutters," "drapes," "pane," and "sill" are all related to window, but the word "window" itself is not included in the list. Yet, when the same people are tested again later, many are quite confident that they saw the word "window" in the list. Moreover, warning people about this effect apparently does nothing to extinguish it, even if people are also asked to recall the list of words immediately after first learning it (McDermott & Roediger, 1998). Thus, if during a dissociative state or imaginal experience a person experiences a host of stimuli that are associated with encounters with anomalous beings—sensed presence, pounding heart in naturalistic settings, visual or auditory hallucinations—the experient might later *remember* perceiving more and different incidents than was the case.

outright story telling). This in addition to the obvious fact that just as modern tales of UFO abductions are influenced by and have an influence on popular science fiction notions of the nature and behavior of extraterrestrials (Kottmeyer, 1994; Sparks, Sparks, & Gray, 1995; Blackmore, 1998), the theatrical devils of the medieval stage influenced popular notions of how devils behave (Kieckhefer, 1976).

Flights and abductions to Sabbat and UFOs have been interpreted as sleep-related episodes, and they have been examined in the light of the wider issue of flying dreams (either with or without the aspect of sleep paralysis: for in-depth discussions see Hufford, 1982; Davies, 1996-1997; Blackmore, 1998; Cheyne, Rueffer, & Newby-Clark, 1999; Randle, Estes, & Cone, 1999). Dreams of flying are common and apparently ancient. The Babylonians had an elaborate system of interpreting flying dreams (de Becker, 1968); for instance, if in his flying dream a man rose and took to flight, it meant that he was to be liberated from poverty, unhappiness, or slavery, depending on his present circumstances. Eliade (1959), in particular, has pointed out that in the majority of archaic religions, flight signifies access to a superhuman mode of being (God, magician, or spirit). Modern interpretations of the flight dream in the psychoanalytic mold have emphasized the organic and sexual roots of such dreams. Many of the reports of flight from the Sabbat and UFO abduction literatures parallel flying dream accounts and appear to serve the same strivings for freedom and release.⁵ In both, according to this kind of interpretation a conscious or more likely unconscious fantasy or need is being worked out, or struggled with as it emerges into consciousness. In the case of witchcraft the symbols used center around the myth and reality of the Sabbat; in the case of UFO abductions the symbols center around the myth and reality of extraterrestrial life. In both a flight has been taken to another world with its own secret and forbidden knowledge—a knowledge that is both a threat to the established order and a symbol of contact with “something far greater than oneself” (Peters, 1977, 1979; Bartholomew, 1991).

It is almost a truism that all dreams have social referents (Ullman, 1973; Houran, 1998). These psychic tags have evolved and changed as the dreamers have changed from the age of witches to the age of space exploration; but the dream stuff is working in the same matrix, whether it be purely a

⁵Hansen (1901/1963) argued that the idea of mystical raptus or ecstasy is a source of the phenomenon of witches' flight. Russell (1972), in his *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, agreed that this is an aspect of the phenomenon but noted that it is incomplete as an explanation. However, many researchers believe there is a physiological source for these experiences that is independent of cultural influences (see, e.g., Hufford, 1982). Persinger emphasized temporal lobe stimulation as the likely source for “entity encounter experiences” and related phenomena and has published extensive evidence in support of his hypothesis (e.g., 1976, 1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1992, 1993), although we note criticisms by Rutkowski (1984).

world of imagination or a world that touches on extrasensory perceptions (Tolaas, 1976). For instance, the popular *physical* conceptualization of extraterrestrials, which has generally shown a bias towards humanoid forms (Malmstrom & Coffman, 1979), has changed over time (Huyghe, 1996; Nickell, 1997). These observations are consistent with the finding that experiences involving supernatural "beings" are largely shaped by the sociocultural context in which they occur (Evans, 1984, 1987; Lange & Houran, 1996; Lange, Houran, Harte, & Havens, 1996; Houran & Lange, 1997; Houran, Lange, & Crist-Houran, 1997).

DISCUSSION

As we outlined above, explanations of both UFO and Sabbat abductions and flights have followed three major trends: (1) that these are real physical events; (2) that they are psychical and perhaps windows to other worlds and perceptions; and (3) that they are no more than manifestations of organic, psychological, or social deficiencies. If the two lores, in fact, arise out of the same matrix of social, psychological, and religious needs, the stories and the phenomenon these stories represent may shed light on each other. It suggests that the attempt on the part of some contemporary UFO investigators to prove the physical reality of the UFO phenomena by means of abduction cases will prove fruitless and that more can be gained by looking at historical precedents such as the Sabbat literature. It also suggests that modern day UFO abduction cases can be used as insights into the psychology and physiology of the witches and "innocents" who flew to Sabbat. Contemporary UFO cases have the obvious advantage of percipients that are here today and may be available for in-depth study.

For example, there has recently been empirical evidence for Evans' (1984, 1987) contention that contacts with extraterrestrials may be just one expression of a singular, although dynamic, core experience known as an "entity encounter." In particular, Houran and Thalbourne (in press) found that experiencers do not have isolated contacts with extraterrestrials but rather report encounters with a variety of different supernatural beings and forces, e.g., angels, the dead, UFOs, and haunting/poltergeist phenomena. Moreover, this same study showed that entity encounter experiences are correlated with paranormal beliefs that specifically reflect interpersonal control as well as a person's degree of *transliminality* ("a hypothesized tendency for psychological material to cross thresholds into or out of consciousness" (Thalbourne & Houran, 2000)). These findings suggest the possibility of an encounter-prone personality trait that manifests in times of psychological need. And consistent with our suggested link between flying dreams and tales of flight and abduction, further analysis of Thalbourne and Houran's data (2000) indicated that highly transliminal people (both in Australia and

the USA) are more inclined to report flying dreams ($r = .45$, $n = 138$, $p < .001$; $r = .26$, $n = 135$, $p = .003$, respectively, two-tailed).

Whether we choose to re-examine historical documents around witchcraft and the Sabbat in the light of findings from the clinical and empathic study of UFO abductees living today, or whether we choose to interpret UFO abductees in light of the history of the Sabbat, it appears that the popular tales of both traditions share many themes and share many motivating factors. It suggests that modern UFO abductions are in some sense no more than the Sabbat abduction dressed up with contemporary props. Accordingly, these narratives draw upon the same symbolism and may serve the same purpose of providing an interpretation for anomalous (ambiguous) sensory, imaginal, or dissociative experiences while simultaneously giving the experient a sense of freedom, release, and escape from the self.

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