

Review

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Source: *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2002), pp. 216-217

Published by: [Penn State University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20718440>

Accessed: 27-10-2015 14:59 UTC

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hodge-podge of print types, mixed highlighting and white print on black pages was truly disturbing. Marshall McLuhan would have said that this is an example of the medium destroying the message. This book may be helpful for those whose goal is becoming a part of a "new category of public visual intellectuals" (111). But this old fashioned reviewer would rather review a book that deals with what the title promises but does not deliver.

Calvin Redekop

James R. Lewis. *UFOs and Popular Culture, An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Myth.*

Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000. xl + 393 pp. \$75.00.

THIS BOOK by James R. Lewis is an encyclopedia with over 400 entries arranged alphabetically from A to Z, but it is not a comprehensive encyclopedia about UFOs. For example, there is no mention in either the encyclopedia or the chronology that appears in the appendix of the Shag Harbour incident of 1967 or of the Socorro, New Mexico, landing in 1964, an incident long prominent in UFO lore. If there will be a complaint from the reader about this book, it will be that it does not give enough hard information about UFOs. This volume cannot begin to compare, as an encyclopedia about UFO phenomena, with Jerome Clark's two-volume *The UFO Encyclopedia: The Phenomena from the Beginning* (2nd ed., 1998). Clark, in fact, contributes many of the substantive entries on UFOs that appear in the encyclopedia by Lewis.

However, the encyclopedia by Lewis actually is not intended to be encyclopedic about UFOs. Careful examination of the title should have forewarned the reader—*UFOs and Popular Culture, An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Myth*. The foreword by Thomas E. Bullard is titled "UFOs—Folklore of the Space Age." The author's introduction, a broad overview of UFOs in popular culture, gives considerable attention to the religious or New Age aspect of UFOs. Indeed, when James R. Lewis asks "Why another UFO encyclopedia?" and then answers his own question, we can see what he is about: "I concluded there really was room for a new, up-to-date treatment of the subject—one that would focus on so-called soft ufology, namely, UFO religions, folklore, mythology and the like. . . . Although ufological purists may object, most readers will be pleased with the result of this approach."

Lewis has written similar encyclopedias on new religions, cults, Wicca and astrology. *UFOs and Popular Culture* allows Lewis to relate what he knows about those subjects to UFO phenomena. Persons other than Lewis contributed many of the longer entries that are directly about UFO phenomena. The contributions by Lewis, on the other hand, tend to relate or compare non-UFO subjects to UFO phenomena. For example, there are entries in the encyclopedia that explain near death experiences, astral projection, Bigfoot, theosophy, pyramids, automatic writing, archetypes, channeling and angels, to mention just a few. Interestingly, there is a picture of Stonehenge on the cover of the book but no entry for Stonehenge in the book.

The volume of material also is expanded by a lot of entries describing movies about UFOs or space adventure. Of the 20 entries under the letter "T," twelve of them are movies. The author states in his introduction, "Because the human imagination's response to the UFO phenomenon is at least as important as the question of what UFOs 'really' are, extensive space has been devoted to examining how UFOs and aliens are represented in the medium of film." However, most of the movie

entries are merely short synopses of plots. For example, one entry consists of two sentences summarizing the plot of "The Three Stooges in Orbit." Entries like this one, and there are many, simply add to the length of the book without contributing much substance. I counted 53 entries just from "A" to "F" that summarized movie plots. A better approach would have been to focus on a handful of important movies or have a single entry about UFOs in movies that discusses common themes. As a reader, I was neither edified nor entertained by reading plot summaries of "Cone-heads" and "The Cat from Outer Space."

Some entries, such as the one about narratives composed by colonial New England Puritans who had been captured by Indians, seem a bit of a stretch for a UFO encyclopedia. The author says the Puritan narratives demonstrate an American proclivity to find "hostage" tales exciting, making it "almost inevitable" that alien abduction tales would originate in America centuries later. This seems an overstatement without evidence that other cultures have less literary interest in such stories.

The encyclopedia has four appendixes. The latter two consist of lists of UFO organizations, periodicals and non-print resources. However, the first two are substantive and add to the value of the book. In one, Lewis has created a chronology of UFO phenomena beginning in 1837. Though the chronology is not complete, it is interesting to read reported descriptions of UFO phenomena in a time context. The second appendix consists of documents from the Heaven's Gate cult preceded by a discussion of the Heaven's Gate movement. Lewis classifies it as a New Age cult. He states that there is a "marked tendency of the New Age movement to portray ufo-nauts as spiritual beings" and that the notion of "walk-ins" (aliens who enter and use the bodies of earthlings) is "widely accepted." In the view of Lewis, the anomalous component in Heaven's Gate was suicide, not UFOs.

The foreword and introduction of *UFOs and Popular Culture* create a perspective removed from the immediacy of the alleged facts about UFO incidents, identifying underlying themes that arguably thread their way through UFO phenomena. Read from this perspective, juxtaposition of a hodgepodge of material indirectly linked illustrates, in a non-linear way, those themes, suggesting that a broad range of phenomena, religion, folklore and art share an origin in like inchoate impulses tugging at the imagination. How UFO phenomena are real (i.e., hallucinations, psychic events, or physical events) is less important, in this book, than the underlying ideas and archetypes that run through UFO events, stories and films.

It is a misnomer to call this book an encyclopedia. It is more like a collage illustrating a broad thesis about the human imagination. As such, my criticism regarding too many movie entries may be nullified by poetic license. A similar book, *The Encyclopedia of Alien Encounters*, by Alan Baker (2000), has many of the same types of entries as *UFOs and Popular Culture* but differs in two ways. First, Baker's book has more of what UFO enthusiasts would consider "hard" information than appears in *UFOs and Popular Culture*. But the introductory material in *UFOs and Popular Culture* is both more in depth and does a better job of creating a folkloric or literary perspective for contemplating UFO phenomena.

UFOs and Popular Culture is less about UFOs than about the human imagination. As stated by Bullard in the forward, "whether UFOs crumble into a collection of conventional occurrences or exist as an independent phenomenon, no one can hope to study UFOs without recognizing the role of human beliefs and concerns in UFO lore."

Mike Wilson