science can be opened up to a colorful exploration of consciousness and the ultimate nature of reality." I recommend this book highly. The author does not claim to know the final answers, but he has formulated the questions clearly enough. I suspect Diogenes could rest easily in Professor Baruss' classroom.

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Alien Abductions: Creating a Modern Phenomenon by Terry Matheson. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998. 317 pp. $26.95, (c). ISBN 1-57392-244-7.

The UFO rumor, craze, myth, or narrative fad has taken a fresh lease on life in the last couple of decades. Perhaps its biggest boost came in 1988 with a vast-eyed neotonized grey gazing out from hundreds of thousands of paperback covers of *Communion,* horror writer Whitley Strieber's purportedly true story of alien abduction. It had already entered mass culture in a big way with Spielberg's 1977 *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and is now firmly entrenched via the *X-Files* and the *National Enquirer.* What's going on? Are aliens really abducting and anally probing or fetus-harvesting thousands of reluctant people, perhaps for their entire lifetime and even beyond death into endless hybrid rebirths? That is a less interesting question for Terry Matheson, English professor at the University of Saskatchewan, than the puzzle of this narrative's immense popularity in a culture ostensibly shaped by rational bureaucratic and scientific canons. Professor Matheson's enjoyable, plainly written study proposes that the UFO narrative gains its force from its adoption as a myth, an organizing structure that (borrowing from Northrop Frye, Roland Barthes, and other mythologists) blends dream and ritual to "reflect a culture's preoccupations and concerns as well as the things it fears," ordering and structuring (although hardly *explaining)* "certain aspects of the world that would otherwise remain unintelligible or objects of dread" (p. 285). Some of these elements are age-old—the nature of cosmic, social, and interpersonal forces often allegorized in astrological or sacred doctrines—while others are typical precisely of our technological and allegedly rational epoch.

Ancient Greeks figured powerful ambiguities of lust, war, and political power in such mythologized tales as Leda's rape by Zeus and her subsequent triple impregnation with twins, Castor and Pollux, and the Helen fated to ruin two cultures in protracted battle. Today, Matheson argues, we find in the bleak, emotionless, and faceless UFO aliens a strikingly vivid figuration of late twentieth century postindustrial life at its worst; but also at its darkly numinous,

with technology's ceaseless parade of wonders and medical promises, we find its ambiguous offer that we might soon transcend human limitations.

Matheson's approach is historical (technically, diachronic), tracing the slow waxing and waning of subordinate elements in this developing mythos (a narrative form often regarded as timeless or synchronic). While he claims to bracket the reality of UFO abductions, attending solely to the narrative or semiotic codes and forces in play, this is disingenuous. The book is published, after all, by Prometheus, notable for its sturdy inquisitorial list of texts by people friendly to CSICOP and other ardent skeptical organizations. His method is known in literary studies as *close reading:* In a forensic way, he examines the claims and descriptions in several notable books by and about abductees, testing them for consistency, plausibility, sequential influence, and their rhetorical design and devices.

A brief introduction to the nature of narrative draws on some technical work from the 1980s and earlier by narratologists and morphologists. Written testimony is not a clear windowpane through which we can see the truth of reported events. Authors help form and reshape the tale they tell. Even in legal narrative, the courtroom "construction of truth" is "primarily a matter of the *overall* narrative plausibility" (p. 37), the case as a whole rather than the details. Still, he notes, realistic details help, and it is noteworthy how many get inserted later into abduction narratives as authors tidy the blurts and scraps or summarize floods of verbal and pictorial testimony. Avowals of integrity and probity are frequently used to fill the void left by the inevitable absence of hard or compelling evidence, so such books usually begin with "an introduction or preface written by a presumably objective third party who often possesses impressive academic credentials" (p. 38). Such strategies are not invoked to deceive but are part of the protocols and practice of writing and reading, which impose certain "resemblances...from account to account [that] may say more about the nature of a realistic narrative's inner logic" (p. 39) than speak to their true content. All this is compelling, yet Matheson's skeptical presumptions can lead him astray. Citing a certain blatant inconsistency in John Fuller's *The Interrupted Journey*, he remarks: "Because Fuller makes no attempt to resolve this, the Hills' credibility is bound to suffer" (p. 53). Yet it did not do so, on that basis at least, which is a surprising fact that Matheson's methods do not quite resolve.

His investigation proper launches from that key 1966 text, which dealt with the celebrated case using hypnosis, in the early 1960s, to unpack (or perhaps instill) the terrifying Ur-abduction reports of Betty and Barney Hill. In the nearly four decades since, its core story has gathered fresh elements, dropped others, strengthened that early reliance on hypnosis while abandoning the stuffy requirement that trained specialists should do the honors, and in general has followed a course convincingly seen as the elaboration of a living myth.

Matheson takes us through consecutive versions from Raymond Fowler (Betty Andreasson's abduction and space tour, replete with fundamentalist im-

agery and glossolalia appropriate to her Christian faith—and Fowler's own abduction, belatedly realized) to Travis Walton's self-authored testimony, Ann Druffel and D. Scott Rogo's treatment of several gay women who oddly enough were spared the usual phallic probing, the vatic arrival of Budd Hopkins with his menacing extraterrestrial aliens, and Strieber with his even more terrifying occult shapeshifters, Ray Fowler again with four men in a boat whose drawings and stories do not especially resemble each other, despite the extensive interpretative zeal and leading questions of their interrogator, concluding with the arrival of the big guns from academia, historian Dr. David Jacobs and Harvard psychiatrist Professor John Mack.

Matheson adopts an annoying tic in these analytic recountings: Often, sentences tell us that "many readers may be inclined to…" (p. 86), "some readers may conclude that…" (p. 117), "many readers will emerge from this section having concluded…" (p. 208), and on and on. This is exactly the kind of narrative bullying Matheson discerns so frequently in the abduction documents. I found myself wondering whether the first draft was a straightforward skeptical demolition of these often woolly, dreamlike, perverse, and inconsistent narratives, lightly rejigged with slightly old-fashioned narratological gadgetry in order to gain a publishing niche.

Professor Matheson's account is persuasive, as far as it goes. According to structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, myth is an ideational and affective ensemble of stories that articulates schemata of expected behaviors while specifying and defusing its culture's antinomies or internal contradictions. Its aim is the coercive institution of order, regularity, and harmony—even if those ends are met, at times, through controlled ritual passages into frenzy, carnival, and hysteria. This is the type of analysis adverted to in the book, although rarely attempted in any subtlety. Occasional references to Thomas Bullard's 1982 Ph.D. thesis, the only work I know of other than Jacques Vallee's to look closely into the folkloric and mythological components of the emerging mythos, make one hunger for more detailed analytics—a far more exact semiotic unmasking of the codes at work, rather than vague if plausible generalizations about the impact of science fiction iconography on vulnerable people at the ends of their twentieth century tethers.

Structuralism, of course, is now out of fashion, replaced in the humanities by variants of critical theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and discourse theory—approaches that emphasize a shimmering uncertainty where earlier models sought a reliable if abstract binary algebra. Even so, like Lévi-Strauss's myths and Jung's archaic dreams risen from a postulated collective unconscious, discourses are held by contemporary literary theory to possess an eerie autonomy, indeed a preeminence over any thought or intention that one might suppose lies behind the utterances they "enable." Like cosmic radiation, discourses *traverse* the fragmented subject. Meanwhile, cognitive and experimental neurosciences offer similar accounts, replacing old folk images of a unified self with modular brains and multiple intelligences. Consciousness, individual and collective, is prey to memes, an inward ecology of

mental viruses that might indeed in their totality *constitute* the parliament of the self. On this view, a myth might be a kind of commensal package of memes, a roaming mental genome that infests us even as we learn some local patois and hear or speak its latest modish utterances.

Can hermeneutic, narratological, semiotic, or discursive analyses take us much farther than Matheson manages in his intriguing but frustrating book? He provides a telling critique of the major texts in the abduction industry, but he does not go very deep or venture far from the books under consideration. There is no discussion of the murky undergrowth that preceded and paralleled the invasion of the grey gynecologists: the delicious semi-occult contortions of John Keel (especially) and Brad Steiger, let alone the subterranean foliations and filiations of mind cults and more reputable marginal belief systems: the Heaven's Gate dupes, Scientology with its space opera theogony, Theosophy and its Ascended Masters, all the charmingly crackpot scholarship that Desmond Leslie assembled in the 1950s in *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. The vimanas of ancient Atlantis and Mu might not seem direct ancestors of John Mack's aporias, half in this world and half beyond it, but I scent a narrative trail.

And there remain endless apertures for an inventive reader of these accounts. Andreasson's friendly ufonauts passed along *faux* explanations Matheson finds 'unedifying,' cast in "pseudoscientific language" (p. 198). This is so, but consider the following: the hybrid-engineering aliens must "put their 'protoplasma' in the 'nucleus of the fetus and the paragenetic,'" and Betty mentions "balancing 'the oscillating telemeter wheels'" (ibid), although this latter task apparently relates to their propulsion or guidance systems. But Betty simply might have been confused; in the last two years, biologists have found they can significantly extend the lifespan of *in vitro* human fibroblasts by inserting into the nucleus a genetic package that codes for the recently discovered enzyme telomerase. That prompts the chromosomes to repair their ever-shortening telomeres (key to their replicative capacity), which very recently were found to form a wheel or loop at the ends of DNA strands. Surely that is not what the aliens were telling Betty, but I would not be surprised if the evolving mythos incorporates such a reading with a cry of recognition.

This kind of urban myth is so charming, so B-movie sci-fi, that for decades I have gobbled down the revelations of Adamski, Mack, Jacobs, C. D. B. Bryan (that upmarket journalist). I wallowed in Whitley Strieber and his creepy, profitable concoctions or perhaps psychodramas and laughed my head off at Jim Schnabel's splendid travelogue among the beamed-up, *Dark White*. Somewhere in there, a curious prickle ran down my spine. I started making lists, drawn from these books, of the signs and symptoms of alien abduction. I recalled the primary school near Monash University, where a whole class and the teacher witnessed a close encounter of the third kind, just a kilometer or two from where I was studying in April 1966. I glanced back through my own science fiction novels and, one after another, out popped virtually the entire checklist: the investigation and probing on the floating slab, the wafted transi-

tion through a wall in a bubble, the mysterious mutant fetus, the transferred embryo, the creatures suspended in tubes, the occlusions of memory, the great-eyed animals with cold voices, the prophecies of doom or transformation, *etc*.

I am not about to spring any unseemly revelations, leap from the UFO closet. But it did focus my amazed attention on the ubiquity of these narrative elements, the odd way in which they seem to have seeped into our dreams and our unconscious (or out of it), long before they were written in fat lurid paperbacks or dramatized for network television and Spielberg movies. I do not know their source, and nobody else does either.

Matheson is surely correct: The abduction mythos *is* a culturally created phenomenon or perhaps a spontaneously emergent one, catching in its slowly shifting narratives the changing pressures, fears, and hopes of turn-of-millennium technological societies. I hope other scholars, drawing on more recent techniques and perspectives, soon open out the trail he has broken.

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At the Threshold by Charles F. Emmons. Mill Spring, NC: Wild Flower Press, 1997. xi + 268 pp.

Skeptics unfamiliar with the field often dismiss the UFO phenomenon with something like, "If it were true, then surely science would recognize it by now." And even for people sympathetic to ufology, the lack of mainstream acceptance is something of a puzzle. Surely, given the reported size of alien craft and the frequency of sightings, one would expect overwhelming evidence despite institutional resistance.

At the Threshold goes a long way toward resolving this puzzle. Author Charles Emmons, a professor of sociology at Gettysburg College, adopts primarily a sociological perspective—but not to explain away the UFO phenomenon as myth and folklore. Instead, *At the Threshold* examines the social mechanisms through which orthodox opinion has come to reject UFOs and through which ufology has become a deviant field. It also surveys the spectrum of opinion—among scientists, skeptics, and believers—regarding UFOs and explores some of the challenges UFOs pose to science, both as a social institution and as a method of understanding reality.

Indeed, there is much explaining to be done. Emmons overviews the entire spectrum of UFO phenomena—from sightings, to physical evidence, to abductions, to channeling and other associated paranormal phenomena, making it clear that there is no facile, obvious means to explain away any category of UFO events. In discussing false-memory syndrome, for instance, Emmons discusses the precautions that hypnotherapists use to test for suggestibility and