

of religious movements its members tend to seek knowledge and meaning for wider horizons than science presently is able (or willing) to provide.

Although not geared to a popular audience, this book will appeal to intelligent laymen who are comfortable with some scientific and philosophical concepts and terminology. They will find it to be a very rewarding, insightful, persuasive, and thoroughly documented book. This reviewer can think of no other book on the UFO subject that is at all similar to this one. It is in many respects a unique contribution to understanding of the UFO phenomenon, its proponents and detractors.

A final note: the actual text is only 178 pages, supplemented by 63 pages of chapter notes and a 43-page bibliography, both testimonials to the author's scholarship. Additionally, there is a thorough and useful 9-page index.

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Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live by Bill Ellis. Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2001. 291 pp., \$38.00. ISBN 1-57806-325-6.

The production quality could have been better (my copy annoyingly had uneven and rough-edged pages), but I loved and highly recommend this book, which was authored by a respected authority on the subject of folklore and legends. Bill Ellis is an associate professor of English and American Studies at Pennsylvania State University, Hazleton campus. Throughout this work Ellis examines our cultural history through narrative, and his insights suggest how to continue to examine the role of legend in society. His research suggests that legends—old and new—are not static and independent from everyday life. Rather, Ellis points out that “traditional narratives exist not simply as verbal texts . . . they are also maps for action, often drastic action” (p. 235). Accordingly, legends motivate *ostention*, i.e., in essence the premise that narratives become action. The outcomes can be benign (playful visits to “haunted houses”) or malevolent (horrifying threats of violence), but Ellis argues that the tendency of people to literally enact legends is widespread in our society. Ostention is also argued to explain the proliferation of many reports of anomalous and Fortean phenomena; an idea not unlike that discussed recently by Showalter (1996). Ellis’ ideas might also have value for understanding other types of behaviors that are motivated by rumor (not just strictly narratives), such as contagious psychogenic illnesses and socially-oriented delusions (see e.g., Bartholomew, 2001).

My interest and appreciation of the subject of ostention dates from my early examinations of the influence of contextual variables on the experience and

report of anomalous phenomena (for a review, see: Houran, 2000). However, I am not ashamed to say that Ellis' methods of analysis and sophisticated treatise outshine my own work. Several entertaining case studies nicely illustrate Ellis' points and arguments, and *JSE* readers will appreciate the insights that are offered. Nevertheless, the book should not necessarily be regarded as antagonistic toward our field, especially topics such as alien abduction and UFO and apparition sightings. That is, Ellis does not insinuate that the sources for *all* legends and folklore (be they old or new) are spurious or ill-founded. His work does not—nor probably cannot—address the ontological reality of reports of anomalous phenomena. Only detailed analyses, such as the sort pioneered by Thomas Bullard (1987a,b), can begin to extract the facts that may underlie legends, folklore, and their relation to reports of anomalous phenomena. But, what Ellis implies throughout this book complements an idea proposed many years ago by apparition researcher, G. N. M. Tyrrell (1943/1953)—namely, that experiences seem to be active participants in the construction of their experiences, much the same way that characters in fictional ghost stories are complex, emergent products of the interplay between narrative design and narrative processing (Herman, 2000).

Understanding that this phenomenon exists and that it has social and notably *political* ramifications is to the advantage of all researchers of anomalous phenomena. It is also an excellent intellectual reading for students and laypeople. The contents of the book are not merely intended to be read and digested. Rather, Ellis calls strongly for the timely collection, documentation, and interpretation of legends, for through inaction “we risk condoning by our silence actions that perpetuate intolerance and even age-old bigotry” (p. 243). Such forces, as many *JSE* readers can attest, are no strangers to our field.

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