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**Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens**  
by Susan A. Clancy. Harvard University Press, 2005. 179 pp. \$22.95 (hardcover). ISBN 0-674-01879-6.

Some years back, Carl Sagan wrote an article about UFO abductions for the Sunday newspaper insert magazine, *Parade*. This was in preparation for his next book, *The Demon Haunted World*. I had received a copy of the manuscript and I noticed a number of factual errors, not errors in interpretation but errors of truth. I carefully noted the problems and sent the manuscript back. When the article was published, all the factual errors were included, except for one very small one: Barney and Betty Hill did not say the aliens "slithered" as Sagan had originally written.

What would possess a scientist to allow for known factual errors in his publication? This is normally unthinkable in any scientific or even a responsible popular article. But this type of behavior is common in debunking and skeptical writings about the abduction phenomenon. When it comes to abductions, scientists become unscientific with speeds approaching that of light. Of course, abductions are not in the normal scientific milieu. They are so far out of the norm that it leads to a line of reasoning as follows: "It does not matter how I get to my Explanation. Doing careful research is a waste of my precious time. Everyone knows that UFO abductions cannot and do not exist. Therefore, even though a UFO fanatic out there might take issue with petty factual problems, I am not required to get everything right because my Explanation will, in the end, be correct." Thus, when it comes to abduction debunking, careful research and academic and/or scientific justification or rationale is not necessary. The ends justify the means.

In my forty years of UFO research, the last twenty of which I spent studying the abduction phenomenon, I have learned a simple evidence truism: All debunkers make one or more of three fundamental mistakes: They do not know the evidence, they ignore the evidence, or they distort the evidence. Any one of these errors would be catastrophic and perhaps even scientifically dishonest when writing about something of accepted scientific consequence. Leaving in mistakes is tantamount to ignoring or to distorting the evidence. Unfortunately, when it comes to abductions, all debunkers comply with the evidence truism. There are no exceptions.

Susan Clancy's book, *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens*, is the latest in a dreary parade of debunking academics, scientists, and writers who have an explanation for the abduction phenomenon while obeying the evidence truism. Clancy has a PhD in psychology from Harvard. She has worked with Richard McNally who has done research in false memories. She had a post-doc appointment in Harvard's Department of Psychology where she was also able to study false memories. Eventually she came up with a study of abduction claimants. Now she and her book have been all over the media, appearing on *Larry King Live* and many other television and radio shows. To the uninitiated she appears to be a sensible and logical voice carefully solving an exceptionally complex and difficult problem. She has received positive reviews in *Science* and other media outlets.'

Her book does not actually have a new explanation for abductions; she recycles old ones but puts a veneer of "science" around them. She has a plethora of explanations from which to choose. It might be instructive to list some of them. They are in no particular order: Conscious lying for any reason (encompassing many forms and variations), the desire to lead glamorous lives, normal hypnosis, incompetent hypnosis, the collective unconscious, millennial fears, false memory syndrome, childhood sexual abuse screen memories, childhood physical or verbal abuse, fantasy prone personalities, multiple personality disorder, myth and folklore, psychosis (schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, delusions), brain tumors, gullibility, hallucination, waking and lucid dreams, night terrors, sleep walking, hypnogogic and hypnopompic experiences (sleep paralysis), birth trauma, the will to believe, baby desires and fantasies, pseudocyesis, stigmata, illegal drugs, psychogenic fugue state, media influences, "epidemic hysteria," hysterical contagion, mass hysteria, post-modern anxieties, popular culture absorption, the psychological creation of a physical alternative universe, alternative realities, angels, demonic possession, temporal lobe lability, guided imagery, tectonic plate stress, and/or a combination of any of the above. This list is by no means inclusive. I have left out many, and new ones come about all the time. As I write, the soporific specter of Ambien looms.

Clancy's book is based on interviews with and tests of self-reporting abduction claimants whom she got from placing ads in newspapers. She soon noticed they have had their experiences at night and they had viewed media depictions of abductions. For Clancy, this means that they have suffered from sleep paralysis with its fears and sometime hallucinations. Searching for the meaning of these poorly understood events some sleep paralysis victims might think that they were abducted. If they do not at first think this, they "fall into the hands of" (pp. 57, 63) an abduction researcher who convinces them to undergo hypnosis. The hypnotist, also influenced by popular culture and the media, leads these vulnerable people into thinking that space aliens have indeed abducted them. Victims, also having absorbed media abduction depictions, buy into it willingly. This theory is based on several variables that must all fall into place neatly: Sleep paralysis is correctly diagnosed, abduction researchers' analyses are

wrong, hypnosis is not correctly conducted, false memories are generated, those memories are influenced by media abduction accounts in both the victim and the hypnotist, and the two people incorporate them into a belief system that becomes hardened as a "real" memory.

The explanation has some problems, the first of which is the content of abduction testimony. One would think that when writing a book about a subject it would be incumbent upon the author to know something about that subject in order to ascertain a baseline of what people actually say when they are abducted. However, for abduction debunkers not knowing the evidence (number one on the truism list) is not worrisome. In fact, ignorance of abduction activity is a driving force behind all previous debunking explanations. Clancy does appear to be vaguely cognizant of this problem and she reassures the reader that she does indeed know something about the subject. Says Clancy: "I believe I've read every account of alien abduction ever published, and just about everything that social psychologists, psychoanalysts, postmodernists, journalists, physicists, biologists, and ex-military personal [sic] have to say about them. In addition ... I've watched nearly every American movie and TV show ever made about aliens" (p. 82). But because her book contains no bibliography one must carefully analyze her references. In fact, most are from debunking sources. This accomplishes two important things: It allows her to go forward, free from having to engage in serious research of the phenomenon (she read a few popular books about it) with all its pesky disconfirming evidence for her explanation, and it allows her to appear as if she has read "experts" on the subject, when in fact most of the authors she has read are debunkers and, like Clancy herself, anything but experts.

Furthermore, given the large number of abduction accounts that have been published (if she had looked in my edited book *UFOs and Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge*, she might have noticed a bibliographic section of books written by abductees, but her references do not indicate that she has done that), it is unclear how many she actually read. What is clear is that she apparently gained much of her abduction information by watching television shows. One might recoil in horror at this thought, but it, along with her lack of knowledge of the phenomenon, enables her to not have to deal with the abductions *wie est eigenlicht gewesen ist* ("as it actually was"<sup>m</sup>)—to quote nineteenth century German historians who strove for accurate narrative history.

I do not want to suggest that Clancy is entirely ignorant of the abduction phenomenon. She has a superficial awareness of some its reproductive aspects like sperm taking, egg harvesting, holding babies, and examinations. This knowledge comprises a very tiny amount of the information known about abductions, most of which has never appeared in the media. About 75% of the information I included in my 1992 book *Secret Life* had never been in the media or written about in even the most esoteric UFO literature. Yet, the abductees with whom I was working were describing procedures and events with remarkable accuracy and consistency that I, as the hypnotist and researcher, had

never heard before, and of which neither I nor the abductees knew the meaning. The people who described these procedures and events so precisely were unaware that others were saying the same thing with the same exact details.

As I learned about the phenomenon it became far more complex than I ever imagined but all within fairly narrow procedural pathways. When I wrote *The Threat* in 1998, I had learned quite a bit more and once again most of the information in that book had not been in the broadcast media or in print. Rather than going into the complexities and precise details of the abduction phenomenon, it is simply worth mentioning that Clancy's book does not display the slightest awareness of any of the material that Budd Hopkins or other researchers discovered. More disturbingly, she displays no awareness of anything that does not "confirm" her theories.

Along with her obvious lack of knowledge of the subject, Clancy seems unaware of the debates that have taken place over UFO abductions in the past forty-five years. For that matter she even seems entirely oblivious to the debates that have taken place about her own specific explanations. She does not appear to know about a book that came out five years ago, *The Abduction Enigma* (one of whose authors is a clinical psychologist), that gave practically her same explanation. Well, I believe that she believes that she has read every academic work on the subject. So, how can we explain her vacuity about the phenomenon itself? The answer is that if you have The Explanation, you need not be bothered by having to acquire this knowledge. Therefore, in spite of her belief system, she obviously is profoundly ignorant of the phenomenon about which she is writing an academic book.

If she had learned a little more about abductions, she would have realized that her explanations must take into account some of the phenomenon's verities: During abduction events, abductees are missing from their normal environments. Police have been called, search parties have been sent out, parents have frantically searched for their children, etc. When people remember abductions, they sometimes return with marks on their bodies—not just any marks, but with seemingly impossible fully formed scars. They sometimes return with broken bones and they have no idea how they happened. Sometimes people return with unusual stains on their clothes that were not there before the abduction. Attempts to discover the nature of these stains have been unsuccessful. They return with their clothes on backwards, and/or inside out. They return wearing someone else's clothes. When people are abducted, they are often abducted with others who can confirm the details of their abduction, as with Barney and Betty Hill. Often it is family members, but there are instances when friends or bystanders witness the abduction as well. People are abducted while fully awake, driving a car, gardening, and so forth. Clancy either ignores or is not aware of all of this.

It is also critical to understand that about half (I am being generous here because my own statistics, based on about seven hundred abductions, indicate about 40%) of abductions take place at night in bed. That does not mean that people were sleeping. Many of them were in bed but had not fallen asleep yet

and might be watching television, reading a book, or just not asleep. Of course, about 100% of the people who were sleeping woke up right away and realized that something was happening to them. Some of them felt paralyzed and others did not. Clancy automatically and without evidence interprets all of this as sleep paralysis. Sleep paralysis has long been known to overlap superficially with the edges of abduction activity. I wrote about it in *Secret Life*. Skeptics have bandied this about for many years as they tried their best to force the abduction phenomenon into it. It died down for a number of years but now it is back in vogue. In sleep paralysis, people cannot move, some people sense a "presence" or even "figures" in the room, some can even feel a floating feeling, and they can sometimes visualize "light." Sleep paralysis is relatively common, but its effects differ in their frequency. It makes a tempting answer to the abduction problem, especially when you do not know what abductions are.

But Clancy, aside from not knowing what the problems are that have to be surmounted when coming up with a sleep paralysis explanation, has another void in her knowledge that is even more appropriate to her "study." She has no criteria for establishing who is or who is not an abductee. For Clancy there are no such things as true abductees, there are only people who erroneously think they are abductees. Therefore, uninvestigated, unfiltered people who do not meet long-established criteria for having abduction events are, for her, "abductees." Everyone is the same when it comes to abductions because she is "fairly certain" that abductions had never happened to anyone because the victims convey the events anecdotally and the confirming physical evidence is too thin. In fact, Clancy's qualifier of "fairly certain" reads as "impossible" in her book. One cannot prove a negative, as she points out, but the book conveys a powerful sense that for her this negative is fact.

Sensing some weakness in this area she covers herself by saying that as a graduate student she was taught that there should be no "forbidden questions." But she learned differently when doing research on sexual abuse and there had been forbidden questions. She did not like this (p. 19). Alas, when it came to abductions, the lesson did not take. She does have a forbidden question: "What criteria will I use to discern whether people might be abductees before I include them in my study?" She never asks this question, and it is one of several critical questions at the heart of the abduction controversy. But Clancy does not care if her self-proclaimed population of "abductees" might have a variety of causative factors as long as one of them is not being abducted by aliens.

Armed with her "abductees" Clancy makes sweeping claims about the evidence she develops to show that people are not being abducted. She used the Deese/Roediger-McDermott (DRM) test to demonstrate that abductees fashion false memories. In this test a person is given a list of closely related words and then asked to remember them. One of the related words was not on the list. Clancy says that people who claim to be abductees will say that they remember the unlisted word in greater frequency than those who do not claim to be abductees. Thus, they made up false memories. There might be quite a bit of

data behind this test, but the actual meaning and reason for "hearing" the false word is unclear. Does this mean that by remembering a "false" word they also remember a lifetime of complex events in which they and others were participating? Does this mean that they were just mistaken about the word and therefore it does not really have any significance? Does it mean that abduction experiences cause people to think that they heard a word that was not there because of the commonly reported telepathic communication during abduction events? Does it mean that people think they are abductees but they are not? Of course, Clancy does not have a way to determine this. There are other problems. Why does falsely remembering words increase with age? Does age correlate with the abductees who did or did not falsely remember the words? Why was not another abduction debunker able to replicate her data?<sup>2</sup>

Some of the people in her study did seem to have the experiences that would argue for strange things happening to them, but with no set criteria for determining whether they had experiences that abductees have had before they even thought were abductees, there is no way of filtering out who scored what on which test. Oddly, the book has no test results or numbers. The readers are required to believe her story that the abduction claimants responded the way they did.

In Clancy's world, the media has the power to supply the key information for false memories, if not the false words. This is a hardened fact; if it appeared in the media, it filtered into the abductees' consciousness and became actual memories of events happening to them. It is an idea with direct causative factors that allow for no doubt. A movie comes out and people think that they are living within it. Motion pictures and television shows about aliens are so powerful that they enable people to think that aliens have abducted them. It is all so simple and obvious.

Memories, of course, are also a prime culprit. They are pliable and so extraordinarily unreliable. In Clancy's world they are of little use. She gives a personal account of misremembering a pleasant series of events that happened to her years before. Memories appear to be so untrustworthy that it would be pointless for me to remember what happened to me yesterday (and I have to admit, the older I get the more difficult that becomes). Even without popular culture absorption, memories degrade, they change, they can be totally wrong. They can have no relation to reality whatsoever: They can even be of alien abductions. Memory, the basic element that gives us our identity, gives us our sense of an independent self, and is the storehouse of information needed to survive, is all but worthless. I have investigated abductions that happened only a few hours before. But what difference does it make? Memory will never be accurate.

This, of course, would be news to the psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians, attorneys, professors, nurses, teachers, and other PhDs and MDs who are quite aware of sleep paralysis, the problems with hypnosis, the problems of media contamination, the problems of memory, and so forth. They are all abductees

whose cases I have investigated. In Clancy's simple world, her idea of causative factors for very difficult problems allows for no doubt. Investigation is not an option. She takes her self-described abductees at their word, never wondering whether some of them are lying about their memories to skew the results of her study. One would assume that this is not true, but who knows?

The same is true of Clancy's assertions about the interplay of hypnosis, media, false memories, and of abductions. They are just that—assertions. The science behind her claims is either thin or nonexistent. She overreaches her evidence so much that she launches herself into inner outer space.

She tries to impress the reader that she is compassionate towards her subjects. She takes great care to say throughout the book that abductees are not crazy (I have known a few people who were, in fact, both crazy and abductees). She feels somewhat sorry for the poor people who are led to believe that they are abducted. She tries to explain to them calmly and rationally that they were not really abducted but they will not hear of it. They think it happened to them and they will not be talked out of it. It is just the way people are, they cannot help it and she cannot help them. Her book contains an extremely unpleasant condescension throughout.

Even though she tries to display compassion for her population she points out that the abductees scored higher than average on a test for schizotypy which, she says, indicates that they are more imaginative and might believe in paranormal phenomena like telepathy and clairvoyance. They are perfectly normal but they are often "loners" (a loaded word in this serial killer society). Rather than leaving it at that, she puts in a zinger: "if symptoms of schizophrenia lie on a continuum, alien abductees are perhaps closer to being schizophrenic . . ." (p. 129). She mitigates this by saying they are thus inclined to "magical thinlung," and "perceptual aberration" but the subtext is there: These people are further along the road to being nut cases. Once again, we do not know which "abductees" scored higher and which scored lower on the lunacy continuum.

Clancy's actual knowledge of abduction patterns is severely limited. She is aware of the reproductive activities of the abduction phenomenon. Beyond that her knowledge appears to drop off considerably. In addition, she has no idea of the great mass of material that has never been publicized or appeared in the media. If she actually were, as she calls herself, "an alien-abduction researcher," she would know that the phenomenon is not one in which all abduction stories are completely diverse with no details except the grossest matching.

Every abductee with whom Clancy talked had a different story. If she knew about the abduction phenomenon she would have a variety of reasons to pick from that would explain this phenomenon, one of which would be hers; they are not being abducted. The other reasons for this more than adequately deal with the difficult problems of consciously remembered events. Rather than go into why these disparate stories exist among consciously remembered events, it is important to understand that researchers have found most conscious memories of abductions to be notoriously inaccurate and scattered. I would refer the reader

to my discussion of these problems in *The Threat*. Although a minority of abductees are fairly accurate in the conscious memories, researchers and hypnotists who automatically take abductee remembrances at face value tend to make fatal errors.

Everything comes together in Clancy's revealing discussion of Betty and Barney Hill, probably the best known abduction case in history. How could two people say the same thing about being abducted, especially when all abductions are different? Easy. You see, she explains, the material was retrieved through hypnosis, which was bad enough, but a few days before the hypnosis, an episode of the science fiction television show *The Outer Limits* called "The Bellerio Shield" had aired. In it, she points out, "the aliens looked remarkably similar to those of today: they had big, black, wraparound eyes, no noses or mouths, and delicate waif-like bodies" (p. 89). This show, she suggests, was the genesis of the gray beings so commonly described today. I would urge anyone who has access to "The Bellerio Shield" video to view it (I bought mine at my local video store). In it there is only one alien. He is a normal-sized guy in a jump-suit type of clothing. He does have a large head, but his actual eyes are his normal eyes. He has a flattened nose and a regular mouth. His body is normal and not waif-like. Every fact that she describes about the show is demonstrably wrong. But Clancy would certainly know this because she says that she has seen nearly everything on television ever made about aliens. She is making a crucial point in an academic book about an extremely important case. Surely, she has seen this *The Outer Limits* episode. It would be academically reckless, or worse, to not have seen it. If she did see it, one wonders if she were deliberately distorting the evidence. If she did not see it, it suggests even more serious problems with her research.

Curiously, Clancy appears to be unaware that in 1997 UFO researchers and debunkers had debated the role of "The Bellerio Shield" episode in the Hill case. Thus, when Barney described wraparound eyes that he had never seen before she proclaims: "The problem is that contrary to what Barney said, he *had* seen eyes like that. 'The Bellerio Shield,' which had aired twelve days before his regression session, featured the same eyes" [her emphasis] (p. 97). Once again, I urge readers to look at Barney's drawings and then view "The Bellerio Shield" and judge for themselves.' More than that, when this came into debate in 1997, Betty Hill (Barney died in 1969) was asked about whether she had seen *The Outer Limits*. She had never even heard of the show. Not only that, Barney worked nights. When he was home they were usually busy with community activities.<sup>4</sup> But, for Clancy, I suppose, this is just anecdotal nonsense. And besides, what difference does it make if your facts are wrong? In the end The Explanation will be right.

In her book Clancy builds basically an unfalsifiable system. If it is not sleep paralysis, it is hypnosis. If it is not those two, then it is fantasy prone personality. If it is not that, it is popular culture absorption. If it is not that, well, abductees are, after all, on that continuum to schizophrenia. If not that, then it is the

psychological need to believe in gods from above; if it is not that, then it is a form of hysteria; if it is not that, it is a combination of two or three or more reasons. Her pool of explanation-combinations is virtually inexhaustible. Links to the explanations are either not made, or are so tenuous that they do not rise even to the level of bad social science. Ultimately, she buys into most of the common debunking explanations except that abductees are not "crazy," or at least not yet. And even this "liberal" view of abductee claimants suggests her lack of knowledge. She is apparently unaware that that most debunkers gave up on this explanation long ago because the evidence never supported it. She is also unaware of Budd Hopkins' 1983 battery of psychological tests including the MMPI, TAT, Wechler, and others, given to nine abductees which showed that they do not display evidence of mental illness.

If Clancy had carefully filtered her population and kept two categories of those who did and those who did not fit the patterns of abduction activity (heaven forbid, she might have had to call in an actual abduction researcher for help), she might have had an argument that would tell us something important about the two populations. But she did not and she does not.

How could a book as flawed as this one be published? The fault lies squarely with Harvard University Press (HUP). HUP has published two books about the UFO phenomenon: Donald Menzel's 1953 diatribe, *Flying Saucers*, and Clancy's book. In both cases the manuscripts either were refereed by people incompetent in the subject matter or were not refereed at all. The problem was just as egregious in Menzel's case. As the head of the Harvard Observatory and a nationally known astronomer, Menzel's word carried weight. Thus, when he claimed that some UFO sightings were caused by mirages from mountaintops, HUP's referees were not about to take issue, even though his own data proved him wrong. He went forward with the wrong numbers and nobody bothered to check. Because in the end, it did not matter that his facts were wrong, his explanation that UFOs were not extraterrestrial would be right."

Clancy could have avoided her problems by learning something about abductions. But, like her, most academics are not aware that there has been significant research into UFOs and abductions. They have no idea that there are academics who actively engage with the evidence free from the inadequacies that so taint this book. Ironically, if Clancy had read my second book on abductions, *The Threat*, she would have seen my fairly extensive critique of John Mack's methodology and conclusions and she could have used it to good effect to make her arguments. She might have also read my critique of incompetent hypnotists, their lack of controls in hypnosis, and the damage that hypnotists and therapists had done to abductees and to abduction research. Clancy was not far from the truth when she criticized hypnotists. But, in Clancy's black and white world, all abduction hypnotists are unaware of the problems of hypnosis. All abduction hypnotists do not know enough to control for false memories, suggestibility, leading, and so forth. In Clancy's world, few potential abductees are aware of the problems of hypnosis or popular culture osmosis or sleep

paralysis. Indeed, for Clancy no abduction hypnotist is aware of these things either. It is the incompetent Svengalis leading the ignorant, already suggestible and vulnerable Trilbys deeper into media fantasies, false memories, and alien abductions. Or if it is not that it is something else equally as explainable.

There are many other problems with Clancy's book, some factual: In 1969, the National Academy of Sciences did not "sponsor a study of all available UFO evidence" (p. 137). John Fuller was not an abduction researcher, etc. (p. 111). More importantly, her book reveals much deeper problems than just factual errors. It displays the deep inadequacies of the academic confrontation with the abduction phenomenon. It is a depressing story of thoughtless assumptions, flawed methodology, and wrong explanations, all based on ignorance and dubious facts. The problems are not unique to Clancy; they are ubiquitous. But, if one has the will to believe that he or she has the solution to the mystery, nothing else matters.

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**Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bial Foundation Symposium: *Behind and Beyond the Brain* (5<sup>o</sup> Simpósio da Fundação Bial: *Aquém e Além do Cérebro*)** by Nuno Grande, Alexandre Castro-Caldas, Dietrich Lehmann Fernando Lopes da Silva, Mário Simões, Robert Morris and Rui Mota Cardoso (orgs.). Porto, Portugal: Fundação Bial, 2004. 301 pp. ISBN 972-99286-0-6.

Bial Foundation is notable for being one of the few institutions in the world which gives financial support to parapsychology research, besides supporting psychophysiology research as well. Every two years, since 1996, the foundation organizes the Bial Foundation Symposium, titled *Behind and Beyond the Brain*, with the purpose of offering to researchers an opportunity to present the results of the researches granted by the foundation, besides counting on thematic lectures. *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bial Foundation Symposium: Behind and Beyond the Brain* brings the papers and posters presented during the symposium held from March 31<sup>st</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004 in Porto, Portugal, and also includes a list of