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The "Men in Black" Experience and Tradition: Analogues with the Traditional Devil Hypothesis

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Source: *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 100, No. 396 (Apr. - Jun., 1987), pp. 148-160

Published by: [American Folklore Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/540919>

Accessed: 09/04/2011 22:17

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P E T E R M. R O J C E W I C Z

## The “Men in Black” Experience and Tradition

### *Analogues with the Traditional Devil Hypothesis*

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*Within the post-World War II context of belief in extraterrestrial visitations of the Earth, older folklore traditions have found a renewed vitality. The “Men in Black” enigma provides the folklorist a rich body of narratives and beliefs by which to examine the relationship between the ancient tradition of the Devil and a contemporary UFO-related experience.*

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MOST EXISTING FOLKLORE STUDIES OF UFO BELIEF MATERIALS have failed to fully appreciate the complex interrelatedness of UFOs with numerous belief traditions. This fact is no more clearly demonstrated, perhaps, than with belief in the “Men in Black” (MIB). The MIB phenomenon constitutes a rather esoteric part of the UFO experience and tradition. The cryptic nature of the MIB indicates something of the complexity of the UFO question, as it involves a continuum of related but discrete phenomena and beliefs (Rojcewicz 1986). With a better understanding of the UFO experience in general, the student of belief materials is more likely to perceive the numerous continuities between UFO-related phenomena and various folk traditions. The overall UFO framework provides a useful means of reorganizing the contexts of these folk traditions into more contemporary ones without negating either the basic traditional components or their important phenomenological differences in order to prove that UFOs exist (Rojcewicz 1984).

#### *Levels of Involvement*

From the outset we must distinguish between two levels of involvement, that is, the tradition and the actual experience. The MIB tradition consists of those individuals who know of the MIB through oral accounts, publications, and recently a movie, but who themselves have never actually encountered such a figure, and thus provide the “data” we are to use to gauge the nature and distribution of the tradition. An individual qualifies as a “passive tradition

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bearer" if he knows the tradition but does not actively pass it along. Secondly, the scholar must carefully handle memorate accounts of MIB encounters. First-person accounts of MIB often reveal phenomenological traits different in degree or even in kind from the tradition. Individuals who possess an experiential relationship with MIB may be completely independent of the existing body of lore. Moreover, the scholar faces the problem of gauging the informants' degree of belief. An individual may wholeheartedly believe one's MIB experience but only partially accept or completely disavow its alleged extra-terrestrial nature (Goldstein 1964:17–18; Dégh and Vázsonyi 1976:116–119).

### *Tradition and Experience*

We will face some difficulty in attempting to distinguish accounts of tradition from accounts of actual experience, especially if these accounts have found their way at some point into print. Scholars would do well to keep several factors in mind. First, we need a knowledge of the generic conventions of UFO narratives in general, and accounts of the MIB experience in particular. Aware of the generic tradition out of which the informants' claims arise, we can spot pressure points, as well as values, within the generic frame. In addition, it seems equally important for scholars to be aware of the conventions of form, content, and style of investigative reporting, or what is sometimes called "journalistic fiction," in order to scrape away the personality of the investigator and get to the experience. In cases where it is possible to do so, a psychological profile of the informants would help us determine to what degree the reality of the community of those visited by MIB finds consonance with the informants' accounts. Since we know the framing structure of the popular author and, perhaps, even the witness, we can now gauge the potential for individual elaboration and variation. Precisely by guarding against personal or cultural reflectivity, the phenomenology is allowed to come through.

### *Origins of the "Men in Black" Tradition*

One of the oldest "legend proposals" (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1979:66) of the age of flying saucers concerns the mysterious "Men in Black." The story begins with a Bridgeport, Connecticut factory clerk, Albert K. Bender. In 1952 Bender lived with his stepfather on the top floor of a house that a local newspaper described as a "chamber of horrors." Bender had artificial bats, spiders, rats, and shrunken heads in his apartment. Pictures of vampires, werewolves, and assorted monsters adorned his bedroom. Bender was an avid fan of both science fiction and horror films. He had a strong interest in black magic and the occult. These cold war years after World War II saw the rise of interest not only in flying saucers and their occupants but also in monsters and the fantastic in general.

Bender's involvement with the "Men in Black" took place in 1953, a time when UFO investigation in America lay primarily in the hands of enthusiastic

science fiction fans. Bender sent a letter to a friend who was likewise interested in UFOs, stating that he had learned the origin and ultimate goal of extraterrestrial visitation of the Earth. Soon after Bender mailed this letter, three men dressed in black suits approached him; one of the three men carried Bender's letter. The MIB delivered a message to Bender that troubled him profoundly. He immediately discontinued all his UFO-related activities. Gyroscope technician Dominick Lucchesi and publisher Gray Barker, friends of Bender, believed that the MIB had revealed to him the secret of UFOs and had prevented him from telling the world what he knew. In any event, Bender appeared frightened. Gray Barker wrote a book about the Bender case, entitled *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* (1956). Several years later Bender published his own account of his MIB experience, which he called *Flying Saucers and the Three Men* (1962). This account of Bender's alleged abduction to the South Pole by grizzly monsterlike UFO occupants from the planet "Kazik" was dubiously received by even Bender's closest friends (Clark 1980:178).

### *Descriptive Phenomenology of the MIB Experience*

MIB activity flourished with the increased sightings of UFOs during the "flap" of 1966–67, and numerous UFO researchers claimed MIB experiences (Keel 1976b:86). MIB have been reported to arrive unannounced, sometimes alone or in twos, traditionally in threes, at the homes or places of employment of selected UFO witnesses and investigators or their research assistants, usually *before* the witness or researcher has reported the UFO experience to anyone; or in the case of some investigators, before they have even undergone a UFO experience of any kind. People have reported that MIB know more about them than the average stranger could possibly know, and thus MIB can possess an omniscient air (Hynek and Vallee 1975:138–141).

In the mid-1960s, MIB often identified themselves as military intelligence personnel, usually representing the Air Force. On 15 February 1967, a confidential correspondence from the Pentagon went out to all intelligence command centers informing them to immediately notify the Office of Special Investigations if persons masquerading as military officers were apprehended intimidating UFO witnesses (Fawcett and Greenwood 1984:237). Sometimes referred to as "strong-arm agents," MIB reportedly appeared during this time like gangsters or international terrorists and spies, the same time James Bond 007 was matching wits with his nemesis SMERSH in movie theaters across America (Steiger 1978:121).

The Jews have also been associated with the MIB. Some of the early "contactees" of the 1950s were members of fascist fringe groups, and the Jews were their primary suspects for political and racist reasons. "After Hitler's Final Solution had rendered an open advocacy of anti-Semitism a difficult proposition," Jerry Clark (1980:286) has written, "American fascists resurrected a code phrase: 'International Banker.' " Those conversant in the literature of po-

itical hanky-panky knew full well that the term "International Banker" referred to the Jews. The belief that the Jews intended to make life miserable for select "decent white folk" and thus dispatched darkskinned and -attired intimidators to frustrate the lives of Aryans never became an acceptable position in the UFO investigative community. The majority of investigators felt that MIB participated in a conspiracy of silence, orchestrated not by fascist political groups, but by the United States Air Force. The chief proponent of the conspiracy theory was Donald E. Keyhoe (1955, 1960).

Although some MIB have been reported to act silly more than threateningly and thus suggest the figure of the Trickster, people have reported that MIB have roughed up or otherwise intimidated UFO witnesses, investigators, or their families. Max Radar (pseudonym), an associate professor at the University of Denver, has revealed that during a period of several months during which he underwent an "MIB attack," his children were on different occasions stopped on the sidewalk and warned that their father should stop his UFO lecturing and research. Dr. Radar left the university to hide for a short time.<sup>1</sup> Even police officers who have chased UFOs in their squad cars have been gathered into garages and sternly advised by MIB that they did not see what they saw (Steiger 1977:197-198). It has happened that if a witness has managed to photograph a UFO or its occupant(s), a fact known only to the witness, the MIB have stolen the picture or have demanded possession of the photo or negative. Dr. Herbert Hopkins, the skilled physician who conducted hypnosis sessions with David Stephens after his UFO experience, himself encountered a "Man in Black" on Saturday, 11 September 1976, at 8:00 p.m. The MIB told Dr. Hopkins that celebrated UFO abductee Barney Hill (Fuller 1966) "died because he knew too much" about UFOs and that unless Hopkins destroyed his UFO-related tapes and correspondence, he would suffer the same fate as Barney Hill (Schwarz 1983:II, 242-243). Dr. Hopkins complied.

Often dressed in black clothing that may appear soiled and generally unkempt or unrealistically neat and wrinkle-free, MIB have on occasion displayed a very unusual walking motion, moving about as if their hips were swivel joints, producing a gliding or rocking effect, often with the torso and legs seemingly moving off into opposite directions.<sup>2</sup> Some witnesses have indicated that MIB walk as if intoxicated. MIB have displayed a penchant for black Cadillacs or dark, large sedans. Some MIB display an unusual growth of hair, suggesting that their hair had grown back unevenly after having recently been shaved. Witnesses have identified the Great Seal of the United Nations on the lapels of some MIB.

MIB speak very distinctly. Either this distinctness results from their resonant eloquence or from a monotone (Schwarz 1983:II, 242), singsong, or whining sound. Facially, MIB often possess an Oriental resemblance. UFO witnesses have reported men who appeared Italian, Burmese, or Indian. Jerry Clark (1980:288) has pointed out that in addition to the "racially ambiguous crypto-Asian type," MIB also display a normal appearance or speech, that is,

"pure American or Spanish, or Portuguese or French or Norwegian." At this time there is some question as to the actual international distribution of the MIB experience.<sup>3</sup>

### *First-Person Accounts*

One could easily interpret Albert K. Bender's MIB experience (described earlier) as a psychological drama resulting from a combination of his bizarre interests and the stress his close friends placed upon him to reveal his secret; indeed, it would be hard to dispute this. The challenge to this view as a general interpretation of all MIB accounts stems from the fact that reliable witnesses, who neither sleep in rooms with artificial bats and spiders nor hang pictures of vampires and werewolves on their walls, also report encounters with MIB. Such a case involved 27-year-old Michael Elliot (pseudonym). The following memorat was collected from Mr. Elliot on 13 May 1982.

It was mid-November of 1980, Wednesday or Thursday, and I was doing research on flying saucers. It was a strange day, weather-wise, with erratic shifts of rain and wind and sun. It would get very blustery, and then it would become very calm. It was approximately 4:30 P.M. and already on the dark side. I had been reading in a nearby university library for about four hours. I sat alone in a wing facing a large window to the south and stacks of books to my right running for some six rows behind me. I had the table closest to the window, facing the window. Without any sound to indicate that someone was approaching me from behind, I noticed from the corner of my right eye what I supposed was a man's black pant leg. He was wearing rather worn black leather shoes. . . . A man moved around the table to the chair opposite where I sat and stood silently, for about three seconds, with his back to the window, before sitting down very mechanically, straight and very affected. . . .

He had a dark complexion, but not Oriental or Indian, but dark. He had black hair with something of the greasy look, looking somewhat "Punk" by today's standards. He was very thin, with a chiselled nose and chin, and had sunken eyes. The man wore a black suit that needed ironing and possibly cleaning. He had on a white shirt and a black Texan-like string tie. Later when he rose to leave, I remember noting that the suit was much too large for him, despite his being over six feet, as I estimated it. . . .

The man asked me what I was working on, and I told him. He spoke very articulately and had a slight accent that I couldn't place, but remember thinking it was European. . . . We engaged in some chit-chat about flying saucers, and I just wasn't into having a conversation.

Now the man asked me if I had ever seen a flying saucer. . . . I curtly told him that at the moment I wasn't particularly interested in whether flying saucers were physical, extraterrestrial craft. I found the stories about them interesting. Well, I thought the guy was going to come unglued! He became highly agitated and said in a voice much too loud for use in a library: "Flying saucers are the most important fact of the century, and you're not interested!?" . . . I couldn't believe it was happening to me, and I was getting a bit fearful. I was beginning to think that he was more than just a nut. I felt that he might be dangerous. I tried to calm him. Finally he said nothing. . . . He stood up, not like you or I would, but as if he were mechanically lifted. He looked real awkward . . . Placing his hand on my shoulder he said something like "Go well in your purpose." It sounded religious and I remember thinking that he was going to leave some proselytizing religious tracts with me. I didn't look up to see him go.

Within, say, ten seconds, great fear overwhelmed me and for the first time I entertained the idea that this man was otherworldly. Really, I was very frightened. I got up, walked two steps in the direction he had left in, turned around, and returned again to my seat. Got up again. I was highly excited and finally walked around the stacks to the reference desk and nobody was behind the desk. In fact, I could see no one at all in the library. I've gone to graduate school, and I've never been in a library when there wasn't *somebody* there! No one was even at the information desk across the room. I was close to panicking and went quickly back to my desk. I sat down and tried to calm myself. In about an hour I rose to leave the library. There were two librarians behind each of the two desks! [Rojcewicz 1984:163–165]

The second first-person narrative comes from journalist and noted UFO investigator and author John A. Keel. Within a year of launching his full-time investigation of UFOs in 1966, Keel found that “the phenomenon had zeroed in on me, just as it had done with British newspaper editor Arthur Shuttlewood and so many others.”

My telephone ran amok first, with mysterious strangers calling day and night to deliver bizarre messages “from the space people” (emphasis in original). Then I catapulted into the dream-like fantasy of demonology. I kept rendezvous with black Cadillacs on Long Island, and when I tried to pursue them they would disappear impossibly on dead-end roads. Throughout 1967, I was called out in the middle of the night to go on silly wild-goose chases and try to affect “rescues” (emphasis in original) of troubled contactees. Luminous aerial objects seemed to know where I was going and where I had been. I would check into a motel at random only to find that someone had made a reservation in my name and had even left a string of nonsense messages for me. I was plagued by impossible coincidences, and some of my closest friends in New York, none of whom were conversant with the phenomenon, began to report strange experiences of their own—poltergeists erupted in their apartments, ugly smells of hydrogen sulfide haunted them. One girl suffered an inexplicable two-hour mental blackout while she was sitting under a hair dryer. More than once I woke up in the middle of the night to find myself unable to move, with a dark apparition standing over me. [Keel 1976a:255]

### *Analogous Traditions*

As a master shape-shifter, the Devil can appear in any form he desires: monster, animal, or man. In 1584 Reginald Scott (1972:86) described the Devil as ugly and having black skin, and possessing a monstrous form. The earliest depiction of the Devil as a man was reported by J. Charles le Chauve in 1902 (Wall 1968:69). In a Greek manuscript of the 11th and 12th centuries, the Devil appears human and black. The connection here with the “Men in Black” is obvious.

Like the MIB who often walk awkwardly or fail to comprehend or accomplish simple tasks, the Devil of tradition also possesses some defect. Colin de Plancy, to whom the Devil appeared frequently in the first quarter of the 19th century, maintained that the Devil received most of his deformities from man, for “God had decided that whatever men attribute to him, he must retain” (Seligman 1948:162).

Historian Marion Starkey (1969:234) has noted that the Reverend Cotton Mather's "black man" possessed more the spirit of a poltergeist, or the "comic devil" of the early miracle plays. The Devil, as Mather saw him, "was ubiquitous, and as such damnable dangerous and eternally a nuisance, but as little dignified as the worm that eats up the garden." As a comic devil, the MIB possess a nature very similar to the mythological figure of the Trickster. The Trickster is known to play pranks upon people and often falls victim to the vengeance of those he has injured (Radin 1956). The Trickster is both subhuman and superhuman, bestial and divine. C. G. Jung (1973:136) identified the Trickster as an archetypal shadow figure that possesses a "compensatory relationship to the 'saint.'" Douglas Hill has written in *Man, Myth and Magic* the following:

Trickster is comic relief; he is psychic catharsis on a deep and vital level; he is a hero whose own evolution perhaps mirrors that of mankind toward a higher consciousness and social maturity. And embodying all these essentials, he is deathless—no ethnological museum piece but alive and flourishing today as in the primal past. [Steiger 1977:214]

Brad Steiger (1977:211) has asked if it is possible that the MIB function as "tutors," whose lesson to humanity is to stand up and assume a directed and purposeful control of our lives.

There has been some serious discussion (Bearden 1980:45–73; Keel 1976b:5–6; Steiger 1978:121) that MIB and perhaps UFOs in general are related to the Tibetan mystical tradition of the "tulpas." A tulpa is a materialized thought-form and thus may be related in part to holographic images. W. Y. Evans-Wentz wrote the following:

Inasmuch as the mind creates the world of appearances, it can create any particular object desired. The process consists of giving palpable being to a visualization, in very much the same manner as an architect gives concrete expression in three dimensions to his abstract concepts after first having given them expression in the two dimensions of his blue print. [1968:29]

In *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, Alexandra David-Neel (1973:315) revealed that she herself had succeeded in creating a tulpa, which after some time became malignant and bold, escaping her control.

From this perspective it can be said that MIB are materialized tuloidal forms stabilized by collective fear—of "Big Brother," of terrorism and violence, of hijackings, of all forms of personal intimidation. Quantum physicist Thomas Bearden (1980:69) has conjectured that "the men-in-black [sic] syndrome is based on our unconscious tuning; since each of us has some unpleasantness in the unconscious, sometimes the tuned-in men-in-black can be very nasty indeed." John A. Keel (1976a:280) insists that "in psychic phenomena and demonology we find that seemingly solid objects are materialized and dematerialized or apported."

Michael Talbot has pointed out parallels between the MIB and an enigmatic group known inside the Eastern mystical tradition as the "Brothers of the Shadow." According to Talbot, the "Brothers of the Shadow" are

. . . cunning and evil; intent upon keeping any student of the occult from finding out the proverbial answer. In mystical jargon this answer is the "Veil of Isis," and is synonymous with the "Great Secret" of Maeterlink . . . The Brothers of the Shadow, like the MIB, are known for threatening students whenever they get too close to lifting the Veil of Isis. [Steiger 1978:114]

Encounters with MIB often leave witnesses confused and disoriented. Vertigo, nausea, or even amnesia lasting for days are common symptoms. Are the "Men in Black" the dark but complementary factor that the modern age must reconcile with for the purpose of psychic wholeness? Historian William Irwin Thompson (1981:248) has argued that in our utopian fantasy of technology, we have created a sinister mirror image of the utopian dweller: "In the jungle of Guyana with Reverend Jim Jones, or in the space colonies of NASA, 'man,' will painfully discover that wherever he goes, he brings his evil along with him." The MIB, perhaps, represent human fear and deceit made flesh. Michael Elliot and John A. Keel displayed fear in the presence of the MIB, a common response elicited by the Devil and his cohorts.

The Devil's powers of mind have no peer, outside of God. "His powers were enormous," Keith Thomas (1971:470) insists, "for he had himself once been one of God's angels and he knew all the secrets and mysteries of the natural world." The MIB in the Elliot account did not reveal to him an unusual secret about himself or his family, as other MIB reportedly do, but the "coincidence" of the man's arrival precisely at the outset of Elliot's UFO research must not be totally without meaning. In the John A. Keel memorandum he indicates that when he "catapulted into the dream-like fantasy of demonology," UFOs seemed to know where he was going and where he had been. Someone or something knew which motel he would randomly check into and even made a reservation for him there. Coincidence or "synchronicity" (Jung 1973; Von Franz 1980) often plays a very active role within the larger context of UFOs. Some researchers see this as an indication of the presence of the paranormal. Some people seem to know where and when to see a UFO, as if instructed to do so (Rogo 1977:93). Noting that paranormal events reported in connection with UFO close encounters seem to have become the rule rather than the exception, Jacques Vallee, Ph.D. (1975:93) has stated that "such events might take the form of minor 'unexplained coincidence.'" Omniscience and coincidence both find correlatives also in the context of the tradition of the Devil.

Since the publication of Gray Barker's story (1956) of the Bender incident, MIB traditionally work in teams of three. Elliot and Dr. Herbert Hopkins mentioned only one MIB, and so we see a discontinuity between experience and tradition. Keel's memorandum does not give the exact number, but elsewhere Keel has noted MIB in threes. The number three has its own importance inside the devil frame of reference. The "Trinity of Evil," consisting of the Devil, the old serpent mentioned in the Apocalypse, and his two lieutenants provide the correlative to the three MIB. A French manuscript of the history of the Holy Grail contains a drawing of the "Trinity of Evil" pondering the birth of the magician Merlin (Wall 1968:27-28).

Earlier in this article it was stated that the "Men in Black" have associations with the military, particularly the Air Force, since the 1960s and '70s. With the publication of Donald E. Keyhoe's book *The Flying Saucers Are Real* (1950), many people believed in the conspiracy theory, charging that the Air Force consciously withheld UFO information from the general public.<sup>4</sup> MIB, some felt, functioned as a means of discouraging the dissemination of UFO lore. In the framework of the devil tradition, Scott's *Discourse of Witchcraft* (1972) lists the military roll of the infernal forces. The Duke of Amazeroth, for example, "a sort of brigadier general," commanded some 60 legions (Wall 1968:25–26).

Angelou S. Rappaport's *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* points out the danger one faces when entering into places where demons frequent. "To go alone into such places is dangerous, and the eves of Wednesday and Saturday were considered dangerous times," Rappaport notes, "for on those days Agrath roves about in the air accompanied by 18 myriads of evil spirits" (Keel 1976a:94). Michael Elliot's MIB experience took place on Wednesday or Thursday near evening. Elliot mentioned peculiar weather that November day, sometimes stormy, sometimes clear. In 16th-century England, the Devil, according to Keith Thomas (1971:472), "provoked high winds and thunderstorms." Whether the "Wednesday factor" is continuous with the MIB tradition cannot be determined, since the necessary data do not exist at this time. However, John A. Keel (1976a:146) has discovered that one is most likely to witness a UFO on a Wednesday or Saturday evening, from 10 P.M. to 2 A.M., in the area close to a magnetic fault.

A most peculiar feature of the Elliot case involves a reversal of the intimidation factor, a key component in the MIB tradition. By not attempting to dissuade Elliot, and by indirectly encouraging him to learn about "flying saucers," the MIB acted against the generic grain. Experience here lies in polar relationship to tradition and so structurally speaking can still be said to be connected with tradition. Although here it functions in a manner inverse to the traditional norm, the intimidation factor reversal has a correlative within the wider structure of UFOs. Many UFO "contactees," individuals in constant communication with otherworldly entities whom they serve as channels or mouthpieces, receive "messages" via "voices," telepathy, and automatic writing.<sup>5</sup> Otherworldly entities use these "messages" to exhort contactees to seek out and better understand "flying saucers" and their occupants so that life on Earth can continue (David 1967:74–75).

A feature of great interest from the folklorists' perspective is found in the last line of the Keel memorat: "More than once I woke up in the middle of the night to find myself unable to move, with a dark apparition standing over me." It is clear from this passage, as well as from Keel's chapter on "bedroom invaders" in *Strange Creatures from Space and Time* (1970), that Keel has undergone an attack from what David J. Hufford, Ph.D., has called the "Old Hag." Many people who are "hagged," that is, who wake up to find that they cannot move their bodies, often report seeing or feeling a sinister entity, or report a

glowing object nearby where they lay. While being ridden by the Hag, the individual may hear feet shuffling, or laughter, or smell some foul odor, elements similar to Keel's experiences. "The Old Hag, then," according to Hufford (1982:234), "can be as easily assimilated to UFO beliefs as it can to vampirism, witchcraft, or anxiety neurosis." Sidney J. Jansma (1980:70) insists that UFOs in general are demonic powers, pointing out that their ability to violate the laws of nature, "the coldness of UFOnauts, their sulfuric stench, and their lying also testify to their Hellish origin." According to Kurt Seligman (1948:152), "the evil one wants to pretend that he does not exist . . . But he is legion . . . he is a gangster on the lookout for a kidnapping . . . for the devil is ever changing in man's mind . . . The devil likes to be modern."

There is good evidence today to suggest that the enigmatic "Men in Black" visit not only witnesses to UFOs, but also witnesses to "monsters," Bigfoot-like creatures, and a variety of nonordinary entities. This observation is a most important one, since it points to the interrelationships between UFOs and various folklore belief traditions. Brad Steiger (1978:114), who, like John A. Keel, has been brave enough to publish personal accounts of MIB encounters, has been "convinced through special investigation and first-hand experiences that this phenomenon euphemistically known as the Men-in-Black is *very real* and that its victims are not simply suffering from particularly eerie delusions" (emphasis mine).

### *Conclusion*

This article, while arguing for the relatedness of UFOs, the "Men in Black," and the ancient figure of the Devil, likewise argues for their discreteness. These separate but not separated phenomena form a continuum of folk concepts and beliefs in "other worlds." Scholars studying the MIB phenomenon must not fail to distinguish observations, descriptions, and interpretations of the MIB experience. Confusing these factors when dealing with belief materials in the past has prevented scholars from appreciating the phenomenological continuities between UFO-related experiences and older folklore traditions, as well as resulting in difficulties of academic attitude, method, and taxonomy (Rojcewicz 1985). An informant's account might begin with a description of the "flying saucer" and finish with the inference that abominable snowmen are its occupants (Hufford 1977:241). Some scholars have failed to distinguish features of experience from interpretive features, because they have maintained, at least implicitly, the condescending attitude that what the scholar knows is "reality," and what the informants know is "folklore."

This problematic attitude has led some folklorists to declare that the question of the objective nature of the phenomenon behind a body of beliefs does not constitute a worthwhile area of folklore investigation (Dégh 1977; Ward 1977). David J. Hufford (1982) has argued instead that believed accounts that look to repeating occurrence as their authority must be evaluated as to their

objective nature before the question of their stability and distribution can adequately be answered. There exists no good epistemological and ontological reasons to distinguish descriptions from explanations if the folklorist cannot seriously entertain the possibility that a real experience lies behind traditional belief. Facing what we will not seriously entertain, we face ourselves as we really are, positioned squarely in the tension between a fearful will and an actual situation. Experience, however, will not be reduced by timidity.

### Notes

A shorter version of this article was presented at the Pennsylvania Folklore Society 1985 Annual Meeting, "Folklore in the Modern World" session, 16 March, Philadelphia.

Special thanks to David J. Hufford, Pennsylvania State College of Medicine, Department of Behavioral Science, for his general counsel and helpful comments relative to this article. I am also indebted to Ron MacKay, Northeastern University, Department of English, and poet Ron Price of Philadelphia for the time they took to read this article and offer their commentary.

<sup>1</sup>My conversation with Professor Radar was conducted by phone from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 8 March 1983.

<sup>2</sup>My own fieldwork has uncovered two cases wherein this peculiar walking motion was described by witnesses. John A. Keel has likewise reported similar features of the movement of MIB. Recently, filmmaker and actor John Sayles has comically portrayed this peculiarity of the MIB in his film *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984). Sayles himself plays one of the two "Men in Black."

<sup>3</sup>UFO investigator and author Raymond E. Fowler has written that "MIB reports are not limited to the United States," and then mentions an MIB case from Mexico City (1982:218). John A. Keel has reported that MIB have been encountered "from Sweden to Spain, Australia to South Africa" (1975:141). Margaret Sachs states that although MIB have been active on the American UFO scene since 1947, they "rarely appear in foreign countries" (1980:196).

<sup>4</sup>Many magazine articles were published on "flying saucers" in the United States from 1949 to 1951. *True* magazine published Keyhoe's article, "The Flying Saucers Are Real," which became one of the most widely read articles in American publishing history. Keyhoe developed this piece into a full-length book by the same title, which he published in 1950.

<sup>5</sup>One can read about "channels" and "contactees" and the "messages" they transmit to chosen individuals on the Earth in Brad Steiger, *Revelation: The Divine Fire* (1973). David Michael Jacobs situates the "contactee" phenomenon inside the overall history of the modern ages of UFOs in his excellent work, *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975:108–131).

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