

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A Case of MPD in London

To the Editor:

I wish to report on a case of MPD which I diagnosed during a rotation at the Maudsley Hospital in London this past summer. My impressions were drawn from three or four interviews which transpired during the last week of my stay.

The patient was an attractive, casually dressed, and well groomed woman in her mid twenties who was a life-long citizen of the United Kingdom. She had been admitted to the ward six months previously for depression and increasing suicidal preoccupation. At the time of our interviews she was severely self-mutilative, cutting or burning her left forearm and hand almost daily despite being on one-to-one nursing supervision. She had forged alliances with a number of other patients on the ward and had begun to develop a relationship with a social worker, which had ended abruptly when the social worker left the ward for maternity leave shortly after my arrival.

During my last week the patient engaged me in conversation and began to relate to me her increasing despair. She reported to me as she had previously to other members of the staff that she had been incestuously abused by her father during childhood. She was preoccupied by a sense of "badness" which she localized in her left upper extremity and which she felt necessitated that she harm herself.

In answer to a direct question during the course of the first interview she reported that she often found herself in "bad" neighborhoods but had no recall of taking herself to them. She also reported that not uncommonly she found clothing in her closets which she not only did not remember purchasing, but that she would never wear as it was not even her style.

When I asked her who she thought bought this clothing or took her to these "bad" neighborhoods she began to tell me about three other personalities which had control of her at times. These had been with her since childhood and although she was terrified of the destructive power of one of them, another provided great consolation that she felt she could not live without. She impressed upon me the fact that she had never told anyone else about these other personalities for fear that people would think her insane if she did. She was well aware that other people did not experience having a number of different personalities which operated autonomously.

Throughout our talks she remained logical without evidence of psychosis and related to me in an appropriate and poignant manner. I shared my impression that she had multiple personality disorder with the staff who remained skeptical but were intrigued with my perceptions. I tried to impress upon them the need to secure a therapist for this woman as individual therapy had not been a part of her treatment during her hospitalization.

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### Satanism, UFO Abductions, Historians and Clinicians: Those Who Do Not Remember The Past . . . .

To the Editor:

In reading Hill and Goodwin's paper on "Satanism: Similarities between patient accounts and pre-Inquisition historical sources" which appeared in *DISSOCIATION* in March, 1989 (Vol. II, No. 1), I once again became seriously concerned that many clinicians in the MPD/dissociation field may be stepping out of their traditional areas of expertise by citing historical materials in an undisciplined manner and may be repeating the mistakes made by many other such dilettantes in the past by doing so. I am specifically referring to efforts to identify core "satanic" (whatever that really means) ritual cults that are purported to have somehow existed down through the centuries and into today that have rituals involving cannibalism, ritual murder, sexual sadism, and many other unsavory practices—often also involving the abuse of children during these activities.

In citing these so-called historical materials, many contemporary clinicians who are trying to understand the ritual abuse claims of their patients with dissociative disorders often appear to do so as a way of confirming that it is highly possible that such terrible groups continue to exist today as they have in history—and perhaps, for the more conspiratorially minded, on a grand, secret scale. Hill and Goodwin fall into many traps in their selective use of often inferior historical materials, and therefore I have extensive criticisms

of the historical accuracy of their paper and some comments on the whole issue of "satanism" as it is portrayed by many today. In addition, I briefly comment on how the phenomenon of "satanists" may be related to other equally suspicious claims about "UFO abductions" that may also be related to the dissociative disorders.

Many non-historians tend to selectively cite historical materials on witchcraft or ritual magic ("black magic") without: (a) being aware of *all* of the historical materials and critiques of these sources; or (b) realizing that the graphic descriptions of cannibalistic and orgiastic rituals reputed to be practiced by cults in centuries past are more often than not an ancient (but still prevalent) form of propaganda promoted by one group to devalue the beliefs and practices of another.

The truth of the matter is this: distinguished historians of witchcraft and of ritual magic (two very different traditions in European history, and neither of them "satanic") *do not* find evidence that "satanic" cults practicing the "Black Mass," with cannibalism, ritual murder, worship of Satan, etc., have ever existed. Our modern fringe element of robed "satanists" performing "Black Masses," is first recorded only after the modern "occult revival" in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries—and then was still only an odd ceremonial pastime of the upper classes and was relatively harmless.

True, isolated and sometimes violent cults that do not survive for very long are reported from time to time today, but not in the traditional abominable "satanic black mass" form that has been depicted throughout history (and especially in the British productions of Hammer Films of the 1960s and 1970s). Instead, it is the power of the *idea* of cannibalistic and orgiastic cults (who later were imbued with the traditional trappings of satanism in the Middle Ages) that has been carried through the centuries—not their reality.

An essential reference for all clinicians concerned with satanism (and one not cited by Hill and Goodwin) is the classic *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* by British historian Norman Cohn (1975). Cohn, a medievalist who has published several important historical analyses of deviant European religious movements and cults during the Middle Ages, documents how, since at least the second century A.D., accusations of infantile cannibalism, abuse, and orgiastic promiscuity have been aimed at minority groups often in the course of European history. Indeed, Christians were the earliest recipients of this mudslinging by the ancient Romans, and then used these tactics themselves against Jews and other groups with deviant religious beliefs (Hsia, 1988). "The essence of the fantasy was that there existed, somewhere in the midst of the great society, another society, small and clandestine, which not only threatened the existence of the great society but was also addicted to practices which were felt to be wholly abominable, in the literal sense of anti-human" (Cohn, 1975, p. xi).

Cohn shows how this idea, by the 1400s had developed into the notion that there was a widespread, hidden, secret society of "witches" who held "sabbats" that performed these horrible ritualistic activities. The power of this fantasy led to the execution of hundreds of thousands of such "witches."

Cohn argues that this fantasy has its roots in antiquity and continues today—with the Nazi extermination of minorities in the 1930s and 1940s being a recent example. Modern media depictions of a vast underground conspiracy of "satanists" is simply a modern version of this paranoid mass delusion—and one in which all too many clinicians and law enforcement officials also share.

Cohn's relevance to our thinking about satanism is also evident in his careful analysis and refutation of the assertions that secret underground organization of witches or satanists once existed. Furthermore, in a pointed critique of the idea that witchcraft (what we now think of as satanism) was a survival from an ancient pagan religion, he strongly criticizes the two primary sources utilized by Hill and Goodwin—the works of Margaret Murray and Jeffrey Burton Russell. Although Russell is a learned scholar of the idea of evil and of "Satan" (Russell, 1977), Murray's fraudulent work has long been discredited (Rose, 1962) and is no longer taken seriously by historians (see Hoyt, 1981, for an excellent survey of the witchcraft literature). Another frequently cited scholar in discussions of satanism (also cited by Hill and Goodwin) is Montague Summers who, although undeniably learned, was also an eccentric who fancied himself a modern Inquisitor and who firmly believed in the reality of the threat of Satan, demons, vampires, werewolves, etc., in our world. Summers is not cited with approval by serious historians of witchcraft and ritual magic, and it should be mentioned that his works must be taken by clinicians with a grain of salt.

To avoid future misunderstandings about the "true" history of satanism, clinicians are also strongly urged to read "The Myth of Satanism," the appendix to E.M. Butler's noted scholarly work, *Ritual Magic* (Butler, 1949), in which she—like Cohn—refutes the "historical continuum" of satanism and therefore Hill and Goodwin's thesis "that certain satanic cult practices have been documented over many centuries" (1989, p. 40).

Hill and Goodwin also do not cite the work of a scholar who is considered to be perhaps the foremost authority on cults (satanic and otherwise) in America today—J. Gordon Melton, Ph.D., a religious historian at the Institute for the Study of American Religion. In his *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, Melton (1986) concludes that, "The satanic tradition has been carried almost totally by the imaginative literature of non-Satanists—primarily conservative Christians, who describe the practices in vivid detail in the process of denouncing them. That is to say, the satanic tradition has been created by generation after generation of anti-Satan writers. Sporadically, groups and individuals have tried to create groups which more or less conform to the satanism portrayed in the Christian literature (p. 76)." In a 1986 paper on *The Evidence of Satan in Contemporary America: A Survey*, Melton furthermore defuses the myth of widespread satanism with the following comments (cited in a highly recommended popular book by Arthur Lyons):

Satanism remains a twofold phenomenon: First, the public (or) open satanic groups remain, though their relative size had changed, relatively small and harmless. They pose no public threat. Secondly, small ephemeral satanic groups, most consisting primarily of young adults

and/or teenagers, some led by psychopaths and/or sociopaths, continue to come and go. While they pose no threat to the larger society, they do pose an immediate danger to those involved in them and are frequently involved in criminal activity, from dealing in drugs to rape and murder. Wherever they appear, they should be carefully monitored by local authorities. Further, personnel and energy currently devoted to the protection of children from proven physical threats should not be diverted to a crusade against an evil whose very existence must be considered dubious at best (cited in Lyons, 1988, p. xv.).

A further note of criticism must be made about Hill and Goodwin's use of the literature on the deviant Christian religious traditions of the first several centuries A.D. we now call Gnosticism (that is not what these groups called themselves). To use the literature on Gnosticism as further verification of the presence of a satanic mass performed by early satanists is a serious contradiction of the thorough analyses of scholars who have studied the primary sources relating to witchcraft, ritual magic, and satanism. Reliance upon modern English-language translations of basic texts and reinterpreting ancient Gnostic rituals in the light of our modern (mythical?) notions of satanism is an entirely unsupported distortion of historical data.

What, then, are we to make of our patients' recalled childhood experiences of ritualized abuse at the hands of satanists? Some experiences are undoubtedly true. Most, however, fit Cohn's *fantasy* much too closely to be taken as reports of actual experience. Perhaps—as has often been suggested—they are merely the screen memories of childhood abuse at the hands of adults (perhaps even parents) but which have taken on a mythic, almost archetypal form, in their representation of the essential evilness of the experience. In this way, the many reports of abductions by extraterrestrials (UFO abductions) are also very similar to reports of satanists and may also be indicative of dissociative disorders, especially since one of their overriding characteristics seems to be missing time (Hopkins, 1981; Strieber, 1987). They likewise involve the recalling of childhood traumata in which patients claim to have been kidnapped and then sexually and physically abused by more powerful, adult-like beings. Thousands of people apparently now claim to have had such UFO abduction experiences—but are these extraterrestrials and satanists one and the same? When the historical and corroborating physical evidence does not support the tale—as is the case with satanists and extraterrestrial abductors—then let us please be careful not to condemn ourselves to a repetition of past interpretive mistakes.

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#### Dr. Goodwin and Ms. Hill respond:

To the Editor:

We read with interest Mr. Noll's comments. He seems to agree with our basic premise that historians have been struggling with materials about satanic rituals longer than have therapists and that we can learn much from the styles of approach and analysis that have evolved. We agree that historians can teach much about how to think skeptically about such materials. This is important but was not the focus of our paper, which emphasized strategies for approaching these narratives with the possibility in mind that they describe actual experiences. Hopefully, someone will write too about spiritual/ethical approaches to such narratives, another possible level of analysis that we did not emphasize.

It is true that clinicians approach historical and anthropological materials differently from historians. We look for analogies to our own experiences. As Freud said, "Analogies prove nothing . . . but sometimes thus can make us feel more at home." Our aim is to find useful ways to think about the narratives patients present. Mr. Noll suggests that studies of people who describe contacts with extraterrestrials provide a helpful analogy when we are trying to keep in focus the richness and variety of narratives derived from or distorted by fantasy. Our article explored the analogy between listening to our patients and listening to the ancient voice of Epiphanius; we found this helpful, too.

Mr. Noll makes the point that allegations about witchcraft are used rhetorically, as against Jews. Parenthetically, we would not agree that this type of rhetoric was important in the Holocaust; it had been in many, many earlier po-

groms. However genetic and economic rhetoric was Hitler's mainstay against Jews, Gypsies, Poles and others. The accusations about satanism that we have heard of in this epoch were made by the other side, that is, about the Gestapo. This type of rhetoric is a problem when we study any form of family violence. "He beats his wife." "He sleeps with his mother." "He is a child molester." All these statements can be made in anger or as part of a program of vilification. All of them can describe actualities. Many other medical and psychiatric conditions are used as insults as well: "crazy", "syphilitic", "demented", "leper." Historically, the rhetorical use of such phrases becomes more honest and less stigmatizing as our understanding of the phenomenology becomes more precise and complete.

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