lack of scholarly attention being given to current supernatural folk belief and legend.

Bennett finds two distinct kinds of spirits in the corpus of legends she collects: those her informants identify as evil or "nasty," such as poltergeists; and good spirits—those of parents, spouses, siblings and children— who continue to love, protect, and occasionally interact with the living. In examining the rhetorical traditions of belief and disbelief in which these stories play a part, Bennett finds them closely interrelated with her informants' traditional attitudes about familial relationships and women's roles and attributes. She argues that these precepts determine what beliefs are acceptable to her informants. For example, spiritualism seems to be taboo to believers and skeptics alike; it undermines the qualities of purposefulness, connectedness, and caring that differentiate the good dead from the bad for believers, and it also challenges the skeptics' view that the world is knowable and "un-supernatural."

ESP and divination of various kinds are also the subjects of some of Bennett's data, and here again the worldview of the tellers colors their relationship to the belief. While telepathy and premonitions of various kinds are consonant with the women's views of themselves as intuitive and emotionally connected to others, divination is viewed with suspicion as "divining" into areas outside the natural and permissible sphere of knowledge.

While historical background and documentation for these beliefs is found throughout this excellent book, the final chapter is devoted to a brief history of ghosts and a discussion of their place in the worldview of different eras, providing a fascinating overview of the extensive literature on this subject and demonstrating that then, as now, ghosts fit in as part of a wider belief system and comprehensive worldview. Traditions of Belief is an exciting addition to this literature, and one that will, I hope, inspire further serious research in this area.


Reviewed by Kenneth D. Pimple

Cult Archaeology & Creationism is a collection of essays which "grew from a symposium at the 1986 meeting of the Society for American Archaeology" (xi); the symposium was organized by Kenneth Feder, Luanne Hudson, and Francis Harrold, all anthropologists. The essays are concerned with "pseudoscience," a blanket term which covers both creationism and "cult archaeology," or claims about the past which cloak themselves in the guise of science but which are at best bad science, such as Erich von Däniken's Chariots of the Gods (1970). Efforts have already been made to debunk cult archaeologists, and so the articles in this book "are not primarily concerned . . .
with showing how and why these beliefs are wrong. . . Instead, this book is concerned primarily with two tasks relatively neglected by the scientific community, those of understanding these beliefs and dealing with them" (x-xi). It seems that by "understanding" the authors primarily mean that they wish to know where these beliefs come from (rather than, e.g., what the beliefs do for people—though see pp. 4-7 for some discussion of the "functions" of pseudoscientific belief) and that "dealing with" the beliefs means getting rid of them.

The direct implications that this collection has for folklore are limited, though intriguing, and I will bring some of them up after giving an overview of the work.

The eleven contributors include several anthropologists and archaeologists, as well as a sociologist, a psychologist, and a historian. The essays average about ten pages in length, cohere remarkably well, and are without exception clearly written and thought-provoking; even the several chapters explicating statistical data do not get bogged down. For anyone interested in pursuing the issues of belief in creationism, ancient astronauts, pre-Columbian European expeditions to the New World, and a number of other belief systems, this book certainly offers both a good introduction and invaluable bibliography.

Chapter 1, "The Nature and Dangers of Cult Archaeology" by William H. Stiebing, Jr., defines terms and sets the scope of the book; Chapter 2, "Scientific Creationism: World View, not Science" by Alice B. Kehoe, describes "scientific creationism" as a political movement rather than a scientific stance, and therefore rather different (both more holistic and more dangerous) than other fringe beliefs; and Chapter 3, "Educational Experience and Belief in Paranormal Phenomena" by Thomas Gray, presents the findings of a study which shows that even "a course specifically dealing with evidence for the paranormal has only modest and not very durable effects on beliefs" (32)—in other words, science education does not seem to be effective in stemming belief in "pseudoscience." I found Chapters 2 and 3 to be particularly provocative and even-handed (in some other chapters, scientific zeal seems to outweigh objectivity just a trifle).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 ("Cult Archaeology and Creationism: A Coordinated Research Project" by Kenneth L. Feder; "East is East and West is West? A Regional Comparison of Cult Belief Patterns" by Luanne Hudson; and "Patterns of Creationist Belief Among College Students" by Francis B. Harrold and Raymond A. Eve) represent a massive coordinated effort in which a questionnaire (provided in the appendix) aimed at discerning the level of belief held on various pseudoscientific topics was filled out by 979 students attending five colleges in Texas, California, and Connecticut (38). This study is impressive and will no doubt prove useful to anyone interested in pursuing questions about these beliefs, including belief in UFOs. Likewise, Chapter 8, "A Century after Darwin: Scientific Creationism and Academe" by Laurie Godfrey and John Cole, is a statistical study of how often the issues of creationism and evolution were discussed in the scientific and scholarly presses between 1977 and 1985.

Chapter 7, "ETs, Rafts, and Runestones: Confronting Pseudoarchaeology in the Classroom" by Suzanne Knudson Engler, is a highly anecdotal piece about the author’s experiences in teaching anti-pseudoscience courses; and Chapter 9,
"Fantastic Archaeology: What Should We Do About It?" by Stephen Williams, presents a fascinating though brief overview of the history of "fantastic archeology," starting in 1580 with Spanish debates about the origin of American Indians (124). Both this chapter and Chapter 10 (Pseudoscientific Beliefs: The End of the Beginning or the Beginning of the End?" by Raymond A. Eve and Francis B. Harrold) also offer some suggestions about what to do about pseudoscience. One suggestion made repeatedly is the need for better science education (for example, pp. 87 and 138). I certainly do not object to any efforts to improve education in America, but in the light of Gray's findings as presented in Chapter 3 it seems unlikely that more or better education will have much effect on the level of pseudoscientific belief. It seems ironic that these scientists, who bemoan the ability of students to think critically and take objective data into account, consistently let their preconceptions about what can be accomplished in the classroom override their colleague's clearly presented data proving these preconceptions wrong (or at least ill-founded). However, Eve and Harrold do recognize in Chapter 10 that a simple increase in the number of science courses will not solve the problem addressed in this work (147): new kinds of science courses are needed to help students unload themselves of certain kinds of undesirable (from the archeologist's point of view) cultural baggage.

To the folklorist there are several particularly interesting things about this collection. First, of course, is the fact that these scientists are dealing with folk beliefs (acknowledged as such on pages 35 and 72). I also found the discussion in Chapter 5 on regional variation very interesting. "The working hypothesis was that noticeable regional differences in levels of cult beliefs exist because of differences in attitudes and values due to regionally different modes of socialization," but the hypothesis "does not appear to be validated" (54). The lack of regional variation seems to empirically demonstrate the existence of a fairly widespread "popular culture" vis-a-vis paranormal belief, a popular culture which folklorists certainly have the expertise to investigate. Also of potential interest to folklorists are the findings that "belief in astrology and its predictive powers appears ... to be on the wane" (60) and that "sensationalistic media" such as the National Enquirer do not seem to have a strong impact on fantastic beliefs (64).

The authors seem to have a few blind spots of their own. For example, they seem to be blissfully unaware of a few aspects of "Pseudoscientific" belief which might be quite salient. Their focus is always on intellectual capacity and whether people "understand" or can "reason" adequately, and never on how entertaining cult archeology can be. The authors do recognize that to compete with ancient astronauts for the hearts and minds of the public, scientists must write popular-level books, but they seem not to realize that the framing of science as entertainment tacitly supports the pseudoscientific project. I am intrigued by their seeming lack of awareness that they, too, are steeped in a particular worldview, one which values "true" or "good" science extremely highly. While the authors clearly disapprove of people who believe in creationism on the basis of religious authority (72), I suspect that a degree of uncritical acceptance of the authority of "good" science would not be unwelcome.
At any rate, the book ends with a plea for a "sociology of science," which should be studied by "scholars of all disciplines" (150). I think it is clear that folklorists would have much to offer such an investigation.


Reviewed by Jeffrey H. Cohen

In this entertaining book, Schechter demonstrates the connection between folklore and popular expressive culture. Contemporary images, primarily from "B" movies, pulp fiction, and tabloids, are identified with motifs and genres associated with folk culture. The assumption that popular arts are rudimentary expressions of "fine art" is bypassed; instead, popular arts are examined as the realm where folklore is given life.

To make the connection between popular art and folklore more explicit, Schechter takes a number of examples and discusses their relation to traditional motifs. Social messages about individual identity, marriage, and morality abound. "B" films of the 1950s, often cited for their messages of pending nuclear destruction, are shown to also comment on the world of interpersonal relations. This is made absolutely explicit in Chapter Four, "The Killer Granny: Archetypes of Schlock," where a motif index is developed for tabloid news.

Schechter finds the key to understanding the continued existence of these motifs in the work of Jung. Specifically, he uses Jung's theory of compensation and his concept of mythic symbols. These are compelling powers that, "have a tendency to arise in response to any serious imbalance in the conscious life of a single person or an entire society" (p.128). Folk motifs are seen by the author as powerful mythic symbols. Their usefulness is seen in the way they are interpreted and compensate for modern tensions. Images like the eternal child (embodied in the youth movements of the late 1960s) are read as folkloric responses (primordial images) to the tensions of modern life.

Finally, Schechter briefly examines the symbiosis of popular art, folklore, and contemporary life. Stories from the realm of popular art inform contemporary reporting. Images from horror films are cited in the description of everyday occurrences. This signals one of the ways folklore and popular culture continue to grow and develop through time.

Schechter's book is original and informative. The folkloric nature of his study complements studies that focus on social criticism and the popular arts. For the student of popular culture, or those interested in this field, The Bosom Serpent can serve as a fine introduction.