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.