

The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions. By David J. Hufford. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. Pp. xxiv + 258, bibliography, indices.

Reviewed by Phyllis Harrison.

The validity of individual taste has long been commonplace in folkloristics, and the issue of "superstition" vs. "belief" long settled, the latter being brought forth regularly only in introductory folklore classes and as a convenient brickbat to hurl at disciplinary foes. That certain herbs do indeed possess curative powers, that many "old wives tales" do indeed provide effective remedies or solutions will surely not surprise readers of this review. Hufford's work demonstrates clearly, however, that such attitudes do not necessarily prevail with those particular folk beliefs involving personal experience and the supernatural. **The Terror That Comes in the Night** does not aim to provide ultimate psychological, parapsychological, or physiological explanations for the traditional belief known variously as the Old Hag, witch riding, or (in its oldest sense) nightmare. It does provide a specific body of empirical data regarding the Old Hag tradition/experience and a specific methodology which concentrates on the experience itself rather than the validity of cultural explanations for it. Hufford's experience-centered approach assumes that accounts of experiences like the Old Hag are neither falsehood nor fantasy but are accurate reports of physiological events experienced by the tellers.

Beginning with the tradition in Newfoundland, Hufford employs archival material and in-depth interviews to identify the pattern of subjective experiences known as the Old Hag. Primary features of the experience include an impression of wakefulness, the accurate perception of surroundings, paralysis, and fear. Secondary features include visual and/or auditory stimuli (i.e., an animal, an old woman, a bright light, footsteps), a sensation of presence, feelings of motion or pressure, and respiratory difficulty. In Newfoundland, this experience is sometimes defined as a supernatural visitation (the Old Hag), and

sometimes as a stagnation of the blood, though the latter does not exclude the former. The frequency of this experience/belief in Newfoundland and the close links between victim and narrator lead Hufford to question the validity of the assumption that cultural models like misinterpretation, faulty memory, psychoses, hoaxes, or the tradition itself provide the primary source for the belief. Rather than a cultural source, Hufford postulates an experiential source for the tradition, and questionnaire surveys along with further interviews demonstrate the existence of the experience among Newfoundlanders who have had no previous contact with the Old Hag tradition.

Drawing upon field-collected data as well as archival, literary, and historical source materials, Hufford extends his research cross-culturally and diachronically. Such comparisons allow him to conclude that the experience known in Newfoundland as the Old Hag is indeed a recognizable physiological experience, one which may be described and interpreted according to cultural models but which does occur regularly-- Hufford estimates approximately fifteen percent of the general population has experienced the pattern-- in the absence of cultural models. Such data clearly supports his hypothesis that the tradition stems from experiential sources, the experience shaping the tradition, rather than from cultural sources, the tradition shaping the experience.

One chapter of **The Terror That Comes in the Night** reviews sleep research literature pertinent to the Old Hag phenomenon, including both psychological studies of dream content and physiological studies of sleep processes. "The Psychological Dis-Interpretation of the Old Hag" illustrates some of the potential problems brought to the study of belief by the assumption that a tradition arises from culture rather than from experience. One problem has been a confusion of terminology through which "nightmare" comes to refer to any bad dream or sleep disturbance rather than to the specific pattern of events which Hufford, and those familiar with the tradition, call the Old Hag. A more serious problem has been the tendency of psychological studies to rationalize or explain away the belief with little regard for the events described. Thus the Old Hag or nightmare becomes various forms of sexual repression,

hostility, fantasy, delusion, and almost anything but a genuine physiological experience. Research into the physiological processes of sleep, though suffering some of the same difficulties mentioned above, sheds interesting light on those physical events which constitute the Old Hag. These processes include the intrusion of factors from one stage of sleep, rapid eye movement or REM sleep, into wakefulness, specifically the factors of sleep paralysis (the inability to perform voluntary movements while consciously aware of wakefulness) and hypnagogic hallucinations (hallucinations which generally occur just prior to awakening). Sleep research does not explain what sets these particular processes in motion, nor does it offer any explanation for the content of the experience itself. It does provide accepted medical terminology for the description of observable physiological processes which, appearing together in particular cultural settings, have long been described in folk tradition as "the Old Hag."

As Hufford notes, the relationship of the Old Hag phenomenon to ordinary dream processes raises yet another puzzle. That numerous individuals outside the tradition report similar physical experiences like sleep paralysis is understandable. That individuals outside the tradition report similar content, like an old woman or footsteps, is less easily understood. The solution to the puzzle is beyond the scope of Hufford's work, and his acknowledgement of that a refreshing change from theoretical interpretations which indirectly assume that large portions of humankind are victims of delusions and deceptions which just happen to manifest themselves in remarkably similar patterns. Hufford's demonstration that narratives of Old Hag attacks include accurate reports of empirically verifiable physiological processes marks a significant turn-about in the study of supernatural belief, one which, as Hufford suggests, might well be applied to other supernatural or paranormal traditions.

At the same time, though the experience-centered approach provides valuable data, it does not address that portion of the tradition most likely to interest the folklorist, that being not the cultural source, but the cultural definition or explanation. Our interest in folk medicine lies not with the wart or the cold itself, but with the

culturally derived remedies and attitudes associated with it. The omission is intentional. Observers do not question the existence of the observable symptom, whatever they think of the cure. Observers frequently question both the experience and the belief when dealing with the supernatural. This attitude provides the impetus for Hufford's work, and his primary interest is in the validation of an experience rather than the analysis of a tradition.

Because the primary focus of his study is the physical experience of the Old Hag, much of the book consists of verbatim texts of interviews illustrating types of the experience and various settings for it. The data itself will be of intrinsic interest to students of folk belief, and Hufford's handling of it is careful, sensitive, and insightful. Although the lay reader might find some of the medical terminology a bit confusing, Hufford has avoided jargonistic pitfalls to provide a fascinating and highly readable study of the Old Hag experience. His criticisms of what he calls the cultural source hypothesis and his presentation of his experiential source hypothesis make the volume far more than a collection of interesting texts. **The Terror That Comes in the Night** offers a methodology which provides significant data on a highly sensitive subject and which allows tradition bearers full respect for the validity of the experience quite apart from explanations for it.

Trapped! The Story of Floyd Collins. By Robert K. Murray and Roger W. Brucker. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1982. Pp. 335, bibliographic notes, black and white photographs.

Reviewed by John Bendix.

The authors assert that the story of Floyd Collins "was one of the first truly **national** media events" (p. 163), and that it fit within the context of an America that "was a silly, immature society" in the 1920s which "gaped at flagpole sitters...and made superhuman heroes out of sports figures and aviators - Red Grange, Babe Ruth, Charles Lindburgh" (p. 244). Floyd Collins, a member of a "typical