

Review of *Intimate Alien: The Hidden Story of the UFO* by David J. Halperin

Halperin, David J. *Intimate Alien: The Hidden Story of the UFO*. Stanford UP, 2020. Spiritual Phenomena Series. 292 pp. ISBN 9781503607088 (hardcover), 9781503612129 (e-book). \$26.00 (hardcover), \$19.99 (e-book).

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Retired UNC Chapel Hill religious studies professor David J. Halperin's 2020 book *Intimate Alien: The Hidden Story of the UFO* develops C. G. Jung's position in *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* that UFOs are mythical in the sense that they represent psychological truths about human beings. *Intimate Alien* is about the psychological dynamics that engage between the perception of an external stimulus and the conclusion that one has seen a UFO. The process often includes an individual trauma, alienation, or a mythic theme with historical or archetypal roots. There may be a latency period after a traumatic event in the distant past until a mundane stimulus triggers the individual to give a UFO interpretation to a particular experience or event. Frequently there is projection from the personal or collective unconscious. Once news of the sighting spreads, the UFO becomes a "collective dream" (247).

Intimate Alien is divided into three sections, with chapters 1 and 2 constituting the first section. In chapter 1, Halperin recalls that his teenage engagement with ufology—inspired by Gray Barker's *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*—helped him cope with his mother's approaching death but waned after her passing. Chapter 2 provides four examples of how UFO sightings can be explained in psychological terms. A young man's drawing of a UFO, which differs from three other witnesses' circular drawings in looking like a ruptured condom, reflects his anxiety over his girlfriend's pregnancy; the red light amid three white lights on a triangular craft reflects the fear of Communism in Europe; a shared vision relates to "paintings and sculptures of the virgin of the Immaculate Conception standing on the moon" (52); and so on with a mother ship and three smaller craft in Papua New Guinea. All of these examples include some version of the Jungian quaternity, which supports Halperin's argument that the key to UFOs is not their objective reality but instead their psychological meaning.

Section two explores UFO abductions as the spontaneous reoccurrence of historical memory or archetypal influence. Chapter 3 attributes biracial couple Betty and Barney Hill's 1963 abduction experience to "the deep collective experience of African enslavement" (82); Barney's circle of warts on his groin is a "psychism" or physical manifestation related to slaves' fear of castration (82). In chapter 4, Whitley Strieber's abduction experience in *Communion: A True Story* reveals the repressed memory of

childhood sexual abuse; however, the familiar alien image on the cover reaches back to archetypes related to Neolithic ritual masks thought be of the gods. In chapter 5, Ezekiel's vision of a wheel and four faces (human, lion, ox, and eagle—similar to ancient art and sculpture) constitutes another mandala/quaternity image. Halperin also emphasizes that an abduction that feels like a descent is really a trance journey into the unconscious. (The point might have been helpfully amplified by Jung's own statement in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* about his encounter with the unconscious: "Then I let myself drop" [Vintage Books, 1961/1989, p. 179]. Also, Halperin's discussion of Paul's third-person narration of a man in Christ who visits the third heaven could have benefited from the proper terminology—astral body, bilocation, out-of-body experience; OBEs are often mistaken for alien abductions.)

Section three deals with terrestrial matters: men in black, the Shaver mystery, and Roswell (148). In chapter 6, Halperin traces the men in black to Gray Barker's mythmaking, which reflects unease about McCarthyism and Barker's own fear of being outed as a homosexual; black-clad men also suggest Death or the Devil. Chapter 7 examines the writings of Richard Shaver (mythmaker and mental patient), published by Raymond Palmer in *Amazing Stories*. Shaver's claims reflect his experiences in a mental institution and fears related to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (Here Halperin might have added that Shaver is Jung if Jung had explored the depths without a firm anchor in everyday reality.) Finally, chapter 8 attributes the Roswell event to fallible memory, concerns about Soviet espionage, and the fear of nuclear war. "Translated from the mythic symbolism, this is the meaning of Roswell: Child-humanity, dreaming of heavenly domination, crashes to permanent extinction" (237).

Halfway through *Intimate Alien* Halperin wisely notes, "I learned this [caution] as a graduate student in Biblical studies: 'similar' and 'dissimilar' are not an either/or choice, but a both/and" (138). Yet in claiming, "The totality of UFO lore is a religious myth through which those who've not been blessed (or cursed) with the experience can vicariously participate in it" (243), he engages in black-and-white thinking and mistakes the part for the whole. It is not possible to interpret the "totality" of UFO information as psychological myth. Here are some examples of the historical information that Halperin distorts or overlooks. He claims that MJ-12 (the group President Truman appointed to deal with the UFO issue) is not real. He asserts that there has "never . . . [been] an actual piece of hardware that can be analyzed and shown to be otherworldly" (9). On the contrary, the late Philip J. Corso's *The Day After Roswell* (Pocket Books, 1997) describes his distribution of recovered extraterrestrial artifacts to research laboratories around the country. In stating, "Why haven't the twenty-first century's incomparably greater opportunities for on-the-spot photography produced a harvest of equally persuasive pictures?" (9), the author overlooks, among other examples, the photos taken by Edward Albert "Billy" Meier, whose alien contact is the most thoroughly documented case in history. Neither is there any reference to the historical record established by Steven M. Greer, whose *Disclosure: Military and Government Witnesses Reveal the Greatest Secrets in Modern History* (Crossing Point, 2001), a 570-page compendium of official documents and first-hand accounts, makes a persuasive case for UFOs' physical and extraterrestrial reality.

Thus, questions arise. Would Halperin's experience as a teenage ufologist have been different if he had read Donald E. Keyhoe's *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* (Henry

Holt, 1953), which is based on Air Force case files, instead of Barker's *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers?* (In light of Keyhoe's importance, Halperin's one reference to him seems insufficient.) What about the two fly-overs of Washington, DC, in July of 1952 and the Phoenix lights in 1997? Were these too just symbols of the Self from the collective unconscious? When UFOs hover over nuclear launch facilities and missiles go offline, can there be any doubt that the craft are not psychological? Was the recent cockpit camera footage of a jet fighter chasing a UFO just the pilot's projection?

Intimate Alien has its place in the UFO literature because it offers some excellent readings of central accounts, but it is marred by name-calling and reductionism: UFOs "remain the province of the eccentric, the discontented, and the deluded . . . losers and misfits" (4); and the mythological "approach explains better than anything else why people see UFOs and believe—and disbelieve—in them" (10). Halperin never fair-mindedly considers "anything else" beyond Jung's mythical method.

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