CHELSEA SMILEYS:

Interim Report on a Gang-Violence Rumor

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I first heard the rumor on 28th February when my
daughter Kate reported that it had been rife in her
Croydon Secondary School (1st-3rd years) on that day
and the previous day. Phone-calls and letters to pupils
and headteachers elsewhere in the borough showed that
it had visited every secondary school in Croydon at
the same time as Kate's or the end of the week before
(23rd-24th February).

In each case the basic pattern of response had been the
same. Pupil's reaction had been near-panic--
children refusing to leave the school premises without
adult escort, worried phone-calls to friends and family,
some children kept away from school, and children talking
of little else for two or three days.

Teachers reacted by checking with other schools and
police, by one-to-one reassurance, and by holding
special assemblies and/or circulating notes to form-
teachers discrediting the story.

BASIC STORY. Details vary, of course, but the
following motifs are extremely constant:
1. A gang of youths called the Chelsea Smileys are
going round schools attacking pupils on their way home.
2. They question children about the Chelsea
Football Club.
3. They cut pupils' mouths at the sides in a
grotesque 'smile' (using knives/razors/credit cards).
4. They do something else (e.g., punch them in the
stomach) to make the victim scream, which splits
their face even wider.
5. They were at so-and-so local school on day X,
and will be here on day Y.

DISTRIBUTION. Detailed research has so far
concentrated on South London and has shown that
the rumor and panic were found right across the region.
The following London Boroughs were definitely affected:
Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lewisham, Southwark,
Lambeth, Croydon, Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton.
In addition, areas in Kent, such as Dartford and
Gravesend were also hit. I have not, however, had
reports from every school in the region, and the
distribution may be more patchy than it appears at this
stage. A brief report on the rumour in the Sunday
Express ('Riddle of Knife Rumour' [12th March 1989])
gives the distribution as "South London and as far as
Greenford and Sevenoaks in Kent."

I have not yet attempted a systematic search
elsewhere, but have received reports from isolated
places in North London: Archway, Marylebone, Tufnell
14-year-old nephew from Leytonstone (East London)
reports no school-panic, but he has heard one friend
refer to the story (he had renamed it the 'Liverpool
Smiley Smilers'). I have received no other report from East
London.

Friends elsewhere in the country have not heard of
it, but one important reference from outside London has
come to light: a boy was giving a talk about football
violence. He mentioned the practice of a particular
"firm" of making two slits, one at each corner of the
victim's mouth and then 'kneeing him in the balls' so
that the resulting grins caused his cheeks to tear.
The scars left him with a permanent 'smile'. I'm
fairly sure he was talking about Chelsea supporters, 
though I can't be absolutely certain. As far as I
know, the story was news to his friends (who were in
his discussion group) and so it was certainly not a
rumour of the type you describe" (Milton Keynes, March 1989).

CHRONOLOGY. Schools in a particular
borough appear to have been first reported on different days, and we
do not always have exact dates, but by charting the
earliest known occurrence in each borough a reasonably
clear broad pattern emerges of a spread from
Bexley/Bromley westwards across South London and
eastwards across Kent.

Apart from the Milton Keynes example, the first
known dated reference we have so far is in Bexley
on 1st January, but the first reported school-panic is in
Bromley on 2nd February. Smiley panic in Bexley is 6th February. It is worth noting that
several Bexley schools reported that they were not
visited by the rumor at all.

REPORTED ORIGINS. A regular feature of the rumour as
reported by pupils is that the gang come from a
particular named school in the area. This 'localising'
trait is common in rumours/legends. A theory of origin
which was regularly reported by teachers maintained
that the rumour had stemmed from a fight between two
pupils at a school in North Bexley, in which one pupil
had his nose broken. This appears to have been started
unwittingly by the Bexley police.

The first thing that local police do when confronted
with such a story as the Chelsea Smileys is to check
their 'incident book' to see if anything relevant has
been reported. It appears that the Bexley police did
just this and told enquiring local teachers that the
only incident remotely connected with the story was
this fight, and as this information was passed from
school to school--at teacher level--the qualification
was dropped and this 'rumour' became accepted as fact,
or at least as probably correct.

OTHER 'ORIGIN' THEORIES. In areas affected after the
26th February, many teachers (and pupils) connected the
story with the TV film The Firm (BBC2 26th February).
This film was about football violence, and apparently
included some gratuitous face-cutting (I have not seen
it), but not of the 'smile' type. Given the chronology
involved, this film may have added credence or vitality
to the rumour, but it cannot have caused it.

One person I met in the London area on hearing the
story connected it immediately with a half-remembered
incident in the Kings Road, Chelsea which was widely
reported in the national press and TV. This was the
so-called 'fat man' case of December 1984, where a
Chelsea supporter had savagely attacked a publican's
face with a broken glass. Again, however, there was no
'smile' motif.

Several people have pointed out the possible connec-
tion with the Acid House 'smiley' badges which received
a great deal of media attention in 1988. A fairly
regular motif of the rumour has the gang travelling in
a van with the 'smiley' badge painted on the side.

PRECURSORS. Information gleaned from other folklorists
and responses to an unpublicized questionnaire (30th May)
show that neither the Chelsea Smilers story, nor the
ensuing panic, is unique. Selected items in
chronological order:

-
1950's Newcastle: A very similar story (including 'smile' motif) was told about the Glasgow razor gangs.
Early 1970's Liverpool: Gang: "Can your mother say? - Well, sew this" - Skelmersdale: 'Green (or red) Jackets' gang caught someone who pleaded it was their birthday, so the gang scored 'happy birthday' on their back with a knife.
1971/2 Liverpool: The 'Green Jackets' gang playing nothings and crosses on faces with razors or Stanley knives (plus other things). Some degree of school panic.

NOTES. It must be stressed that my research so far is at best patchy, and any conclusions must be very tentative. It is clear that we must distinguish between the story of the Chelsea Smilers and its associated panic. The story can exist without the panic, although not vice versa.

Teachers, when faced with such a phenomenon, are in a very difficult position. They must act to discredit the story and to calm things down, but they run the risk of their actions being taken as legitimising the rumour (examples of this have been reported to me). When the panic hits, teachers have to rely on the teachers and the police for information—which is often as much 'hearsay' as the pupils' rumour. Local police are in a similar position. Hence the spread of official rumours such as the origin in the fight at the Bexley School.

The element which appears to have caused the children to panic, and which sets the story off from other legends, is the reported premised timetable of the gang. Their dates were not located in 'rave time', but are coming here next Tuesday, etc. To adult eyes, however, this is the one motif which seems to be immediately suspect: if the timetable is known then the police must be prepared for it.

Even this motif, however, is not unique. The 'Green Jackets' theme and the rumour in the 1970's is described thus by a correspondent: They were reported to be approaching Formby along the beach from the direction of Liverpool and were said to have terrorised other schools... Though I found it hard to believe that the police could not prevent such an invasion I was genuinely alarmed and kept my daughters at home the afternoon. It was only after contacting the police ourselves later in the day that we were reassured that the scare had no foundation.

[Editor's Note: The "smile" motif may have deeper folk roots. Among 'The Witty and Entertaining Exploits of George Buchanan' (a chapbook printed in 1703), we find an incident in which 'teacher' makes himself ridiculous by courtiers for his shabby dress. At dinner, he comes into the stables, and with a knife cut all their horses' coats, not sore, but so as they might bleed. Later, as the courtiers begin to get some again, he turns to them and laughs heartily, saying to the king, "How can I but laugh, when horses cannot hold their peace... don't you see how your horses have rent their (chaps, laughing) by old boots?" (Reprinted from Fables and Allegories. A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 328). I believe that this cruel prank shows up in other Anglo-American trickster tales as well.

"The Joker," a regular nemesis of the American comic book superhero Batman, also boasts a similar deformed, perpetual smile and may reflect a similar motif in popular culture. Jack Nicholson's memorable embodiment of this character in this summer's movie may give the motif added vitality in America. And the Japanese "spit-mouth woman" (described by James Kirkup later in this issue) may be yet another way "Smiler." Readers?]

"CONTemporary Legends," 1924

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Contemporary legend scholarship dates from the 1940s but awareness of the phenomenon can be found in the 1930s. Alexander Woollcott's "Weirdos" (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1937) is probably the most frequently cited example. But no legend scholar seems to have noticed a somewhat earlier example. Near the beginning of Chapter 6 of The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald appears the following:

"Gatsby's notoriety, spread abroad by the hundreds who had accepted his hospitality and so become authorities upon his past, had increased all summer until he fell just short of being news. Contemporary legends such as the "underground pipe-line to Canada" attached themselves to him and there was one persistent story that he didn't live in a house at all, but in a boat that looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore."

The interest of this passage is two-fold. First, it seems to show that Fitzgerald was aware of some features of what we now call contemporary legends, in particular that the same basic motif may be "attached" to different people. Secondly, and perhaps more strikingly, there is the fact that he calls such stories "contemporary legends" which is now favored by many scholars but which has had to compete with the many rivals used by both scholars and the lay public.

The Great Gatsby was published in 1925, but largely written in 1924, and the manuscript contains a passage virtually identical to that quoted (Brucoli 1973:156). Thus we have Fitzgerald using the phrase "contemporary legend" with apparent casualness in 1924. Is there any other evidence of awareness at this time or earlier?

Source

TRUTH STRANGER THAN LEGEND: Contemporary Legends in Europe and the Orient

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I first became aware of the emotional power of urban legend in the early 1960's. The city of Bath was then starting to receive increasingly large numbers of foreign residents, in particular blacks and Indians, many of them part of a continuing traffic from Bristol. The contrast between their colorful, exuberant and often happy-go-lucky way of life and the staid gentility of the English Bath was to me very exciting. But to most of the inhabitants this injection of vitality appeared like an inversion and an affront to values that were sometimes still set in the 18th century.

This gave rise to the first urban legend I remember. I heard it from my mother, a working class Tyneside woman who might have been expected to accept "coloured people," for there had been quite a large population of Arabs, Indians, and West Indians in our home town, South Shields. But a few years' residence in Bath had perhaps infected her with middle-class "Bath-itis," or perhaps Bath encouraged the underlying conservatism often found in the working class in Britain. She was a woman whom I had thought to be tolerant, but whether in racial or sexual prejudice, so I was shocked when one day she informed me that the blacks in Bath lived on cans of cat and dog food.

I knew that many of them were unemployed, and that they lived in run-down accommodation in the poorer parts of the city. But she knew my mother's story was absurd. I found out that she had heard it from our cleaning woman, a Bath widow who had "come down in the world" as she put it. But whatever the origin of this legend was the fury with which they both turned upon me when I ventured to doubt its truth or her anger was as irrational as their tale, and soon died down. But it showed me how ferociously some people will cling to rumour and legend, and how they will indignantly try to
prove the truth by citing the experiences of a friend or
someone with whom "the noise is any noise when she is riding in her husband's car...." The name of the place where hubby stopped for petrol is also relevant. The fact that his car was parked in a residential area with a lot of wildlife might add some weight to his story. The factual details often invented by authors of urban legends to make them more convincing.

In the Mid Pyrenees since early spring, Liberation reported that farmers were desperate. Only the fruit-growers were happy, because they were able to sell their crops.

The Paysans became jealous of the fruit farmers - they were inserting their invisible, controlled water channels. The paysans began claiming that whenever a rare cloud appears in the burning blue sky, the clouds are the work of the foreigners. They are convinced that if they can release a single drop of rain for the drought-stricken farmers.

They say it is the fruit-growers who send up phoney rainclouds, just like the Russians when Chernobyl sent up planes to prevent clouds sending down radioactive rain that might contaminate the ground.

In the Zurich TageS Anzeiger I found a story telling how a hearse carrying the body for burial could not find a parking space because of the scores of cars surrounding the village church in Hartmannsdorf. The driver had to drive her husband's body down the road while he went to get help and to inform the relatives of the dead person who were waiting in the church. But when the hearse arrived, the driver found that her husband's body had been thrown into the street...." (Le capiteaine" 1985). I seem to remember a similar form of chaos logic used by Mr. Thatcher against the miners. It was strikingly similar.

1982 saw an interesting crop of urban legends from France. There was the case of housewives finding snake eggs among the Asiatique made textiles in the department stores of Lyons. Then there was the rumour of poisonous spiders found in potted yucca plants-- "from abroad," of course. And snakes had even been found in mechanical toys from Hong Kong. Such rumours are the source of urban legends, and are obviously based on fears of economic competition from foreign sources, mainly from the Far East.

The interest in urban legends in France in this respect is the creation of Le Fondation pour l'etude et l'Information sur les Rumeurs, started by the sociologist Jean-Francois Revel, on the subject of a report in Liberation of October 4th, 1984. People can telephone the Foundation with the latest rumour. One of these, recorded in Liberation, was that the dog had become a feral in Paris to raise rats as pets. Raperfer rejects this rumour as "physically incoherent," and suggests that the rat, which has the appearance of a small dog such as a chihuahua, could possibly be a small rodent called an agouti found in Guyana and Brazil, and which is not carnivorous. Therefore, he says, the rumour would find difficulty in being accepted ("Elle court" 1986). But is this not the same urban legend as that which provides the title to Jan Harold Brunvand's The Mexican Pet? (1986)

Through the summer of 1986, there were sightings of, reports, and rumours of a big black panther prowling in the dunes at le Touquet, said to be feeding on wild rabbits and small children. The police took imprints of its paw and sent them for analysis to a zoologist. It turned out to be simply a large black cat.

There was another tale of a woman who usually when returning from vacation in the South of France slept all the way in the back seat of her husband's car. But when she started to get nervous, knew she was going to win him back up and went to the Ladies. "Without bothering to check if she was still asleep on the back seat, the husband got off without his gendarme who had been mobilized to find him, but as long as four hours after forgetting his wife on the Autoroute du Soleil he still had not checked if that person was still alive."

This true fight divers resembles those found in the collections of Paul Smith (1983: 36) and Jan Brunvand (1981: 112-116) about caravanners on vacation. In this case, the real victim is the name of the victim is given: "Mme X had asked his son who lives any noise when she is riding in her husband's car..." The name of the place where hubby stopped for petrol is also relevant. The fact that his car was parked in a residential area with a lot of wildlife might add some weight to his story. The factual details often invented by authors of urban legends to make them more convincing.

In the Zurich TageS Anzeiger I found a story telling how a hearse carrying the body for burial could not find a parking space because of the scores of cars surrounding the village church in Hartmannsdorf. The driver had to drive her husband's body down the road while he went to get help and to inform the relatives of the dead person who were waiting in the church. But when the hearse arrived, the driver found that her husband's body had been thrown into the street...." (Le capiteaine" 1985). I seem to remember a similar form of chaos logic used by Mr. Thatcher against the miners. It was strikingly similar. I worked in Japan, but frequently traveled back and forth to Europe. The envious West, jealous of the continuing economic successes of Japan, would naturally be filled with a kind of anti-Japanese urban legends. So we have had reports that the raw fish used in sushi and sashimi contains minute grubs that can enter the blood stream and contaminate the brain. Certain chopsticks exported from Japan are said to have poisoned tips.

In Japan, the first urban legend I heard was about a taxi driver and appears to be a version of the well known Vanishing Woman. One night in Kyoto, a young and inexperienced taxi-driver picked up a beautiful young woman dressed in exquisite kimono and obi at a famous temple. The lady gave him the address she wanted to go to, which said it was a house right next to a famous temple. Like all Kyoto taxi-drivers, the young man knew quite well where the temple was, so he was confident he could find the house without difficulty.

During the drive, the woman kept silent. The driver tried to start a conversation, but she would not reply. She kept brushing the folds of her kimono with her hands, as if trying to brush something away. The driver fell silent, deciding she must be a little crazy.

As he approached the temple, he saw that the house next to it was burning. It was completely devoured by flames. The firemen were helpless against such a great conflagration. The driver turned to the woman to warn her that her house was on fire, but she had vanished. But as Japanese taxi doors are automatic, and controlled by the driver, who alone can open them to let a passerby in, the driver asked her. At that very moment, a dead body was being carried out of the house by the firemen, and to the taxi-driver's horror, he saw that it was the woman he had driven in his taxi from the Kamogawa. Her body was burned, and dripping with water from the firemen's hoses, but her face was still plainly recognizable.

Terrified, the driver sped away, back to his taxi company head office. No one was there, shaking with fright as he told his story. One of his fellow drivers cried: "Hey! Look here! The back seat of your taxi is all wet ...." He gazed in stupefaction at the pools of water on the back seat and the floor, he saw that they were swimming with
charred cloth exactly like that of the woman's kimono. Then he just fainted clean away. . . .

There is at present a great conflict going on between the Japanese and the Americans regarding the "nuclear allergy" of the Japanese and the increasingly powerful pro-nuclear energy (and arms) lobby in the Diet. Various protest movements are going on all over Japan against the construction of nuclear power stations, like the one at Mihama in Fukui on the Japan Sea Coast.

It is from this region that the latest urban legend springs. As most Japanese are very afraid of nuclear energy in any form--there have already been several accidents--it is difficult to recruit Japanese workmen, so most of those working on the sites are Koreans, Okinawans, or day laborers who cannot find any other kind of work. Frequently these are the underprivileged, and the outcasts of society--mostly recruited from the social dropout areas of Sanyo in Tokyo and ina and Amagasaki in Osaka. Every night, helicopters transport highly radioactive nuclear reactor sludge, which they carry on Wired day laborers have been shovelling out of the plant all day long.

"It is said"--the Japanese non-committal phrase that often begins a story--the helicopters also fly out from the plant the corpses of laborers who have died of radioactive contamination, for clandestine burial at sea. This legend forms part of the theme of a new movie, Iketuri Uchi ga Hana na no yo Shindara sore made yo to Sengen, or The "While You're Alive Life Is a Gift But When You're Dead You Had it" Party Manifesto (directed by Azuma Morisaki).

"It is said" also that parts of the dead laborer's bodies are sometimes found in catchpots of fish being hauled to the Japan Sea ports. Consignments of nuclear waste sent to Cumbria for disposal also contain these "corpses," as other reports say.

One of the most interesting Japanese urban legends concerns the Ainu, a racially discriminated minority that was regarded as the subject of ignorantly racist remarks. The Ainu have risen up in arms because the Japanese government has stated officially that the Ainu are not a racial minority in Japan--which drew protests also from Koreans and the burakumin or "untouchable" minorities in Japan. Once Prime Minister Nakasone further offended the Ainu, who regard being called "half-breed" an insult, by referring to his own very bushy eyebrows in a clumsy attempt to distance himself from the Ainu. The Ainu weren't the only hairy people in Japan in the legend.

In the legend, two housewives went on a trip to Hokkaido. While there they visited the Ainu village of Shiranui. They bought an Ainu doll as a souvenir, and when they got home they were horrified to find that the doll's hair had started to grow out of its wooden skull. They measured the hair every day and found it was growing longer and longer. The phenomenon was widely reported in the Japanese press and gave me the subject for a short story, "Living Doll" (1986).

Finally, a few years ago young people and small children were reportedly frightened and appalled by the story of the kuchi-sake onna, literally "split-mouth woman." There are several versions, but the best one in the US can be found in a children's book playing at dusk in a deserted lane, when they saw the elegant figure of a kimono-clad young lady walking toward them. But, like many Japanese when they had a cold, she was wearing a white gauze mask covering her nose and mouth, and hooked round her ears with elastic. The children gazed in admiration in her beautiful and expensive clothes, and one of them remarked: "What a shame! Such lovely clothes, and wearing a mask!" I'm sure she must be a very beautiful lady. What a pity we can't see her face.

On hearing these words, the lady stopped in front of the children, and, swiftly removing her mask, revealed a gaping mouth hideously slit from ear to ear! "How do you think I'm beautiful?" she screamed after the children as they ran away.

In another version of the story, her nose is also missing. This tale was highly popular for a year or two among school children, so much so that women were afraid to go out wearing a gauze mask when they had a cold, because children would run after them shouting: "Kuchi-sake onna!" One school teacher, who came to school wearing such a mask tried to commit suicide because of the taunts of her pupils.

Of such is the very stuff of urban legend.

 Sources


JUST IM!

MORE SECRET AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE. "The spoofs at the CIA have pumped millions of dollars into a frenzied race to catch up with Soviet advances in psychic spying. America lags so far behind in the race for inner space--that the CIA is now sensible about public exposure when it uses mind readers and mood benders and voodoo pin stickers.

Jack Woods, a former Customs investigator, found out the hard way just how sensitive the CIA can be. In 1982, Woods got a tip that the infamous terrorist called "Carlos" was getting to kill President Reagan. . . . His source was a 9-year-old girl he says was a CIA psychic.

In 1982, while he was with Customs in Virginia Beach, Va., Woods got to know a family whose psychic daughter worked with the CIA, according to papers that Woods filled with information. The girl helped him in the 1982 search for American Gen. James Dozier, who was kidnapped by the Italian Red Brigade.

She advance information about a top-secret American mission to Yurch Andropov in the Soviet Union; and predicted that a man with a gun would be lurking outside the White House, prompting Reagan to light the national Christmas tree from inside the White House . . .

"The information was passed on to Secret Service agents and Woods does not know what they did with it. But later the Secret Service demanded to know his source. The CIA handler, speaking through the girl's mother, warned Woods against divulging information to Customs. . . . The message was clear to Woods: He was not to say anything about the girl or the CIA. . . . [The handler] assured him through the girl's mother that the CIA would fix things privately so he could keep his job. The CIA had ended of the bargain and has since disavowed any connection with . . . the girl. . . .

That leaves Woods as the only person telling what sounds like a preposterous story. Is he a hare-brained nut or a victim of CIA skulduggery? Four federal law enforcement agencies--the CIA, FBI, Customs, and some 200 years told us he is one of the best investigators they know." [Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Investigator tips CIA and keeps his job," February 19, 1989.]

US MILITARY AND WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC. "Korean hookers are plying their trade around the United States in houses of prostitution thinly disguised as massage parlors and modeling studios. The hookers are not smuggled secretly into the country--the U.S. Military brings them in.

According to top federal and state investigators, 99 percent of the Korean prostitutes working in the United States got here by marrying American GIs stationed in Korea. The marriages are often brief, sometimes the soldier is duped into marriage with a woman he will never see again. The women are transferred to the United States. Sometimes the GI is part of the scam, collecting as much as $5,000 to marry a Korean hooker and bring her from Korea. As the wife of a soldier, even a prostitute is almost guaranteed admittance to the United States. Korean police rarely investigate. So many of the women have no arrest record to tip off the U.S. military authorities who can the marriage. Korean officials working for the Army and the State Department are often the war are rubber-stamped by American officers. Former U.S. Embassy officials in Korea told us that some Koreans are paid for their services by black market viss brokers."
"Koreans have become the most common purveyors of organized prostitution in the United States. . . . Vice cops in Texas, with contacts nationwide, maintain that at least 80 percent of the houses of prostitution in the country use Korean women. . . . A former undercover agent for the U.S. Embassy in Seoul told us that some soldiers marry three or four Korean women on their tour of duty there" [Jack Anderson & Dale Van Atta, "Korean Prostitutes Enter U.S. as Brides," 22 June 1969].

ELVIS WATCH CONTINUED. Interest in the idea that Elvis may not have died but faked his own death seems to have declined into skepticism backash. The cartoon feature "Phenomenon!" in Egyption Times 51 (Winter 1988/89), depicts the phenomenon as "a modern religion" with a "shrine . . . miraculous manifestations of the cult figure's image . . . claims for reincarnation . . . but mainly . . . gullible acolytes!" (58). The graphics that follow (with one exception located by Paul Smith in Newfoundland) suggest that the mass audience agrees.

HAVE YOU SEEN ELVIS? IF YOU HAVE CALL THE ELVIS HOT LINE (619)239-KING

IN CASE OF SIGHTING KEEP THIS CARD NEAR YOUR PHONE

"ROOT HOG OR DIE" AN INFORMATION SERVICE PROVIDED BY

and ENIGMA LAND CANADA

Flier distributed at the Avalon shopping mall, St. John's, Newfoundland, 9 May 1989.

"HONK IF YOU'RE ELVIS"


Michael Goss writes to confirm that the legend's most popular subject in England earlier was Jim Morris's niece, Doreen, who died under odd circumstances in Paris on 3 July 1971 and who was buried there without public viewing. (My Hasleton colleague Alan Price confirms that his own site remains a popular pilgrimage site for all kinds of strange types.)

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TANNING BOOTH DEATH. On May 24, 1989, Patsy Campbell of Portage, IN, died at the University of Chicago Medical Center of burns suffered in a 25-minute tanning booth session eleven days earlier. Campbell had been taking psoralen, a drug used to increase the skin's sensitivity to light as part of a program to treat psoriasis. Soon after visiting the parlor, she began to itch all over, and blisters soon developed. A burn expert from the University thought it was the first verifiable case of fatal burns suffered in a tanning booth [AP release, 28 May 1989. Courtesy Linda Milligan].
LADY DRIVERS. Erna Bombeck's syndicated column, "No Music to the Ears of Women" (5 June 1989) reflects severe consequences of sex typing. "You can make women sit in the back seat and listen to "soft" music if you want but I don't think it's necessary. I don't mind being driven around, but I do mind being made to wear the hat which says 'woman of the house,' 'mother,' 'wife.' Can you imagine doing things like that? It's all part of the role we're given."

Bombeck, in her self-deprecating style, then tells how she was once stuck with a "boomboom" noise in the trunk and paid $102 to find out that a can of creamed corn was banging against (her) spare tire. But she adds that a husband, too, has been known to "stop" the windshield wipers when he has to turn left and release the hood when he thinks he's turning on the light. She ends triumphantly by claiming that she eliminated a "ping" by having the car washed and waxed.

Such stories are too numerous to count, and many stories widespread in American folk and popular culture are from Bombeck. Tennant's notes cognate stories about a Cadillac that had sat in a factory's parking lot between its being sold and its being driven home by a factory's work. "[She] couldn't drive fast enough to keep the fire from burning in the trunk."

Bombeck notes that the factory worker was a woman, and that many women in the factory had been known to be "helpless" in the way that women are in our culture. She then tells the story of a woman who was running late on a date and found herself stranded in the driveway of her date's house. She asked him what he wanted to do to "fix" the car. He said, "I'll fix it."

Mickey Mouse LSD RUMOR UPDATE. Jan Brunvand sends his United Feature syndicated column for 1 January 1988, in which he notes that the letters from the警示教育 awarded $1 to the a child mistaking blotter acid for stickers could be verified, and that some of the cases involving blotter paper decorated with a blue star or cartoon character but concluded that LSD use was not increasing but holding steady. No case involving a child mistaking blotter acid for stickers could be verified, and competence of legends continue to surface. Before taping an interview on the subject for a Penn State radio station, the school manager told me that she had been warned by the state police to keep her blonde-haired, blue-eyed child under strict watch, "because we know cults are operating near your house." And just last week a PSU official told me, quite seriously, that a certain coven in the New York City area sacrificed a naked boy or girl to the devil. This was an urban legend, not a fact. The police had been called to a house in Brooklyn and identified one of their meeting places and had dug up "human bones." The bones were identified as being those of a German shepherd. (Did not mass murderer "Son of Sam" have a thing about German shearers?) Here are some of the more revealing news items relating to satanism in our country.

EYE ON SATANIC CULTS. Although I have not heard of any major rum-powder since the Metamoros cult atrocities, allusions to this complex of legends continue to surface. Before attending a seminar on cults held at the University of Houston during the spring, officials became concerned that the symbol adopted for the seminar was the cross with a broken arm. One spokesperson said that the cult slayings in Metamoros reinforced their doubts about the symbol.
"but the awareness was already there. . . . We'd pick up little signs, like students doodling things on desk tops... or rumors of some students involved in cult practices."

The author is discussing the impact of confidential tips from students who were aware of activities in the small town of Clintonville, NY, and West Pittston, PA. These tips led to a lecture at April in a standing-room-only crowd at Tulane University. Lorraine, herself a clairvoyant, described her personal journey and the success of her team.
HAVE YOU HEARD...?

CATS IN SANDBOXES. Linda Milligan (1250 Bristol Rd., Columbus, OH 43221) has observed that several communities in Ohio have suddenly felt the need to pass laws requiring cats to stay on the owners' property. Simultaneously, animal control officers have stepped up efforts to pick up and destroy "stray" cats. The rationale given is that cats seek out children and sandboxes and defecate in them, thereby spreading diseases. There is a bill in the Ohio Legislature that would enact such ordinances statewide, and Linda has heard that a similar anti-cat campaign (based on the same fear of sandbox-dirtying) led to similar laws around Calgary, Saskatchewal. A student of mine recalls a similar move around Westchester, NY.

But aren't most sandboxes made with lids these days? And what dangerous disease is spread this way? I vaguely recalled a flyer on toxoplasmosis, a parasitic disease that can be spread by accidental ingestion of cat feces, that included an image of a cat defecating in a sandbox. But the only version I could locate does show a child with a pail and shovel like those used in sandboxes, but playing in grass. Close to the child is a deflecting cat, but the scene shows many other animals also fertilizing the landscape, including birds, rabbits, mice, hogs, and cattle. And, as the text makes clear, most children who are infected with toxoplasmosis show no symptoms, though if a pregnant woman contracts it, the fetus may be damaged.

Still, the timing and the similarity of these campaigns suggests that there is some rumor element to their spread, and perhaps even a xenorex component based on the image reprinted here. If you have encountered this rumor, or have knowledge of such an anti-cat flyer, please contact Linda or Editor, FN.

BULLETIN BOARD


The upcoming AFSL meeting will feature several events of interest to legend scholars. Among these will be the First General Meeting of ISCLR in the US, to be held at 12:15 PM on Friday, October 20 at the Sheraton Society Hill (room to be announced). The agenda will include a number of issues ranging from the need for a bank account in the society's name to negotiations for a new regular publisher for our proposed yearbook, Contemporaries in Legend. The panel will also give sponsors to take suggestions from members for new activities that ISCLR may want to investigate or sponsor.

The AFSL's Folk Narrative Section will sponsor a panel of papers, "Emergent Legends: How Do We Handle Them?" scheduled for 8:15 to 10:00 AM on Saturday, October 21. The panel, chosen by Bill Ellis, will include these presentations:

Jeffrey S. Victor (James Madison College) "A Rumor-Panic About a Dangerous Satanic Cult in Western New York."

William Ellis (P.S. Harleton) "The Devil-Worshippers at the Prom."

Véronique Campion-Vincent (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris) "Situations of Uncertainty and Emergent Legends."

Linda J. Milligan (Ohio State) "The 'Truth' About the Bigfoot Legend."

Jan Harold Brunvand (Utah) "Some News from the Miscellaneous File."

Phillips Stevens, Jr. from SUNY-Buffalo will serve as discussant for the panel. Dr. Stevens is past editor of New York Folklore and recently published a strongly-written editorial titled "Satanism: Where are the Folklorists?"

Following this panel, at 10:15 will be a forum on Folk Narrative and Social Problems, chaired by Gary Alan Fine. Mark Glazer, Janet Langlois, Sabina Magliocco, and Patrick Mullen will participate.

The Folk Narrative Section will have its annual business and planning meeting at 7:15 PM on Thursday, October 19, in Ballroom A. I encourage all members to attend.

Other sessions and panels of interest include:

October 18, 10:15, Paper Session: "Life Stories and Personal Narratives" (with Anna Davis on serial murder rumors; Robert Ackinnon, Chair).

October 18, 3:15, Paper Session: "Creatures of Myth and Legend" (Dany Garay, Chair).

October 19, 8:15, Paper Session: "The New World" (Jim Griffith, Chair).

October 20, 8:15, Paper Session: "Czech Legends and Ballads" (John S. Patterson, Chair).

October 20, 1:15, Paper Session: "Eighth International Humor Conference Announced."

October 22, 9:00, Paper Session: "New Books in Folklore and Popular Culture" (Elizabeth Lewis on Elvis; Elizabeth Walker Meckling, Chair).

EIGHTH SEMINAR ON PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND AND EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL HUMOR CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED. Plans are now underway to hold the 1990 International Folklore Seminar at the University of Sheffield on July 20-22. As in 1986, it will be followed by a conference sponsored by the International Society for Humor Studies on July 23-25. The estimated cost of each conference is £400 US$ which includes registration and full board and board inclusive of transportation to Sheffield.
PART 3: LEGENDS AND SOCIETY

Gillian Bennett
Playful Chaos: Anatomy of a Storytelling Session

Keith and Kathryn Cunningham
The Appearing Hitchhiker: Narrative Acculturation among the Ramah Navajo

Brian McConnell
The Corporate Folk-Legend: Marketing Invention or Consumer Response

Copies of this volume are available directly from Sheffield Academic Press, 34 Fulwood Road, Sheffield S10 3BP, England, or through Cornell University Press Services, 740 Cascadilla St., P.O. Box 250, Ithaca, NY 14851. (But has anyone successfully ordered S.A.P. volumes from Cornell? Please advise Ed., TN.)

FORTEAN TIMES 51. The current issue of this detailed and well-edited journal contains items of interest to legend and rumor scholars. These include:

Dmitri Bayanov, "Black Sea Serpents" (59). [Russian accounts of a lake monster.]

Mark Chorvinsky, "Strange Tongues" (38-39). [1909 clipping reprints from MO; includes "bosom serpent," "abduction by eagle," "Jerry devil," and others.]

Mike Dash, "Marine Mysteries" (26-30). [Rumors and panics surrounding sightings of mystery submarines in Swedish coastal waters and apparent collisions between subs and fishing boats in the Irish Sea.]

Michel Meurger, "In Jormungandra's Coils" (63-68). [Mythological background of Scandinavian lake monsters.]

Nigel Mortimer, "Yorkshire's Water Wolf" (48-49).

Paul Sieveking, "Lizard Man" (34-37). Sightings of a huge, scaly humanoid near Bishopville, SC.]

ET 51 also contains a variety of weird and wonderful new clippings, ranging from a bigfoot abduction story (15) to a young English couple who found "what appeared to be a scented and scented and allelgemeen Pest in a packet of potato crisps" illustrated by a photo, 11.)

SPECIAL ISSUE ON UFO ABDUCTIONS. The Journal of UFO Studies has published the first volume of a new series, including a lengthy discussion of the alien abduction phenomenon from several angles. The Journal, which is available from The J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies, Chicago, Illinois, includes the following:

Thomas E. Bullard
Hypnosis and UFO Abductions: A Troubled Relationship

ISSUES FORUM: UFO ABDUCTION

Michael D. Swords
Introduction

Robert A. Baker
Q: Are UFO Abduction Experiences for Real? A: No, No, A Thousand Times No!

Peter M. Rojczewicz
Signals of Transcendence: The Human-UFO Equation

Stuart Appel
Reflections on the Reports of Being Abducted by UFOs

D. C. Donderi
Comments on the Evidence Concerning Abductions

Hilary Evans
Abductions: A Policy Statement

Jean Mundy
A Psychological Study of Subjects Who Report Contact with Intelligent Alien Beings

Michael D. Swords
Abductions: Questions in the Data

The issue also includes a "second round" of reactions to the Forum by each of the contributors, along with an article by Richard F. Haines on "A Three Stage Technique" (TST) to Help Reduce Biasing Effects during Hypnotic Regression.

THE JOURNAL OF BIZARRE OCCURRENCES AND RIDICULOUS EVENTS. Well-subscribers may want to investgate this publication, which reprints "stranger-than-fiction" news items contributed by readers across the country. Issues run about 40 pages and include the name and date of the papers in which the items appeared. Volume 5 (1989-90) is now available for $4.50. Contact Harry Farkas, 421 E. 15th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43201.
RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

We are always on the lookout for publications on any topic relevant to contemporary legends, particularly those in journals not usually read by professional folklorists. Please forward offprints (if convenient) or abstracts/titles of content to Bill Ellis, Editor, FOAPtale News. Publications in foreign languages, English abstracts would be quite welcome.

Items starred (*) have been placed in a file in the Editor's office and are available to qualified legend scholars for reference. Books and articles in major folklore journals are not normally starred.


Beidler, Peter G. Ghosts, Demons, and Henry James: The Turn of the Screw at the Turn of the Century. Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1989. [Discusses James's novella against the background of contemporary "reports of supernatural incidents known to James."]


FOAPtale NEWS: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

ISCLR was formed to build worldwide links among legend scholars. It encourages study, not only of so-called "modern" or "urban" legends, but also of any legend now in active circulation in a given community. We invite all who have an interest in this research area to join. As a member of ISCLR, you will receive this newsletter and advance notice of Society events and publications.

To apply for membership, send a check for 18 US dollars or 10 UK pounds sterling to W.H. Nicolaelsen, Membership Secretary, Department of English, SUNY-Binghamton, Binghamton, New York 13901, USA, or to Sandy Hobbs, Treasurer, Applied Social Studies, Paisley College, Paisley PA1 2BE UK. Institutions wishing to receive FOAPtale News may affiliate themselves with ISCLR for the same price.

Send queries and material for publication to the editor, Bill Ellis, Penn State--Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201, USA. (Telephone: 717-450-3126 or 717-788-2021; E-mail WCE246@PSUH/BENNET.