



University of Missouri
University of Missouri

ARTIFACTS

A Journal of Undergraduate Writing

Crop Circles Explained

McKenzie Pendergrass



McKenzie is a senior student, studying magazine journalism. She really loves scary movies. Arts and culture are her favorite things to write about, and she loves how they are incorporated into film. She chose this topic because she loves the legends and stories surrounding aliens and crop circles, and not to mention Signs is one of the greatest alien films of all time. She loves

all the mystery and loves to think that there might be a little bit going on that we don't know about.

Crop circles and their mysterious origins have spawned years of debate and speculation about whether or not they are formed by aliens. Crop circles have been adapted into films and television series, and usually the use of crop circles in these mediums is to give way to a supernatural or otherworldly entity that has come to earth. But in all its forms crop circles are beautiful and cryptic, so they innately fascinate people even though they've been around for a very long time. They've generated rumors, been researched and debunked, and people all over the world hold varying levels of belief as far as the origins are concerned.

Some people believe that crop circles are used as a message from a foreign species. That perhaps they represent some sort of alien language. Others believe that they are a hoax by people who wish to scare or stun the people who view them. But whatever the reason people believe what they do, crop circles have a long and vibrant history that has many legends swirling around it.

The first appearance of a crop circle was in England 1678. The "Mowing Devil" was the first reported incident of a crop circle, and the farmer who found the circle said that there was a devilish entity that visited his field. The crops in his field were trampled or cut down in the shape of a circle. The circle was recorded on a wood engraving. However, different editions of the wood engraving depict a devilish being with a scythe cutting at the crop.

That goes against the usual descriptions of crop circles because they are typically described as being patted down into the shape and not cut. Since then, many crop circles have popped up in the countryside of the United Kingdom, but throughout the years, crop circles have begun to appear in other countries. In 1966 in Australia, a farmer said that he saw a flying saucer leave a swampy area, and when he investigated the area he found a circular pattern lain into the reeds and swamp grass.

However, police blamed the shape on natural phenomena like disease or water damage. The difference in the two accounts is that the man in Australia obviously blamed it on aliens, but the man in England believed it to be the devil. Scientists and police since then have garnered the truth and believe that the circles might appear from a certain disease in the plant. Different types of fungi and sickness within the grass or crop can make the plant fall, and sometimes it happens in localized patterns, which might explain the actual circle that is formed.

The theories on the origins of crop circles are wide and varied. One explanation in the 1980s said that they are formed from overactive hedgehogs. Another theory says that specific wind patterns to an area could cause the crop to lie down. One theory includes earth's energy fields and meridians. The force of the energy on the land would cause the crop to fall. But many people who believe in an extraterrestrial origin think that aliens use their enhanced technology to send energy down from outer space to create patterns in the crop.

Others still believe that spaceships are the cause for the varying patterns in the ground. Benjamin Radford, a contributor for LiveScience, said that unlike other supernatural or unexplainable entities

like Bigfoot, crop circles are very real and definitely exist. And it's because we can't account for the origins of every crop circle that all these different theories exist. Radford continues, though, and says that one case from the United Kingdom in 1991 had two men come forward and admit to creating hundreds of crop circles, which leads people to believe that mostly the circles' origins are very human. They were inspired by the case in Australia, so they tried to blame the circles on UFOs. Many of the examples of crop circles being linked to UFOs gets confused about whether it's really about the UFO or the crop circle. Like with the case in Australia, the legend becomes more about the sighting of a UFO or an alien spaceship than it is about the actual crop circle.

Since then, people have used crop circles to varying degrees. Jay Busbee, in a 2014 article for Yahoo! News, published that one man in California created a crop circle as a publicity stunt. The circle gained attention in late 2013, and eventually the chipmaker that created it confessed to doing so. "Huang came clean about the stunt and noted that the "192" observers correctly picked out of the circle stood for the 192 cores in the company's new chip" (Busbee, 2014).

The woman who stumbled upon the crop circle with an aerial photo is quoted in the story saying that she might believe in the existence of aliens but doesn't know why they would bother with a crop circle message. And that seems to ring true for many unbelievers in the supernatural. People tend to believe that all crop circles are manmade because so many people have come forward and confessed in the making of various crop circles. And it's because of these people who confess after years of silence that lead many to believe that those crop circles that don't have an explanation will eventually have an identified creator.

However, the mysticism persists. It won't go away, despite the proof and evidence we have that points to humans creating the circles. Freddy Silva, a respected, best-selling author, concentrates his studies on sacred sites and special places around the world. Silva claims that the images and glyphs found in the circles are very intelligent and advanced. These shapes and symbols have shifted, though. They've formed, reformed, and been adapted. Silva explains the first occurrences of symbols in crops and how that changed through history.

"References to out-of-place geometrical shapes appearing in cereal crops date back fifteen centuries. Chronicles of English customs during the reign of Henry VIII mention Maypole dancing— that curious fertility dance common to Celtic Britain— in which locals describe the origin of the dancers' movements by learning 'the geometrical shapes we find in the tall grasses before the morning'. By the 17th century, these strange markings spiraled into crop fields had become the stuff of folklore, the 'witch's circles' or 'devil's rings' as they would later be called in the Victorian era" (Silva, 2010).

Silva claims that signs from other beings are usually "gentle nudges." Miracles and supernatural feats aren't uncommon, but signs like crop circles are a bit more blatant. If crop circles are a message from another entity perhaps from outer space, then it's an obviously different phenomenon to humans but it's still a peaceful one. Humans don't take kindly to otherness, and any direct contact from this otherness would be disastrous. "So the circle-makers attempt to get their point across by etching euphonious symbols in fields of wheat, barley and corn" (Silva, 2010).

It seems like a plausible explanation, but this explanation assumes that these circle-makers and other beings have a desire to come in contact with us at all. And if these symbols have been littered across centuries, why hasn't there been any further interaction from the circle-makers? It seems like the symbols would be useless, then, if the makers didn't have an objective.

Silva (2010) has an explanation for this, and it stems from the idea that humans can't handle contact from a being other than themselves.

Few have paid attention, and so outside forces have intervened, as they have done for thousands of years. However, they cannot interfere directly in human affairs. That would violate the Universal Law of Non-Intervention; Star Trek fans will recognize this as the Prime Directive, and it's no secret that Gene Roddenbery, the series' creator, wrote this into the script following meetings with a highly respected trance medium. All that the gods or angels or aliens can do is offer suggestions and guidance and let our free-will allow for events to take their course. If the crop circles are indeed signs of such an intervention then it is fair to point out that within the thirty years of their modern appearance hardly a staid political, social or financial institution is still standing.

At some level, Silva believes that humans have taken in this message, and it will bring about change that is better for the world. These beings are more advanced, and they are pushing for a different future in our race.

Silva uses science and reason to try and understand the appearance of crop circles, but many directors and producers in Hollywood have used the mysticism to create suspenseful joy rides of movies. One movie that gained both critical and mass praise is "Signs" directed by M. Night Shyamalan. The film follows a farmer who is struggling with his faith while raising his young family. In the film, the farmer, Graham and his brother, Merrill, discover a crop circle on their farm, and then must battle aliens as they've come to earth to presumably take over. It's through this invasion that Graham is lead back to his faith and is compelled to fight to save his family from the aliens.

In the film, Graham provides the role of the skeptic as it takes him a while to believe that aliens are actually the cause of the crop circles. However, as other crop circles begin to appear around the world, and he chases a figure into his field and discovers its green leg, he understands that Earth has been invaded. Shyamalan doesn't use the aliens for much of an allegory, but he is a master of suspense in the film. Again, since crop circles provoke so much interest and intrigue with people, Shyamalan uses that as a gateway to the bigger, scarier parts of the film.

Unlike Silva, where he believes that the circles are a symbol from another entity to send a message, Shyamalan uses the circles to evoke suspense and chills as an introduction to the main event. It doesn't hurt that there is so much rumor and conspiracy circulating around crop circles, so it provides a plausible and easy gateway into an alien invasion storyline. The aliens in "Signs" are an advanced species, as well. While they do suffer a burning reaction when doused in water (the substance that sets Earth apart from other planets), they do fly spaceships and run really fast. It could also be assumed that since they discovered humans and traveled to Earth, they are much more advanced than humans. Shyamalan plays heavily into the stereotypes that Hollywood and fiction has built around aliens and alien contact.

It's an interesting debate that is waged between believers in science and believers in the supernatural. Many people, like the man in Australia who allegedly saw a UFO by a crop circle, claim that they can see unusual light sources or flying objects near the place they find a circle. Others, and the vast majority of people who investigate crop circles, believe that it is pure science and trickery that form these circles.

Doug Bower and Dave Chorley, the earlier mentioned pair who created hundreds of crop circles in the '90s, even explained how they did their work and people continued to believe that it was done by aliens. In the early '70s, when the first modernized version of the crop circle appeared, it seemed as though the best way to complete it would be with a rope and plank. If one tied a string to a pillar at the center of the circle and worked out from there, then the shape would be symmetrical. However, in modern times, GPS is playing a role in the creation of the circles. Professor Richard Taylor, director of the Materials Science Institute at the University of Oregon, said that advanced technology could be the source for the shapes.

"The modern patterns which involves elaborate geometric shapes suggests that circle makers have upped their equipment from the simple plank and rope to something more technologically sophisticated. GPS systems could help the circle makers cover vast spaces and keep the pattern intact while microwaves can be used to flatten large numbers of stalks" (Taylor).

At any rate, with the technology and advancements that we have in this day and age, it doesn't seem so unlikely that a human could make such a sophisticated design in crops. Taylor notes that crop circle artists aren't going to give up their secrets any time soon, either. Whether the creation is supernatural or not, the mystery behind the creation of the circles is still key to holding people's interest in the designs.

An article for The Telegraph, published in August 2013, said that the execution of the designs is carefully planned. The article even offers multiple steps to how to properly go about creating a circle. Perhaps in a slightly satirical manner, the article points out that the first step in creating a crop circle is to find a field. The article continues to point out that having help and being away by dawn are keys to the success of the circle. "Getting caught as the sun comes up is an embarrassing situation, so most crop circle creators time their pattern creations to be finished before dawn. Once complete, sneak they sneak out the way came in and wait for the conspiracy theories to start flying" (Jani & Gray, 2013). The Telegraph takes a sarcastic approach to the creation and execution of crop circles, and it seems like this is a more common ideology in the scientific and academic communities.

Some people strongly believe that aliens are definitely linked to the creation of crop circles and use the sightings of suspicious objects at the scene as proof. And it's because of the people who claim to see UFOs and other supernatural things that make the alien rumors around crop circles continue today. Could there be an intelligent alien community that sends us messages in the fields? It's not outside the realm of possibility. But perhaps it plays into our fears of the unknown. The human race has advanced by leaps and bounds in the last century and certainly has the capacity to develop technologies beyond our wildest dreams that could be the source of crop circles.

Reference List

Busbee, J. (2014). Crop circle mystery solved: It was all just a marketing stunt. Retrieved on Jan. 6, 2014 from Yahoo News.

Jani, L, & Gray, R. (2013). Crop circles demystified: How the patterns are created. Retrieved on May 12, 2014 from The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group

Radford, B. (2013). Crop circles explained. Retrieved on May 12, 2014 from LiveScience. TechMedia Network.

Signs. Dir. M. (2002). Night Shyamalan. Perf. Mel Gibson and Jaoquin Phoenix. Buena Vista Pictures. DVD.

Silva, F. (2010). Crop circles: Art of alien signs? Retrieved on May 12, 2014 from *Crop Circles: Art of Alien Signs?*

Part of **Issue 13**, published in August 2015

Topics: **Arts**, **Culture**

About *Artifacts*

Artifacts is a refereed journal of undergraduate work in writing at The University of Missouri. The journal celebrates writing in all its forms by inviting student authors to submit projects composed across different genres and media.

Artifacts is sponsored by [The Campus Writing Program](#).

Published by the [Campus Writing Program](#).

Copyright © 2015 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and [other copyright information](#). An [equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer](#).