

Volume 8 Number 2

The Skeptic



The Creation: What Really Happened?

Also in this issue:

Crop circles—the full story, part 2
Freud and the paranormal

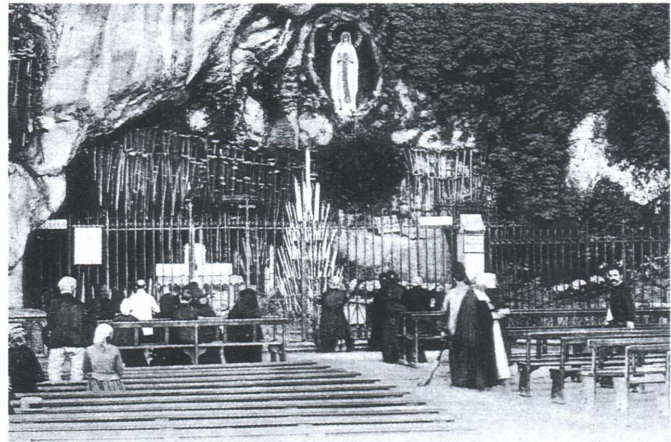
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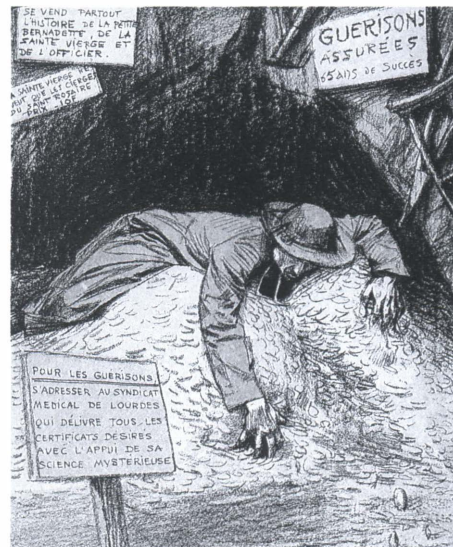


Jesus' mother comes down from Heaven to visit Bernadette

The Church has good reason to be grateful for Bernadette's vision



The 'miraculous grotto' where the vision occurred: note the statue which Bernadette rejected, and the crutches left by miraculously cured pilgrims.



Lourdes: the continuing miracle (part one)

It is hard to say which is the greatest miracle of Lourdes: the claim by 14-year old Bernadette Soubirous to have met Jesus' mother on 11 February 1858, or the fact that, believing that claim, millions from round the globe stream to this small town in southern France, making it one of the most visited places in the world.

From the start, it has been pointed out that, even accepting Bernadette's good faith, there are good reasons to question the literal reality of her experience. A wide variety of alternative explanations have been proposed, but none of them shakes the faith of the pilgrims who flock in ever-increasing numbers: upwards of 5 million people come every year. Lourdes has more hotel accommodation than any French city outside Paris, and the shopkeepers benefit from a continual flow of pilgrims and tourists. The Church benefits too, of course; not only from direct offerings but from such spin-offs as the sale of the millions of candles purchased by the pilgrims, and the re-use of the wax which drips from them.

One revealing fact illustrates how Lourdes has been overtaken over by its own myth. The statue in the grotto, before which those millions of pilgrims stand in adoration, was derided by Bernadette herself, who said it bore no resemblance to her vision. No matter: it depicts the Virgin as the pilgrims want to see her, and as the Church wants them to see her...

The concluding part of this article will appear in the next issue

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Sorry if we've missed anyone out! Please keep the clippings coming!

Hits and Misses

Steve Donnelly

Doing your head in

Referring to the *Sunday Sport* in the days that it was full of stories about sentient alien cabbages and Marilyn Monroe's job as a nanny in heaven, an *Observer* journalist once observed that the great thing about inventing your stories was that you always had exclusives.

Nowhere has this suggestion been used to greater effect than in the *Weekly World News* (*WWN*), an American tabloid that has featured previously in *Hits & Misses*. In the 24 May issue, *WWN* highlighted a little known, and thankfully rare, medical phenomenon 'Hyper-Cerebral Electrosis' (HCE) in an article entitled 'How to tell if your head's about to blow up'. Apparently, chess grand master Nikolai Titov was in deep concentration during a recent chess championship in Moscow when 'All of a sudden his hands flew to his temples and he screamed in pain. Everyone looked up from their games, startled by the noise. Then, as if someone had put a bomb in his cranium, his head popped like a fire-cracker'. A similar fate befell European psychic Barbara Nicole who, like Mr Titov, was an intense person who tended to keep her cerebral circuits overloaded—literally someone who was too smart for her own good—and this condition has terminally afflicted a total of five people in recent times. As a public service, the *WWN* includes a list of seven indicators for people at risk from HCE but according to medical expert Dr Anatoly Martinenko, 'Victims are highly intelligent people with great powers of concentration'. It seems unlikely that any *WWN* subscriber is in danger.

Magnetic bunkum

Electromagnetism occupies an uneasy position in the world of alternative health care. On the one hand, extremely weak electromagnetic fields from pylons or even mains wiring in the home are believed by some people to be detrimental to health. On the other hand, a perusal of those little glossy booklets that come with your credit card bill or high-tech alternative health care catalogues reveals that a number of magnetic devices can be obtained to cure a variety of human ills. The latest in electromagnetic snake-oil has just arrived in Britain in the form of the *Magnetic Bed* which, according to the *Daily Telegraph* on 27 March, looks rather like one of those cryogenic pods beloved of science-fiction movie makers. Proponents claim that it will help with arthritis and kidney stones as well as speeding up the healing of wounds and the mending of bones. Scott Lucy, who is promoting the bed in the UK, talked with a significant disregard for accuracy about astronauts in the early days of the space programme who returned to Earth suffering calcium loss from their bones. According to Lucy, the reason for this was that

'they had left the earth's magnetic field. When they put magnets in the space capsule these problems cleared up'. In reality, of course, the calcium loss was due to the astronauts not being subjected to the usual pull of the Earth's *gravitational* field and had nothing whatever to do with magnetism. Continuing in the same logical vein, Lucy claims that we are all suffering from the 'electronic smog' emanating from televisions, computers, power-lines and the like and that the negative effects of this can be offset by the electronic smog emanating from 20 pulsing magnets in the *Magnetic Bed*. As this must be the equivalent of curing hay-fever by sticking your head in a bucket of ragwort pollen, I think I'll stick to my healing crystals.



Tim Pearce

Wild thing

Reg Presley, né Reginald Maurice Ball, is best known as lead singer of the sixties pop group 'The Troggs'. With a number of top twenty hits such as 'Wild Thing', 'With a Girl Like You' and 'Any Way That You Want Me', the group went from relative obscurity to stardom and back again in a period of a few years. But Reg has been back in the news recently and has featured in radio and television interviews in connection with his intended use of the royalties that he stands to earn from the success of his song 'Love is All Around'. The song, which was recorded this year by Wet

Wet Wet, was featured in the film 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' and Reg reportedly stands to earn a million pounds from its success—money that is going to be used to further (if that is the correct word) crop circle research. In an interview with Robert Chalmers in the *Observer* magazine on 18 June, Reg referred to a 200 ft long penis-shaped crop formation that appeared in corn near the Prime Minister's home at Chequers last August. The testicles on this formation were apparently in the form of half-circles and a week later: 'we learned that the American male had lost half of his sperm count... you put these things together and you think: do they know?' With similar cosmic logic, Reg also discusses the megalithic yard: 'This is 2.72 feet, and it was used by all the ancients. The Incas. The Egyptians. The Greeks. Keep that figure in mind. Colin Andrews was returning from Petersfield to Winchester when he saw his first crop circle formation. That field is off the A272. You've got to start asking questions on this. This is not just bloody coincidence'. The royalties will enable Reg to ask many more questions like these, increase his collection of aerial photographs and visit Mexico where, according to Aztec elders, 'something big is about to go off'.

Ouch!

It certainly takes balls to undergo a vasectomy without anaesthetic and that is precisely what Andy Bryant, a 32-year-old hypnotist, subjected himself to recently. Mr Bryant had decided to demonstrate the effectiveness of self-hypnosis in controlling pain by this (in my view) fairly courageous method. A number of newspapers on 23 April reported that he had headed for the operating theatre at the Marie Stopes health clinic in London at 10 a.m. on the previous day and emerged smiling forty minutes later. The *Guardian* reported that there was one nasty moment when Mr Bryant realised that he had not prepared himself for pain in the nerve supply from the scrotal area to the stomach and he flinched somewhat—but after a few mental adjustments all was well. However, theatre nurse Jane Georgiadis did report that at one point 'he went a little bit pale'. Nonetheless, both the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph* showed photographs of the smiling patient leaving the clinic immediately after the operation. Dr Tim Black, the surgeon who carried out the vasectomy was impressed: 'What I found fascinating was there was a lot less bleeding than you would expect. I had no doubts that he could cut the pain off but I didn't really believe that he could decrease the bleeding'. Mr Bryant, who had had a previous small operation on his toe without anaesthetic, also claims to have used the power of positive thought to halt the thinning of his hair. Male readers can uncross their legs now.

Spontaneous (court) cases

Ghosts may not exist, but it would appear that, in Lancashire, their presence (or absence) in a house can significantly affect the value of property. A number of newspapers at the end of June reported on a case heard in Liverpool High Court in which a Canadian professor and his wife were judged to be 'gullible and naive' when they agreed to buy a

haunted house. Professor Trevor Kirkham and his wife Judy claimed that they were duped into buying Cringle Hall at Goosnargh at a cost of £420 000—a property that is reputedly haunted (amongst others) by the ghost of Catholic martyr John Wall who was hung, drawn and quartered in 1679. To be fair, it was the absence of ghost hunters, rather than of the ghosts themselves that had persuaded the couple to take legal action. According to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 25 June, before the passing of the Property Misdeemeanors Act last year, estate agents often quoted details of alleged spirits in their publicity for some of their more upmarket properties. However, this practice seems largely to have ceased—presumably because of the estate agents' fear of encountering, not ghosts, but local trading standards officers who enforce the legislation. But there is little, if anything, to prevent owners from continuing to try to inflate the value of their property by means of tales of clanking, headless insubstantial inhabitants.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Great Divide, a court case in 1991—recently reported to the (electronic) *Skeptic Mailing List*—serves to illustrate important differences between British and American attitudes to lodgers from the other side. The case, *Stambovsky vs Ackley*, heard in a New York State court, allowed for the breaking of a contract for the purchase of a house on the grounds that the property was haunted by poltergeists. The court did not base its decision on any effects on the value of the house arising from rumours of haunting but on the actual existence of ghosts in the house and explicitly held that 'As a matter of law, the house is haunted'. The court justified its departure from the general rule of *caveat emptor* on the grounds (quite reasonable, in my view) that 'the most meticulous inspection... would not reveal the presence of poltergeists at the premises'.



Tim Pearce

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Cereology is Dead —Long Live Cerealogy!

Robin Allen

Part 2 of our skeptical history of the circles phenomenon

TO MANY CEREALOGISTS, the reappearance of circles in 1992 amounted to a test of the genuineness of the phenomenon. If it was all a hoax, the argument went, the fields would be silent; after all, hoaxers would have quit their pranks at the end of 1991, what with the game being up and all. But with Doug and Dave and the other hoax claimants of that year failing to survive critical scrutiny, and with the laboratory and anecdotal evidence for anomalies as robust as ever, confidence in a circular renaissance was high; and it was not misplaced. Sporadic reports of single circles in the spring matured into descriptions of full-blown pictograms by the summer, and it was soon clear that the phenomenon was back. 'Despite the gloomy forecasts and the winter of cerealogical doubt and suspicion,' proclaimed CCCS Field Officer George Wingfield in the Centre's journal, *The Circular*, 'the circles have now returned to Wessex and, circlewise, it is business as usual.'

In many ways, it was. Both in the formations that offered themselves up for cerealogical consumption, and in the strange phenomena they catalysed, 1992 seemed as glorious a year as any of its predecessors. Hundreds of formations appeared nationwide, amongst which could be discerned several exceptionally fine specimens, easily as genuine as anything seen in the Good Old Days. East Meon, near Petersfield in Hampshire (Figure 1), for example, was visited by a classical pictogram which echoed in its structure many of the splendid features characterising the Hampshire pictograms of the golden era, supposedly the handiwork of the liars Bower and Chorley; whilst mystical Silbury Hill cast its shadow on an exquisite 'Dharmic Wheel', or 'Charm

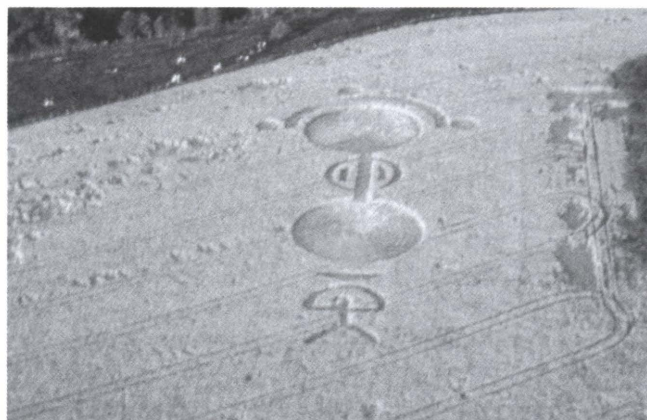


Figure 1: The East Meon pictogram from the air

Circlevision

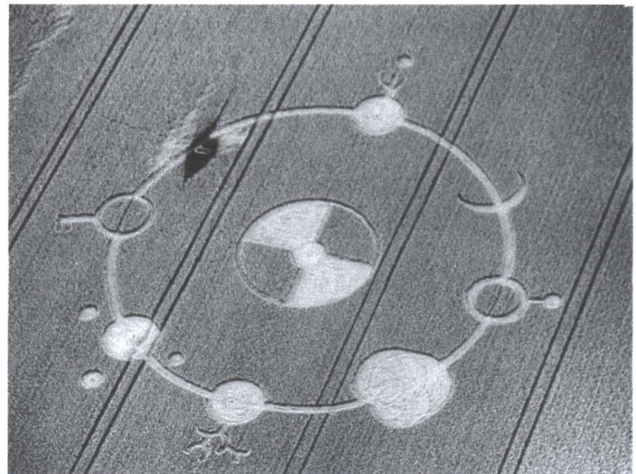


Figure 2: The 'Dharmic Wheel' at Silbury Hill

Fortean Picture Library

Bracelet' (Figure 2), unprecedented in its complexity... and erased from its cereal canvas by an irate farmer with a combine the very morning it appeared, but not before experts were able to photograph and measure it, and subsequently appreciate its symbolic power. Some researchers threw caution to the wind in expressing their enthusiasm for the latest patterns. 'If this is a hoax,' declared George Wingfield of a formation that appeared near Wroughton, in Wiltshire, 'I'll eat my shirt in public.' Cerealogical confidence was fed further by increasingly spectacular accounts of anomalous experiences in and around circles country: such as those of the American ufologists of CSETI (Committee for the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), whose Wiltshire-based ufowatch 'Project Starlight' was rewarded by a sighting of a 'structured craft', moving in the distance, its weird lights flashing in unnervingly intelligent response to the torch signals of the watchers...

But the doubts and suspicions fostered by the traumas of 1991 lingered. Many cerealogists noted with distress that, barely had they dusted off their tape measures and dowsing rods in the spring, than they had begun to notice a disproportionate number of fakes in the fields; and even formations that looked genuine on the ground had designs that stretched the credulity of the most ardent croppie. East Field at Alton Barnes, for example, the holiest site in circledom since the tenancy of a marvellous pictogram in 1990, was visited by a vast snail, replete with antennae and hundred-foot shell. Elsewhere, the phenomenon cocked a

cornographic snoop at the experts by presenting them with tumescent genitalia. Some researchers could not help but acquiesce to the nagging self-doubts about hoaxing that had plagued them since the previous season. One such was Pat Delgado of CPRG, father of the mystical school of cerealogy, who echoed the thoughts of many when he wrote in his newsletter: 'Something does not seem right about the crop circle phenomenon this year. There have been a large number of hoaxes, and quite frankly, I am not prepared to say that any of about thirty I have examined are genuine.' Delgado, prime victim of Doug and Dave in 1991, was perhaps more aware than most of another anomaly of 1992: he lived not far from Cheesefoot Head, allegedly the favourite stomping ground of the Southampton artists, and had seen many formations there. But not in 1992; that year, Cheesefoot Head was silent... just as Doug and Dave, Retired, had said it would be. By summer's end, Delgado had shut down his newsletter and withdrawn from the field.

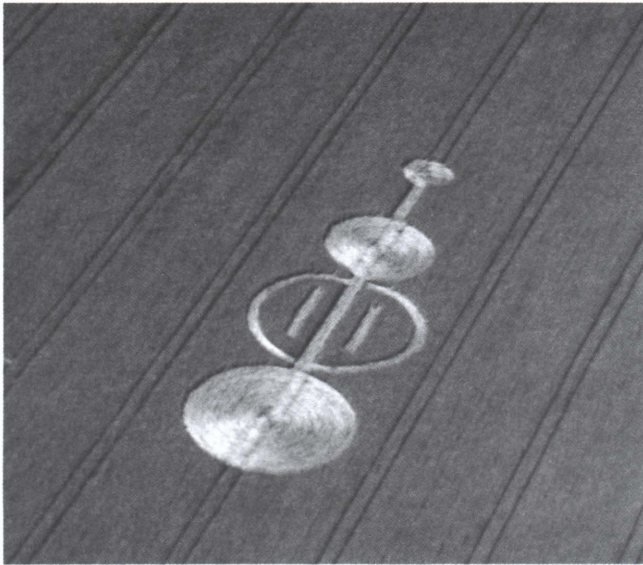
Others followed suit. Colin Andrews, Delgado's erstwhile partner in CPRG, would end his cerealogical tour of duty in 1992, leaving his job, and his wife, and emigrating Stateside. CCCS members deserted in droves; one founder member of the organisation even suggested it be closed down. But other cerealogists rejected such extremism. They conceded the increase in fakes, even that hoaxers might be improving at their sordid craft, but reiterated the positive evidence the season had brought; indeed, they said, 1992 had seen actual empirical evidence against the feasibility of hoaxing, resulting from a competition, held at West Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, in which a prize was on offer to the hoaxing team that best reproduced, overnight, a set circle design incorporating many of the most perplexing features of past formations. The dozen entrants (which, significantly, included neither Doug and Dave nor the Wessex Skeptics) did their best, but experts agreed that close scrutiny of the fakes enabled their artificial nature to be discerned. Certainly, none had been up to the standard of the author of a pictogram that appeared that same night at Aston Rowant, nearby: unlike that formation, the hoaxes did not dowse, and they lacked certain tell-tale signs of genuineness, such as a 'crunchy' feel underfoot.

The cavils of the hoax-sensitive would not be quelled, however—they noted, for example, that one of the West Wycombe judges had defied the consensus and declared that the top five entries would have fooled most researchers in the field—and cerealogy entered the winter hiatus despondent, split over the extent and effectiveness of hoaxing. During that winter, and in the spring of 1993, cerealogists were forced to confront their worst fears. Trusted cropwatchers were revealed to be in league with hoaxers, or to be hoaxers themselves, exposing many of the great mysteries of the circle phenomenon—such as its ability to react to the spoken wishes of researchers, or to place circles in fields supposedly under observation—as inside jobs. Even *cerealogists* fell under suspicion; such as the coordinator of the CCCS database, rumoured to be listing pictograms before they had appeared in the fields... And one by one, the favoured formations of 1992 were exposed as fakes, or claimed as such. The Dharmic Wheel was the work of one

Jim Schnabel, an American journalist who had come second at the Wycombe competition, who staked his claim in a scurrilous and offensive anti-cerealogical book, *Round in Circles*; in which he also claimed authorship, with a number of acquaintances, of a sizeable percentage of the 1992 formations—such as the circles near Wroughton, which so impressed George Wingfield. There were strong rumours that Schnabel and Co. did not stop at circlemaking, but had developed a taste for manufacturing UFO sightings; and they were in the area the night CSETI saw its structured craft... in a nightmarish throwback to 1991, it was revealed that a once-sympathetic filmmaker had treacherously thrown in his lot with the circlefakers, filming them at work in 1992 and recording the subsequent authentications by hapless experts. The cream of his crop was the cereal highlight of 1992, the elegant pictogram at East Meon. As good as anything the conspirators Doug and Dave had *supposedly* made, East Meon was made by... Doug and Dave. It was their revenge on a cerealogical community that had abused and scorned them. The supposedly retired Southampton artists turned out to have been very active in the summer of '92, making an estimated 25–30 formations. One other of their charges was the pictogram at Aston Rowant, the exemplar of genuineness that appeared the night of the circle competition, so much better than the work of the mere *humans* huffing and puffing their way to inadequacy at West Wycombe. Doug and Dave *had* entered the competition after all; they just neglected to inform the judges.

Things got worse. In the spring of 1993, Project Argus and its associates announced their results: nothing. No radioactivity, no polyembryony, no new physics. Initial findings had either failed to replicate or were fraught with methodological difficulties. Other evidence fell by the wayside. The crackling, hissing noise heard by so many researchers in circles turned out to be the misheard song of a mischievous bird, the Grasshopper Warbler. An infamous video of a strange light dancing across the corn of a pictogram, so long unexplained, was undermined by another video showing a similar light over a field; only this time the light obligingly approached the camera lens and revealed itself to be—a thistle spore. But most devastatingly, researchers were having to acknowledge that *strange, anomalous phenomena were occurring in definite hoaxes*. A miraculous healing was reported in a formation made by arch-hoaxers Schnabel and co at Lockeridge in Wiltshire. It was recalled that a medium had experienced overwhelming spiritual forces in the Wessex Skeptics' hoax at Clench Common in 1991. UFO reports, and tales of odd noises, often surrounded fakes; one hoaxer even reported encountering a strange luminous form in a circle whilst making it! And of course, dowasers, sensitives and electronics engineers continued to detect strange energies in hoaxes with awkward regularity. There were dark mutterings that perhaps one did not need a genuine phenomenon to account for the weird events experienced in circles...

Not all cerealogists were disturbed by such developments. The Scientists of CERES positively relished the discomfort of their mystical colleagues, whom they saw as appallingly irresponsible pseudoscientists simply getting their



Pepperbox, near Salisbury

comeuppance for having misled the public, and encouraged acts of criminal damage, by their promotion of the pictograms. Relieved of such formations itself, and non-committal on the matter of how many simple vortex-created circles appeared each season, or what they looked like, CERES had effectively severed all links with the contemporary phenomenon; but it was still active, gathering evidence of historical precedent and seeking eyewitnesses to circle formation. Supremely confident of the correctness of its revised (but still Scientific) views, the meteorologists launched attacks on the CCCS, demanding that it apologise publicly for its errors, and the sceptics, whom it charged with bigotry and laziness. The attitude of the latter, who had not only dismissed CERES as just as pseudoscientific as the mystics, but were actively seeking to turn the scientific community against it, particularly rankled. '[We have] done more than any of their feeble efforts to establish the simple truths behind the circles,' announced ufologists Paul Fuller and Jenny Randles in the 1993 reissue of their 1990 book, *Crop Circles: A Mystery Solved*. Lest anyone bring up CERES' pre-Doug and Dave stance on hoaxing, the two pointed out that they had always taken that subject seriously; indeed, *Mystery Solved* distinguished itself from all other circles books by devoting a whole chapter to the topic—albeit one saying how difficult it was to make genuine circles. 1992 was not a good year for Fuller and Randles *qua* authors. The publishers of the German edition of *Mystery Solved* had, without their knowledge or permission, secured the services of a well-known scientist to pen the foreword to their book; a man whom, the skeptics chortled bigotedly, could not have been chosen more appropriately. The name of this leading scientist? Erich Von Daniken.

Mystical cerealogy entered the summer of 1993 teetering on schism. Numerous cereal formations adorned the fields once more, but in place of delight over their reappearance was bitter division over their authenticity. Some researchers dismissed most, even all, of the patterns as fakes; the formations looked messy, they said, and there were silly designs, such as '666' symbols, spaceships and disabled

toilet signs... even Holy East Field had been defiled, by a pathetic, half-finished looking formation dubbed the 'lollipop' (suspects: the Wessex Skeptics). Others begged to differ, asserting that the 1993 crop was as good as ever. Wiltshire, Sussex, Surrey and good old Cheesefoot Head in Hampshire, for example, had been visited by magnificent pictograms, and the season had also brought arguably the most spectacular crop circle ever seen, surpassing even Barbury Castle and the Mandelbrot: the huge, phenomenally complex, 'Bythorn Wonder', discovered in Cambridgeshire, in early September (Figure 3). 'This was the one!' enthused researcher Peter Chapman in *The Circular*, 'Not only the one that had been waited for throughout the 1993 season, but *the* one that we had all been waiting for—the most incredible ever.'

As the summer wore on, the tide of opinion began to turn against the pro-hoaxers, who were increasingly seen as negative myth-makers, rejecting perfectly sound formations on the basis of no more than cynicism and rumour. 'Who needs to go and fake circles any more?' asked a bemused Michael Glickman, a staunch proponent of the reactionary cerealogy, 'A simple claim will do the trick. We have among us people who receive any whisper from whatever source, with glee and enthusiasm and then promote it with vigour'. Whither this bizarre propensity to trust the utterances of trouble-making self-publicists? Was it not the case that all hoaxers had singularly failed to back up their claims by demonstrating their supposed skills in front of researchers? Doug and Dave had created an unholy mess in barley in 1991. Loudmouth Jim Schnabel may have done a creditable job at Wycombe, but when invited to replicate 'his' Dharmic Wheel in front of the CCCS in 1993, he produced a second-rate semi-copy that convinced no-one. Who *says* this incompetent had a hand in the Charm Bracelet, or the Lockeridge circle or others in 1992? Only him. And who *says* Doug and Dave made Aston Rowant? Only them. And what if they *did* make East Meon? What does that prove? Some cerealogists noted conspiratorially that even video footage could be faked... would a government bent on disinformation—or a filmmaker bent on sales—not exploit such an opportunity to influence the public? Who *says* the East Meon film is genuine? It could be a hoax.

Matters came to a head at the Autumn Conference, held in Dorchester in early October, which found delegates split

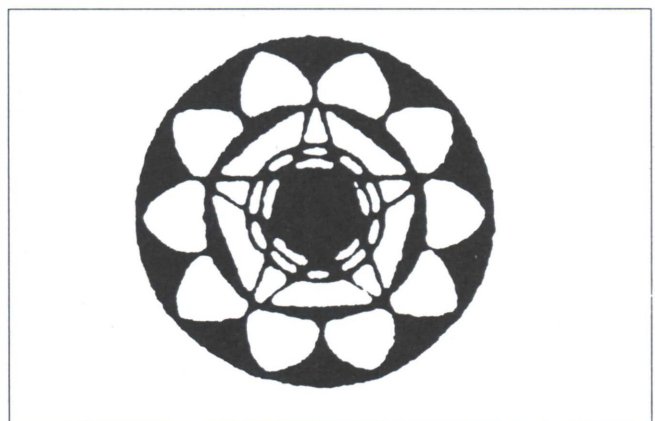


Figure 3: A sketch of the 'Bythorn Wonder'

over the authorship of the 1993 formations, in particular the 'Bythorn Wonder'. Now Bythorn was within reach of the notorious 'Bailey Gang', a bunch of teenagers responsible for many outstanding 'genuine' formations in the Midlands since 1990, and George Wingfield, newly-appointed editor of *The Cerealogist*, and now a pro-hoaxer, was convinced that they, or perhaps just their head, were responsible; not only that, he had said as much in his journal. Michael Green, CCCS Chairman, disputed Wingfield's conclusion, noting that the Bailey Gang often informed the CCCS of their cereal plans in advance; no such tip-off had accompanied Bythorn. Michael Glickman went back to basics, pointing out the bankruptcy of Wingfield's 'evidence'—Bailey's word, a few blurred 'before and after' photos, and the incorporation in the Bythorn design of a typically Baileyesque pentacle—and reaffirming the *sheer impossibility* of such a huge, intricate design resulting from the exertions of mere hoaxers. Glickman's refreshing positivism resonated with an audience desperate to return to the clear-cut, hoax-free days of yore, and he emerged clear winner over Wingfield. The case of the pro-hoaxers was further undermined by the spectacular gaffe of speaker Jurgen Krönig, who had barely finished confidently ascribing the authorship of numerous 1992 and 1993 formations to various hoaxing teams than one of the accused—ironically, a member of the Wessex Skeptics—stood up from the audience and flatly denied his allegations. Whither the assertions of pro-hoaxers now? By the Winter of 1993, Michael Glickman had become the figurehead of a rejuvenated cerealogy, tired of vacuous hoax claims and determined to bring the genuine phenomenon back onto centre-stage. In December 1993, in the pages of *The Circular*, he vented his exasperation at the negativity of the likes of Krönig and Wingfield: 'What Lunacy! *The Circular* is used to promote doubt, *The Cerealogist* prints falsehoods against all evidence and the platform of the Conference is used to make statements which the slightest research would prove to be untrue. Could we, in our wildest fantasies have imagined this? Who would have thought that a crop circle 'researcher' would—in his promotion of hoax fantasy at a Conference—be corrected from the floor by an admitted hoaxer?... How can we, once and for all, put a lid on this stupidity?'

1993 had seen hoaxing finally restored to its rightful, pre-1991 place: an irrelevance on the periphery. But cerealogy still faced difficulties with Argus, and the trilling sound, and dowsing false-positives and ostensible miracles in hoaxes. Theorists applied themselves to such problems with aplomb. The Argus failure was disappointing, but hardly terminal; perhaps, like so many paranormal phenomena, such as spoonbending, the essence of circles just could not be trapped in the lab. Dowsers and sensitives were quick to point out that scientific method, incorrigibly left-brained as it was, could not fail to miss the subtle dimensions of cerealogy, which required the application of more dextrous hemispheres; and where such techniques were employed, scientific certainties—consistency, repeatability, reliability—had to be sacrificed, as each investigator accessed his or her own aspect of the multi-layered energy field that was reality. (Those who had heard the crackling noise in circles

concluded. They *knew* it was not a bird, whatever the matching sound traces said.) But what of the apparently thorny problem of anecdotal reports of anomalies emanating from hoaxes? Did this not weaken the argument that circles must be paranormal because of the phenomena they catalysed? Not at all. It fell to leading parascientist Andy Collins, champion of the Reichian Orgone Energy theory of circle creation, to ask, with customary perspicacity: so *what?* It proved nothing. It simply demonstrated how hoax circles had become foci for paranormal phenomena, as was already the case with paranormally-produced, genuine ones. 'If we accept this, and are honest with ourselves,' he wrote in the pages of *The Cerealogist* in 1993, 'then what's the problem? We still have a genuine mystery.'

Cerealogy had survived again.

Are These People Gullible, or What?

We are looking at flattened corn. That's all it is, just flattened corn.

—Dave Chorley

It is quite possible that some of these formations were man-made with garden rollers, string and planks of wood. It is equally possible that some of them arrived by means currently quite unknown to science.

—John Martineau, CCCS

These people are crazy!

—Doug Bower

As I write, the first week of May, 1994, the new circle season is already upon us. Two formations, both in rape, have appeared near Winchester (one at Cheesefoot Head), and I have a report of several, again in rape, in the vicinity of Avebury. Hoaxers usually start in rape; it is the first crop to mature to the point where it stays down when you flatten it. Rest assured, by the time you read this the rollers and stompers will have dutifully switched to wheat and barley, and the whole sad cereal behemoth will be up and shambling again.

A writer charged with the task of accounting for the extraordinarily persistent phenomenon of crop circles clearly has to focus on two distinct entities: the circles themselves, and their students, the cerealogists. I will return to the former—that is, the issue of hoaxing—shortly. For the moment, I would like to make one or two comments on the latter. I have attempted to shed light on the shortcomings of circles research by trusting to the eloquence of history; and whilst I may not have been entirely successful, I suspect readers will by now have at least some appreciation of why so many people have striven for so long, at times so hard, with such little palpable success. *Homo Cerealogicus*, like *Homo Triangulensis Bermudans* before him, combines a remarkable talent for generating 'anomalies' with precisely those research strategies that ensure he never makes any headway in solving them. We have seen it all before: the grab-bagging of any and all 'evidence' supporting one's viewpoint, irrespective of relevance or quality; rampant anecdotophilia, switching to a near-rabid anecdotophobia when the testimony goes against the grain; the premature touting as definitive of tentative, ambiguous, unreplicated results; a failure to test one's hypotheses meaningfully, or at all; an insensitivity to competing hypotheses, and the shifting of the burden of proof onto those who raise them; an intolerance of criticism; scientific ignorance coupled with

the promotion of empty, jargon-laden word salads as 'theories'; and fallacious appeals to authority, public opinion, emotion, and posterity. If readers will forgive this transgression against Skeptical Correctness, I must also add: a phenomenal intransigence of belief and—as the above quote from John Martineau illustrates—an improbable readiness to believe in mysteries; if you prefer, gullibility.

Of course, there are no more true cerealogists than there are true Scotsmen, and it would be unreasonable to stigmatise all circles enthusiasts as clones of the unflattering composite implied by this list. Most croppies believe in 'genuine' circles simply because their preconceptions lead them to interpret features of the phenomenon differently to the rest of us, and they neither consider themselves 'scientific researchers' nor play any active role in promoting the cerealogical cause. To point this out is not just a case of a damp skeptic attempting to be fair to the chip- and axe-less croppies who were so fair to him at the Conference: in cerealogy, as in industry, people tend to rise to the level of their own incompetence, and many of the tragicomic tribulations of the field are attributable not to the general shortcomings of human inference, but to the personal idiosyncrasies of prominent researchers. Few cerealogists, for example, are as well-versed in the three R's of pseudoscience—rationalise, rationalise, rationalise—as Andy Collins; or the radical clique that has declared that *it does not matter if all circles are fakes, as hoaxers are being driven by the Goddess*: what matters is Her message, hidden in each formation's design. Neither are all as desperate to prove their case as CERES, whose database of 'early circles', predating Doug and Dave and necessary if vortices are to play a role in the phenomenon, indiscriminately takes in shapeless scorchmarks, windswept dirt, holes in the ground and—wait for it—fairy rings; everything except, last time I looked, a clear-cut crop circle. Even committed croppies are unlikely to share Michael Glickman's extraordinary concept of the burden of proof, that he is justified in believing that there is a genuine phenomenon until someone proves that each and every circle that has ever appeared is a fake; although the CERES ufologists come close in spirit with their 'Challenge', issued in the pages of their periodical *The CropWatcher* in 1991, wherein they give critics of Meaden's theory until July 1991 to provide precise, not vague, counter-explanations for all of CERES' eyewitness accounts... or give in. Many croppies are refreshingly open about the difficulty they have in detecting 'genuine' circles, and are not as determined to keep up appearances as, for example, Richard Andrews who, at the 1993 Conference, declared that he knew Doug and Dave's East Meon formation to be fake, but authenticated it on camera *as a favour to the producer*. Not all researchers jealously guard their data—the mystical CCCS puts scientific CERES to shame in this regard—and nor do they withhold information from enquirers: such as CERES, again, whose secretive 'instrumental test' for detecting genuine circles turned out to be ...dowsing; or Colin Andrews of CPRG, who announced in 1993 that he had been finding evidence of faking—post-holes, guiding pegs—in major 'genuine' formations for years, but had simply *sat on it* for fear it would distract from the real

phenomenon. Thankfully, few circles buffs are as blinded by the power of the 'ology as the CERES amateurs—ufologists, students, weather enthusiasts—who, perhaps drunk on the reflected glory of Dr Meaden's credentials and the 'rational' nature of vortices, champion what might be called pseudoscience-with-attitude, combining a rigorous adherence to sloppy procedures with a melodramatic, in-your-face scientific conceit that is, at times, excruciating. And I daresay that not every cerealogist is as—*stupid*—as the PhD researcher who declared, on television, that he could not be responsible for the movement of the dowsing rods he was holding because their ends were inside biro tubes: he was not touching them, see. A young girl was heard to remark that this must mean that whenever she wrote a letter with her Bic, she wasn't actually responsible for it. Very sharp, you might think: but *she* is not a scientist.

But however much one might wish to focus skeptical ire on the culpable, the fact remains that contemporary mainstream cerealogy—by which I now mean mystical cerealogy—comprises individuals whose core belief in 'genuine' circles has been *absolutely untouched* by the evidence—Doug and Dave, Clench Common, Schnabel *et al*, East Meon *et al*, the failure of Argus *et al*, the occurrence of ostensible anomalies in fakes—that saw off their colleagues, and convinced the rest of the world that the circle phenomenon was just a gigantic hoax. Such a belief, even if initially founded in rational considerations can only be sustained by an ample subscription to the methodical, self-deluding charms of *H. Cerealogicus*.

Very Diplomatic. Can We Get Onto Hoaxing Now?

In part one of this article (*The Skeptic*, 8.1) I pointed out that the croppy case for genuine circles rested on two pillars: the positive evidence—*anecdotes*, Argus—and the negative, the alleged inability of hoaxers to make such circles. One of the most notable recent developments in cerealogy has been the rehabilitation of the latter argument; in fact, many modern researchers dispute the abilities of hoaxers with a confidence not seen since 1990, and the debate between cerealogists and their critics seems to have gone full circle. It is only fitting, then, that this critic should end his article with a look at the main objections to the position—total hoaxing—that he has implicitly endorsed throughout. I will take them one at a time.

(1) No human being could do this!

I've been investigating crop circles in Canada for four years and in England for two. For those unfamiliar with my work, my specialty is searching for anomalous effects. I spend a minimum of three to four hours, sometimes eight hours or more, in each formation, noting and recording anything odd. Some of the evidence I gather is physical, like the lay of the stalks, bends in the stems, differing effects on weeds, lack of damage, etc. Other evidence is mechanical or electrical, such as the effects on recording equipment, cameras and film. Yet another area is the physiological effects on people and animals, including headaches, nausea, dizziness, visual and audio incidents. I also dowse every site thoroughly.

—Chad Deetkin, *The Circular*, March 1994.

The art of cerealogical fieldwork. Chad strolls into a formation, looks around for a while, does a double-take, and we are supposed to shift our paradigms.

And that is all there is to it. The cerealogical belief that human beings cannot make genuine circles is rooted in no more than what we might christen Chadism. A typical circle, comprising many thousands of fallen stems, offers a rich canvas for our imagination, and by failing to appreciate this, and by confusing ignorance with significance, cerealogists have simply been generating signals from noise all these years. Legions of hoaxers have marvelled at the ability of croppies to discern unhoaxable stem-layering patterns amidst randomly flattened crop, magical properties in stalks that were actually trodden on by accident, and deep symbolism, or inhumanly fiendish geometry, in designs cobbled together at the last moment. Not that hoaxers never deliberately incorporate subtle layering or mystic designs in their work; they do. But they do not need to. They can always rely on the ability of cerealogists to add two and two and make x , the unknown; or $\pi \exp(\phi \ln E (ie + \alpha))$, much more scientific.

There is no doubt that human beings can make 'genuine' formations, and with comparative ease; although, as the hoaxing competition demonstrated, the Chadism-driven subjectivity of circle examination renders it unlikely that some researchers will ever discover the truth of this for themselves. None of the alleged barriers to human manufacture—the undamaged crop, the spiral pattern, the sharp cut-off at the edges, sheer scale—present hoaxers with any real difficulty. A variety of techniques can be used to flatten the crop—such as stalk-stompers, favoured by Doug and Dave, the Bailey Gang and modern skeptics, and rollers, preferred by many of the 1992 hoaxers, such as Jim Schnabel—and circlemaking simply involves laying crop, within surveyed limits, as quickly as possible, modulo any subtleties the hoaxer wishes to include. Although in 1991 the Wessex Skeptics helped to perpetuate the myth that hoaxing was time-consuming—by ineptly taking over three hours to swirl a simple 70' circle at Lurkely Hill in Wiltshire—the fact is that it generally takes a surprisingly short time. Doug and Dave are astonishingly quick: I thought I was being fast in 1993 when, with my cousin, I knocked out a 70' single in about twenty-five minutes, but the footage of East Meon reveals that Doug and Dave took just *twelve minutes* to make a sixty-footer (this footage, incidentally, will be in-

cluded in a video from CircleVision, to be released shortly, and reviewed in this magazine). However, even when a formation does require considerable work, there are hoaxers willing to put it in; the Bailey Gang, the young Michelangelos of circlemaking, think nothing of starting a design one night, and coming back the next to finish it off.

(2) OK, so they might make some... but not all of them. No way. Too many!

How many is 'too' many? The greatest number of formations to be reported in any one year was 232, in 1990. This is about ten times Doug and Dave's then annual average. By comparison, there were 50+ in 1988, 30 in 1989 (Doug and Dave had temporarily fallen out), 181 in 1991, and 179 in 1992, the 'year of the hoax'. Although these figures are lower limits—I know of at least three major pictograms that went unreported on the Isle of Wight last year, for example—given that there might be dozens of hoaxing teams in existence, some of which could be more active than a couple of pensioners, or more energetic—*pace* Bailey—the claim that there are 'too many' circles to be accounted for by hoaxing is ridiculous.

Cerealogists have shored up this particular argument by shamelessly inflating numbers: one regularly hears nonsensical claims that 'thousands' of circles need to be accounted for. These appear to be due to the counting strategies of researchers, who count component parts of pictograms as separate formations: so a single quintuplet—a central circle surrounded by four others—would be reckoned as five; and a major pictogram could run into double figures. On this basis, I was responsible for some fifty circles in 1993! Cerealogists seem to be so intoxicated with their subject that they are seeing quadruple.

(3) OK, but even if they could make them... they wouldn't bother!

In a world containing people who will climb mountains, swim Channels and eat bicycles, and lodgers, it is unwise in the extreme to declare on what humans are prepared to do. Making crop circles is rather like spraying graffiti, only slightly more criminal; but unlike spreading paint, it brings more by way of reward than an adrenaline buzz and a sense of artistic pride. Hoaxers create a *stir*. People flock to their work, pay to get in—many parted with a pound to enter the Cheesefoot Bohemias last year—and freak out in it. It gets into the papers, into books, onto posters and postcards, or immortalised in jewellery. Most importantly, it attracts a peculiarly arrogant and pompous individual, the 'expert', who strides into it and declares it a work of such artistry that *no human being could have done it*. Reward enough, one would think, for the small effort usually required.

There are other reasons. The thrill of secret knowledge, of seeing those around you baffled by your work. The opprobrium of your targets, the croppies, who give you melodramatic names—Snake, Spiderman, Mr Sinister, Catwoman, Ringmaster—and mutter about your connections to MI5 and the Vatican. Some rewards are personal; for example, a picture of Bohemia Two was one of three designs—another was Bythorn—chosen to grace an advert for a talk on circles to be delivered, with beautiful irony, by Uri Geller. Moreover, on 29 September 1994—my birthday.

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Needless to say, not all hoaxers operate from the clearest of motives. Some appear to be driven by a religious urge, seeing their circles as responses to 'genuine' formations, which are communications from a higher intelligence. I have been told that the head of the Bailey Gang considers himself driven by some mysterious force. Even the affectation of some to be simply artists is dubious; artists do not, for example, plan to go out and put down 'rough, single circles, with eyewitnesses' for the benefit of CERES, hoax UFOs, or place ads in the circles press for a company named 'Circumcereal Ltd', offering 'pictograms for all occasions, guaranteed genuine.' But whatever the motives of individuals or teams, the fact is that hoaxing is widespread; and if the rumours I have heard—that several hoaxers are considering publishing a 'how-to' manual—are true, it might even be about to gain in popularity.

(4) Err... umm..

The preceding three arguments are the strongest in the anti-hoax canon. There are others, weaker. We are told, for example, that circles in out-of-the-way places are unlikely to be fakes, because hoaxers want their work to be seen: as if hoaxers never practise, or get nervous about being caught—or have the savvy to realise that, if they put a formation in an out of the way place, the experts will authenticate it because... CERES queried the possibility of rollers being used to make circles because of the isolated stems occasionally found strewn beyond the perimeter: How, they ask, can rollers explain these? *Duhh*. CERES is also responsible for surely the most extraordinary circumscription of them all, to wit: that one particular circle could not have been caused by a spaceship landing because—it appeared beneath powerlines. *No extraterrestrial craft could do this!*

Without exception, the objections cerealists raise against hoaxing betray either a shocking lack of imagination or a wilful, arrogant circumscription of human nature; and invariably, an allergy to experiment. In this respect, nothing has changed since 1990; and one could not hope for a more trenchant comment on the ultimate banality of the Science of cerealogy.

So That's It Then. All a Hoax.

Probably. Although I hinted in part one of this article that writing off the whole phenomenon as a hoax might be premature, I no longer think so. Then, I was alluding to the work of CERES, which has made an interesting case for the existence of novel atmospheric phenomena, which might, if they reach the ground, leave a physical trace. However, I am now of the opinion that such traces, if they exist, and if they turn up in a cornfield, are unlikely to be true crop circles. Interested readers might like to consult the *Journal of Meteorology* and the *CropWatcher*; if their blood pressure can stand it. For my part, I figure that the result of the study of cerealogy is the usual: social sciences one, physical sciences, nil.

And here, I bring this review to a close. But as we laugh at the ineptitude of cerealists, and raise a glass to Doug and Dave and their imitators for having given us so much fun, let us spare a thought for some of the victims of the crop circus: for those who were humiliated, or had their reputations ruined; for the shattered marriages; the descents into paranoia; and the farmers, who have sometimes incurred such a loss of livelihood. Some of the latter may have profited handsomely from the circles—one thinks of the Carsons, who farm East Field, who have made thousands—but most have not. One image that I cannot erase from my mind is of a farmer from Silbury Hill, driven to tears by his inability to prevent gawping croppies from walking into *his* field and trampling *his* grain to satisfy *their* desire for mystery. It is an image that ought to be borne in mind whenever we think that the only casualties of the circle phenomenon are the masochists.

But wait! What's this? New results from Argus, ruling out the possibility of human involvement? We're in business again! *Cerealogy is dead: long live cerealogy!*

Robin Allen is a physicist, and a member of the Wessex Skeptics.

Erratum: in the first part of this article, it was stated that anomalous radiation levels had been found in crop stems from genuine circles. It should have been soil from such formations. Thanks to Monte Keen for spotting this typo.



The Creation: What Really Happened

Mike Walsh

A fly-on-the-wall account of the origins of humanity

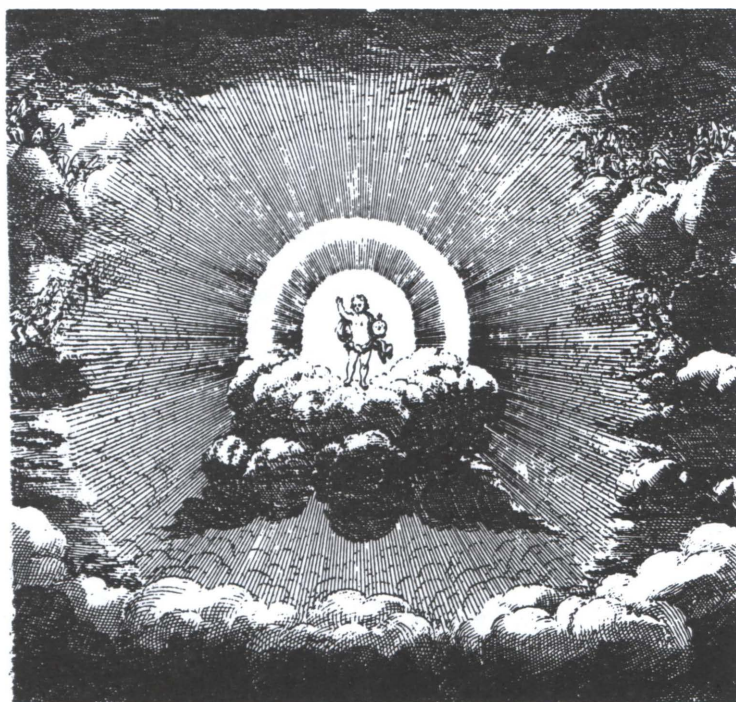
THE TAP ON THE DOOR broke God's concentration. He put down his pen. 'Come,' He boomed. The door opened, and a figure shuffled in. 'Ah Gabriel. Good of you to come. How's the Creation coming?'

'Quite well, actually,' replied the Archangel. 'I've had to have words with Archangel Beadle again, though.' 'What's he been up to now?' asked the Almighty, motioning to Gabriel to take a seat. Gabriel sat down carefully. As usual he was indecisive whether to tuck his wings in behind him or to allow them to hang over the back of the chair. God snorted with impatience as he wriggled and shuffled, seeming to take an age until he finally found comfort. 'What was it you asked?' Gabriel asked at last. 'Beadle. You said he'd been up to mischief.' 'Why do I have to tell you? I thought you were omniscient.' 'You know damned well I still like to be told things,' snapped God, irritably. 'This bloody omniscience is all very well, but it can be a damned nuisance at times. It completely spoils every episode of Miss Marple.' 'Miss who?' 'Never mind. Just tell me about Beadle. I want to hear it right from the horse's mouth.' 'The what's mouth?' 'Horse. It's a new creature currently in design.' 'And it can talk?' 'Of course not. 'But you said right from the...' 'Never

mind. It's just an expression.' 'Well I've never heard it.' 'Of course you bloody haven't. We haven't finished the bloody horse yet,' spluttered God. Really He'd be glad when this whole damned creation thing was over.

'Now what about Beadle?' 'Well I caught him up to his old tricks again. This time he was going round the Earth burying what looked like giant lizard bones. Apparently he thought it would confuse the Humans when they get a bit more advanced.' God tried to suppress a smile. He had a secret admiration for Beadle and had been quite upset at having to punish him the week before for building a circle of stones on a plain in southern England. 'That boy really is incorrigible,' He said. I suppose you've had to punish him?' 'Yes. I gave him a hundred verses.' 'A hundred?' 'Well we've got to get that Old Testament written somehow. Anyhow he'll soon have them finished. Knowing Beadle he'll just turn out another hundred "begats".' God frowned. 'That book's becoming increasingly tedious,' He said. 'Do you think we'll ever get anyone to read it?' 'Don't worry. It's a sure-fire best seller. We've just finished a really good chapter about a flood, with lots of human interest and whole processions of animals. That kind of story will really sell.' 'Like David Attenborough.' 'Who?' 'Never mind,' said God.

He became suddenly businesslike. 'Anyway that's not why I called you here today.' 'It's not those bloody Humans again is it?', asked Gabriel. 'As it happens, it is,' said God, scarcely able to conceal his annoyance at the remark. 'What's the problem this time?'. Like most of the inhabitants of Heaven, Gabriel was becoming increasingly impatient with God's obsession with the Humans. None of the other animals had been any problem, apart from the minor setback when, as an experiment, they had got the lion to lie down with the lamb, and the great cat had, in a moment of forgetfulness, devoured the hapless creature. But the Humans had been nothing but trouble. The problem was that God had decided to create Adam in his own image, and unlike the beautiful creatures created in the Heavenly workshops, with their smooth shining pelts and graceful movements, God was thin, pink and completely hairless, apart from a couple of isolated patches. To add to their problems, He had



Mary Evans

insisted on giving Adam intelligence. This had caused no end of problems once Eve had come along.

Whilst he had to admit that Eve was a considerable improvement on Adam—quite attractive even—ever since her arrival there had been nothing but bickering in the Garden of Eden, and her constant insistence that he ‘make something of himself’ had tried the patience of a good many of the saints. ‘The thing is,’ said God, rising to his feet and beginning to pace back and forth on the small cloud that served as a carpet for his study, ‘We’ve got to think about their reproduction’. ‘Reproduction?’, queried Gabriel. ‘You mean you want more of them?’ ‘Of course. I can’t keep taking ribs out of the poor man. His chest will collapse.’ ‘But the place will be overrun.’ ‘You seem to forget the Humans are mortal.’

‘Well why the hell didn’t you make them immortal? After all they’re in your own image.’ ‘Well, Eve isn’t exactly in my image,’ said God, blushing slightly. ‘Besides, I’ve had an idea about that. We could offer them immortality if they praise me enough. They could put up buildings in my honour and sing songs about me. I’d like that.’ Gabriel gazed at the Almighty sadly. It didn’t seem to be enough being the Supreme Being nowadays. God was turning into something of a megalomaniac. ‘But what about those who don’t praise you?’ he asked. ‘Simple. We let Satan have them.’ ‘What, stoking those bloody central heating furnaces? That’s a bit rough isn’t it? After all, what’s going to happen in a few hundred year’s time, when they’ve forgotten how you started it all? There’s bound to be some daft buggers who’ve never heard of you.’ ‘All the more reason to bung them down the cellar. No, my mind is made up. It’s either sing songs about me, or shovel coal.’

‘So you really want to find a way to let them reproduce by themselves?’ ‘That’s the idea. I had in mind some way by which physical contact between them would fertilise an egg inside the woman.’ ‘Do we really want her laying eggs all over the Garden of Eden? It’ll make a dreadful mess if anyone treads on one’, mused Gabriel. ‘Perhaps you’re right. Maybe we’ll drop the egg idea. But I still want to go through with this reproduction thing.’ ‘And you think physical contact is the key? What kind of physical contact?’ ‘That’s the question. We’re going to have to involve some kind of orifice, in order for the juices to mix. The trouble is, most of the ones I’ve given them are already used for something else.’ The two of them meditated silently for a while, then Gabriel had a brainwave. ‘I know. What about those little holes in the middle of their tummies?’

‘Their navels?’ ‘That’s right. After all we’ve never found a use for them.’ ‘They’re not supposed to have a use,’ replied God, petulantly. ‘I put them there for purely aesthetic purposes. I think they look rather nice.’ ‘You might just as well say you designed those bits of skin that dangle under their ears so they could hang jewellery from them,’ replied Gabriel scornfully. God did not reply. ‘No, seriously,’—now that the idea had occurred to Gabriel he found himself quite enthusiastic—‘They could stand with their tummies touching and some kind of fluid could pass from the man to the woman. I mean it’s so simple. They could do it anywhere.’ ‘You may be right,’ replied God. ‘If I could just work out a way of...’ He was interrupted by a loud banging on the door. ‘Yes?’ The door was opened a crack, and a junior seraphim peered into the room. ‘If you please Almighty...’ ‘What is it now, Gascoigne?’ ‘It’s them Humans in the Garden of Eden,’ said the stocky young angel, nervously. ‘Oh no,’ sighed Gabriel, casting his eyes in a direction that would have been Heavenwards, had he not already been there. ‘What have they done now?’ ‘Please Sir,’ mumbled the messenger meekly. ‘They’ve been at the apples.’ ‘The apples?’ ‘The Forbidden Fruit. They’ve scoffed the lot.’ ‘WHAT?’ God’s voice thundered at such a volume that, far below, a small volcano erupted violently. The area in which the eruption took place was a remote one but unfortunately a particularly large lump of lava fell on the only pair of Griffins, who had been created the day before by a seraph as an experiment.

Back in Heaven, God was very cross indeed. ‘Those stupid buggers,’ He ranted. ‘I told them to leave those



bloody apples alone. They were my entry in the Celestial Produce Show next month. Now that bloody Satan is bound to beat me with his hothouse fruits.' 'But the Garden of Eden is full of fruit,' put in Gabriel. 'Not after those two have been at it,' said God bitterly. 'A nibble at this, a bite at that. Before you know it they've ruined most of the good stuff. That's why I told them to leave the apples alone.' 'Apparently it was the serpent,' stammered the seraph, beginning to cry. 'The serpent?' 'Yes. He suggested to the woman that she try them, then she told Adam, and that was it.' 'Damn,' said God. 'I always knew that serpent was a lousy design. I mean, you let the poor bloody thing crawl on its belly whilst the rest of creation is rushing about, then expect it to be grateful. I suppose Satan promised it legs.' 'It sounds like the sort of thing he'd pull,' said Gabriel. 'If you ask me, he's riding for a fall.' 'Well the serpent can forget legs,' said God, decisively. 'It's eating dirt from now on.' 'What about Adam and Eve?' asked Gabriel. 'I'll have to think about them,' said God, menacingly. 'I mean what about the reproduction thing?' 'Oh yes, that.' God turned to the seraph. 'All right, you can go now. We've got important matters to discuss.' 'Yes Almighty,' sobbed the youngster. 'Now,' said Gabriel, once he had gone. 'About the navels. I thought...' 'Forget the bloody navels,' thundered God. 'They can use...' He broke off, and a strange gleam appeared in his eye. 'Yes,' He mused, 'Forget the navels. If they think they're going to get away with scoffing all my apples, they've got another think coming.' 'But if not the navels, what are they going to use?' 'Well I thought that...' but God's voice died into a giggle, and the giggle turned into a chortle, and soon the Almighty was rolling about on the floor, clutching his stomach and roaring with mirth. 'What is it?' asked Gabriel in alarm. 'I-I've just thought of a wonderful idea?' gurgled God 'What?' 'We-we'll,' God exploded with mirth again. 'Tell me,' cried Gabriel, beginning to giggle himself. 'We'll make them use their willies.' 'Yuk!' exclaimed Gabriel. 'Their willies? But they use those to excrete waste. That's disgusting.' 'That's the whole point,' chortled God, the tears still running down his cheeks. 'It'll take away all the fun. They'll all think reproduction is disgusting.' 'But what about Eve?' asked Gabriel. 'She hasn't got a willy. You used all the surplus to make those lumpy bits on her chest.' 'Yes, I rather liked those,' mused God, his composure being restored. 'One of my better ideas I always thought.' 'The fact remains she's willyless.' 'That's the whole point. Whole point!' said God in delight. 'I just made the first pun!' 'The first what?' 'Never mind. The way I see it, we make him put his willy into her excreting hole.' 'What, up her bum?' 'Yes. No, that might make the plumbing a bit too difficult. We'll use the one at the front.' 'But if we make the whole thing too disgusting, they won't do it, and they'll die out.' 'You've got a point there,' said God, his face falling. 'We've got to make them want to do it.' 'You could make it feel nice.' 'Great idea,' beamed God. 'We'll take some of those pleasure neuron things and use those. Let's see, we put a hundred thousand on the tongue for things that taste nice. Let's put a million on the end of the willy.' 'A million?' 'Certainly. We'll never persuade them to do it otherwise.' 'What about the woman?' 'Yes, I sup-

pose we'd better do something for her.' 'We could put something around the hole.' 'All right, but let's put it somewhere where the man will never find it. That'll frustrate the hell out of her. After all, it was her that ate the apples first.' 'It still seems pretty disgusting to me.' 'That's the whole point. It's so disgusting that they'll all be too embarrassed to talk about it. I can see it now. Just when they reach the age where they should be enjoying it, they'll be told it's dirty and get the most frightful hang-ups. Why even their own parents won't be able to discuss it with them. The real fanatics will even turn it into a sin.' 'A sin? Just wanting to reproduce? Surely they won't take it that far!' 'You'd be surprised,' grinned God. 'And the real joke is they'll think they're doing it in my name. That'll teach the buggers to scrump my apples.' 'What about the rest of the process? You know, where the baby goes.' 'I'll leave the details to the design department, although I've just thought of a great use for the navels, and the lumpy bits. 'Great,' said Gabriel, rising to his feet. 'I'll get started right away.' 'Hang on,' said God as Gabriel reached the door. 'About the willy. Make it two million neurons.' 'Two million?' 'Yes. I want the buggers to enjoy it so much that when they do it they'll remember who's idea it was, and call out my name.'

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Freud and the Occult

Rebecca Drayer

A look at the paranormal interests of Sigmund Freud

PROFESSOR SIGMUND FREUD was an extraordinarily controversial figure in his day. His followers adored him, and hailed him as a 'Columbus' of the mind. On the other hand, his critics, who were just as vehement, found his views to be outlandish, and sometimes referred to him as 'the most consummate of charlatans' [1]. Even today, feelings about him run to either extreme, with little or no middle ground.

No doubt Freud's reputation as an eccentric was enhanced by his delvings into the occult. Although it often seems difficult to believe, Freud spent a distinct portion of his professional life investigating paranormal phenomena. (Ernest Jones, in his three-volume biography, states rather scornfully that Freud's interest in the paranormal represents proof of the fact 'that highly developed critical powers may co-exist in the same person with an unexpected fund of credulity.' [2]) Much as more traditional psychoanalysts might like to ignore this aspect of their mentor's career, it must be addressed in order to obtain a complete picture of Freud's personality.

It is logical to wonder at this point whether Freud truly believed in the phenomena he spent so much time studying. Most scholars tend to agree that Freud was basically a skeptic, but was willing to keep an open mind about certain aspects of the occult. Peter Gay, author of a comprehensive biography, asserts in his book that Freud thought that most 'supernatural' phenomena could be explained in a more naturalistic fashion. However, he did believe that thought transference might be possible under certain conditions.

Ernest Jones adopted a slightly different position on the subject of Freud's belief in the occult. Despite his derogatory statement concerning Freud's credulity, he contends that equal amounts of evidence exist to either support or deny Freud's belief in the paranormal. He calls Freud's attitude an 'exquisite oscillation between scepticism and credulity.' Jones summarizes his opinion by saying that for Freud, the desire to believe was in constant battle with a bias towards disbelief, and that the conflict was apparent in Freud's writings on the subject.

It is not the purpose of this paper to determine the precise extent of Freud's acceptance of paranormal phenomena. Such speculation is best left to the scholars and biographers. Instead, the intent here is to demonstrate that Freud should not have believed in the occult, since most of



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the phenomena to which he ascribed a supernatural origin can be better explained by elements of modern psychoanalytic theory.

Freud first became involved with the paranormal in 1905. He published his last paper on the subject in 1932. During the intervening years, both he and some of his colleagues, particularly Carl Jung and Sndor Ferenczi, devoted a great deal of time and energy to the study of the occult. (One of Freud's favourite quotes during those years was, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.') However, not one of the occurrences they witnessed or heard about would today be taken seriously by a respectable parapsychologist. Instead, these instances can be interpreted in several different ways. They could represent examples of the unconscious mind acting in ways that can be predicted by Freud's theoretical papers. Alternatively, they could be examples of investigators only seeing what they wish to see.

The occult phenomena that Freud described in his personal communications and published papers can be divided into two broad groups: phenomena that are associated with dreams and those that occur during waking hours. These categories can be further subdivided into prophetic and telepathic occurrences. Freud also spent some time examining superstitions, beliefs that seemingly chance events actu-

ally have a hidden meaning and can predict the future [3]. While superstitions are not strictly occult phenomena, they deserve mention here because a belief in the supernatural is intimately connected with them.

Freud defined telepathy as the instantaneous transmission of an event between the minds of two people. According to him, the individuals who are 'telepathically' linked must share strong emotional ties [4], and the event that is transmitted should be charged with negative emotions. This definition is different from the one employed by professional parapsychologists. They define telepathy as 'extra-sensory awareness of another person's mental content or state' [5]. No mention is made about the necessity of an emotional link or the type of event that can be transmitted. This more closely corresponds with Freud's definition of thought transference, a process he considered to be closely connected to telepathy.

Freud often thought that telepathy, if it did actually exist, might prove to be useful in the analytic setting. Indeed, in one of his papers on technique Freud stated that an analyst must 'turn his unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient' [6]. Other psychoanalysts jumped on the same bandwagon. Helene Deutsch and Istvn Holls, contemporaries of Freud's, published papers on their theories of the role of the occult in psychoanalysis. Even psychoanalysts unconnected to Freud became interested in the subject.

Freud never made any secret of his bias towards a scientific explanation of mental phenomena. He had, after all, first been trained as a medical doctor. He described psychoanalysts as having fundamentally materialistic and mechanistic attitudes, even though they were willing to search for undetected qualities of the mind and soul [7]. This inclination towards rational definitions extended to the occult.

Freud proposed a possible physical basis for thought transmission (which presumably could be extended to telepathy as well) based on an analogy with the telephone. He postulated that the thoughts or other mental processes that are transmitted are transformed into physical processes such as waves or rays. Once these waves or rays reach their target, they are transformed back into the original mental processes. Additional evidence for Freud's belief in this physical basis for the occult can be found in a letter of his to Ferenczi, in which he describes his opinion of a soothsayer whom they had both visited. Freud thought that she had a 'physiological gift' that allowed her access to the thoughts of others.

It is time to turn to the occult phenomena themselves. Superstitions should be dealt with first. It can be shown that, even though they seem connected with the supernatural, they are really products of the unconscious mind. From there, it will be a relatively simple matter to extrapolate from them to the other supernatural happenings that Freud studied.

A substantial portion of one of Freud's papers was devoted to an examination of superstitions. In this paper, called 'Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition—Some Points of View,' Freud described the phenomenology of superstitious beliefs. According to him, the average per-

son knows very little about psychoanalytic theory. Because of this, the person will be unaware of the significance of his own chance actions. However, these chance actions will possess unconscious motivations which will attempt to find conscious representations. Since the person has no other way to express his hidden desires, he will project them onto the external world and will view external chance events as having the ability to reveal things that would otherwise be hidden from him.

Usually, the repressed material tends to be a death wish against a loved one. It is common for an individual to feel both love and hate for the same person. The hatred, however, will be imprisoned in the unconscious, since the person will most likely have been brought up to deny such negative emotions. Since superstitions are usually associated with anticipations of trouble, it can be seen that they are really unconscious expectations of punishment for evil thoughts.

Interestingly, Freud compares superstitious people with paranoiacs. Both, he says, will fabricate a supernatural reality in order to express unconscious processes and relationships. It falls to science to recognize this fact and project it back into a psychology of the unconscious.

As alert as Freud was to the causes of superstitions, he fell prey to them nonetheless. He was particularly susceptible to number superstition, the belief that certain numbers had a special significance. His telephone number in 1899 was 14362; he was convinced that the last two digits represented the age at which he would die. This number served to remind Freud of his mortality; indeed, he attributed his own superstitions to an unconscious desire for immortality instead of the usual repressed hostility.

Occult phenomena in dreams

Freud concentrated a great deal on the appearance of occult phenomena in dreams, and wrote several papers dealing with this subject. He repeatedly maintained, however, that supernatural phenomena are fundamentally distinct from dreams. The two are often grouped together because they occur together, but the supernatural really has no place in the theory of dreams. The important questions instead should be why the paranormal seems to surface repeatedly under dream conditions (8) and whether the phenomena involved are truly paranormal in nature.

Occult phenomena tend to be linked with dreams for the additional reason that both seem very mysterious. In one of his papers, Freud remarked that dreams were frequently regarded as 'portals to the world of mysticism' and were seen by the uneducated as occult phenomena in their own right. However, as Freud would so often repeat, both dreams and their subject matter—occult or mundane—could only be understood by scientific investigation. Mysticism had no place in the study of dreams.

Telepathic dreams were the more common type of 'occult' dreams investigated by Freud; he very rarely analysed prophetic dreams. Naturally, he was quick to state that the only reason for mentioning the connection between telepathy and dreams was that sleep seemed to be conducive for the reception of telepathic communications. Telepathic mes-

sages, he claimed, would not be treated any differently by the mind than any other material used in dreams. Furthermore, telepathic dreams should in all ways adhere strictly to the accepted view of dreams, since telepathy in no way altered the fundamental character of the dream.

According to Freud's theory of dreams, there are two types of dream-contents. There is the latent dream-content, which consists of the actual psychological material behind the dream, and there is the manifest dream-content, which is the material actually remembered by the dreamer [9]. A process called the dream-work serves to transform the latent into the manifest [10].

Freud postulated that a telepathic message would serve as the latent dream-content. The message would be distorted during the dreaming process, and hence the dream would not exactly reflect the nature of the communication. As a result, only analysis of a telepathic dream would enable it to be distinguished from a non-telepathic one. Freud hoped that psychoanalysis would be equally successful at uncovering other types of occult phenomena.

At this point, it is necessary to point out a flaw in Freud's explanation of telepathic phenomena. If so-called telepathic messages are modified and distorted by the dream work, then how is it possible to prove that they are indeed telepathic? Might they just be other unconscious images altered beyond immediate recognition so that they appear to be telepathic in nature? If this is the case, then analysis should enable alternative interpretations of the dreams to be made that do not involve the supernatural.

As will be subsequently proved, that is exactly what analysis does. An excellent example of a 'telepathic' dream that was stripped of its paranormal nature can be found in Freud's paper 'Dreams and Telepathy,' which was published in 1922 [11]. This dream was reported to Freud via correspondence; Freud was unable to interview the dreamer, whom he did not know personally [12].

The dreamer was a mature widower who had remarried. His daughter from his first marriage was pregnant at the time of the dream, but was not expecting the baby for another month. In his dream, the man vividly saw his second wife and the twins she had just given birth to. The man gave a very detailed description of the newborn babies, down to the colour of their hair, and stated that one was a boy and the other a girl. Two days later, the man received a telegram stating that his daughter had given birth to different-sex twins at the approximate time of the dream.

The dreamer proceeded to offer more information about himself and his family situation. He stated that he and his daughter were very close, and that they had frequently corresponded during the pregnancy. The dreamer therefore felt certain that she would have thought about him during the delivery. In addition, both the dreamer and his first wife were very fond of children. Finally, the man considered his second wife unfit to raise children.

To give Freud credit, he immediately acknowledged the possibility that the dream might have a non-paranormal explanation. He stated that the dream could presumably be a manifestation of a repressed desire on the part of the father to violate the incest taboo and have his daughter bear his

children. Freud claimed that the appearance of the man's second wife as the mother of the twins represented nothing more than a wish that the daughter could be his second wife.

Furthermore, instead of the dream being a telepathic message of the birth, it might have been an unconscious expression of the man's belief that his daughter had miscalculated the length of her pregnancy by one month. Therefore, instead of the babies being due a month from then, they would really be due at the time of the dream. The appearance of twins instead of a single child could be explained by a wistful notion on the part of the man that if his first wife were still alive she would love to have more than one grandchild.

Therefore, this 'telepathic' dream has been shown to be a wish-fulfilment fantasy on the part of the dreamer. However, despite this interpretation, Freud still insists that the existence of telepathy has not been disproved. In 'Dreams and the Occult,' he states that the possibility of telepathy could only be dismissed if all the circumstances of the case were thoroughly examined, something he could not do because of his lack of personal contact with the dreamer. These are the words of a man who does not want to admit that the 'desire to believe' has been made futile by the necessity of disbelief.

The second type of 'occult' dream that Freud analysed is the prophetic dream. He only analysed one of these, and he had absolutely no qualms about stripping it of its supernatural character. Instead, Freud offered a perfectly rational psychoanalytic interpretation that attributed this kind of dream to activity of the censor between the unconscious and the conscious [13].

The dream, described in 'A Premonitory Dream Fulfilled,' was related to Freud several years after its occurrence. The dreamer, a woman whom Freud called Frau B, stated that one night she had dreamed that she met a certain Dr K at a particular spot on Vienna's main street. Dr K was a friend and had at one time been her physician. The next day, Frau B actually met Dr K at that spot.

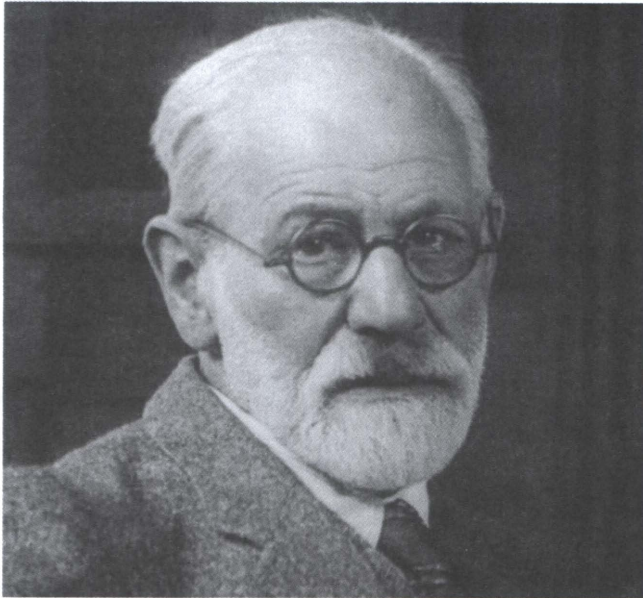
At first glance, this dream would indeed appear to be premonitory, since it predicted an event which later came to pass. However, Frau B had not written down the dream immediately after she had woken up. Indeed, there was no evidence of her having even remembered the dream before the meeting. This fact proved to be crucial to Freud's explanation of the situation.

Freud also learned from Frau B that she had been married twice. The first time, many years before, had been to an elderly rich gentleman. Several years after the marriage, the man lost his money, became ill with tuberculosis, and eventually died. To support them, Frau B began to give music lessons. Dr K was extremely supportive, and helped her find students.

The family barrister, also called Dr K, managed the financial affairs of Herr B during this period. At the same time, he managed a different type of affair with Frau B. However, Frau B's scruples prevented her from obtaining any real happiness from this relationship.

Even though the love affair was not a complete success, the barrister continued to offer help and support to Frau B.

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She remembered one instance when she was sobbing wildly and wishing for Dr K's presence. At the exact moment of her wish, in he walked. (Freud did not even consider this to be prophetic, since she probably thought of him a great deal and he probably visited her quite often.)

The dream occurred more than twenty-five years after these events, during which time Frau B remarried and was widowed again. This time, however, she had been left with money and a child. Dr K the barrister was still involved in administering her affairs, although they were no longer intimate.

Based on all this information, Freud proposed the following interpretation of the dream. Frau B had been expecting a visit from Dr K, but for some reason he did not come. As a result, she nostalgically dreamed of the day when he visited at the exact moment she had wanted him to. However, that period in her life had generally been an unhappy one, and thinking about the bygone romance made her uncomfortable. As a result, the dream was repressed and she did not remember it when she awoke in the morning.

Later on that day, she went for a walk and met the physician Dr K? At that point a distorted derivative of the dream was able to gain access to Frau B's conscious mind. (Freud's theory of repression states that derivatives of a repressed idea that are far removed from the actual idea will be able to enter consciousness.) [14] The neutral figure of the physician was substituted for the emotionally charged figure of the barrister. Since both figures were named Dr K., Frau B believed that she had dreamt the actual rendezvous.

According to Freud's interpretation, Frau B created a dream in response to an actual event. This phenomenon is similar to a screen memory, a psychological construct which plays an important role in childhood development. Screen memories can be defined as memories of one's earliest years that are actually formed during later periods of emotional arousal [15]. They are not entirely fabrications, since they are based on actual memory-traces, but they owe their greatest value to the fact that they represent repressed material in the unconscious. Even though Frau B.'s dream was not in any way involved with childhood events or memo-

ries, it still suggests the formation of some sort of screen construction.

Besides examining dream-related occult phenomena, Freud also studied those that appeared in the conscious life of a person. He conducted several experiments of his own; he attempted thought transference with Ferenczi and his daughter Anna and on one occasion observed Jung as he supposedly made objects rattle of their own accord. However, these experiments were generally inconclusive. Of more use is Freud's analysis of some of the spontaneous experiences recalled by himself or by his patients and friends.

Freud describes many such occurrences. He particularly liked to examine prophecies of fortune-tellers that did not come true. He claimed that the significance of these prophecies did not lie in predicting the future, [16] but rather in supporting the existence of telepathy.

One such failed prophecy was reported by a 43 year-old female patient of Freud's. At the time of her analysis she was childless, yet she desperately wanted to bear children. (Freud claimed that she reason she wanted to bear children was so that her husband could replace her father, a man whose child she had unconsciously wanted her entire life.) The reason why the patient could not have children was that her husband had been sterilized by an earlier illness.

Many years before coming to Freud, when the woman had been 27 years old, she had consulted a fortune-teller in the lobby of a Paris hotel. She was very young-looking and had removed her wedding ring. The fortune-teller, Monsieur le Professeur, prophesied that she would get married and have two children by age thirty-two. The prophecy was never fulfilled, yet the woman expressed no hostility towards Monsieur le Professeur in her sessions with Freud. Rather, she recalled the entire experience with a certain amount of pleasure.

Freud, upon questioning his patient, learned that her mother's life had proceeded along a path remarkably similar to that predicted by the fortune-teller. She had married late (she was over thirty at the time of her wedding), but had managed to have two children by the time of her thirty-second birthday. Therefore, if the fortune-teller's words were true, the patient would be in the same position as her mother. To the patient, this identification with her mother would be tantamount to taking her mother's place with her father. The patient could not help but feel pleasure at recollecting the fortune-teller's prediction of the fulfilment of her fondest wish.

Freud was naturally curious as to how Monsieur le Professeur had come up with those particular numbers. One theory he proposed was that his patient had transferred her strong unconscious desire to the fortune-teller. He believed that emotionally charged thoughts could be transferred quite easily, especially if they were at the border between the conscious and the unconscious.

However, Freud also suggested that the patient herself may have inserted the numbers into the prophecy. After all, she was relating an incident that had occurred many years prior to her analysis; Freud believed it quite possible that she could have unconsciously falsified the memory. This explanation seems much more plausible, especially since it

seems to signify the creation of a type of screen memory, the existence of which had already been successfully demonstrated in Freud's publications.

A personal recollection of Freud's, reported in his paper on determinism and chance, represents another seemingly paranormal phenomenon that was really caused by the workings of the unconscious. On the surface, the experience seemed prophetic in nature. Freud recalled taking a walk one night soon after he had received the title of professor. Suddenly he experienced a vengeful fantasy against a couple who had refused to let him treat their daughter. He imagined them returning to him after other treatments had failed and begging him to cure the little girl. He pictured himself saying in response that his professional abilities were the same as they were when he was but a lecturer. If they wouldn't avail themselves of his services then, they weren't going to receive them now [17].

At that moment, his reverie was disrupted by a loud voice saying, 'Good day to you, Professor!' Freud looked up to see the couple of whom he had just been thinking. Had he really predicted the future in his thoughts? Probably not; there is a simpler explanation of the event.

Freud had been walking down a straight, deserted street. It is probable that he had looked up and seen the couple in the distance. Due to the hostility he felt towards them he suppressed the perception and instead took refuge in a seemingly spontaneous fantasy. So much for Freud's prophetic powers.

All the preceding examples of supposedly occult phenomena were proven to be natural occurrences instead. There presumably exist mundane explanations for most of the other so-called supernatural happenings that are constantly being reported. The question to consider now is why people persist in believing in the occult.

According to Dr George Devereux, telepathy is connected to infantile omnipotence fantasies [18]. So perhaps, as Helene Deutsch suggests, man's belief in his own occult powers is a way of elevating himself to the level of the 'Divinity which he fashioned in his own likeness.' [19] Or maybe belief in the paranormal is a type of narcissism; Freud based his studies of narcissism on children and primitive people, both of whom tend to believe in magic and the 'omnipotence of thoughts' [20].

However, I think the best explanation of why people believe in the occult was offered by Freud himself in 'Psychoanalysis and Telepathy.' He stated that this type of belief was an attempt to regain by supernatural means 'the lost appeal of life on this earth.' This puts me in mind of 'Miniver Cheevy', E A Robinson's poem about a man who found no appeal in his life because he was born at the wrong time:

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
And kept on drinking. [21]

Perhaps those who too fanatically believe in the occult were also 'born too late'.

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Psychic Diary

Toby Howard

An unexpected encounter

OVERLOOKING SILBURY HILL, and not far from Avebury, is West Kennet long barrow, one of the finest Neolithic burial mounds in Britain. Over 320 feet long and 8 feet high, inside is a stone passage giving access to two circular burial chambers on each side, and another at the end of the passage. Human and animal remains were buried in the chambers, and in spite of extensive plundering of the tomb in the seventeenth century, a number of burials, flints, beads and fragments of pottery have been recovered. An analysis of their dates shows the tomb to have been in regular use for 1000 years. They built things to last in those days.

In the cleared-out chambers on either side of the passage there was evidence of recent occupation of the 20th century kind—a few cigarette butts of the ‘herbal’ variety, some cinders and the inevitable discarded can of Special Brew. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye I saw a light flickering at the far end of the passage. My first thought was that there was a chink in the rock letting the daylight in. But that was nonsense: beyond the far end of the passage were tonnes of earth making up the barrow. Perhaps there was someone else in the tomb, using a torch. I shouted ‘hello’, but there was no answer. I felt agitated. After years of highly skeptical exposure to Hammer Horror and Dennis Wheatley, I would have expected to be able to take flickering lights in ancient tombs on deserted windswept hills in my stride, but it was proving remarkably difficult to do so. Then I remembered my heavy walking boots, the day-glo whistle in my rucksack, and decided to be brave. I held up my car key like a dagger and rushed down to the end of the passage. What I found there astonished me.

In the wall at the end of the passage was a small stack of stones, making a kind of rough shelf, which had been transformed into a shrine, decorated with freshly-cut flowers, straw, sticks and jewellery. There was a thick red candle, burning onto a block of incense, which filled the chamber with a sickly sweet smell that had not yet permeated the rest of the tomb. The candle could not have been burning long: it only just fitted into the narrow gap at the top of the shelf, with room for the flame to burn the block of incense lodged into a gap in the stones above, and there was little melted wax. On the floor were pieces of evergreen, sweets, and coins, carefully arranged in patterns. On a ledge on the side



Fortean Picture Library

of the passage someone had placed a large fired-clay mask, a cross between a woman’s face and the Whitley Strieber ‘alien’ symbol.

The shrine I could understand; what perplexed me was the candle. The air in the tomb was still, so the candle wasn’t in danger of being blown out. It appeared to have been lit very recently—but by whom? I had been parked for ten or fifteen minutes before the walk up the barrow, and had seen no-one. And before I entered the tomb I had stood for ten minutes looking round at Silbury Hill and the fields beyond. There was no-one in sight.

A New Ager might find much potential in a minor ‘mystery’ like this, and similar anecdotal examples crop up in New Agey books all the time. Earlier, at lunch in a nearby pub, I had chatted with two campers who were visiting the area specifically to feel the vibes around Avebury and the other ancient sites. They had heard that you could see mystical lights hovering around the standing stones, and feel radiations of natural energy. I have no reluctance to say that I enjoyed the vibes around the shrine, but I remain convinced that the candle was ignited by a corporeal tent-based entity, and not by the breath of the Earth Goddess.

Back at Kennet, as I was returning to the car, a man and his young boy were on their way up. We nodded hello. I wanted to tell him about the shrine and that it wasn’t my work, but I didn’t. I hope he isn’t a New Age author.

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Skeptic at Large

Wendy M Grossman

Distinguishing fantasy from reality

THE WORST, says Kyle Degges, is the loss of your own faith. Degges is a former Evangelist—a fairly senior position—in what he likes to call the ‘Boston Movement’. It’s known here as the London Church of Christ (LCC), and recruits widely on university campuses.

Degges fascinated me with this statement. I am, I suppose, a blinkered agnostic the way some people are blinkered Christians. It never occurred to me to think of Christian cults as causing a loss of faith, or that Christians would mourn it as a bereavement. Degges is in a position to understand that; he was a preacher even before he joined the movement.

The night I saw him was a meeting of former members of the LCC. The man who invited me, himself a former Elder in the church, told me that those present—maybe about 20 people—had all been out for more than a year. Even after three years out of the movement, he says, many are still angry and resentful, especially against the government, which treats the LCC as a religion and grants it charity status. The group’s newsletter, though, *Close to the Edge*, reports that the Charities Commission is investigating the LCC; 1993 also saw negative media reports on the LCC including one by the BBC’s *Newsnight*.

Degges is engaging, if long-winded. For the meeting, he surrounded himself with books and pamphlets to quote from. Much of what he wanted to say, however, was in his head. You realize why he’s careful with the name he gives the movement when he tells you his former job was preaching at ‘a small church of Christ in Louisiana’. He says he never expected to have the kind of ministry he has now.

‘I think of myself as a fireman’, he says: he goes in where he’s needed and cleans up the mess. But being a minister was his ‘grand obsession’ from the age of 12; it was all he ever wanted. It is, I think, the first time I’ve ever heard anyone speak of such a desire that way: he does not lay the blame on God; no talk of being ‘called’.

It was a small group, but an emotional one, and Degges’ particular brand of ministry, which involved searching out Bible quotations commonly used in the LCC and explaining how the movement abuses them and takes them out of context drew a lot of nods of recognition. Skeptics might recognize the process, which is very similar to analysing the way creationists misuse scientific quotations. The emotional reactions, though, are completely different. They remind me of open Al-Anon and AA meetings I’ve been to, where people are deeply affected to hear others voice doubts and anguishes that they thought only they knew.

Degges has a nice example of what happens to Biblical quotations: ‘Judas hung himself. Go ye and do likewise.

Act quickly’. All these sentences appear in the Bible, he says. Is this what they’re supposed to mean? Everyone laughs.

There’s no laughter, however, when he reads a section from Viktor Frankel’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. This is a passage about the deep resentment and anger of a Holocaust survivor and his struggles to recover from his experiences. Several of those in the audience cry openly at this. Earlier, Degges has explained that there are three major types of anger among former members: anger at themselves, anger at their friends and family, and anger at God.

One of those present says, ‘Where do I go?’. Everybody asks that question, says Degges. Again he turns to the Bible, pointing out that this question has very little to do with scripture, and much more to do with Western society: ‘Western people tend to think of their personal validity in terms of being in the right group’. He calls this ‘salvation by affiliation’. This notion, he thinks, explains why Christianity has split into so many sects.

The LCC, like most cults, preaches that it has the only true path to God, and everyone else is going to Hell, if they’re not there already. Instead, says Degges, the church doesn’t save anybody. Jesus taught that salvation was through Him and Him alone: the right relationship, rather than the right group. He recounts with some dismay—to the amusement of those assembled—that in the movement they would race to save anyone who was ‘struggling’ as if they were called to a three-alarm fire: ‘Let’s put out the struggle’. In fact, he says, struggling is what Christians do in their attempts to be at one with God and interfering in that struggle is both arrogant and wrong.

Degges also covered more familiar material to skeptics: Lifton’s list of the characteristics of mind control, war stories about brainwashing. But he spoke from a position of needing to understand what had happened to him, and I doubt the material would be as meaningful from anyone else, just as recovering alcoholics say they would not have heard the message of sobriety except from another alcoholic who understood their experiences. Skeptics may inoculate through education; we can learn from others’ examples; but I doubt that we can help anyone recover from the effects of exploitation on this level.

Wendy Grossman is the founder of *The Skeptic*, a member of the UK Skeptics, and a writer and folksinger. Her Compuserve ID is 70007, 5537.

The meeting was organised by the group ‘Triumphing over London Cults’, PO Box 348, Morden, Surrey SM4 6ZD, Tel: 081 646 7477.

Reviews



An over-enthusiastic theory?

Stuart Campbell, *The UFO Mystery: Solved* (Explicit Books, 4 Dovecot Loan, Edinburgh, 1994, 208 pages, £11.95)

UFOlogy has long been in need of an enema—in the form of a good, well-written and skeptical examination. For much of the time I hoped that this book could be it. But, sadly, it commits suicide by way of over-enthusiasm. Stuart Campbell has an excellent pedigree. He was a valued Scottish investigations coordinator when I was national director of investigations at BUFORA. Skeptical—yes, but then all good investigators should have inscribed above their beds the motto that if you do not solve at least nine out of every ten UFO cases then you are doing something wrong.

Once upon a time he assessed UFO cases as potential examples of ball lightning—something I am sure he was right to do. Physicists are struggling to comprehend this phenomenon largely because the extreme cases get reported as UFOs and so fall outside their province. The data they use to define ball lightning parameters is therefore restricted. However, rather mercurial like, Campbell found a new hobby horse to ride with his discovery that optical mirages can result in UFO sightings, the culprits for the distortion effect being bright stars and planets.

Again, I think he is spot on. This can, and does, happen in the wonderful tapestry of IFOs (or identified flying objects). But where I think he loses credibility is in a far too liberal interpretation of that idea.

For the first 50 pages of this book Campbell hacks through the undergrowth of distortion, confusion, misperception and wishful thinking that any honest student of the UFO world knows it to be. Sadly, his book soon leaves this sensible ground about the UFO myth and moves into its main course—the optical mirage theory. No case is invulnerable as lights in the sky, UFO landings, alien contacts and abductions, multiple photographic cases, all fall beneath the sword of this wondrous new theory. The end result, for me at least, was to turn what starts as a promising concept into a caricature of itself, where you begin to wonder what might *not* be evaluated as a stellar mirage in the author's view. We do not quite get President Kennedy's assassination explained this way, but the fact that you begin to half suspect this may pop up sooner or later rather demonstrates the fear this book exudes. Has Campbell gone a close encounter too far in his analysis?

Unfortunately, this tendency is difficult to avoid. I speak from experience after co-authoring *Crop Circles: A Mystery Solved*. That provided much the same service to crop circles (and UFOs), seeing them as the product of both hoaxes and a natural atmospheric vortex. I still believe that Paul Fuller and I were onto something (and our much repudiated book

is now earning a bit of respectability in the neo-crop circle universe). However, we were also rather too enthusiastic about our new discovery.

In our excitement Paul and I tried to use the concept to turn UFOlogy into a branch of meteorology. As such we took almost every case we could find (including, ironically, at least a couple that Campbell now interprets very differently as a mirage!). This 'shoot 'em down' style of UFOlogy did us no favours and probably stopped some sensible folk from seeing the sense of what we were arguing. I fear that the same thing is going to happen to Campbell's theory.

In more detail, what Campbell proposes is that stars and planets near the horizon are bent and distorted by optical mirage effects to produce a glowing mass or fuzzy 'UFO' shape that can then be readily misperceived. It can, of course, also be photographed. Taken like that it sounds perfectly reasonable. Indeed it is. We have all seen similar mirage effects when driving on a road on a hot day and what looks like a pool of water seems to form dead ahead. This is not water but, in truth, light from the sky, whose rays have been bent to the point of extreme distortion.

It is far from ridiculous to expect this to operate in UFO terms and Campbell is not the first person to suggest it. The theory emerged to explain the very first UFO sighting (Kenneth Arnold's in June 1947). It was argued, with some feasibility, that Arnold's flotilla of UFOs was a distorted image of the mountain peaks over which he was then flying.

In May 1989 the north-west UFO group, NARO, investigated a case at Heywood in Lancashire where ambulance crew and police officers had seen a fuzzy mass of light in the sky. There were media claims that the ambulance station phone had stopped operating during the encounter. Superficially it seemed like a classic encounter and made the national press for a day.

As it was unfolding at 3am the police called in NARO and three investigators visited the site later that day. By 10am Jodrell Bank were working with us by checking an interferometer programme to test a theory. Within 24 hours we had jointly concluded that this UFO was probably a mirage of a star, and publicly said so. We published results in *Northern UFO News* and noted that research had resolved the phone interference claim too. A local radio station had called the ambulance crew to give a 'live report' but had not immediately broken the connection, thus leaving the ambulance phone seemingly dead until the radio station replaced the receiver. We had quickly discovered that there could be no possibility of true electromagnetic interference (as I think occurs in some cases) because none of the other equipment at the ambulance station was effected. Indeed even this phone had worked with the UFO present before the radio station had called them, making its

sudden failure unlikely to be UFO related.

However, four years later a London UFO magazine published a report from another group. They claimed the interference was real, moreover they intimated that witnesses had been silenced because they would not talk to them. Indeed, they even presented a first-hand account of meeting three MIB (or 'men in black'), here described as very smartly dressed individuals walking out of the building in unison after evidently having instructed the witnesses not to talk to this other group.

The deliciously ironic truth is that these three 'MIBs' were the NARO investigators (one of whom was Peter Hough). They had, of course, silenced nobody, except perhaps indirectly by being able to offer the witnesses a reasonable explanation as to what had gone on.

This anecdote is important because it shows how a simple phenomenon can be badly distorted by its transfer through the UFO myth. It also shows that the star mirage theory is acceptable to UFOlogists and, more than that, provides a working example that Steuart could have used in his book—had he still been a part of the UFO field rather than, by choice, apart from it.

Here a close encounter fell to the mirage theory with immediate on-site investigation. However, had it been analysed years later and at a distance (sometimes half a world away)—as Campbell tries to do with most of his cases—the star mirage might well have been calculable, but the explanation for the rest of the case that turned it into a close encounter (i.e., the alleged physical effects) would have been near impossible to prove.

Unfortunately, Campbell's book does not stop with cases where the idea of a stellar mirage makes good sense given the data. It moves into territory where the theory sits far more uncomfortably.

For instance, at Socorro, New Mexico, in April 1964 a UFO landed in mid to late afternoon, seemingly left indentations in the ground, was witnessed by a highly thought of church-going policeman as an egg shape with some humanoid beings beside it, and set the scrub on fire upon departure (an effect seen by a police sergeant on his arrival at the desert site moments later). To identify this as a mirage the book devotes a chapter to the idea that it was caused by a distortion of the bright star known as Canopus (which is otherwise invisible in broad daylight). The other effects are suggested to be a combination of coincidence and unrelated things.

Well, you might say, UFO cases like the Heywood affair show that this is not impossible from time to time. But as Campbell trots out more and more equally extraordinary landings with physical traces, and applies the same sort of freak combination of circumstances, you begin to wonder whether the laws of chance might not make visiting alien spacecraft less incredible than some of these solutions.

Campbell's detailed study of the Trindade Island photographs is a good illustration. The images of a large fuzzy Saturn-shaped object seen in the middle of the day by several sailors as it flew from one part of the sea to another, rounding a rocky, uninhabited island upon which they were then setting up a meteorological station in the process, look

for all the world like a 'real UFO', whatever one of those is. In the past I have myself proposed that this object was a cloud of dust particles drawn together by electrostatic forces—that is, a form of UAP (or unidentified atmospheric phenomenon). Many American UFOlogists, of course, disagree with me as much as I dispute Campbell's new idea—they saying that it is a spaceship from another world.

Who knows which of us is right, if any, but I will take more convincing than this book offers that a mirage of Jupiter, then quite invisible to anybody's eye, distorted into a large structured 'craft' and in a matter of moments—coincident, by the way, with the ship's electrical winch ceasing to operate—climbed in an arc up and behind the rocky island just as Campbell's montage of the photographs clearly demonstrates it to do. To be sure, with cases like these, Campbell offers ingenuity of argument. But the price we pay is a feeling that common sense dictates against such use (or even abuse) of the facts to form this theory.

One case that really worried me was police officer Alan Godfrey's encounter from Todmorden, West Yorkshire in November 1980. This is probably Britain's most famous 'spacenapping'. I wrote Godfrey's story for him in *The Pennine UFO Mystery* in 1983 and, as such, have met him on various occasions, including at the site where we reconstructed what had happened.

Anyone who has read what I have written will know that I do not believe that Godfrey was kidnapped by an alien spaceship although I am sure he saw a 'real' UFO. Moreover, that he himself has argued against a literal interpretation of his later hypnosis 'memories', tells me that he could have based them on books read after his sighting. However, what he saw in the first place remains puzzling. I have, for various reasons, stemming from evidence at the site, proposed an electrically charged wind vortex. As for some of the witnesses who saw UFOs in the area that night, it is possible that Venus, being very bright in the early hours, caused some of these people to misinterpret that stimulus.

But Campbell puts forward the theory that Venus was what Alan Godfrey saw to trigger his complex experience. He does not mention Godfrey's own doubts about the hypnosis testimony. Nor can Venus—via a mirage or otherwise—explain the way the bushes by the roadside shook as if struck by a localised violent wind or how the wet road surface underneath where the UFO had hovered was dried in a swirl pattern whilst the surroundings remained soaked.

A rotating vortex could do both these things and explain the static on Godfrey's two police radios.

Yet there is a more serious problem. For Godfrey to have seen a mirage of Venus, the policeman would have had to have been driving south-east along Todmorden road. Not even a mirage could make the planet appear in the opposite part of the sky. But, even though Campbell has him driving towards Venus this is nonsense. The witness has always insisted that he was driving in the opposite direction and—given that I have been on site with him reliving the sighting long before there was any possible need to have him going in the other direction—I feel that I can be more assured about this fact than can someone who, to my knowledge, has not been to Todmorden.

It would be nice to fit the theory that the policeman was driving towards Venus, rather than away from it. But you have to justify changing the known facts to do that. Indeed, here Campbell completely fails to tell his readers that there is even any dispute about which way the driver was headed. He simply has him going in the direction that suits his theory. In my view that is unacceptable.

When Campbell first mooted his mirage theory in BUFORA's magazine a few years ago he brought up this case. I and several others pointed out his error on this point and we had a debate in print about how he could justify switching directions. So he presumably knows, but does not tell his readers, that the case investigators who worked on site and the testimony of the witness himself all agree and negate his theory.

By the time we reach the infamous 'Rendlesham Forest' case most UFOlogists will have long sent for the Valium.

This is a case I know all too well, having devoted 14 years to what occurred outside the twin NATO bases of Bentwaters and Woodbridge in Suffolk and written two books about it. My most recent, 'From out of the blue' is dismissed by Campbell as being 'sensationalist' amidst his attempt to explain this case (which has more evidence supporting it than any other in British history). He adds a few of his own touches to the usual skeptics' theory that the UFO was a combination of a meteor, a few stars, a lighthouse (or—he thinks—lightship) beacon, plus some rabbits digging holes. The result was mayhem amongst the US Air Force, later confusion in Whitehall and the Pentagon and an idiotic investigation by UFOlogists such as myself.

Indeed, in so far as I know, none of the skeptics who have written about this case—including Campbell—have interviewed any eyewitnesses. He actually seems astonished that we went to America to track down US Air Force witnesses—terming this approach 'credulous' and 'ignorant', whereas forming his conclusions without doing any such work is presumably not. What I find amusing is that my 'sensationalist' and credulous book spends more pages—I think objectively—assessing and analysing the skeptics' theory than Campbell devotes to his entire discussion of the case. Far from concluding that the UFO was a spaceship, I present various ideas to explain the data covering 25 pages. Under three of these pages are devoted to the alien spaceship theory. The rest look at military technology, psychological warfare, UAP, and, of course, the misidentification hypothesis. Forgive me if I find a charge of sensationalism against this approach hard to justify.

I do not know what happened in Rendlesham Forest. I doubt that it was a spaceship but I am sure it was more than just a misperception. However, I do believe that, whilst any theory is welcome, it can only be guesswork—in this instance seemingly unaccompanied by any first-hand on-site investigation, which in my book is the first ground rule of any casework.

So, in summary, I would say that this book is well worth reading and makes telling points from time to time. I do believe that Campbell is right and that some UFOs probably are stellar mirages. It will always be worth being reminded of that fact and testing possible cases against this hypoth-

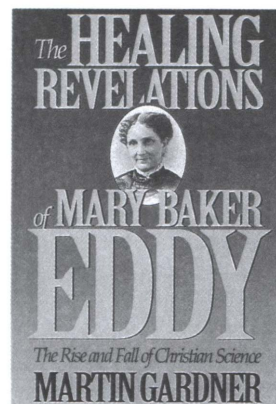
esis, something I am sure that the author will readily do for us all in future. However, as a way to solve the UFO mystery or, indeed, even as a widespread explanation for presently unsolved cases, I think not.

The two facts I believe we can say with assurance about UFOs are that most of them are cases of mistaken identity and that those mistakes cover a broad spectrum of options. There is not one, or even two, answers to the UFO mystery—there are answers (plural) to the UFO mysteries. Campbell points us in the direction of one of these, but it would be a big mistake if he were to continue to believe that he does any more than that.

—Jenny Randles

The illusion of illness

Martin Gardner, *The Healing Revelations of Mary Baker Eddy. The Rise and Fall of Christian Science* (Prometheus Books, 1993, 255 pages, hardback, £21)



In 1989 Ian Lundman, age 11, was dying of diabetes in suburban Minneapolis, USA. At his bedside were a nurse and his mother. The nurse was making notes about his condition, the mother was praying for her son's healing. Both women were avowed followers of Christian Science. Earlier, a school official had noticed a fruity odour on the boy's breath,

the classic diabetes symptom, but did not recognize it as such. Neither did she know that Ian's mother had religious beliefs against medical care. The father, a former adherent of Christian Science and divorced from his wife, sued the church. According to him, this religious organisation was guilty of negligence causing the death of his son. In August 1993, the church was sentenced to pay the father 14 million dollars for damages.

This sketch epitomizes two distinguishable features of Mary Baker Eddy's legacy: the true believer rejects regular medical health care and there is a lot of money involved. Since the movement's early stages, this unique combination has elicited rampant scorn from a wide range of interested outsiders. Around the turn of the century, a variegated amalgam of puritan theologians, medical professionals and a residual parade of concerned individuals raised their voices against Eddy and her sect. They opposed her extreme psychosomatic maxim, wrapped in an unorthodox biblical exegesis, that every disease is an illusion of the mortal mind. Illness could only be healed by studying her works and solemn prayer. Physicians were superfluous. Besides the questionable fact that Eddy was a woman making a rather pecuniary success of her religious enterprise, the clergy considered her scriptural derivations as blasphemy, while her uncompromising condemnation of conventional healing infuriated the medical world. The famous (catholic) writer

Mark Twain even wrote a book about her and the movement, in which he cynically wiped the floor with her views. In short, Eddy exemplified the fate that falls to every innovative religious leader's lot.

Gardner's book is the umpteenth example of anti-Christian Science literature. His attack is rooted in his upbringing. On page 10 he states: 'Having myself been a Protestant fundamentalist for a brief period of youthful ignorance and confusion, I know what it's like to be a true believer'. Obviously, this was a bad experience. The genre of his book may be quite legitimate if it would reveal a sect's hidden agenda or widespread abuse of power. However, the author presents stale news for those who are familiar with the movement's history. It is mainly composed of references to ancient and renowned sources written by previous opposers. So, the uninitiated reader learns of the numerous scandals surrounding the founder and her coterie: Eddy's hysterical temper, her plagiarism, her authoritarian entrepreneurship, the early schisms, the recent theological quarrel among the adherents, and the tragic deaths of children whose parents relied on Eddy, rather than consulting a regular physician. Gardner presents these events in a sour litany, focusing on the first decennia of Christian Science's history. Because of this emphasis, the book's subtitle is not fulfilled. The author does not mention a word about the movement's impressive growth until the early 70s. Simultaneously, he hardly pays attention to the organisation's dubious monetary operations since the 80s. Alarmed by the leadership's overspending of financial resources and other forms of mismanagement, a considerable part of the adherents wondered if their leaders were administering an obscure multinational enterprise rather than a respectable religious community. To be sure, Gardner refers to the recent theological controversy regarding Eddy's spiritual status. Bizarrely, it is money once more that seems to underlie this affair, contributing to the existing turmoil among the following and the shaky reputation of the highest echelons.

Apart from these shortcomings, the book suffers from some factual errors and incorrect references. More important, though, is the fact that missionary attempts like these (Gardner has the slight hope that new converts, after reading his book, may be discouraged to join Christian Science) often suffer from the same bias as their ideological antagonists. This lack of detachment suggests that those who still appear to have to square the frustrations of their religious past, are not the most eligible for describing deviant belief systems.

—Richard Singelenberg

Salvation through science?

Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (Routledge, 1994, 239 pages, paperback, £8. 99)

Mary Midgley is a learned and highly articulate moral philosopher with a special interest in ecology, animal rights and the ethical problems that arise through the misuse of scientific ideas. In a previous book (*Evolution as a Religion*, Methuen) she attacked the quasi-religious, pseudo-scientific doctrines of Progress that are sometimes derived from a

misreading of the theory of evolution. In the present book she extends the attack on 'scientism' (science-as-ideology) to include the bizarre fantasies of the future that are sometimes to be found in popular and semi-popular works on science written by physicists or cosmologists.

These fantasies include such ideas as the possibility of 'downloading' the human personality onto a computer, the mass colonisation of the far reaches of outer space, and the anticipated omnipotence of mankind (or of his mechanised descendants) achieved through advanced technology. These ideas, presented as fact rather than fiction, seem to have more to do with the pursuit of power for its own sake and with overcoming the fear of death than with providing a rational solution to the present problems that face the world, Midgley argues. They present science as a means of achieving salvation and attaining a sort of disembodied immortality, but they promote a false view of what it means to be a human being and they express an unjustified contempt for the body and for natural feeling. Moreover, they are symptomatic of an underlying reductionistic scientism which radically over-estimates what science can reasonably be expected to achieve whereas, in fact, science is simply one legitimate field of inquiry amongst many.

It is easy to sympathise with these sentiments for these bizarre visions of the future are both wildly speculative and overly indulgent. However, whilst they may unfortunately have a disproportionately large influence over the general reading public, I doubt that such ideas carry much weight within the scientific community itself. As for the scientism that supposedly underwrites these strange Promethean fantasies, my impression (as drawn from my own professional experience of working amongst physicists) is that it does indeed exist, although usually only in quite a mild form, as a barely articulated prejudice against other fields of knowledge which lie outside the realm of the exact sciences (philosophy and sociology being particularly favoured targets, it seems). Such attitudes are of course far from universal, but they are common enough, and no doubt betray the narrowness of much scientific education, a narrowness that can surely only be remedied through the development of a broader conception of what it means to be a scientifically literate individual—one that successfully locates science in its proper philosophical, historical, social and cultural context.

Nevertheless, whilst clearly agreeing with much that Midgley has to say in this book, I can't help feeling that—by concentrating on the extravagant claims made by a few individual scientists—Midgley has too little to say about the positive contribution which science might be expected to make to our understanding of the world and of the human condition. We can surely acknowledge this possibility without necessarily falling into the extreme reductionism of a Jacques Monod or a Peter Atkins (two well-known representatives of scientism quoted by Midgley). What is needed is a little more mutual understanding and communication between scientists and scholars from the various disciplines. Only then might we begin to comprehend what science is and is not capable of achieving.

—Tim Axon



Letters

Island of sanity

Please keep up the good work; it's an old cliché but your magazine is an island of sanity in an ocean of fools, fraudsters and fakers. As an utter layman where science is concerned, I often lack the intellectual weapons with which to fight against those who would still have us sitting in caves. *The Skeptic* has on many occasions given me those weapons, for which I thank you.

I have a question, and I hope it will not sound too trivial or silly. Ionisers—those devices which pump negative ions into the air of a room and supposedly have beneficial effects upon all in the vicinity. Is there any scientific evidence that these things work? I must confess I have one at home having been tempted by the packaging promises of air like that of an Alpine meadow, but the only effect I can see is that a lot of dust builds up around the vents where these ions are supposed to be emitted. Is there any chance on doing an article on these things?

Finally, with the European elections looming, surely every Skeptic was delighted to see the broadcast by the Natural Law party. If anything is going to show the man in the street the value of their philosophy, it will surely be the sight of a bloke bouncing around on his bum claiming he's reducing the crime rate in Liverpool by sixty percent. Isn't it time the Skeptics formed a political party and got their views on the air? Apparently all that is needed to earn a five minute broadcast is to have ten candidates in an election. Surely we can manage that!

Ian Harris
Chester-le-Street

The boy named 'Sue'

Welcome back. I note your parenthetical remark (Hits and Misses, *The Skeptic*, 8.1) on a name to make a 'strong' son, '(Sue?)', referring to

Johnny Cash's song 'A boy named Sue'. According to Edward J Larson in *Trial and Error* (Oxford University Press, 1985) the prototype for the subject was S K Hicks who became a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives after pursuing a successful career in the law.

So, why should this be interesting? In 1925 Hicks was the local prosecutor in Dayton, Tennessee and his most (only?) memorable case was Tennessee v Scopes (278 SW 57), now universally known as the 'Monkey trial' and the inspiration for the play and film *Inherit the Wind*, in which Hicks is not mentioned (this last is from memory only, and I apologise to film buffs if this is wrong). The prosecution won the case at first instance so must count as a success for Hicks, although all that is remembered are the great speeches of Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan (not to mention Spencer Tracy's braces).

The appeal (289 SW 363) which Scopes won was only successful because of a mistake in sentencing by the judge, which had nothing to do with the facts or the law of the original indictment.

So, even if his life was not as colourful as that of Cash's hero, Hicks did achieve at least the status of a footnote to history; which is more than most of us can manage.

Ernest Jackson
Kingston upon Hull

Ark observations

The item about Noah's Ark ('Two by Two', Hits and Misses, *The Skeptic*, 8.1) brought to mind not only the *Observer* article, but the ludicrous TV film shown at the time, which revealed that the 'Ark' is a common geological feature: either an anticlinorium or a synclinorium (almost certainly the latter—a huge trough of rock strata). Not only could one see the bedding planes, but two of the photographs of the entire area

showed similar geological outcrops nearby. But none of those are boat-shaped. The 'Ark' is a slight freak.

Even the clear boat shape in the vertical aerial photographs shows that the structure itself is quite irregular, because a true boat shape would only appear so, if the ground surface were level—but in fact it strongly undulates across the 'boat's' sides, which were not vertical, but sloping (try cutting a wobbly section lengthwise along a carrot—and see the result!).

I'd suggest this sequence of events: millenia before the Ark myth arose, the local people and travellers knew of this 'boat' shape, inventing fables (giants etc.) to account for it. As the 'boat' is near Mt Ararat, the Ark myth soon linked with the 'boat' shape to 'prove' that that is where Noah landed. And the remarkable similarity in the 'boat' dimensions and that of the Ark—300 by 50 cubits each—is because that's the dimensions of the exposed bit of the synclinorium. The Bible puts the cart before the horse. (Again.)

By the way, I took pics of the TV scenes, for reference. It's simple: use an SLR camera close enough to the screen for the picture almost to fill your view, set speed at 1/15th of a second or thereabouts to avoid black bars across the pic, and set your lens aperture with a meter or the built-in light meter. (This technique can also be used to take pix of half-clothed ladies in those incomprehensible BBC historical dramas, which is why most people watch them?).

John Clarke
Uxbridge

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