

criticisms made against Rhine and his work, exposing some of the factual errors made by sceptics such as D. H. Rawcliffe and Martin Gardner. He devotes a whole three pages to describing the astounding attack on parapsychology made by the physicist John A. Wheeler who, according to Rao, deliberately falsified the evidence in an attempt to discredit Rhine. When it became clear that there was no factual basis for his allegations, Wheeler wrote a letter to *Science* admitting that he had 'unwisely repeated' a secondhand and incorrect account of Rhine's experiments. That, it seems, was a masterpiece of understatement. I find myself wondering just what it is in parapsychology which provokes such violent and irrational reactions in scientists who are otherwise sane and sensible men. Why do they feel so threatened that they have to react in this way? Perhaps we should devote some of our research effort to studying the psychology of belief and disbelief in psi, rather than the psi effects themselves.

Marcello Truzzi is a good example of a tough-minded, sceptical thinker who does *not* foam at the mouth whenever psi phenomena are mentioned. In a paper entitled 'J. B. Rhine and Pseudoscience: Some Zetetic Reflections on Parapsychology', he gives a calm and critical analysis of what is meant by 'pseudoscience', and discusses the relationship of parapsychology towards it, and towards orthodox science. He categorises parapsychology as an example of a *protoscience*, that is, one of those enterprises which 'seek to play by the rules of science insofar as these are manifest, but about whose claims the general scientific community may yet remain unconvinced' (p. 180). Truzzi also considers that parapsychology has been 'dysfunctionally cutting itself off' from the other sciences, and urges a much closer integration with them, particularly with general psychology. This was, of course, the original objective of J. B. Rhine, but he met with so much hostility from 'orthodox' psychologists that he decided to 'go it alone'. Whether general psychology is yet in a fit state to welcome back its errant offspring may be doubted; however, Truzzi's point is a valid one, and reintegration must surely come one day. Meanwhile, we cannot do better than heed the advice given in Truzzi's concluding paragraph (p. 188):

'In the final analysis, all we can ask of one another is to demonstrate openness to evidence and commitment to enquiry. And we must apply that openness to ourselves and the possibility that we may be wrong, as well as to those we wish to share our views'.

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THE SPIRITUALISTS. THE PASSION FOR THE OCCULT IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES by Ruth Brandon. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1983. xii + 308 pp. £12.50

When the medium Daniel Dunglas Home arrived in England in 1855 he was investigated by, among others, Sir David Brewster, who told friends that he could think of no way in which the phenomena, which he had witnessed in good light, could have been faked. Later he recanted; although he had not been able to account for all the phenomena, he wrote, he had seen enough to satisfy himself that they 'could all be produced by human hands and feet, and to prove that some of them, at least, had such an origin'.

Ruth Brandon relates this, making it clear that she accepts the recantation; 'there was no-one in Britain less likely to be taken in by trickery. And indeed he was not taken in'. She does not choose to mention that Brewster's daughter unwittingly gave the show away after his death by printing the description he had written of the first seance at the time, in which he described what he had witnessed in vivid detail; a table 'actually rose from the ground when no hand was upon it'; a hand-bell 'actually rang when nothing could have touched it', and then 'came over to me and placed itself in my hand', leaving him unable to give any explanation of how the phenomena were produced.

It would be charitable to assume that Ms. Brandon had not come across this damning account; but both her bibliography and her source references indicate that she must have known of its existence. She must also have known that Brewster was a thorough-paced rogue, who was fortunate not to have been jailed for false pretences (he ended up, instead, as Principal of Edinburgh University).

If this were a solitary instance of *suppressio veri*, charity might allow it as venial; but *The Spiritualists* is riddled with similar specimens. For example, she quotes Professor W. B. Carpenter's allegation, following the report by Lord Adare and the Master of Lindsay of the celebrated seance with Home at Ashley House, that 'a whole party of believers affirm that they saw Mr. Home float out of one window and in at another, while a single honest sceptic declares that Mr. Home was sitting in his chair all the time'. What Ms. Brandon does not care to tell us is that the 'single honest sceptic', Captain Wynne, promptly wrote to rebut the accusation; he, too, he insisted, had witnessed the levitation.

Again and again, throughout the book, the evidence is fudged in this way. Thus she cites Maskelyne's 'exposure' of Eusapia (it was not an exposure; rather, a humiliating failure to catch her out—but let that pass) without mentioning that Maskelyne believed in the reality of psychical phenomena, from his own experience. And when she contrasts the 'immense meticulousness' of the Curies' work on radium at the Sorbonne with Charles Richet's tests of Eusapia, she neglects to tell us about the immensely meticulous tests of Eusapia, also at the Sorbonne, conducted by—among others—the Curies, who were impressed.

When *suppressio veri* does not sufficiently damage a medium's reputation, Ms. Brandon does not scruple to report total fabrications, such as the story originally put out by a British scandal sheet (she omits to say this in her source references) that after basking in the favour of Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie, Home had to leave Paris 'suddenly and not at all voluntarily'—under a cloud. Home in fact went to America to collect his young sister, at Eugenie's invitation, so that she could be educated in France; and on his return resumed the close relationship he had with the royal family. Ms. Brandon even repeats the canard, as possibly accounting for Home's disgrace, that he had been arrested for homosexual practices. Sceptics, then as now, were all too ready to invent and spread rumours.

Other examples of this type could be cited, but sometimes Ms. Brandon is more subtle. I was naturally interested to see her describe my mockery of Professor Muensterberg's much-trumpeted 'exposure' of Eusapia as 'reasoned'; but not at all surprised to find that she goes on to dismiss my veracity on the ground that the remarkable feat with which Muensterberg credited Eusapia after the seance can be naturally explained by Eusapia's peasant 'strength and plumpness'.

Wisely, from her point of view, Ms. Brandon does not give Muensterberg's own description of Eusapia's 'splendid' achievement—pushing her unshod foot under her chair and up behind a curtain at its back through which she played 'thumb and fingers' (presumably with her toes) with his arm while he sat beside her controlling her hands, and 'without changing in the least the position of her body'. Eusapia was by that time a fat, elderly lady. To judge from her photograph Ms. Brandon is younger and more lissom: perhaps she will show us how the trick is done?

Ms. Brandon is evidently sincere in her detestation of psychical researchers (*The Spiritualists*, incidentally, hardly deals with Spiritualists at all, except in their capacity as mediums subjected to investigation: Stainton Moses, for example, does not rate a mention). But this prompts the question: why does she resort to such sorry devices?

Part of the explanation can be found in Richard Kamman's model, which he designed to account for the survival of false beliefs in the face of contrary evidence. Once a belief is established, he argued, 'especially one that resolves uncomfortable uncertainty, it biases the observer to notice new information that confirms the belief, and to discount evidence to the contrary'. Kamman originally applied this variant of Festinger's 'cognitive dissonance' to believers in psychical phenomena; but his recent exposure of the deplorable conduct of leading members—all sceptics—of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) has compelled him to accept that it applies to disbelievers, too.

There is more to it. The will to disbelieve is not merely, as James Hyslop of the ASPR wrote—reflecting on his career as a psychical researcher—as prevalent as the will to believe; it is also 'no more creditable'. In Ms. Brandon's case, it has deprived her of the ability to sort genuine from bogus evidence, prompting her to fudge—and to nudge, with innuendo, as in her prurient hints about Home's homosexuality, and her odiously superficial examination of the so-called 'evidence' for Crookes's liaison with Florence Cook ('it explains all the facts; and it feels right').

It would not have been worth dealing with this deplorable book—how any reputable publisher can have accepted it without having it checked for historical accuracy defeats me—in such detail, were it not for the fact that psychical researchers have in the past shown themselves to be all too easily conned by a proliferation of plausible historical detail when it is backed by an array of source references. The wretched Podmore started this rot, and it has spread, thanks to the assiduity of sceptics, most of them within the Society, who think they are doing the community a service by smearing earlier researchers—their assumption being that as psychical phenomena do not happen, the researchers must have been either dupes or knaves, and consequently deserve whatever they get.

As a result, many members of the Society today believe that Florence Cook, Eusapia, 'Eva C.', Kathleen Goligher, 'Margery' and others were so effectively discredited that they are best swept under history's carpet. Not so: and if *The Spiritualists* is worth study, it is only as a curious example of the way in which evidence can be twisted by the evasions and distortions which disbelief

nourishes, and as a warning not to allow sceptics to dictate their terms about what is, and what is not, acceptable historical evidence.

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THE ALTERNATIVE HEALTH GUIDE by Brian Inglis and Ruth West. Michael Joseph, London, 1983. 352 pp. £12.50.

Psychical research has tended to neglect the field of health and healing despite the fact that in the early days of the SPR one of the important groups was the Medical Committee. The reasons for this are manifold. Perhaps the most respectable reason is that, if to the extreme difficulty in investigating the efficacy of therapeutic practices of any kind is added the dimension of some unknown mental influence of unknown nature, origin and extent, the problems may well seem insurmountable. Nevertheless it seems to me the time must surely be approaching when we need to face these difficulties: the issues are of the greatest human importance and the problems are with us anyway.

Brian Inglis, an explorer of what he first christened 'fringe medicine', and also an eloquent champion of the reality of the paranormal, has in this book joined forces with Ruth West, who has a long-standing and dedicated interest in all forms of healing, to bring out an attractive and extensive compendium of virtually all the 'alternative' therapies available in Britain today. (The latest in-word is 'complementary' to indicate that there is no rivalry with orthodox medicine, but opinions on that as on everything else in this context are passionately divided.)

The authors have, wisely in my view, made no attempt to weed out any particular method or system of improving the health of suffering humanity, and I have little doubt that there will be fierce disagreement as regards the efficacy of the treatments on offer. The discriminating reader will, I think, be inclined to judge that if some of the therapies described actually work, the *modus operandi* must be paranormal (whatever *that* may mean!).

Therapies are divided into three categories: (1) physical therapies: nature cure, herbal medicine, systems of medicine, manipulative therapies, oriental therapies, exercise and movement therapies, sensory therapies, each with separate sub-headings; (2) psychological therapies: psychotherapy, behaviourism, humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, again sub-divided into different sections; (3) paranormal therapies. Most therapies are sub-divided into sections under the headings of origins, procedure, suitable cases, and often self-help. The reader is told what to expect if he or she goes for any particular form of treatment. There is a rather sketchy section on the disorders, and a down-to-earth informative one on resources, listing some of the major names and addresses of relevant organisations in this country.

Everyone, I suppose, is bound to query some omissions and sub-divisions. Many psychologists at any rate might feel their dignity affronted to see some of the therapeutic procedures that have achieved a certain respectability (or rather perhaps those they happen to approve of) in such heretical company. My own