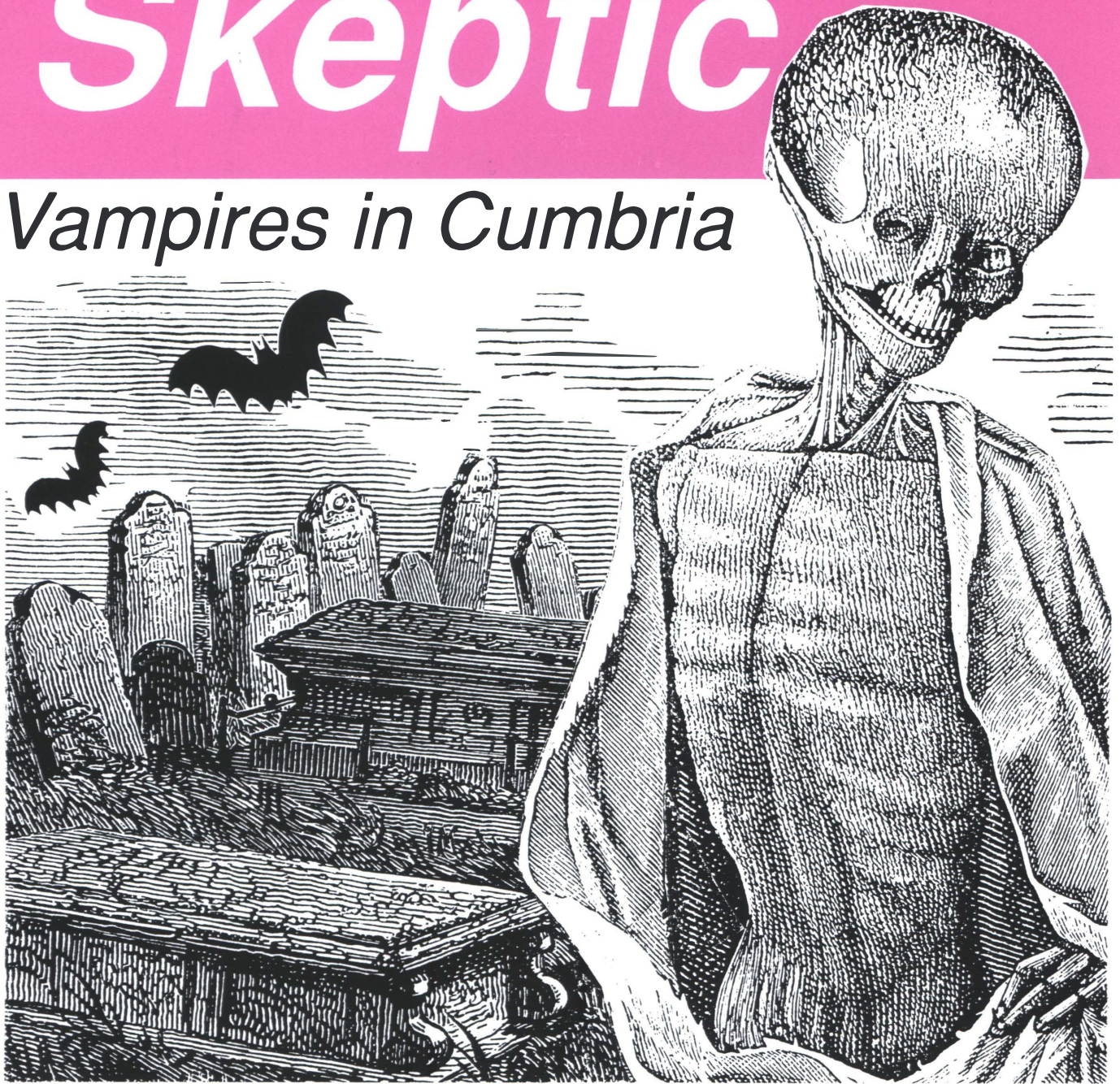


Volume 6 Number 5  
September/October 1992

# *The Skeptic*

## *Vampires in Cumbria*



## *The Man Who Died Twice*

Also in this issue:

*Is Light Slowing Down?*  
*Physics in the New Age—Part 2*  
*Professor Mesmo Returns*  
*Musings on Life and Death*

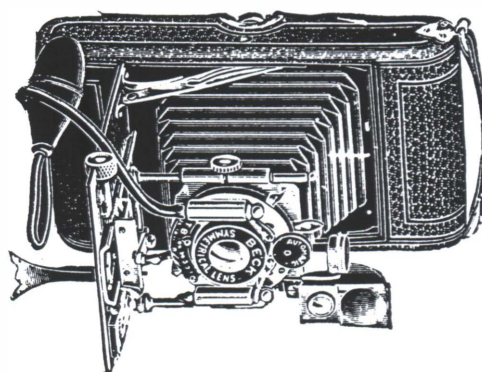
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# Hilary Evans' *Paranormal Picture Gallery*



*Buguet is entranced by the medium before going to work.*



## The lying camera

The persistence of the belief that it is possible to photograph spirits of the dead is paradoxically a tribute to the popular respect for science: if a machine can record these otherworldly visitations, it is argued, then they *must* be occurring. Even today, otherwise intelligent persons are unwilling to dismiss spirit photographs wholly, despite their intrinsic implausibility, the unconvincing (to put it mildly) nature of the results, and the frequency with which practitioners have been detected in fraud.

The classic case is that of Edouard Buguet, whose *modus operandi* was to have himself put in trance by a medium, and then take photographs in which deceased relatives, or notable personalities, appeared in conjunction with the sitter. In 1875, he was arrested for fraud, and pleaded guilty. However, many of his sitters refused to accept the verdict, accused the authorities of conspiracy fostered by the clergy, and maintained their faith in the convicted charlatan. The verbatim account of his trial is a classic document for the study of human gullibility, the more so in that it was published by the spiritists themselves.



*The end result: the spirit of the poet Gérard de Nerval visits M. Dumont, of Paris.*



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

# Hits and Misses

Steve Donnelly

## Guardian angels

As a child growing up as a Roman Catholic in Northern Ireland, I had a firm conviction that I had my own personal guardian angel who was permanently located somewhere in the vicinity of my right shoulder and who watched over me day and night protecting me from all harm—well, perhaps not *all* harm as he/she didn't intervene when the school bully gave me a black eye nor when I fell off my bicycle. In recent years, however, I had gained the impression that guardian angels had gone the way of limbo and purgatory and had been consigned to a rest-home for outmoded Christian ideas. But an article in *Woman* magazine on 10 August has shown me the error of my ways. Not only are angels alive and flapping but it appears that they are also, on occasion, putting in brief personal appearances.

Mrs Hope Price, from Wimbourne in Dorset, is preparing a book—to be published next year—describing 380 cases of angelic visitations. According to Mrs Price: '...many people have seen full-sized eight-foot tall angels, sometimes carrying immense swords. Other people have seen rings of angels standing around children in a protective circle.... And one woman was woken up by a fluttering of angelic wings on her face'. More impressive than any of those cases, in my view, is the story of Patricia Price whose central heating boiler broke down in the middle of winter at a time when she had insufficient funds to pay for its repair. She phoned a plumber from the Yellow Pages but couldn't afford the price he quoted for the repair and was moved to pray: 'Please God, find me a way out of this mess.' At that moment there was a knock on the door and, when she

opened it, she was greeted by a man who said he was a plumber and that he had come to repair the boiler. She had no idea of how he had known about the boiler: 'I hadn't told a soul. 'He was just an ordinary looking man dressed in overalls and with tattoos on his arms.' He went upstairs to fix the boiler (and two leaking taps), refused payment in a broad local (Yorkshire) accent and then took his leave: 'Before I had a chance to ask him anything, he went out the door and disappeared into thin air—right before my very eyes...My friends at the coffee bar where I worked were Christian and they said I'd seen an angel.'

I have one major worry about this remarkable story of a tattooed, boiler-suited, Yorkshire accented guardian angel: could the friends at the coffee bar possibly have been wrong? Can we really be absolutely certain that this was an angel and not an alien visitor from another galaxy or a parallel universe?

## A monstrous suggestion

It seems that never a month goes by without the Loch Ness monster featuring in one newspaper story or another. For instance, over the summer, Britain's favourite mythical monster was given a new lease of life when many newspapers reported that a holidaymaker had shot a video film of a mysterious creature moving at speed across the loch. But now it appears that Norway is trying to muscle in on British territory by means of a beastie called Selma. This 30 metre long creature (a metric monster), which is reported to have the head of a horse, supposedly inhabits Seljordsvannet lake near to the town of Seljord, 190 km south-west of Oslo. According to the *European* on 8 August, officials from the town have recently returned from a fact-finding mission to Inverness to discover how their creature could rival the popularity of Nessie. 'We are trying to develop our monster tradition into a tourist activity and build up the identity of the town' said a spokesman from the Seljord trade association. 'Selma is very friendly and deserves all the attention he receives. Children love him'. The Norwegians are planning to build a tourist centre to rival the Loch Ness Monster exhibition centre in Drumnadrochit and a party of officials travelled to Inverness to study how the Loch Ness region had used the monster to develop its tourist industry. Selma was first sighted 300 years ago but like Nessie has proved to be fairly shy of underwater cameras and sonar.

## Early return

According to a remarkable sheaf of documents that *The Skeptic* has recently obtained in response to a small ad in the Guardian, Halley's comet has abandoned its normal timetable and 'has started coming back to our world unexpectedly! Now!' This remarkable discovery comes, not from an observatory but from Sister Marie Gabriel, 'Polish like Copernicus'. Apparently, a 'massive cosmic explosion of



Tim Pearce



Halley's comet' on 12 February 1991 was so massively cosmic that 'eventually Halley's comet was totally thrown off its usual orbit. Now it has started speeding back to earth decades ahead of time... The Royal Greenwich observatory does not accept our data but that is because other astronomers are not yet aware of this dramatic change in the path of Halley's comet.' Sister Marie Gabriel is a 'plain-clothes sister' and a member of a group of amateur astronomers who have formed the Scientific Forecasts Society. With a humility unusual in this type of document, the group writes of Marie Gabriel: 'She is just an Amateur Astronomer so she apologises in advance in the event of any mistake.' The sole purpose of the comet's early return, by the way, is to fulfil the good sister's predictions about the event 'in order to prove that her urgent messages from God to Britain, Europe, USA are true.' Readers will be relieved to know that news of the comet's return, seventy years earlier than expected, has been sent by registered post to Buckingham Palace.

## After the deluge

For fundamentalist Christians, belief in the Darwinian (or any other) theory of evolution is 'simply the continuation of Satan's long war against God.' One important strand of their arguments concerns the dinosaurs, which for Creationists, must have been around in relatively recent times. (In fact, everything must have occurred in relatively recent times on a planet that was created about 10 000 years ago). According to an article in the *Guardian* on 24 August, a pamphlet on sale at a recent fundamentalist conference in Hertfordshire claimed that the monsters slain by Beowulf were in fact dinosaurs: Grendel was a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* and he himself was slain by a *Pteranodon*. One of the conference organisers, Dr David Tyler, a senior lecturer at Manchester Polytechnic (as it still was in August) thinks that this might be going a bit far but does believe that Noah's Ark existed and that there were dinosaurs on board four or five thousand years ago. Meanwhile, in Sydney, Australia, a gentleman by the name of Adam Newman (an appropriate name for someone who may have the responsibility of siring the continuation of the whole human race) has built some modern arks for when the floods return. According to the *Guardian* on 17 September, some twenty-eight years ago the spirit told him to build an ark and he has now built four; the main one being his converted four-room house. He has a rat, pigeons and cats on board but it's not clear how far he is down the full list of his animal complement or whether, indeed, he hopes to include any dinosaurs. I can't help wondering if the early-returning Halley's comet might not herald the start of the new deluge. I shall check the rigging on my Windsurfer forthwith.

## Slime ghost

The days of ectoplasm and other physical manifestations from the spirit world seem to be long gone. With the exposure that most of us have had to sophisticated special effects in movies such as Steven Spielberg's *Poltergeist*, any medium producing special effects from the spirit world would have to be extremely technically sophisticated if it was to be convincing. A disgorged yard of muslin would simply not

work with a modern audience. A haunting in Leicester, reported on 9 August in the *Observer*, however, seems set to break the mould of modern spirit manifestations. Doris Boulter who lives in a semi-detached council house with her husband, son, daughter and grandson, is a victim of what appears to be a very unpleasant spirit indeed—one who leaves quantities of slimy, sticky gunge around her house. When she first moved into the house two years ago, the slime simply collected in small quantities on the floors but last November, according to Doris Boulter, a new phase began when it 'started to come on vicious'. Sticky deposits began to appear on chairs, inside wardrobes and drawers and even inside the fridge and the handbags of visitors.



Tim Pearce

In one particularly vicious, viscous attack the pet goldfish was glooped to death. The trend has continued so that, of late, electrical equipment has begun to malfunction as a result of being filled with unpleasant substances. Tests of the slime at Leicester University have identified it as animal urine—but not that of cats or dogs. The *Observer* article does not mention whether the Boulters had pets (other than the deceased goldfish) of a non-canine/feline nature. I know of similar cases of puddles of urine appearing mysteriously around the place—but in Australia not in the UK—and, in fact, I have myself when living in Melbourne, undergone the definitive Australian experience of being pissed on by a possum. These creatures, marsupials about the size of large cats, who take up residence in the roof space and practise clog dancing on the roof in the mating season, have a habit of urinating when startled. Perhaps the problem in Leicester is simply the displaced spirit of an Australian possum.

## Sinical

The Catholic church has finally updated its attitude towards sin. As reported in many newspapers on 23 September, mortal sins have now been replaced by 'grave sins'. Amongst these are included drunken driving and driving too fast. But don't break out your packet of condoms just yet as the sexual taboos are still there. Sex within marriage is for fecundity and homosexuals should live in chastity. But skeptics will be relieved to know that it is now sinful to read horoscopes, consult astrologers and take part in séances.

**Steve Donnelly** is a physicist and a reader in electronics and electrical engineering at the University of Salford.

# In No Hurry To Go

Charles Ward

## *Musings on life and death*

**‘Y**OU SHOULDN’T JOKE about death’, say some. Why not? A poor business if we can’t release our feelings in this way when reminded of the least attractive feature of our existence—its conclusion.

Dylan Thomas opined ‘Old age should burn and rave at close of day.’ That is going a bit too far, surely. I have passed my seventy-fourth birthday, and, while I hope to elude the Grim Reaper for some more years yet, it would seem rather peevish to stamp my foot when the time comes, yell how unfair the universe is, or fling the crockery about.

Not that I favour cringing. Even if you have had a dog’s life, why go out with a whimper? Kicking and screaming or adopting a posture of spiritual servility I regard as undignified modes of departure. Of course, life’s day for each of us will have been a unique and by no means necessarily a wholly, or even partially, enjoyable experience, for there are terrible sufferings and injustices in the world, and there are several ways in which we may react, depending on the kind of people we are and assuming that we are given the opportunity.

In that respect humanity may be divided into two main groups—those who acknowledge, albeit with varied emotions, that death is THE END and those who cannot bear this thought and prefer to suppose that, in some fashion, in some other order of existence, their lives are TO BE CONTINUED. Since their bodies will be incapable of providing means for sensation, locomotion and so forth, ‘life after death’ propositions have as their basis the notion of a physically invisible self, frequently referred to as a soul or spirit.

When we glance through our family albums this may seem an appealing conjecture, the differences in size, shape and appearance of the same individuals at various stages of their lives being ludicrously obvious. However unless we are victims of total amnesia, we know that the persistent impression we have of the continuity of a singular identity throughout life is somewhat misleading. For, as we reflect on what has happened to us, and how we have responded with regard to matters which photographs cannot record, we distinguish several selves. The latest of the series may be the least desirable candidate for perpetuation, but the others are no longer available and in any case are all muddled up with Oneself Right Now.

The trouble is, we are deluded by the dualism of mind and body with which popular thinking on the subject has been drenched. We are inclined to talk as if a self could be thought of as having a separate existence. John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; his soul goes marching on.



Living intelligences free to dispense with some medium of corporeal expression, some association with a physical mechanism, are unknown. A correspondence exists between the efficiency of the equipment and the behaviour/consciousness/intelligence exhibited. Moreover what we call our ‘selves’ (character/disposition/personality) relate to hereditary, environmental, social and cultural conditions and interplay with these aspects over a period of time. Selves might be described as customised products manufactured with built-in obsolescence.

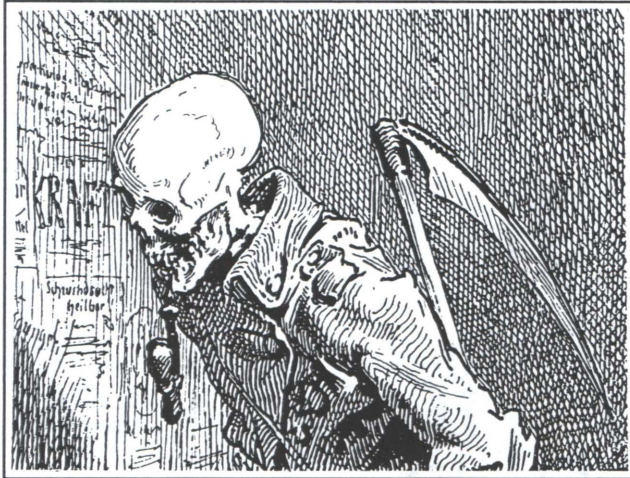
True, it is John’s body which can be said to lie a-mouldering, not John. Not that John is marching on anywhere. John exists no longer. In life, something quite marvellous held John together, besides his belt and braces (or suspenders, as Americans say). In fact you could say it produced him, organized in a highly personal way all those physical constituents which may be described, less inelegantly, as being reprocessed.

We do not fully understand this power of organisation which we name ‘life’ but that is no excuse for allowing fear or sentiment of any kind to befuddle our thinking and lead us into self-deception. Our dreams make no difference to reality. What is certain is that this power belongs to nature just as molecules and atoms do. Whether or how (if such be required by the law of conservation) it is transmogrified on disappearing from our field of view, is simply speculation.

Many never tire of looking for some way to cling to belief in survival beyond death. The following is an interesting example. Although written by a modern mystic (now deceased), it has ancient parallels. He introduced his autobiography as follows: ‘This book is the record of an empirical



Mary Evans



ego who possesses no reality outside time, and only a fleeting existence *in* time. The story it attempts to tell is about the self of delusion and separation, which makes a fleeting appearance on the stage of life, and little or nothing is said about the Spiritual Self, which is forever one with the eternal.' (H T Hamblin: *The Story Of My Life*)

The final clauses are vague religious statements quite unlike the forthright outline of our human condition, which up to that point seems to be what is being provided. Higher Selves are popular spiritual concepts, whose 'reality' may be proclaimed with great conviction, but which from a down-to-earth standpoint appear merely as aspects of the mundane self with which we are physically familiar.

Not to believe that one will somehow be reconstituted in Another Realm is no reason to be miserable. Indeed, it can be a relief. Think of those who have been frightened almost out of their wits by threats of damnation, having absorbed cruel doctrines as 'gospel truth'. The good news they really appreciate amounts to a realisation that they have been gulled and need be so no longer.

Christians are often surprised to learn that the Hebrew people, of whom their Bible tells (but which they study in a devotional rather than a scientific manner), lived quite happily and purposefully without a belief in immortality until the period of the exile, when they came into contact with Persian mythology.

When I meet people who try too hard to make sense of life and death I am reminded of a stretch of road on the coast of Ayrshire, which is known as 'the electric brae'. The interesting feature of this hill is that when you are travelling up it you appear to be going downhill. When you are travelling downhill, you appear to be going up. It is a weird sensation to be on a bicycle, say, gliding apparently uphill with effortless ease as if drawn by some mysterious power. Conversely, on what appears to be a downward journey you must pedal hard in order to make any progress.

It is an optical illusion, of course, due to the peculiar lie of the land, and may be seen as such from a point out at sea. Nevertheless, whether by disregarding the facts, or simply through being unaware of them, some people have advanced all sorts of outlandish theories to account for the phenomenon.

Ages of Faith have bequeathed to us a type of mind that constantly seeks reassurance by means of fantasies, the

bizarre nature of which is overlooked because they have acquired respectability in the course of a long tradition favouring credulity and opposing rationality. Such a mind thinks it is going up, so to speak, when, from a scientific angle, it is going down. And *vice versa*. Death, however, is not an option we are in a position to decline. Nature has the last word, whatever we prefer to imagine.

But I simply must end on a lighter note. I was 58 when one morning my wife opened an envelope addressed to her and was clearly startled at what she read. 'You had better deal with this, darling' she said sweetly, passing the missive round the marmalade jar. When I saw what was in the letter I thought her request was a trifle unreasonable, as I learned that I was dead. Interested, I went on reading, but the condolences, I felt, betrayed rather less regret at my decease than I should have regarded as fitting. Their expression was formal and conventional. Indeed the letter was sadly deficient when it came to the business of enumerating my qualities and talents. The writer must have had a bad day, and certainly wasn't improving mine. Nevertheless I complied with my loved one's wishes and was mollified by the swift arrival of a reply which expressed great joy at my resurrection.

I continue to warm both hands before the fire of life. Let's face it. I am in no hurry to depart.

Charles Ward is a freelance writer living in Gloucestershire

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### Prometheus Books and *Skeptical Inquirer*

*UK Distributor:* Michael Hutchinson, 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex, IG10 4PZ.



# Ask Professor Mesmo

*Britain's leading metaphysical pure mathematician divines the answers your psychic questions*

*After a summer spent renewing his psychic energies in the Bermuda Triangle, Professor John Aloysius Mesmo has returned to tackle your psychic problems. His abilities as a pure mathematician, his honorary membership of Mensa and his extensive library of carefully cross-referenced index files put Professor Mesmo in a unique position as psychic and personal counsellor. Cuddlier than Russell Grant, more active than Doris Stokes and with his own psychic abilities nearly as powerful as those of Uri Geller, Mesmo is back.*

**Dear Professor,**

I am desperate. My family has been harassed, frightened and bullied by those malevolent spirits at the housing department. When my son Nobby saw a poltergeist appear in our living room and hover over our video camcorder, I didn't believe him. He pointed to a picture on the front page of the *Sunday Sport* of a fuzzy grey being that had infested 10 Downing Street, and he reckoned that was the very form this thing took. But, as I live and breathe, later, my mother (Nobby's Gran) saw a bowl of plastic fruit rise over our shag pile carpet and plummet to earth behind the freestanding unit. She also heard manic sniggering in the background. It gave her such a shock that we had to lock her in the drinks cabinet. Both Doris and myself have heard heavy footsteps on the stairs which is strange because the flat is all on one level.

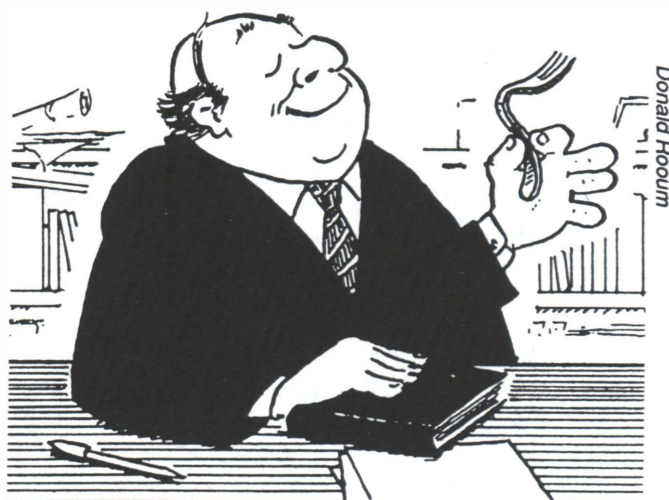
But will those nerds at the housing unit let us move because of our haunting experience? My wife's nerves are shattered, my son can't do his homework and refuses to come out of the airing cupboard. Since the sighting, Gran has developed a most unpleasant habit of rambling around the flat at the dead of night carrying a torch and setting her personal alarm to 'overload'.

I heard on the radio that the presence of pubescent girls of a certain age brought on such visitings, well my son is 17, is spotty and gets right stropky sometimes for no reason, could his hormones be the beacon to which this spirit is drawn?

Anyway, Gran got hold of some Advocaat and babbled our story to the local rag—next minute we are overwhelmed with the press and phone calls all the time. One of the reporters—a seedy little bloke from *The Skeptic*—kept on shouting through the letterbox. Well we had never heard of the mag so we gave him the elbow pretty sharpish.

We are just ordinary council tenants in a high-rise block, what does a poltergeist want in 201 Baskerville Buildings?

**Sid & Doris Dope**



## Professor Mesmo Replies

My largest cross-referenced card index file contains hundreds of such visitations, and they do not always happen in 16th century manor houses, poltergeists can hound even the inhabitants of Baskerville Buildings. Perhaps your flats were built on the former site of an ancient building such as a monastery or an asylum? More recently, your visitation could be a disgruntled itinerant building worker who came to a nasty end whilst carrying a hod. What about the previous tenant? Could he or she have been swallowed up by the Byzantine rubbish chute system, or fallen from your balcony—I imagine you are pretty high up.

Young adolescent girls do attract poltergeists, but I'm sure spotty youths with turbulent 'Sturm und Drang' psychological profiles can also draw in these wayward energies. You see, poltergeists are jolly fellows with a slight sadistic bent and there is nothing they like better than frightening people by saying 'Boo!' behind them, or throwing a kitchen carver at the family while they watch TV. These japes are a result of these spirits 'kicking their heels' in purgatory (an even more unpleasant place since it dissappeared from the Roman Catholic lexicon) with nothing to do for an eternity. They display the same mischievous high spirits as teenage inner city rioters.

Best thing for you to do is to lock up all the breakables and get in a psychic investigation group who can record this presence—giving me much needed tape, photographic and anecdotal evidence for my next article for *What Spirit*. (By the way, I think I know a psychic counsellor who will be able to help your mother).

**Professor Mesmo**



# The Cumbrian Vampire

C M Drapkin

## *The bloody mystery of Croglin Grange*

**I**MAGINE THAT YOU ARE ROUSED from sleep, one night, to see, staring through the window of your first or second storey bedroom, a corpse-white face with large, hollow, red eyes. Long-nailed fingers scrabble feverishly on the window. A red-lipped mouth exposes long, pointed teeth as it implores or demands entry. You are either terrified, bravely defiant or simply indifferent because you saw the same thing last night, on video. Whatever your reaction, you realise that you are confronted by a vampire.

But, of course, we all know that vampires do not exist. They are just an old folk-myth, exploited by Bram Stoker and others for the future benefit of film-stars, producers and special-effects men. Or are they? The Vampire Research Centre (VRC) of New York does not think so. It claims to have documentary evidence of 810 vampires around the world. Their most favoured area is not Transylvania, but California. In Britain there are between twenty and thirty.

There is no suggestion either by the VRC or by *Fortean Times*, which has featured a number of newspaper reports of vampirism world-wide, that these are in any way supernatural. Dr Stephen Kaplan, 'the world's leading authority on vampires', and director of the VRC, says they are 'mainly nice people', who drink only a few ounces of blood at a time, presumably not directly from source, avoid strong sunlight, and occasionally sleep in coffins [1]. There's no accounting for taste.

But, do Dracula-type vampires exist, with insatiable blood-lust, propagating by turning the corpses of their victims into vampires, immortal unless killed by one of the prescribed methods? Captain Edward Rowe Fisher of Thorncombe, near Guildford, evidently thought so. He sounds an impeccable witness: a retired army officer, active throughout the Crimean War, as a cornet, later lieutenant, in the 4th Dragoons [2]. One of those to whom in June 1874 he told his story was Augustus Hare, who recorded it in his diary, and later published it in his autobiography [3]. Incidentally, Fisher told the story of the Croglin Grange Vampire twenty-three years before *Dracula* was published.

Thomas Fisher, Captain Edward's father, migrated from Cumberland in about the middle of the last century. Their home there, Croglin Grange, was some centuries old. By a curious tradition, it had never been more than one storey high. Today, you can find the village of Croglin on the B6413, about twenty miles south-east of Carlisle. The Grange



was let to a family of two brothers and a sister, and the young people settled down happily in their new home.

One night, after they had all retired to bed, the sister lay enjoying the view through her window of the moonlit countryside, and the little church nearby. Presently, she noticed two lights, flickering in the trees between the house and the churchyard. To her horror she saw that they were the eyes of a monstrous figure which elided inexorably nearer and nearer until it stopped outside her window.

Her bedroom door was next to the window. To unlock it, she would have to stand near *the thing*. She stayed in her bed, too terrified even to scream. Red eyes glared from a brown, withered face, as the creature scratched on the glass. The scratching was followed by a pecking noise as it unpicked the lead holding a diamond pane of glass. As the section fell out, a bony hand reached in and turned the catch. The figure entered the room, seized the woman by the hair, and bit her throat. At last she found her voice and screamed. Her brothers rushed in, to find her bleeding and unconscious. The intruder fled from the room, climbed over the wall, and disappeared in to the churchyard.

The young lady evidently did not have a morbid imagination. When she recovered, she suggested that her attacker was an escaped lunatic rather than something supernatural. However, the doctor insisted that her brothers take her abroad to get over the shock.

The next year, they returned to the Grange. This time, the brothers slept in the room next to hers, keeping loaded pistols by their beds. One night in March, she was awakened



by the familiar scratching at her window, to see the same wizened face peering in at her. She screamed for help. Her brothers rushed out into the garden, to confront the creature. One of them fired his pistol, and hit *the thing* in the leg. It limped away, scrambled over the wall, and slipped into the vault of a long-extinct family.

Next morning, the brothers, with their servants and neighbours, broke open the vault. Inside, they found the coffins burst open, their contents hideously mangled and strewn over the floor. Only one remained intact. When they opened it, inside lay the brown, shrivelled creature that had twice attacked their sister, with a fresh bullet-wound in its leg. They burnt the body, and nothing more was ever heard of the ghoulish assailant of Croglin Grange.

This story has fascinated students of the occult. Anthony Masters simply repeats Fisher's account, as set down by Hare, without comment [4]. Peter Haining credits the story on the grounds that it was told more than twenty years before *Dracula* was published [5].

The famous occultist Montague Summers was the principal champion of the Croglin Grange Vampire [6]. One objection to the story is that there is no Croglin Grange in Croglin. There is or was, however, a Croglin Low Hall which, according to Summers, sufficiently answered the description. Hare might have recorded the name wrongly. Furthermore, the church does not contain a family vault, nor any record of one. No doubt the local people destroyed it along with the vampire, since they would not wish to publicise such a story.

So, what are we to make of this rather ineffective vampire? Not a lot. The identification of Croglin Grange with Croglin Low Hall is a triumph of faith over reason. The Grange was evidently a gentleman's residence, near the church. Croglin Low Hall was a farmhouse, situated a mile from the churchyard. A sketch of it by Charles G Harper clearly shows it as being two storeys high. Incidentally, Harper himself discounted the story [7].

The Fisher family did indeed come from Cumberland. The first mention of them was 'Joseph Fisher of Scarrowhill, parish of Cumwhitton, later of Ruckcroft, parish of Ainstable' [8]. Both places are within a few miles of Croglin. (Captain Fisher never actually said that Croglin Grange was in Croglin, but it is a natural assumption to make). Early directories of Cumberland mention Fishers at Coathill and Moorthwaite, Cumwhitton and at Dale, Ainstable [9]. None are mentioned at Croglin whose name would be perfect for anyone inventing a creepy story. The name actually means 'Rock (by the

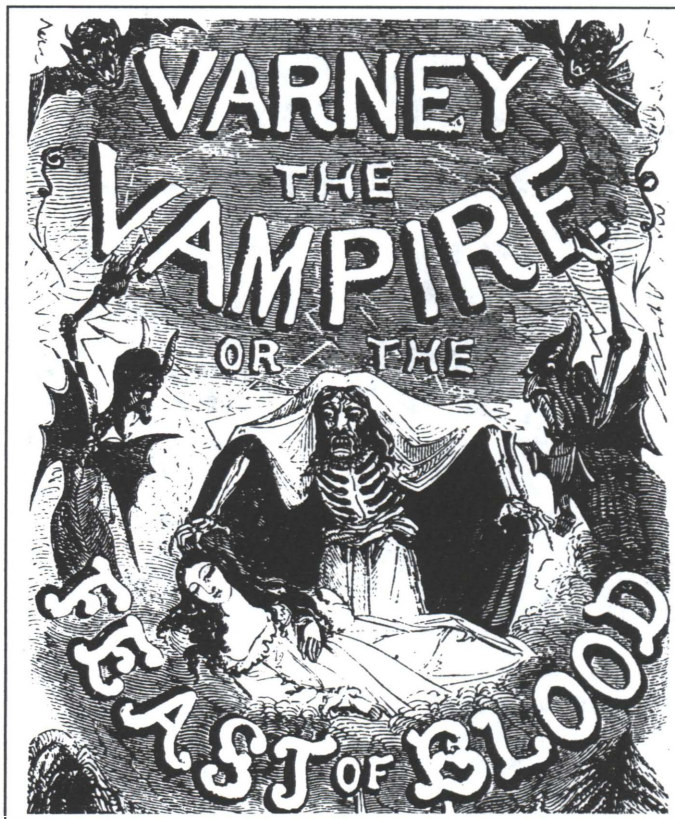
water'.

But why should a manifestly honest man like Fisher invent such a story? Presumably, the answer lies in the character of Augustus Hare. This distinguished writer was also rather a comic figure, a humourless snob with an insatiable appetite for scandal and tall stories. (I am bound to say that he sounds rather likable, nevertheless). He tells of several supernatural events, including the famous discredited story of Lord Dufferin's escape from a fatal lift-accident, thanks to a premonitory dream.

Another concerns the death of 'Mr (or Colonel) McPherson of Glen Truim'. Colonel Lachlan McPherson, who was the first member of the McPherson family to

live at Glentruim House, Invernesshire, outlived Hare by a year [10]. He served in the Crimea, as a lieutenant in the 30th (Cambridgeshire) Regiment, where Lieutenant Fisher may have met or heard of him. It was he who told Hare this palpably false story. 'The captain wasn't a liar. He merely had a sense of humour. Unfortunately, Hare took him seriously.'

The fact that this story was told years before *Dracula* appeared is a blood-red herring. There were several fictional vampires before 1874, such as J S Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, published in 1872. Another was T P Prest's lengthy *Varney the Vampire*, whose first chapter has the vam-



pire entering his victim's bedroom by unpicking the lead from a diamond window-pane. Fancy!

As I say, we all know that vampires do not exist.

#### Notes

1. *Sunday Telegraph* 19 August 92.
2. *Burke's Landed Gentry: Army List*, 1855.
3. Augustus Hare, *In My Solitary Life*, Geo. Allen & Unwin, London, 1953.
4. Anthony Masters, *The Natural History of the Vampire*, Hart-Davis, London, 1972.
5. Peter Haining, *Vampire*, W.H. Allen, London, 1985.
6. Montague Summers, *The Vampire in Europe*, Kegan, Paul, London, 1929.
7. Charles G Harper, *Haunted Houses*, E.P. Publishing, Whitehaven, 1974.
8. *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 1871.
9. *Parson & White's Directory of Cumberland*, 1829. Michael Moon, Whitehaven, 1984. *Mannix & Whellan's Directory of Cumberland*, 1847. Michael Moon, 1974.

C M Drapkin is a writer with an interest in the occult and criminology.



# Is Light Getting Slower?

Donald Rooum

*Two reputable institutes publish a disreputable report*

**T**HE ATOMIC CONSTANTS, LIGHT, AND TIME, by Trevor Norman and Barry Setterfield (1987), is a Technical Report from Flinders University of South Australia, which forms an invited research report for Stanford Research Institute International. The Report has 24 tables of measurements and 377 references. The authors have studied 163 measurements of the velocity of light by 16 methods over 300 years. They have also studied 475 measurements of 11 other atomic constants by 25 methods. The conclusion they reach is that the velocity of light  $c$ , and all the other atomic 'constants' are not constant at all, but have decayed.

As their unit of time measurement, the authors use the 'dynamical second', defined as  $1/31\,556\,925.9747$  of the period of Earth's orbital rotation, which they say was standard until 1967. In fact, there has never been such a standard.

Until 1955, the standard second was  $1/86\,400$  of a day [1]. This standard lapsed when clocks accurate to one thousandth of a second became available, because days vary in duration by several thousandths of a second. A new standard, in terms of vibrations of the Caesium atom, was agreed in 1967 when all standards laboratories had Caesium clocks. Between 1955 and 1967 there was no standard second, in the sense of a standard against which clocks could be set. However, the internationally agreed definition of a second was  $1/31\,556\,925.9747$  of the solar year 1901. A particular year had to be specified, because years vary in duration no less than days.

The whole argument of the report in question is based on the assumption that all 'dynamical seconds' (that is, all years) are of equal duration. By definition, the years 1955 to 1981 contained exactly the same number of dynamical seconds. By observation, they contained successively fewer atomic seconds. This is presented as evidence that atomic seconds were lasting longer.

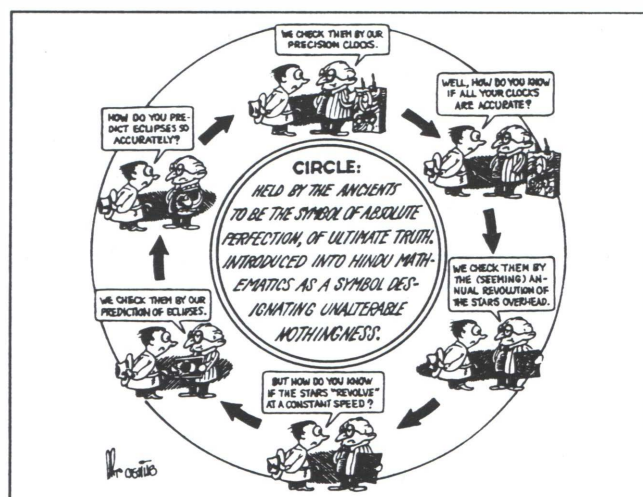
The finite velocity of light was first demonstrated in 1675, by the astronomer Ole Roemer [2]. Roemer's observatory notebooks were lost in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728, but he had published his calculation that light took 22 minutes to cross the diameter of Earth's orbit. With modern values of the diameter, this gives a value for  $c$  of 225 000 km/s, about 25% slower than the currently accepted value.

The report, however, takes Roemer's value for  $c$  to be  $307\,500 + 5400$  km/s, about 2.6% faster than the currently accepted value. The authors rely on a private communica-

tion from S J Golstein, who had earlier published a finding, based on 'an examination of the best 50 Roemer values', that Roemer's value for  $c$  was in excess of 320 000 km/s. Goldstein rescinded this when it was pointed out that he had added some figures which should have been subtracted. His revised figure ('after correction on of a procedural error') contributes to the evidence that estimates of  $c$  did not vary randomly as measuring techniques improved, but systematically became slower.

The motives of the authors of this document are apparent. They fit a cosec<sup>2</sup> curve to their doubtful data, to show that the whole history of the Earth, until the appearance of the first humans, took only a few days in or about the year 5 300 BC. The report is circulated with a supplement written by Setterfield, entitled *Geological Time and Scriptural Chronology*. (I learned of its existence, in fact, from a pamphlet of the Creation Science Movement.)

But how did two reputable scientific establishments, Stanford Research Institute and Flinders University of South Australia, come to lend their authority to such obvious nonsense? Part of the answer is in an appendix to the report, and another part in a memorandum prepared by Mr Malcolm Bowden. A draft of the report, written by Barry Setterfield, was circulated for comment in 1982 or 1983. Among those circulated was Dr Lambert T Dolphin, Assistant Director of a laboratory at Stanford Research Institute, who responded, 'Your paper is well-written and thorough and I cannot find anything that needs changing or improving. I gave a two-hour presentation a week ago in Los Gatos summarizing your work'.





In early 1987 Trevor Norman, of the School of Mathematical Sciences at Flinders University, had become involved, and Dolphin suggested that the paper should be published as an 'invited report' from Flinders University to SRI. In July 1987, Dolphin circulated 15 copies for comment within SRI and elsewhere, and received no adverse comments. Dr Leonard, the laboratory director, was kept fully informed of Dr Dolphin's activities.

In August 1987 Dr Leonard had the misfortune to lose his job at 24 hours' notice, and left without signing a certificate of authorisation for the invited report. Dolphin himself was given three weeks' notice, and in the confusion omitted to seek a certificate from the new director. The certificate of authorisation, however, is a formality frequently overlooked. It cannot be denied that Dolphin was a senior research physicist at SRI, or that he genuinely invited the report.

There is no denying either, that permission was given to use the Flinders University logo. This is proved by a letter dated July 1987, signed by Dr Rao, head of the School of Mathematical Sciences, applying for tax exemption for the Report. (Dr Rao's name does not appear among the acknowledgements, but several clerical workers at Flinders

are thanked for their help.) The Report was printed in Australia, at private expense, late in August 1987. In June 1988, Flinders University circulated all known recipients, on behalf of themselves and SRI, denying responsibility for the document and demanding that the covers be removed. Defenders of the report, however, insist that it had been authorised a year earlier, and that, in any case, authorisation cannot properly be revoked after the document has been published.

The Report is now out of print, but anyone who wishes to study it may borrow a copy for fourteen days from Mr Malcolm Bowden, 92 Bromley Common, Bromley, Kent BR2 9PF. Please send him a strong, A4, self-addressed envelope, with an 84-pence stamp.

#### Notes

1. 'second' in *The Penguin Dictionary of Science*, 1963 edition.
2. 'Ole Roemer' in Williams (ed), *Biographical Dictionary of Science*, 3rd edition 1982.
3. K D Froome and L Essen, *The Velocity of Light and Radio Waves*, Academic Press 1969.

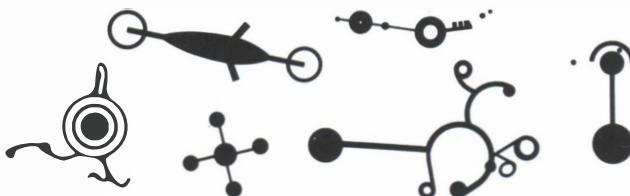
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Donald Room draws the Sprite for *The Skeptic*.

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## Euro-Cerealogy

Ernest Jackson



ALLOW ME, through the pages of *The Skeptic*, to propose a new theory to account for the formation of crop circles. The main advantage of this new approach to cereology is that it draws together many of the less-understandable features that newspapers have brought to our attention during the past few years, explains why the circles are found mainly in Britain, suggests a reason why they should be formed *and* why they should be increasing in frequency.

Consider the following interesting aspects of recent economic life:

1. Ever-increasing numbers of unemployed workers have been brought into more varieties of government-inspired retraining schemes.
2. The teaching of mathematics in schools has relied increasingly on practical demonstrations so that students can become more productive employees when they enter work.
3. European cereal farmers currently grow greater quantities of grain than can be sold in the E.C., and at too high a price for it to be sold outside.
4. E.C. regulations allow farmers to be paid to take land out of cultivation, but even so the surplus is barely diminished.
5. British farms have the largest field size and greatest efficiency in the community. The new generation of crop illustrations requires more space for setting out than the prototype circles.
6. Local authorities have a history of providing patronage for the arts, but have had to cut back because of central

government pressure to keep down expenditure.

7. The definition of 'art' covers more activities than ever before.

Assembling the evidence leads irresistibly to the conclusion that the E.C. has made available funds for local authorities to allocate grants so that unemployed artists with a background in practical mathematics can exercise their skills for the public delight, while simultaneously removing more grain from the market and saving money from the intervention buying budget.

Further ancillary benefits arise in that even the serious newspapers are misdirected from more important investigations, and the less inquisitive members of the populace have something to divert them from Royal weddings and, I suppose, divorces.

I think you must agree that this represents a useful and imaginative use of public funds: much more acceptable than wasting money on *[insert your suggestion here]*.

The sceptical amongst you will probably be thinking that there must be some regulation authorising the use of E.C. funds in this manner—after all, not even the E.C. can dispose of money without giving itself the requisite permission. I have searched carefully through the indexes to the *Official Journal* of the E.C. and can state categorically that it is impossible to find such a regulation—*exactly the same as for any other regulation*.

What further proof could anyone need?

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Ernest Jackson is a librarian based in Hull who is currently preparing an application for an E.C. crop-circle grant.

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# Physics in the New Age—Part 2

Tim Axon

*Do mystical interpretations of modern physics make sense?*

**D**URING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN of March and April 1992, a curious advertisement appeared in several of the national daily newspapers (see, for example, *The Guardian*, 16 March). It began: 'Modern Science and Ancient Vedic Science Reveal the Constitution of the Universe, the Source of All Order and Harmony Displayed throughout the Universe, Discovered through Maharishi's Vedic Science, Verified by Modern Science...'. This was in fact an advertisement for the 'Natural Law Party', the party which proposed to use Transcendental

Meditation and the TM-Sidhi programme to eliminate the root cause of crime and other anti-social behaviour and ultimately implement the Maharishi's Master Plan to Create Heaven on Earth! It must rate as one of the most unusual campaigns in British political history, but the reason I raise the issue here is because the rest of this particular advertisement consisted of an attempt to draw analogies between the Maharishi's version of 'Vedic science' and recent ideas in modern physics concerning so-called 'superstring theories'. The details need not concern us here (the analogies are in any case too crude to warrant serious consideration) but it does illustrate in a dramatic fashion a recurrent theme in New Age Physics (a theme which seems to have subsequently been picked up by the Maharishi and his followers), namely, that there is some sort of connection between the ideas of modern physics and those of Eastern mysticism. This notion first gained popularity with the publication in 1975 of Fritjof Capra's book *The Tao of Physics* (now in its third edition with over a million copies sold worldwide), and later other books (such as Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*) also made use of the same idea. In this—the second and final part of my article on New Age Physics—I want to take a closer look at 'mystical' interpretations of

modern physics and examine how well they stand up to criticism.

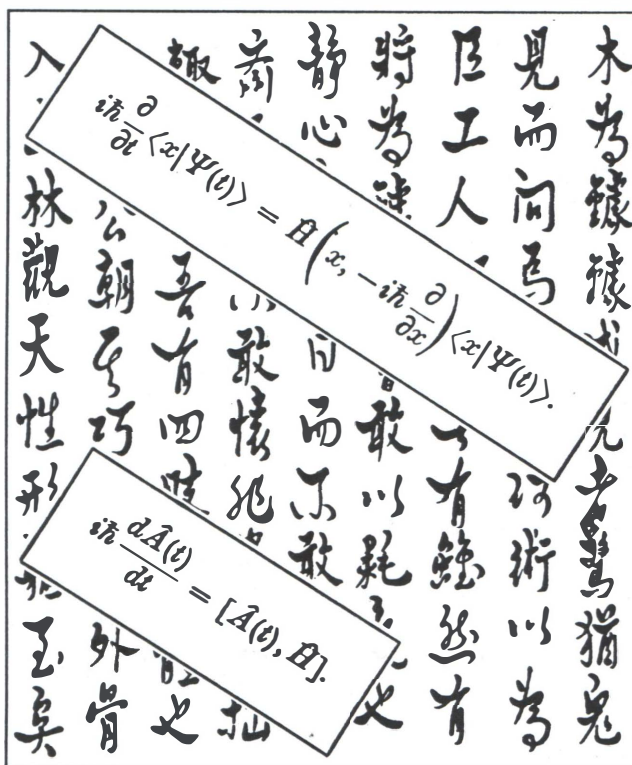
## A Tao of Physics?

The principal thesis of *The Tao of Physics* is that there are profound similarities between the ideas of modern physics and those of Eastern mysticism—a notion which is surprising, provocative and yet also somehow rather intriguing. For Capra, both modern physics and Eastern mysticism lead one to view the world as an intrinsically dynamic and uni-

fied whole. His arguments for this view are far more sophisticated than the crude imitation of his thesis advocated by the Maharishi and his followers, and as someone who clearly has an interest in Eastern thought as well as a training in theoretical particle physics, Capra is in many respects well qualified for the task he set himself. Nevertheless, anyone who attempts to draw parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism faces certain problems which must be overcome if a convincing case is to be made.

The first thing that one must do is to provide an accurate portrayal of modern physics. Capra's description of the theories of modern

physics does seem to me to be broadly correct and as a popularisation of the subject his treatment has much to recommend it. It is, however, a somewhat biased account in that it overemphasises certain approaches (such as S-matrix theory and the so-called 'bootstrap' model of sub-atomic particle interactions), perhaps because such approaches are more easily reconciled with Capra's view of Eastern mysticism than are the more successful theories which have in recent years superseded them. However, a more subtle problem arises when we turn to consider the philosophical impli-

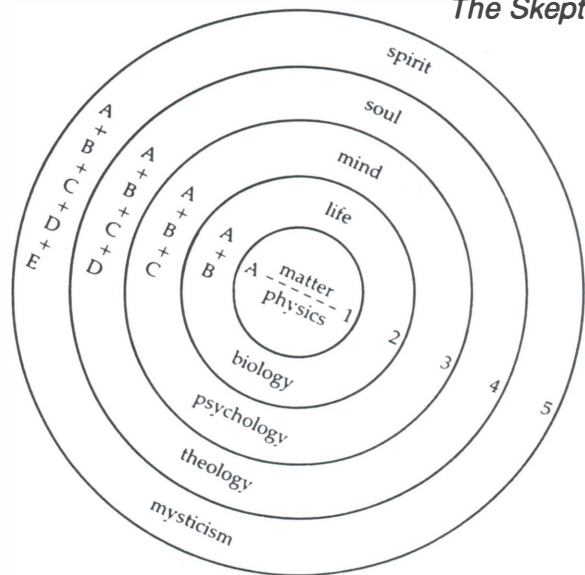




cations of modern physics. For whilst there is a wide measure of agreement amongst physicists as to which particular mathematical theories describe atomic and sub-atomic phenomena, there is unfortunately no general agreement amongst them as to the philosophical conclusions to be drawn as a result. In fact, many different philosophical 'interpretations' of modern physics exist. Thus there is the 'Copenhagen interpretation', the 'hidden variables interpretation', the 'many worlds interpretation', and so on. Consequently, it is not easy to say just precisely what is the 'world-view' of modern physics, since this will depend on which particular interpretation one selects.

Fortunately, there are one or two features which are more or less common to all the viable interpretations of modern physics and so one can be pretty certain that these reflect genuine characteristics of reality rather than being simply artifacts resulting from choosing an incorrect interpretation. One of these invariant features is that all the interpretations seem to require a form of 'action at a distance' (or some other radically non-local effect) in order to explain the correlations that are observed between measurements made at widely separated distances from one another. The precise nature of this non-locality differs from interpretation to interpretation, but some kind of non-locality seems to be unavoidable. This feature (which was discussed in more detail in the first part of this article) is sometimes referred to as quantum 'non-separability' because it implies that the physical systems described by modern physics (and by quantum mechanics in particular) cannot be regarded as totally isolated from one another no matter how far apart they may be. There seems to be good evidence that the universe is somehow 'connected together' in a way which is genuinely holistic and Capra is therefore probably correct in thinking that modern physics must envisage the world as being in some sense a unified and interconnected whole. On the other hand, I am less convinced by Capra's argument for the intrinsically dynamic nature of reality, not least because his argument seems to rely fairly heavily on the use he makes of the now rather dated approach of S-matrix theory.

The second thing that one must do is to provide an accurate portrayal of 'Eastern mysticism', and it is here that more serious problems arise. By 'Eastern mysticism' Capra seems to mean the philosophical schools associated with those Eastern spiritual traditions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism) which emphasize the importance of contemplation, meditation and certain types of religious experience. However, this construct 'Eastern mysticism' is really not a very satisfactory one because it suggests that there is a greater degree of uniformity between the various schools of Eastern philosophy than may in fact be the case. The task of reconstructing the philosophical systems of cultures that are far removed from our own in time and space is in any case not an unproblematic one, especially as scholars of oriental thought inevitably bring their own philosophical preconceptions to the study of their subject, and this may tend to colour their interpretations. However, so far as one can judge, the world-views of the various schools of Eastern philosophy differ quite considerably from one another, not just between Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism



but also between the large number of schools which exist even within a particular tradition. Capra is aware of some of this diversity but nevertheless seems to want to extract some common denominator which would conform to his characterization of the world as a unified, intrinsically dynamic whole. But this characterization blurs the very real distinctions which exist between different schools of Eastern philosophy and is in some cases totally inappropriate. For instance, the influential Hindu philosophy of Advaita Vedanta is essentially a *monistic* philosophy which emphasises the undifferentiated, unchanging and timeless character of reality rather than what it takes to be the illusory surface flux of phenomena. On the other hand, Samkhya-Yoga is a *dualistic* philosophy which rejects any kind of monism, adopting instead two principles roughly equivalent to the Western notions of 'matter' and 'spirit'—whilst the Sarvastivada school of Hinayana Buddhism is a *pluralistic* philosophy in which the entire world of phenomena is conceptually reduced to a multitude of component factors. Many other examples could be produced, and faced with diversity such as this it is very difficult to see that there is any such thing as *the* world-view of Eastern mysticism. In which case, what is one supposed to be comparing modern physics with?

If Capra believes that there are *close* parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism then it would seem that what he would have to do is to make a case for the strong similarity between at least one of the viable interpretations of modern physics and perhaps one or two of the most closely related schools of Eastern philosophy. But in fact Capra does not do this in his book, and he seems content instead to select material from several different interpretations of modern physics and from many different Eastern philosophies and draw parallels between them as and when they show any kind of similarity at all, no matter how superficial these similarities might in fact be.

As it stands, therefore, Capra's thesis that there are close parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism is simply not convincing. But of course, finding parallels between different sets of ideas is unlikely to be an all or nothing kind of affair and at some level of generality Capra's arguments may have a certain validity. Although mystical views of the world embody no single doctrine and often



differ considerably from one another, it is difficult to deny that certain general themes tend to recur again and again in one form or another: themes such as the 'unity of all things', the 'ultimate unreality of space and time', and so on. And it is also difficult to deny that similar themes are often encountered in the various interpretations of modern physics. For example, quantum non-separability really does suggest that there is a sense in which 'All is One'. This does not mean that the holistic implications of modern physics are identifiable with the teachings of any particular school of Eastern philosophy, but it would certainly be going too far to claim that there exist no similarities whatsoever with any mystical world-view. Much depends on what one wishes to infer from such similarities as do exist. They are surely too weak to imply that Eastern philosophers had any real foreknowledge of the most recent advances in physics. On the other hand, mystical views of reality tend to be so far removed from our commonsense understanding of the world that the existence of any similarities with modern physics is itself a somewhat surprising fact which is in its own way quite impressive: the universe, it emerges, is a very strange place indeed! Moreover, comparing and contrasting the world-views of modern physics and Eastern mysticism may itself be a valuable exercise simply because it is always instructive to examine one set of ideas in the light of another. So I do not wish to imply that Capra's thesis has no grain of truth in it and is completely without merit, only that by exaggerating the closeness of the parallels Capra has radically overstated his case.

### The Holographic Universe

Another thinker who has produced what one might describe as a 'mystical' interpretation of modern physics is the physicist David Bohm. Bohm is an unconventional physicist in his interests and his approach to the subject but he is cer-

tainly no crank and he has a proven research record which includes several important contributions in the area of the foundations of quantum mechanics. In the early 1950s he developed what he called the 'causal interpretation' of quantum mechanics, which subsequently played an important role in clarifying the nature of quantum non-separability, and (together with his colleagues Basil Hiley and P N Kaloyerou) he later developed this interpretation further in a much more sophisticated form. But Bohm is better known to the general public for his ideas concerning what he calls the 'implicate order'. These ideas received much publicity when his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* appeared in 1980. This, together with several other subsequent books by or about Bohm and his ideas, have ensured him a high profile. And Bohm's interest in the role that holism plays in modern physics (and perhaps also his friendship with the Indian religious teacher Krishnamurti) have guaranteed him an enthusiastic audience amongst New Agers. Indeed, Bohm's ideas are probably better known to the general public than they are within the physics community itself, where his theories are just too unconventional and too speculative to have aroused much interest so far.

In order to understand Bohm's notion of the implicate order it is necessary to appreciate that quantum mechanical objects (such as electrons, for example) exhibit a curious feature known as 'wave-particle' duality. That is, even though we may normally tend to think of them as being 'particles', in quantum mechanics they nevertheless need to be represented by a wave that spreads out across space as the object moves along (much as a water wave spreads out on the surface of a pond, for example). Description in terms of waves is therefore a quite fundamental feature of the world as described by quantum mechanics. In fact, the quantum mechanical wave associated with an object moves through space according to a rule known to all physicists as 'Huygen's

Principle'. According to this principle, every point on a wavefront may itself be regarded as a source of secondary waves. These secondary waves spread out and overlap one another to produce a new wavefront, representing the position of the wave at a later time. This new wavefront then in turn acts as the source for yet further secondary waves and so the process continues, with the wave advancing a little at each stage.

The mathematics of Huygen's principle is in fact closely analogous to that used in the theory of the hologram. A hologram is (as most readers will already be aware) a sort of special 'three-dimensional' photograph of an object. An ordinary photograph stores its information in a simple way: points on the photographed object are mapped into points on the photograph. However, in creating a hologram, the points of an object are mapped into a photographic plate in a much more complicated way which effectively encodes a blurred image of the entire object into every small region of the plate so that in fact an image of the object can be reconstructed from



even a small fragment of the original hologram. In a sense which can be made precise, the image of the object is 'enfolded' into the hologram and then 'unfolded' when the hologram is viewed. In a similar way, each small section of a wavefront is produced by the overlapping and 'enfolding together' of many secondary waves (each originating from a different point in space), and also produces its own secondary wave which spreads out and contributes to the formation of an entire new wavefront. So, in a sense, a quantum mechanical wave moving through space can be seen as the net result of a continual process of enfoldment and unfoldment.

This much is, I think, uncontroversial. But Bohm goes on to speculate that the greater part of physical reality may exist in a sort of enfolded or 'implicate' state which, however, gives rise through a process of unfoldment to the 'explicate' phenomena that we observe as the manifest world of particles and planets. Space and time are also envisaged to be merely the explicate form of an unmanifest underlying reality. This view of the world is an holistic one in the sense that the whole is reflected in the parts (rather than being simply the sum of the parts), just as in our analogy an image of an entire object can be enfolded into even a small fragment of the photographic plate. The problem is to turn an intriguing and intuitively appealing speculation into a precise mathematical theory that is useful to other physicists in their theoretical and experimental work. Unfortunately, Bohm's ideas remain at a fairly provisional stage at the moment and most physicists would probably wish to reserve judgment concerning their likely fruitfulness until more definite results have been obtained.

In the meantime, however, Bohm's notion of the implicate order has received the enthusiastic endorsement of New Agers who are attracted by its holism and by its slightly mystical quality. And, indeed, the concept of the enfolded implicate order as a form of existence which underlies the manifest world of space, time and matter is somewhat similar to the notion of the 'Ground of Being'—conceived as an undifferentiated reality which underlies the world of everyday experience—which is a common theme in many different philosophies of a broadly 'mystical' persuasion. To this extent, Bohm's ideas do tend to lend support to an identifiably mystical view of the world. But whether these ideas are in fact substantially correct still remains to be seen.

### Paradigm Found?

New Agers clearly hope that the ideas of modern physics can be used to support and promote their own particular system of beliefs and so help bring about the profound spiritual transformation of our society which they both anticipate and desire. Indeed, those who advocate New Age Physics are fond of saying that it represents a 'new paradigm' that has overthrown (or is destined to overthrow) the older, mechanistic framework of Newton and Descartes. Such a characterization tends to exaggerate the mechanistic nature of classical physics (Newton was, after all, no simple mechanist: he was an alchemist as well as a physicist and a mathematician!). But New Agers are certainly correct in thinking that modern physics nowadays makes it very difficult to argue the case for a mechanistic view of the world.

Unfortunately, the full philosophical implications of modern physics remain unclear and, in practice, New Agers simply tend to emphasize those features and interpretations of modern physics which lie closest to New Age interests and concerns. It is true that some characteristics of modern physics (such as quantum non-separability) are provocatively close to the holistic notions endorsed by New Agers, but the full significance of these features is as yet rather uncertain and still remains to be clarified.

In order for New Age Physics to truly attain the status of a 'paradigm'—in the sense in which the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn has employed that term—these various features and interpretations would have to become accepted by the physics community as a whole and somehow form the basis for the 'puzzle-solving' activity that constitutes normal scientific practice. So far this has not happened. Instead, most of the approaches and interpretations that appear under the heading of 'New Age Physics' remain marginal to the work of the great majority of professional physicists and often represent no more than the personal viewpoint of one particular philosophically-minded physicist (be it Prigogine, Capra or Bohm), together perhaps with a handful of their collaborators. By contrast, the approach taken by most physicists is primarily mathematical and/or experimental in emphasis and is (for better or worse) strongly permeated by a pragmatism that is sometimes openly hostile to anything that smacks of even 'philosophy', never mind 'mysticism' or the 'New Age'. Consequently, the claim that New Age Physics represents a new paradigm seems to me to be rather exaggerated and premature.

Nevertheless, it is of course conceivable that this situation will change at some time in the future and that a common understanding of modern physics will eventually emerge that is broadly consistent with New Age ideas. If this happens then the New Age Movement will have gone some way towards gaining an intellectual respectability that it does not now possess and the implications for our view of the world and for Western culture generally might then indeed be as significant as New Agers claim. But how likely it is that this will in fact happen is another matter and, in the meantime, it seems to me that the fairest judgment one can make on most of the claims of New Age Physics is that they are either wrong, exaggerated, or as yet not proven.

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Dr Tim Axon is the author of *Beyond the Tao of Physics: Mysticism and Modern Physics—A Reappraisal* (Tehuti Press, 1988).



# The Man who Died Twice

Frank Koval

## *The story of Washington Irving Bishop*

**A** STORY WORTHY OF THE PEN of American writer Edgar Allan Poe was enacted in real life just over one hundred years ago. The story of the world's greatest mind-reader, Washington Irving Bishop, has the same ingredients of terror and horror that earlier had existed only in the fertile imagination of the author of *The Raven* and *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.

His family and close friends called him Irving, but I will refer to him as Bishop. Bishop was born on Lower Broadway, New York City, on 4 March, 1856. His father, Nathaniel Coney Bishop, was always described by Bishop as an eminent lawyer, when he was, in fact, a travelling salesman with too great an affection for strong drink.

Bishop's mother, Eleanor Fletcher Bishop, was one of America's earliest spirit mediums. Bishop inherited from Eleanor a most unfortunate and rare illness. They both suffered from hysterio-catalepsy. This meant that at any time they could collapse and fall into a deep trance. This trance would be so deep that no signs of life could be found—the breathing too shallow and the pulse too faint to detect.

Bishop had a genuine fear of dissection while he was in one of his trances. Because of this, he always carried a paper with the following message written upon it:

To whom it may concern: If I am found apparently dead, do nothing to me for 48 hours. I occasionally fall into a state which resembles death, but which is merely a trance. Get me to bed, keep my body warm; and have patience. Under no conditions let a surgeon's knife touch me, do not apply electricity to my body, and do not place my body on ice.

Bishop suffered a very severe cataleptic fit on one occasion and was pronounced dead by several doctors. In spite of this, he recovered after 48 hours. No wonder Bishop has been called 'The man who died twice'!

Bishop was educated at St. John's College in Fordham, New York, and started work at the age of 16 as a clerk in Hudnut's Drug Store. He later had a job at the New York Customs House. He became very interested in magic and soon became proficient at sleight of hand with cards, coins and other small objects. This, coupled with his inside knowledge of the shady side of spiritualism, qualified him admirably to get a job working with the famous stage medium, Anna Eva Fay.

Anna was a baffling sensation wherever she appeared. She was a vivacious performer who had more than her fair



share of self-confidence. She was a slender woman with grey eyes and curly blonde hair, always superbly dressed and invariably wore half a dozen glittering diamond rings. Anna's act was explained and illustrated in 1883 by John Truesdell in his book *The Bottom Facts Concerning the Science of Spiritualism*. Her speciality was the Cotton Bandage Tie. A committee from the audience would tie Anna's wrists behind her back. She then sat on a stool and her tethered wrists were secured to a ring in a post behind her. Her neck was tied to another ring higher up the post to prevent her bending forward. Finally, her ankles were tied together with a length of rope which was then trailed out to the audience for someone to hold. Anna's husband, Henry Fay, placed a selection of musical instruments on her lap, asked for the gas-light to be turned down and a curtain was drawn in front of her. Then, bells rang, a guitar was played and a tambourine was tossed over the curtain. The curtain was whisked away and Anna was found securely tied exactly as before.

Truesdell explained how these effects were accomplished: Anna was always tied the same way so that she could manoeuvre both wrists to one side of her body to play the instruments. In some of the tests, Anna allowed a spectator to sit behind the curtain and to put one hand on her head and the other on her knee. Bishop worked with Anna for two years but then they quarrelled over money and Bishop left the show. Shortly afterwards, Bishop gave private performances of the Cotton Bandage Tie, but he made his shows an exposé of spiritualism, showing how the effects were accomplished.

In 1876, he wrote a devastating expose of Anna's act and sat for eight illustrations for an article which appeared in the *New York Daily Graphic*. For shows in private houses, the bandages were tied to two iron staples which had been

hammered into a door jamb.

As well as having an inside knowledge of spiritualism, Bishop knew about a new development in mind-reading. In the early 1870s, he had seen performances in New York of the pioneer of contact mind-reading, John Randall Brown. John Randall Brown was born on 28 October, 1851 in St. Louis, Missouri, and his efforts definitely predate Bishop's work in this field, although some have suggested the opposite to be true. Brown's most impressive stunt was to have a member of the audience hide a pin anywhere in the theatre. Then, wearing a blindfold, he would grasp the wrist of the hider of the pin. The two of them would then move around about a minute or so until the pin was found.

The effect was genuine (no confederates were involved) but not psychic. Brown depended on the very slight but detectable unconscious movements of the spectator. All that was necessary was that the spectator should actively *will* the performer to succeed. The basic idea of unconscious muscular pressure had been proved experimentally by one of the greatest scientists of all time—Michael Faraday—in England in 1853 in connection with the spiritualistic craze of table-turning.

Bishop's own first theatre performance was at Chickering Hall, New York on Thursday 18 May, 1876. Bishop was described as 'a young man, slightly but symmetrically built, of lithe carriage, and with a face denoting intelligence and quickness of thought.' Bishop, clean-shaven at this stage of his career, was only 5 feet 5 inches tall. He could be the most charming man in the world. I quote: 'his wit was boundless and like lightning in its swiftness.' In short, he was more than a match for sceptical spectators. He showed all of Anna Eva Fay's tricks under the glare of the calcium lights. The *New York Times* of 10 June said that after Bishop's shows the 'spiritualists might as well give up.'

I have a programme of Bishop's for December 1877 in which he appears as 'The Renowned AntiSpiritist and Mind-Reader'. So, by then, he was using Brown's contact mind-reading.

Now, there was something contradictory about Bishop going around exposing spirit mediums, while his mother, Eleanor, was still giving séances. He solved the problem by sailing to Great Britain. Bishop's first performance in Britain was on 16 January, 1879 at the Edinburgh Music Hall. Here, and later in Glasgow, Bishop played to packed theatres, and eminent Victorians were beginning to take notice. For example, Sir William Thomson—the distinguished scientist who later became Lord Kelvin—gave Bishop a testimonial to the excellence of his performance.

While he was in Scotland, he published in Edinburgh in 1880 a 78-page booklet for sale at his performances entitled *Second Sight Exposed*. It was actually ghost-written (!) for him by a journalist on the *Glasgow Evening News* called Frederick Wicks. It exposed the verbal code used for two-person second-sight acts, such as the one made popular by Robert-Houdin.

The illustration comes from a series of drawings from *The Graphic* and shows the blindfolded Bishop searching for hidden objects. Note also the blackboard test. He used contact mind-reading to find the serial number of a banknote

that was being thought of by a spectator. Bishop had a profound effect on a number of prominent scientists—who ought to have known better. For example, he performed a number of shows in Lancashire. He was in Manchester in October 1882 and Liverpool in January 1883. At this time he was having trouble with his catalepsy and was described in Liverpool as a 'full dress-coated skeleton', but he still held the large audiences in the palm of his hand.

Two young ladies, Miss Ralphs and Miss Edwards, saw a Bishop performance in Liverpool and afterwards experi-



mented in thought transference. They later convinced Oliver Lodge that telepathy was real. As a result of this, he became a leading spiritualist along with Arthur Conan Doyle. They were both later knighted on the same day in 1902.

The Member of Parliament of the day for Northampton and editor of the weekly crusading paper, *Truth*, Henry Labouchère, had a more healthy scepticism, though. He bet his £1000 against Bishop's £100 that Bishop would not be able to reveal the serial number of a banknote that he himself had sealed in an envelope. Bishop arranged a special performance on 12 June, 1883 at St. James's Great Hall in London.

Before the event, they disagreed over who should be the spectator who knew the serial number. Bishop did not believe that Labouchère would actively *will* him to find the number because of the bet, and Labouchère wanted to make sure that there was no confederacy, as he would be the only one who knew the number. On the day of the test,





Labouchere failed to turn up, but Bishop went ahead with the performance and found the number on someone else's note. A fire balloon was released outside the theatre to signal the success.

After the Labouchère challenge performance, Bishop had thousands of copies of a booklet called *The Truth*, whose cover and layout closely resembled Labouchère's paper *Truth*. One of the articles in the spurious paper said:

In London [a] dastard plot, which for ever cover John Nevil Maskelyne and Henry Labouchère with infamy, was being hatched... The plot was as simple as its villainy; to bring the well-known and highly respected gentleman, Mr William Ladyman... to ruin... It was to bribe Mr Ladyman... to declare that he had been guilty of fraud. Now then, let John Nevil Maskelyne, whom I unqualifiedly stigmatise as a man devoid of honourable instincts, bring forth this proof... By the best advice procurable at the highest bar, I am assured that with the proofs of infamy in my possession I can hold John Nevil Maskelyne criminally liable and make justice punish him.

Maskelyne sued Bishop for libel and the case was heard on 15 January, 1885. Bishop was the one not to turn up this time, but this did not stop the jury agreeing on damages of £10 000 in favour of Maskelyne. This was truly a massive fortune in 1885. However, Bishop was never made to pay, since he had left Britain in 1884 for the continent and, of course, he was never to return.

After his tour of the Continent and Russia, Bishop returned to the United States. Here, he found that people had still not forgotten his libel against Maskelyne and was finding bookings difficult to come by. So, he came up with the finest publicity stunt of his career—that of driving a horse and carriage at full pace, though wearing a blindfold and searching for a hidden object, through the streets of New York. The publicity stunt worked and Bishop packed the theatres once again.

At about this time, an ambitious 15 year-old by the name of Ehrich Weiss was taken into Martinka's Magic Shop in New York by his friend Joseph Rinn. While they were there, in walked Washington Irving Bishop. So, two of the greatest wonder-workers of all time met briefly—Bishop, coming to the end of his career, although he did not know it at the time, and Ehrich Weiss, just starting out on what was to be a most dazzling career as Houdini.

Bishop gave his last performance at Lambs Club, New York, on Sunday 12 May, 1889. During this, he fell into the very deepest cataleptic trance and had to be put to bed at the club. He was pronounced dead on the following day at 12.10 p.m. and an autopsy was carried out only four hours later. The reason for this hasty action probably stems from Bishop's frequent claim that his ability to read minds was due to his unusual brain structure.

Further, he was always urging doctors to investigate his brain after his death. They did just that, but found that his brain was perfectly normal.

Bishop's wife and mother found out about the post mortem in horrific circumstances. When they visited the undertakers to view the body, his wife noticed that his hair had been combed forward, not his usual style. When she tried to comb it back his normal way, she disturbed a large incision that had been made and the top of his skull came away. If that was not bad enough, she noticed that Bishop's brain was not in the skull!

Bishop's wife and mother both claimed that he was not dead during the autopsy, but was in one of his cataleptic trances. Eleanor had her own experience of such fits and knew that he would be keenly aware of all that went on as they sawed through his skull to examine his brain. In what was a unique case, the doctors involved were charged with Bishop's murder, but eventually the charges were dropped. After the funeral service, the hearse took Bishop's body to the family plot at Greenwood Cemetery. Bishop was buried in the same grave as his little half-sister, Sarah, who died in 1849 at the tender age of six years. To the side of him lay his father's first wife, Sarah C Bishop, who died in 1852, and next to her was Bishop's father's coffin.

In my studies of the history of mind-reading, and in all my travels at home and in the USA, I have come across no story as absorbing as that of 'the man who died twice'. I feel sure that Edgar Allan Poe would have been drawn to the story. He would certainly have written it far better than I can but, unfortunately, he was found dying in the streets of Baltimore on 7 October, 1849, some six and-a-half years before Bishop was born.

**Frank Koval** is a writer, lecturer and Associate Member of the Inner Magic Circle

# Psychic Diary

Toby Howard

## A visit to a strange museum

**I**F I HAD KNOWN in advance that the American humourist P J O'Rourke had likened a summertime visit to New Orleans to taking a sauna in a high-crime drainage ditch, I might have cancelled my visit to the city—part of a 'see America' holiday schedule that made Richard Branson's escapades look like trips to the laundrette. As it happens, New Orleans was very hospitable. But while its hyperactive French Quarter may be a sort of Cajun Blackpool, with tacky nightclubs, booze, blaring music, coy peep-shows, and all the giant Lucky Dogs you can eat, it also has a darker side. At 724 Rue Dumaine, sandwiched between a jazz club and a souvenir shop, lurks 'The New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum'.

After passing the alligator's head and the broom at the entrance, powerful ju-ju charms to ward off evil spirits, I knew at once that this was probably not the sort of place I would want to visit after dark. The museum was tiny, with two rooms crammed with stuffed snakes, charms, chicken feathers, talismans, ugly masks, dolls, shrunken heads and—most disconcerting of all—some extremely odd smells. Maybe there was a dead tourist under the floorboards. Walking around the dimly-lit, pungent rooms was like visiting the house of a mad aunt your family doesn't talk about.

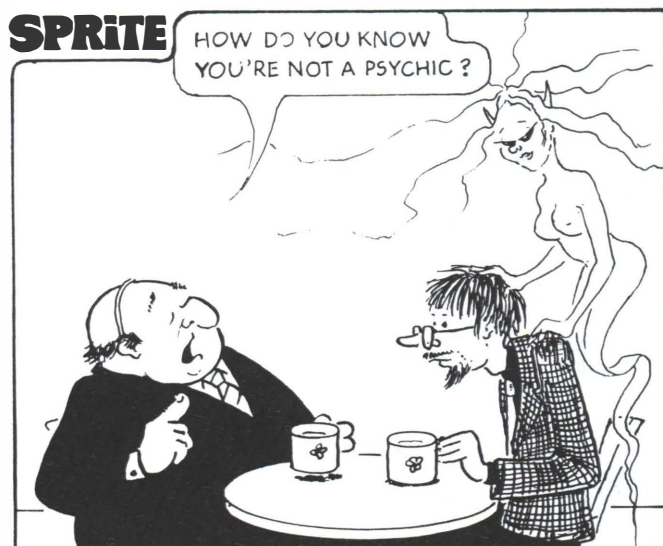
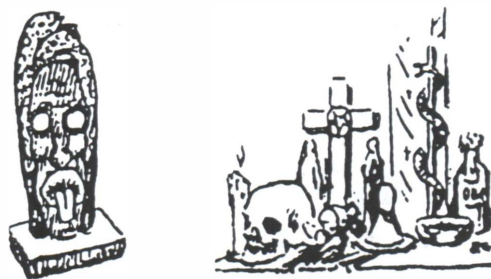
Looking after the museum was Kali, who was happy to answer my skeptical questions with patience. Did 20th century people *really* believe in this stuff? Were Americans walking around with Gris-Gris charms in their pockets? Were the exhibits the genuine article? Do you practice Voodoo? Kali was incredulous that I was incredulous. Far from being a museum of discontinued practices, there

were all sorts of services on offer: have a special Gris-Gris mixed for your special needs, or consult the Voodoo Queen Miss Black Venus, who was carrying on the tradition of Marie Laveau, the Popess of Voodoo. When I saw the photographs of contemporary Voodoo practitioners on the walls, I realised that these people were deadly serious.

Kali, it emerged, as well as being immersed in Voodoo, was a member of another mystical order, Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (that's how it's supposed to be spelled). TOPY is an occult information network founded by artist Genesis P Orridge (who has since severed all connections with the group), and Kali saw some of the ideas of Voodoo as dovetailing perfectly with those of TOPY. Unfortunately, exactly what these are is rather hard to determine, since, at least from the literature I have seen, a basic tenet of TOPY is that ... there are no tenets.

For me, a lifetime of couch-potato addiction to late-night Hammer Horror films had left me with the impression that Voodoo was something of a pantomime, and that shrunken skulls, a throbbing beat, and a general air of frenzy didn't add up to much except a kind of occult rave. But whatever its popular profile may be, Voodoo is certainly no joke. Like all religions, when people travel, it travels too. In June of this year, the *Evening Standard* reported that senior social workers in Hackney had received voodoo dolls sent to them in Jiffy bags. I wonder if you can get hold of alligator heads in London? I hope so.

Toby Howard is a lecturer in computer graphics at the University of Manchester.





# Skeptic at Large

Wendy M Grossman

## Getting skeptical CIX

Return-Path: <70007.5537@compuserve.com>  
 Date: 18 Oct 92 15:33:32 EDT  
 From: "Wendy Grossman (skeptic)" <70007.5537@compuserve.com>  
 Subject: column  
 Sender: 70007.5537@compuserve.com

**A** FEW MONTHS AGO I wrote about the New Age Forum on CompuServe; why, I said, weren't the skeptics getting in on electronic conferencing as a way to spread information? In July, Lucy Fisher and I decided to be what many Americans these days like to call 'proactive': we started a skeptics conference on the Surbiton-based electronic conferencing system CIX. Things didn't turn out quite the way I expected—I should say that the opinions expressed here are mine, and I'm not speaking for Lucy.

I thought we'd get a bunch of people interested in science and the paranormal, and figured we could help advertise London-based events. I certainly thought we'd be able to post files of the sort of information we circulate in *The Skeptic* and that people would be interested to learn more about things they had perhaps only vaguely thought about. Well, there's real life, and then there's CIX.

The people who frequent electronic conferencing systems are practically a pseudoscience in themselves. First there are the ones you would avoid rigorously if you ever met them in person. On CIX, you can recognize these people by what they say about themselves in their resumé—these are on-line descriptions of individual users submitted by the users themselves. If a resumé tells you the make, model, and serial number of the user's home, work, and portable computers, plus it has a list of the languages he (usually it's a he) most enjoys programming in, you can make a fairly safe guess about how interesting this person is likely to be to talk to.

In its first month, 'Skeptics' was one of the busiest conferences on CIX; it's quieted down some since then, which is undoubtedly a good thing. Topics of conversation have ranged from the Mars Effect, to astrology generally, graphology, the problems of being an ex-Catholic, breast-feeding and the problems with medical advice about same, faith healing, spiritualism, and dowsing.

We have, however, had quite a few surprises. First of all, you would think that a conferencing system full of engineers skilled in using and learning new technology would tend to be full of skeptics. This turns out to be wholly wrong. Some of the techiest people, who read news and product reviews in computer magazines with the sort of skepticism most people reserve for politicians nonetheless are prepared to believe that astrology might be explained by the action of gravity.

One frequent contributor describes himself in his resumé as a freelance programmer/consultant ...and then

adds that in another incarnation he is 'be-coming a healer ...and trying to centre and re-connect my be-ing by joining the vectors of my life ...I am also actively working out gender issues.' He is doing this, his resumé tells us, with his partner and children; he also likes reading SF, is Vegan, and likes hugging.

All this goes to prove two things often said in skeptical circles. First, as soon as you take someone, however well educated in the sciences they may be, outside of their area of expertise, they are no better than the rest of us at evaluating claims. Second, knowing about technology, the way computer people or, these days, doctors do, does not guarantee understanding anything about the scientific method or constructing proper experiments.

Running the conference has been both exciting and frustrating. The excitement came at the beginning: I was delighted to see so much traffic and such heated discussion at the beginning. The frustrating side of it became apparent later. It's obvious now, after a few months, that the same topics are going to keep cropping up, and that the discussions are largely populated by people who are more interested in talking themselves than in considering evidence they don't know about. There have already been plenty of accusations from some of those assembled that skeptics are closed-minded when one or another of us has tried to present scientific evidence on one or another topic, and there seems to be no way to counter this. In terms of spreading skepticism, probably the most useful thing we've done so far is to publicize Richard Mather's appearance at Conway Hall and the London Student Skeptics' meetings to the 50 or 60 conference members we have (CIX has about 7,000 users all told).

Nonetheless, the intention is to keep trying. So, if you're ever online—you can reach CIX at 081 390 1255 at speeds up to 38,400 bps and sign up on the spot with a credit card—stop in.

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.

### Calling contributors old and new!

*The Skeptic* welcomes articles, cartoons and illustrations for possible publication. Please send your contribution, together with an SAE if you require it to be returned, to *The Skeptic*, PO Box 475, Manchester M60 2TH. PC and Mac disks are welcome.

# Reviews



## The pagan year

Marian Green, *A Calendar of Festivals: Traditional Celebrations, Songs, Seasonal Recipes and Things to Make* (Element Books, 1991, 160pp., pbk, £9.99)

Whether we like it or not, significant dates give structure our lives. Most of us celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, and many people observe the traditional festivals. There are the 'major' ones—Christmas, New Year and Easter—and a whole host of 'minor' ones, such as Guy Fawkes' night, Shrove Tuesday, April Fools' Day, and Well Dressing. Festivals are for everyone, and it is not unusual to find that even the most ardent skeptic of the paranormal has few qualms about enjoying Halloween. And rightly so.

Marian Green has written a celebration of our festivals and traditions, and gone one better than the many calendar guides now available, by taking the year month by month, noting the various customs, and incorporating historical notes, traditional recipes, the lyrics and music for songs, and instructions on making things like kites, corn dollies, valentine baskets and pumpkin lanterns. Green loves her subject, and if you're interested in modern folklore this is a guide well worth having. But, there is a 'but'.



What spoils the book is the astrological nonsense that accompanies each month. Let your toes curl along with mine as we read about the sign of Aquarius: 'Aquarians are usually fairly healthy though not fitness freaks, but can suffer circulatory problems, cold feet, and occasionally trouble with their ankles'. Or Taurus: 'Some can become spotty

as teenagers'. Yes, once again astrology proves itself able to unlock the secrets of the universe. It is sad to see such rubbish in an otherwise fascinating book that has so much going for it. But don't let this put you off too much. Anyway there's a great recipe here for Nettle Quiche.

—Les Francis

## Newtonian chemistry?

Mark Haeffner, *The Dictionary of Alchemy: from Maria Prophetissa to Isaac Newton* (Aquarian, 1991, 272pp., pbk, £12.99)

As the author points out in his introduction, the word 'alchemy' conjures up any number of negative connotations: secret societies, witchcraft, occultism, gold greed, quack medicine, charlatanism, fraud, primitive chemistry. The author, therefore, sets out to catalogue some of the more positive contributions which it also made, in the East, as well as in the West ('the task... is to disentangle the more genuine aspects of alchemy as a spiritual tradition which preserves a fantastic wealth of symbolism and poetic or mystical ideas about the world').

The first thing which the reader discovers about the book, though, is that it is *not* a dictionary! At an average of about one page per entry, 'mini-encyclopedia' would be a closer description. Even better, though, it could be thought of as a non-linear, tree-structured, text book (rather like those choose-your-own-story books, where the reader chooses which of the offered pages to read next). I enjoyed dabbling amongst the entries very much, and learned much, chasing those cross-references which caught my interest, whilst leaving others alone. I am sure that I read much, much more at each sitting than I would otherwise have done if it had been presented as a conventional text book (certainly, if the rambling introduction is a representative example of the author's normal style).

I cannot help, though, but express some disappointment that I could not commence a search by first treating the book as a dictionary. It would not have cost much, surely, for the author to have inserted a few one line entries, with cross-references, for all the 'obvious' things that I might have wanted to look up: the archaic and Latin chemical names (hydrargyrum, kalium, natrium, oil of vitriol, and so on), and their modern translations; even words like amalgam, sublime, decant were absent. On the whole, though, I found those entries which were present very interesting, and the book has certainly changed my impression of what alchemy (and Isaac Newton!) were and what they were not.

—Malcolm Shute



## Gardner and the Snark

Martin Gardner, *The Snark Puzzle Book* (Prometheus Books, 1991, 124pp., hbk, £8.75)

This is the second book by Martin Gardner that is based around Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem *The Hunting of the Snark*. The first, *The Annotated Snark*, discusses the ballad in more detail, including the speculation surrounding its possible interpretation. Very little is made of such aspects here, however, as this book has a somewhat different purpose—to draw as much puzzle-making potential as possible from the poem itself.

This it does by the somewhat Carrollian idea of embodying a number of puzzles into the text, each of which is related to a line of the ballad. This is neatly done by presenting the poem narrative on the left hand page with accompanying puzzles or illustrations on the right. The illustrations given are the originals produced by Tenniel and Holiday. The puzzles have a reasonable range and are generally amusing, although we both admit to peeping at the back for answers to quite a few of those tried! Also included is *Jabberwocky*, another well-known ballad of Carroll's, from *Through the Looking Glass*. Although it isn't said who the intended audience is, we think this might well fascinate children from 12 upwards, or perhaps a bright 10 year old. Although we didn't think it to be much of a problem, some British readers may find the occasional Americanism used by Gardner rather irritating (such as 'backof' instead of 'behind'). Perhaps this is only made more noticeable when contrasted with the very English feel of Carroll's colloquial writing style!

All in all, an out-of-the-ordinary children's book (for Christmas, perhaps?) and a good introduction to Carroll. It is probably essential for Carroll fans, young and old alike.

—Anne Broadhurst & Brian Monahan

## At least they'll be warm...

Michele Jamal, *Volcanic Visions* (Arkana, 1991, 136pp., pbk, £5.99)

An astrologer told Michele Jamal that she is living a 'Persephone-Pluto myth', which Jamal took as a clue to her affinity with Hawaii's Mount Pele volcano. She went to Hawaii to find out more. Reports about visitors falling into the lava did little to deter her.

'Clairsentient', Jamal seems to be calling for a revival of never-never beliefs. She presents Pele as centre-stage for a future Aquarian renaissance. She envisages Hawaii as 'a beacon unto the fifth world', and wants its main temple to be UFO-shaped, its schools to teach long-distance clairvoyance... Archeologists can learn how to excavate other planets. Hawaii is a surviving remnant of Lemuria, she says, adding that Lemurian gods promise to return to visibility, disguised as dwarfs and speaking another tongue, so we can't recognise them (an idea Terry Pratchett would be proud of).

Ashtar, of The Ashtar Command, Universal Federation & Universal Christ Force (no less) has a few words with

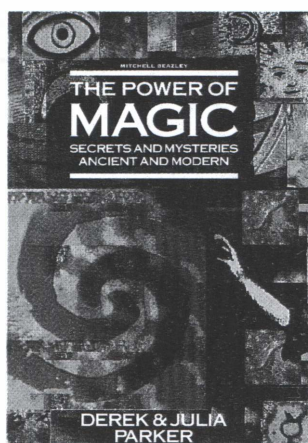
Jamal, through psychic channeller Michael el Legion. Ashtar explains why Jamal is so drawn to Hawaii. It's because she is a reincarnated priestess (Eagle commandress rank) from Lemuria, which was nearby. Ashtar wants her to regain her former powers to the full one day, when she overcomes her allergy to the human form. Jamal tries to doubt the validity of all this wisdom, but skepticism gives her headaches, which she takes as confirmation that it's all for real. While Hawaii celebrates 'Harmonic Convergence Day', with even Hare Krishna followers out saucer spotting, Jamal admires the 'lorry lights' in the clouds on another part of the island. The Krishnas see nothing. Overcome by the Vog (volcanic smog), Jamal goes to California, where UFOs still pass by to remind her that she's special.

Her father saw UFOs too. That's why he raised her on science fiction movies that film buffs may recognise in Jamal's narrative. Watching one unnamed film, her Dad points out a scene where the hero is probed by extraterrestrials and left with scars to prove it. Jamal notices a similar scar on her Dad's neck, and though he has a natural explanation for it, she still wonders... But we shouldn't.

—Arthur Chappell

## Ancient and modern magic

Derek and Julia Parker, *The Power of Magic* (Mitchell Beazley, 1992, 222pp., hbk, £14.99)



Derek and Julia Parker are well known writers on the 'paranormal', having been responsible in recent years for titles such as *Dreaming*, *The Complete Astrologer* and *The Children that Time Forgot*. Their standpoint on matters 'paranormal' is clear: they believe. That's OK, of course; they're as entitled to their opinion as I am to mine. Which is there is no such thing. What there is, instead, is a horribly complex mish-mash

of belief, hope, longing, confusion, mistake, misinterpretation, psychology, hoax and, hoo-hah.

The Parkers' latest book, *The Power of Magic*, is an interesting read. It is in two parts, covering Ancient Magic and Living Magic. The first part looks at magic in a historical context, including contact with the spirit world, rites, rituals and superstitions, the origins of witchcraft, sexual magic, alchemy and soothsaying. Part two looks at the practice of magic today, taking in wicca, talismans, alternative medicine, numerology and prediction. There are, of course, the obligatory photographs of sky-clad wicca enthusiasts dancing lugubriously in the woods, looking rather goose-pimply.

The authors believe that magic has real power, and in a sense they are right. Within the right social contexts, the practice of rituals can certainly affect the practitioners, and those who are members of 'the club'. What it *can't* do is to manipulate the natural world. The universe is far too myste-

rious and beautiful to be affected by people fiddling about with eye-of-newt or whatever today's shrink-wrapped mail-order equivalent might be.

However, it has to said that this is a handsomely illustrated, and well-written book, containing plenty of valuable reference material for skeptics and enthusiasts alike. It makes truly fascinating reading, if one can remember that what the book is *really* concerned with is the human psyche, in all its genuine strangeness. It is there, if anywhere, that the 'power of magic' lies.

—John Leslie

## Witch power?

Laurie Cabot with Tom Cowan, *Power of the Witch (A Witch's Guide to her Craft)* (Arkana, 294pp., 1992, pbk, £5.99)

There are Witches in Salem—the author is one! However, they do not work Sky-Clad (nude), do not engage in ritual sex, and have nothing to do with Black Magic or Satanism. They are followers of the benign Old Religion, worshipping the Great Goddess and her Horned Consort, the Tao, or even the Force. The works of Graves and Campbell are mentioned, as is Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

Called 'magicians' in the Ancient World, 'shamans' in Siberia, and 'druids' among the Celts, from Sumeria to the Americas they have been priests, healers, counsellors, and visionaries, aware that the Earth and all living beings form an interconnected web. Ancient matriarchal, nature-oriented civilisations like the Celts gave way eventually to patriarchy, and Witches were forcibly suppressed under Christianity in the Burning Times of the Middle Ages and, later, in Salem itself!

Their methods include invocation, ritual circles, charging magical tools, divination (with runes, Tarot cards, crystals, and so on), herbs, drumming, chanting, trance, and the use of dreams and guided visualisation (as popularised by Jung and many other modern psychologists). However, they need to be prosperity-conscious nowadays—don't we all?—and to balance spiritual and material needs.

The author mentions, without critical comment, auras, quantum connectedness, Kirlian photography, talismans for protection, and the myth of alpha consciousness (in relaxation, meditation and dreaming). She believes that psychic power is reliable, having been scientifically researched by Rhine, Tart, Targ and others, that 'as long as a species has a purpose, it will survive', that 'energy moves in coils like a serpent', and that electromagnetism runs along ley-lines similarly. Her incantations, affirmations, visualisations and magical diagrams would probably help some people, if only those with psychosomatic or self-image problems, but I should like to see some evidence for the efficacy of her psychic diagnoses and healing, together with some mention of the possible dangers of alternative medical practice.

Did photographs really show blue light after a magic ceremony (page 132)? Did she really make it snow in Summer (page 169) or magic a £5 note onto her plate in a restaurant (page 219)? Does a 32% success rate really prove a scientific hypothesis (page 140)?—chance alone would do

better, such as in coin tossing trials! Is science really rediscovering the Hermetic laws? I was a little irritated by her continual references to Pythagoras and *The Kybalion*, without any critical considerations. The book has a chart of planetary correspondences, but unfortunately no bibliography, and—of course—no reference to skeptics or to CSICOP, while Colin Wilson, Itzhak Bentov, Fritjof Capra, David Peat, T C Lethbridge, and Madame Blavatsky herself, are cited as great authorities.

There is good advice on magical dress and the use of scents to attract a lover (not to mention charging tools!). If you want to guard against psychic attacks, find a soul mate, or just talk to the flowers, this is the book for you; just don't take any wooden pentacles!

—Mike Rutter

## Hot air in the forest

Steve Blamires, *The Celtic Magical Tradition* (Aquarian, 1992, pbk, 256pp., £7.99)

This book is an attempt to partly explore the native magic traditions of the ancient Irish Celtic Legends. The vehicle for this exploration is the Battle of Moytura which is presented in 167 sections, with narrations and practical work. The battle itself is actually two battles concerning the actions of two races, the Tuatha De Danann (The People of Craftsmanship) and the Fomoirie. The actions centres around four cities; *Falias* (Earth), *Goria* (Fire), *Murias* (Water) and *Findias* (Air) and four magical objects; a stone, a spear, a sword and a cauldron. There are also four obligatory wizards—each based in one of the four cities.

Hot Findias (Air) is aplenty in the narration of the 167 sections. The sections themselves are never more than a few sentences but Blamires must surely have kissed the very Blarney Stone himself to have stretched out his narrations to such lengths. Section 55 is a mere 34 words and his narration is more than ten times that length—at 349 words. This would be fine if what Blamires said was either interesting or credible. The list of books in the bibliography may be long, but there is very little reference in the text to what other people think of his interpretation of this ancient legend. The word 'I' is heavily over-used in these subjective ramblings.

The practical work is introduced occasionally with the reader being invited to take part in journeying to an inner-world. There are 14 practical sections, the first four of which introduce us to the Four Teachers of the Tuatha De Danann and how to obtain four magical weapons. Blamires describes outdoor scenes in which the reader meets people and has conversations. This form of pseudo-meditation is quite relaxing in a way—there is no harm in dreaming of the green fields of Ireland with Enya playing 'Orinoco Flow' in the background, or Christie Moore's lilting tones (he is recommended in the discography)—but to imagine that this is magic is beyond me. We are advised to take everything in our inner-world seriously. Not so easy for many women when they get to the final practical work and have to imagine mating with another woman (to think of this in the physical sexual way is to 'let mundane thoughts and emotions block its higher flow').

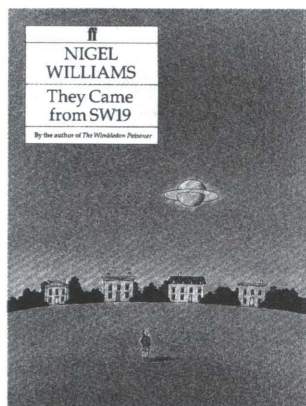


I did not enjoy this book much at all, although the legend itself was quite interesting to read. Meditation is a perfectly respectable and relaxing pass-time, but what Blamires suggests is more than this. Standing in a clearing in a forest at dawn with four candles and 'cleansed' magical weapons is not exactly what I would describe as a constructive attitude to everyday life. At least one thing is for sure—I won't have to buy my daily rag for advice from Dear Marge (or whoever) because I have my very own Aengus Mac Oc in my inner-world who will give to advice on how to forge my way in life. No dancing in circles in this book though, and I still don't know how to turn my acne-ridden brother into a toad either (but the search goes on).

—Terry Robinson

## Aliens in spirit

Nigel Williams, *They Came from SW19* (Faber and Faber, 1992, 250pp., hbk, £14.99)



'You may find this hard to believe, but Operation Majestic 12 really happened. You can look it up in *The UFO Report*, by Timothy Good, if you like. It's the most convincing evidence we have of an alien invasion of this planet, and a matter of public record'. So speaks Simon Britton, a 14 year-old angst-ridden ufology enthusiast and hero

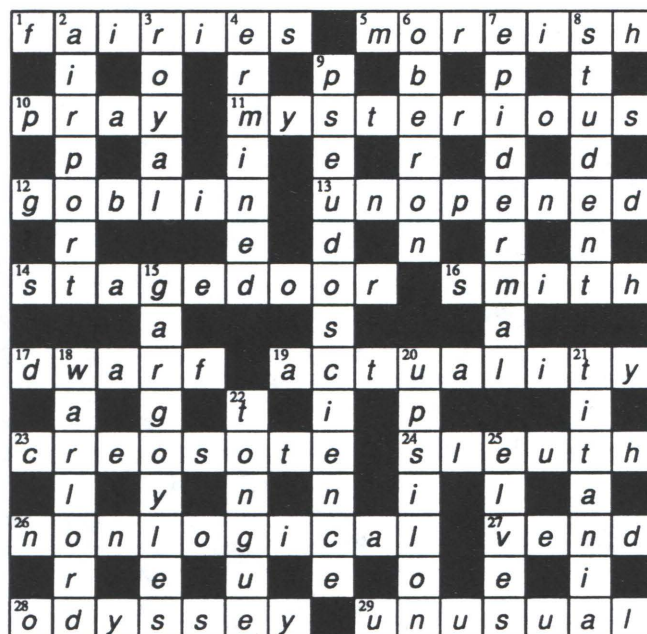
of Nigel Williams' gloriously skeptical novel *They Came from SW19*.

Life is far from simple for Simon. On top of the traumas of being an adolescent male trapped in Wimbledon, Simon's parents and their friends are involved with a spiritualist church of such strangeness that members of the Aetherius Society would look like Rotarians in comparison. Imagine Doris Stokes teaming up with Vic Reeves and you have some idea. Members of the First Church of Christ Spiritualist follow the teachings of Rose Fox (who had been John Wesley in a previous life), which range from the reasonable 'Wave thine extremities and be joyful' to the rather awkward 'Face north-west whenever possible'. They eat only with spoons, after the spirit moved one respected member of the church to assert: 'Forks do the devil's work, and knives grieve the spirit'. After Simon's father dies, things get progressively stranger as a local ufologist disappears and messages from aliens start coming through the church's trance medium. What is the alien 'Argol' from star system BG4543/2221 really up to? Well..., no, that would be telling.

Alongside blistering satires of physical mediumship, UFO cover-ups and the social shenanigans of churchgoing, Nigel Williams juggles an affecting story of an adolescent boy trying to make sense of the confusing, and extremely weird world in which he finds himself. Hilarious and rewarding.

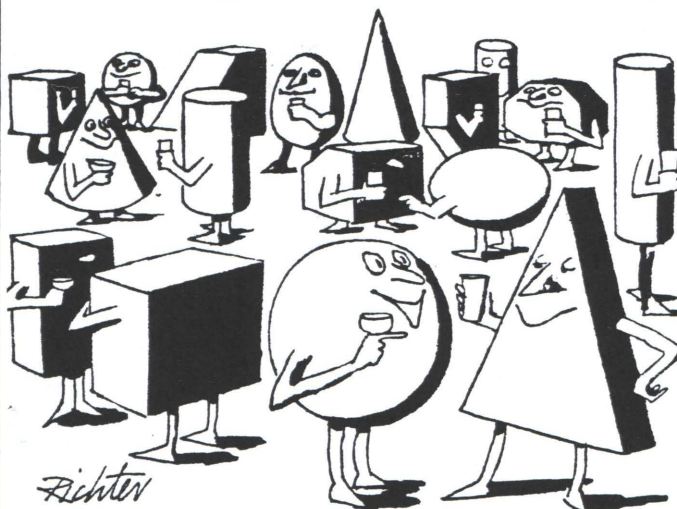
—John Yates

# Crossword Solution



Congratulations to Nick Neave of Durham, who is the winner of last issue's Skepticus crossword competition. We predict that Joe Nickell's book *Secrets of the Supernatural* (published by Prometheus Books) will mysteriously materialise on his bookshelf.

Prometheus Books specialises in skeptical books about the paranormal. For a free catalogue, write to Prometheus Books, 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex, IG10 4PZ.



"Not THE Bermuda triangle?"

## BOOKSEARCH

Good price paid for John Fuller's book *Arigo: Surgeon of the Rusty Knife*.

Contact Ian Rowland on: 081 664 6378.

# Letters



## Lights, bags and circles

Some ricochets from the last issue of *The Skeptic*: UFOs. In 1942, before Flying Saucers, myself and the lad next door acquired some Verey cartridges and fired them from a piece of long piping stuck in a brazier (no black-out where we lived). The coloured lights soared high. Next day we wrote to a major newspaper, tongue-in-cheek, about seeing 'lights in the sky'. A couple of people in our suburb wrote to say they'd seen them. But even more wrote from impossibly far away, saying they'd seen coloured lights near them, too. Autosuggestion?

Stephen Moreton (Letters) on Dave Mitchell's gas-bag experiments, and his own flaming condoms: Something funny here. In the mid-1970s, from my Knightsbridge office, I saw a large sort of plastic 'mattress', about 20 feet long, wallowing along over the rooftops, and gaining height. As it was heading for the Heathrow approach path, I phoned Heathrow radar (not easy, but I quoted my pilot's licence number, and got through), and warned them. The object didn't appear on radar, and finally flew up, up and away. Never found what it was. Probably Dave Mitchell.

Crop circles. Dr Terence Meaden is at it again, in a recent issue of *Current Archaeology*, insisting yet again that prehistoric crop circles persuaded our ancestors to build their huts and even Stonehenge circular. Funny, our engineering professor used their circular shape as evidence that their builders, not being quite thick, realised that circular huts are stronger than square ones, use less material, and conserve warmth better.

And now a special message for Robin Allen ('Hoaxers on Trial'). On Sunday 9 August I passed the West Wycombe field where the hoax crop circles had been made on 12 July.

Would you believe... there were at least a dozen people scattered all over it, earnestly waving metal detectors around. Now *there's* a paranormal mystery!

John Clarke  
Uxbridge

## Matters of belief

In his article 'The Science of Miracles' (*The Skeptic*, 6.4), Eric Stockton seems to be arguing that we must be prepared to believe any rubbish put before us, no matter how it conflicts with 'known' science, because all knowledge is necessarily open to question and is subject to later correction.

The amount of evidence needed to establish a proposition must depend on our past experience. If someone tells me they saw my wife 10 minutes ago in the next village, I may well believe them. I am, however, likely to disbelieve if I have just telephoned my wife in a town 100 miles away. I am even more likely to disbelieve if I am single. This is a consideration well-known to thinking readers of detective stories. It is dealt with in books on scientific inference under the term 'prior probability'. I am much more prepared to believe that a magician is cheating than that he has disproved the first two laws of thermodynamics.

In another article in the same issue Tim Axon is unduly kind to those who believe that no physical quantity has a definite value until it has been observed by a human being. There is even an interpretation of a 'thought experiment' according to which a cat in a closed box is neither alive nor dead until a human looks into the box, when the cat suddenly takes on the status of having died some determinable time ago. This attitude seems to imply that there were no dinosaurs until humans realise they had existed, no Big Bang until humans discovered it had happened,

and indeed neither history nor cosmology until humans looked for evidence of them.

This view resembles solipsism—the belief that only I exist and that everything else is the invention of my brain. Like solipsism it can be made consistent with any facts whatever, but such fruitless beliefs are hardly science.

Alan Jones  
Devon

## Miracles, not tricks

Paul Daniels' claim to do tricks 'just like Jesus' (Hits & Misses, *The Skeptic*, 6.4) shows how most magicians view miracles. I first became acquainted with spiritualism through reading Houdini's book *A Magician Among the Spirits* (a cat among the pigeons). *The Skeptic* reports that Premenand 'ran flaming torches down his bare arm'—a trick children do with candles. Can this be the stuff of miracles? Jesus never billed himself a star performer, nor did he charge for his fish and chip suppers. Jesus was a psychic—nothing more—and like other psychics he said, 'What I can do, you can do also'.

When Sai Baba produces objects with a wave of his hand—often of a kind requested—he makes a present of them, even though fashioned of gold and precious stones. I do not think Randi and Premenand do so. It is true Randi has offered to buy a miracle, but, as Sai Baba says: 'I show you something, and you still do not believe in the miracle. You should learn to do things for yourself. It is possible'.

Uri Geller also invites people to try bending spoons themselves, by concentrating while he is broadcasting, which would be pointless if trickery were involved. Skeptics, of course, concentrate on *not* bending—successfully.

Tom Banner  
Surrey



## Serious cerealogy

Like Robin Allen ('Hoaxers on Trial', *The Skeptic* 6.4) I did not witness the circle-making competition, but I was closely enough concerned with its conception, design, rules and evaluation to recognise how wide of the mark Allen's article was. 'One does not need to be a cynic to suspect a tawdry Public Relations exercise designed to discredit the hoaxing hypothesis...' he writes. True: one needs to be singularly ill-informed and thoroughly prejudiced. Allen scores on both counts.

The government's former chief scientist, Lord Zuckerman, in a highly perceptive (and moderately skeptical) article in the *New York Review of Books* last autumn urged those seeking to evaluate crop circles scientifically to conduct precisely such a competition. Another distinguished scientist, Dr Rupert Sheldrake, formed a small committee, and raised sufficient sponsorship money (not, as implied by Allen, from *The Guardian*) to carry out this exercise. And while it was a great social success, its objective was as rigorously scientific as the inherent difficulties of the operation would allow. It was to establish as objectively as possible the gap between competently created man-made pictograms and those which experienced observers had hitherto deemed genuine, i.e., not man-made. Since open competition implies publicity and public observation, if not participation, the venture inevitably risked the derision of bigots. It was made clear by the organisers that the competition could not prove anything, but that it could give more reliable guidance in future to circle investigators. In this way one would hope to minimise the waste and frustration of sampling crops and soil from formations which were clearly man-made. Not a hint of that in Allen's article, though he must have been well aware of the facts.

The Wessex Skeptics, of which Allen is a member, had been invited to nominate a judge, and declined—wisely I think. The judges, all of whom believe in the genuineness of

the phenomenon, were honest enough to admit to surprise at the high standard. None I have questioned considered that the circle makers did 'supremely well'.

A survey I carried out among those who observed the circle-making contest as well as judges and others, shows that the amount of noise made and light observed was far greater than would have been safe for any hoaxer operating in darkest Wiltshire (night photographs clearly support this); that the amount of light from the neighbouring village (of West Wycombe) and town of High Wycombe, as well as from the cars and street lamps, made the contest unrealistically easy. So did the absence of penalties for carrying elaborate equipment.

Considering the efforts that are now being made by serious cerealogists here and abroad to investigate the phenomenon scientifically, it is particularly unpleasant to read Allen's sneer that the popular press (whose reports of the event trivialised where they did not misrepresent it) is the 'cerealological equivalent of scientific literature'. From all I have gathered, the circle makers were not able to reproduce satisfactorily a number of features I have seen this year in Wiltshire. That doesn't mean that they can't ever be done: simply that those who participated in open competition, and in favourable circumstances, either were unable or were not invited (because it may not have been a specific requirement) to do so.

Montague Keen  
Sudbury, Suffolk

## Twist and... talk

Concerning 'Mirror Talk' (Psychic Diary, *The Skeptic*, 6.3). Curious readers who cannot afford \$199.95 for an 'official' Mirror Talk machine might like to know that an ordinary cassette recorder can be converted into an effective substitute. Simply record in the usual way, then sever the tape at the end of one side, twist through 180 degrees, and re-connect. It will now play backwards!

(P.S. If anyone thinks that this information is worth \$199.95, it would be greatly appreciated.)

Yilmaz Magurtzey  
Edinburgh

## Specialist knowledge

Ray Ward doubts that Specialist Knowledge Services has many customers amongst readers of *The Skeptic*. Well, I for one have been an SKS customer.

If one is to have a skeptical interest in the paranormal, then it is useful to have access to paranormal publications etc. and SKS are a very good source. I assume that most readers of *The Skeptic* are sensible enough to judge for themselves the value of the various publications offered by SKS, and are unlikely to become sudden converts to spoon-bending, belief in fairies, and so on.

Incidentally, Dr Hugh Pincott, who runs SKS, is a very charming and pleasant man who, in my experience, is happy to engage in correspondence with skeptics on paranormal issues.

John Rowe  
London

## New Age physics

I thought I recognised the diagram on the cover of *The Skeptic*, 6.4 as a Feynman diagram, possibly showing the exchange between a proton and a pion. However the directions of the arrows confused me. Surely one set of arrows (either the top two or the bottom two) should be reversed.

Particles and energy cannot emerge from nothing (except perhaps at the Big Bang!).

Steuart Campbell  
Edinburgh

*Mr Campbell misses the point. The cover of The Skeptic 6.4 shows a Feynman diagram illustrating New Age physics.*

*The spontaneous generation of four protons interacting via a pion exchange may be the energy source for poltergeists, TM-levitation and spontaneous human combustion.*

Eds.

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- 6 **Creationism in Australia**; Noah's Ark founders on the facts; Hunting Nessie;

### Volume 2 (1988)

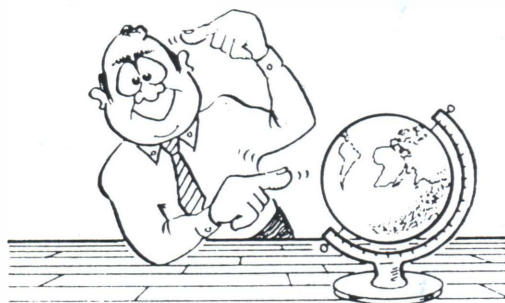
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- 2 **Doris Collins and the Sun**; Paul Kurtz interview-1; State of the art; S.G. Soal: master of deception.
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