

BOOK REVIEWS

ABNORMAL HYPNOTIC PHENOMENA: A SURVEY OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CASES. Eric J. Dingwall (Ed.). Volume I: France, by E. J. Dingwall. Volume II: Belgium and the Netherlands, by G. Zorab; Germany, by L. Moser; Scandinavia, by E. Bjelfverstam. London: J. & A. Churchill, Ltd., 1967. Pp. vii + 328; viii + 256. 50s (each).

The frequent intertwining of the histories of hypnotism and parapsychology has at least four causes. First, hypnotic and psi phenomena seem to have always had a supernatural aura about them, thus tending to unite them in the popular mind. Second, many of the early hypnotists invoked the alleged clairvoyant and telepathic abilities of their subjects as proof of the reality of the hypnotic trance. Third, there is a body of evidence suggesting that hypnosis may be useful in eliciting many of the forms of behavior of interest of parapsychologists. And fourth, alas, the annals of hypnosis and parapsychology contain the names of a disconcerting number of frauds, fools, and crackpots.

All four of these types of interrelationships are documented in the first two volumes of *Abnormal Hypnotic Phenomena*. Within the limits that they have set for themselves (selected European countries during the nineteenth century), Dingwall and his associates provide us with a virtually exhaustive compendium of alleged paranormal phenomena allegedly induced in allegedly hypnotized subjects.

As the authors repeatedly point out, the reality of the hypnotic state emerges far more clearly than the reality of anything paranormal. Still, a number of fascinating individual performances are described, quite worthy of careful consideration by parapsychologists and their critics. There is, for example, the remarkable Calixte Renaux, a young man apparently capable of telepathic and clairvoyant feats that do not readily yield to the usual explanations of phony blindfolds, "muscle reading," or collusion. Similarly, accomplishments of the Didier brothers constitute a challenge worthy of the most dedicated skeptic. To give but one additional illustration, there is Becht's patient, "Louise," whose manifestations of precognition

and traveling clairvoyance were of such a nature that a paranormal explanation can be avoided only by recourse to a very complicated conspiracy theory.

These spectacular performances notwithstanding, the bulk of the cases reviewed are clearly specious, as transparent as the blindfolds that constituted indispensable parts of so many of the early exhibitions. Both volumes are replete with episodes describing the tribulations of would-be psychics whose powers invariably deserted them in the presence of impartial investigating committees—episodes that seem comic until the reader remembers the continuing quest by contemporary experimenters for the Grail of replicability.

Indeed, what gives these books their particular fascination is the inescapable juxtaposition of past and present. The petitions of hypnotists and their clairvoyant somnambulists throughout the nineteenth century for endorsement by the scientific Establishment strikingly foreshadow the attempts by the PA to gain recognition from the AAAS. Dermal vision, psychometry, and medical diagnosis at a distance were all subjects of lively debate in the previous century, as in this one. And it is of interest to note that a French Commissioner of Police "considered it to be in the interests of society that persons attached to the police force should have a somnambule at their disposal in order to discover and punish the guilty" (V. 1, pp. 190-91); the year was 1852.

On the other hand, these volumes also make clear the ways in which both parapsychology and hypnosis have matured during the past 150 years. The gradual recognition of the need for controlled experiments is vividly traced, along with the equally gradual increase in understanding of the nature of hypnosis. The latter development is especially noteworthy. Mesmer's concept of the magnetic fluid was worse than fruitless, effectively blocking progress in hypnotic research for several decades. Nevertheless, it stubbornly held on (probably because of its insusceptibility to disproof) until being finally supplanted by the far more useful concept of suggestibility. In the course of their joint progression, hypnosis and parapsychology frequently became associated with spiritualism. This tendency, probably inevitable, does not escape the acrimonious notice of Dingwall and his colleagues. The authors of the two books unite in reject-

ing all forms of spiritualism, with a vehemence not in keeping with the generally detached tone that prevails on other pages.

In addition to occasional lapses in objectivity, these volumes have a number of other flaws that make unequivocal enthusiasm impossible. The two books suffer from an almost total lack of integration. Despite the fact that the various authors sometimes have occasion to refer to the same individuals and events, there is virtually no cross-referencing. The lack of meaningful connection between the books is also evidenced by the marked differences in presentation adopted by the authors. Dingwall, in Volume I, is scholarly and authoritative (perhaps reflecting his early training as an anthropologist), but his commendable attention to details appears to prevent him from making analytical or interpretive remarks that get below the surface. On the other hand, the authors in Volume II may be somewhat less complete in their coverage but they are more willing to offer integrative hypotheses that make for more interesting and satisfying reading. Stylistically, a disconcerting disparity exists between Dingwall's own graceful writing and the plodding, sometimes ungrammatical prose in Zorab's two chapters. In short, Dingwall appears to have been more successful as an author than as an editor.

A second general criticism concerns the scope of the volumes. Though written as history, both volumes reveal a striking lack of historical perspective. Aside from a few refreshing exceptions, the authors make no attempt to relate their subject matter to the broader cultural and intellectual developments that were occurring simultaneously during the period under examination. Thus, instead of constituting a contribution to the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, these books all too often offer merely a set of anecdotes devoid of meaningful context. A part of the problem might result from the disjointed, country-by-country presentation. As already indicated, I would have preferred a more unified approach.

Also lacking here is any attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the phenomena being described. There is frequent mention of the hypersensitivity of hypnotized individuals, enabling them to utilize what would otherwise be subliminal cues. But, assuming that at least a few of these cases presented are genuinely paranormal and without the possibility of sensory leakage, what is the mechanism by

which hypnosis plays its eliciting or facilitating role? The authors are strangely silent.

Finally, an unwelcome prudishness pervades these volumes, almost suggesting that they were written in the century they are describing. One example will have to suffice here: "In the seventh experiment Professor G. Max stroked Schrenck-Notzing's tongue with a brush soaked in turpentine, at which Lina made marked gestures of disgust, expressing her repugnance both in words and by indignantly spitting repeatedly on the floor. She even showed her objection in a way which was unmentionable" (V. II, p. 182). Hmm.

(Two more volumes, covering the rest of Europe, the United States, and Latin America, are scheduled to complete this series. Hopefully, at least some of the flaws listed above will be rectified in these later volumes.)

Despite their defects, these books are so full of well-documented and otherwise difficult-to-obtain information that they are bound to serve as frequent references for scholars interested in either hypnosis or parapsychology. It is a pleasure to report, therefore, that the subject- and author-indices appended to each volume are of unusually high quality.

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DE ZIN VAN HET HYLISCH PLURALISME (The Import of Hylic Pluralism). OCHÊMA, Vols. VI-A, VI-B, and VI-CD. By J. J. Poortman. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Co., 1967. 3 vols. Pp. 746. Dutch guilders 60.

In the first two volumes of this extensive work on the problem of *Ochêma*, a Greek term denoting a "vehicle," the writer collects and reviews all the various religious and philosophic beliefs connected with the idea that the human soul possesses a vehicle, an instrument formed of some subtle matter. In a great many ways this vehicle is to be regarded as the equivalent of what, in various occult systems and also in psychical research, is known as the hypothetical *astral body*, the etheric or fluidic double, etc. Poortman's term "hylic