

## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE ART OF DREAMING** by Carlos Castaneda. Aquarian, London, 1993. £9.99 (hardback).

The case of Carlos Castaneda is a very odd one. Other writers have pulled off straightforward hoaxes, though not for long; none, I imagine, has been awarded a doctorate in anthropology for writing best-sellers, followed that up by six more books on the same theme, and then had a whole book devoted to exposing him.

Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* came out in 1969 and was set out like a genuine, but atypically fascinating, anthropological account of a Mexican shaman's magical practices. It sold 300,000 copies, and sequels did almost as well. Exposure came with Richard de Mille's *Castaneda's Journey* (published in Britain in 1978), from which it became clear that Castaneda, an elusive Peruvian who first emigrated to California in the 1950s, could not actually have been taught by a Yaqui sorcerer to eat magic mushrooms and see visions and experience bilocations and time turned inside-out. Those of us with sheep-like rather than goat-like attitudes to the paranormal were disappointed. Castaneda is nevertheless no ordinary con man — as de Mille says, he lies to bring us truth.

The guiding theme throughout the books (which got weaker as invention began to run out) is the relative nature of consensus reality, and the need to envisage alternative realities—a subject in which parapsychology has a stake. They are very much of their time and place—the LSD years in California—but are inventive and lively, good fairy-tales for grown-ups that also incorporate much knowledge about shamanism and hallucinogenic plants.

In this ninth volume, Castaneda explains its late appearance by saying that, although he was taught for years by Don Juan how to manipulate dreams magically, he has only now acquired the 'energy' to remember and recount the experiences. 'Energy' is no small word here; the whole theme of the book is that all is energy, and the sorcerer acquires enhanced power when he learns to see pure energy rather than formal appearances. Castaneda's concept of energy is reminiscent of Myers's when the latter says that "the life of the organism depends on perpetual and varying indraft from the cosmic energy" and that it flourishes when it is "carried to some unknown pitch of intensity which draws fresh energy from the metetherial world".

Nevertheless, Castaneda's bag of tricks is getting rather empty, and this latest book may not find him many new readers. The influences behind it are probably the literature on lucid dreaming, the South American 'magical realist' school of fiction, and a tinge of alien-abduction myth. Castaneda's aliens are called inorganic beings and are seven feet high and a foot wide, rather than little and green. They come not from space but from other time-worlds, eager to grab humans to acquire their energy supplies. This brings in a theme familiar from fairy-tales and myths: the human who strays into the 'other' world and is trapped there.

De Mille in his book on Castaneda wonders whether the link between psi

and this literary hoax will contribute to uninformed hostility towards parapsychology. I doubt if this has been the case. Castaneda's books will remain an important reflection of post-1960s fascination with alternative realities and states of consciousness.

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**UNUSUAL PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DATA FROM THREE NATIONAL SURVEYS** conducted by the Roper Organization for Bigelow Holding Corporation. Obtainable from them at 4640 South Eastern, Las Vegas, Nevada 89119.

If Democracy has a voice, it is surely that of the polls. If the Man in the Street cannot, of himself, make his voice heard, at least he can do so as a unit in a statistical sample. Here, if anywhere, we can expect to learn the truth about what people really believe.

Alas, a poll is only as trustworthy as those who phrase its questions. Before we accept its findings as the Voice of the People, we must ask ourselves how neutral, how disinterested, were those who framed it?

In the case of this particular report, it is particularly important that we have trust in those who compiled it, because its findings, if valid, constitute the most extraordinary thing that has happened to the human race throughout its entire history. "This survey . . . suggests that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of American men, women and children may have experienced UFO abductions, or abduction-related phenomena" (p. 7).

This is to say that there are, living in the United States, hundreds of thousands (at the lowest estimate) of people who have been taken from their homes or automobiles by extraterrestrial aliens, and carried aboard their spaceships, generally for the purposes of medical examination. Unless we suppose the aliens to be exclusively interested in American citizens, we must envisage the possibility that a similar proportion of the rest of the world's population have undergone the same experience. Which makes it statistically likely that, even if you who read this review have not yourself been abducted by aliens (and you wouldn't necessarily know it if you had), you know someone who has (who could be equally unaware of it).

Faced with so serious a scenario, it would be irresponsible not to take this document seriously. And we are given every encouragement to do so, for "it is the collective effort of a Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, a Professor of Sociology at Eastern Michigan University, an Associate Professor of History at Temple University, a psychiatric therapist in Springfield, Missouri, an author and researcher from New York City, and a large polling organization" (p.5). Clearly there is more to this than a Sunday tabloid sending its minions into suburban shopping malls to take the pulse of the nation by way of drumming up headlines in a slack week.

On the other hand, the sentence which follows the one just quoted tells us that "the report has been funded by two interested individuals", and naturally this invites the question who these individuals are and what their interest is.