

magonia

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EDITORIAL NOTES

First of all we would like to apologise to our readers for the rather poor graphical appearance of this issue of *Magonia*, which quite frankly is something of a dog's-dinner. Unfortunately our high-quality electronic typewriter, with its elegant daisy-wheel printer, broke down about a quarter of the way through setting up articles for the magazine. The good news was that just at that time we took delivery of one of the now famous little Amstrad word-processors (as has just about every other small magazine in Britain, it seems) which has enabled us to finish producing copy. The combination of styles and layouts is not aesthetically pleasing, but at least the magazine is out. Next issue we hope to be able to produce something more worthy of our readers. Please bear with us.

As promised, this issue deals largely with BOLS/earthlights/fireballs or what you will. We have had a good response to our call for articles and more will appear in the next issue. If you have any views on the subject, or would like to comment on the contents of this issue, please let us know.

SHITO DAMA The Japanese Fireball Spirit

Michael Goss

The Japanese spirit world is populated by a strange crew; there are teasing, shape-changing entities known as *kitsune* or 'fox spirits' which delight in deceiving lone travellers; there are bird-faced *tengu* in the forests, and half-human, half turtle *kappa* in the deep ponds. And of course there are the ghosts of the departed who cling obsessively to the things left undone or uncorrected in their earthly existence. These phantasms have amused Western readers ever since folklore retailers like Lafcadio Hearn and A.B. Mitford made the mythologies of Japan accessible to non-specialist audiences. Yet the *shito-dama*, the 'fireball spirit' remains a largely unpublicized quantity.

In Japan more than anywhere else in the world, spirits of the departed tend to harbour strong feelings on justice. Above all, a ghost is unlikely to rest until the wrongs which led to its being deprived of a physical existence have been put right. Take as an example the unhappy and vengeful spirit of O Same - she died of a broken heart for the love of a handsome priest - who was blamed for the great Tokyo fire of 1788 that killed 180,000 inhabitants. She was protesting from beyond the grave about the way that her fine dress (presented to the temple after her death) had been sold. After two young female owners had died of lovesickness not long after acquiring the secondhand garment, the dress was judged to be possessed and a ceremonial exorcism-by-burning arranged. In the course of this a mysterious wind whisked a burning sleeve into the rafters, causing the conflagration which fire-conscious Japanese narrators claimed was one of the worst in the history of mankind.

History, mythology and supernatural revenge on the living - including those not directly responsible for and probably not even born at the time of the original offence - rank high in this and other tales garnered towards the end of the nineteenth century by Richard Gordon Smith. During nine years in Japan where he was chiefly engaged in collecting natural history specimens for the British Museum he had unusual opportunity to talk to fishermen, farmers, priests and children, drawing from them folk material which might otherwise never have reached the west. Much of it featured ghostly apparitions and none of it was more puzzling than the fireball-like spirit that informants styles *shito-dama*.

Though he never saw one for himself, Smith encountered belief in *Shito-dama* on several occasions and in several places. One such instance happened on a visit to Lake Biwa, the famously-beautiful stretch of water in the southwest of the main island that is named after the traditional four-stringed lute-like instrument of Japan.

One of the lesser attractions of Biwa-Ko - not one of its 'Eight Beauties' celebrated by Japanese poets - was the small settlement of Seze. As Smith indicates, the 'settlement' amounted to little more than the lakeside cottage of a very old fisherman and his three sons who owned and operated "an immense fish trap which runs out into the lake nearly a mile, and is a disgrace to all civilized ideas of conservation". the family had

apparently acquired the rights a century or more before from the local *daimyo* (lord).

Though a little bewildered to find a visitor - and a foreigner! - interested in simple tales that even his sons didn't care to hear nowadays, the elderly fisherman had a few 'truths' (or as we'd say, folk yarns) concerning his part of the lake. First and most intriguing of these was the *shito-dama* or 'Spider Fire of the Spirit of the Dead Akechi'. Rooted in local history, the fireball was a fact as far this aged narrator was concerned: "a curious and unpleasant thing" that he had seen at first hand - evidently too close and too often for his comfort.

The fireball was seen on the lake in wet weather, began the narrator, and it was "The Spirit of Akechi". Whether Smith realised it or not, the old man must have been referring to the *daimyo* Akechi Mitsuhide, familiar to generations of Japanese as "Shogun of Thirteen Days". Akechi was famed for an act of revenge and rebellion; he had waited five years before rising against his liege-lord Nobunaga whom he held responsible for the death of his mother and he capped the encompassing of his enemy's death by proclaiming himself Shogun or military dictator (and effectual ruler) of Japan. From the time of his rebellion to his total defeat by Nobunaga's righthand-man Hideyoshi Toyotomi and thence to his death in 1582, Akechi had enjoyed a paltry 13 days of glory, hence his popular title.

Historians say that Akechi Mitsuhide died *en route* for the safety of his Sakamoto castle, massacred at the hands of a peasant mob in the village of Ogorusu. Smith's informant had a more romantic version of that event which invested cold fact with picturesque overtones dear to the heart of folk-narrators and audiences everywhere... at the expense of actual cold fact itself. These overtones were the staple twin-elements of Japanese popular lore: betrayal and supernatural revenge.

According to the fisherman, Akechi had built his now-ruined castle at the foot of Mount Hiyei and when the time of his reverses came he held it against a siege by the far larger forces of Hideyoshi. The castle might well have remained untaken had not a fisherman from Magisa told the besiegers the secret of its watersupply. Once this lifeline was cut the garrison had no choice but to capitulate; Akechi and most of his men took the honourable way of forstalling the inevitable by committing suicide.

As already pointed out, this version of Akechi's bloody end does not square with the sober biographical details given in standard texts like Papinot's *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan*. More interest though, is the way that it lent itself to interpretation of a menacing local phenomena. For it was said that ever since the betrayal and death of Akechi:

"...in rain or rough weather, there has come from the castle a fireball, six inches in diameter or more. It comes to wreak vengeance on the fishermen, and causes many wrecks, leading boats out of their course. Sometimes it comes almost into the boat. Once a fisherman struck it with a bamboo pole, breaking it up into many fiery bits, and on that occasion many boats were lost... That is all sir, that I can tell of it - except that often have I seen it myself and feared it"

As a meteorological phenomenon - a literal fireball, perhaps, or ball lighting which is seen only in certain rough-weather conditions - the *shito-dama* of Akechi sounds quite believable. More important is the way in

which something that could possibly be a natural phenomenon has been interpreted as a *supernatural* one. Certain aspects of this process seem peculiarly adapted to the prevailing cultural beliefs against which the story is told; the *shito-dama's* purpose is revenge on fishermen because to this class belonged the man who in distant time offended against a dominant social law - namely, loyalty to one's lord. The spirit does not distinguish between innocent fishermen and the descendants (if any!) of the guilty one: *all* fishermen are guilty and hence legitimate subjects of its supernatural vengeance. That this rationale is founded on a non-existent or literally incorrect piece of history doesn't matter.

At the same time, the basic motif - a supernatural light over water commemorating a past homicidal tragedy engineered by betrayal of accepted human standards - is not uniquely Japanese. The *shito-dama* of Akechi bears comparison with themes implicit in Rhode Island's ghostly classic, the so-called 'Palatine Light'.

As described by one resident of Block Island, RI, in 1811, the light appears about half a mile out to sea: sometimes small, like an illumination from a far-off window, at other times reaching the heights of a fully-rigged sailing ship. Whatever its source, the oft-cited accounts indicate that the light was regularly reported throughout the 19th century and (more specifically) was just as much a reality for the residents of Block Island as the Akechi *shito-dama* was for the Seze fishermen. Also like their Japanese counterparts, the islanders usually attributed it to the paranormal - and to a piece of spurious criminal history.

The *Palatine* was supposed to have been a Philadelphia-bound immigrant boat lured onto Block Island in 1752 by wreckers who slaughtered the helpless survivors and set the vessel on fire. Since that day, ran the yarn, the blazing ship appeared sporadically offshore to testify to that foul and inhuman deed.

Local historians have proved quite confidently that there was *no* foul deed - at least not on the islander's side! and not even a ship named *The Palatine*. It is thought that the story derives from the wreck of the *Princess Augusta* in 1738 (not 1752) with 350 refugees who came from the German districts of the Upper and Lower Palatinates. The ship struck a hummock off Block Island, and the local inhabitants were almost wholly responsible for saving some of the immigrants despite the inexplicably callous behaviour on the part of the *Princess Augusta's* commanding officer; the ship eventually drifted away and sank after hitting a rock. Since she did not catch fire there seems no logical connection between the burning "Palatine light" and the ill-fated ship, save for the folk-rationalisation that the allegedly paranormal radiance at sea marked the feiry fate of a vessel which had come to be equated with the genuine wreck of 1738. As we have seen, Japanese folklore furnished similarly dubious reasons for the Akechi fireball to seek revenge on fishermen, quite ignoring the historical fact that Akechi had more reason to hate the land-based Ogurusu peasants than the boatmen of Seze.

The crux of the Akechi story is the way in which it shows how a rare but universal phenomenon - here, some kind of fireball - has been interpreted according to folklore conventions on the supernatural. For the fishermen it was not merely a random ball of light, but none other than a *shito-dama*.

Richard Gordon Smith wrote: "So much evidence have I got from personal acquaintances as to their existence, and even frequent occurrence, that I almost believe in them myself". The *Shito-dama* seems to have been such an integral part of Japanese beliefs that it is surprising to find so little on it from western commentators. Smith felt that the *shito-dama* was an astral spirit that could wander the earth after death. As such, this specifically Japanese form relates to a widespread tradition that some part of the human organism may survive death and be visible in or around the locality in which that terminal event took place. Japanese readers would have had little difficulty in understanding (and believing in) the pallid lights or "magnetic effluvia" said to have been witnesses by 19th century clairvoyants in graveyards.

Smith's informants divided *shito-dama* into two categories: some were of 'roundish tadpole shape', others 'more square fronted' and 'eyed' as in the case(s) of those belonging to a deaf man and a fisher-girl seen by two to three dozen people at Tsuboune near Naba. His hunter assistant Oto of Itama claimed that he and his son had seen the *shito-dama* of a dead woman that was something like an egg with a tail. At Toshihima a number of elderly men testified that the *shito-dama* belonging to a carpenter had been red, but more typically witnesses spoke of a smokey white phosphorescence.

Although *shito-dama* were firmly held to be manifestations of the human spirit, they were not to be confused with conventional ghosts of the dead. Generally speaking Japanese ghosts are always recognisably human in form. The *shito-dama* was nothing more than a moving light, perhaps an abstract of the human spirit. At the same time it might be seen alongside a more representational phantom. In Smith's ghoulish record of 'A Haunted Temple in Inaba Province' the *shito-dama* hovers and buzzes as it leads "the luminous skeleton of a man in loose priests' clothes with glaring eyes and a parchment skin!" The narrative makes it clear that both apparitions belong to the same murder victim.

A kind of limited intelligence directs the *shito-dama's* peregrinations. In common with haunting ghosts the world over, its actions seem defined by obsessive preoccupying thoughts, of which revenge or the desire to reveal the whereabouts of its mortal remains are usually paramount. Again, it may continue in an attempt to carry out some important act left unfinished by death.

The folktales collected by Gordon Smith were told and retold to him principally for their entertainment value. Then as now Oriental ghost stories can be enjoyed for that alone; they have a quaintness and charm of unfamiliarity that is hard to resist. But what does the *shito-dama* tell us about the Japanese approach to the paranormal? And has it any relevance to our own approach to that topic?

At folktale level a phenomenon which may sound to us uncommon but natural has been taken as something spiritual - a visual symbol of the soul, the astral body, or some other element that survives bodily death. The *shito-dama* stories also have a moral or educative value aimed at the living. The phenomenon is intended to reinforce a deep-rooted ethical teaching that binds humans and society. Overt or implicit, these underlying factors are loyalty and duty. Betrayal of trust - a terrible failing in a hierarchical society like that of Japan - brings evil consequences not merely for the individual but for those about him. Thus the fisherman who gave away his lord's secret and caused his death drew supernatural

SPOOKLIGHTS IN TRADITION
AND FOLKLORE

David Clarke

...Of purpose to deceive us
And leading us makes us stray
Long winter nights out of the way
And when we stick in mire or clay
He doth with laughter lead us
Drayton's *Nymphidia*

Few people today will have heard about the once common phenomenon known generally in the British Isles as 'Will o'the Wisp' or 'Jack o'Lantern'. Prior to the end of the 19th century this rural mystery was a terror familiar to night travellers, especially in the marshy, undrained areas which still remained in many parts of England.

Will o'the Wisp (henceforth WW, Ed.) is known to scientists by its Latin name *ignis fatuus* - foolish fire - and is variously described as a strong, flame-like light (often first taken for a lantern or the lights of a house in the distance) seen hovering over marshland just after sunset. However, many reliable witnesses have described seeing brilliant WVs dancing over hedgerows, rising high in the air or performing elaborate movements. They often appear to display signs of intelligence - the light is said to recede from an observer who approaches it, or follow him if he retires. This appears to contradict the long-held, but never proven, belief that WVs are caused by the spontaneous ignition of marsh-gas or 'phosphoretted hydrogen' in swampy areas.

In 1980 A.A. Mills, a chemist at Leicester University, published a study investigating the possible connections between marsh-gas and WVs.¹ He worked initially on the old premise that the phenomenon was due to ignition of natural gas or methane (CH₄), perhaps ignited by contamination with phosphine (PH₃) or a higher hydride. Mills experimentally tried to create a WW in his laboratory by filling a gallon glass bottle with compost, peat, eggs, bone meal and other such ingredients, which were then allowed to incubate at a warm temperature. He collected the 'marsh gas' which bubbled off, "but although repulsively odiferous it never displayed the slightest luminosity when allowed to come into contact with air". Further, Mills stated that to explain WW as marsh gas one had to "explain how to achieve natural ignition of intermittent, disconnected bubble of gas rising through the marsh". The suggestion that phosphine could provide this natural ignition is a non-starter, as phosphorous is never found in a pure state in nature, and vapour-phase chromatography has failed to detect even parts per million traces of phosphine in marsh gasses analysed in laboratories.

WW is therefore as much a mystery in our present age as he was to earlier generations. In recent times he appears to have disappeared from the countryside, along with fairies, as marshes have been drained, and as technology has re-defined his image for our modern perceptions. We now regard strange lights in the night sky as heralds of extraterrestrial visitors rather than the mischievous sprites, evil spirits and elementals which were once familiar to our ancestors.

In 1855 a writer in *Notes and Queries* asked if WW was still to be seen in any parts of the British Isles. He received replies from many correspondents, giving eyewitness accounts of recent sightings.

"I have little doubt," wrote one, "that the sprite is still to be met with in certain districts of Essex or among the Norfolk Broads... the inquirer might procure a sight of one if he would enquire of some rustic where they most frequently occur. But for this purpose he must know the vernacular name in the district where he lives"²

Nearly every country district of the British Isles has its own particular name for WW and his kind, most of them personalised - Joan the Wad (Devon and Cornwall); William with the little flame (Ireland); Jenny Burntail (Warwickshire); Kitty wi'the Wisp (Northumberland), and countless others. Similar names can be found throughout Europe: *irrlightern*, 'wandering light' (Germany); *feux-follets* (France); *Fuoco fatuo* (Italy); *lycktegubbe* 'lantern bearer' (Sweden) - suggesting a world-wide occurrence of similar phenomena. Other names have been given, or related to WW. Countryfolk and folklorists connect him with Puck, Robin Goodfellow, Friar Rush and other pagan elementals. These traditions are unwittingly continued on bonfire night when children place a candle in a hollowed-out turnip to represent the evil spirit or Jack o'Lantern.³

These wandering lights have been known to haunt certain spots for centuries. The folklore of the Scottish Highlands is particularly rich with stories concerning strange lights regarded as omens of death or disaster, and the Gaelic language has several names for them: *solus bairs*, a death light, *solus taisg*, a spectre light, and *teine biorach*, "a fire floating in the air like a bird".

In 'Ghostlights of the Western Highlands'⁴ R.C. McLagan writes that "there are places which have got their names from the belief that mysterious lights have appeared in their neighbourhood. Thus Creag an T-Soluis, a rock above Cairn near Port Charlotte, has its name from a belief that supernatural lights used to be seen about it. For the same reason another rock down at the shore below Cairn Cottage is called Carraig na Soluis."

Almost everywhere these lights are regarded as omens of death, particularly in Celtic countries where the 'corpse candle' tradition originates. One account describes the candle as a light "seen during the night slowly gliding from the house to the gate of the churchyard and along the church-road, but that by which the funeral processions pass"⁵ McLagan notes that

"In the Isle of Man, on May Eve, many of the inhabitants remain on the hills till sunrise, endeavouring to pry into futurity by observing particular omens. If a bright light were observed to issue, seemingly, from any house in the surrounding valleys, it was considered a certain indication that some member of that family was soon to be married; but if a dim light were seen, moving slowly in the direction of the parish church, it was then deemed equally certain that a funeral would soon pass that way to the churchyard!"⁷

This tradition is similar to that connecting the lights to areas of pre-historic sanctity - burial mounds, stone circles and ancient religious sites⁶. In Norwegian folklore the little islands off the coast were inhabited by dwarfs, and on festive nights were "lit up with countless blue lights that moved and skipped about without ceasing, borne by the little underground people; and the grave mounds of heroes emitted lamdent flames that guarded the dead and treasure buried with them"⁴.

A fascinating account of this kind appeared in the popular science magazine *English Mechanic* during 1919. This described how a correspondent, T. Sington, saw "strange lights... no doubt will o'the wisps" whilst walking with a friend in the dead of night near the ancient and spectacular Castlerigg Stone Circle near Keswick in the Lake District:

"When we were at a point near which the track branches off to the Druidical circle, we all at once saw a rapidly moving light as bright as the acetylene lamp of a bicycle, and we instinctively stepped to the road boundary wall to make way for it, but nothing came. As a matter of fact the light travelled at right angles to the road, say 20 feet above our level, possibly 200 yards or so away. It was a white light, and having crossed the road it suddenly disappeared. Whether it went out or passes behind an obstruction it is impossible to say, as I have not yet had an opportunity of again visiting the place during daylight. There is certainly no crossroads there. We then saw a number of lights possibly a third of a mile away, directly in the direction of the Druidical circle, but of course much fainter, no doubt due to distance, moving backwards and forwards horizontally; we stood watching them for a long time, and then only left as it was so late at the hotel people might think we were lost on the mountain (Helvellyn).

"Whilst we were watching a remarkable incident happened - one of the lights, and only one, came straight to the spot where we were standing; at first very faint, as it approached the light increased in intensity. When it came quite near I was in no doubt whether I should stoop below the boundary wall as the light would pass directly over our heads. But when it came close to the wall it slowed down, stopped, quivered, and slowly went out, as if the matter producing the light had become exhausted. It was globular, white, with a nucleus possibly six feet or so in diameter, and just high enough above ground to pass over our heads"

Mr Sington concluded his fascinating story by stating his suspicion that the ancient builders of the stone circle had selected this particular spot "owing to some local conditions at present unknown... such lights would have attracted the attention of the inhabitants, who would have attached great significance to them, and might then have selected the site as a place of worship or sacrifice."² In view of recent research at various megalithic sites by members of the Dragon Project³ Mr Sington's idea seems to be vindicated.

In *Folklore* (1894), Mr M.J. Walhouse describe a visit to the marvellous megalithic stone-rows at Carnac in Brittany, where he asked a boy who was guiding him about any local popular beliefs attached to the stones: "It was not easy to understand him, and I could only gather that on certain nights a flame was seen burning on every stone, and on such nights no-one would go near - the stones are there believed to mark burial places."¹⁰ Walhouse adds that "in the extreme south of India the Shanars, a very numerous caste of devil-worshippers, believe that waste-places, and especially burial grounds, are haunted by demons that assume various shapes, one after another, as often as the eye of the observer turns away, and are often seen gliding over marshy land like flickering lights. They are called in Tamil *pey-neruppu*, i.e. devil fires. Riding late after dark over a jungle tract near mountains I once saw what the natives averred was a *pey-neruppu*; it seemed a ball of pale flame, the size of an orange, moving in a fitful wavering way above the bushes and passing out of sight behind trees; its movements resembled the flight of an insect, but I know of none in India

that shows any such light; the fireflies there are no larger than fireflies in Italy."¹¹

Another writer in the same publication tells an interesting story of similar lights observed in another part of India, upon which similar legends were attached.

"I was staying on a tea-garden [plantation] near Darjiling last year (1893), and one evening as we were walking around the flower garden our eyes were caught by a light like that of a lantern being carried down the path which leads to the vegetable garden some 200 feet below. My host sent for the *Mahli* who came down from his house, and asked him what business anyone had to be going to the vegetable garden at that time? 'Oh', said the man, 'that is one of the *chota-admis* (i.e. little men); and on being asked to explain, he said that these little men lived underground, and only came out at night. He did not appear to be very clear as to what their occupation was, but they always walk or fly with lanterns. They are about three feet high, and they will never allow anyone to get near them; but if by any chance one was to come upon them unexpectedly, they would quickly disappear, and the person who saw them would become ill and probably die. They are constantly about on dark nights, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty together, but he and all the natives always gave them a wide berth.

"Whilst he was speaking we watched the light, which apparently left the path, and in two or three minutes flew across to another portion of the hill, between which and the vegetable garden was a steep dip which would take an ordinary individual at least half an hour to descend and ascend the other side; then it disappeared, and we saw no more that night, but two or three times afterwards we saw similar lights, sometimes carried along the paths and at others flying across dips in the hills. We made enquiries from the natives, who all told the same tale; but when we asked other planters they could tell us nothing about them. The light was too large and not erratic enough for any firefly that we have seen in that neighbourhood, more like a lantern than anything else we could think of."¹²

There can be little doubt that there is a real, objective natural phenomenon lurking behind many of these accounts, which appear to be describing luminous shape-shifting blobs which have a mysterious relationship with certain areas and types of terrain. They appear to interact in mysterious ways with human beings, particularly those undergoing intense emotional excitement - as shown by the phenomena accompanying the Welsh Revival of 1905, or are attracted to the electric fields surrounding human beings out in the open. Although they may appear to possess some kind of rudimentary or mischievous intelligence, this is more likely to be an illusion produced by the observer through some process of perception. It is more likely that the energy from which they are formed is affected by external changes in the surrounding environment - geology, variations in the earth's magnetic field, changes in air density, etc. These may all contribute to giving the impression of intelligent motion.

In 1967 ufologist John Keel had realised that it was the spotlight sightings, what he described as 'soft objects', which "represented the real phenomenon." He described these sightings as of "transparent or translucent objects seemingly capable of altering their size and shape dramatically."¹³ During his investigations in West Virginia Keel actually had the opportunity of watching them from his skywatch position at Gallipolis Ferry.

In *The Mothman Prophecies*⁴ he says: "Each night from three to eight unidentified 'stars' appeared. They were always in the same position at the beginning of the evening and a casual observer would automatically conclude they were really just stars. However, on overcast nights these unidentified would be the only 'stars' in the sky, meaning they were below the clouds. While the rest of the night sky slowly rotated, these phony stars would remain in their fixed positions, sometimes for hours, before they would begin to move. Then they would travel in any direction, up, down, clockwise, etc. they had a number of curious traits. When a plane would fly over they would suddenly dim or go out altogether. As soon as the plane was gone they would flare up again."

These strange lights are still with us, appearing at various spots throughout the world, and there is little doubt their comings and goings will add to the considerable amount of folklore already in existence. The lights which have been haunting the remote Norwegian valley of Hessdalen since 1981 display remarkable ghost-like characteristics - playing tag with observers, at times appearing to be gaseous and at others solid; sometimes showing up on radar and at others not. A similar kind of phenomenon - this time a brilliant orange ball of light - has been plaguing the Pennine hills of Yorkshire and Lancashire since the 1970's, particularly the Rossendale Valley and the area around Skipton and Grassendale. The fact that both these areas are criss-crossed by numerous geological faults can surely be no coincidence, and adds to the considerable evidence now available which appears to indicate that one of the variables which may explain the creation and origin of the lights - fault lines - has now been isolated.

As regards the recent sightings in the Craven district of Yorkshire, local UFO investigator Tony Dodd, a police officer and alleged witness to over 200 sightings, said in 1983:

"There are strange things flying around at night, but where they come from is another thing. They seem to be more prevalent on winter nights. A lot of the ones I have seen have been way below cloud level. This area has a very high percentage of national sightings. I have seen 60 to 80 of these machines in the last ten years... I feel because this is one of the hotspots as far as sightings go, there are bases located in certain places where they go underground."⁵

Although Mr Dodd may not realise it, he may have given us one of the most important clues to solve this mystery.

Notes and References 1. MILLS, A.A., 'Will o'the Wisp' in *Chemistry in Britain*, 16:69, Feb. 1980. 2. *Notes and Queries*, April 4th 1891. 3. Old drawings and woodcuts showing WW consistently depict the light being carried in the outstretched hand of an imp or hobgoblin. 4. McLAGAN, R.C., 'Ghostlights of the Western Highlands' in *Folklore*, vol.8 (1897), pp.203-256. 5. FEILBURG, H.H., 'Ghostly Lights' in *Folklore*, vol. 6 (1895), p.293. 6. This connection has become apparent to me time after time during research work. The sightings around Burton Dassett, Warwickshire, in 1923/4, described in *Spooklights; a British Survey* were seemingly centred upon a pre-Norman church and its holy well. This is one of many examples which could be cited. 7. *Trains Isle of Man*, vol.ii, p.118. 8. SINGTON, T., 'A Mystery' in *English Mechanic*, Oct. 17, 1919, pp.152-153. 9. ROBINS, D., *Circles of Silence*, Souvenir Press, 1985. 10. WALHOUSE, M.J., 'Ghostly Lights' in *Folklore*, vol. 5 (1894), pp.293-299. 11. In McLAGAN, *op. cit.*, there is the story of a prehistoric burial cairn near Ledaig in Scotland called Carn Bhan which has a legend attached to it that seven kings were buried there. A 70-year-old woman resident of the

area told McLagan that "there used to be a large light often seen at the Carn Bhan, indeed I think it is not so very long ago since it was seen there, I have often seen it there myself, it was as large as the light of that lamp". 12. *Folklore*, vol. 6, (1895), pp.245-246. 13. KEEL, JOHN A., 'The principles of transmogrification' in *Flying Saucer Review*, vol.15, no.4, (June-July 1968), pp.27-31. 14. KEEL, JOHN A., *The Mothman Prophecies*, Dutton, 1975. 15. *Craven Herald* (Skipton, Yorkshire), July 21, 1983.

PERSINGER'S
TECTONIC STRAIN THEORY
Strengths and Weaknesses

CLAUDE MAUGE

Sightings of lights in the sky are often neglected by many ufologists who consider them too 'simple', and unworthy of their *avant-garde* researches. Yet this simplicity is an important factor. Abnormal luminous phenomena can be compared with rather well-known manifestations, such as St Elmo's Fire, auroral phenomena or optical refraction phenomena, many examples of which can be found in Corliss's books. Others, such as ball lightning, are progressively integrated into the scientific corpus, or are phenomena claimed by ufologists, but studied by scientists (e.g. green fireballs).

Several authors today think that UFOs, or at least a large part of them, are geophysical phenomena essentially linked with seismicity. The best known ones are Michael Persinger in Canada, and Paul Devereux in Great Britain. I would like to take a particular look at Persinger's Tectonic Strain Theory (TST), which is indisputably one of the most important and interesting attempts at a study of the UFO phenomenon.

Tectonic Strain Theory

There is no question of expounding this theory in full here. It is complex, still evolving, and is the subject of numerous papers. Its outlines are presented, for instance, by Persinger¹⁰, Wanderer²¹ or Mauge². Its essential bases are very well summarised by Persinger himself¹⁰ in the following passage:

"This theory requires the analysis of the UFO problem at three separate levels: 1, the large scale space-time pattern; 2, the particular UFO event, and 3, the neuropsychological contributions of the observer [...] Each component is characterized by a major hypothesis. First, most UFO phenomena are generated by processes associated with crustal deformation (or 'earthstress') over geophysical time. Second, the single UFO event is a highly localised (a few metres), transient (a few minutes), extraordinarily energetic electromagnetic-like manifestation of this earthstress. Third, the rich variety but persistent common themes of close UFO encounters are a predictable consequence of the direct effects of the UFO event upon the electrochemical activities of the observer's brain."

However, TST presents a certain number of ambiguities and weak points, some of which are seriously damaging to the model. Rutkowski^{19,20} has already presented some objections, insisting on the question of the selection of ufological data, statistical problems, and the weakness of the geophysical basis of the model.

Reliability of ufological data

The first point is fundamental, and Rutkowski is unfortunately totally right. None of the data sources used to build TST (Fort, UFOCAT, *Fate*) seems to be reliable enough to be the basis for a valid study. Persinger¹⁷ reproaches Rutowski for having criticised his sources using value judgement and not empirical criteria. However, it was Hendry's empirical experience which had led him to reject UFOCAT as a reliable statistical tool.³

As for me, I showed⁴ albeit with a very limited and particular sample, that the 29 trace cases of the French 1954 wave and the 16 Belgian trace cases which appear in a computer printout from UFOCAT⁶ give the following results (the first number corresponds to the French cases, the second to the Belgian ones):

sound cases (unexplained after serious counter enquiry), 1/1;
inconclusive cases (lack of sufficient data, unreliability of primary sources, etc.), 8/6;
dubious cases (with particular reasons for caution), 7/1;
explained cases, 13/8.

Yet these 'physical evidence' cases are often regarded as the most reliable records by researchers.

Persinger recognises that there are misinterpretations which have nothing to do with TST, but he is apparently not well informed of the primary ufological literature, for which one cannot blame him. So he is wrong when he thinks that in UFOCAT the UFO types with medium to high strangeness (types 3 to 9) "did not include non-UFO reports"¹⁸, and even that the 'luminosities' reports (types 3 to 6) form "a very select sub-cluster". Now it is proved in several high-strangeness cases, and probable (or at least possible) in the large majority of them, that they correspond to misinterpretations rather more sophisticated than in the cases of reports of stationary or regular-trajectory luminosities (UFOCAT types 1 and 2). Rutkowski²⁰ uses the same argument, and notes that:

"Persinger dismisses this argument by saying that using a consistent data-base will allow the relationship to come through anyway, subtracted out as 'noise' in the final analysis. However a 90% level of noise is not that easy to filter out, especially if one cannot distinguish it from the rest of the data." (I think that the 10% 'unknowns' residue generously conceded by Rutowski is greatly overestimated.)

The Correlation problem

But if the data are inadequate, why do the various calculations converge on rather coherent and quite impressive results? Several arguments allow us to think it *might* be statistical artifacts, which Persinger recognised as possible for the first results concerning the Washington-Oregon area.¹⁸

Persinger in fact tests several functions in varying the co-efficients of the geophysical variables, and he keeps the ones(s) which give the best correlations. This procedure is mathematically accurate, but the seismic-geomagnetic variables are not always independent, which can bias statistical calculations, and the little reliable UFO data are heterogeneous, which can introduce other biases. The fact that optimal analysis increments, selected functions, reached correlations are different according to the

region studied is indeed partly justifiable by different geology; but it can also reveal artifacts, as long as we do not have causal or at least partly quantified reasons for the variations (conversely, such causal and quantified reasons would be very strong arguments in favour of TST).

It is clear the seismic is used as an observable indicator of the tectonic strain: earthquakes do *not* directly produce UFOs, the cause of both phenomena is the unobservable strain. However, like Rutkowski¹⁹, I thought that too great a distance between luminous events and corresponding seisms is "intuitively unsatisfying". Persinger¹⁷ partly replies to this objection: "The requirement of such large space-time frames within which to see a phenomenon is not unique to [his] hypothesis" and that the argument "would repudiate the most recent developments for the forecasting of earthquakes" which use parameters changing months before 'quakes. This is however an argument by analogy, and the matter is to know if it is valid for our problem, because the variables mentioned are not those used in TST.

Some of the correlations obtained by Persinger are not so well founded as the author claims. For instance, his results for five European countries, France and Italy included¹¹, absolutely do not predict (*a posteriori*) the major French-Italian wave in autumn 1954. It is however possible that the used function predicts this peak with a short delay, since the results show a very high score for 1955, but Persinger does not note this discrepancy. In any case, the predicted continuous peak from 1955 to 1959 is erroneous: the year 1957 only showed an 'actual' peak, much lower than the 1954 one. The predicted peaks in 1946, 1963 and 1964 seem likewise to have been non-existent in these countries. The 1954 wave is also not predicted in an improved version¹⁶, which is also unable to predict the 1973-1974 wave. In both versions the function used was built with Fort's data during the 1870-1905 (or 1910) interval.

But were the numbers of European events reported by Fort significant of the actual numbers, or of the numbers of events reported by witnesses? This problem is always a potential bias in all ufological statistics.

It may be logical that the 1954 wave, which was of a sociological nature to a very large extent, is not predicted by geophysical variables. But if so, why are these variables able to predict the major 1897 U.S. wave, which was also essentially journalistic?²² Here is another weakness of TST, which totally neglects sociological factors, yet these are fundamental in ufology. Persinger admitted their role,⁹ but the *only* aspect he considers is the variation of imagery according to culture. In his reply to Rutkowski he even mentioned the hypothesis that "much non-seismic UFOs [UFO reports] were randomly distributed within each [space-time] increment". We know already how important is the rôle of the media in the production or the extension of several UFO waves. Such sociological factors also explain the correlations between numbers of UFO reports in UFOCAT and *Fate*, and these correlations therefore tell us *nothing* about the reliability of data, contrary to what Persinger claims.¹⁷

Finally, some methodological details seem to me to be unclear; I shall cite only one. Persinger notes (e.g. 18) that he seeks to "attenuate the effects from outliers". This is mathematically accurate: in a 'normal' data set, outliers are often aberrant points. But in ufology it is possible that such a procedure eliminates the right data - that is, strange and reliable cases differing from the ufological 'norm', whereas the 'norm' would correspond to badly investigated and potentially explainable cases.

Persinger's statistical results therefore pose some serious problems of interpretation. It would be desirable to examine the statistics much more exhaustively than I have been able to, for instance in comparing carefully the predicted peaks with the actual 'waves'. It would be helpful if an expert in statistical theory could say if it is possible that so many apparent converging results can render only statistical artifacts. Such questions are not unwarranted, because Persinger writes that "the critical test of the hypothesis is the systematic spatial and temporal coupling between UFOs and earthquake measures within a region"⁷ - that is, the obtained correlations.

The Individual UFO event

We have for the time being no viable physical model to explain the formation of the 'electromagnetic column' (EM column). But this situation is not damning, particularly for ufologists who speculate far beyond the most 'advanced' physics. Persinger⁷ disputes Rutkowski's argument⁹ according to which "the geophysical basis for the theory [...] is extremely dependent upon recent reports of luminous effects produced by strain on rock during fracture tests". In fact, several authors, such as Brady and Rowell¹ or Devereux et al² report having obtained a light emission in such circumstances. Others, such as Ogawa et al³ notice the emission of (low frequency) EM waves. The important question is the problem of the extrapolation from laboratory 'micro' results to the natural scale, especially since, as far as I know, all Persinger's interpretations are purely qualitative.

Effects on witness's central nervous systems

The model assumes that in close encounters the electromagnetic field of the EM column can induce several types of physiological effects: it can produce induced currents in various structures of the central nervous system, particularly those of the temporal lobe. A consequence could be very complex and vivid hallucinations. But such hallucinations are obtained with direct stimulus by intracranial electrodes, in surgical circumstances, amongst essentially epileptic patients. I have not read all of Persinger's references, but those I have do not mention these phenomena for subjects placed in EM fields. Hallucinations are the crude (eg. phosphenes), and the associated physiological phenomena are of the headache, fatigue or pain type. We are again faced with the problem of extrapolation: is it legitimate or is it not?

But it is perhaps Persinger himself who brings out one of the most interesting arguments against the TST, or rather against the large number of UFO sightings it is supposed to explain. First, he rightly notes the basic identity between UFO 'sightings' and religious entity 'sightings'.¹⁰ Second, he considers that "many close-encounter-type experiences (concerning gods, demons or aliens) could be produced by temporal lobe dysfunctions not initiated by close proximity to UFO-related luminosities"^{10,12} but by various stimuli such as fatigue, social isolation, perturbations of circadian rhythms, hypoxia, personal crisis, certain drugs, and so on. Third, he is developing the *temporal lobe transients hypothesis*, endogenous or exogenous with 'mundane' stimuli, to explain religious-mystical and paranormal experiences.^{13,14,15} One can then wonder whether an original geophysical process of large extent is needed to trigger off the mechanism of the 'UFO' sighting.

In his reply to Rutkowski, Persinger says a "substantial portion" of UFOs generated by tectonic strain "would not be evoked by the traumatic stimulation" that is the direct action on the brain. If this "substantial portion" contains a substantial number of close encounters, this statement is new and it dims the impact of the above criticism, but I fear the "substantial portion" concerns only distant sightings, therefore the objections still have their value.

Conclusion

In fact, TST seems to be unnecessary for the large majority of sightings which, besides inevitable hoaxes and psychopathological cases, would be the concern of the 'socio-psychological hypothesis'. These cases would be 'only' more or less mundane misinterpretations, sometimes complex, either with an objective description, or on which the witness grafts a set of themes and images according to what he knows, more or less consciously, about the UFO phenomenon.

As for the remainder, possible temporal lobe transients or similar processes and original geophysical phenomena, some of which would be the concern of a TST limited to particular areas and/or types of sightings, seem for the time being well sufficient.

But if Persinger could succeed firstly in reinforcing the value of his correlations (particularly by taking sociological factors into account); secondly in clarifying the processes which create the 'EM Column', and thirdly in clarifying the processes of the action of this 'column' on the central nervous system, then TST will really deserve the label of the best scientific theory of UFOs.

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The article in the last issue of *Magonia*, "Flying Saucer from Moore's" provoked a considerable amount of comment from our readers. It is probably the first article in *Magonia* ever to have been referred to in both the *New Scientist* and the gossip-column of the *Star*. Here Jenny Randles presents some background to the story, and the media reaction to it.

OLD MOORE'S ARMOUR KNACK

Jenny Randles

Congratulations to Chris Allan for at last getting the evidence, and having the courage to publish his exposé of Patrick Moore's spoof book *Flying Saucer from Mars*: it is important that the UFO field has the capacity for self-policing. When Chris first told me of his research in 1983 I made some enquiries myself. I spoke to an astrophysicist who also happens to write books about strange phenomena - whilst he did ask not to be named, there are not too many of those about! He was well aware that Moore had hoaxed the book, and he had mentioned it in passing (without naming the culprit) in one of his own books. Another enquiry, via an ex-employee at Muller's, the publishers revealed the same story, although I was led to believe that Moore had been a sort of 'astronomical consultant'. Although involved with the project all the way through, he had not, I was informed, actually written the book; however my source was not the first-hand one which Allan and Campbell cite.

I had been in correspondence with Moore over a UFO case which he had ludicrously 'identified' as a meteor (see *UFO Reality*, pp. 98-100), and had also received a "UFOs are absolute rot!" reply from the great man, I decided to inform Patrick of what Chris Allan was up to, and suggest he might like to 'come clean'. I pointed out, as Chris wanted, that there was no desire on his part to publish and be damned, but that the evidence was persuasive, and Patrick would end up with much less egg on his face if he told the truth himself.

Moore's reply was intriguing. He claimed that he could not be Allingham because he had met him, and that if I ever published the claim that he was then he would immediately issue a law-suit. Frankly, his letter was so conceited and arrogant that I felt utterly disinclined to care whether or not he ended up looking like the eccentric he evidently is.

That all happened a couple of years back, and Chris Allan kept me informed about progress on the computer tests and the discovery of the Muller link. I remained fearful that someone might blow the story before Chris got his chance, as he had put so much time and effort into his investigations. A

→Continued from previous page

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couple of times I found through quiet enquiry that the 'Patrick Moore hoax UFO book' was an open secret in the astronomical world. Everyone seemed to be aware of it, and were surprised that Moore was still denying it

For this reason Peter Warrington and I deliberately planted a mention in *Science and the UFO* in 1985. We discussed contactee books, named a couple (including *FSFM* and said that: "We have been shown irrefutable evidence, collated by a remarkably persistent ufologist, that one of the contactees mentioned in this chapter did not even exist. His book about space voyages was written by a person who later became famous and highly respectable. The hoax has not yet been admitted to." We dared not be more specific, not simply for fear of a lawsuit, but did not wish to put Chris on the spot before he was ready

Between May and July of 1986 I was working on a BBC local radio series. I wanted to have Moore on one of the programmes criticising UFOs, we had discussed this over the phone a few times. He was willing and co-operative, and my fears that he might recall my name from our earlier correspondence was groundless. The interview was delayed, as Patrick was in hospital during June, but I was cordially invited to call back in July. Meantime, Peter Hough had written an article about UFO hoaxes for *Exploring the Supernatural* magazine, and had decided to mention Allingham. He knew about it from having read Robert Chapman, and because he had been with me in May 1986 when I was interviewing an astronomer for the radio programme. The astronomer made it quite clear he knew Moore was responsible for the book. I explained the full story to Peter, and asked him not to reveal the name in his article - that was to be Chris Allan's prerogative.

However, the astronomer's frank revelations had intrigued me. The next week I was to interview a famous TV personality who I knew was a close friend of Patrick Moore. After the interview I steered the conversation round to Patrick and the Allingham book. This man, who had actually been talking to Moore the night before, laughed, and admitted the story. His attitude was that as far as he was concerned the story was common currency. He told me that Moore had written several other things under assumed names, some of which had still not been discovered.

Very shortly after this meeting, Peter Hough received a letter from Chris Allan, having read an earlier piece Peter had written in a magazine called *The Unknown*. Chris explained that he was finally publishing in *Magonia*. I could not resist mentioning the matter in my 'Soapbox' column in *Exploring the Supernatural*, where I was discussing the pros and cons of famous people getting mixed up in the paranormal. I mentioned the Allingham book, saying that the only person who seemed to take it seriously was Patrick Moore. By coincidence my comments appeared in the same issue as Peter Hough's piece. The cumulative effect of the two pieces gave away rather more than we had intended, but as *Magonia* was out the same week it hardly mattered.

I had called John Rimmer when I heard of his intention to publish, and thought it best to warn him of the Patrick Moore's threat to sue. My concern was raised somewhat by a conversation with Moore a few days earlier. I had been careful not to mention anything about Allingham to him, as this would undoubtedly have meant the end of his co-operation with my local radio series

However, in a general discussion on UFOs (where as usual he was repeating his tirade against the mental calibre of everyone involved) he brought up the subject of Allingham. He began talking about Peter Hough's article, and "some nut from Stoke-on-Trent who is going around accusing me of being Allingham." By now I was jotting everything down verbatim.

"I must be a split personality, because I met this bloke once". He paused for effect before explaining how he attended a lecture given by Allingham. I decided to challenge him directly: "You and I both know you were involved in that book. I have seen the facts. I have no intention of discussing Allingham on the radio, but if you want to deny the rumours over the air, be my guest."

Instantly his mood changed: "I am going to pull out. It will only bring all the nuts onto me if I talk about flying saucers. The whole subject is absolutely ridiculous. There is nothing in it. It just attracts loons, freaks, cranks, wierdos. I don't want them round my neck". There was more of the same. I tried to repeat that I was not interested in the Allingham story, but wanted to talk to him about "real UFOs - not fairy stories invented thirty years ago". His mood changed abruptly again: "Ha! I know who did write that book, but I didn't" I asked him who, but he refused to answer, and after a few seconds he slammed down the phone.

A couple of days after I had spoken to John Rimmer about the forthcoming *Magonia* feature, Peter Hough received a call routed from the offices of *Exploring the Supernatural*. A freelance journalist had seen his article and wanted to know who the author of *FSFM* was. Peter told him he had no first hand evidence, so he should contact Chris Allan and *Magonia*.

Several days later Peter Tory of the *Star* called and asked about my mention of Prince Charles's interest in the paranormal. I told him what I knew: that a few years ago the Prince had hosted a party for a group of parapsychologists and others interested in the subject - although I did not know who. Tory's *Star* account of the party was laughably inaccurate: he said it was a 'UFO party', that Charles was a subscriber to *FSR*, which he is not, to my knowledge, and that Uri Geller and Michael Bentine were there - which I have no knowledge of. Tory said "I suppose you know Uri Geller was at the Royal Wedding?". I said I did not, and asked him how he knew. He mentioned David Frost as the source, and asked for my comments. I had none to usefully offer!

The *News of the World* was the only paper to call for a follow-up, and they seemed only interested in the Prince Charles story, and did not seem to know about the Moore/Allingham affair. By the time of my conversation (30th July) *Magonia* was out and the *Star* had published both the Charles and Allingham stories.

In fact Tory, after we had talked about Prince Charles, casually said "Oh, by the way, you wouldn't happen to know about another story we are doing, would you?" I knew what he meant, but he refused to say any more about what he knew. I told him I had no comment, and suggested he read *Magonia*.

"We know all about this story in Mag-One-Ear" he said, pronouncing the name, quite unconsciously, in this daft fashion. He had read Peter Hough's article, and guessed that the culprit was Patrick Moore. I suggested that if he knew that he should ask Moore outright. "We have," he told me, "he did not deny it, but poured out abuse and then slammed down the phone!" I told Tory that if he wanted any more information he should contact Chris Allan, who had spent a great deal of time following the story up.

Looking back on the affair I suppose the freelance journalist who picked up *Exploring the Supernatural* for 90p. was well recompensed by the *Star*. Chris Allan comes out with nothing but his pride at salvaging the reputation of ufologists, and we owe him and Steuart Campbell a debt of gratitude. Might I suggest that they might now try their hand at uncovering the author of those rather worrying hoaxes, *The Uninvited*, 2 and 3?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,
I will not comment in general on Peter Rogerson's rambling article *Taken to the Limits*, but I must challenge his understanding of beliefs concerning the Loch Ness monster (and kelpies)

Lester and Grimshaw's idea of the meaning of the LNM was not necessarily correct (indeed, it can be argued that it has no meaning). the idea that it has a small head and a large body comes not from "an excess of instinct over reason, desire over restraint"; it comes from a belief that it is a plesiosaur and a misinterpretation of a photograph of an otter's tail. Since the tail is limp at the tip it can hardly be 'phallic'!

Kelpies were neither 'beasts on the waters' nor 'men upon the land'. They were evil spirits in the form of horses who lived in water and enjoyed luring the unwary to their deaths by drowning. I know of no tradition that kelpies took human form or that they impregnated women. They were certainly not 'mediators' between humankind and the natural world. At [Loch] Ness the Monster is a mythical descendent of the lake's Great Kelpie. Our 'complacent' view of the world cannot be challenged by a creature that does not exist.

Willy Smith's rejection of Ian Ridpath's rational explanation for the Serena UFO report lacks any force. In the first place it is evident, as his own print-out demonstrates, that Venus had not set before the incident. At the beginning it was about 10' above the unobstructed horizon and by the end it was about 5' above.

But Venus was setting in the west, above the Serrania de Cuenca mountains, which must have lifted the horizon nearer the planet. This might have given the impression that Venus was a craft hovering close to the Earth. In fact, if the weather was calm and it had been sunny, temperature inversions could have created a *mirage* of Venus, which must have frightened the Serena family (only a mirage could account for the description of an objects 'like an extremely large tray')

Smith criticizes Ridpath because he has neither interviewed the witnesses nor visited the area of the incident. There should be no need for Ridpath, or any other critic, to go to Spain if the principle investigators make an adequate and thorough report; all the necessary data to make an evaluation should be available in published form. Unfortunately, this is not the case; some essential data are missing (e.g. weather data). I can only make an evaluation on the basis of what is available: Ridpath has done just that. Critics cannot tour the world making on-site investigations.

One criticism of Ridpath; he claims that the Serenas were travelling south-westwards. But the route from Villar del Arzobispo to Liria lies south-east, and from Liria to Cheste almost due south. Thus Venus must first have been observed *behind* the car (at about 5 o'clock). After passing through Liria it must have appeared at 3 o'clock, appearing to follow the car on a parallel course. This seems to be consistent with the published account, but due to lack of precise bearings one cannot be sure.

Smith's implication that Ridpath is not a scientist is offensive (and ignores the photo caption in *Magonia* 22 to the contrary. A scientist is someone who uses the scientific method; by that criterion Ridpath is a scientist and Smith is not.

Steuart Campbell, Edinburgh.

Dear John,

I read with interest the article *Flying Saucers from Moore's*. It is good that Messrs Allan and Campbell have had the courage to openly show that Patrick Moore was responsible for the Adamski fairy-tale. Everyone seemed to know this, but no one had the guts to openly reveal this information - rumours abounded of the threat of a law-suit if all was revealed. Thank you Allan and Steuart for setting the record straight.

One must smile at the comments made by *Quest/YUFOS* regarding *Magonia* and crew. Their rather zealous approach to our subject is almost as amusing as their comment "what have ghosts and fairies to do with ufology?". More than spaceships and "vile government plots against the people", I suspect! I also note their comment "it is small wonder that science stays well clear of ufology". I suspect that this is more due to the credulity of the ETH/magic spyplane/ cover-up lobby than to the involvement of 'ghost-hunters' (there seems to be a lot of 'think this or else' attitude in ufology at the moment).

Ufology seemed to have entered a golden age of objectivity at the beginning of the '80's - which didn't last long! Now it just seems to be a case of spaceships, spaceships everywhere. I for one reject such irrational theories, and anyone with any common sense should think of doing the same, and not be afraid of saying so. The prevalent attitude makes me want to cry sometimes, but I do my best not to let the idiots get me down!

Robert Moore (No relation), East Huntspill, Somerset.

Dear John Rimmer

Thank you for sending me the July 1986 issue of *Magonia*. Having finished reading it, I can honestly say it is the best £2.50 I have spent in a long time. I was particularly interested to read *Flying Saucer from Moore's*. Christopher Allan and Steuart Campbell (and *Magonia*) should be congratulated for printing this most important article, and revealing the diabolical tricks of Patrick Moore!

I found the criticism levelled at *Magonia* by YUFOS quite amusing, and a very good example of the hostile reactions 'new ufology' still receives. I wonder who are the 'serious people' YUFOS mentions? No doubt they are all Yorkshiremen!

As for the 'earthlights' theory, and readers views upon the subject. I certainly think that it is a worth-while idea, desperately in need of more scientific study. However, I doubt that it can explain all aspects of UFO phenomena. During the Third International UFO Conference, Paul Devereux came under a lot of attack for his theory, especially when it came to the tricky subject of CEIII/IV's. I don't think that at the moment any serious arguments can be put forward for or against it. However, the 'natural UFO' theory - earthlights, UAPs, etc - seems to have become a very popular subject among some of the more well-known UFO authors. A trend which I suppose was started by Steuart Campbell; who, after an investigation always seemed to conclude that the UFO was a hoax or ball-lightning (even black ball lightning!). Maybe as in the 1960's, when a few ufologists revolted against the ETH, a new group are going it alone with their natural explanation for UFOs.

David Taylor, Stourbridge, West Midlands.

BRAUDE, Stephen E. *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science*. New York and London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. £19.95

Should the evidence for psychokinesis be accepted? Do psi phenomena conflict with the theories of modern physics? Is it possible to devise a coherent theory of PK? Stephen Braude's answers to these questions would be yes, no and yes. He begins by arguing that the nature of PK makes it impossible to reveal any important facts about it by conducting laboratory experiments. As we do not know what PK is and have no coherent theory as to how it operates, we cannot devise experiments which would clearly indicate whether or not such phenomena are real or illusory. Braude thus favours a re-examination of the non-experimental evidence, which these days receives little serious consideration from the parapsychologists.

He devotes a great deal of space to accounts of phenomena produced by physical mediums, concentrating on D. D. Home (1833-86) and Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918). An account is also given of the famous levitating priest, St Joseph of Copertino (1603-63). In the case of St Joseph, it is disappointing that he cites only secondary sources for the descriptions of the alleged levitations.

As Braude is a philosopher his main concern is to try to devise a theory to describe PK. He is well aware of the difficulties involved, as he admits that '...there remain serious doubts as to what *broad* ranges of phenomena PK theory must cover.' and '...it is far from clear how "psychokinesis" should be defined, even provisionally'. However, he proposes to define PK as 'the causal influence of an organism on a region *r* of the physical world, without any known sort of physical interaction between the organism's body and *r*'. Now this raises the obvious problem that if we know of no physical connection between the organism and *r* then we have no reason to make any connection between what the organism does and what happens in the region *r*.

This objection can be dealt with by referring to the evidence for physical mediumship, for example the phenomena associated with D. D. Home. Braude apparently assumes that Home caused the phenomena, but without using any known physical methods (such as those that would be used by conjurers).

Braude's interest in physical mediumship arises from his objection to the idea of PK as a microscopic phenomenon operating at the quantum level, and thus producing the kind of results revealed only by statistical analysis, such as highly improbable departures from randomness in long series of card-guessing experiments. He favours the idea that PK may operate on a large scale and considers that it may account for various anomalous events or circumstances. 'For example, it could explain why some soldiers escape serious injury, despite taking repeated heroic risks on the battlefield.' However, it does not need PSI to explain this; the laws of statistics can easily account for such observations.

Although Braude provides some material for metaphysical speculation, including a chapter on the concept of retrocausation (which would require much more space than I have available to do it justice), he does not succeed in formulating a scientific theory which could be used to test apparent PK phenomena. However, this book is an interesting addition to the literature on the subject, but is perhaps of more interest to philosophers than to parapsychologists.

JH

ROBERTS, Andy. *Cat Flaps; Northern Mystery Cats*, Brigantia Books, 84 Elland Road, Brighouse, Yorkshire, HD6 2QR. £2.00 inc. post and packing. 1986.

This booklet provides an overview of anomalous 'big cat' activity in the north of England from the early 1970's to the current Durham flap, based on archive research and personal investigation. The incidents chronicled range from the single sighting of a lion in a suburban road in Chester, to the sixty or seventy reports on the 'Nottinghamshire Lion', the north's biggest 'cat flap.

It is hard to read this carefully-collated summary without coming to the conclusion that *something* physical is stalking the roads and fields of rural (and not-so-rural) England. Roberts make a good case for a cross between feral cats and the native wildcat - the latter has already been reported crossing the Anglo-Scottish border as re-forestation of some of the wilder parts of the north of England gets underway in schemes like the Kielder Valley. However the author is also very aware of the psychological and folkloric aspects of the 'big cat' sightings, and devotes a chapter to comparing the cat reports to other Northern animal lore. Here he convincingly refutes the claims of some other writers who have made comparisons between the cat reports and traditional 'Black Dog' legends, with a list of contrasting characteristics: these only serves to emphasise the decidedly physical nature of the cat, as against the spectral appearance of the legendary dog.

This nicely produced booklet is essential reading, most of all to those who might be tempted to see *all* anomalous phenomena in purely psychological terms. (JR)

KNIGHT, Gareth. *The Treasure House of Images*. Thorsons, 1986. £5.99.

SHARMAN-BURKE, Juliet, and GREENE, Liz, *The Mythic Tarot; a new approach to Tarot cards*. Rider, 1986. £14.95 (including specially designed pack of tarot cards and spread cloth.)

There is something about the Tarot that makes it attractive to several paranormalists who otherwise adopt a highly sceptical approach to such topics as divination and precognition. Perhaps this is because its rich and strange imagery acts as a stimulus to intuitive and

lateral thought, producing a state of mind in which potentially fruitful hunches and guesswork surface into the consciousness. Rather than having some intrinsic 'paranormal' quality of their own, the Tarot images may strike archetypal resonances in the sensitive 'reader' - this was certainly Jung's attitude to the Tarot. If, as writers such as Michael Dummett and Stuart Kaplan suggest, the origin of the Tarot designs may be traced back to the Renaissance memory aids described by Francis Yates, then they may be said to be designed to such an end.

This possibility is often obscured by writers who propose an impossibly archaic and arcane origin for these cards, bringing in ancient Egyptian, gypsy, or even Atlantean predecessors. Fortunately, both of the books under consideration here avoid these extremes, although Sharman-Burke and Greene's introduction hints at an origin earlier than the fifteenth century Italian decks. The first part of Gareth Knight's contribution presents a brief but accurate account of the history of the tarot cards, both in their original role as the major element in a range of popular card-games, and their later evolution (from the eighteenth century) as a means of divination and a repository of occult belief.

Of particular interest is his outline of the growth of the occult Tarot in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and his description of the development of the card designs through the major regional and chronological variations. The second part of Knight's book is the description of a series of meditation exercises using Tarot cards. These follow the usual path of ascribing a variety of meanings to individual cards, and reflect the various cabalistic interpretations that have been offered. As with most exercises of this nature, the only fair thing to say about them is that they must be practiced to assess their effectiveness.

The Mythic Tarot relates the cards more specifically to the archetypal images of Classical mythology, seeing significance in the Tarot's emergence at the time of the re-awakening of Classical culture in the Renaissance. Curiously, the specially designed cards supplied with the book, although portraying the gods and heroes of Greece, are painted in a rather wishy-washy *art nouveau* style like too many other twentieth century Tarot decks.

It would have been interesting to see a series of designs more in keeping with the directness and vigour of Classical art, perhaps based on Greek vase paintings or architectural friezes. (JR)

MONROE, Robert A. *Far Journeys*. Souvenir Press, 1986. £12.95.

GREY, Margot. *Return from Death; an exploration of the near-death experience*. Arkana, 1985. £4.95.

ROGO, D Scott. *Life After Death; the case for survival of bodily death*. Aquarian Press, 1986. £4.99.

WALKER, Benjamin. *Masks of the Soul; the facts behind reincarnation*. Aquarian Press, 1982. £4.95.

By far the oddest of this little collection is Monroe's *Far Journeys*. It is a sequel to his *Journeys out of the Body*, which was published some years ago, and has now been re-issued by Souvenir Press (£6.95, paperback).

Monroe tells us how his out-of-the-body experiences (OOBEs) have developed since he wrote his previous book and describes how he set up a laboratory to study OOBEs. Despite this laboratory, with all its impressive gadgetry, the author appears to have little interest in the scientific approach. We are thus given practically no insights on the neurophysiological aspects of the OOBE, but plenty on Monroe's feverish imagination and psychological quirks.

Much of the book consists of dialogues with the various entities, human and non-human, allegedly encountered by Monroe in the course of his OOBE excursions. These dialogues are non-verbal so he gives us a "deliberately free translation". To "abet the method" he invents a strange jargon. Here is a sample:

The form vibrated. (*Ident Routine Entry Dispatcher. RED . . . Just call me Red.*)

(*Red?*)

(*Not to be confused with . . . sorry, wrong department. You must have joined in when I was busy. Need to get a rote on you so I can try to place you properly. Roll it.*)

AA opened and gave him the best rote he knew.

Red lightened. (*KT-95, hey? Well, that's a new one for me. Haven't had a KT-95 since I've been here.*)

(*I don't believe there ever has been, AA replied (No records, only side rote which didn't mean anything.)*)

(*And you came in on a TSI cruise, and you want to get the feel of it, huh? M Band noise got to you, did it?*)

(*Well, no.*) AA flickered. (*Not exactly, you see, I . . .*)

I think that's quite enough of that. To use Monroe's jargon, when I got an ident on this book I turned, reached for it and lighted somewhat. Cautiously I opened the rote. I flickered. What sort of rote is this? Nothing but M Band noise. I dulled and closed.

Margot Grey was inspired to investigate near-death experiences (NDEs) as a result of having such experiences herself when she became gravely ill while travelling in India. The book is divided into two parts. The first is a review and comparative study of the NDE reports, the second deals with the after-effects of NDEs and with explanations and interpretations of them. It is interesting to note that these after-effects are similar in many ways to those associated with persons involved in UFO 'abduction' experiences. For example, some who have had NDEs believe they have acquired the powers of healing and prophecy. Some of these prophecies are rather alarming: there seems to be a wide measure of agreement that something terrible is going to happen in 1988!

Margot Grey ranges widely over the different aspects of this difficult subject and has produced a useful addition to the literature on NDEs. Furthermore, she has managed to do this without recourse to bizarre science-fictional jargon!

Anyone who wants a fairly straightforward account of the kinds of questions asked and investigations undertaken by those who seek convincing evidence that we somehow survive bodily death should consider buying D. Scott Rogo's *Life after Death*. The work of psychical researchers is discussed, together with OOBEs, NDEs, apparent cases of reincarnation and other phenomena. In expressing his own views on the subject, the author demonstrates that he is aware that it is not a simple question. Because we have no clear idea of what it would be like to survive death ourselves, or precisely what it would mean to say that some other person had survived death, it is impossible to say exactly what kind of evidence would be necessary to convince

most people of the reality of such survival.

Still on the subject of life after death, we turn to a book on reincarnation. Benjamin Walker reviews the history of this widespread belief, gives some modern examples of apparent reincarnations and discusses the arguments for and against it. Walker is not attracted to the concept of reincarnation, saying that it has "... no great moral significance, and is ethically unacceptable". He prefers the 'many mansions' of the other world to the belief in many incarnations in this. (JH)

COLLINS, Andrew. *London Walkabout*. Earthquest Books, 19 St Davids Way, Wickford, Essex SS11 8EX. 1984. £0.95.

At last a guide for the metropolitan earth-mystery enthusiast, who shudders fastidiously at the thought of his Gucci shoes covered in mud or worse as he traipses from long barrow to standing stone through ploughed field and plashy marsh. Here is a walk rich in occult lore, moving from holy hill to pagan temple, from Templar church to sacred stone. All roughly on the route of the number 11 bus, and never more than a few minutes walk away from some comfortable pub. A splendid little guide. (JR)

CROWE, Catherine. *The Night-Side of Nature: or ghosts and ghost-seers*. Introduction by Colin Wilson. Aquarian Press, (The Colin Wilson Library of the Paranormal) 1986, £8.99.

Thorsons are to be congratulated on making this classic compilation of early Victorian supernatural folklore available. Crowe gives an insight into the beliefs of the 'educated superstitions', before the tidying-up processes of the S.P.R. Many of the correspondents of Gurney and Myers would have read and been influenced by Crowe. Not for her the 'perfect apparition' of Tyrrell - her ghosts hold conversations, give warnings or help locate buried treasure.

It is a pity that the publishers did not attempt to add more to the meagre information about the author taken from the Dictionary of National Biography. Readers should be aware that the literary style is not easy, but those with an interest in the supernatural beliefs of the period should persist. (PR)

Some older books, still of interest, which you may have missed:
Peter Rogerson

MARKEL, Gerald E, and James C. PETERSON. *Politics, Science and Cancer: the laetrile phenomenon*. AAAS Selected Symposium, 1980.

Discussion of unorthodox cancer treatment; US biased, but extendable to all types of fringe medicine and debates about government enforcement of scientific opinion, etc.

KRIPPNER, Stanley. *Human Possibilities; mind exploration in the USSR and Eastern Europe*. Doubleday, 1980.

Quaintly naive account of Soviet life and parapsychology, praising Russia for "community based mental-health program" - the author seems to have forgotten to add "compulsory"!

ROGO, D. Scott. *Miracles: a parascientific inquiry into wondrous phenomena*. Dial Press, 1982.

An exploration of a variety of Catholic miracles, this book includes a great deal of interesting material, but is marred by Rogo's lack of a sophisticated appreciation of historical and cultural context, his uncritical acceptance of polemical sources, and willingness to evoke controversial (to put it mildly) parapsychological theories as explanations.

In his conclusion Rogo makes the surprising statement that "a vast spiritual realm exists in the universe" - this is presumably 'The Phenomenon', a.k.a. God. Rogo also makes the interesting suggestion that the entities encountered have a real existence in some domain of cultural archetypes.

BEGG, Ean. *Myth and Today's Consciousness*. Couverture, 1984. £5.25.

Do not be misled by the title, as I was, into thinking that this is an account of contemporary mythology (or even myth in general). It is in fact a Jungian meditation on the 'coming age of Aquarius'. Time was when I was quite impressed with Jung; today it is painfully obvious how much Jungianism reflects the inflation of the racist and sexist prejudices of a puritanical Swiss bourgeoisie into Cosmic Faith.

WATSON, Lyall. *Beyond Supernature; a new natural history of the supernatural*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1986. £10.95

Lyall Watson's *Supernature* was one of the biggest literary surprises - and successes - of 1973: a lively cocktail of biology and parapsychology, full of startling insights and connections as its author took freely from the arcane and technical, swished the results around and made them tastily accessible to persons who were neither biologists nor parapsychologists. The general reading public responded gratefully and enthusiastically; *Supernature* became a book which no half-serious follower of psi dared to miss, partly because so many folk who were ordinarily non-interested non-followers were talking about it.

Now 13 years and a respectable number of titles further on, Dr Watson takes us *Beyond Supernature*. His tour-guide style has not changed; the insights are still there, the melding of data from apparently unconnected fields jollies readers along as he pursues a holistic vision in which the significance of what we persist in styling anomalies floats like a beacon seen through fog. But perhaps we have changed. We no longer get excited by pyramid powers - or at least most of us don't; we don't believe in Cleve Backster's telepathic plants, though Dr Watson is inclined to. There have been enough whistle-stop tours of the paranormal to make another seem about as inviting as a visit to Basildon on early closing day. What can *Beyond Supernature* do to put that right?

For a start, and as befits a trained biologist) Lyall Watson looks at all phenomena as evidence of the workings of a vast organism. Between the constituent parts of that organism - even between ones we do not traditionally think of being connected, such as plants and Man, or Man and fish - there flows an alternative mode of communication and interaction. Part I of *Beyond Supernature (Life)* deals with the real nature of living things and enlists such exemplars as the calluses on camels' knees, the stripes on the great anteatr or the ability of leaves to produce defensive tannin against predators, as indications of "a faculty with clear survival value, a biological attribute that gives decision making a predictive quality". Animal behaviour, he suggests, may demonstrate ostensibly supernatural powers which make their owners better geared for survival.

But this is only a prelude to the idea of how our *human* supernormal powers relate to the rest of creation. In this model, society appears as an interlinked organism in which each individual can reach or affect another by unknown 'extrasensory' means. These acts of transference may help to explain mass hysteria, xenoglossy, multiple personality and, would you believe, the music which departed greats dictate to medium Rosemary Brown. Further, this extrasensory dialogue can be taken to reveal the existence of a shared or 'group soul', or common awareness for which Dr Watson coins the name *sama*, 'something which thinks together or is of common mind' (p.137). And in Part III (*Planet*) he pleads, via summaries of paranthropology, parabiology and several other 'paras', for a less restrictive, less restricted approach which will help us to understand the growth of this planetary bonding: a global ecology of the mind, no less.

This is highly dynamic stuff, presented in a highly readable fashion. So why didn't I find *Beyond Supernature* more exciting? Surely not because the material seemed over-familiar, though it's true that bar a scary Filipino possession case or a Timor-Timor polter-geist (both witnessed first-hand by the author) there is little here that *Magonia* readers won't have come upon elsewhere. You do not look for new case-histories in a book like this. What you look for is how the writer uses and interprets standard cases, the fusion of material into something which not only justifies their inclusion but offers clues as to how they relate one to another. And maybe what on earth they mean.

Heads down, boys,
here comes Sheldrake's
morphic resonance again

Unfortunately, Dr Watson's approach itself seems over-familiar. The eclectic sweep through a gamut of phenomena, the skilful progression from diverse case-material to overview has become something of a convention in psi literature, and at times it seems that he who can juggle the greatest number of strangely-coloured balls at the same time has achieved all that there is to achieve. Familiarity breeds complacency and there is a dreadful tendency to turn off when Modern Physics makes its inevitable entry on the scene, or as the Dragon Project shuffles over the horizon. To rearrange what Dr

Watson borrows from Heraclitus, we have come to expect the unexpected because writers have been giving it to us for years; it no longer stimulates and the insights and connections arising from the approach suffer likewise. Heads down boys, here comes Sheldrake's morphic resonance again.

I'm reminded of something that Scott Walker once said about one of those Jack Good TV pop-n-rock programmes, where manically rapid 2½ minute acts hurtled along in breathless succession: "In the end", declared the Walker Brother solemnly, "it works against him". *Beyond Supernature* has something new to offer on practically every page, but at a cost; the sheer pace makes each phenomenon blur into the next. And that is the problem with eclecticism.

Dr Watson makes a cogent appeal for a holistic vision over the more divisive view of science (and parapsychology as well) which prefers to dwell on parts in isolation. This, he argues, gives a sense of perspective and permits us to recognise patterns: "You only get to see the wood when it becomes too difficult to distinguish individual trees". There are an awful lot of trees in Dr Watson's forest and some of them would appear on closer inspection to be in a sad state - if we were allowed time for a closer inspection. The reviewer who criticised *Supernature* for what he called the author's "ready acceptance of certain dubious phenomena" - meaning specifically some of the PK work summarised in that book - may be sharpening his pen even now. Dr Watson's rapid transit from Vasiliev's 'long distance hypothesis' to the blood of St Januarius means that critical evaluation of separate components gets left far behind. I only hope a certain ultra-sceptic I know never sees the single-paragraph treatment of the Mons Angels affair (p.138), which oddly neglects to mention the rôle that Arthur Machen claimed to have played in the thing, let alone the near-certainty that it never happened at all. Parapsychologists who contest these cases aren't doing so for the fun of it, nor because they are wilfully obstructive or reactionary: they realise only too well that weakly-evidenced cases are fuel for the fires built by real reactionaries. Dr Watson obviously realises this too, but his approach does not cater for it.

Yet everyone will agree with his statement that there is a need for "A slightly broader definition of reality. One which includes the possibility of certain

things happening when humans are involved. A definition that is not so exclusive; one less inclined to dismiss certain thing as impossible, and better able to deal with what actually happens in terms of probability rather than out-right and unreasonable denial" (p.266).

Beyond Supernature may not be the galvalic force that its predecessor was back in the seventies, but if it encourages people to go looking for that 'slightly broader definition', it will have done its job. (MG)

INGLIS, Brian. *The Hidden Power*. Jonathan Cape, 1986. £10.95

A rather unappetising mixture of credulity and ill-tempered polemic, which reveals Inglis's simplistic view of the world rather well. His world is divided into a handful of 'goodies' - Crookes, Richet, Schrenck-Notzsig and other supporters of physical mediumship, who are perfect in every way, cannot tell a lie or let the wish be father of the observation; and on the other side a vast army of 'baddies', including the majority of the leadership of the SPR and most scientists, who have the temerity not to believe everything the goodies write without question. These baddies are the sceptics, who promote vicious 'scientism' and 'materialism', and are capable of every kind of blackguardism.

Inglis is no doubt correct to criticise those scientists who denounced psychical on slender grounds, or denounced the whole field because a certain medium cheated, or who sneered at ideas they could not understand. What a pity therefore that Inglis disposes of such ideas as Neo-Darwinism or struct-uralism with a sneer, and denounces the evidence for fossii man because an American once reconstructed a fossil human from a pig's tooth!

Works like this do no service to psychical research. In their indiscriminate attack and defence, real targets are missed. Thus Inglis is quite correct in his comments on the CSICOP *Starbaby* fiasco, but many readers will regard his criticism of that in the same light as his defence of Eva C., Ted Serios, Uri Geller, Clive Backster, etc. Furthermore, many scientists are going to get their impressions of the field, not from careful works, but from Inglis, as he takes another not inconsiderable step towards being psychical research's biggest public relations disaster since Conan Doyle. (FR)

