Book Reviews

Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology. Edited by Leslie Shepard. Gale Research Co., Detroit, 1978. 1084 pp. Two volumes. $48.00/set.

Reviewed by Ray Hyman

The subtitle of this encyclopedia—"A Compendium of Information on the Occult Sciences, Magic, Demonology, Superstitions, Spiritism, Mysticism, Metaphysics, Psychical Science, and Parapsychology, with Biographical and Bibliographical Notes and Comprehensive Indexes"—indicates its ambitious range of coverage. States the editor: "The scope of the present work is a very broad one. The word 'occult' has been interpreted in its widest sense of 'hidden, secret, beyond human understanding,' as well as pertaining to magic spells, miracles, and witchcraft. Certain mysteries, such as the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, and Unidentified Flying Objects have a valid inclusion, even if they may someday be identified as elusive but objective entities around which legends and mythologies have grown."

Three individuals have written the more than 4,000 entries. Approximately 3,000 entries have been taken over from the two standard works: *Encyclopedia of the Occult* by Lewis Spence (1920) and *Encyclopedia of Psychic Science* by Nandor Fodor (1934). In most instances the items have been taken over unchanged. In a few cases, Shepard has added a paragraph or a bibliography to bring some of the entries up to date. In addition, Shepard has written around 1,000 new entries, as well as provided a complete and useful general index along with nine helpful special indices on such topics as "Animals, birds, insects," "Demons," "Gods," "Paranormal Phenomena," "Societies and Organizations," and so on. The special index on "Paranormal Phenomena" is further divided into 50 subcategories, such as "Animal magnetism," "Apparitions," "Automatic writing," "Dowsing," "Extrasensory perception," "Eyeless sight," "Haunting," "Healing, psychic," "Levitation," "Mediums" (over 220 are indexed), "Multiple personality," "Poltergeist," "Psychic photography," "Slate-writing," and so on.

The handiest standard for comparison is the 24-volume set of *Man, Myth, & Magic: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Supernatural*, edited by Richard Cavendish (1970). The Cavendish encyclopedia has three times as many pages but many of these are covered with lavish illustrations (the Shepard volumes have no

Ray Hyman is professor of psychology at the University of Oregon.

illustrations). The Cavendish work has more entries, but the Shepard volumes have longer entries that cover special topics in greater depth. Both works have superb general and special indices.

The major difference between the two contemporary encyclopedias is in the authorship of the entries. Cavendish's work contains contributions from over 200 experts. This gives the advantage of expertise for each entry. It also results in the inevitable unevenness of such varied authorship. The majority of entries in Shepard's book have been left just as they were written by Spence in 1920 or Fodor in 1934. In many cases, this does not matter greatly because the entries refer to events or persons of the past, but some of the entries would have profited from the addition of material that has emerged since the Spence and Fodor accounts. However, because of the material that Shepard has added and the entries he has written, the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* benefits from being published eight years later than the Cavendish work. In addition, the Shepard work will be kept contemporary by interedition supplements that come out four times a year (a subscription costs $30 a year).

Shepard's encyclopedia exhibits both the advantages and disadvantages of limited authorship. Both Spence and Fodor produced works of heroic proportions. The range and thoroughness of their scholarship is impressive. I am equally impressed with Shepard's attempt not only to include many of the original entries but also to provide coverage of what has taken place since 1934.

But a single individual cannot have command of the entire range of knowledge relevant to occultism and the supernatural. And this results in inevitable gaps or weaknesses in specific instances. The fact that all three authors share the same biases is both a minus and a plus. It is a minus because a specific bias creates a filter for deciding what is and is not to be included; and it colors the presentation of debatable issues. To be fair, however, I should point out that the three authors, although proponents of the genuineness of many paranormal phenomena, seem to lean over backward to present many of the skeptical arguments. And since their collective biases become readily apparent through reading the entries, the careful reader can take such biases into account when using the encyclopedia.

All three authors included in this work seem to share not only a common set of attitudes and beliefs but also rather similar backgrounds. Lewis Spence (1874-1955) was a journalist and a Scottish scholar of the occult. He was especially concerned with the problem of Atlantis, on which he wrote four books. L. Sprague de Camp described Spence's first book on Atlantis as "the best pro-Atlantis book published to date" (as of around 1950). Although less naive than Ignatius Donnelly's wild speculations, a recent expert on classical studies (E. S. Ramage) has characterized it as "full of misconceptions about chronology, geology, archaeology, and ethnography." Both in his Atlantis books and in his entries in this encyclopedia, Spence shows signs of impatience and hostility toward what he calls the "tape-measure school" of science and pushes for a more "inspirational" approach.

Nandor Fodor (1895-1964), who began as a lawyer in Hungary, became a journalist and then a psychoanalyst. Spence's *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, which came out in 1920, is more heavily oriented toward mythology and folklore than is Fodor's *Encyclopedia of Psychic Science* (1934). The latter work is much more concerned with mediums and spiritualistic phenomena. But both authors share remarkably similar beliefs about the role of fraud, self-deception, and psychological states in the production of allegedly paranormal phenomena.

Other than his contributions to the current encyclopedia, I know of Leslie Shepard only through the forewords he wrote to reprints of Baron von Reichenbach's books on the Odic force. Reichenbach, a nineteenth-century chemist and metallurgist, began in 1850 to publish works that presented his theories and results of experimentation with what he considered to be a new force. This force could only be detected by special individuals whom he termed "sensitives." These sensitives could see colored flames emerging from magnets and they could see auras emitted from individuals. The Odic force could also account for table-turning, divining, and many phenomena attributed to animal magnetism. Reichenbach's contemporaries ridiculed his claims and refused to take him seriously. But with the current pop-occultism revival of interest in mysterious forces such as radiesthesia, Kirlian auras, ley lines, and orgone energy, the Odic force has been rediscovered. Shepard is among those who feel that "it is time that Reichenbach had another hearing."

Shepard gives a clear presentation of his views toward his subject matter in his Introduction. He has taken "much care... to present occultism and parapsychology in a way that avoids the sensational presentation so often associated with such topics in modern times... Occultism and parapsychology are still highly controversial subjects and there are varying shades of opinion on all aspects, ranging from uncritical acceptance to invincible disbelief.... It has to be admitted that the occult world has been permeated by deception, fraud and folly, although this does not invalidate much that is genuine and of great cultural and scientific importance.... Social responsibility requires the avoidance of a too ready acceptance of the dubious and dishonest as much as a too hasty rejection of the bizarre and paranormal. Because of this, every effort has been made to maintain a realistic presentation that strikes a fair balance between credulity and skepticism."

How does one evaluate such a work? I tried a number of approaches. I have had a reprint of Fodor's *Encyclopedia of Psychic Science* for a number of years and have found it a very useful reference on a number of occasions (paperback reprints are available for less than $10, a very good buy). The Shepard work, containing not only most of Fodor and Spence but additions by Shepard, is even more useful because of the several indices (Fodor has no index). In the few months I have had Shepard on my bookshelf I have found it useful on a number of occasions—in preparing book reviews; in researching talks on psychics and scientists. It is useful for historical material, especially with respect to the heyday of spiritualism during the Victorian era.

I drew a random sample of 50 items to read. Most were highly informative and seemed to be written from a neutral or nonevaluative standpoint. In some cases, such as the entry on Florence Cook, the accusations of fraud are fully described, but the writer tends to dismiss them or to find ways to save the case for at least some genuine paranormal elements. On some phenomena, such as ectoplasm, psychometry, and clairaudience, the entries are written as if there is no question about their reality. The article on Nostradamus is especially credulous and, in this respect, compares unfavorably with the one in Cavendish.

I supplemented this sample with a selection of items that I felt somewhat knowledgeable about. I will briefly indicate some of my reactions. I was surprised to find no separate entry or indexing of Clever Hans. Clever Hans and his owner, Herr von Osten, are briefly alluded to in an article on the Elberfeld Horses, who were the direct successors to Hans. Shepard presents the case for these horses having either human intelligence or mediumistic powers in a credulous manner.

Surprisingly, he does not mention Pfungst's classic book on Clever Hans or his systematic investigations that produced a completely normal explanation of the phenomenon. Indeed, in my opinion, Pfungst's book is the classic debunking job of all time.

For Harry Edwards, England's famous faith healer, Shepard reports an 80 percent recovery rate for such illnesses as cancer, TB, and the like. He vaguely alludes to skepticism on the part of the medical profession but, surprisingly, does not refer to Dr. Louis Rose's important book *Faith Healing*, in which he describes working closely with Edwards and failing, after a determined effort of many years, to find one single case of valid faith healing. Kathryn Kuhlman's faith healing is also described by Shepard in a completely credulous manner with no mention of William A. Nolen's careful study of her methods and his inability to find any proof that she can produce results.

On the other hand, Shepard seems skeptical of dianetics and Scientology, cloudbursting, some claims of modern gurus, Castaneda's Don Juan, and the reality of Bridey Murphy. But such skepticism is more than offset by his positive verdicts on the reality of water witching, the Cottingley Fairies, table-turning, psychic surgery, Abram's Black Box, Ted Serios's psychic photography, Reich's orgone energy, dermo-optical perception, the Davenport brothers, Jeane Dixon, psychic plants, some of Madame Blavatsky's miracles, and the Raudive voices.

Nevertheless, I find the encyclopedia a useful reference work. Shepard, for the most part, does honor his commitment to present both sides. His biases are out in the open and easy to discount when using the material. I do find some striking omissions on the skeptical side, but I attribute these to the limitations inherent in a work for which a single individual is responsible. Some of these omissions are the following:

1. On water witching, pendulum divination, Ouija boards, and related practices, the encyclopedia presents Chevreul's and Faraday's arguments that these are the result of involuntary muscular movements. But Fodor and Shepard dismiss these arguments as inadequate to account for all the phenomena and attribute paranormal forces to many of the applications. No mention is made of the many scientific studies, all casting doubt on the reality of these phenomena, that are covered in the book by Vogt and myself (*Water Witching U.S.A.*) or of studies made since that time. Nor does Shepard make it clear that no scientific evidence has ever been accumulated for the position he takes.

2. N-rays, Abram's Box, and related ideas on mysterious radiations are presented without reference to the striking and convincing evidence against their reality (e.g., Wood's famous *Nature* paper on N-rays).

3. The Kirlian aura, acupuncture, and alleged phenomena of psychic plants are all presented in a credulous manner with no reference to many scientific studies that failed to replicate the phenomena or demystified them in terms of very normal science.

4. The entry on Raudive Voices, which concludes that "there is impressive evidence that the communications are mainly from dead individuals" fails to mention the work of Ellis, which indicates that most, if not all, of the phenomena can be attributed to artifact.

5. Arthur Ford's mediumship, and his alleged breaking of Houdini's code through spirit contact, are presented with no reference to damaging revelations in books by Spraggett and Rauscher.

Even when Shepard, or his deceased coauthors, do bring up the damaging

material, they often find excuses, sometimes very farfetched, to somehow save the day for paranormality. Here are some examples from my notes:

1. Shepard discusses Abrams and his famous Black Box. He admits that Abram's approach to diagnosis was unconventional—the patient could send a drop of blood (or even a sample of his handwriting) and this could be the basis of a diagnosis from long distance by use of the Black Box—but argues that he "was no quack." Compare this with James Harvey Young's quotation of Cramp's that Abrams "easily ranked as the dean of twentieth-century charlatans." In his entry on Black Boxes, Shepard admits that the box does not operate reliably but claims that this is because "special sensitivities were involved."

2. In the entry on psychic surgery, Shepard admits that "there is a strong possibility that some 'operations' ... have been fakes." He concludes, however, "But, as with Spiritualist and related paranormal phenomena, it is possible that the healers and a large proportion of their phenomena are genuine, but that trickery may sometimes be resorted to when natural powers fail."

3. After presenting Fodor's account of Helene Blavatsky, with its summary of the Hodgson report that concluded, "We think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished and interesting imposters in history," Shepard adds some paragraphs of his own that state: "The character of this remarkable woman was too complex for instant judgments on whether she was a genuine mystic or a charlatan. In fact, she seemed to manifest genuine paranormal phenomena with the same unconcern as the most childish frauds. She had a great contempt for stupidity, and it is possible that much of her undoubted trickery was performed as a prank, to mock the credulity of foolish followers ... That she had genuine occult inspiration and powers cannot be doubted."

4. On Jeane Dixon, Shepard remarks: "Because some of her predictions have not been realized, Mrs. Dixon has been widely disparaged by some critics, who have also taken exception to what they regard as her right-wing bias. However, most sensitives have a certain failure rate, often based on faulty interpretation of symbols ... Mrs. Dixon has had an impressive rate of successful prediction of important world events." Shepard does not document this record. The attempts to tally her predictions and compare them against outcomes, at least the ones I have seen, are impressive mainly for how strikingly wrong she has been.

5. With respect to the medium Eva C, Shepard comments, "Some ambiguous or even fraudulent phenomena [have] often been mingled with genuine mediumship. Mediums in a state of trance do not have conscious control over their actions, and often respond to the desire of sitters for paranormal phenomena by ingenious frauds. Sometimes a strong expectation of fraud will result in fraud."

6. But my nomination for the "Bent-Spoon Award" goes to Shepard's ability to salvage some genuineness for Keely and his notorious motor. Ord-Hume in his book on *Perpetual Motion* opens his chapter on Keely with the following words: "Of all the perpetual motion frauds the story of John W. Keely's carefully planned deception and the manner in which the Keely Motor Company defrauded people of large sums of money rank supreme. As a perpetual motionist, it is difficult to imagine that he ever set out with honourable intent." Apparently such a feat of imagination is not beyond Shepard's abilities. Shepard reports: "After Keely's death ... startling evidence of fraud was uncovered, and it has since been assumed that all his inventions were fraudulent. The real motive force seems to have been compressed air, concealed in cylinders in a secret basement and conveyed to the

apparatus by thin hollow wires. Nonetheless, many individuals even today believe that any fraud may have been merely because of the intense pressure to show practical results, and that there may have been some genuine basis to Keely's life work."

This is just a small sampling of many of the defenses of the reality of paranormal phenomena put forth by Spence, Fodor, and Shepard. Such defenses will surely tend to raise the hackles of many of the readers of this journal. But, if such readers can make the proper emotional and intellectual adjustments for these biases, I think they can profit in many ways from careful use of this reference work. As I have indicated, the biases are out in the open. They typically show up when the authors are trying to cope with accusations of fraud, error, or mistaken judgments. To the credit of the authors, they do, for the most part, try to acknowledge the arguments of skeptics. In most of these cases the skeptical reader is alerted to counterarguments and can make his or her own conclusions.

For me, the most valuable benefit of browsing through this encyclopedia was the opportunity to gain insights into the mentality of a type of believer who falls into error because of good intentions. Spence, Fodor, and Shepard represent the type of believer that, in my opinion, we skeptics should take quite seriously and try to understand. These men are not fanatics, cranks, or crackpots. Unlike the more extreme supporters of the occult, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Alfred Russel Wallace, and the like, they pay careful attention to the critics and accept many of the charges of fraud or error as true.

In their own way, Shepard and his coauthors are trying their best to be scholarly, fair, and balanced. In many ways they are more open-minded and impartial than some of the skeptics and critics. But it is just this commitment to balance and fair play that, in my opinion, traps them into false beliefs. I find it somewhat touching and appealing that these men are so willing to try to accommodate all sides.

The problem comes from trying to balance testimonies from two sides as if they were equal in trustworthiness. In treating all parties fairly, they easily err in giving credence to testimonials that have no place in the court of science. Spence's entry on "Evidence" reflects this tendency. He complains, "The whole history of science and discovery is a triumph of true testimony, yet it is a strange fact that very little thought is generally given by the very representatives of science to the enormous amount of testimony and experimental observation that has been piled up by spiritualists and psychical researchers in the last eighty years."

Spence wrote that entry in 1920. The sort of "testimony and experimental observation" that he was talking about was just the kind that is useless for scientific purposes—it depended upon unsystematic accounts, untrained and unaided observations, nonstandardized tasks, and phenomena that were generally unrepeatable and inaccessible to skeptical eyes. Shepard seems to sense that adherence to the ground rules of science might never allow paranormal claims to become accepted. In his article on parapsychology he concludes: "It is this separation of parapsychology from life which makes laboratory experiments tedious, lacking in warmth or incentive, whereas the uncritical believer, whether Spiritualist, Christian Scientist or member of a witchcraft or Voodoo cult may generate a powerful emotional drive which produces sensational phenomena or exalted states of consciousness. It may eventually become necessary for certain areas of parapsychology to sacrifice some of their objectivity and discover a philosophical or religious basis for the validation of the paranormal as a functional

part of everyday life, as it was in primitive societies."

The dilemma for Spence, Fodor, and Shepard is how to make sense out of the conflicting testimonies of believers and skeptics without impugning the integrity of any of the witnesses. The irresolution is more creative than the simple decision that one of the sides must be wrong. They assume that there must be truth on both sides. Shepard accepts the testimonies of those who claim to have seen Tony Agpaoa faking his "operations." But he also accepts the testimonies of those who claim they saw Tony perform his psychic surgery under conditions that precluded trickery. Fodor apparently accepts some of the testimonies of individuals who claim they saw Henry Slade, the nineteenth-century medium, cheating. But he also accepts the testimonies of Zoellner and others of the genuineness of Slade's effects at other times.

Out of the sincere attempt to give credence to witnesses on both sides, certain scholarly proponents of the reality of paranormal phenomena have developed a belief system that not only handles these seemingly conflicting testimonies but insulates their beliefs from any possible falsification. I think it is important to fully understand this belief system and how it works. It is built up of basic cognitive principles that most of us, in our daily lives, probably employ to protect our cherished beliefs from erosion by the inroads of reality.

What follows is a tentative and incomplete attempt to make explicit the propositions and presuppositions that underlie the sincere and scholarly attempts to justify the paranormal. I hope to achieve a better and more complete characterization of this thought pattern at a later time. What I am presenting here is merely an illustration of what can be extracted from the study of the entries in Shepard's encyclopedia. The system will be presented as a set of numbered propositions:

1. Some apparently supernatural events can be accounted for by natural causes, such as: (*a*) unconscious muscular acts, (*b*) perceptual illusions, (*c*) selective perception, (*d*) hallucinations, (*e*) selective memory, (*f*) dissociation, (*g*) unconscious deception, (*h*) coincidence, (*i*) deliberate fraud.

2. When such natural causes are duly taken into account, some phenomena still remain which are truly paranormal.

3. These paranormal phenomena may be due to (*a*) new forms of energy or radiation previously unknown to science, (*b*) nonphysical causes that are beyond the pale of science, (*c*) nonhuman intelligences, such as spirits of the dead or entities from another realm.

4. A sensitive who cheats may do so (*a*) only as a way to supplement erratic or failing powers, (*b*) because it is less costly in effort and health then to employ genuine powers, (*c*) as a way of teasing or poking fun at stupid or incompetent observers, (*d*) because of possession by, or the influence of, evil or mischievous spirits, (*e*) because of suggestions implicitly accepted from a skeptic, (*f*) as a way of anticipating a truly paranormal occurrence.

5. An observer who honestly believes he or she has witnessed cheating by the sensitive may be making wrong inferences. In Shepard, for example, we learn that the spirit photographer Hope was discredited as a fraud when it was discovered that some of the alleged spirits that appeared in his photographs were of living persons. But a current reinterpretation exonerates Hope in that it is assumed that portraits of living as well as dead persons can be achieved paranormally. Likewise, as reported in Shepard, when a materialized "spirit" was seized by an intrepid witness and found to be the medium in disguise, this was originally considered evidence of fraud. But revised theories of materialization now allow for such

occurrences to be perfectly genuine after all!

6. When a witness catches a sensitive in the act of cheating, this often is because (*a*) the witness secretly wanted the sensitive to cheat and indirectly induced the cheating; (*b*) the witness is incompetent and his laxity actually encouraged the sensitive to take the easy road of cheating rather than the difficult path of producing genuine phenomena. (This charge was not only brought out against the scientists who caught Palladino in trickery, but it was also leveled against me because I allowed Uri Geller to employ trickery when I was investigating him. The implication is that if I was a good investigator, Geller would have not had the opportunity to cheat and would have been forced to display his genuine powers.)

7. A magician or critic who demonstrates that he or she can simulate, through trickery, an apparently paranormal feat (*a*) may actually be a renegade psychic who is not employing trickery but merely claiming to be using trickery (such charges were leveled at one time or another in all sincerity against Davey, Houdini, Maskelyne, Randi, and, recently, against myself); (*b*) further emphasizes the reality of the original paranormal event, because one can simulate or counterfeit only that which is real; (*c*) cannot do so under the "same" conditions as those under which the alleged "real" phenomenon occurred (whatever these "same" conditions were, it turns out that the "psychic" also cannot duplicate his or her own feats under these "same" conditions).

8. Because of the nature of paranormal phenomena, strict scientific controls are often inappropriate and self-defeating.

9. Truly paranormal powers and strong tendencies to cheat often occur together within the same individuals. In the case of poltergeists, we are told that the adolescent around whom the phenomena originally occur eventually learns to imitate the genuine phenomena through trickery.

10. If a sensitive has not been detected in cheating over several demonstrations, then the phenomena must be genuine. Richet stated as a rule that a medium who cheats could get away with it for a maximum of two years at the most. •

Proceedings of the 1976 CUFOS Conference. Center for UFO Studies, 1609 Sherman Ave., Evanston, Illinois 60201. 320 pp. Paperback, $15.

Reviewed by Robert Sheaffer

"A secret UFO conference," charged the critics of the Center for UFO Studies, when word of this by-invitation-only symposium began to leak out. "The heads of the major UFO organizations were left out... How can I find out what goes on in there?" asked one writer in exasperation. The proceedings of the 1976 CUFOS Conference are secret no longer, and anyone who is willing to shell out $15 for a paperback book can now obtain a copy of the papers presented at that highly controversial meeting. What went on behind those closed doors?

A great deal of new material was presented. Unfortunately, not all of it is good. A "mixed bag" is the most generous description one can give of this uneven collection. A few papers are excellent. A few others should have been laughed out

---

Robert Sheaffer studied astronomy at Northwestern University and is a member of CSICP's UFO Subcommittee.
