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BOOKS

NEWS & REVIEWS

by Jerome Clark



DREAMS AND ENCOUNTERS

FOR AS LONG as there have been human beings, human beings have been reporting encounters with entities of various kinds: apparitions, disembodied spirits, deities, fairies, monsters, angels, demons and extraterrestrials. For most of human history it was assumed that these entities were precisely what they appeared to be. Then, as science and materialism came to redefine the world, such phenomena were declared nonexistent; those who claimed to experience them were deemed mistaken, dishonest or crazy.

But this did not stop people from having such experiences, although it did discourage most persons from reporting them. Those relatively few individuals who bothered to investigate these reports found that the average percipient was of sound mind and honest tongue. Fantastic as their claims sounded, the witnesses appeared to be normal persons sincerely describing incredible events.

Eventually, in the late 19th Century, a number of intellectuals interested in the question of survival after death began to study apparitions and mediumistic communications, phenomena which, literally interpreted, imply that the dead can return to interact with the living. Their investigations showed these psychical researchers that the reality behind the appearances is not that simple. While a case for survival could be made from these kinds of entity experiences, other interpretations, both conventional and unconventional, are possible. In other words, the entity experience may be real but it may be something other than what it seems to be. But the nature of this "something" remains a subject of continuing controversy in all areas of entity investigation.

In our own time UFO researchers have grappled with a vexing problem: Are the humanoids reported in close encounters of the third kind really the extraterrestrials they seem (and sometimes claim) to be—or are they something else, something more relevant to psychology or parapsychology than to exobiology? And are they related to other entity phenomena such as Marian visitations, ghosts and fairies?

In an attempt to shed new light on these issues, Hilary Evans has written one of the most ambitious works on the paranormal to be published in recent years. *Visions, Apparitions, Alien Visitors* (The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England, 1984, 320 pages, £ 9.95), subtitled "A Comparative Study of the Entity Problem," reviews a broad range of phenomena, beginning with dreams and hallucinations and going on to examine just about every reported category of "real" entities. He believes that all of these phenomena, from the undeniably subjective to the apparently objective (i.e., those manifestations that can be observed by more than one witness), share certain core elements which indicate they are generated by the same psychological processes.

Evans is hardly the first writer to attempt to establish a common origin for reports of different types of entities. In *Passport to Magonia* (1969) Vallee compared UFO humanoids to Celtic fairies and in *The Unidentified* (1975) Loren Coleman and I discussed UFO contact claims in the context of religious visions and supernatural folklore. But in retrospect Vallee's once-influential book seems frustratingly vague and question-begging and 10 years later the most charitable

(crisis apparitions, for example) in which an entity communicates information the percipient could not possibly have known. He believes that in these instances the producer interacts with an outside agent (another intelligence, human or nonhuman) to create an entity appearance that "embodies information supplied by both." The forms these entities take—humanoids, ghosts, fairies or whatever—reflect "our unarticulated wishes, fears, hopes or preoccupations." Sometimes this process produces manifestations of at least some physical substance.

Evans sums up his theory in these words: "The entity-experience has a material basis that can reasonably be conceived of as a physical communication, fabricated by an autonomously operating part of the percipient's mind, either on its own or in liaison with an external agent; expressed in the same encoded-signal form as any other mental communication; presented to the conscious mind as a substitute for the sensory input from the real world; and occasionally being given a temporary external expression utilizing some kind of quasi-physical substance."

Is Evans right? I don't know. But he certainly is to be admired for his effort to bring new ideas to bear on this fascinating, endlessly complex subject which so seldom gets the intelligent scrutiny it deserves. *Visions, Apparitions, Alien Visitors* is so superior to the average work on the paranormal that, whether Evans is right or wrong, his book deserves our highest respect. And of course if he is right, then his book is a literary landmark.

A less important but still worthwhile book is John Rimmer's *The Evidence for Alien Abductions* (The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England, 1984, 160 pages, £ 2.50, paperback). Despite the somewhat misleading title Rimmer, who edits *Magonia*, the leading journal of revisionist ufology, takes the view that "abductions" are probably purely imaginary events. He leans toward Alvin Lawson's idea that abductees are reexperiencing "birth traumas," although few psychologists and neurologists believe any such phenomenon exists or is possible. (Rimmer does concede that the "Birth Trauma Hypothesis is far from being proved . . . Even the existence of any

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form of birth trauma is a subject of considerable controversy among psychologists themselves.")

But Rimmer is refreshingly undogmatic in his approach and he acknowledges that reasonable people can read the evidence differently. I have to say I am unpersuaded by some of his arguments. At the same time I think the UFO literature has needed a skeptical book on abductions and I'm glad that someone as thoughtful and literate as John Rimmer has written it. Those readers who want to know what the case for abductions looks like should read Budd Hopkins' *Missing Time* (1981) and make up their own minds.



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thing I can find to say about my own book is that it is naive. In this country the enthusiasm for revisionist ufology faded some years ago. In Europe, however, it claims a small army of adherents who hold that the "UFO phenomenon" is (to state crudely an idea that is often elegantly argued) a psychological aberration symptomatic of something akin to a planet-wide nervous breakdown.

Empirical evidence for so exotic a notion (it can hardly be called a hypothesis) is scant. But if the revisionists' answers are unsatisfactory—I think, for example, that they are quite wrong to assert that no nonhuman intelligence is involved in *any* entity experiences—at least they have raised some provocative questions about the role psychological processes play in such events. In addressing these questions, Evans takes a bold and original approach.

In the course of a long book printed in small type he argues that "there exists, within the human mind, a capability for one part of that mind to function autonomously: one of the things it can do is to stage a display, which it presents to the conscious mind to perceive. The conscious mind may have little or no idea that this is happening." The "producer," as he calls this function, constructs our dreams, which of course we recognize as wholly subjective, and it also on occasion produces hallucinatory figures, which we may easily mistake for "real" entities.

This explanation is fine as far as it goes, but Evans expands it to include those cases