

**Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-of-the-Body Experiences**, by Susan J. Blackmore. Academy Chicago Publishers, 1992, 299 pp. \$13.00, paperback, ISBN 0-89733-344-6.

I always find it difficult to read a book like this. Not because it is badly written or researched. It is superbly written and researched. Because it argues long and well against Out-of-the-Body (OBE) and Near-Death (NDE) Experiences as major sources of evidence supporting a basic human desire: survival of the personality after death of the body. Even the author sheds her poker face at times to express her disappointment after surveying the evidence, but gamely suggests at the end that her conclusions are still "tremendously exciting."

Originally published in 1982, this 1992 "American Edition" updates the previous version with an eleven-page Postscript with references as well as a revised biographical sketch. The book is published "on behalf of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR)", and the biographical sketch describes the author's SPR activities but fails to mention her membership, since the Spring of 1988 (when her name first appeared in the listing in *Skeptical Inquirer*) as a Fellow of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Hardly fair to the uninitiated reader. Does "Over the years . . . I have had many such experiences [i.e., OBEs] usually through meditation or OBE induction [i.e., drugs such as hash, p. 2, and Ketamine, p. 273]" sound like it comes from a CSICOP Fellow? To the author's credit, she presents all the evidence, including her own research, fairly without resorting to debunking ridicule or hyperbole. Although she inserts her own interpretations, she does not bludgeon the reader with them. The Foreword of her book, written by Brian Inglis, rails against hardcore skepticism: "Skeptics have sedulously propagated the notion that psychical researchers believe in ESP, PK, apparitions, and so on because they . . . need to believe" and that this is a "ludicrous misconception." Surely Dr. Blackmore would not permit such a comment if she did not hold a similar view, unexpected as it may be in a Fellow of CSICOP.

The book begins with a discussion of the author's OBE and expands to experiences of numerous well-known astral projectionists. In each case Blackmore discusses fully all possible explanations for the experienced phenomena. Here also is a fascinating historical account of the development of belief in an "etheric body" or "aura", with its roots in Theosophy and the disenchantment with what religion and science had to offer in the late 19th century. Death, rather than a materialistic permanent end or a vague religious nirvana, can be viewed simply as the ultimate and final form of astral projection. The author makes several points that are repeatedly emphasized throughout the book: that the OBE is not, in her view, a psychic or paranormal phenomena; that the details of OBEs seem to be a mixture of correct and incorrect visions; that there is insufficient evidence to associate ESP with cognition in the OBE; and that psychological theories of the OBE are the most valid.