

Throughout the conference, discussions assumed a primarily historical, cultural, or cross-cultural position rather than an emphasis on recounting anomalous experiences. The latter are a given. However, a biographic essay on Eileen Garrett, who founded the Parapsychology Foundation in 1951, clearly shows that anomalies can provide stimulus and framework for important academic work. In 1931, Garrett agreed to be scientifically tested by the American Society of Psychical Research, opening a new world to her. Her connection to scientific study continued throughout her life, working with Johns Hopkins and Duke University and Maimonades Hospital, among many others, as a subject, researcher and funder.

In "Women, Power, and the Paranormal: A Cultural Critique" Marilyn Schlitz, says, "Women, whether believers, practitioners, or psychical researchers, are part of an on-going process in which morality, personal relations, and research directions reflect and resist the socially constructed gender categories." Her discussion could easily be applied to other aspects of the feminine experience. Similarly, Jessica Utts in "Past Reflections, Future Prospects" offers two thoughts, "we must be aware of how the expectations of those around us are influencing our behavior, our research ideas, and our modes of thinking..." and "we must learn to distinguish when it matters that we are women and when it does not."

Even from perspectives other than parapsychology such as Transpersonal Psychology or Women's Spirituality, the topics and the content of *Women and Parapsychology* are interesting and relevant. The science of Parapsychology is considered by some to be controversial and outside the mainstream, and as a consequence, research is sparse and funding is a problem. Yet, the issues these women face are parallel to those facing women in other fields and walks of life. In reconnecting, understanding and honoring the feminine in all fields, including parapsychology, a conscious attunement to the wholeness of our life experience may be achieved. *Women in Parapsychology*, though it might have been a dry conference report, succeeds in honoring the feminine in a richly informative discussion of a challenging field.

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Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief by James McClenon. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994. 281 pp. \$19.95 ISBN 0-8122-1355-6 (pbk.), \$39.95 ISBN 0-8122-3074-4 (cloth).

The author, a sociologist, supposes that most students of religion believe that religions endorse anomalous events within their context and the religious beliefs lead their adherents to credit the anomalous events; "Wondrous stories" (to use his phrase) derive their credibility from the culture in which the narra-

tor lives. In this book he tries to show that the opposite is true: People "experience" anomalous events and secondarily derive their religions from these experiences. I should explain here that the "wondrous events" described in this book are of human experiences and feats, such as apparitions, knifeless surgical operations, firewalking, and experiences near death. McClenon has not written about physical phenomena, such as novae, monsters of the sea, or UFOs.

In support of his view of the origin of religion, McClenon presents descriptions of a variety of anomalous events within the context of a religion or of a sect or cult within a major religion. McClenon's findings — that is his term — derive from disparate sources: Questionnaires, interviews, and (in "psychic surgery" and firewalking) participant observation. He provides examples (sometimes illustrated) of wondrous events from several different cultures. The countries chosen are nearly all from eastern Asia, especially, China, Japan, and the Philippines, with some information from Korea and Sri Lanka. He gives us a glimpse of Dervishes in Jordan running knives into their flesh; but he says little about wondrous events in the rest of Western Asia, India, Africa, and (with one notable exception) the Americas.

Although most of the book reports contemporary or recent wondrous events, two chapters are excursions into history. One of these is entitled "Near-death experiences [NDEs] in Medieval Europe, China, and Japan." At the end of this chapter McClenon concludes that "the prevalence of similar elements in Asian and European NDE accounts suggests that this form of experience has primary features that shaped religious ideologies in a common direction. The data support the experiential source hypothesis." The second historical chapter is entitled "The Scientific Investigation of Wondrous Events." This is a summary history of the scientific study of paranormal phenomena.

McClenon devotes the penultimate chapter of his book (before the final one in which he recapitulates his interpretation) to the phenomena reported by a group in Missouri known as the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis (SORRAT). Their phenomena included raps, levitations, and writing within sealed glass containers. Despite evidence of some fraud, some of the observed events remain inexplicable by normal processes. McClenon compares the phenomena reported by the SORRAT group with those observed by a much less controversial one led by the late Kenneth Batchelder in England. As usual, McClenon focuses most of his attention on the social (or sociological) aspects of the participants in the SORRAT phenomena. Their members formed a small circle, one might say a tiny cult, of persons who believed in the authenticity and importance of their observations.

McClenon emphasizes that his concern is with belief, not with knowledge. What people believe influences their conduct and shapes their religion. The warrant of belief has little interest for him. This is a safe position, and it has enabled him to look with detachment at a great many anomalous phenomena.

It is not, however, a stance that most scientists find attractive, let alone helpful in advancing the understanding of wondrous events. As I read this book I found myself wishing that McClenon would stop travelling from one country to another, settle in one of them, and make a thorough investigation of at least one of the phenomena he has observed.

We should, however, judge McClenon's book by its success in achieving his aims, not those of most scientists. Here I have to say that I do not believe that McClenon does succeed in the main purpose of his book, which aims at showing that the experiential source theory of religion fits the facts better than the cultural source one. Both the performers and the observers of wondrous events nearly always place them in a religious context; but that does not make them the sole or even the principal foundation of religious belief. I was glad to note that at the end of his text McClenon makes a less ambitious claim than that of his subtitle. There he states that "anomalous experiences... have had an important, but restricted, role in the development of modern religious doctrines" (p. 248). I think no one would disagree with that.

On the whole, this book is well-produced. It has adequate references. The chapter on the history of scientific inquiry, however, shows some evidence of hasty reading or reliance on secondary sources. For example, McClenon describes John Elliotson, a British professor of medicine of the first half of the 19th century who was active in promoting mesmerism, as a "surgeon." He implies that J. B. Rhine was the first person to adopt the Greek letter ψ as a useful short designation for all paranormal phenomena; in fact, B. P. Wiesner and R. H. Thouless first proposed this use of *psi*, and Rhine later accepted it. In thinking of the usefulness of this book as a work of reference for some parapsychologists and some cultural anthropologists I found the index in many ways adequate, but in some respects disappointingly incomplete. For example, Korea is indexed, but Japan, Jordan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka are not. And among important subjects mentioned in the book, firewalking is indexed, but apparitions, levitation, possession, and "psychic surgery" are not.

Readers may wish to compare McClenon's collection of wondrous events with two earlier books of the same genre. I refer to *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena* by D. Scott Rogo (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1983); and *The Skeptical Occultist* by Terry White (London: Century, 1994). Both Rogo and White undertook to appraise the evidence favoring or disfavoring a paranormal interpretation of the phenomena they described; and both covered a wider range of phenomena than McClenon has. On the other hand, McClenon differs from them in offering a theory about the place of "wondrous events" in the origin of religious belief.

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