

Politics of the Imagination: The Life, Work, and Ideas of Charles Fort by Colin Bennett. Manchester, England: Headpress, 2002. 206 pp. \$17.95 (paper). ISBN 1-900486-20-2.

The above subtitle is misleading. There is little in this book about Charles Fort the person. Do not expect a biography. Nor is there significant treatment of the observations Fort culled from the scientific literature during a lifetime of library research. Do not expect a compendium of Forteania; that is, frog falls, moving stars, sea serpents, disappearing people, spoon bendings—you know, those weird events that are the essence of Fort's massive compilations. Bennett's book focuses instead upon a single theme: Science conspires to shield the commons from the true nature of the universe, which is bizarre, magical, fantastic, and often not amenable to Science's computerized probing. In Bennett's eyes, Science is a sort of social control, a high barrier of paradigms and professed laws erected to hide us from the truth about life and the cosmos. Science is just one more conspiracy. As I read *Politics of the Imagination*, my mind kept flashing to the movie "The Matrix"!

Bennett's assessment of Fort and Forteanism is not mine. I have read Fort's four books and do not see anything in them ominously conspiratorial. Instead, I see Fort chuckling over every anomaly he finds in Nature and Science. He laughs often at Science's claims of its "final" explanations of this or that phenomenon. But while he may seek to embarrass Science, Fort is not into social control. He wouldn't even take the Fortean Society seriously when it was formed in the 1930s.

My first thought upon opening *Politics of the Imagination* was that it was really a hoax. I readily grant that there really are cases of falling fish, sightings of unknown hominid-like animals, and a good many strange lights in the sky; and, further, I agree that Science often ignores such extraordinary phenomena and often brushes them under its very large rug. But these attitudes and actions do not even come close to Bennett's postulated, almost evil, Big Brother conspiracy of mainstream scientists.

Bennett's words greatly overplay Forteanism, as in this sentence: "The main Fortean principle is not so much one of the real versus the unreal, or truth versus falsehood, but the question of what as a society we decide we shall allow ourselves to experience."

Here's an even more extreme evaluation of Fort by Bennett: "What [Fort] uncovers is a picture of Science as a map of terror, concealment, disguises, removing the cover of massively engineered cultural advertising."

Science may not be perfect but, unless I have missed something, it is not evil. It can be pompous and overbearing but not the monster portrayed in the 206 pages of this book.

Two comparisons made in *Politics of the Imagination* really astound me. First, Fort's books are compared favorably to Joyce's *Ulysses*. Really!! Second, the final chapter is titled: "Lee Harvey Oswald as Fortean Man." Amazing!!

Actually, Bennett could have made his points in just 20 pages. The book rambles a lot; the writing is dense. Bennett is a world-class name-dropper and refers ad nauseum to scores of famous works of literature, politics, and philosophy. Every page, it seems, advances the thoughts of some famous non-scientist. I perceive here a connection to the fact that the original Fortean Society and many later copy-cat organizations were and are composed almost exclusively of writers, artists, and other non-scientists. Emulating Bennett's name-dropping, I see in Forteanism hints of C.P. Snow's "two cultures"; that is, the Liberal Arts versus Science.

Does Science really conspire to snuff out Forteana—those observations that do not fit its paradigms? Of course it does to some extent. Every human social system tries to preserve and protect its turf. And, to be honest, some Forteana should be classified as pseudoscience.

Even in his 206 pages, I don't think Bennett has proved a grand conspiracy in which Science has significant roles in hiding truths or in social control.

I cannot recommend this book as a realistic picture of Science or evaluation of Fort's work and influence. There is no great C.P. Snow-type confrontation. Science in general does not even know Forteanism exists; and few, if any, Forteans are scientists or even familiar with scientific methods.

Nevertheless, to be fair, Fort did amass in his four tomes many valid observations that are still not well explained. Some Forteana are legitimate scientific anomalies suggesting fertile research areas. Then, too, Science does have some fantastic and bizarre elements of its own that can be fairly classified as Fortean, such as cosmology's "dark energy" and quantum mechanics' "entanglement"!

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Encyclopedia of Space Science and Technology by Hans Mark, editor. Indianapolis, IN: John Wiley & Sons, 2003. 1864 pp. two-volume set. \$550. ISBN 0-471-32408-6.

The Encyclopedia of Space Science and Technology is a nice pair of books, coming in at over 900 pages each. The goals are worthy. An online statement says: "This state-of-the-art reference outlines what astronomers know about the sun, planets, galaxy, and universe as well as the effect of the space environment on human and other biological systems." The preface claims that not only will such scientific results, obtained by space missions, be presented at a high technical level, but the enabling technology will be described by authors who are or have been active participants. Editor Richard Truly, a former head