

**The World's Most Haunted Places: From the Secret Files of Ghostvillage.com** by Jeff Belanger. Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2004. 256 pp. \$15.99 (paper). ISBN 1-56414-764-9.

*The World's Most Haunted Places* devotes about six pages to each of 29 haunting investigations. Most locations are public establishments—often restaurants, hotels, and public buildings such as the White House in Washington, DC, or the Tower of London in England. This book is clearly written and popular in style. Typically, the author summarizes the results of his interviews with haunting experiencers and with psychics brought to the premise. The 29 "most haunted places" include locations in Great Britain (6), the Western USA and Alaska (6), East Coast USA (5), Central USA (4), Canada (4), Australia (2), Jamaica (1), and France (1). It is not certain that all should be included on a "most haunted" list. Many poltergeist cases, when active, generate experiences at a rate of more than one a day (Gauld & Cornell, 1979). Although the hauntings in this book create experiences at a far lower rate (some cases with rates of less than a few incidents a year), these cases draw interest due to their longevity and availability.

Few parapsychologists will be interested in this book. There is no discussion of the psychical research literature and no mention of psychical research theories. The author seems to assume that incidence of haunting experiences indicates that there is life after death. As a result, he merely describes reports of experiencers and psychics. Readers who wish to learn about the scientific study of hauntings should consult Gauld and Cornell (1979), Houran and Lange (2001), and Houran (2004).

We must consult others' writings if we wish to understand the context of this type of "ghost chasing." For example, Potts (2004: 211) provides a sociological analysis of such groups, noting that "hundreds of websites across the Internet" reveal a "great diversity of approaches and methods, ranging from relatively serious attempts to analyze paranormal phenomena, to blatantly commercial attempts to exploit the perennial interest in the supernatural." He discusses four types of ghost hunter: (1) sensationalist/popular, (2) high-tech ghost hunter, (3) mercenary, and (4) the pseudoscientific. *The World's Most Haunted Places (TWMHP)* falls into the "sensationalist/popular" category—it has a "popular" orientation yet its author does not describe using technology for verification, has no product to sell, and presents no pseudoscientific theory.

The "sensationalist/popular" genre is of sociological interest and could play a role in psychical research. This book illustrates a form of lay anthropology, portraying "ghost chasing" as it is practiced at the beginning of the 21st century. The cases constitute ethnographic data—and as such, they demonstrate a degree of validity. The stories are similar to the thousands reported by previous popular writers. Based on my own decades of haunting investigation, I find the general tone of this book to ring true: people all over the world report similar forms of haunting perceptions. These perceptions are more common than might be

imagined. In the USA, for example, 14% state that they have "been in a house you felt was haunted" (Gallup & Newport, 1991).

Although this "first-hand" evidence is not overwhelming, *TWMHP* supports the argument that normal people report similar forms of anomalous experience—typically apparitions, psychokinesis, and paranormal dreams. Chapter 23, for example, describes the haunting of Stone's Public House, originally built in 1832 in Ashland, Massachusetts. In the mid-1980s, the restaurant's owner allowed psychics to visit, resulting in explanations of previous perceptions. Hauntings involve a series of stories that listeners evaluate as "clues" pertaining to the case's authenticity. They want explanations for things they cannot explain. The present bartender provides such folklore stories as well as accounts of his own perceptions of apparitional voices. *TWMHP* illustrates how anyone could gather such accounts. "It seems as though just about all of the staff has had some supernatural experience at the restaurant," *TWMHP* proclaims (p. 191). People have been awakened in the middle of the night by strange sounds and voices, for example. Some heard noises such as furniture moving. As a result of these experiences, both staff and patrons became believers in the supernatural. The present owner, who has not had a single experience, was warned that renovations would increase haunting phenomena. This did not occur and the owner suggested that the spirits must have liked his renovations. Others continued experiencing haunting episodes at a "normal" rate.

My own theories apply to recurring features within these investigations. Some people have far greater propensity for anomalous experience than others. I argue that variations in propensity are linked to differences in hypnotic capacities. My "ritual healing" theory explains these processes within an evolutionary paradigm (McClenon, 1997, 2002). Over many millennia, ritual healing has provided survival advantages to people with dissociative/hypnotic propensities. This has affected the distribution of genes related to dissociation and hypnosis, and these genes govern the incidence of recurring forms of human experience: apparitions, paranormal dreams, waking ESP, out-of-body experience, psychokinesis (much correlative research links dissociation/hypnosis and these experiences). Such episodes generate beliefs in spirits, souls, life after death, and magical abilities—the foundations for shamanism, humankind's first religious form. Because shamanic healing has been practiced over many millennia, an evolutionary cycle has resulted: selected genes provide the foundation for modern religious sentiment and experience.

This theory is testable. It predicts that certain people gain greater benefit from ritual healing and have greater propensity for anomalous experience. Specific hypotheses related to hauntings are presented in McClenon (2001): (1) people admitting a previous history of anomalous perception have a greater probability of experiencing haunting events; (2) those experiencing high incidence of anomalous events develop profound beliefs regarding spirits, souls, life after death, and anomalous capacities; (3) those lacking the propensity for, and belief in, anomalous experiences may perceive anomalous episodes when placed in

environments with those with a greater propensity—as a result, their belief systems are modified; (4) group rituals (inducing altered states of consciousness) increase the incidence of anomalous experience, inspiring belief in ideologies associated with the ritual; and (5) beliefs, resulting from anomalous experience, support spiritual healing rituals.

Although TWMHP does not entail social scientific research, "ghost chasers" could evaluate these hypotheses. Hauntings are amenable to social scientific investigation and discussion of these ideas could refine these hypotheses.

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**Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon** by Roy Willis and Patrick Curry. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004. 170 pp. \$25.95 (paper). ISBN 1-85973-687-4.

In *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, Roy Willis and Patrick Curry take a postmodern, dialogical, linguistic perspective, confronting science and modernity to promote astrology as a divinatory technique. They unapologetically argue for astrology as a conversation with a universe that is permeated with intelligence, in contrast to the dualist perspective of a scientific observer who is somehow outside of the inanimate universe being studied.

Willis and Curry form an interesting partnership. Willis is a social anthropologist at the University of Edinburgh who came to the study of astrology from exposure to the work of the Gauquelins and the scientific