

## BOOK REVIEW

**Dear Martin / Dear Marcello: Gardner and Truzzi on Skepticism**  
edited by Dana Richards. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2017.  
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This is a collection of correspondence between Martin Gardner (1914–2010) and Marcello Truzzi (1935–2003). The editor, Dana Richards, never introduces himself, but he is associate professor of Computer Science at George Mason University and was a longtime friend of Gardner as well as his bibliographer. Kendrick Frazier, Editor of the *Skeptical Inquirer* and Michael Shermer, Publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, have contributed blurbs, showing their appreciation of the book.

Richards has written an Introduction in which he provides brief backgrounds of Gardner and Truzzi. Gardner developed an early, lifelong, interest in magic. In the 1930s he was educated in the philosophy of science. In the 1950s he started to develop into the godfather of the modern skeptical movement. His book *In the Name of Science* (Gardner 1952), a collection of essays about what he considered to be irrationalism, became popular in the late 1950s and was reprinted (Gardner 1957). At that time Gardner also became well-known for his column “Mathematical Games” which ran in *Scientific American* from 1956 to 1986.

Truzzi was born into a circus family, hence his interest in magic and his many articles about circuses. In the late 1960s Truzzi became interested in the occult revival, and got a Ph.D. in sociology. He edited and published *Subterranean Sociology Newsletter*, later *Explorations*, later *The Zetetic*, and eventually *Zetetic Scholar*. In 1982 Truzzi was one of the founding members of the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE).

The correspondence between Gardner and Truzzi starts in 1970. At the time, Truzzi was 34 years old and Gardner was 55 years old. Combined with Richards’ Introduction, the correspondence provides some details about the origin story of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Much correspondence concerns Immanuel Velikovsky and Michel Gauquelin and how they should be treated. Gardner regarded both men as cranks, and defined the typical crank as “. . . a man who passionately believes in his system, but for one or more

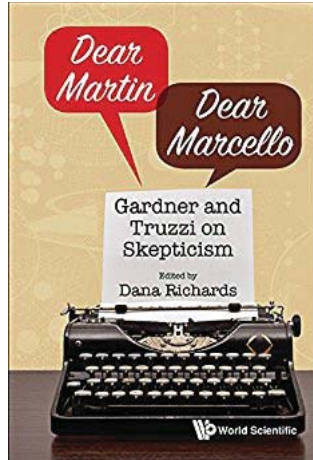
reasons is blind to the evidence against it” (p. 66). However, Gardner did not regard J. B. Rhine, Charles Tart, Robert McConnell, or Gardner Murphy as cranks. To Truzzi crank “. . . mainly means someone stubborn and obstinate, someone eccentric possibly, but not necessarily irrational about it” (p. 91). Gardner was inclined to ridicule cranks and Truzzi was more inclined to treat them with respect.

Gauquelin became known for finding the so-called “Mars effect” which has been debated in the pages of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* previously. To Gardner, the very idea that the position of planets could have an influence on people was “. . . too outrageous to justify trying to test it” (p. 114). However, members of CSICOP became involved in replication attempts and the end result was: negative publicity (Rawlins 1981), the resignation of some members, a policy to not conduct research, and eventually a denial of a cover-up! The correspondence naturally touches on this. Several members of CSICOP have tried to dissociate CSICOP from the matter, but as Truzzi (1982) noted their efforts are not convincing.

It may come as a surprise to some that Truzzi was originally more skeptical than open-minded concerning psi. In 1979 he wrote “I am inclined to disbelieve in psi, but I must confess the issue remains quite open; and here I am truly more agnostic than I was a few years ago . . .” (p. 220). Gardner did not believe in psi, but as Truzzi once pointed out Gardner had to reject the common definition of paranormal to avoid having to label himself a paranormalist. Gardner believed in God, the power of prayer, and life after death (Hansen 2001). He also admired the philosopher C. S. Peirce, and possibly more surprising William James. Gardner wrote:

My attitude is exactly the same as that of William James, the American philosopher I most admire and whose photograph hangs in my library. I think that James was gullible on many occasions, owing to his lack of knowledge of methods of deception, and his almost total ignorance of mathematics got him into occasional trouble, but he was a Platonist (as am I) in the sense of having a marvelous sense of wonder at the infinite mystery of being, and open to all possibilities. (p. 170)

As all who are familiar with their writings know, Gardner and Truzzi agreed on precious little. Both were nevertheless among the founders of



CSICOP in 1976. However, due to differences of opinion, Truzzi resigned in 1977. Apparently, there had also been a personality clash between Truzzi and Paul Kurtz, the Chairman of CSICOP, from the start. Truzzi made his views clear (see Clark & Melton 1979a,b; Truzzi 1980), but the absence of his letters to the CSICOP Fellows in the book is unfortunate.

Among other things, Gardner and Truzzi disagreed about CSICOP's journal (first titled *The Zetetic*, later *Skeptical Inquirer*). Gardner wanted “. . . a nonscholarly, nonacademic, bad-tempered magazine . . . perpetually skirting libel laws” (p. 61). Gardner considered it as being a means to combat the occult wave rather than being devoted to analyses of the occult revival. In contrast, Truzzi wanted it to be a scholarly journal and after his resignation from CSICOP he published and edited *Zetetic Scholar* (ZS). In several letters Gardner complains about the ZS, and Truzzi wrote back:

It seems to me that you are accusing me of being revengeful and fighting a personal vendetta in ZS when I am clearly trying to be fair-minded and responsible toward both sides. I don't claim I always succeed in being completely fair. But I assure you that I get more complaints about my not being harsher on Kurtz & Co. from readers than I get the other way around. In fact, so far you are the only person to suggest that I have been using ZS for revenge or a vendetta. (p. 367)

Truzzi wanted to act as a kind of *amicus curiae* “. . . a friend of the court who recognizes the rules of evidence and the adjudication procedure and tries to help the process work more efficiently and fairly” (p. 78). Gardner felt that some claims were so extreme that horselaughs rather than argumentation was warranted. Despite their differences, they had mutual respect for each others' views. Gardner wrote:

The worst I have said about you are: You are naive with respect to the philosophy of science, relatively uninformed about the physical sciences, overly fond of bizarre, Fortean-type anomalies, uninterested in the kind of eccentric science that has the best chance of providing a new Kuhnian paradigm, and fond of sitting on the fence with respect to outlandish claims. (p. 382)

After more than ten years of correspondence, their relationship turned sour in 1981 when Truzzi tried to find out why and how Dennis Rawlins was ejected from CSICOP. Gardner thought that Truzzi had a vendetta against Kurtz and CSICOP; hence he eventually declined to answer. The correspondence between Gardner and Truzzi ceased for a while and when they started to correspond again their letters were less frequent.

Gardner considered some of the correspondence to be worth publishing. Truzzi was more hesitant because the readers would not understand the

context. In order to appreciate reading the correspondence one needs to have some familiarity with philosophy of science and the history of parapsychology. Readers should note that some of the correspondence concerns articles that were reprinted in *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus* (Gardner 1981). Some correspondence naturally concerns Uri Geller. Gardner considered him to be a magician who “. . . more or less improvised his own methods, without much knowledge of modern mentalism” (p. 25). Other individuals whom the correspondence touches upon are Jule Eisenbud, J. Allen Hynek, Harold Puthoff, and Ted Serios. Much correspondence as noted above, does, however, concern Immanuel Velikovsky and Michel Gauquelin.

The book includes a name index, which should have been useful, but a cursory look reveals that it is misleading. For example, Velikovsky is mentioned in numerous letters, yet the index directs the reader to just three pages; hence the index is almost useless. Unfortunately, much of the correspondence is also quite tedious and repetitive. In addition, many letters are missing. The editing of the correspondence has been minimal, though addresses and phone numbers have been omitted. The book would really have benefited from some explanatory footnotes and the inclusion of references because many readers lack a grasp of context. In summary, the correspondence is mainly of interest to curious readers who have some familiarity with Gardner’s and Truzzi’s writings.

—Nemo C. Mörck  
nemomorck@hotmail.com

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