

and an uninhibited search for truth must show how that context shapes.

References

- 1 Keightley. *The Fairy Mythology*. London: 1882.
- 2 W.A. Craigie. *Scandinavian Folklore*. Gardner: London 1896. In William Craigie's book the Nykur, Nok, Neck, Long Horse or Hell Horse, River Horse and Kelpie (= gaelic celpach, a colt) would seem to be synonymous expressions. The creature had magical attributes and was considered dangerous. Like the trolls and wood-elves it was said to belong to the fallen angels.
- 3 In a letter to the writer describing an incident in July, 1968.

- 4 T.W. Rolleston. *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*. Harrap: London, 1919. Rolleston says the invisible beings first made their appearance in Western Connacht when "they were wafted into the land on a magic cloud." He continues: "They are immortal (with limitations) and they wield mysterious powers of sorcery and enchantment. But no sort of moral governance was ever ascribed to them nor (in Bardic literature) any act of worship paid to them. They were called Danaans, but degenerated into the fairies of popular imagination. The Book of Armagh calls them *dei terreni*, earth gods. (However, see the Translator's notes on p.9 of FSR, March-April, 1973).

BELIEVING IS SEEING

A question of perception

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IT is encouraging that more people are now beginning to explore some of the erstwhile 'fringe' theories concerning the sources of and meanings behind UFO manifestations. The once generally accepted but unimaginative 'extraterrestrial visitors' idea is now less popular — though like all theories, whatever their degree of acceptability to the researcher, the extraterrestrial possibility should not be completely scrapped but held in abeyance, for it may have some relevance.

Specialists in other fields are now being seen to have an interest in UFOs and allied phenomena, for example Dr. Lyall Watson, biologist and author of the best-selling *Supernature*. His new book *The Romeo Error, A matter of Life and Death* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), ranges through such apparently unconnected topics as premature burial and psychic surgery, but he also devotes a few pages to miscellaneous unexplained phenomena, such as the 'Bermuda triangle', the Loch Ness Monster (he considers one of F.W. Holiday's sightings to have been 'set up...by his own unconscious'), and UFOs. Concerning the latter and other 'apparitions', he has some very perceptive comments to make, but unfortunately he doesn't develop his ideas as far as one would like! I will quote the relevant passage:

"Perhaps fairies, dwarfs, elves, leprechauns, dragons, monsters, vampires, werewolves, ghosts, poltergeists and flying saucers all exist. And perhaps the cynics who say that it is all in the mind are also right, because all these things exist or are produced at the second or etheric level.

"The strange behaviour of all apparitions suggests that they obey laws not quite like those of conventional physics, and that they probably belong to a reality with slightly different space-time references. *The fact that those who come closest to these phenomena, usually receive information structured*

to support their own beliefs or fears, suggests that these apparitions cannot be entirely independent of the minds of those involved. Taken together, these two suggestions provide the basis for a concept that could account for a great many mysteries. The allocation of all these unexplained odds and ends to the already mysterious area of the mind, does not seem at first sight to be a very productive procedure, but I believe that the discovery of bioplasma and the possibility of its holographic action, made the mind more amenable to investigation than it has ever been before."

The italics above are mine; I find this sentence perhaps the most challenging in Dr. Watson's highly readable book. Many people underestimate the part played by our minds in all our activities; the mind's capabilities are staggering. My own sporadic studies of various aspects of psychic and other inexplicable phenomena have suggested to me ever more strongly in recent months that the mind is responsible for many of the phenomena which are currently attributed to outside agencies. Telepathy is now widely accepted, but many people still refuse to credit the mind with responsibility for the formation of apparitions, poltergeists, and the performance of psychokinesis and Uri Geller-type feats. I believe the mind is also capable of inventing ostensibly separate personalities such as are contacted through the ouija board, through mediums, through automatic writing, through hypnotic regression to so-called other incarnations, and through tape recordings of the kind received by Raudive.

I am not saying that the mind of the experimenter or percipient is always *solely* responsible for what results. But those readers who have agreed with me this far will find it logical to apply Dr. Watson's comments on the mind to UFO research. This field needs much more active participation by those trained in the study of the workings of the human

mind, and more studies of contactees should be made from a psychological point of view.

John Keel has already done some work on the similarity between the traditional 'ghost' and the apparently solid UFO (which may in fact be an apparition of some kind). He consulted a list of criteria for the 'perfect' ghost given in G.N.M. Tyrrell's *Apparitions* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1953) and considered whether UFO sightings qualify. This line of enquiry is again fruitful, but I doubt if the traditional ghost can be equated fully with UFO manifestations, because the two exhibit different features. For example, however solid a ghost may appear (and they usually do look very solid, often being mistaken for living people until they do something no living person would or could do, such as walk through a wall), it cannot be touched. Usually, if the observer were to stretch out his hand to touch it, it would always appear to be beyond his reach. There are probably a few exceptions to this statement (there are always exceptions to everything!), and in cases where a ghost has been touched, the sense of touch is being hallucinated as well as the sense of sight, but as a general rule ghosts are not able to be touched.

The same law, however, does not seem to apply to UFO 'ghosts'. There are on record cases where witnesses have been warned by UFO entities not to touch the craft, and this is usually thought to be because of radiation or other dangers, but may it be because to attempt to do so would indicate to the witness that the craft is an hallucination? But what of the numerous cases where people are invited inside craft, and there touch various objects, are touched by the crafts' occupants, and also converse with them (it is very rare that a 'normal' ghost talks)? Obviously these experiences, if hallucinatory, are far more intense than ordinary ghost sightings, with all the senses co-operating in the hallucination. It seems likely that this type of apparition, if apparitions they be, obey different laws from the more well-known ghost-type of apparition.

These are only sketchy thoughts; I have not researched any case details to try to confirm or deny any of the ideas suggested here. But I feel it is an avenue worth further exploration.

Also related to the topics of the powers of the mind and the apparitional nature of UFOs, is our perception of unexpected and inexplicable events. Are we sure that we see what is really there, even in everyday life? Of course we don't, we only perceive objects on a narrow waveband; in fact our sight is very limited. This limitation poses problems for those observing UFOs and their occupants. Are UFO witnesses seeing what is really there, or are their minds restructuring the unprecedented visual impressions to make them acceptable to their mental capacities?

J. Allen Hynek, in *The UFO Experience* (Abelard-Schuman Ltd, 1972), comments on this aspect of UFO witnessing and reporting, and his experience has been that "...the reporters of the UFO experience try their best to describe and explain their experience in conventional terms. They almost always attempt to find — even force upon the lack

of fact, if necessary — a natural explanation. In direct contradiction to what we are often told, that people 'see what they wish to see,' my work with UFO reporters of high calibre indicate [*sic*] that they wish to see or to explain their observations in terms of the familiar."

This suggests conscious striving to make the experience explicable; the unconscious is also hard at work on the same task, but only its results are visible to the witness in what he actually thinks he sees — he has no idea that he is not seeing what is actually there! I am no specialist in the workings of the human mind, conscious or unconscious, but if the minds of the witnesses *are* causing the incoming impressions to conform to accepted criteria, this underlines again the importance of investigating the *whole* witness, not just his own interpretation of what he thinks he saw, and from a psychoanalytical viewpoint; it also emphasises the difficulties in UFO research if all the data is subject to varying degrees of change at the whims of the witnesses' unconscious minds!

If the possibility of faulty perception is accepted, it could provide more support for the belief that certain happenings described in the past as visits by 'fairies' could in fact be examples of what we today call UFO contacts. The following case fits into this category. It comes from the book *The Peat-Fire Flame*, Folk-Tales and Traditions of the Highlands and Islands, by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor (The Ettrick Press Ltd, 1937).

The events took place about 1912 or maybe a few years earlier, on the Island of Muck in the Inner Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland. Two boys aged 10 and 7 were beachcombing one Friday morning, and in a cove they found a tin. The author continues:

"On commencing to strike it open with a big stone, lo! two tiny boys with green vests appeared beside them, and inquired of them in excellent English what they were trying to do. They replied that they were endeavouring to break open the tin, which they believed to contain paint. Evidently Sandy MacDonald's lads were 'under spell.' They were simply 'charmed' by the little fellows in the green vests, who questioned them regarding their home and their family, and who also could speak the Gaelic.

"Then the lads perceived that, lying alongside the little cove, was a tiny boat with a beautiful cabin aft. In the doorway of the cabin stood a wee woman. By her side barked a fully-grown dog, about the size of a rat. MacDonald's boys also noticed that the cabin contained a number of pots and pans and other kitchen utensils.

"Said the little woman, charmingly attired in green raiment, to the lads — 'Come into the cabin and have your tea with us before you go home.' However, the lads were loth to step aboard the faery boat; and so the little woman handed out to them a few loaves of faery bread, each about the size of a walnut. These they ate, and enjoyed.

"Then said the little green boys to MacDonald's lads: 'We are departing now. When you see our boat out at the Dubh Sgeir (a certain black rock out

a little from the shore), you must return home. We will not be coming back here any more; but others of our race will be coming.'

"Not long after the faery boat had left the shore, Sandy MacDonald's daughter came on the scene, while looking for her young brothers. Suddenly she noticed them sitting on a rock by the shore, gazing out to sea — gazing presumably at the faery boat, which appeared to be steering for Ireland.

" 'What are you doing here?' she shouted. The sound of her voice broke the spell that the faeries had put on the lads; and immediately they went home with their sister. While 'under spell' they had been 'awfully happy,' to use their own words: now they trembled with a strange fear."

These boys, familiar only with the islands' life and lore, would naturally recognise their visitors as fairies, whose presence was generally accepted in the Gaelic-speaking lands, but there are several factual similarities between this case and reports of UFO occupants:

1. The tiny people. Sometimes, but not always, UFO occupants are smaller than the human average.
2. 'Green vests' is rather a vague description of their apparel, but it suggests a tight garment, which is what UFO occupants usually wear. Without much searching, I found a UFO case from America where the entity wore green, and I quote from *The Humanoids* (Neville Spearman, 1969, and as a Futura Books paperback, December 1974): "The 'little man' was dressed in a green suit with shiny buttons, with a green tam-o-shanter-like cap..."
3. The 'fairies' could speak Gaelic. There are not many UFO contact reports in which the entities could not speak in whatever language the witness used, however out-of-the-way it might be.
4. The 'faery bread.' In the Joe Simonton case, the witness was given a cookie from a batch which the entities were preparing in their craft.
5. The message: "We will not be coming back here any more; but others of our race will be coming." This does not sound like the fairies talking, if the fairy lore is any guide. But it does resemble the type of phraseology used by some UFO entities, mainly those who appear to have a message for mankind and so endeavour to communicate with humans.
6. The spell cast on the witnesses. It seems from the description that they were under mild hypnosis; and how often have we read UFO reports in which the witnesses have experienced unusual mental states, including happiness and fear?
7. There are other features of this report which give the impression that it was a UFO sighting —

the mysterious, apparently sudden, appearance of the entities; their interest in the way of life on the island; the attempt to entice the lads aboard the craft; the instruction to them at departure time, almost like a post-hypnotic suggestion: "When you see our boat out at the Dubh Sgeir...you must return home" — and readers will probably have noticed others which I have missed.

One feature of this case which I have not so far mentioned is the unusual craft. At first sight, if this really was a UFO contact, it does not appear to make sense that the entities were in a boat and not some form of aerial craft. But, on reflection, perhaps it does make sense; it may even support the point I made earlier about perception.

Could it be that the entities, whoever they may be, appear in whatever craft is likely to be acceptable to the witness? Today they usually come in streamlined 'spacecraft,' highly acceptable to technologically-orientated twentieth-century man; at the end of the last century some of them came in airships; perhaps to witnesses unfamiliar with the concept of airborne travel they would appear in boats, especially in such a region as the Inner Hebrides where boats were as familiar to the islanders as cars are to us.

If this is the case, who 'manufactures' the craft? Do 'they' do it, or do the witnesses see types of craft in line with their expectations? In one respect the boat does sound as though it may really have been a UFO — the 'tiny boat with a beautiful cabin aft' brings to mind the conventional UFO shape, with a 'saucer' surmounted by a domed 'cup.' Another point is that UFOs have been seen diving into the sea and emerging out of it, so perhaps they are also able to travel on its surface as does a boat.

I am aware that not everyone will agree with my interpretations of certain features of UFO reports, but I hope I may at least have awakened the interest of someone who is qualified to investigate further the question of perception as it relates to UFO witnesses. In fact, it seems that it is not only our eyes which can be deceived. While I was writing this article I read a letter in the *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research (December 1974) by Dr. Charles T. Tart of the Department of Psychology, University of California, in which he suggests that our hearing is not as 'objective' as we believe. He says that "...hearing, especially the understanding of words, is an extremely complex process, subject to much distortion, based on our inner moods, needs, and belief systems," and goes on to describe how we can prove this to ourselves. So perhaps some of the 'space' messages we read about have been unwittingly distorted en route!

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