

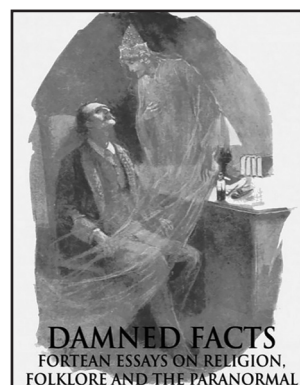
Fortean Perspectives¹

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Review of *Damned Facts: Fortean Essays on Religion, Folklore and the Paranormal*, edited by Jack Hunter. Paphos, Cyprus: Aporetic Press, 2016. Pp. 172. \$ 22.51. ISBN 13: 978-9963221424

This book put me a little bit at a loss. To be honest, I assume that the same happened to its editor, Jack Hunter, when he received the contributions from the 13 authors of the nine chapters. The book starts with a well-written foreword by a religious scholar, Jeffrey Kripal, followed by the introductory chapter by Jack Hunter. This includes a short and informative overview on main thoughts and concepts of Charles Fort, who is, or should have been, the focal point and inspirer for the volume. Thereafter, however, I experienced a shift from being stimulated to becoming more and more bored by several authors' musings that appear somewhat narcissistic at times. I began to ask myself what the second title of the book "Fortean essays on religion ..." might mean. Does it mean "dealing in a Fortean style of thinking with these issues", or "dealing with Fort's data, or Fortean data ('damned facts') about these issues", or "dealing with Fort's approach and considerations about these issues"? I then went back to the editor's introduction and reread this: "The original goal of *this* book was to explore what a Fortean approach to the study of religion might look like, with all of its associated anomalous events and enigmatic experiences. The book you hold in your hands, however, became something much more diverse" (Hunter, p. 2).



Writing this review for a scientific parapsychological journal I need to focus on the possible benefits of the book for its particular readership – a readership that is very familiar with many "damned facts," i.e. facts that do not fit into the models of conventional mainstream science. Therefore, some of the more or less simple calls for integrating anomalies into the spectrum of the scientific agenda are unnecessary. However, some of the contributions at least also provide facts, thoughts, and considerations valuable for parapsychologists.

There are two points I would like to emphasize in particular: (1) There exists a huge amount of

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interesting anomalies aside of the “usual” paranormal phenomena most parapsychologists are concerned with. The tendency of parapsychological research, following J.B. Rhine’s approach, to narrow its spectrum by disregarding, for instance, the scientific value of the investigation of spontaneous cases and focusing on experimental laboratory research with all its strength, but also simplifying consequences, strongly limited the parapsychological horizon (e.g., Mayer & Schetsche, 2016). The field of anomalistics is much broader and provides many more stimulating phenomena than several parapsychologists might be aware of. This is one thing we can learn from Charles Fort. And furthermore: (2) there also exist “damned facts” inside the classical realm of parapsychological research. Fort’s criticism of the sciences applies also to parapsychology. The significant point concerns the relation of empirical facts and theoretical models, beliefs, or worldviews (the latter two are often linked together). The openness of a scientist to “damned facts” that challenge cherished belief systems is important in any field of science, be it mainstream or part of the frontier areas of research.

With regard to the first point, the volume includes chapters that range from typical parapsychological topics such as spectacular poltergeist cases and mediumship (Zangari et al.) to folklorist themes such as the “Mothman prophecies” (Clarke) and fairies (Jarrell), UFOs and alien abductions (Clarke; Jarrell; Zangari et al.), alternative history (Barrett), and science of religion (Grieve-Carlson), philosophical, and sociological topics (French & Laursen; Grieve-Carlson), issues of consciousness (Harris), and criticism of science (Harris; Short; Sepie). This assignment to different fields of science or scientific disciplines is a little bit artificial because most of the chapters are related to more than one topic, thus highlighting the interdisciplinarity of anomalistics. The openness to “damned facts” combined with the look beyond the familiar disciplinary horizon can, in any case, be stimulating and fruitful for theory construction in one’s own discipline.

However, not all contributions are well-written. Some of them gave me new insights and ideas, such as the comparison of Charles Fort and William James with regard to radical empiricism and monism by Grieve-Carlson, or the comparison of narratives of UFO abductions and fairy folklore by Jarrell; others provided interesting spontaneous cases that are not easily accessible in the usual parapsychological literature (e.g. Zangari et al.). Still, others were somewhat annoying due to a lack of clear differentiations of terms and concepts, as well as an only superficial penetration of the respective subjects. Nevertheless, the volume absolutely achieves one goal: It raises awareness of the person of Charles Hoy Fort, the autodidact researcher and critic of science, and his work. This alone is a merit of this small book.

References

Mayer, G., & Schetsche, M. (2016). On anomalistics research: The paradigm of reflexive anomalistics. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 30, 374-397.