

BOOK REVIEW

The Close Encounters Man: How One Man Made the World Believe in UFOs by Mark O’Connell. 403 pp., New York: HarperCollins, 2017. 403 pp. ISBN: 0062484176.

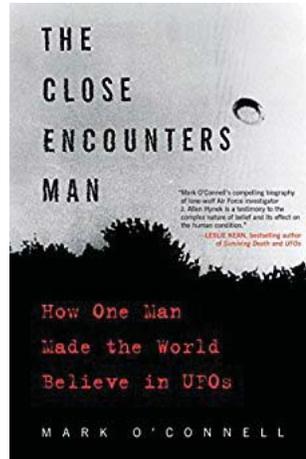
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Though short in physical stature, Dr. J. Allen Hynek is the towering figure in the study of unidentified flying objects (UFOs), an enterprise that has attracted an astounding amount of public interest and in part responsive attendant effort and investigation by governments worldwide over the last 70 years. Yet the lack of recognition accorded Hynek beyond that of his name and a few associated phrases is merely one of the many contradictions in the life and work of the man. From 1948 to 1970 he was the U.S. Air Force’s (USAF) top consultant to its public Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) program, studied thousands of its cases, and figured in many of its controversies. Hynek’s *The UFO Experience* is arguably the best book written on the subject (Clark 2017), and he left an enduring legacy by founding the Center for UFO Studies in 1973, its publications setting a high standard for work on the subject and fostering a number of disciples and other researchers. Hynek’s matrix for evaluating UFO reports by “strangeness” and witness credibility allowed a determination of the probative value of those reports; his basic six-category system of reported UFO phenomena has dominated the discussion since its first publication in 1972; and the “Close Encounters” subset of that system has, along with Hynek’s rather unfortunate “swamp gas” statement, for better or worse become part of the popular lexicon.

Those interested in UFOs will remember Hynek mostly as the consultant to Project Blue Book who turned his back on the USAF attempts to whitewash the subject, coming to advocate serious study of unidentified flying objects. A smaller group of academics and technical people know of the scientist Hynek, highly regarded both for tangible accomplishments in astronomy, but also as champion of interpersonal techniques and changed attitudes as to how the astronomical community conducted its efforts. Numerous university graduates will remember Hynek the teacher and administrator.

A book has long been needed about Hynek’s life and times, setting in context and reconciling the ufological, astronomical, and academic careers,

and attempting to explain contradictions that surface during that life's story. In *The Close Encounters Man: How One Man Made the World Believe in UFOs*, screenwriter, university teacher, and UFO researcher Mark O'Connell seeks to unite the different "Hyneks" and show how J. Allen Hynek's formal, "mainstream" careers and UFO entanglement benefited each other, and in fact helped form a significant part of today's popular culture. And interviews with certain Hynek family members and former colleagues provided O'Connell with additional clues toward assessing Hynek the man.



Hynek demonstrated an openness to new data, collected and examined as rigorously as possible, that should characterize scientific thought and procedure. The problems posed by UFOs were many, however, and puzzled Hynek to his death. Hynek may never have settled upon exactly what he believed UFOs—or some of them—to be. Biographer O'Connell quotes Center for UFO Studies archivist–historian Frank Reid as saying Hynek “vacillated, sometimes day by day or hour by hour”—yet also that “Hynek’s vacillation on the subject was proof of his scientific integrity” (p. 346). And Hynek never advocated what became the traditional “nuts-and-bolts” UFO explanation with the consistent passion popularly ascribed to him. Late in the 1960s—likely in 1967 at Hillsdale College almost a year to the day after its famous sighting—Hynek gave a lecture in Michigan. Backstage afterwards, Hynek entertained a little knot of adoring fans and chatted about UFOs. Dealing with why certain UFOs weren’t reported continuously along a certain route, he proposed that perhaps they flit in and out of our existence. Was this an early interest in mysticism and Rudolf Steiner’s alternate world idea manifesting again? Or was it just Hynek’s creative scientific mind considering different hypotheses for the observed data? In either case, Hynek demonstrates a broad-mindedness quite different from Donald Keyhoe’s firm ET belief that has been so dominant in the field since the early 1950s and was adopted by Dr. James McDonald as the “least unacceptable” of eight different hypotheses for UFOs that he could imagine. Many modern ufologists who find ET vehicles an unsatisfying explanation for some or all “genuine” UFOs could recognize Hynek as a forerunner. His thought certainly does resonate with some of these researchers when Hynek suggests that UFOs were to some “a new form of religion” with a scientific twist (p. 328).

So what is the importance of Dr. J. Allen Hynek? To scientists and other like-minded engineers and other individuals aware only of Hynek's UFO career, perhaps the takeaway is nothing more than an example of single-minded determination against the status quo. But there are numerous tangible contributions, as well, to hard science and technology. Besides the proximity fuze work in World War II, Hynek was instrumental in a high-altitude camera project; proposal for a telescope and weather satellite, which would find eventual realization in TIROS I and the Hubble Space Telescope; selection of Apollo space program lunar landing sites; finding a record number of supernovae in a short amount of time; and the image orthicon, using a television tube to enhance the brightness of astronomical images (which Hynek thought was his greatest astronomical achievement). Hynek, along with Fred Whipple, also implemented a global satellite tracking network, Project Moonwatch, intended for U.S. probes. When the Soviets surprised the world with their first Sputniks, Hynek and Whipple turned the Moonwatchers and equipment over to the task of following these Communist space objects, and explained to the American people just what was going on. Hynek's contributions to the way science and technology were executed include coordination of international observations of the June 1954 solar eclipse and the July 1, 1957, to December 31, 1958, International Geophysical Year efforts, promotion of high-energy and fast-deadline peaceful activities that drove fast obsolescence of equipment, and concomitant changes in how scientists viewed their equipment, and even crowdsourcing. And Hynek broke attitudinal ground with his physical science colleagues in his salutary championing of respect and sympathy for witnesses.

Hynek tried to bridge the gap between UFO studies and mainstream science in several evident ways. Hynek's system of Close Encounters and three categories of UFOs-at-a-Distance (Daylight Disks, Nocturnal Lights, and Radar/Visual) cases (Hynek 1972:28–31), and his "S-P" matrix system that gauged the value of a UFO report in terms of its deviance from expected reality and also the coherence and believability of the witnesses (Hynek 1972:22–28, with chart on p. 27), provided needed classification schemes to enable scientists and other researchers to communicate effectively. Hynek strongly advocated the serious study of UFOs in his books and articles in letters to and interviews with various publications, running the gamut from *Science* to *Playboy*. His speaking engagements and other public appearances promoted his message all across the country and abroad. And his 1972 book *The UFO Experience* is still regarded as perhaps the best UFO book ever written, garnering surprisingly good reviews in the larger literate community, largely because of the academic approach with which it

was written and the recognition Hynek's astronomical and teaching career had won him.

Dr. Hynek's organizational legacy has been the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS). CUFOS has fostered investigations, publications, and in general the work of numerous researchers. Reading the list of contributors to its late periodical *The International UFO Reporter (IUR)* reads like a *Who's Who* of the serious ufologists of the last 40 years. Indeed, sitting some 15 years ago in the Library Room of the Center's former brick-and-mortar location in Chicago, Illinois, this writer was strongly taken by how many of the books on the packed shelves owed their creation to people affiliated in some way with Hynek and/or the Center.

How much of an influence Hynek had on popular ufology is more difficult to gauge. A May 2016 survey was performed on a Midwestern UFO group composed predominately of middle-aged or older adults with more than a decade of interest in UFOs and a strong belief in their importance, with almost 40% of the respondents claiming to have read more than 20 books on the subject. The results demonstrated good name recognition of Dr. Hynek as a leading UFO scientist and his connections both to "swamp gas" and Project Blue Book. But while close encounters type IIIs (CEIIIs) were commonly understood, only a small percentage of the respondents could list all three types of Hynek's "UFOs-at-a-distance," about the same number as those who could identify the "Probability" half of the "S-P" ("Strangeness-Probability") matrix for estimating report significance.

Against this somewhat indifferent backdrop, biographer O'Connell says *The Close Encounters Man* is an attempt "to rectify Hynek's story, to find the heroism, humor, and humanity" in the man. Generally speaking, this is a fine biography and first effort at explaining the "Close Encounters Man" to a variety of audiences, including the public. The "art" in this book is especially deserving of emphasis, for the simple fact is that it is a book that a wide audience should find worthwhile, and indeed fun, to read. The book is well-written, with a clear and easily-flowing style. Perhaps it is not the "definitive work," but it is generally well-researched, eminently readable, and therefore a highly commendable and indispensable resource for understanding the man and his contributions.

The Close Encounters Man amply demonstrates how Hynek turned from UFO opponent to "proponent." His was not a "Road to Damascus" (Franch 2013) overnight conversion, but an evolutionary process based upon logic if perhaps also something of the mystical tinge that O'Connell and book reviewer David Halperin¹ accentuate. O'Connell portrays Hynek as a scoffer at the outset, the apparently dead-rational scientist who was an ideal "go-to" guy for astronomical explanations of UFO reports. But, as

O'Connell shows, perhaps as early as 1952 and certainly by 1953, Hynek recognized that UFOs proper were something more than misidentifications, hoaxes, and the like. O'Connell believes that in 1952 Hynek was struck by the fact that good UFO reports "endured"—they persisted, against his initial belief that they were a "silly season" product and that the public "whim" would pass. Even more, a quiet poll of astronomers Hynek conducted that same year surprised him at how open most were to the study of these strange new off-world fantasies. In fact, some of the 44 scientists Hynek canvassed revealed that they had actually *seen* a UFO. But there was a vast gulf between willingness to research or much less to confess privately to having seen a flying saucer on the one hand, and admitting it publicly, on the other—that was professional suicide (p. 77).

The April 24, 1964, Socorro, New Mexico CEII-III story of Officer Lonnie Zamora had had a major impact upon Hynek, and Hynek felt courageous enough in 1965 to endorse the groundbreaking work *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*, a book by his protégé Jacques Vallee, on its rear cover. In 1966 Hynek went further, penning the Foreword to *Challenge to Science: The UFO Enigma*, co-written by Jacques and his wife Janine. Nonetheless, Hynek felt close to professional suicide in 1966, as frictions between himself and his then-current Air Force boss, Hector Quintanilla, reached a boiling point. The events of March 1966 may have catalyzed Hynek's reticence to mount a public campaign for UFO honesty into action.

A major UFO "flap" occurred in southeast Michigan from March 14th to the 22nd, involved numerous local police jurisdictions and hundreds of citizens, and was highlighted by the classic Dexter and Hillsdale sightings. On March 20th the Frank Mannor family's "Disney night" was shattered by a "meteor" that seemed to settle into a swamp on their property—then bob up and down again. Dexter police and Washtenaw County Sheriffs' units, already "on alert" due to distant encounters they as well as others had had within the last week, were dispatched to the scene. Several hours later, dozens of civilians were confused by what had happened at the Mannor property, while peace officer units from several jurisdictions chased more UFOs through the southeast Michigan countryside.

The next evening, coeds at Hillsdale College, some 60 miles southwest of the Dexter "hullaballusion," were either trying to get some sleep and/or preparing for their exams. This was made difficult against the backdrop of a major storm that was also dampening the ardor of the hundreds of University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University students, faculty, and common citizens whose UFO vigil in the hopes of a second night of UFOs there was making the life of the Mannors miserable in Dexter. At about 10:30 p.m. one Hillsdale coed saw something appear to zip by her

women's dorm window and set down into an arboretum below. She and more than a dozen other excited women agreed to make a call to the local Civil Defense chief, William "Bud" Van Horn, who told his wife to tell them to call him again should the thing reappear.

An hour later, the now-energized coeds *did* see the apparent object again, moving up and down in the arboretum, and phoned the Van Horn residence once more. This time Van Horn responded in person. When Van Horn and the Assistant Dean for Women got to the room whose overlook of the arboretum afforded the best view, they and a much larger group of exam-haunted young women stared at the thing. Eighty-seven people watched the apparent object move around in the arboretum during a four-hour-plus period. Van Horn saw the thing through binoculars and came to believe it was a solid object—though he had originally thought it was the product of "marsh lights" self-igniting for some reason in the late-winter and electrified atmosphere (p. 186).

What makes the Dexter and Hillsdale events—which never qualified as "close encounters" nor left identifiable trace evidence—noteworthy is what happened next. After initially refusing to send Hynek to Michigan to study the situation, Project Blue Book head Hector Quintanilla dispatched his top expert to deal with this rapidly-expanding UFO media "problem." The result was a whirlwind investigation truncated by a hastily scheduled press conference that, Hynek was commanded, would feature an explanation for the Michigan reports that would damp down the expanding public sensation. By a process covered in a presentation biographer O'Connell gave in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on March 19, 2016, Hynek arrived at the "swamp gas" suggestion for the two Dexter and Hillsdale sightings. The result was largely a public outcry whose repercussions traveled worldwide. Local officials and House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford, whose district was in the west of Michigan, called for a Congressional investigation of the Air Force's treatment of the concerns of the witnesses and others, and of Project Blue Book itself. Hynek, plagued by the events and a jaw he'd broken the previous week, and unhappy with the reception he figured he'd get from his "invisible college" UFO-minded associates back in Evanston,² headed back to Illinois, convinced that this was the lowest point in his Blue Book career.

Not much later, on April 5, 1966, Hynek would testify, with some courage, as he put it, at a one-day public hearing before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee. Hynek urged that an independent investigation should be conducted of Project Blue Book—and indirectly of his role as UFO-debunker within it. That very day, partly driven by a similar recommendation recently made by a secretly convened group, Assistant

Secretary for Defense Harold Brown set things in motion for a study similar to Hynek's proposal. This would result in The University of Colorado UFO Project, the end of Project Blue Book with the for-some-years-desired ridding of UFOs from public Air Force responsibility, Hynek's surprising ascendancy to his highest popularity ever, and his founding his own UFO study organization, CUFOS. Though Hynek would say that he had not fully made up his mind about UFOs until later in 1966, it seems clear that the "swamp gas" flap had set him irrevocably on his course.

There is less in the O'Connell book about J. Allen Hynek's life before UFOs, especially dealing with the period before Hynek's graduation from the University of Chicago in 1932, than one might expect in a biography. Yet here, as throughout the book, O'Connell is careful to uncover elements—experiences and interests—that would inform the rest of Hynek's life. The small mystery as to how Josef Allen Hynek became "J. Allen," for instance, is naturally solved early on. Hynek may have been stimulated to navigate carefully the shoals of academic and generally professional life, in the lesson he learned about publishing a doctoral dissertation that proved the inaccuracy of a cadre of astronomers; that the "more convincing" rather than the "right" argument should prevail (p. 24). Hynek would apply this learning to his often-prickly relationship with the several heads of Project Blue Book, an association that O'Connell compares to that between Johannes Kepler, one of Hynek's idols, and Tycho Brahe. Hynek's background would affect his largely contentious back-and-forth with the young Carl Sagan, whom author O'Connell paints in less than favorable strokes (for example, pp. 303, 305). Throughout the biography Hynek is shown promoting the multiplicative value of teamwork, and we sense why failures of such may have weighed heavily upon the man's psyche.

And there is this theme from the very beginning and carrying throughout the work to form a culminating point at its conclusion: the arc and course of J. Allen Hynek's life coincided with the circuit of Halley's Comet, whom his parents introduced to the newborn Hynek and whose return was upon Hynek's mind as heralding his own death—if O'Connell does not exaggerate—coursing as a leitmotif throughout Hynek's life. One of the book's last vignettes is of Hynek, his wife Mimi, and close confidante Jennie Zeidman viewing the heavenly body on a cool Arizona evening in 1986, a trip that "completed the circle" of Hynek's existence.

The Close Encounters Man is not only about J. Allen Hynek, however, as it necessarily discusses the course of UFO history from 1947 to the man's death in 1986. Along the way, iconic UFO cases are presented and their importance assessed upon the general regard for and treatment of UFOs by the Air Force, the media, and the common people. Here author O'Connell's

background as a television screenwriter and science fiction buff is in evidence, as he argues for an interplay between these outside events and Dr. Hynek's career, focusing particularly upon those instances from the Thomas Mantell crash in January 1948 to the Pascagoula abductions in 1973, where Hynek became directly involved. Generally, O'Connell successfully negotiates a path between too much information, which would have turned his book into more of a UFO history than its size and intent would ever permit, and too little explanation, which would render the stories as meaningless asides.

In particular, biographer O'Connell has skillfully interlaced developments in Hynek's mainstream scientific and academic pursuits with those in his increasing interest and involvement in UFOs, setting these against the larger backgrounds of the course of history and ufology, particularly in the United States. Throughout, O'Connell provides valuable insights as to why Hynek was, while reacting to these outside forces, such a seminal figure in shaping public attitudes toward them. Thus, early work with the proximity fuze allows Hynek to contribute to the WWII effort while at the time experiencing the power of collaboration, which could usefully be applied to such constructive purposes as cancer research and fundamental nuclear studies; the 1957 launch of Sputnik I thrusts the mild-mannered astronomer into the media spotlight as he and Fred Whipple explain its technical implications and do much to calm the politically based fears of the nation; the notorious "Swamp Gas" fiasco of 1966 pushes Hynek back into the public eye as the "go-to" man for a field that had become less secretive; and simple coinage of the "Close Encounters" portion of a UFO categorization system would resonate in a major box-office smash-hit movie and forever enshrine the man in media lore. And the evocative power of "Swamp Gas" and "Close Encounters" will likely ensure that those terms stay in the lexicon even after J. Allen Hynek's many other contributions are forgotten. But O'Connell assures those achievements *are* known and understood.

A major contradiction or struggle running through *The Close Encounters Man* is that between Hynek the Timid and Hynek the Bold, in speaking up for himself and challenging the system when necessary. Though acknowledging observations by such people as Jacques Vallee on Hynek's aversion to "confrontation and scandal" (p. 253), O'Connell accepts Hynek's own explanations for his general approach. O'Connell defends Hynek for emphasizing cooperation and being politic, like Kepler, in subordinating his tactical urge to speak out, against the greater strategy of maintaining access to UFO information he did not control. There were times, as in the fatal Mantell crash and the August 13, 1947, Snake River Canyon multiple witness case, where Hynek later wished he had not been

so quick to “toe the party line” with a dismissive explanation. On the other hand, O’Connell shows Hynek speaking out fearlessly in public, albeit in urbane tones, against the unscientific stance and tenor of Drs. Urner Liddel and Donald Menzel at the October 1952 Boston meeting of the American Optical Society (pp. 84f), and in his letter published in the October 1966 journal *Science* even while still an Air Force consultant.³ Contrasting with Hynek’s keeping of information from the 1953 Robertson Panel, the UFO-debunking results of whose deliberations had been largely predetermined (p. 88), there is Hynek’s April 5, 1966, testimony against his own employer, as it were, before the open hearing of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee for the outside and independent review of Project Blue Book. And differing with Hynek’s private efforts to “tone down” the rhetoric with Carl Sagan in their public pronouncements and occasional in-person contests, there is Hynek’s fury at premature cancellation of “Project Star Gazer” (p. 171) and snarky letter Hynek apparently wrote Northwestern Dean of Sciences John Cooper on the University’s decision not to submit a proposal for a \$250,000 Air Force contract funding a project to transfer Project Blue Book case reports onto computer files.⁴

Certain other themes flow throughout this story of Dr. Hynek’s life, supported by events, quotations, and, in many cases, references back from the concluding portions of the work that bring these themes to their own maturation and make the book’s end more satisfying and natural. An early attraction to mysticism, latent throughout Hynek’s life but underplayed, we are told, through the exigencies of presenting a “proper,” mainstream appearance lest his “day-job” be compromised and his more borderlands assignment receive more raised eyebrows than it already did, resurfaces during the later Hynek years. The human fascination with Mars forms a backdrop to Hynek’s love of mystery and desire to explain it; O’Connell believes that Mariner 4’s effect upon “Mars dreamers” was an impact similar to the more obvious one the first Russian satellites had previously upon the general public (pp. 173f). The Mars matter also embodies the contradictory nature that O’Connell perceives in 20th-century science—at one and the same time expanding upon, and rejecting, the human sense of wonder. Lastly, Hynek’s appreciation that each UFO case usually involves at least one, and often several, witnesses who have been flummoxed by what they have experienced and nevertheless tried to represent it faithfully is noted throughout the biography.

The Close Encounters Man offers numerous observations that will intrigue readers. Aside from the general value for those steeped in only one of Hynek’s several fields of endeavor, such things as O’Connell’s suggestion that Major Hector Quintanilla “planted” an article in the local

Detroit, Michigan, newspaper on the morning of Hynek's fateful "Swamp Gas" press conference stand out. Hynek's exposure to an "Elements of Astronomy" book during a youthful bout with Scarlet Fever will help explain the eventual course taken by his educational and career choices. Ufologists will also appreciate what Hynek said about his belief that Project Blue Book was not funneling the high strangeness cases across his desk (p. 321). And Hynek's own statement that it was only in the Fall of 1966 that he really changed his mind about UFO research⁵ will surprise those who think back to his early 1950s review of the Thomas Mantell incident and his general surprise that the larger UFO phenomenon he had helped to debunk during his earlier Air Force connection had still endured.

O'Connell utilized the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies' large holding of reports, letters, papers, and other documentary and human resources, and visited other archives to gather additional information. The material not only seems well-integrated into the text, but its vignettes do much to increase our appreciation of Hynek the man. O'Connell performs a juggling act in interweaving the course of Hynek's personal life with his academic and ufological duties and his evolving sense of what is going on and the great mystery that remains. At times, therefore, the narrative bounces around between developments in one area and another, in order to make sense of the progression in each field. Yet rarely if ever is the unity of the common thread uniting the life and book threatened. Each chapter's length seems appropriately tailored to the particular aspect of Hynek's career under consideration, and often a pithy but intriguing first sentence or powerful last comment will prepare the reader for what is to come next. The author's deft eye for spotting an evocative moment, illustrative example, or summative quotation is evidenced throughout. Thumbnail descriptions of the characters who will interact with Hynek are generally well done. There is even a moment where author O'Connell successfully allows the action to move through a series of different but thematically connected quotations—a rare feat in this reviewer's experience. Generally, *The Close Encounters Man* has been well-proofed, unfortunately not that common a practice in UFO books and even among recent works in other fields—and thus worthy of note here. Even the fonts and titles in the "Contents" pages perhaps unconsciously intrigue the reader at the book's very beginning, and intimate this will be, at the least, potentially a very interesting read.

O'Connell combines footnotes and asterisks to good effect, using the former generally to support certain assertions; the latter to explain unfamiliar terms or ideas. However—and this is a major problem for anyone wishing to check references and make their own evaluations of source-use—literature references resolve no further than the document level. Thus, while

a short article might require only a scan of two pages to locate a referenced passage, the same is not possible when the source is in a book such as the Hynek–Vallee collaboration *The Edge of Reality*. And here the absence of a separate bibliography is an especial problem.⁶ For comparison, biographers of Carl Sagan William Poundstone (1999) and Keay Davidson (1999) both integrate separate Notes and Bibliography to facilitate readers' checking their sources. And references seem to be lacking for statements that might appear to need them. This fact alone would affect *The Close Encounters Man* being considered the "definitive" biography of Dr. Hynek. And this concern is compounded for those who question interpretations or discern gaps in the narrative for cases familiar to them.

There is insufficient consideration of the important role that Hynek's second wife Mimi played in his career, as she came to be a force in the Center for UFO Studies' work during Dr. Hynek's life, as well as afterwards. The limited number of family members O'Connell was able to interview may have played a part in this matter. Hynek's chosen successor as CUFOS President and Scientific Director Mark Rodeghier⁷ accords Mimi Hynek a good portion of the credit for the Center's success during Hynek's life. People coming to the Center in the '70s and early '80s met Mimi as well as Hynek, and she ran the Center's book sales and edited books by its members as an intellectual partner.

By closing his consideration of Hynek's legacy at the latter's death, O'Connell missed a chance to give full value to that creation. For the Center reorganized itself and maintained the *International UFO Reporter (IUR)* and *Journal of UFO Studies (JUFOS)* traditions, conducted investigations including, of course, that of Roswell, and fostered the work of investigators such as Ted Phillips and Jennie Zeidman. And O'Connell has been criticized by Jerome Clark (2017:60) for not contacting more of Hynek's former colleagues. In fairness, O'Connell has answered this criticism by observing that some of those people refused in whole or in part to talk to him. The narrative runs 350 pages as it is, so some of these deficits are understandable, if lamentable.

More serious is the treatment accorded Hynek's Arizona sojourn, with its interplay between the activity of Tina Choate, Brian Myers, and a benefactor who failed to deliver, on the one hand, and the Illinois Center that Hynek left, on the other. O'Connell explains this as due to his inability to contact the Arizona principals until the eve of the publication deadline, and only later yet to secure their side of the story. But the Illinois perspective has not been represented to the same extent. For instance, the book incorrectly states that the "officers of CUFOS had pointedly changed the name of their organization to the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies; they then sent

Choate and Myers a letter demanding that Hynek's name not be used in association with any of ICUFOR's activities. This saddened Allen." This name change could not have "saddened" Dr. Hynek for he had passed before it happened.⁸ Hynek's personal style of the *bon vivant*, conversant in good wine and amicable discourse among friends, could have been better emphasized. But O'Connell does an excellent job of bringing out Hynek's sense of humor.

While editorial changes helped maintain the pace and artistic quality of *The Close Encounters Man*, sometimes this occurred at the expense of the historical narrative. The account of successive Air Force explanations for the Roswell incident is truncated to the point of confusion; the "very short while" that page 331 intimates occurred between the first "flying disc" and the third Project Mogul story was actually on the order of 38 years. And the "fireplace in Maine" O'Connell invokes at the end to inject the reader more directly into the Hynek story should be situated in Ontario, not New England (p. 350). O'Connell would have included more such material about these events and cases, benefiting from his considerable knowledge of and experience in the field of ufology, but for the editorial imperatives of keeping the book's page-count down. As one example that O'Connell mentions on his own *High Strangeness* website, the remarkable 1955 Kelly-Hopkinsville "goblins" case was basically excised from the manuscript, a deficit O'Connell has subsequently made good in a series of posts online.

The March 1966 Michigan "Swamp Gas" story was much cut due to space considerations, although this series of events was pivotal in Hynek's career and, as O'Connell notes, both a "low point" in Hynek's own estimation and the thing that most elevated him in the public eye and thus extended his ability to contribute further to our serious consideration of the UFO phenomenon. This pruning mars the timeline of the Dexter-Hillsdale and associated "flap," as it appears that the March 21st experience of the Hillsdale College co-eds, their housemother, and the local Civil Defense Director was a single event, rather than two separate sightings (p. 179). The "wild ricochet of the swamp gas statement" on page 205 is also much less powerful than it would have been had the description of the sound the Dexter UFO supposedly made as it took off from the surprised witnesses on the night of March 20th actually been included in the text. At the March 2016 presentation in Ann Arbor dedicated to Michigan's then-50-year-old "Swamp Gas" case that was so pivotal in Hynek's career, O'Connell evinced a much more masterful command of the material and penetrating thought about its importance than the relatively few pages allowed him in the book.

Critical reviewers may somewhat discount *The Close Encounters Man* for occasional exaggerations and its downright hyperbolic subtitle: *How One*

Man Made the World Believe in UFOs. As Jerome Clark (2017) and David Halperin (2017) have pointed out, Dr. J. Allen Hynek did *not* in fact “make” the world believe in UFOs. One wonders if this isn’t a commercial addition. Clark rather hits the mark in the title to his *Fortean Times* review: Hynek *did* make UFOs respectable for a wide swath of America and the world.

In the overarching matter of J. Allen Hynek’s legacy to society at large, biographer O’Connell’s experience in both ufology and writing successfully for popular culture becomes very cogent and powerful.⁹ Does O’Connell over-promote both the impact that media such as movies and TV, in addition to books, has had upon public perceptions of and attitudes toward unidentified flying objects and their study? That is debatable, and beyond this reviewer’s competence to assess. But O’Connell’s case is well-argued and certainly deserves strong consideration.

Some may quibble with O’Connell’s question to self: “What kind of man, I wondered, could calmly stand at the center of a decades-long conflict and be equally despised by both sides?” *Despised* must be too strong a word to use for all but a relatively few people who interfaced with Hynek. Perhaps one or two of Project Blue Book’s heads might have entertained that dark emotion, but even that seems speculative, and the brief for applying it to McDonald and Sagan doesn’t persuade, either. O’Connell suggests that the whole state of Michigan was enflamed against Hynek in March of 1966 for his “swamp gas” remark. Besides certain Michigan professors having suggested something of the sort to Hynek as a diagnosis for the strange phenomena reported at Dexter and Hillsdale, this reviewer was there at the time and does not remember matters being that universally acrimonious.

In fine, Mark O’Connell’s book about Dr. J. Allen Hynek reflects some of the dichotomy of the figure the author puts before us. As with any such initial biographical effort—and even many treatments done much longer after a person’s passing—it falls a bit short in certain demonstrable areas. But knowledgeable readers, including those who knew Hynek best,¹⁰ agree that it well reflects the man they once knew and still remember. The book gives us a far more-rounded view of Hynek than anything done since the man’s passing in 1986. And at this writing it is hard to imagine anyone being able to replicate the significant work that O’Connell has done on the book, and certainly to be capable of surpassing it in its easy grace and readability. Considering that he remains as one of the formative figures in the history of a field that has persisted in popular culture for more than 70 years, Dr. J. Allen Hynek’s biography was long overdue and this effort is both needed and welcome.

The Close Encounters Man is a major achievement, through the sheer amount of effort and accomplishment it demonstrates applied and achieved by Hynek in making a case for the scientific prosecution of ufology and its

merit as a legitimate field of inquiry. The style and wit with which it has been written will serve a large audience, and perhaps fire within them some of the passion for the subject that Hynek so came to love. Mark O’Connell’s book deserves reading, certainly within the scientific community, and just as importantly among the larger literate public, who have heard of “swamp gas” and “close encounters,” and who may sometimes, like Hynek himself, look up into the sky and wonder at the majesty and mystery of it all.

Notes

- ¹ Halperin, D. (2017). “The Close Encounters Man”—Mark O’Connell on J. Allen Hynek, *Journal of a UFO Investigator*, November 29, 2017. <https://www.davidhalperin.net/2017/11/>. John Franch (2013) luxuriates in this explanation.
- ² O’Connell says that Hynek knew that his Detroit statement “would offend and anger everyone he had ever recruited to the UFO cause” (p. 194).
- ³ pp. 201–204. Page 203 gives Hynek’s list of “seven popular misconceptions” about UFOs. See also Hynek (1972:9–11).
- ⁴ p. 225. O’Connell mentions Cooper’s August 1966 letter to Hynek, so it is here inferred that the Hynek quote comes from a written response directly to Cooper, but source locations are not provided in the text.
- ⁵ p. 222. “‘In the fall of ’66 was the real time I changed’ he told Vallee.” O’Connell’s footnote references Hynek and Vallee (1975). O’Connell does not provide a page number.
- ⁶ See, for instance, Chapter 15 and footnotes 11 and 12 references to Saunders (1969) and Hynek and Vallee (1975).
- ⁷ In Jerome Clark, *The UFO Encyclopedia: The Phenomenon from the Beginning*, second edition, Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998, Volume 1: A–K: Hynek, Josef Allen, pp. 531, 533.
- ⁸ pp. 336f. The CUFOS officers did not change the organization’s name until *after* Hynek’s April 27, 1986, death, which is first announced as a late addition to *IUR*, *11*(2) (March/April 1986), and reflected in the name change to the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies in *IUR*, *11*(3) (May/June, 1986), p. 2. The change by CUFOS Board of Directors vote is explained in that issue’s page 12 as the concluding part of new Center Director Mark Rodeghier’s tribute to Dr. Hynek. Vallee’s journals are inaccurate in this regard and another primary source should have been consulted for these statements.
- ⁹ Mark O’Connell teaches screenwriting at DePaul University, has worked on films with Disney and DreamWorks Animation, among others, and his television achievements include *Star Trek: Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* episodes.

¹⁰ The Extraordinary Legacy of Dr. J. Allen Hynek—The “Close Encounters Man,” *The Oz Files*, <http://theozafiles.blogspot.com.au/2017/05/>, May 25, 2017; O’Connell, “Bravo, UFO!,” April 9, 2017, and *High Strangeness*, April 9, 2017, and “Crying UFO Tears,” August 17, 2017, all 3 pieces at <http://www.highstrangenessufo.com/>.

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