

## BOOK REVIEW

**JOTT: When Things Disappear . . . and Come Back or Relocate—And Why It Really Happens** by Mary Rose Barrington. San Antonio, TX: Anomalist Books, 2018. 199 pp. \$14.95 (paperback), \$9.99 (Kindle). ISBN: 978-1938398940.

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This book accomplishes the nearly miraculous achievement of being both substantive and highly entertaining. According to Barrington, “JOTT,” derived from “Just One of Those Things,” stands for a kind of “spatial discontinuity”—namely, a motley class of events in which objects appear or disappear in mysterious ways. For example, some can be classified as “Walkabouts,” in which “an article disappears from the place where it was known to have been and is found in another place.” Similarly, in “Comebacks,” “a known article disappears from the place where it was known to have been and later is found back in the same place.” And in “Turn-ups,” “a known article from an uncertain location appears in a place where it is known not to have been before it was found there.” The other primary categories in Barrington’s taxonomy are Flyaway, Windfall, and Trade-in (the reader might be able to guess what these are). The central contention of this book is that JOTT phenomena merit the attention of psi researchers and theorists of the paranormal.

I’ve often lamented that lab research in parapsychology is premature, because we have no decent idea what kind of organic function scientists are trying to investigate under inevitably straitjacketed laboratory conditions. Not only are we ignorant of psi’s finergrained features, we don’t even know what its natural history might be—for example, whether it has an evolutionary role or primary or overall purpose or function (although there’s no shortage of speculation on these matters). Of course, there’s no reason to think that psychic phenomena occur only for parapsychologists, much less only when those parapsychologists set out to look for them. After all, a major motivation for conducting formal studies is that we have evidence of psi occurring spontaneously in life. Moreover, there are good reasons for thinking that psi might be triggered unconsciously or subconsciously, in which case it might also occur surreptitiously. But since we’re a very

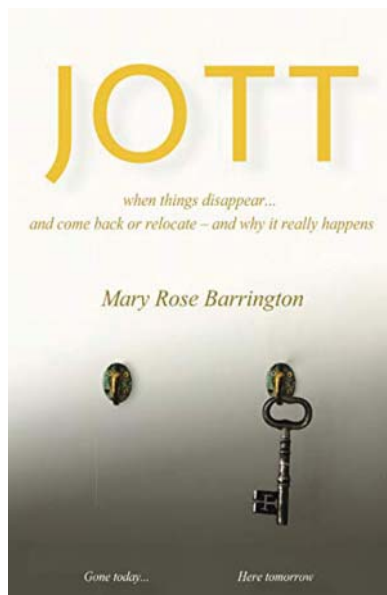
long way from understanding the nature and function of everyday psi, we don't know whether psychic functioning is an ability (like musical ability) or whether it's a brute endowment such as the capacity to see or to move one's limbs. Obviously, then, in the absence of this rudimentary knowledge, we have no idea whether (or to what extent) our experimental procedures are even appropriate to the phenomena. After all, many human capacities or endowments are situation-sensitive and can be evaluated only in real-life contexts.

In fact, I suspect that the most valuable attributes a psi researcher can have are those that (ironically) seem to be in short supply in psychology—namely, perceptivity and sensitivity. That's why I've argued that we need fewer lab parapsychologists and more parapsychological naturalists, good observers (like the biological naturalist), who can record and systematize the subtleties of broad ranges of relevant phenomena and behavior. Until we have some sort of empirically justified idea of what psi is doing in the world (and it's no more than a conceit to think we have it now), we don't even know what it is we're looking at in the lab.

Barrington, in her book, plays this crucial role of the parapsychological naturalist, by looking at some unheralded peculiar events and then trying to incorporate them into the big picture. She focuses on a class of ostensibly paranormal phenomena that have received much less attention than, say, cases of apparitions and poltergeists. And she's clear about why that is. The phenomena typically and all too easily get dismissed as merely a nuisance and are readily put out of mind. They're not as dramatic and conspicuous as a table levitation, and we can, without much difficulty, churn out counter-explanations which at least superficially satisfy us, even if they wouldn't withstand greater scrutiny. But, Barrington urges, the best of these cases present real puzzles with serious ontological implications, and they force us to attend more carefully to the many other cases that are less initially compelling. She writes,

... when all known or imagined forms of eccentric behavior are considered, there remains a hard core of cases that cannot be reasonably explained away in mundane terms, and eventually an attempt must be made to explain them using broader concepts. (p. 4)

So Barrington devotes two chapters (nearly half of the book) to presenting an extensive selection of cases, and then two more chapters in which she tries to place these phenomena in a wider parapsychological and broadly theoretical context, with appropriate emphasis on the connections between JOTT and other examples of ostensible macro PK. In the first of



those chapters, Barrington summarizes, rather quickly but thoroughly enough to be useful to parapsychological newcomers, the wide range of both spontaneous and experimental psi phenomena. I especially appreciated the details she offers about some of the more interesting and dramatic examples of spontaneous PK. Barrington's final chapter is devoted to more general speculations about the nature of reality and the place of psi in the larger scheme of things.

In that last chapter, Barrington asserts, "the one overriding law that unifies normal and paranormal under one system is the law of probability" (p. 163), which (she claims) "is built in to the cosmos rather than imposed on it" (p. 167). Moreover, she writes, "I am leading up to positing an all-embracing Cosmic Mind as fundamental" (p. 167).

With regard to the primacy of probability, Barrington reaches the unsurprising conclusion that the human mind, and the unconscious mind in particular, can at least sometimes override usually pervasive statistical natural laws. And in that connection, it's regrettable that Barrington makes no reference to Jule Eisenbud's more nuanced explorations of the same theme (see Eisenbud, 1970, 1992), especially since Eisenbud's conjectures lead away from Barrington's Cosmic Mind (of which we are dissociated parts) and more toward a cooperation among many minds. Interestingly, Barrington seems to posit something like that when she writes, "people's preconceptions are reinforced . . . to the point of permitting or preventing things from happening. This is a collective version of experimenter effect" (p. 179). Moreover, Eisenbud considers a more subtle range of ostensible psi manifestations (many from the clinical setting), as well as a more radical look at probability (see Kissner 2017). It would certainly have been illuminating to see Barrington engage Eisenbud on these matters and probe more deeply into the issues.

Nevertheless, Barrington provides much food for thought in her final chapter, including a good discussion of both active and passive telepathy, and the nature of mediumship. But no matter what the reader may think about her metaphysical speculations, the primary value of Barrington's

book will be her extensive and systematic coverage of JOTT cases. And that's no small achievement.

Incidentally, readers fortunate enough to know Barrington will not be surprised at the delicious and often trenchant humor found in this book. One of my favorites is a jab at "American university researchers with nothing better to do than deprive rats of sleep." Barrington notes parenthetically that "a bit of animal abuse always makes the obvious seem more scientific" (p. 4).

So Barrington's book is easy to recommend. She has undoubtedly and successfully argued for including JOTT in a satisfactory theory of the paranormal. Now if only I could find my socks . . .

—STEPHEN E. BRAUDE

### References Cited

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