THE RESEARCH WITH B.D.: A REPLY TO GEORGE HANSEN

BY JOHN BELOFF

I have never met Bill Delmore and have never attended any tests in which he took part. The confidence I expressed in his case was based mainly on my high regard for those who tested him. If today I would be less confident, this would be due, not so much to any weaknesses in the experiments to which Hansen rightly draws our attention, as to the fact that B.D. himself has remained silent. It would, after all, be hard to conceive of any more dastardly act of treachery and duplicity than that of which he stands accused. An innocent man would seek to clear his name. I shall also want to see what response his investigators offer to Hansen’s criticisms.

Hansen believes that B.D. deceived his investigators, exploiting, in the process, their ignorance of card tricks. Let us consider, then, the “single-card clairvoyance tests” that he discusses. I would naturally assume that the experimenter would place the target card in its folder behind the desk at which he/she was sitting and using that desk as a screen, would have “slipped it into the folder, all this out of the subject’s view.” (See Kanthamani & Kelly, 1974.) I would likewise assume that any observers present would stand on the opposite side of the desk from the experimenter. Am I mistaken in these assumptions? If not, then I see no possibility of B.D.’s making use either of a casual reflection of the target card from a polished surface or from a confederate.

In addition to his prodigious success on these card tests, B.D. also achieved a high score on the Schmidt machine. So far as I know, there is no way in which one could fake such a score on this device without first dismantling it. Hansen complains that the machine had not been tested for randomness. Is he seriously asking us to believe that B.D. was just the lucky beneficiary of a faulty machine? Kelly and Kanthamani (1972) tell us: “Under good conditions at the Institute, with Helmut Schmidt and J. B. Rhine observing, he produced a complete run of 508 trials with 180 hits for a CR of 5.4, p < 10⁻⁷.”

Hansen has singled me out, along with Gertrude Schmeidler, as an example of those whose ignorance of conjuring has made them
vulnerable to deception. I am honored to find myself in such distin-
guished company, but I am sure Gertrude does not need me to de-
fend her. I will therefore confine myself to just three instances
where my own judgment is impugned.

1. Glenn Falkenstein. Presumably something I must have read in
that Australian newsletter must have given me the impression that
Falkenstein (whose name I had never heard before) might be worth
investigating. I then promptly forgot that I had ever written that
brief letter. Later I learned that Falkenstein is, in fact, a well-known
conjuror. So what? That Hansen should bother to pick on such a
trifle shows how desperate he must be to discredit his opponents.

2. Margery. I am not in the business of "promoting" anyone's me-
diumship. My concern only is to get at the truth. All the world
knows that there was much that was suspicious about the Margery
mediumship. However, Tietze has not said the last word and, with
the publication of Marian Nester's new book about Margery, the
case will be due for a reevaluation. Meanwhile, I challenge Hansen
to say whether he thinks: (a) that the wooden rings which Margery
is credited with linking paranormally on many occasions never, in
fact, existed, so that this whole episode is a myth perpetrated by a
number of professional men who conspired together to fabricate the
documentary and photographic evidence or (b) that his knowledge
of conjuring enables him to say how she faked these objects?

3. "Tim." Hansen's remarks suggest that one is damned if one
fails to consult a conjuror and damned if one does! In fact, Randi
gave us very good advice on the protocol that we should use with
"Tim," who, as a result, never once succeeded in bending metal in
our laboratory. Eventually he was caught out by being left alone
with a concealed camera.

I would never want to deny that a knowledge of conjuring is an
asset to a parapsychologist, and I regret that I was unable to give
my students such expertise. I would suggest, however, that it is not
enough to be sophisticated about conjuring techniques. If Hansen
wants us to reject such outstanding cases in the literature as those
of Serios or of B.D., he must offer us a more convincing counter-
explanation.
REFERENCES


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