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## SORT's Next Meeting:

**Wednesday, June 30, 1999  
 7:00 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center,  
 Room 415  
 5325 Engle Road  
 Carmichael, CA

# The *SORTified* NEWS

## JUNE 30<sup>th</sup> MEETING— REVISITING AMITYVILLE: THE HOAX THAT REFUSES TO DIE

It was the most famous haunted house in America. Books, movies, and television shows have been made about it. It has been debunked, demythologized, and deconstructed, and it has become decidedly old news. Yet the "Amityville horror" is still alive and kicking on the net, on the bookshelves, in the movies (yes, there is another one in the works—and you thought that the "Doll House" shtick was about as low as it could get), and on television. Join us for coffee, cookies, and conversation on Wednesday June 30<sup>th</sup> as we revisit Amityville and take a look at "The Hoax That Refuses to Die."



We meet at 7:00 p.m. at La Sierra Community Center on Engle Road in Carmichael.

## FROM THE BARGAIN BOOK BINS: *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*

As promised, from time to time we will keep you alerted to some of the best skeptical book buys on the bargain counters of your local book stores. This month we

spotted about a dozen copies of the Barnes and Noble reprint edition of Charles MacKay's classic, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. It's a hardcover edition selling for \$9.95 and the paperback, when it can be found, goes for more than that. We found these at Barnes and Noble's Birdcage store on Sunrise near Greenback. Grab one while they last. Originally published as two separate books in 1841 and 1852, the book is really quite fascinating and extraordinary in itself.

## NEW ARRIVALS AT YOUR FAVORITE BOOKSTORE

You might want to check out *Therapy's Delusions: The Myth of the Unconscious and the Exploitation of Today's Walking Worried* (Scribner, 1999, \$25) by Ethan Watters and Richard Ofshe. Following their highly successful examination of so-called "recovered memory" in their previous book *Making Monsters*, Watters and Ofshe here boldly take on the entire concept of "talk therapy" and the psychodynamic mind. What is this "unconscious" that Freud wrote about and that so many of his followers as well as later breakaway psychotherapists claim exists? Does it actually, in fact, exist? Can a therapist strip away layers of resistance to uncover the key that will unlock some secret source of a patient's

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troubles? Is there *something* that *can* be stripped away? Is there a key? And, shockingly enough, does the patient in some cases actually have any real trouble in the first place, or are problems created as a result of the dynamic search for narrative in the interaction between therapist and patient? When real and actual problems do exist, why has talk therapy failed so badly in treating them?

Walking us clearly and lucidly through the history of psychodynamic therapy, Watters and Ofshe examine the claims and failures of what they see as one of the most popular and influential fads of the 20th century. Using some intellectual slight-of-hand, talk therapy has managed to pass itself off as a scientific discipline, while at the same time influencing and claiming a foothold in much of 20th-century culture—from medicine to literature and the visual, musical, and dramatic arts. Today, when so much is being learned about the biological basis of mental illness and biological methods are proving so effective in treating it, talk therapy, in an effort to survive, is now reaching out to embrace such popular (albeit murkier and decidedly less scientific) areas as “spirituality” and the “holistic mind.” Where will it all end? Or has it ended for talk therapy already?

Watters and Ofshe offer a strong case here, in a remarkably accessible and brave book.

Highly recommended.

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## **SORT’S NOW ON THE NET!**

We're happy to announce that the SORT website is up and running. You can find us at:  
<http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray>



Besides information about SORT, you'll be able to find details on upcoming meetings, an archive of the *SORTified News*, special announcements, an ongoing bibliography of books for rational thinkers and skeptics, links to other rational thinking and skeptical sites, and lots of upcoming future goodies. Of course, even though the web page includes a copy of the latest edition of the *SORTified News*, we will continue to send it via e-mail and snail-mail to our mailing list of supporters. If you would like to be added to our mailing list please contact us via e-mail at [kitray@quiknet.com](mailto:kitray@quiknet.com).

## **MEDIA TIDBITS: WICCANS IN THE ARMY, OH MY!**

From the *Washington Post*, Tuesday, June 8, 1999, comes a little no-comment story about witches in the Army, as reported by *Post* Staff Writer Hanna Rosin. According to Rosin's story, it seems that a Wicca coven comprised of US Army privates and sergeants is holding

regular services at Camp Hood in Killeen, Texas. The witches, “a blend of pre-Christian paganism and New Age earth worship,” have been holding their services over the last two years with the permission of Fort Hood Army authorities in accordance with, as Rosin explains, their “little known but routine lifestyle policy: supporting soldiers who want to practice what the military calls, without passing judgment, ‘minority’ religions.”

All was going well apparently until a local photographer was invited to attend the Spring Rites ritual and a local newspaper featured photographs a couple of weeks later of the “high priestess and several others leaping over a campfire, the men shirtless, the women in witchy robes.” Then, apparently, well, shall we say, all hell broke loose. Christian groups began bombarding the military base with telephone calls and threatened to stage marches and disrupt the rituals. According to Rosin, “witch skittishness” even spread to Washington, where Rep. Robert L. Barr Jr (R-Ga.) wrote to the commander of the Fort Hood base imploring him to “Please stop this nonsense now... What’s next? Will armored divisions be forced to travel with sacrificial animals for satanic rituals...?”

Rosin quotes one of Killeen's local Christians, Reverend Jack Harvy of the Temple Baptist Church, as saying, “Everyone thinks they're such sweet lovely people.... God says, ‘Suffer not a witch to live’... We would like to see them saved, but God doesn't

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change his mind.”

So far, though, all the brouhaha apparently hasn't discouraged either the witches or the Army. The Army has however, as Rosin explains, laid down a few rules. The Wicca services must not be conducted “skyclad,” the Wiccan poetic word for naked. And while nine-inch daggers may be used on the high altar, they may not be used for cutting anything. Furthermore, Pentagrams are all right, provided that they are relatively unobtrusive, permitting small rings and necklaces worn inside Army uniforms. Also the Army has declared no candles are to be allowed in the barracks, and tattoos are to be avoided, although Rosin's story notes, “A few young privates just back from Bosnia bore the mark of MTV overload witches, with fist-sized red devils tattooed on their biceps.”

The only real hang-up in the whole thing might be that strictly speaking Wiccans are supposed to be pacifists. According to Rosin's story, though, there is an out—she quotes David Oringsderff, “a 30-year Army veteran and founder of the Sacred Well,” the base Wicca group's sponsoring congregation, as pointing out that Christians aren't supposed to kill either, and that at least Wiccans are more honest about the whole thing. He says, “We accept responsibility for our actions and don't have the devil to blame things on.”

Rosin reports that other Wicca groups have begun to pop up at other military bases, including Fort Polk in Louisiana, Fort

Wainwright in Alaska, and the Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa. Rosin quotes Marcy Palmer, the Fort Hood group's high priestess, who explains, “We are at the end of one age and the beginning of another. . . . Our time has finally come.”

Don't you just love the 90's?

### NET NOTES: THE STAND-UP SKEPTIC

Do your friends call you sourpuss; does your spouse call you grumpy? Do people wearing those happy faces kick sand on your face at the beach? Is it tough having the reputation of a skeptic and rational thinker? Well, fear not, friend, now you have proof that skeptics can also learn to laugh and be the life of the party.

Dial into the net and check into the web site of Drew Henderson “The Stand-Up Skeptic”: <http://www.pathcom.com/~drewh/>. Chuckle along with Drew as he explains, “I consulted an Herbal Acupuncturist. He's like a regular acupuncturist, except he uses pine needles. . . . I think I just invented remote acupuncture. I stuck pins in a voodoo doll to get back at a neighbor and it cured his arthritis. . . . A scrap metal dealer in Des Moines claims he can detect buried wire coat-hangers by walking over the area with a cup of water in each hand.”

Well, maybe they are going to keep kicking sand in our faces, after all. But keep up the good work, Drew.

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### DON'T MISS IT! SORT PRESENTS BOB STEINER: “HOWDO PSYCHICS DO IT?”

September 29th

*Be prepared to have your grasp of reality seriously challenged!*

Watch this space for more info!

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#### About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 29 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

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“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”  
—Clarence Darrow