

Cryptoscatology
Conspiracy Theory as Art Form

Robert Guffey

Walterville (OR): Trine Day, 2012, \$19.95 (USA), p/b

This is collection of the author's essays on secret societies, the Masons and other esoterica, and various ways in which conspiracy theories are interacting with popular American culture. The book's title is meaningless, as far as I can see, and the attempt to squeeze these disparate essays under one title is essentially futile. There is no central theme holding them together.

The author belongs to the 'conspiracy theories for the hell of it' school. That is to say he is not too concerned whether or not any particular theory is true or false. He writes (p. 8):

'I'm saying that the state of paranoia is a new art form, and people – either consciously or unconsciously – are well aware of this and use paranoia as a plaything, a palliative to help guide them through the intricacies of the post-post-modern world.'

To a modernist and positivist like me this is either meaningless – How can paranoia, a mental state or attitude, be an art form? – or simply false: I do not see people using paranoia as a palliative or plaything. But the author's theoretical top-dressing really is of little import: it's the essays which matter.

All of these are interesting to some extent. Freemasonry in Shakespeare? The life of American Mason and esotericist Albert Pike? William Burroughs as a 20th century Gnostic? But when he gets to more mainstream subjects, such as secret societies in history, his lack of interest in fuddy-duddy old true or false is a handicap. He tells us that H. G. Wells was a member of the Round Table and spent WW2 as the head of British intelligence. Neither claim is true; and the fact that on this he cites the late Jim Keith, one of the less reliable people in this area, for the intelligence claim says much about Guffey's lack of interest in boring old facts.

So: not uninteresting, just not reliable. But in putting it

like that I am demonstrating that I am simply not on the same page as the author.

Robin Ramsay