

The World's Greatest Hypnotist

by John C. Hughes
& Andrew E. Rothovius

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The World's Greatest Hypnotist, in 296 concise pages, effectively achieves its stated goal of compiling an easily readable yet comprehensive history of dominant figures in the field of hypnosis. The authors describe in the preface their recognition of a "gag in the literature," and their subsequent five year task of research and compilation of resource materials.

The story of hypnosis is documented by relating bibliographical accounts of the field's most recognized proponents. This approach facilitates an understanding of how hypnosis has evolved within the context of the times and provides both sociological and historical perspectives for the changes that have occurred. The introductory chapter provides an overview which links present day perceptions of hypnosis to its early roots in ancient civilizations, and sets the stage for the work's emphasis on character development. Chapters two through six tell of the life, experiences and work of Mesmer in the zeitgeist of the 18th century. It is in these chapters that the concepts of hypnosis begin to take on a life, simultaneously being a part of, yet apart from, the dynamic and illustrious life of Mesmer. Using this literary technique throughout, the authors trace the use of hypnosis, and society's reception to the phenomena from then to the present day.

The use of a narrative style emphasizes the influence of particular persons on developments within the field. The colorful and interesting anecdotes of the powerful men who have dominated the field provide an entertaining view that contains both depth and insight into the evolutionary process. The book is very effective in providing an overview of the major schools of thinking, the differences and commonalities, and in clarifying those elements within the societal and historical contexts.

The most contemporary of the "greatest hypnotists" identified in this

work is Milton H. Erickson. Two chapters are dedicated to his life and his work. For this review, his widow, Elizabeth, was asked to read these two chapters carefully, and search for errors. Although one relatively inconsequential error was found (Erickson fell ill with polio after high school, not between his junior and senior year as reported) both she and I were very positively impressed with the comprehensiveness and overall accuracy of the authors' account.

Hughes and Rothovius have used a referencing style, unusual in works of this level of sophistication. Instead of footnoting, or otherwise citing references, they use a more global method of identifying major source material following each chapter. Their rationale is explained on page 255: "The extant literature on hypnotism and its practitioners is voluminous. To burden a book intended for general readership with ponderous apparatus of numbered footnotes referencing hundreds, if not thousands of scholarly and professional works, would defeat its very purpose" (of producing an easily readable text). I disagree with the authors' position that footnoting impairs readability. The most significant objection I have is that the methods of referencing make it difficult if not impossible to refer back to the source material.

I congratulate the authors on a well-written, readable, and enjoyable text. *The World's Greatest Hypnotist* stands alone in its ability to give a broad overview of the development of hypnosis and the societal contexts within which varied schools developed.

Reviewed by:

Roxanna Erickson Klein, Ph.D., R.N.
Dallas, Texas