

# Raynor Johnson

Raynor Johnson (1901-1987) was an English physicist who spent most of his later life in Australia. He is the author of books about psychical research, survival of death and mysticism.

## Life and Career

Raynor Carey Johnson was born on 5 April 1901 in Leeds.<sup>[1]</sup> He was educated at Bradford Grammar School, winning an open scholarship in natural science to Balliol College, Oxford. There, he obtained a BA in 1922 and an MA in 1926, studying spectroscopy (the study of the absorption and emission of light and radiation by matter) under [Thomas Merton](#). He lectured in physics at Queen's University, Belfast between 1923 and 1926. He was awarded a BSc in physics at London University, a PhD in 1924 and a DSc in 1927, following which he was appointed a lecturer there. He later wrote numerous papers and a book on molecular spectra.<sup>[2]</sup> He also began a medical course, having become interested in psychotherapy.

In 1934 Johnson was appointed Master of Queen's College, University of Melbourne, where he remained until his retirement in 1964.

Contact with religious figures on a 1962 visit to India fed Johnson's growing interest in spirituality and mysticism. Now nearing retirement, he and his wife committed themselves to a life of meditation at their home in the Dandenong Ranges, a mountain range in Australia. Here he hosted regular meditation meetings led by Anne Hamilton-Byrne, a neighbour who shared his interest and with whom he is said to have become 'besotted'.<sup>[3]</sup> Hamilton-Byrne was later exposed as the leader of a secretive cult, known as The Family, mired in scandal when many of the 28 children it had 'adopted' were found to have been acquired by means of forged papers. Johnson was not involved in the subsequent criminal charges against Hamilton-Byrne and her collaborators, but was distressed by his association with the cult.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Psychical Research

Johnson became interested in psychical research during his time in Australia. He came to believe that although paranormal phenomena could not be proved, there was sufficient evidence to suggest its extreme likelihood. His 1953 book *The Imprisoned Splendour* contains eight chapters devoted to the topic. In reviews, RH Thouless called this 'a very adequate summary of recent work in this field',<sup>[5]</sup> while HH Price considered it offered 'an original contribution to the theoretical interpretation of the facts'.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Psychical Research* (1955), a book wholly devoted to research into paranormal phenomena, was published as part of the popular 'Teach Yourself' series.

## Survival of Death

On a visit to England in 1953 he met Geraldine Cummins, an Irish medium, who later sent him material that she had received by automatic writing that purported to originate with Ambrose Pratt, a recently-deceased Australian novelist, politician and businessman whom Johnson had known intimately. Pratt, whom Johnson considered a man of considerable integrity as well as talent, appeared to wish to communicate to him the fact of his having survived death, providing abundant details about himself and his life and interests, to an extent, Johnson felt certain, that Cummins could not have known about by normal means. This is laid out in detail in Johnson's 1988 book *The Decisive Testimony*.

## **Fawcett's 'Imaginism'**

In his communications through Cummins, 'Pratt' indicated that the best extant description of ultimate reality was the philosophy of Imaginism, as described by Douglas Fawcett, a British mountaineer and science fiction novelist with a background in the Theosophical movement. 'Pratt' stated that he and a group of likeminded deceased individuals, which included FWH Myers, were convinced that Fawcett's ideas needed to be promoted to the widest possible public, and he urged Johnson to undertake the task. This is the origin of Johnson's 1957 book *Nurslings of Immortality*, a discussion of Fawcett's Imaginism.

## **Mysticism**

Johnson's interests extended to mystical experience, which he considered an opening to the discovery of ultimate truth.<sup>[7]</sup> His 1959 book *Watcher on the Hills* is a detailed analysis and evaluation of first-hand reports of such experiences that had been given to him over the years. In the preface he writes:

One reason why I have written his book is to show how absurd it is to suppose that the only evidence to be weighed is that which our five senses provide. The human mind, which in all of us daily receives and interprets the evidence of the senses, also receives from time to time intimations, insights, moments of illumination, and occasionally vivid experiences, which are felt to be of the greatest significance by the percipient. This is evidence which has to be weighed carefully if we are in earnest to understand the world. I am not now thinking of psychical phenomena, but of experiences of a much deeper kind which can be differentiated from them.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Selected Publications**

*An Introduction to Molecular Spectra* (1949). New York: Pitman Publications.

*The Imprisoned Splendour: An Approach to Reality based upon the Significance of Data Drawn from the Fields of Natural Science, Psychical Research and Mystical Experience.* (1953). London: Hodder and Stoughton.

*Psychical Research* (1955). London: English Universities Press.

*Nurslings of Immortality* (1957). London: Hodder and Stoughton.

*Watcher on the Hills* (1959). London: Hodder and Stoughton.

The Spiritual Path (1969). *A.R.E. Journal* 4/3. Virginia Beach.

The Wheel of Birth and Death (1977). In *The Dimensions of Dying and Rebirth: Lectures from the 1976 Easter conference at the Association for Research and Enlightenment, inc.* Virginia Beach: ARE Press.

*Light of all Life: Thoughts Towards a Philosophy of Life* (1984). Nottingham: The Pilgrim Collection.

*The Decisive Testimony* (1988). Norwich: Pilgrim.

## **Published Postmortem**

*Mysticism and Life* (2010). Ferny Creek, Victoria: Lakeland Publications.

*A Late Lark Singing* (2012). Heathmont, Victoria: Lakeland Publications.

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## **Literature**

Haworth, A. (2016). [Growing up with The Family: Inside Anne Hamilton-Byrne's sinister cult.](#) *Observer*, 20 November.

Johnson, R.C. (1953). *The Imprisoned Splendour: An Approach to Reality based upon the Significance of Data Drawn from the Fields of Natural Science, Psychical Research and Mystical Experience.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

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Moore, A. (2007). *Raynor Johnson: A Biographical Memoir.* Ferny Creek, Victoria: Lakeland Publications.

Parnaby, O. (2007). Johnson, Raynor Carey. *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 17. Melbourne University Press.

Price, H.H. (1954). Review: *The Imprisoned Splendour* by Raynor C. Johnson. *Journal of Parapsychology* 18/1, 51-64.

Thouless, R.H. (1953). Review: *The Imprisoned Splendour* by Raynor C. Johnson. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 37, 206.

## **Endnotes**

### **Footnotes**

1. ^ Biographical details in Moore (2007) and Parnaby (2007).
2. ^ Johnson (1949).
3. ^ Haworth (2016).
4. ^ Parnaby (2007).

5. ^ Thouless (1953), 206.
6. ^ Price (1954), 54.
7. ^ Johnson (1955), 173.
8. ^ Johnson (1959), 12.

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