

D Scott Rogo

Douglas Scott Rogo (1950-1990) was an author, musician and paranormal researcher who became a public figurehead for parapsychology through his many writings, lectures, and radio and television appearances. His life ended tragically in 1990 when he was aged only 40, stabbed to death by an unknown assailant in his home.



Life and Career

Douglas Scott Rogo, known as Scott to his friends, was born on February 1, 1950 to Jack and Winifred Rogo, the second of two siblings.^[1] He was educated at the University of Cincinnati and California State University, Northridge. In graduate school he majored in the psychology of music, in which he gained his first and only degree before turning to parapsychology as a full-time independent researcher and journalist.^[2]

Rogo had begun researching psi phenomena at the age of 16. His first report, of an investigation of Attila von Szalay and electronic voice phenomena (EVP), appeared in the *Journal of Paraphysics*.^[3] In the course of this he met Raymond Bayless, a psychical researcher and pioneer of EVP research, with whom he formed a long-term friendship.^[4]

While still an undergraduate he produced his first book, on the topic of music sometimes heard by people who report out-of-body states and altered states of consciousness, thus linking his formal music studies with his extracurricular interest in parapsychology;^[5] a sequel was published two years later.^{[6] [7]}

Rogo's 1976 book *In Search of the Unknown* offered an autobiographical insight into his career in parapsychology to that point,^[8] inspired by a similar book by Bayless published four years earlier.^[9]

The growing awareness of AIDS stimulated Rogo's interest in medicine, which eventually led him to offer his services as a medical volunteer and counsellor.^[10] In the last month of his life he was offered a part-time paid position in health and medicine. This, he realized, was the first job he had ever applied for, having freelanced as a writer and lecturer in parapsychology his entire life – a unique position.^[11]

Rogo was a long-time supporter of the Wildlife Way Station in Los Angeles, a non-profit organisation devoted solely to the care and protection of injured or abandoned animals accustomed to a natural habitat.^[12]

Professional Positions

Rogo started his lecturing career by co-ordinating an experimental course in parapsychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, for the academic year 1968-1969.^[13] Following this, he received a grant from the Parapsychology Foundation, New York, to further study education in parapsychology. This resulted in the monograph *Methods and Models for Education in Parapsychology*,^[14] (most recently updated by Harvey J Irwin^[15]) which was followed by a conference on the topic held by the Parapsychology Foundation.^[16]

Between 1973 and 1975, Rogo was visiting research consultant at the Psychical Research Foundation in Durham, North Carolina, during its two-year experimental exploration of the out-of-body experience.^[17] In 1975, he was simultaneously a visiting researcher at the Maimonides Medical Center's Division of Parapsychology and Psychophysics and director of research for the Southern California Society for Psychical Research.^[18]

In the 1980s, Rogo was a visiting lecturer and served on the graduate faculty of John F Kennedy University, Orinda, California. His main duty was to deliver classes on the master's degree programme in parapsychology.^[19]

Rogo joined the staff of *Fate* magazine in August 1978, holding the position of consultant editor until his death in 1990.^[20] Many of his books developed from ideas that he first formulated while writing articles for *Fate*. Loyd Auerbach effectively became Rogo's successor in this role, producing the regular 'Psychic Frontiers' column, and was consultant editor alongside John Keel, Mark Chorvinsky and Jerome Clark.^[21]

Rogo also provided regular news columns on parapsychology for the publication *Human Behaviour*,^[22] and frequently contributed to periodicals such as *Omni* and *Science of Mind*.^[23]

Death

On August 14, Rogo spoke to his publisher and acted as a volunteer on an AIDS hotline. He was last seen alive by a local bartender, who saw him drinking with another man.^[24] It is believed that on the following day he died in his home following an altercation.^[25] He was found in the afternoon of the 16th by Lt. LA Durrer on the floor between the living room and study, having been stabbed to death (the police were called when a neighbour noted that a lawn sprinkler had been continuously running during a period of water restriction). Durrer gained entry by a side-door that had been left ajar. Rogo's wallet was empty and some items of value were missing; however, his valuable book collection and unpublished manuscripts were left undisturbed. The attack was not believed to be related to his interest in the paranormal.^[26]

Rogo was known for helping strangers down on their luck, and initially, Rogo's mother believed her son was the victim of a random attack by someone he had approached for this reason.^[27]

The murder was reported in the *Los Angeles Times* on August 18.^[28]

To try to identify the killer, friends and colleagues turned to psychics specializing in crime detection. The most successful was Armand Marcotte, who was contacted by Ann Druffel, co-author with Rogo of *The Tujunga Canyon Contacts*. Holding items that had belonged to him, including his letter opener and the shirt he was last wearing, Marcotte described a struggle, money, two men, and a spontaneous murder, also offering leads as to where these people could be found.^[29] One detail was that a drinking glass should be rechecked by police for a finger print. This had proved at the time to be too smudged for suitable identification; however, a later analysis using improved forensic methods identified it as belonging to John Battista, a 29-year old Hispanic with a police record whom Rogo had befriended three years earlier.^[30]

Battista was convicted of second-degree murder in January 1992 and began a 15-year life sentence. The print on the glass had placed him at the scene of the crime. Battista denied that he was there at the time, arguing that Rogo might have left the glass there from a previous occasion.^[31] However, Rogo was known by friends to be somewhat obsessive about not leaving plates or glasses lying around.^[32]

Many sources claim psychics successfully led to the conviction in this case, although there is some doubt regarding the specificity of Marcotte's information,^[33] and the result may have been achieved by good detective work using the available evidence.^[34] But the conviction was overturned in 1996 following claims of prosecutorial misconduct; it was also argued that the prints did not match and that other evidence was too vague.^[35]

Criticism and Controversy

Ian Stevenson

Rogo often invited controversy within the parapsychological community, criticizing the work of fellow researchers and publishing strong rebuttals to critical reviews of his books.^[36] A notable instance is his attack on Stevenson's 'Sharada' case of responsive xenoglossy, in which an Indian woman appeared able to speak in a language she did not know: Rogo suggested the case was fraudulent, based on evidence he claimed to have uncovered that she had taken lessons in that language.^[37] An exchange between the two researchers planned for the *Journal of Parapsychology* was not published, after Stevenson refused to withdraw certain allegedly personal remarks and threatened to sue for libel.^[38] An acrimonious exchange eventually took place in 1986 in journal correspondence,^[39] each accusing the other of errors and other failings.

Skeptic Criticisms

Skeptics have accused Rogo of credulity: for instance Joe Nickell criticized his book *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry Into Wondrous Phenomena*, declaring that Rogo overlooked possible naturalistic explanations.^[40] Reviewing the same book, Biblical scholar James F Strange stated that Rogo's ideas 'need maturation and elaboration in a new book perhaps to be written several years down the road.'^[41]

Parapsychologists too found fault, while also welcoming the attention given to a neglected subject.^[42]

[Rosemary Guiley](#) has written, ‘within the parapsychology establishment, Rogo was often faulted for poor scholarship, which, critics said, led to erroneous conclusions.’^[43] This view appears to be endorsed by parapsychologist Douglas Stokes, who wrote of Rogo’s book *Phone Calls from The Dead* that it ‘was widely criticized in the parapsychological community for its generally sloppy and credulous nature.’^[44]

However, Stokes’s judgement appears to have been based on a single negative review which itself contained factual errors.^[45] Rodger Anderson provided a more nuanced critical evaluation of the book, to which Rogo responded.^[46]

In common with parapsychologists generally, Rogo has been subject to critical claims based on questionable assertions and limited understanding of the subject. For instance, some have labelled Rogo a ‘proponent of pseudo-science’ for having discussed the possibility of [experimenter effects](#), which Terence Hines considers a non-falsifiable hypothesis,^[47] apparently not realising that such effects, while controversial, are inferred from frequent observations in parapsychology and have also been discussed in relation to the behavioural and physical sciences.^[48]

Testimonies

Following his death, parapsychologists largely concurred in praising the depth of Rogo’s scholarship and understanding of the subject.

George P Hansen wrote: ‘Scott was ... a leading authority on the history of psychical research. In this I would estimate that there are only three or four people in the world who might be considered to be in his league. The breadth of his historical knowledge of the field was unsurpassed.’^[49]

Jerome Clark wrote: ‘I never ceased to be amazed at Scott’s encyclopedic knowledge or his unfailing ability to zero in on the truly crucial issues – or, just as important, on the fatal flaws; whether one agreed with him or not, *no one who knew him ever deemed him credulous*. He was too smart, too experienced, too skeptical to fall into that all-too-common trap’.^[50]

Keith Harary referred to Rogo as parapsychology’s ‘preeminent modern historian and scholar... He generously shared his vast knowledge and provocative speculations, and wasn’t afraid to deal with topics that were difficult to scientifically pin down and which other researchers no doubt felt safer leaving ignored. If we did not always share Scott’s conclusions, we respected the process through which he arrived at those conclusions.’^[51]

Others who worked with him found him to be meticulous and cautious in his approach and evaluations. Harary quotes a comment by Rogo in one of his final books, *Beyond Reality*:^[52]

I cannot offer any startling conceptual model to explain the mysteries... Nor can I offer a scientific way in which my speculations may be experimentally

confirmed or falsified... Whether these suggestions turn out to be right or wrong is inconsequential, for they are just points of discussion.

... Trying to understand the nature of reality... could cause science to throw up its collective hands in despair.

For the present, I'm far from reaching that point in my own life and work. I think my fellow psychical researchers feel the same way. If our Universe didn't possess secrets and mysteries, it couldn't be a very interesting place. That's the principle that has kept so many of us going for the past several years. I doubt if the situation will change in the foreseeable future.

To honour Rogo's achievements, the [Parapsychology Foundation](#) established *The D. Scott Rogo Award for Parapsychological Literature* in 1992 to assist authors working on manuscripts pertaining to parapsychology and related topics.^[53]

Books

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Callum Cooper

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Personal correspondence, Jack Rogo, 15th December, 2018.
2. ^ Rogo (1979).
3. ^ Rogo (1969), 126-129.
4. ^ Cooper & Parsons (2015).
5. ^ Rogo (1970).
6. ^ Rogo (1972).
7. ^ For a recent discussion, see Foley (2015).
8. ^ Rogo (1976).
9. ^ Bayless (1972).
10. ^ Harary (1990); Harary (1991); Clark (1990).
11. ^ Clark (1990).
12. ^ Rogo (1982).
13. ^ Rogo (1970).
14. ^ Rogo (1973).
15. ^ Irwin (2013).
16. ^ Shapin & Coly (1976).
17. ^ Rogo (1979).
18. ^ Rogo (1979); Rogo (1982).
19. ^ Rogo (1982); *Fate* (1981).
20. ^ Clark (1990).
21. ^ *Fate*, April, 1991, 44 (4).
22. ^ Rogo & Clark (1979), p. 218.
23. ^ Rogo (1992).
24. ^ Clark (1990); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-G7Huw92uw&t=631s> ; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shadow->

[boxing/201209/murder-ghost-writer](#)

25. ^ Clark (1990).

26. ^ Clark (1990).

27. ^ Clark (1990); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-G7Huw92uw&t=631s> ; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shadow-boxing/201209/murder-ghost-writer>

28. ^ Clark (1990);

29. ^ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shadow-boxing/201209/murder-ghost-writer>

30. ^ Cooper (2012). Chapter 2, pp. 9-13.

31. ^ Cooper (2012). Chapter 2, pp. 9-13.

32. ^ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-G7Huw92uw&t=631s> ; Cooper (2012). Chapter 2, pp. 9-13.

33. ^ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shadow-boxing/201209/murder-ghost-writer>

34. ^ Cooper (2012). Chapter 2, pp. 9-13.

35. ^ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-G7Huw92uw&t=631s> ; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shadow-boxing/201209/murder-ghost-writer>

36. ^ Stokes (1977), pp. 368-369; Rogo (1978); Beloff (1978); Stokes (1978); Braude (1990a); Rogo (1990); Braude (1990b).

37. ^ Rogo (1985), p. 77; Cooper (2015).

38. ^ Rogo (1985), p. 77; Cooper (2015).

39. ^ Stevenson (1986a).

40. ^ Nickell (1993), pp.10-62.

41. ^ Strange (1984).

42. ^ Alvarado (1985).

43. ^ Guiley (1992), pp. 284-285.

44. ^ Stokes (1997), p. 200.

45. ^ Hardy (1979).

46. ^ Anderson (1981); Rogo (1981).

47. ^ Hines (2003).

48. ^ Rosenthal, R. (1966). Broughton, R.S. (2015).

49. ^ Hansen (1991).

50. ^ Clark (1990).

51. ^ Harary (1991).

52. ^ Rogo (1990), pp. 226-229.

53. ^ Cooper (2012). Chapter 2, pp. 9-13. <https://parapsychology.org/about-the-rogo-award/>