

Poltergeists and PK

One of the best known of all psychic phenomena is that of the poltergeist, whose activities have been chronicled since ancient times. Literally translated from the German, the words *polter* and *geist* mean "racketing ghost," and this well-documented category of ghostly intervention is never a quiet one.

The activities of the rambunctious poltergeist typically include knockings, rappings, heavy trampling, the setting of fires, the hurling of stones and other objects, the breaking of crockery, the banging of doors, the jiggling of latches, the opening of windows and dresser drawers, the overturning and displacement of furniture, and the shaking and levitation of beds and their occupants. Some poltergeists have also been known to sob, moan, and scream.

As these mischievous, attention-getting, and sometimes malicious tricks would suggest, the poltergeist is almost invariably linked to the presence in the house of one specific young person, usually an adolescent boy or girl. In the Manning case, the poltergeist was associated with 11-year-old Matthew, one of the three children in the household in 1967 when the manifestations began. The disturbances—which consisted chiefly of knockings and the movement of furniture and objects—ceased when Matthew was away and resumed when he returned. Eventually the poltergeist followed him to his boarding school. It was not until 1971, when Matthew apparently siphoned the energy or force behind these manifestations into his developing artistic and psychic skills, that the poltergeist finally retreated. It should be noted that the Manning poltergeist was unusually tenacious—few visitations continue longer than two months.

Although research has shown some poltergeist cases to be fraudulent, investigators have found enough instances above suspicion to convince them that the poltergeist is a true psychic phenomenon, ungoverned

by normal physical laws. Evidence suggests that the manifestations of the poltergeist are produced by bursts of psychic activity emanating from its agent, the one person whose presence is always required.

Attempting to understand the forces at work, researchers in parapsychology have hypothesized that the poltergeist's feats in moving objects (which are often seen to fly in violation of the laws of gravity, gliding, rising, and turning corners) are examples of psychokinesis, or PK—the ability to influence inanimate objects by mind power. The most widely known examples of alleged psychokinesis are those of Uri Geller, but these have now been largely dismissed as fraudulent. (For example, one well known magician has said that Geller used a palmed magnet to stop a watch.) A less well known but possibly more convincing exponent of PK is a Russian woman named Nina Kulagina. Her ability to move and otherwise affect small objects without physical contact has been witnessed by Western parapsychologists but has never been extensively tested under rigorous laboratory conditions in the West, and her feats have not been scrutinized by professional magicians.

The deficiency of the PK theory as an explanation of poltergeist phenomena, however, is that the energy involved in many poltergeist disturbances far exceeds anything claimed by the supporters of Kulagina and other PK adepts. The best they can do is to move a small object, such as a fountain pen, whereas poltergeists can cause crockery to fly across a room.

In view of this, some researchers have cast about for a source of energy that might be utilized by poltergeists. But so far their attempts to explain poltergeist phenomena have simply replaced one mystery with another. Even more mysterious is why any spirit or being that could marshal such remarkable psychic energy should expend it on such purposeless activities.