

BOOK REVIEWS

A CHAOTIC LIFE: THE MEMOIRS OF STANLEY KRIPPNER, PIONEERING HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGIST [3 VOLS]

*By Stanley Krippner. University Professors Press. 2024. 268, 272, 282 pp.
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A Chaotic Life is a three-volume series in which Stanley Krippner (b. 1932), a well-known American parapsychologist (and much more), recounts his life from his childhood, recalling his university years, recounting his reactions to various episodes of the Second World War and passages from his adult life. Krippner has visited more than one hundred countries and has interacted with cultures and people all over the world. *A Chaotic Life* mentions his interactions with historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, as well as with American film stars. As regards parapsychology, his principal interest has been in altered states of consciousness, especially dreams. Krippner is a prolific author, having authored and co-authored more than forty books, and has about a thousand publications to his name.

This paternalistic figure has accompanied much of the growth of parapsychology, especially in Argentina, but also in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, countries he has frequently visited. Since he has visited almost every country in Latin America, Krippner can perhaps be recognized as a natural ambassador for parapsychology and other avant-garde ‘psychologies’ such as psychedelic facilitated psychotherapy and hypnosis facilitated psychotherapy. Through his efforts, Krippner has sponsored the entry of dozens of young Latin Americans into many psychological associations, including the Parapsychological Association, through letters of recommendation, which earned him the nickname ‘Uncle Stan’. Krippner is not only a part of the history of parapsychology in the West, his charismatic personality has impacted at least three generations, and he has often functioned as an intercultural bridge. Besides Latin America, Krippner has served as ‘ambassador’ to China and India, presenting lectures and workshops at several universities, often helping to organize new institutional programs.

Krippner was introduced to things psychic at the age of fourteen when he was suddenly aware that an uncle was dead—and his uncle had, in fact, just died. This experience made him interested in parapsychology. When a student

at the University of Wisconsin in 1953 and despite opposition, he arranged to have J. B. Rhine speak there. After graduation, he visited Rhine's laboratory at Duke University several times. There he met Louisa Rhine, Karlis Osis, W. E. Cox, and J. Gaither Pratt, among others, and learned that "parapsychology was one of the most financially hazardous of professions" (Pilkington, 2011, p. 322).

Years later, as director of the Kent State University Child Study Center, a position he assumed in 1961 after receiving his doctorate from Northwestern University, he ran parapsychological experiments with students. In 1964, Gardner Murphy and Montague Ullman invited him to become director of the newly organized Maimonides Medical Center Dream Laboratory in Brooklyn, dedicated to the investigation of the relationship between telepathy and dreams. There, Krippner designed the research methodology for the experiments. This research led to one of his most popular books, *Dream Telepathy*, written with Ullman and one of their participants, the psychic Alan Vaughan. Originally published in 1973, the book has been re-edited every two decades with new revelations (most recently by Ullman et al., 1973/2023).

Krippner has had many unfortunate and unpleasant moments in his long life, but, after having read his memoirs, I am convinced that all of them are pleasantly compensated by the richness of a life worth imitating, especially his transpersonal perspective. Inspired by insights from Eastern and Western spirituality, he has once again served as a 'bridge' bringing meditation and spirituality into various aspects of mainstream psychology. Krippner has often demonstrated his transpersonal trait, always ready to serve as a mediator, especially in inter-religious and inter-spiritual dialogues. For example, he coordinated a symposium for the Association for Psychological Science, which created a dialogue between sceptics and parapsychologists.

A Chaotic Life not only reflects an intense (rather than a messy) life but illustrates how a scientifically based worldview can change everything: one's way of life, interaction with others, and legacy to future generations. Krippner is an example of everything a young scientific explorer (whether in the Amazonian jungle or in the antipodes of consciousness) can aspire to become. His three volumes are a reflection of his life, but also a guide—if we read it between the lines—on how to achieve goals and how to overcome frustrations despite the obstacles that society, culture, and one's personal life impose.

The volumes serve as an incomplete 'introduction' to Krippner's life and work. I received the complete manuscript, from which at least material for another volume could have been added. While reading the unpublished manuscripts, I had the pleasure of laughing, crying, marvelling, and admiring the life of Krippner, one of the most erudite avant-garde scholars at the end of one century and the beginning of another. Krippner writes about his numerous contacts with supporters and critics alike, his earlier work with the Richmond Public Schools, his graduate days at Northwestern University, and during the post-doctorate period before Maimonides. The range of his parapsychology projects

includes his investigation of the alleged mind-reading horse Lady, investigating a poltergeist case (Hastings & Krippner, 1961), and more!

Although he has written an autobiography once before (Krippner, 1975), and others have attempted to capture his fascinating and multi-paradigmatic life (e.g., Davies & Pitchford, 2015), *A Chaotic Life* describes much more, fifty more years of anecdotes and experiences. For example: How he was introduced to psychedelics by Timothy Leary, being “Rolfed” by Ida Rolf and her son, all before he began his career of investigating telepathic dreaming with Montague Ullman at Maimonides Medical Center. Later, he once spent several days in Haiti to attend some ‘voodoo’ ceremonies at the request of the tourism industry, a venture cut short with the outbreak of AIDS.

Attempting to describe the multifaceted personality who is Stanley Krippner is a daunting assignment. His list of publications covers the fields of parapsychology, humanistic psychology, shamanism, alternative healing, transpersonal psychology, personal mythology, hypnosis, dissociative states, and psychedelics. One of his best-known publications describes his Maimonides research study in which he explored dream telepathy with the audience of Grateful Dead concert goers acting as senders (Krippner et al., 1973).

At 92 years old, Krippner continues to be a key figure, as his work continues to contribute to our knowledge of human consciousness. *A Chaotic Life* reminds us that anomalous experiences should be taken seriously. Chaos theory holds that small events can have unpredictable consequences, hence the title of the memoirs. Thus, Krippner narrates minor episodes in his life that triggered his interest in certain fields. It is as if every door he opens makes him become an expert. For example, he recalls as a child being fascinated by a comic strip character, Mandrake the Magician, that sparked his interest in hypnosis and led to many published studies, earning him Fellow status in the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the International Association of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, and even a position as president of the Society of Psychological Hypnosis.

Another path led him to become involved in the study of ‘gifted children’—for that work he received three awards, and in 2022 he was named one of the *giants and pioneers* of creativity. Among many other awards and citations, Krippner also received the Pathfinder Award for his contributions to humanistic psychology, in 2002 the American Psychological Association gave him another award for his “contributions to the international development of psychology”, and in 2006, he and his colleague Ullman received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

Pilkington (2012) once brilliantly stated, “Krippner is a Renaissance man”—a cultured man of the Renaissance who was knowledgeable, educated, or proficient in a wide range of fields and who had acquired profound knowledge or proficiency in more than one field. Krippner has a profound understanding of multicultural milieus, and he describes instances where he participated

in native ceremonies and rituals. However, he is also knowledgeable about European and American opera, dance, drama, and musical theatre. Krippner has a great love for cinema and the fine arts as well, as revealed in many chapters.

Few have had a circuit of adventures and cultural experiences as incredible as Krippner. Finally, I admire Krippner because he is open and receptive to people, cultures, concepts, and ideas, as well as those of his students, giving them helpful but critical advice to foster their creativity so that they can make scientific contributions as well.

jovillanu@yahoo.com.ar

JORGE VILLANUEVA

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