

Paranormal. A psychologist himself, Alejandro Parra's recommendations on how to work with one's dreams appear to be the result of careful study and of personal practice in the fascinating area of oneiric exploration.

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A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND by Mary Rose Barrington, Ian Stevenson and Zofia Weaver. McFarland & Company, 2005. 200 pp. (paperback) £27.95. ISBN 0 7864 2112 6

The cover of this book suggests that "Stefan Ossowiecki (1877–1944) was perhaps the most gifted psychic ever to come under scientific scrutiny", and on the evidence presented here, I'm inclined to agree. This impressive Polish psychic is lamentably little known in the English-speaking world, despite having been investigated by leading researchers from France, Poland and Britain amongst others (including SPR members Dingwall and Besterman). In the SPR we have been indebted to Mary Rose Barrington for her excerpts of the French research into Ossowiecki, and to Dr Zofia Weaver for her overviews of the Polish literature. Now, Barrington and Weaver have joined forces with veteran parapsychologist Prof. Ian Stevenson to present a comprehensive exploration of Ossowiecki's life and abilities.

If one had to specify an ideal subject for psychical researchers to investigate, one might well come up with many of Ossowiecki's characteristics. He used his talents to aid people in verifiable ways, such as reuniting families separated during the war. He never accepted any payment. He held a respected position in society as an engineer and businessman, and seems to have been well liked for his kind and sociable nature. Most importantly, he was intensely curious about his own abilities and how they might work, and co-operated willingly with numerous psychical researchers over many years. There was never any suggestion of deception.

Although he demonstrated a range of abilities, Ossowiecki's most characteristic performance was to reproduce, often exactly, drawings or words written and enclosed in an envelope by a stranger. The stranger in question was often far removed, unknown even to the investigator, and Ossowiecki would often produce elaborate veridical accounts of the circumstances under which the target was prepared. Once researchers had observed this satisfactorily under well controlled conditions, they turned to process-oriented research, exploring the constraints to his abilities, and devising ever more complex experiments to narrow down the mechanisms involved.

The central portion of this fascinating book consists of translations of case and experimental reports. Of these, two-thirds are formal experiments originally published in the psychical research literature, e.g. *Revue Métapsychique*, the majority by Geley, Osty and Richet. These are written in a sensible mixture of (translated) quotation from the original material and contextual summary, giving the reader a good sense of the development of the research. The rest of the case reports are of informal experiments and 'fieldwork', i.e. cases where

he aided a member of the public. Here, the authors have included only those cases that meet their fairly stringent criteria, amongst others a requirement for multiple corroborating reports. Ossowiecki achieved legendary status in Poland during his lifetime, and the authors seem to have sifted through a vast amount of dubious anecdotal material with admirable caution. A useful appendix lists a chronology of events and cases, identifying which are included in the book and which not.

Were it only for the above this would be a valuable contribution to the field, but there is much more to this book. In the first chapter, Zofia Weaver presents an enlightening overview of the political and social context within which Ossowiecki lived: the Russian Revolution, World War I, and Polish independence (in which Ossowiecki was involved). She outlines the state of psychical research in Poland at the time, and writes perceptively about Ossowiecki the man and his own thoughts about the meaning of his gifts. In the afterword, Ian Stevenson draws interesting parallels between Ossowiecki's abilities and those demonstrated by ten predecessors who were tested under controlled, though less rigorous, conditions.

In a meaty last chapter, Mary Rose Barrington dissects the cases with lawyerly care, firstly anticipating arguments that might be raised, and secondly exploring the different researchers' interpretations of the Ossowiecki evidence. She paints an interesting picture of the politics and biases in the research community, e.g. contrasting the French discomfort with the notion of survival with the English focus upon it, and how that influenced research strategy. The result was a preoccupation with establishing whether Ossowiecki was demonstrating an ability to observe remote events (clairvoyance) or to pick up impressions from remote minds (telepathy). After exploring the significance of this question, Barrington draws on the case material to show how confusing the evidence is in this regard. Although most cases demonstrate an element of clairvoyance, a few do require telepathy. However Ossowiecki's failures and partial successes often suggest an absence of telepathic ability. After extracting patterns in the case material, Barrington proposes that, besides traditional clairvoyance, Ossowiecki had a hybrid ability that allowed him to observe another person's mental imagery, without the normal telepathic sensing of associated idea or meaning. She also uses the evidence to construct an argument supporting the idea of a common consciousness, which, though not fully developed, is a useful starting point for debate.

My only regret is that the scholarly structure of the book is not particularly inviting to people who are reading about Ossowiecki for the first time. For them I would advise diving in somewhere in the middle to get a flavour of the range and quality of the experimental work, before returning to the beginning to read the whole story in context. That aside, this invaluable book contains a wealth of raw material for thinkers to draw on, supported by a good deal of intelligent and stimulating analysis.

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