

BOOK REVIEW

Wings of Ecstasy: Domenico Bernini's Vita of St. Joseph of Copertino (1722) by Michael Grosso, translated & edited by Cynthia Clough. CreateSpace, 2017. x + 278pp. \$10.83 (paperback). ISBN 978-1973739906.

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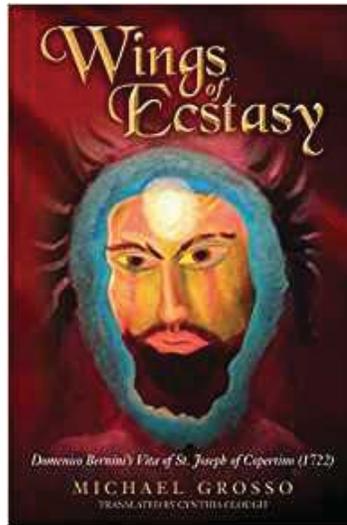
This self-published volume is a valuable and natural successor to Grosso's earlier *The Man Who Could Fly: St. Joseph of Copertino and the Mystery of Levitation*, which I reviewed very favorably in *JSE* 30-2 (2016): 275–278. In the earlier work, Grosso presented the amazing essentials of the career of the Flying Friar, including some detailed descriptions from eyewitnesses extracted from contemporary sources (including Bernini). In this book, Grosso performs the additional valuable service of providing an abridged translation of the most important contemporary biography of Joseph, a book brimming with compelling detailed eyewitness accounts, many taken verbatim during Joseph's protracted inquisition.

Details always matter, but perhaps more so in a case so remote from the present day and so extraordinary with respect to the magnitude of the reported phenomena. I remind the reader that the case of St. Joseph provides the earliest outstanding evidence for human levitation and quite possibly the best from any era. The levitations were observed by thousands of people, often near at hand, in flight (not simply at his destination) and in daylight. Moreover, the reports often converge on fascinating and unexpected striking details—e.g., that Joseph's clothes would not move during his flights, or that he would not extinguish candles as he flew among them.

Moreover, Joseph reportedly caused many dramatic healings (again, richly detailed in Bernini's *Vita*), and his apparent feats of ESP and bilocation are likewise astounding and difficult to dismiss. So this volume takes us more deeply into the life and character of Joseph and regales us with a great deal more material about the phenomena themselves. In my view, this book is indispensable for students of macro-PK and spontaneous psi generally, and (needless to say) especially so for those who can't read Bernini in Italian.

The abridged *Vita* is followed by a mostly outstanding commentary, developing further some topics covered in Grosso's earlier book, and

focusing on the strength of evidence and the historical and religious context in which the evidence must be viewed. However, I wish Grosso hadn't succumbed to the facile temptation to proclaim Joseph's levitations to be a clear challenge to reductive psychophysical theories. Levitation is no more challenging to traditional physicalism than are memory, volition, and many other cognitive phenomena (see Braude 1997). Hard-nosed physicalists will simply offer the usual promissory note that if the phenomena are genuine, the physical mechanisms should eventually be discovered. If we're looking for parapsychological evidence that provides



a clear counterexample to reductive psychophysical theories, our only option is good evidence of postmortem survival. Apart from that sort of empirical challenge, the only way to demonstrate the flaws in reductive physicalism is to show (as a number of philosophers have done, in my opinion) that those theories rest on various unintelligible assumptions. But Grosso doesn't take us down that path.

One more niggle about Grosso's commentary. It's marred (but fortunately not subverted) by political pronouncements—mostly, anti-capitalistic rants, which are gratuitous, needlessly contentious, and in some cases, breathtakingly naïve. Consider, for example, this remark, which ignores the central role in terrorism of intolerant religious ideologies: "Terrorism on earth would not exist if the world's wealth were not concentrated in the hands of a tiny percentage of persons" (p. 247).

So, political punditry may not be Grosso's strength. But these lapses in his commentary shouldn't obscure the fact that the book is a major contribution to the parapsychological literature, and that Grosso's essay at the end of it is filled with interesting observations about Joseph's career and the period in which he lived.

—STEPHEN E. BRAUDE

Reference Cited

Braude, S. E. (1997). *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science, Revised Edition*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.