



**BOOK AND
MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW**

Krippner Memoirs Encountering the Transpersonal Mahayoga Tantras of Sri Stanley Krippner

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<https://doi.org/10.31275/20253681>

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A Chaotic Life: The Memoirs of Stanley Krippner pioneering humanistic psychologist (3vols.) 2024, University Professors Press

Volume 1 ISBN: 9781955737494, Volume 2 ISBN: 9781955737517, Volume 3 ISBN: 9781955737524

“Alice laughed. ‘There’s no use trying,’ she said. ‘One can’t believe impossible things.’ I daresay you haven’t had much practice,’ said the Queen. ‘When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

— Lewis Carroll (1871/1971) *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

“Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres”

— Spanish Proverb

Tell me with whom you walk, and I will tell you who you are -- some cultural axioms appear to be universal. If whatever mysterious soul-force we call “character” can indeed be calculated as a function of the sum of one’s friends (and almost every language and tradition have their versions of this formula) then Stanley Krippner is, by anyone’s arithmetic, the measure of a mensch. With the recent publication of his Micheneresque three-volume autobiography, the Wizard of Od¹ himself has lifted the veil on his extraordinary life and



told the story of how the man behind the curtain -- even sometimes the iron one -- came to be one of the most globally celebrated titans of transpersonal studies, having earned the admiration and respect of many of his critics and intellectual adversaries.

Here is a *life*. Brought to you in Technicolor. The story of a scholar-poet (and amateur musical playwright) who came of age in a century as bleak as it was brilliant. The narrative opens in the enchanted orchards of Wisconsin apple country and follows the education and years of rigorous academic training for the one of the most decorated sons of America's Dairyland. It covers an astonishing amount of ground -- from the bucolic idylls of summer camp to the exploratory and seditious conversations of his student government days at the height of McCarthyism (which he seems to recall with an uncanny akashic precision). Even luminaries like J. B. Rhine and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose gravitational orbits brought them into contact with his own, appear with a curious frequency.

The life in these pages leaps from the page. Krippner is, archetypally speaking, equal parts magician and trickster. An epistemological acrobat, he recognized from an early age that there was more than one way to see and experience the world and he has made it his life's mission to manifest the impossible and show others how to do the same for themselves. In his role as a university professor (read: psychopomp -- insofar as they are *both* "conductor(s) of souls" (from Greek *psukhē* 'soul' + *pompos* 'conductor')) he serves as an epistemic end-of-life doula, guiding his students through the disintegration and death of their previous paradigms and into worldviews that they consciously create for themselves.

Like his friend Joseph Campbell, whose life-long love of mythology originated with early exposure to the stories and artifacts of Native Americans, Young Man Krippner followed his bliss into the wilds of shamanism, doing more than probably any other scholar to expand the circumference of the social sciences to include shamanic studies as a recognized area of inquiry. His seminal work in dream telepathy as Director of the Maimonides Dream Laboratory directly overlapped with this abiding fascination; after all, as he is fond of repeating, if you dream, then you are already doing something shamanic. (Krippner, 2009).

With over 1200 scholarly articles, chapters, papers, and publications, the challenge of metabolizing the staggering totality of his sixty years of scholarship might seem formidable. After all, his first published work was in 1965 -- a research article in *Gifted Child Quarterly* titled "Hypnosis and Creativity" -- and he has been writing with an Asimovian ardor ever since. One solution of how to make sense

of a lifetime's worth of data collection is to borrow a page from the book of data analytics. According to data-journalist and information designer David McCandless, when we visualize information, we create a visually explorable geography (McCandless, 2010).

So how to visually map out millions of data points² and capture the quintessence of Stanley Krippner? Anyone who has worked with him has at one time or another both felt his warmth and witnessed his wrath. I will never forget the withering look I received from him when the appointed hour for my doctoral defense had passed and I was still fumbling with the computer connection. "Find me when you actually *are* ready. I have WORK to do." Spinning around, he returned to his office and to the towering stacks of papers awaiting him on his desk. This was the dissertation that my own advisor, with whom I had a particularly adversarial relationship, had told me was impossible to accomplish. Krippner came to my committee (as well as my defense) and proved that what I wanted to research *was* possible. And that is the magic of the man -- and why this mystical Mister Rogers in sensible shoes and a tasteful cardigan is considered by many to be the High Priest of (Im) possibility.

There is no more fitting symbol that encapsulates the explosive, liberatory force of his scholarship than a tantric wrathful emanation. These terrifying representations of the cosmic Buddha-energies that reach into the world with the purpose of liberating every sentient being are used in tantric practice as ways to confront and transform obstacles on the path to enlightenment. Indeed, it is generally understood that the more arms a deity has, the wider their reach and greater their capacity to help. Like Vajrabhairava (also known as Yamantaka,³ "The Destroyer of Death"), whose thirty-two hands each hold a weapon to slice through ignorance and spiritual materialism, the dozens of arms of Stanley Krippner (how else to account for 1200 publications?) slice through institutionalized ignorance and systemic stupidity. And yet in spite of this seemingly sanguinary appearance, he is a confirmed pacifist who would, in his capacity as a psychologist, write a letter on behalf of those who did not wish to fight excusing them from the draft. How did he manage this trick? He would ask them a simple question: "*Which would you rather be, a drug addict or a homosexual?*" Both were verboten at the time. Better a little prevarication than to send them to their deaths on another doomed children's crusade.

It is for reasons like the one above that this shaman in a lab coat is considered to be nothing less than a psychedelic saint, having been canonized in the counterculture alongside his equally misunderstood and marginalized

compatriots Alexander Shulgin, Stanislav Grof, and Albert Hoffman. As a founding figure of what he calls the “fifth force” (the cognitive revolution, according to his memoirs, should have really been the fourth), he has been inching his Aquarian agenda forward -- project by project, publication by publication -- normalizing the heretical and sanitizing the sacred for scientific inquiry. Krippner extends the idea of the human body beyond the borders of its skin and past the swirling tempests of its Darwinian drives, to include other people and the environment. Here is a *true* transpersonal psychologist whose tantric scholarship speaks of the erotic possibility of an I-Thou encounter with the naked now.

Like his friend Albert Ellis, who was widely considered to be one of the paradigm-shifters who ushered in the cognitive revolution in psychotherapy, Krippner is revered as one of the foundational figures of both the humanistic and transpersonal turns in psychology -- and these memoirs will offer future historians a fountainhead of primary source materials describing the passion and pathos of the founding of these fields. Krippner’s crowning laurel, however, at least from the perspective of his peers, has probably been his 2002 APA Award for “Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology” given by the American Psychological Association (APA). “Not too shabby” as the author is wont to say -- a typical Krippnerian understatement. Even the most vituperative critics of parapsychology tend to agree that Stanley, right or wrong, is someone that can be trusted -- even if some of the people in his circle were suspected of being Blavatskyian⁴ frauds, his *own* work is a paragon of scientific scrupulosity.

Krippner collapses the usual six degrees of separation into one or two; indeed, the pages of these memoirs sometimes have the feel of a “who’s who” list of the cool kids of the beatnik generation and the 1960s counterculture, the most visible being: Alan Watts, The Grateful Dead, Rolling Thunder, Abraham Maslow, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, and Jean Houston.

This autobiography presents a whole human being -- not just the shiny and cerebral parts that academics and intellectuals tend to identify with at the expense of their *actual* selves -- but a fully en fleshed member of the Kingdom Animalia. Indeed, many of the pages positively throb with recollections of a near century’s worth of men and women whose life-arcs have interpenetrated his own. Krippner writes with a sense of intimacy that at times can be quite shocking. The Silent Generation -- with the exception of Barbara Walters, perhaps -- is not typically known to kiss and tell, but that humanness is precisely what makes him such a saint.

How can such a life be measured and weighed? The

answer can be found in a Broadway song (which is fitting, given Stanley’s love of the genre -- indeed these pages are practically festooned with his theatrical recollections -- including having been in the audience of Marilyn Monroe’s farewell performance). It is in the 1996 tear-jerking homage to *La Boheme*, however, where the answer to this question can be found. *Rent* is the story of an impoverished group of sexual and gender minorities (exactly the populations for whom Krippner has always served as a flaming sword of social justice) who struggle for survival at the height of the AIDS epidemic. Amidst the ravage of the disease, they sing a song called “Seasons of Love” which questions how to “measure the life of a woman or a man.” After posing such calculations as sunsets and cups of coffee they decide that love is the only metric that matters.

At 92 years old, Stanley Krippner’s accumulated minutes on this planet total over 48 million. That comes to over 34,000 sunsets and a battlefield’s worth of dead friends and colleagues. So how *do* you measure the life of someone as outlying as Stanley Krippner? The same way it is measured for everyone else in the song: in love. Not romantic interest or sexual congress (although these can both certainly be expressions of it) but the raw primordial radiance of a centerless, circumferenceless love. As the Apostle Paul put it:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

³(*New International Version*, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Stanley would never call himself a saint; his humility precludes the possibility. And admittedly the pages of his memoirs are punctuated with many a broken heart and undone life. Following the “*Song of the Siren*” (the title of his (1975) earlier autobiographical reflections) might lead to a rewarding and “chaotic life,” but it also might unleash a different kind of chaos in the lives of those one loves.

But this is the pearl of great price that every saint and scholar understands. Even Siddhartha, whose own bodhicitta was awakened through a broken heart, left behind the shattered lives of his wife, Yashodhara and their infant son, Rahula, whose name, tradition tells us means, “a fetter on the path to enlightenment.”

Saints are not perfect people; indeed, hagiographies are filled with their follies. They do, however, tend to live exemplary lives of heroic virtue and charity. Is Stanley Krippner a saint? If you consider a near-century of noetic warfare against the forces of ignorance and inequality heroic, then yes. As for charity, attend any of the global conferences he appears at like an electron circling the outer shells of the Earth and witness the outpouring of love. Or ask any of his hundreds of former students (many for whom he fought in one manner or another) and the answer will be a second resounding “yes.” As for any posthumous miracles -- let us hope there are many more years before *that* final hoop in the canonization process must be addressed. Besides, the miracles he has performed in this life are confirmation enough. The very fact that we live in a world where shamanism and spirituality are taken seriously by the academy is testament to the Krippner Effect.

As he has stated “One of my career goals has been to de-pathologize and demystify unusual experiences that people have” (Krippner, 2016). This demystification is remarkably similar to Jeffrey Kripal’s concept of decolonizing reality. Kripal, an historian of religions at Rice University, has spent a brilliant and beleaguered career as a kind of cognitive counter-missionary, challenging his students – and indeed, the academy itself -- to question the fundaments of their own deeply colonized (and usually unconscious) ontological beliefs.

With the recent publication of *The Superhumanities*, Kripal once again champions the cause of comparativism and makes the bold, unequivocal claim that, “a strong and unapologetically *comparative* study of extreme and often culturally anomalous human experiences...must be central to the transformation of the humanities” (p. 7, original italics). Little wonder, then, that the man who literally wrote the book on Esalen would have ended up partnering with one of the Human Potential Movement’s most distinguished men of letters, collaborating on an archival project that incorporates Krippner’s collected papers into an ever-expanding catalogue of onto-divergent facts. The recalcitrant realities taxonomized in this collection dance outside the limen of the possible, refusing any attempt to assimilate them into one of our currently operative paradigms – hence the name.

Like Kripal, Krippner is a transpersonal trickster whose scholarship tacitly advocates a return to the aboriginal religion of wonder. “Transpersonal”, like “bioluminescence” is a hybrid word, combining Greek and Latin roots into a third language: English. Its modern usage mirrors this creative,

combinatory energy making the word “transpersonal” itself a kind of semantic onomatopoeia, linguistically encoding the very multiplicities that make transpersonal studies, well...transpersonal. Words never really lose the echoes of their origins – and the very title that precedes Stanley’s name, “Doctor”, has a long and lustrous history that originally meant a “religious teacher, adviser, or scholar,” -- in other words, a doctor of the church.

I find this uniquely fitting for an Aquarian-ambassador like Stanley Krippner; in many ways he *is* a doctor of the church -- an unchurched shamanic religion of no-religion that worships the God beyond God.⁵ If reality is that Tillichian God’s dream (or dissociative delusion) then transpersonal psychology is the psychology of waking up *inside* the dream – in other words, the sacred science of lucid living.

Tantra, what Trungpa thought of as the searing blood of any kind of real spiritual practice, is also about lucid living. It is distinct from certain other spiritual traditions in that it focuses on liberation via the physical body, rather than through transcendence of it. It is a somatic gnosis and way of making sense of the whole of existence itself. Now, of course the tantric traditions are so varied and diverse that they defy simplistic codification into a single fictive category. And why even use the word “tantric” at all to describe the scholarship of Stanley Krippner when William Blake was able to communicate an entire tantric cosmology in *The Marriage of Heaven Hell* without using a single imported word?

In spite of all these caveats, questions, and qualifications without which we academics seem forbidden to traffic, there is a certain elusive, squirming *something* that cannot seem to be captured and contained with the words we have available to us in the English language. Sanskrit, in comparison, has over 100 billion words, and many of them highly specialized, to describe the ontological plurality we clumsily corral together in the West under the catch-all category “anomalous.”

Whatever “it” is that wriggles free from any attempt at a formal definition appears to be alive, intelligent, and trying to get our attention. In myth, it is often represented as the “glimmering girl” that ever-eludes the one daring enough who would be her captor:

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,

And kiss her lips and take her hands;
 And walk among long dappled grass,
 And pluck till time and times are done,
 The silver apples of the moon,
 The golden apples of the sun (Yeats, 1897).

A challenging task, in a dual-aspect monist world, when this mysterious, nonlocal tertium quid plays peekaboo with us with its alternating masks of “matter” and “mind.”

Like Aengus, (who in Celtic mythology has often been linked with dreams), Krippner is still rapturously in love with the kiss of the Mystery itself. A coquettish primordial ontic-intelligence that likes to play peek-a-boo with anyone bold enough to give pursuit.

These three books are his love letters to that glimmering girl. They are a record of his romance with the life of the mind. And in the true spirit of tantra, these texts do not just transmit information on the cognitive bandwidth, they *initiate* the reader with an electric *zap* into a new understanding of self and cosmos – an enchanted earth that is wider, weirder, and so much more wondrous than the one they had been living in.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Odic force (or simply Od, in homage to the Norse god Odin) was proposed by Baron von Reichenbach in a seminal article, *Researches on Magnetism, Electricity, Heat and Light in their Relations to Vital Forces*, which appeared in a special issue of the eminent scientific journal, *Annalen der Chemie und Physik*. His vitalistic theory claimed that (1) the Odic force possessed both a positive and negative charge (2) that some individuals had the capacity to intentionally “emanate” it; and that (3) Hypnotism was explainable by Od.
- ² Estimating the exact number of data points in over one thousand published studies is close to impossible without knowing the average sample size per study, but it would almost certainly be in the millions due to the wide variation in study designs, participant numbers, and data collection methods.
- ³ It is commonly understood that when President Nixon was contemplating sending financial aid to Tibet, he encountered an image of Yamantaka and immediately concluded that the Tibetan people were primitive demon-worshippers. Needless to say, his plans to lend support were promptly abandoned.

- ⁴ The mass of delicious contradictions that was Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in many ways exemplifies the peculiar nature of paranormal and transpersonal studies. Like so many other charismatic figures in the history of religions, she was heralded as a saint by some -- a holy woman “with the face of a pig” (or so wrote Henry Miller) -- who’s eyes had the ability to catalyze awakening in others. At the same time, she was excoriated as a total fraud who relied on trickery to dupe her audiences. The truth, it would seem, was both.
- ⁵ Theologian Paul Tillich has argued that we have to abandon any theistic concepts of God and embrace the reality that the God beyond God transcends the category of existence itself.

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