

AN ESP EXPERIMENT AT A DRACULA CONVENTION

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BETWEEN 10TH AND 12TH MAY 2002 a colloquium was held in Sinaia, Romania under the auspices of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula with further input from the Ghost Club (UK) and the International Society for the Study of Ghosts and Apparitions (USA). A range of papers were given exploring the worlds of vampirism with special reference to Dracula, ghosts, folklore, electronic voice phenomena and even music. The speakers included Rosemary Ellen Guiley and Sabrina Le Roy from the USA, Elizabeth Miller from Canada, Silviu Angelescu and Sabina Ispas from Romania, and Alan Murdie, John Newton and myself from the UK.

It may be of interest to SPR readers to learn of the confusion that reigned during the conference as various speakers either did not attend or considerably overran their allocated times thereby causing the re-arranging of many speakers' slots. It was mentioned by the organisers that in a previous conference one of the speakers had to give his talk on the bus to the airport since the conference had run out of time! I was therefore particularly pleased to read in the programme that an item entitled 'Extrasensorial Powers at Work with Demonstrations' was to take place as scheduled.

The speaker was Professor Constantin Gherasim, who was described as a psychologist and parapsychologist from Romania. He did not speak English and was therefore translated by an interpreter. He brought with him two of his students from a class that he claimed contained many people displaying paranormal powers. They were both teenage girls, aged about fifteen years, both of whom were to participate in the demonstration.

Professor Gherasim invited members of the audience to inspect a pair of goggles that he was going to use to ensure that the participant could not see. Both another delegate and I inspected the goggles and found that light could easily be seen, especially coming from each side of the nostrils. However, the test went ahead! Several pieces of different coloured paper were presented to the girl after

she had placed the goggles on herself and, not surprisingly, she correctly identified the colours of every one chosen. Since she was also holding the pieces of paper it was asked whether she could perform successfully without touching the paper, to which she agreed and again correctly identified each colour. I then asked whether I could be directly involved in this experiment, to which there was no objection. I was invited to place my hands over her eyes myself which I agreed to do. I took the following steps:

- I asked that I should place the goggles upon the girl.
- That she should also be blindfolded with a soft scarf.
- I placed my fingers over the scarf over both sides of her nostrils hence blocking the escape of light from below.
- I asked that there should not be conversation during her attempts to find colours since clues might be revealed.
- I ensured that her friend was not able to touch her or communicate in any way and I was aware of any possible signals via coughs or other auditory devices. (There were none.)
- I asked that she did not touch the coloured sheets of paper since they were of different shapes and sizes and also of different textures, thus allowing intentional/unintentional recognition of material.

These terms were agreed upon and under these conditions she failed to identify any of the colours. It was suggested that the girl would be able to identify objects chosen from the audience without her prior knowledge. She failed on the first attempt, but with a second object she succeeded with the colour. However, on this trial one of my controls had been broken, namely there was some conversation (in Romanian) between her and the professor. It was suggested that she might be uncomfortable with an unknown man so close to her, albeit in front of the audience and

her colleagues, and accordingly a female member of the audience volunteered to cover her eyes in the same way as I had indicated. A negative result was again achieved. The girl started to become a little upset at her lack of success and the second girl declined to participate. The professor said they were tired after a long journey and that they would try again the next day. This did not take place.

I spoke through an interpreter to Professor Gherasim after the experiment and asked him whether he had come across the work of Professor Robert Morris and his colleagues in the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at the University of Edinburgh. He had not heard of the man or the Unit! It seemed obvious to me that an extended conversation was not desired and we therefore parted company. At dinner he and the girls sat at a separate table from the majority of the group and although he did not seem antagonistic towards me, the girls seemed resentful at the experiment's failure.

There are several possible reasons for the failure of this experiment, of which the following are examples:

- The tiring journey to the venue had caused the extra-sensory power to fail.
- The presence of an audience had produced a similar effect.
- The girl was intentionally / unintentionally cheating.
- The professor and the girl were both intentionally / unintentionally cheating.

My own opinion is that teenage pranking may have been the cause of the alleged phenomena and that when the controls were tightened sufficiently it was not possible to reproduce them. Had she been able to succeed under my controls then my recommendation in this report would have been to consider further investigation, ideally involving a Romanian-speaking parapsychologist. In the circumstances, this seems unnecessary.

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

BERNARD CARR

ONE OF THE GRATIFYING aspects of writing Presidential Notes is that many people react to them — either in private correspondence or in the pages of the *Paranormal Review*. Indeed I am pleased to find several references to my earlier *Note* in this issue. Even my passing comment on worm synchronicity seems to have produced an interesting reaction! Such comments are always welcome, even if they only point out errors, and I would like to devote most of this *Note* to responding to some of them.

My reference in the April issue to my attempts at Cambridge to “weigh the soul” in 1969 has attracted several comments. Many thanks to Nils Jacobson in this issue for pointing out that the Cambridge experiments apparently took place several years *before* the article which I claimed stimulated them! Unfortunately, this reflects my inability to recall the past rather than my ability to foresee

the future. For on closer inspection of my files, I find that my original report of the experiment only refers to the earlier work of Duncan McDougall (which claimed a weight loss of 2 ounces at death) and the Jacobson reference derives from an undated newspaper article. After 30 years, I'd clearly misremembered the sequence. The article gives the impression that Dr Jacobson himself found a weight loss of 3/4 ounce but, as he points out, this was an erroneous attribution.

Thanks also to Chris Bratcher in the July issue and Maurice Grosse in this issue for their interesting recollections of attempts to measure anomalous weight variations in experiments with John Hasted and David Robertson at Birkbeck College. The two experiments were rather different — Mr Bratcher's involved measuring the weight of an entire sitter group, whereas Mr Grosse's involved weighing individual psychics and meditators — but they