



MEDIUMSHIP AND THE PHENOMENON OF CROSS-CORRESPONDENCE

by

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**As thus before the gates she speaks, her face
And color suddenly change; unkempt her hair;
Her panting breast and wild heart madly heaves;
Larger she seems: unearthly rings her voice,
As nearer breathes the presence of the god.**

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book VI

Supernaturalism and the Development of Psychical Research

The theme of this committee is Life, Death and Eternal Hope. My own topic is that of mediumship, the purported communication across worlds between living and departed wherein a living individual serves as the means by which this communication is effected. I have been asked to devote particular attention to cross-correspondence, a purported technique by which the departed communicator sends integral parts of a message through one or more receivers that must be "pieced together" in order to make sense.

A few words might be said at the outset about the context of this phenomenon. First, mediumistic activity is very old. It expresses what may well be a primal tendency in the race to see a reality beyond what is present in nature, and to see in human beings themselves something more than material appearance would make of them.

This tendency toward the supernatural is the subject of a great philosophical divide. It is, say some, an expression of ignorance, present in human nature, perhaps, yet without objective foundation. Reality, on this view, is material. The notion of something outside the natural realm is a remnant of pre-science, outmoded in the face of present knowledge. This view, notes Brian Inglis, finds current expression in our reaction to the belief-systems of certain primitive tribes who entertain notions invisible realms and spirit possession. We identify their tendency toward the *supernatural* with *superstition*.¹

On the other hand is a different view, one sympathetic with this otherworldly impulse. It sees, by contrast, something behind appearances. Spirit, it holds, is something real, something vital and active. There is another reality that impinges on this one. This outlook again is quite ancient, perhaps as old as the race itself. Surely it is present at the root of our own civilization. The literature of the Greeks abounds in references to seers and oracles, and no less a man than Socrates seems to have put some stock in their verdicts.² Plato maintains that poetry is a gift of the muses,³ who bestow upon mankind its sense

¹ Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural - A History of the Paranormal* (Dorset: Prism Press, 1992). See especially chapters 1 - 3.

² See, for example, *Apology* 20 e and following. Plato pays respect to this same Delphic oracle in *Laws* 9.856 e and elsewhere. For an intriguing account of the oracles, albeit one that relies principally on naturalistic explanation, see Robert K. G. Temple, *Conversations with Eternity* (London: Rider and Co., 1984). Temple stresses the probable role of drugs and hallucination in his account.

³ *Ion* 533 e and following.

of rhythm and harmony.⁴ Indeed human existence itself, on Plato's view, is a kind of transworld operation, the soul using the body as its present means of activity on its homeward voyage to eternity.

This latter and supernaturalist view, while often called into question, has persisted through the rise of the modern sciences to the present day. It finds expression in the development of psychical research in the late nineteenth century. This movement formally began with the development of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. In its ranks were some of the world's finest scholars and intellects - scientists, medical doctors, and classicists figured prominently in its membership. What it sought, in broad terms, was an alternative, a third choice in contrast to an outmoded fundamentalist religion, on the one hand, and a soulless post-Darwinian materialism on the other. Granted, the old religion was no longer tenable. Yet this new "scientific" outlook offered nothing in the way of a higher life-meaning or spirituality, and this seemed unsatisfactory as well.

For life, it seemed, contained moments, however odd or fleeting, of a higher apprehension. There were, for one, those occasions (often, it appeared, in moments of crisis) on which the conscious state of one person seemed to be directly present to another, even in a distant location. There were individuals, sane and sound, who seemed to have inward visions of remote events. There were some who claimed to see beyond this world, and to have ongoing contact, in

⁴ *Laws* II 672 d and following.

some way, with those on the other side. Were all such claims fraudulent or delusory? The founding assumption of psychical research was that some of these claims were plausible and that they merited investigation. Why not then subject them to the same kind of inquiry that had yielded such fortunate results elsewhere?

This interest in another reality found kindred expression in the mainstream of philosophy. Does “science” refute the idea of a soul? Such an idea, says American philosopher and psychologist William James, himself a Society member, is not excluded by facts of biology. James offers an interesting commentary on the medical materialism, as he calls it, that seeks to reduce consciousness to events in the brain.⁵ The intimate relationship of mind and matter, he explains, may owe not, as some imagine, to the brain’s production of thought, but to the fact that the brain is the means, the mechanism, through which consciousness operates. It is the shaping medium, thinks James, by which consciousness may “break through” into this world “with all the imperfections and queernesses that characterize our finite individualities here below.”⁶ Our existing personalities, James imagines, may be the result of this filtering of conscious agency through its present material circumstance. Thus, he observes, Shelley’s line:

⁵ See James’ classic essay “Human Immortality”, published together as an appending volume with *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956). This edition duplicates the publications of these materials in separate editions shortly before the turn of the century.

⁶ *Ibid.* (“Human Immortality”), p. 17.

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.⁷

And what of inspiration? The muses might have gone by the way, but what is the source of the genius that gives us poetry and literary masterpieces? As G. N. M. Tyrrell notes, this idea of unseen influence is hardly behind us. Creators of all kinds - poets, musicians, scientists, and dramatic authors - attest time and again to the presence of unseen forces and helpers, without which they would lack the essential creativity that makes their work possible.⁸ Constantly, observes Tyrrell, we find individuals like Keats, Shelley, Mozart, and Dostoevsky acknowledging a wellspring beneath ordinary mental processes.⁹ It lies at depths as yet unfathomed. By their account, says Tyrrell, the characteristic idea or insight does not come "floating passively towards them," but is "imperious, dynamic, and wilful." It comes somehow as a *gift*.

The psychological researchers took seriously these notions of the unseen and the extraordinary. They were especially intrigued with the phenomenon of mediumship. The idea was investigated at length by the Cambridge classicist Frederic Myers, a founding society member who would become one of its greatest

⁷ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*. This work is reprinted in many volumes, including G. B. Harrison, ed., *A Book of English Poetry* (London: Penguin Books, 1950).

⁸ See G. N. M. Tyrrell, *The Personality of Man* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947). Most of the relevant discussion is presented in chapter 2, "Inspiration and Genius".

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

contributors.

This notion of contact across worlds, says Myers, will seem strange to many. There are some, he observes, who will find it absurd - an idea, they will imagine, more at home in "the medicine-man's wigwam" than in the enterprise of modern philosophy. We are still tinged, says Myers, with an uneasiness,¹⁰ with an ancient dread of the unseen.¹¹ But this does not mean that fear need be our guide. Indeed the transmutation of old fear into scientific curiosity, he contends, is the essence of civilization.

Some will, say, too, that this effort to contact the departed takes us into regions of darkness. Yet this notion that mediumship is wrong, that it involves some inherent evil, is not borne out, says Myers, by the facts. Granted, not every purported message is impressive or uplifting. In some cases the communication may be garbled or confused, perhaps even mischievous, in its appearance. But as these spirits rise in definiteness, they seem to rise also in quality. In no case does one find this demoniacal conjunction of *malice* and *intelligence* that conservative critics imagine.¹² The developing contact between the worlds, says Myers, is a

¹⁰ Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1992), p. 251. This set is a reprint of the original 1903 London edition by Longmans, Green, and Co.

¹¹ Cf. the discussion of Rudolph Otto in his celebrated work *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). This work first appeared in 1917 in German as *Das Heilige*. Our encounter with the divine, thinks Otto, has in it an inherent and unearthly terror. It is of necessity "uncanny" and "overpowering".

¹² See discussion in volume II, chapter 7, "Phantasms of the Dead".

source of hope. It allows the possibility that we may at last feel *at home* in the universe.¹³

Whatever one thinks of mediumship in general terms, there can be little doubt that some of the mediums investigated by the Society produced results that defy normal explanation. Mrs. Leonora Piper, for one, was able to transmit information that she could not possibly have acquired by means of ordinary perception. A woman of simple background, Piper time and again produced material, sometimes in languages unknown to herself, that could not be explained by means of fraud.¹⁴ Extensive and meticulous observation failed to turn up a single indication of deceit where her mediumship was concerned. Many cases involving Piper are reported by Frederic Myers in his two-volume classic *Human Personality*.¹⁵ Discussions of mediumship invariably rank Piper, along with Mrs.

¹³ See discussion in the Epilogue, pp. 278 and following.

¹⁴ James, who referred famously to Piper as his "white crow" (i. e., the one exception to fraud or delusion that disproved the rule), cites examples, including some firsthand, of her ability. Piper, says James, could find a lost object (he cites the case of his mother's bankbook, misplaced after her return from Europe), could inform an individual of the pain currently being suffered by an acquaintance with whom she herself was hitherto unfamiliar, and even at times forecast the death of an acquaintance or family member with whom she had never had contact. James' discussions are contained in the volume *William James on Psychical Research* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), Gardner Murphy and Robert Ballou, editors. For related excerpts and discussion see the current volume authored by David Ray Griffin (noted below).

¹⁵ See , for example, volume II, pp. 237-56 and 599-624.

Gladys Osborne Leonard¹⁶ and several others, as being among the most impressive figures ever studied.

Granted, mediums occasionally seem to produce information that resists ordinary interpretation (in terms, that is, of fraud, chance coincidence, or established conscious or unconscious mental processes).¹⁷ But how are we to understand this phenomenon? It is possible, say some, that these results owe not to actual communication with the departed, but to various forms of extra-sensory perception. Nor is it easy to see which of these two hypotheses is the better.

Consider, for example, the case where a medium produces information that is known to the sitter(s), i. e., the individual(s) attending his or her service. Perhaps the medium has actually picked up some bit of the conscious or unconscious information directly from these individuals, or from others connected with them. Perhaps, in other words, the real explanation of this phenomenon is not transworld communication, but thought-transference ("telepathy") among the living.

Suppose, on the other hand, that the medium produces something that is not known to the sitter, and perhaps is not even known by anyone else at the time. How do we know that this information is correct? The answer, of course, is

¹⁶ See, for example, Suzy Smith's *The Mediumship of Mrs. Leonard* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1961).

¹⁷ Many accounts provide examples. Alan Gauld's *Mediumship and Survival* (London: Palladin, 1983) cites many such cases in the past century.

that we must find the fact afterward. But how do we know, in this case, that the medium did not gain this information at the time by means of some independent inward vision ("clairvoyance")?

Here, it seems, is a dilemma. For in order to know that the information is correct, we must confirm it either by means of the sitters (or other related parties) or by our own independent observation. Yet in either case, it seems, we cannot rule out that the facts we have acquired were picked up at the time by the medium through some form of extrasensory perception.

The Emergence of Cross-Correspondence

Early in this century, roughly between the years 1901 and 1932, there develops a fascinating chapter in the history of mediumship. It is that of cross-correspondence. What does this involve? To see its ostensible logic, says David Ray Griffin, we might try to think about the situation from the other side. We might try, in other words, to think of what departed individuals would do in order to convince us of their existence, bearing in mind the difficulty of interpretation just noted. Thus one way to understand the situation, says Griffin,

is to imagine the task confronting some clever souls who, while living, had been involved in psychical research and now wanted to provide evidence for their own survival that could not be explained away in the usual manner. One way would be to communicate through various mediums at the same time, communicating bits of information to one medium that referred to

items communicated through other mediums. These cross correspondences would be especially impressive if the various pieces made sense only when taken together with the others.¹⁸

If these departed souls, in other words, broke up their messages into pieces that by themselves meant nothing, yet made sense when put together, it would be harder to explain them by means of extrasensory ability on the part of the respective mediums through which the pieces had been received. If this scenario cannot provide absolute proof of survival, says Griffin, it does at least strain any hypothesis that purports to explain mediumship in terms of abilities among the living.

The era began, Griffin explains, shortly after the passing of the three principle figures of the movement. Edmund Gurney, a major contributor to the classic work *Phantasms of the Living*,¹⁹ had passed on in 1888; Henry Sidgwick, the noted Cambridge philosopher, in 1900; and Myers, the one most deeply interested in survival, five months later in 1901. The chief mediums, says Griffin, were women "of excellent reputation" widely separated in their locales. One was the celebrated Mrs. Piper of Boston. The others were Mrs. Fleming (sister of Rudyard Kipling), who lived in India and worked under the pseudonym "Mrs.

¹⁸ David Ray Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality - A Postmodern Exploration* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Gurney, Myers, and Frank Podmore contributed to this work on the subject of apparitions, which had its first printing in 1886 and is still cited in studies today.

Holland"; Mrs. Verrall, wife of classical scholar A. W. Verrall, who practiced her activity in England, her daughter Helen (later Mrs. W. H. Salter); and Mrs. Winifred Coombe-Tennant (using the name "Mrs. Willett"), who was later the first British woman delegate to the Assembly of the League of Nations.

Not long after Myers left the world, some interesting things began to happen. One incident noted by a number of commentators is a message received in script through Mrs. Verrall in 1904. The message read, "I have long told you of the contents of the envelope. Myers' sealed envelope left with Lodge. You have not understood. It has in it the words from the SYMPOSIUM - about love bridging the chasm."

Myers, while living, had once left a message in an envelope with the understanding that it would one day be opened and read as a means of establishing his existence on the other side. After the above message was received, the envelope was then opened and its message read, "If I can revisit any earthly scene, I should choose the *Valley* in the grounds of Hallsteads, Cumberland."²⁰ This at first seemed like a failure of the experiment. For the two messages bear no face-value resemblance to one another. But several leaders of

²⁰ This incident is related in a number of books on the general subject. The message is reprinted in its entirety by Suzy Smith in her preface to her one-volume edition of Myers' *Human Personality*. Suzy Smith, ed., *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1961).

the Society²¹ came to think that the answer was not so simple. Myers, it turned out, had printed a small number of copies of a booklet in 1893 called *Fragments of Inner Life*. Copies of this booklet had been left in sealed packets with a number of personal friends who had been instructed to open them after he had died.²²

References to Plato in the last chapter, which were now being made public for the first time, showed that there existed a strong association in Myers' mind between the valley at Hallsteads and the discussion of love in Plato's *Symposium*.²³

Cross-correspondences take several forms. Psychological researcher H. F. Saltmarsh, explains Alan Gauld, distinguishes in his treatment of the subject²⁴ three general types of the phenomenon. These types Saltmarsh calls "simple", "complex", and "ideal". Simple cross-correspondences "are those where in the scripts of two or more [independent] automatists there occurs the same word or phrase, or else two phrases so similar as to be clearly interconnected."²⁵ Complex correspondences "are cases where the topic or topics are not directly mentioned,

²¹ Among these, notes Smith, were Mrs. Sidgwick, Miss Alice Johnson, Sir Oliver Lodge, G. W. Balfour, and J. G. Piddington.

²² A good part of this booklet was published after Myers' passing by his wife under the title *Fragments of Prose and Poetry* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904).

²³ This valley, as Smith explains, was the site of long walks for Myers and Annie Hill Marshall, the first and perhaps greatest love of his life.

²⁴ H. F. Saltmarsh, *Evidence of Survival from Cross Correspondences* (London: Bell, 1938).

²⁵ Quoted in *Mediumship and Survival*, p. 79.

but referred to in an indirect and allusive way."²⁶ An ideal correspondence requires, first, that two automatists each write seemingly meaningless and unconnected messages.

Now, if a third automatist were [independently] to produce a script which, while meaningless taken by itself, acts as a clue to the other two, so that the whole set would be brought together into one whole, and then show a single purpose and meaning, we should have good evidence that they all originated from a single source.²⁷

When such conditions are fulfilled, says Gauld, one might describe the situation as follows.

Call the first two automatists A and B, and the third one, who gives the key that unlocks the whole, C. B will not be able to discover what he should write by paranormally cognizing A's script, and A's mind; nor will C be able to discover the 'key' by paranormally cognizing the scripts or minds of A and B; for in this 'ideal' case (to which perhaps no actual case has done more than approximate) there is nothing in A's script or B's script, or in the minds of A or B, to indicate what must be written to complete the cross-correspondence.²⁸

This issue becomes yet more complicated owing to the nature of the material. Cross-correspondences, observes Tyrrell, are not easy to describe in any succinct fashion. They seem to consist, in large part, in subtle references to quite recondite points in classical literature, "rendered purposively obscure and allusive" by the intelligences that construct them; they tend thus "to spread out and ramify instead of converging towards a neat conclusion, a feature which is apt to be

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

distressing to the tidy type of scientific mind."²⁹

The threads of which they are composed intertwine with one another in a most complex manner, and a single cross-correspondence often spreads out over a long period of time. Also they are so much the work of a particular group of investigators, that they have something of the air of being a family affair, and this makes judgements on the points at issue a difficult matter for the outsider.³⁰

It is generally true, Tyrrell remarks, that evidence in psychical research is generally best assessed by those closest to it. This is all the more true with cross-correspondence. Those less familiar with the relevant literature will see less in a given allusion, and for this reason will be apt to underrate its importance. Just what it is, in a hue and tone of a given purported communication, that makes it expressive of a Myers or a Gurney, or that establishes a relevant connection, is not easy to explain to an outsider. For this reason the reader of such accounts is in the hands of commentators more intimately in the know. Thus he or she may naturally wonder, by the same token, if such commentators might be reading into this material certain intended meanings that are not there. Nor will it be easy to check this hypothesis, though in many cases, thinks Tyrrell, the commentator's view is warranted.

The following he describes as being a relatively simple instance of the phenomenon. It is a case he labels *Thanatos*. In 1907 Mrs. Piper held some

²⁹ G. N. M. Tyrrell, *Science and Psychical Research* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1961), p. 235. (This book is bound in one volume with Tyrrell's *Apparitions*.)

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-36.

sittings in England under the auspices of the Society. On April 17, the words '*Sanatos*' and '*Thanatos*' occurred. The latter word occurred again on the 23rd. A week later it occurred three times. Thus over this period, explains Tyrrell, Piper repeatedly produced the Greek word for death, which was interjected into the rest of the matter in what was a disconnected way.³¹

In the meantime, Mrs. Holland was writing automatic script. On April 16th, it turned out, she had written, "Maurice. Morris. *Mors*. And with that the shadow of death fell upon him and his soul departed out of his limbs."³²

At first glance this collection of material may not look too impressive. Yet on closer examination, it has a conspicuous feature. The reader familiar with classical languages will see that three references are made herein to a single idea - namely, that of death. First (through Piper) is the Greek word for death '*thanatos*'; then (through Holland) the Latin equivalent '*mors*' and the reference to death in English. Those unfamiliar with the general appearance of such material may wonder what 'Maurice' and 'Morris' have to do with the theme. Yet it is characteristic, says Tyrrell, of the way in which words are often "felt after" in psychic utterances, by way of other words with similar sounds.

The case continues as follows. On April 29th (i. e., one day before Piper's threefold production of '*thanatos*'), Mrs. Verrall produced in England a script

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³² *Ibid.*

containing among other things the following:

“Warmed both hands before the Fire of Life.

It fails and I am ready to depart.

[There follows, Tyrrell explains, a large Greek *delta* and some less relevant material.]

*Manibus date lilia plenis*³³

Come away. Come away.

Pallida mors aequo pede pauperum

tabernas regumque turres [pulsat]

*Tu beate Sesti*³⁴

Another time will help.

Good-bye.

But you have got the word plainly written all along in your own writing.

Look back.”

Tyrrell explains the significance of these materials as follows. The Greek letter *delta* was personally associated by Mrs. Verrall with the idea of death. The verse about the lilies is a quotation from Virgil’s *Aeneid* connected with the death of Marcellus. ‘Come away’ refers to the phrase ‘Come away, death’ in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

³³ Translation: “give lilies with full hands”.

³⁴ Translation: “Pale death with equal foot the huts of the poor and the towers of the rich [strikes] Thou happy Sestius.”

Accounts of psychological research in the early twentieth century abound in descriptions of cross-correspondence of all kinds. Additional examples may help to give the reader some further grasp on their nature. One is cited by Sir William Barrett in his book *On the Threshold of the Unseen*.³⁵ As noted by Alice Johnson in her memoir *Proceedings of the S. P. R.*, it involves a message coming through Mrs. Holland's hand on January 17th, 1904. The message, purporting to issue from Myers, read,

The sealed envelope is not to be opened yet. I am unable to make your hand form Greek characters and so I cannot give the text as I wish - only the reference - *I Cor. xvi: 12*. [This passage reads, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."] Oh I am feeble with eagerness. How can I best be identified! It means so much apart from the mere personal love and longing. Edmund's help [a reference to Myers' old colleague Edmund Gurney] is not here with me just now. I am trying alone amid unspeakable difficulties.³⁶

In the meantime, Mrs. Sidgwick had asked Myers through Mrs. Verrall for one sample of a favorite text of her husband's, and received a result. On the same day that Verrall's script in Cambridge made reference to a sealed letter and to a text, Holland wrote the message just quoted. While *I Corinthians xvi: 12* was not the text that Mrs. Sidgwick had in mind, it was, reports Barrett, "the one inscribed *in Greek* over the gateway of Selwyn College, Cambridge, which Mr. Myers constantly passed, and on which, owing to a slight verbal error in the Greek

³⁵ Sir William F. Barrett, *On the Threshold of the Unseen* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1918).

³⁶ This passage is cited by Barrett on pp. 204-05.

inscription, Mr. Myers had more than once remarked to Mrs. Verrall."³⁷ Holland, he adds, had never been to Cambridge, had no connection with the university, and knew nothing of the inscription.

Other episodes are noted by Alfred Douglas in a thoroughgoing history entitled *Extra Sensory Powers*.³⁸ One example, somewhat vague in its connections, is the *Ave Roma Immortalis* case, so called because of a phrase that appeared in the scripts of Mrs. Holland. On March 2nd, 1906, a line appeared in the writing of Mrs. Verrall, which she recognized from the second book of the *Aeneid* and concerning the fall of Troy. The remainder of the script made no sense to her, though she was told herein that she would receive a message through another woman.

When Mrs. Verrall's husband examined the script, Douglas explains, he believed that he could find meaning in other parts of it, including a connection between the verse and another Latin phrase that came afterward. He also believed that this phrase, '*prima inter pares*' (meaning *first among his peers*), concerned the pope, and that it was connected with Raphael's picture in the Vatican of Pope Leo I turning back Attila from his effort to take Rome.

On March 4th and 5th, scripts made reference to a "stoic persecutor," which the Verralls believed referred to Marcus Aurelius. It also alluded to the fall of

³⁷ *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 205.

³⁸ Alfred Douglas, *Extra Sensory Powers - A Century of Psychological Research* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1977).

Troy, the emperors Trajan and Marcus, the persecution of Christians, the turning back of Attila at the gates of Rome, Gregory the Great, the replacing of commemorative statues of Trajan and Marcus by those of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the triumph of Christianity under popes Julius II and Leo X. Miss Johnson, who studied the three scripts at length, came to the conclusion that they provided a brief history of imperial and Christian Rome.

On March 7th, Mrs. Holland, writing in India, wrote the words "*Ave Roma Immortalis*. How could I make it any clearer without giving her the clue?" At this time Holland had no conscious knowledge of the material just received through Verrall.

What does any of this mean? Douglas notes that Myers, when alive, had used the early history of Rome as given in the *Aeneid* as a symbol of the spiritual evolution of the human race.³⁹ Both Verrall and Holland were familiar with Myers' writing and so were probably aware of this connection. The four scripts were received in less than a week. The reference in Verrall's script to a message coming from another woman, as well as the "How could I make it any clearer" comment both suggest a cross-correspondence. As Douglas notes, there does exist the possibility of telepathic connections between the two women, yet this, he adds, leaves unanswered the question of why Roman history should suddenly figure so strongly in the scripts.

³⁹ The material to which Douglas alludes can be found in pp. 281 and following in Volume II of Myers' *Human Personality*.

There are other examples that figure in many discussions. One of these, noted by Douglas, Gauld, and others, is the "Hope, Star and Browning" case. It was triggered, as Douglas explains, on January 16, 1907, when J. G. Piddington suggested to the departed Myers through Mrs. Piper that he might signal a cross-correspondence effort by appending a symbol, such as a circle with a triangle inside. "Myers",⁴⁰ it appears, followed this suggestion in a communication through Mrs. Verrall. A week later on January 23rd he wrote, "an anagram would be better. Tell him that - rats, star, tars and so on ..." (Myers, as those who knew him could attest, had been much taken with anagrams - puzzles involving the rearrangement of words - in this life.)

On the 28th, Myers through Verrall wrote the words '*Aster*' (Latin for *star*) and the letter-similar '*Teras*' (Greek for *wonder*). Then there came tumbling a series of phrases and fragments making reference to these two things. It consisted in bits of material from the work of Robert Browning and some related Greek phrases.

"The world's wonder
 And all a wonder and a wild desire -
 The very wings of her
 A WINGED DESIRE
hupopteros [this term is Greek for *winged love*]
 Then there is Blake
 and mocked my loss of liberty
 But it is all the same - the winged desire

⁴⁰ I use quotation marks here and elsewhere to indicate, without assumption, the seeming or ostensible personality as received through the automatist involved.

eros potheinos [Greek for *passion*]
 The earth for the sky - Abt Vogler for earth
 too hard that found itself or lost itself - in the sky.
 That is what I want
 On the earth the broken sounds threads
 In the sky the perfect arc
 The C major of this life
 But your recollection is at fault"

There followed two drawings, one a semicircle atop a line and inscribed with a triangle, the other a circle that seemed to extend this image. Then were the words, "ABD is the part that unseen completes the arc." It is apparent, says Douglas, from her comments that Mrs. Verrall understood very little of what she had produced.⁴¹

Miss Helen Verrall, who was not aware of her mother's scripts, wrote on February 3rd a script containing the words "A green jerkin and hose and doublet where the song birds pipe their tune in the early morning *therapeutikon ek exoticon*." (The Greek phrase means *a healer from aliens*.) After this series of words was a monogram, drawings of a star and a crescent, and the words, "A monogram, the crescent moon, remember that, and the star." There followed a few more words and the drawing of a bird.

On the 11th, Mrs. Piper wrote, in the presence of Piddington, "Did [Mrs. Verrall] receive the word evangelical?" Piddington said that he did not know, and

⁴¹ In a note to Miss Johnson she wrote, "is the enclosed attempt at *Bird?* 'Winged' upopteros, and Abt Vogler ... suggests it. The latter part is all quotations from R. B.'s *Abt Vogler* and earlier from *The Ring and the Book*." (*Extra Sensory Powers*, p. 128)

there continued the words, "I referred also to Browning again. I referred to Hope and Browning ... I also said Star." At a later sitting it was explained that the word 'evangelical' was an error, and that 'Evelyn Hope' (the title of a Browning poem) had been intended. On the 15th, Miss Verrall was informed by her mother that her script had formed part of a cross-correspondence. But in order to avoid undue influence, Mrs. Verrall told her daughter that the key words were 'Planet Mars', 'Virtue', and 'Keats' (instead of Star, Hope and Browning). On the 17th, Miss Verrall drew a star, followed by the message "That was the sign she will understand when she sees it ... No arts avail ... and a star above it all rats everywhere in Hamelin town."

On March 6th, "Myers" informed Piddington through Piper that he had given Mrs. Verrall a circle and had attempted to draw a triangle that had not appeared. (This, as Douglas notes, is a mistake, since a triangle had indeed appeared.) The script indicated also that a message had been given concerning "Bird". On the 13th, this same influence stated through Piper that he had drawn a circle for Mrs. Verrall. It then drew a circle and triangle again and wrote shortly afterward, "But it suggested a poem to my mind, hence B H S." (These last three letters suggest Browning, Hope, and Star.) On April 8th, "Myers" wrote again through Piper, in a sitting with Mrs. Sidgwick, that he had drawn a circle for Mrs. Verrall, and that he had also drawn, or tried to draw, a star and a crescent. (This involves another minor inaccuracy, since these had come through Miss Verrall instead.)

The use of anagrams, says Douglas, figures importantly in the Hope, Star

and Browning case. They may, for one serve the purpose of hiding what is being written by a given automatist at the time of the writing. But in this particular case, Douglas adds, they have further significance. After Richard Hodgson passed on in 1905, Piddington went through his papers and found among them a number of scraps of paper on which anagrams were written. It turned out that Hodgson and Myers had exchanged many anagrams when they were alive. The same anagrams found in Mrs. Verrall's script were found in these papers.

It is evident, says Douglas, that cross-correspondence figures into the scripts mentioned a moment ago. The word 'star' appears in Mrs. Verrall's first script. The Latin '*aster*' appears in the second. Miss Verrall's first script contains the words "remember ... the star". Her second script contains a star and the words "That was a sign she will understand when she sees it." The word 'arts' - anagram of 'star' - follows, plus "and a star above it all". The final words "rats everywhere in Hamelin town" contains another such anagram as well as a reference to Browning's poem about the Pied Piper. (The words "a healer from aliens", says Douglas, might also refer to this Browning character.)

In Mrs. Verrall's second script the words "in the sky, the perfect arc" (an imperfect quote from "Abt Vogler") could refer to the drawing of a circle and triangle. This, as Douglas notes, is an example of a cross-correspondence in which the messages of two separate automatists require a third reference (in this case, Mrs. Piper) to make sense. While some might suppose that Mrs. Verrall was somehow unconsciously responsible for all of it, she did not grasp the connections

involved until Piper's message of February 11th, and she herself did not have an interest in anagrams. Putting aside the hypothesis of fraud, it is apparent that a single intelligence is responsible for this series of events. If this intelligence is that of some living person exerting telepathic influence upon all of the participants, says Douglas, it is not easy to see who this would be. The best remaining explanation, he believes, is that Myers indeed is communicating from the other side. (The passages of Browning, like the use of anagrams, he adds, were characteristic of Myers in this life.)

I will note one further example of cross-correspondence before concluding with a few related points of discussion in a final section. On July 13th, 1904, at around mid-day, notes Douglas, Piddington wrote a letter on the premises of the SPR in London, sealed it, and left instructions with Alice Johnson that it should be opened only after his death. The same day, at about 11:15 AM, Mrs. Verrall wrote a script beginning with several bits of Greek and Latin and continuing, "But that is not right - it is something contemporary that you are to record - note the hour - in London half the message has come." The script continued with the reference to Plato's *Symposium* and Myers' sealed envelope and ended with the comment, "Surely Piddington will see that this is enough and should be acted on. F. W. H. M."

Three years later, on August 6th, 1907, Miss Helen Verrall wrote,

"A rainbow in the sky

Fit emblem of our thought

The sevenfold radiance from a single light

Many in one and one in many”

This was followed by a sentence in Latin that suggested that messages had been sent to various automatists and needed to be put together.

On February 15th, 1908, Piddington noticed that a script written by Mrs. Holland had made two references to passages in Dante. One of these came from canto 27 of the *Purgatorio*, describing a dream experienced by Dante while in the seventh circle. This led Piddington to find and compare all references to Dante to be found in other scripts. He drafted a paper on his findings and showed it to Mrs. Verrall and her daughter. The elder Verrall read the *Purgatorio*, but Helen did not investigate the subject further. Most of the references found by Piddington referred to material in cantos 27 to 31 of that work and included allusions to the number seven. Mrs. Verrall finished reading these cantos on May 8th, and later that day wrote some lines referring to Virgil (who figures in the cantos) as a pagan who had pointed the way to Christianity. Also on May 8th, Mrs. Piper came out of a trance uttering the words “We are seven. I said clock! Tick, tick, tick.”⁴² On the 11th, Helen Verrall’s script contained references to the seven-branched candlestick and seven colors of the rainbow. The script was signed “F. W. H. Myers.” The following day, George Dorr asked through Piper what this had meant, and received the words, “We *were* seven in the distance as a matter of fact.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

On the 11th of June, a minor automatist named Mrs. Frith wrote a poem around "the mystic seven", and on the 23rd of July, Mrs. Holland wrote, "There should be at least three in accord and if possible seven." She then referred to six of the seven people who had been involved (albeit leaving out Piddington and including one minor automatist who had not been involved). The script also included a passage concerning the color green, which Alice Johnson saw as being a reference to canto 31 in the *Purgatorio*. On the 24th, Myers ostensibly communicated through Mrs. Home, another minor automatist, the message, "Seven times seven and seventy-seven send the burden of my words to others."

Miss Johnson told Piddington for the first time on November 19th about the references to Dante and to the number seven that had now appeared in the scripts of six automatists.⁴³ On the 27th, Piddington told her, after he had studied the scripts, that his sealed letter, left with her four years earlier, bore a connection with this material. They then took the letter from the drawer in which it had been locked and broke the seal to examine it. It read,

If ever I am a spirit, and if I can communicate, I shall endeavour to remember to transmit in some form or other the number SEVEN.

As it seems to me not improbable that it may be difficult to transmit an exact word or idea, it may be that unable to transmit the simple word seven in writing or as a written number 7, I should try to communicate such things as: "The seven lamps of architecture", "The seven sleepers of Ephesus", "unto seventy times seven", "We are seven", and so forth.⁴⁴

⁴³ That is, Holland, the Verralls, Piper, Frith, and Home.

⁴⁴ *Extra Sensory Powers*, p. 135.

The note went on to explain how Piddington had always counted the number seven as a lucky omen in his life, and had deliberately cultivated this *tic*, as he called it, as something that might survive the trauma of death. On the 27th of January, 1909, Mrs. Verrall, who had not been told of the sealed envelope, wrote a script that ended with, "And ask what has been the success of Piddington's last experiment? Has he found the bits of his famous sentence scattered among you all? And does he think that is accident, or started by one of you? But even if the source is human, who carries the thoughts to the receivers? Ask him that. F. W. H. M."

Examining the relevant scripts over a fourteen year period, writes Douglas, "it is hard to escape the conclusion that an experiment had indeed been carried out, though not the one devised by the still-living Piddington." Cross-correspondence scripts, he notes, continued to be received until about 1930, when Piddington, their chief student, finally asked the automatists to decess from the practice unless they felt strongly impelled otherwise. By now the material was massive, not to mention, in many cases, fiercely complicated, and much of it has yet to be thoroughly analyzed even now.

The Mediumistic Experience and Its Evaluation

A few more words might be said, in conclusion, with respect to the nature

of mediumistic activity and its place in the scheme of things. What does one make of it? Just as interesting as the connections within the material I have been discussing, I believe, are the things that are sometimes said about the activity by those actually involved. One of the chief figures in the this era, notes Douglas, is Mrs. Coombe-Tennant (known, once again, as "Mrs. Willett"). Born in 1874, she married Charles Coombe-Tennant, a wealthy man from Glamorganshire, in 1895. Myers, notes Douglas, married his sister Eveleen Tennant, and Mrs. Willett probably gained an interest in psychological research from him. She began to practice automatic writing in the late summer of 1908, following the death of her young daughter Daphne, and after reading material written by Alice Johnson on the subject of Mrs. Holland's mediumship.

Willett did not take her own results very seriously at first, thinking them mostly likely the product of her own imagination. (She was bothered, in particular, by the fact that the words seemed to form in her own head a split second before she wrote them down.) Then in January of 1909, she was told in script, purportedly by Myers, that she ought to stop writing and try instead to receive messages directly into her mind and write them afterward. The script went on to explain that Myers and Gurney were presently collaborating from the other side. Not long afterward a script stated,

I am trying experiments with you to make you hear without writing therefore as it is I Myers who do this deliberately do not fear or wince when such words enter your consciousness or subsequently when such words are in the script. On the contrary it will be the success of my purpose if you

recognise in your script phrases you have found in your consciousness.⁴⁵

Mrs. Willett soon became quite adept at transcribing these “Daylight Impressions”, as they were called in the script itself. Her letter to Mrs. Verrall recounts the experience as follows.

I became aware so suddenly and strangely of F. W. H. M.’s presence that I said “Oh!” as if I had run into someone unexpectedly. During what followed I was absolutely normal. I heard nothing with my ears, but the words came from outside into my mind as they do when one is reading a book to oneself. I do not remember the exact words, but the first sentence was “Can you hear what I am saying?” - I replied in my mind “Yes”.⁴⁶

Willett goes on to explain that she could not see the communicator, yet received undeniable impressions regarding his personality, emotion, and personal quality of voice. She did not hear the voices as one ordinarily hears a voice external to oneself. In another letter to Verrall, she writes, “If you asked me to explain *how* I know when [Edmund Gurney] is speaking and not F. W. H. M. I can’t exactly define, except that to me it would be impossible to be in doubt one instant, and with E. G. I sometimes know he is there a second or two before he speaks ...”⁴⁷

Characteristic quirks of personality, notes Douglas, such as Gurney’s sense of humor, show up in this material. These scripts show also a keen regard for

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38. Douglas quotes here from a report in the *Proceedings*, volume XLIII, p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138. (*Proceedings*, p. 52.)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Willett's state of health. After the initial success of this experiment, the Myers influence stated that it needed to be put aside for a time until she was sufficiently rested.

Nine months later the scripts stated that the Daylight communication could be resumed. "Myers" and "Gurney" both requested that their old friend and colleague Sir Oliver Lodge (a renowned physicist and Society member) be present at sittings henceforth to put questions and to record responses. Though Willett, who was not a professional medium, was reluctant to have an audience, she relented, and she and Lodge met for the first time in May of 1909.

Two years later "Gurney" requested that G. W. Balfour also be present. He had been a close friend of Gurney's and possessed furthermore a wide knowledge of philosophy. He would become Willett's main sitter over the next twenty years. The sittings, as Douglas notes, developed into highly complex discussions of the survival issue. "Gurney", it seemed, wanted Balfour present because of his interest in the technical aspects of the communication process. While Willett herself soon became bored with the nature of these communications, the scripts are thought to comprise some of the most impressive automatist material ever recorded. "It is impossible," says Douglas, to indicate without lengthy quotation "the sense of immediacy and genuine personality" that is present to anyone reading the scripts. In 1935, he notes, Balfour published a paper in the *SPR Proceedings* entitled "A Study of the Psychological Aspects of Mrs. Willett's

Mediumship, and of the Statements of the Communicators concerning Process".⁴⁸

Much of the evidence was too personal for publication, and this material, said Balfour, was the most impressive of all. He concluded, however, that having seen these scripts in their entirety, "I am personally of the opinion that they contain evidence of supernormally acquired knowledge which no mere subliminal mentation will suffice to account for."⁴⁹

It does appear, says Gauld, that an external intelligence did indeed communicate these pieces through the respective automatists. But can we be sure? It is possible, say some, that the hypothesis of extrasensory perception (suitably modified) can explain them. An explanation along these lines, Gauld notes, is offered by researcher Frank Podmore,⁵⁰ who rejects the idea that any intelligence was at work in this process other than those of the automatists. In support of this view, Podmore notes that the purported Myers was never able to

⁴⁸ This material is contained in the aforementioned volume of the *Proceedings*, pp. 41-318.

⁴⁹ Following Willett's passing in 1956, notes Douglas, there appeared some 40 scripts (between August 1957 and March 1960) from the pen of Irish automatist Geraldine Cummins purporting to come from her. They were published under the title *Swan on a Black Sea* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1965). Personal recollection of his own encounter with this woman (whom he knew at the time only as Mrs. Coombe-Tennant) is offered by Professor C. D. Broad in his foreword to this volume.

⁵⁰ Gauld cites here discussion contained in pp. 225-76 of Podmore's *The Newer Spiritualism* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1910). See also Podmore's two-volume work *Mediums of the 19th Century* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963).

state the exact principle of the correspondences. Second, said Podmore, it appears that Mrs. Verrall was unconsciously “behind” that case (noted above) involving Piddington and the number seven. As Gauld explains,

Between April and July 1908 the scripts of several automatists, including Mrs. Verrall, contained numerous allusions to the number seven. Certain of these allusions were, additionally, clear references to passages from Dante. It turned out that Piddington ... had deposited with the SPR a sealed package, the contents of which he hoped to communicate after his death. The package contained a statement referring to his life-long obsession with the number seven. The statement did not mention Dante. Mrs. Verrall, however, had lately been reading Dante. Podmore puts his case as follows: “Mr. Piddington had for years been repeating *Seven* for all the world - that is, for all the world within the range of his telepathic influence - to hear. His is a voice crying in the wilderness, however, until Mrs. Verrall reads the “Divine Comedy”, and the idea of *Seven*, already latent in her mind, is reinforced by a series of Dante images. Mrs. Verrall then ... swells the stream of telepathic influence, and the effects, in the ... remaining automatists, rise to the surface of the dream consciousness.”⁵¹

There are further considerations, says Gauld, that might lead us in this direction. Hints and foreshadowings of cross-correspondence patterns appeared first in her scripts; she possessed likewise a good deal of relevant knowledge of literature and classical language. Yet it is by no means obvious, he adds, that this thesis, in which “Mrs. Verrall’s unconscious mind was, unknown to her conscious mind, a telepathic broadcasting station ... sending out, furthermore, signals of whose import she was frequently unaware,” is preferable to the one involving an independent intelligence.

For one thing, he observes, we do not have much evidence for the

⁵¹ *Mediumship and Survival*, p. 84.

particular kind of thought “sending” that Podmore’s account suggests.

Furthermore, he notes, Verrall was centrally involved “in several cross-correspondences in which the ostensible communicator conveyed literary information apparently possessed neither by Mrs. Verrall nor by any other automatist involved.”⁵² An example that merits note, Gauld continues, is what he calls the *autos ouranos akumon* incident.

On January 29th, 1907, in a sitting with Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Verrall spelled out to Myers (ostensibly communicating through Piper) the phrase ‘*autos ouranos akumon*’ and asked Myers to translate the phrase or to explain what idea it presented to him. The words, says Gauld, might be translated as *the very heaven waveless*. They come from a passage from the neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, and form part of the conditions necessary for ecstasy and divine union.⁵³ Myers, adds Gauld, had used this phrase untranslated as a motto for his poem on Alfred Tennyson, and in translation in his *Human Personality*.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 85. Gauld goes on to describe a case involving phrases and ideas from Homer, Plato, Plotinus, and Tennyson. In reading the details of this case, one sees that Verrall’s unconscious mind must have properties both cunning and acrobatic to manage such a feat.

⁵³ The passage, notes Gauld, states that the soul must be “free from deception and every kind of beguilement, and be in a state of peace, also that the earth must be calm, the sea calm, and the air, and the very heaven waveless.” (p. 85)

⁵⁴ Gauld refers to p. 291 of the second volume of Myers’ work, which has in it the words, “ ... calm be the earth, the sea, the air, and let Heaven itself be still.”

During the next six weeks, notes Gauld, Mrs. Verrall's own scripts were filled with references to Tennyson, and especially to passage which have to do with calm seas, calm air, and serene places. The poem that found expression most often was "In Memoriam", while there appeared references to "Crossing the Bar", as well. The references to "In Memoriam" led Verrall to seek out parallel phrases in the *Enneads* of Plotinus. (Myers, says Gauld, was very likely aware of such parallels. He was well read in Plotinus, and in his essay on "Tennyson the Prophet" he mentions the influence of Plotinus on Tennyson, with whom Myers himself had personal acquaintance.)

On March 6th, "Myers" wrote through Piper, "A cloudless sky beyond the horizon." In the waking stage of her trance, Piper uttered the words, "moaning at the bar when I put out to sea" (a quotation from "Crossing the Bar"). She also mentioned Arthur Hallam, whose early death had inspired Tennyson to write "In Memoriam". On April 29th, Mrs. Verrall had a sitting with Piper in which the words, "Azure a blue sea" were spelled out. Mrs. Verrall, says Gauld, took them to refer to "halcyon days (i. e. days when the sea is especially calm), which had been alluded to in her own scripts." At the end of the sitting came incoherent references to Swedenborg, St. Paul, and Dante. The next day, "Myers" said through Piper that he had answered the question about '*autos ouranos akumon*', adding that it reminded him of Socrates and of Homer's *Iliad*.

On May 1st, Mrs. Verrall's scripts contained the words, "Eagle soaring over the tomb of Plato", a known description of Plotinus that is mentioned in *Human*

Personality.⁵⁵ This led her to delve further into Myers' book. She found in the Epilogue⁵⁶ a passage concerning the vision of Plotinus prefixed by a quotation from Plato's *Crito* mentioning Socrates and quoting a line from the *Iliad*. On page 261 of the second volume is a list furthermore of persons who, like Plotinus, underwent moments of ecstasy or mystical union. It includes Tennyson, Swedenborg, Dante, and St. Paul. Finally, on May 6th, When Mrs. Sidgwick was present, "Myers" wrote through Piper, "Will you say to Mrs. Verrall - Plotinus." When Sidgwick asked, "What is that?", the reply came, "*My answer to autos ouranos okumen* [sic]."

It is clear, says Gauld, that Piddington did not know enough of Verrall's scripts or of Plotinus to have been the source of her material. Nor, he adds, was Piper sufficiently educated to have caught the drift of the allusions in those scripts even if she had been able somehow to know them by extrasensory means. The question then arises, could Verrall have somehow done it all? Did she have the requisite knowledge to (inadvertently) engineer the whole thing, provided that we grant to her unconscious mind "the somewhat sinister ability to direct the course of Mrs. Piper's automatisms?"⁵⁷ We may safely assume, Gauld continues, that she was not aware of the detailed links Plotinus and Tennyson until the Myers

⁵⁵ See page 261 of the second volume.

⁵⁶ See page 278 of the second volume.

⁵⁷ *Mediumship and Survival*, p. 87.

influence led her to them. Could she then have known them unconsciously? It is hard, says Gauld, to know what to make of such a proposal. What is being suggested, in this case, is not cryptomnesia, that is, the reemergence of latent memories. (Verrall's article on the Plotinus - *In Memoriam* connection, notes Gauld, was sufficiently original for publication and does not seem to count, say, upon previous exposure to another such article. Nor does it seem likely that she herself noticed the links, then forgot about them, for if they were this significant, why did she take no action regarding them at the time?)

The proposal in question, then, seems to be this. After separately reading "In Memoriam" and the *Enneads*, and retaining fairly detailed, albeit latent memories of each, she unconsciously grasped the connections between them. This insight came to the surface through her automatic writing and through that of Piper, "over whom she retained a continual but unconscious influence." Verrall apparently did not discover the relevance of the Socrates, Homer, Dante, Swedenborg, and St. Paul allusions given through Piper until her own Myers communicator provided the clue with "Eagle soaring over the tomb of Plato".

We cannot rule out, says Gauld, that Verrall had read the book and might have retained latent memories of the relevant allusions. Yet the allusions were not given through her own writing, but through that of Piper. Thus if we want to embrace the hypothesis of telepathic influence between writers without an independent intelligence, we must imagine something that is really quite outlandish. On such a theory, says Gauld,

Mrs. Verrall's unconscious mind must have reasoned as follows: "I remember now that Myers' book series of names close to that phrase about Plotinus. If I produce these names as if from Myers, it will look as though these are Myers' associations, not mine, which will be very striking. But hang on - I see a snag! I knew Myers quite well, and everyone is aware that I have read his book. Therefore if I produce these names myself it will not make much impression. Suppose, however, I were to infiltrate them into Mrs. Piper's scripts. Then it will look as though they really are Myers' associations. Good! I will do it!"⁵⁸

This does not mean that the extrasensory-type explanation is wholly gratuitous. As noted earlier, it does appear at times that the messages of mediums owe actually to their own perception of fact by means of some extrasensory ability. A principal reason for this is the fact, noted by more than one commentator, that mediumistic messages at times appear to reflect not objective fact but the belief-state (at times unknown to the medium) of the sitter.

But does extrasensory ability alone suffice to explain all of the phenomena that have been discussed to this point? Does it explain, say, the peculiar and immediate sense of personal meeting described above by Mrs. Willett? Perhaps we can attribute certain messages to the mediums themselves.⁵⁹ But can we also attribute to them the capacity to mimic a Myers, a Gurney, or whomever, in the nuances of their expression?

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁹ It is worth adding that the hypothesis of genuine transworld communication by no means rules out the *influence* of the medium's conscious or unconscious beliefs, which may shape the message despite the communicator's intentions. See, for example, Gauld's discussion of "overshadowing" (pp. 118 and following) wherein it appears that the messages owe to an unintended collaboration of medium and communicator.

The verdict of those who studied the material is that not only does it have discernible pattern, but that it often duplicates, in subtle and sometimes hard-to-describe fashion, the quirks and nuances of those individuals whom it purports to represent. The alleged Myers correspondence, says Oliver Lodge, bears unmistakable resemblance to Myers himself when living. Again, for all we know, this, too, may owe to some form of undiagnosed subliminal ability. But at some point one must wonder just what kind of ability this is.

All things equal, it is imagined, the simpler theory is the better. It is thus supposed the ESP hypothesis has some advantage, on this ground, over that of communication from the other side. But is this necessarily the case? Is survival *per se* more fantastic, less plausible, than the explanations involving, say, telepathy? The explanations that exclude genuine communication between worlds require not only extrasensory abilities on the part of mediums, but in some cases complex abilities that extend far beyond anything for which we have evidence otherwise.⁶⁰ Thus Barrett, for one, is led to finally ask, "should we think it so extravagant to entertain the simplest explanation - that occasionally a channel opens from the unseen world to ours, and that some who have entered that world are able to make their continued existence known to us?"⁶¹

⁶⁰ See relevant discussion, for example, in chapters 9 and 10 of *Mediumship and Survival*, which deal at length with the so-called "Super-ESP" hypothesis, which alleges that some combination of extrasensory abilities may account for all mediumistic phenomena.

⁶¹ *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, p. 197.

The non-survivalist hypothesis, writes Gauld, is an elusive thing. It is also very complicated, all the more so as it is stretched and amended to cover every possible case that might otherwise constitute evidence of survival. It is not so much a theory, he concludes, as *an attitude of mind* - an attitude, he explains, that "simply refuses to admit that there is *or ever could be* any evidence for survival which cannot be explained away in terms of the psi faculties, especially the ESP, of living percipients and mediums."⁶²

In a moment I will end this discussion and leave further comment to the members of this committee, some of whom may have extensive grounding in this subject and the problems of interpretation that it raises. The subject, I realize, has only been touched upon in this brief address, and there remain things to be said, I am sure, from many quarters. Those who have read carefully the results noted in preceding pages will see that the alleged correspondences tend to be imperfect and in many cases to be open (for better or worse) to associative leaps in the minds of those who interpret them. How significant is this fact?

I myself am in the position of many who have investigated this material - persuaded, on balance, that mediumship does on occasion involve something outside the ordinary, and much impressed in some cases with the testimony of both mediums and those who have studied them. By the same token, I find the

⁶² *Mediumship and Survival*, p. 129. The psi faculties, Gauld explains, are those involving either PK (psychokinetic) abilities or extra-sensory perception. The latter of these include such things as clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition. See Gauld's introduction.

connections described in some of the above cases to be too hazy, too uncertain, to constitute strong evidence of survival. Were I in the position, say, of Mrs. Willett, and felt myself to be addressed by a companion on the other side, I would be unable to resist the belief that the contact was real. I would, moreover, feel justified in this belief, which would itself violate, I think, no principle of reason or evidence. It is rational, I believe, to trust one's own experience, whether in the realm of things seen or things unseen. Yet again, there is a difference, in my mind, between having reason to believe such a thing and having reason that one can lay on the table, so to speak, for public benefit.

* * *

How does a purported communicator himself speak to the issue of these communications? In conclusion I will cite one example, together with a piece of commentary from a prominent psychical researcher that purport to explain their occasional oddness and imperfection.

The first of these is a passage from "Myers" as relayed by one of the automatists, that he felt as if he were "standing behind a sheet of frosted glass - which blurs sight and deadens sound - dictating feebly - to a reluctant and somewhat obtuse secretary."⁶³

⁶³ This message is recounted by Inglis in *Natural and Supernatural*, page 417.

A second and related passage, a bit lengthier, is the statement by Richard Hodgson, cited by Myers in his *Human Personality*. We might ask, says Myers, how it is that a departed spirit exercises control from the other side. We are told, he explains,⁶⁴ that communicators are attracted to a *light*, a “glimmer of translucency in the confused darkness of our material world” that signifies a *sensitive*, that is, “an organism so constituted that a spirit can temporarily *inform* or *control* it”.⁶⁵ The difficulties that may be inherent in such an exercise, says Myers, are expressed by Hodgson as follows.

Even under the best of conditions ... it may well be that the aptitude for communicating clearly may be as rare as the gifts that make a great artist, or a great mathematician, or a great philosopher ... owing to the change connected with death itself, the ‘spirit’ may at first be much confused, and such confusion may last a long time ... The state might be like that of awakening from a prolonged period of unconsciousness into strange surroundings.⁶⁶

“If my own ordinary body,” he continues,

could be preserved in its present state, and I could absent myself from it for days or months or years, and continue my existence under another set of conditions altogether, and if I could then return to my own body, [I might be] incoherent at first in my manifestations by means of it.⁶⁷

“How much more would this be the case,” he adds,

⁶⁴ Myers cites here the seeming communication, unusually lucid and convincing, of “George Pelham” (so-called), a friend of several of the Society members who operated through Mrs. Piper. See Myers’ extended discussion of this particularly impressive case in volume II, pp. 609 and following.

⁶⁵ See volume II, p. 253.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-54.

were I to return to *another* human body. I might be troubled with various forms of aphasia and agraphia, might be particularly liable to failures of inhibition, might find the conditions oppressive and exhausting, and my state of mind would probably be of an automatic and dreamlike character. Now, the communications through Mrs. Piper's trance exhibit precisely the kind of confusion and incoherence which it seems to me we have some reason *a priori* to expect if they are actually what they claim to be.⁶⁸

I add last one purported communication from Mrs. Piper's communicator "George Pelham", an associate, albeit a skeptical one, of the Society in this life who once promised Hodgson that he would "make things lively" if he should ever find himself (contrary to his present belief) alive and well on the other side.⁶⁹ In a handwritten communication through Piper of February 15th, 1894, he writes,

Remember we share and always shall have our friends in the dream-life, *i. e.*, your life so to speak, which will attract us for ever and ever, and so long as we have any friends *sleeping* in the material world; you to us are more like as we understand sleep, you look shut up as one in prison, and in order for us to get into communication with you, we have to enter into your sphere, as one like yourself, asleep. This is just why we make mistakes, as you call them, or get confused and muddled.⁷⁰

On this rather intriguing note I await the discussion of our committee.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁶⁹ See footnote above.

⁷⁰ Volume II, p. 254. This discussion is reprinted from Hodgson's "History of the G. P. Communications", contained in the *SPR Proceedings*, volume XIII, pp. 295-335.