

BOOK REVIEW

The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World edited by Christopher M. Moreman. 3 volumes. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013. 236 + 299 + 270 pp. \$163 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-313-39947-3.

The Spiritualist Movement is divided into three hardback volumes (handsomely produced) which between them contain 43 chapters on assorted aspects of the subject, the boundaries of which are generously interpreted. Most of the chapters are between 15 and 25 pages in length. The topics covered can be relatively narrow or relatively broad, and not all of them will be of keen interest to every reader. The contributors (who range from Ph.D. candidates to emeritus professors) are of varied academic backgrounds and attitudes toward the phenomena or alleged phenomena of Spiritualism. Some are pretty skeptical, others less so—indeed (interestingly), several are or have been practicing mediums. However, excessive partisanship, pro or con, is refreshingly absent.

The editor, Christopher Moreman, makes clear in his Introduction (which is printed in each of the three volumes) that his “collection” (he also refers to it as an “anthology”) does not aim to provide a “comprehensive coverage of scholarship on Spiritualism,” but rather to “illustrate the complexity of the movement and the ways it might be open to academic consideration.” And this is the light in which we must consider it.

I shall begin with a brief characterization of each volume.

Volume 1 is subtitled *American Origins and Global Proliferation*, which is a touch misleading, because, although the contents are largely historical and the immediate impetus, from 1848, for the modern Spiritualist movement was American, the origins of the movement go much further back, and there is in fact very little about the United States in the volume.

Volume 2 answers well to its subtitle—*Belief, Practice, and the Evidence for Life after Death*.

Volume 3 is subtitled *Social and Cultural Responses*, and is something of a miscellany (not to say a hotchpotch). It contains chapters (mainly historical) on the interrelations of the Spiritualist movement with other religions, with occult groups and societies, with issues of gender and race, and with an assemblage of other cultural matters.

It should be noted that the same or related topics may crop up in more

than one of the volumes and can if desired be followed from one to the other through the indices.

Each volume is divided into several sections. Volume 1 begins with two chapters on Pre-Spiritualist Mediumship. The first of these is by Jordan Paper, who speculatively traces—and it is a line of speculation of obvious interest—what one might call quasi-spiritualistic practices back to hunter-gatherer shamanism of a good many millennia BCE, and from there through more stable early horticultural societies with their propensity to ancestor worship, to the first written records of such practices, which come from the China of 3,000 or so years ago (female mediums were predominant even then). Finally he moves quickly and briefly to the pervasive continuance of mediumistic possession states in various post-industrial societies.

The second is by David Gordon Wilson, who has himself been through mediumistic training. Like Jordan Paper, Wilson sees analogies between Spiritualist mediumship and other shamanisms, and indeed claims (p. 21) that “Spiritualism is a traditional shamanism.” I will not enter into questions of how *shamanism*, a term of multifaceted and somewhat fluid meaning, should be defined. M. & S. Aldhouse-Green (2005), in their learned examination of early shamanism, spend some eight pages giving us a few indications. But it is clear, I think, that certain traditional shamanic practices may well have persisted in variant forms for centuries or even millennia.

Who first drew parallels between shamanic phenomena and the activities of Western mediums I do not know, but such parallels are drawn without introducing the word *shamanism*, in, for instance Howitt (1863(1):389–390, 398–409) and Brevior (1864:402–419). In 1879 Wundt disparagingly referred (p. 292) to Spiritualists as “pitiable victims of exotic shamans.” By 1933—considerably before the earliest date suggested by Wilson—Lawton, in his substantial study of the Spiritualist religion, assumes (x–xi, 480n) that the comparison with shamanism, whether or not wholly viable, is at any rate obvious. A principal reason for this assumption—an assumption which some scholars would dispute—was doubtless that detailed accounts of Siberian shamanism (for example those translated from Russian sources by Czaplicka (1914)) had made it apparent that the range of skills and aptitudes displayed by shamans and by Spiritualist mediums—including trance, healing, possession by spirits, prediction, the production of spirit voices in darkened chambers, even the unexplained movement of objects—have certain similarities. It is, one should note, rather easy to exaggerate the overlap here. Wilson, however, holds that a, or rather the, distinctive similarity between Spiritualism and shamanism is that these skills, and the important background knowledge of the rituals and conventions that go with them, have to be shaped and honed by apprentice-participation until

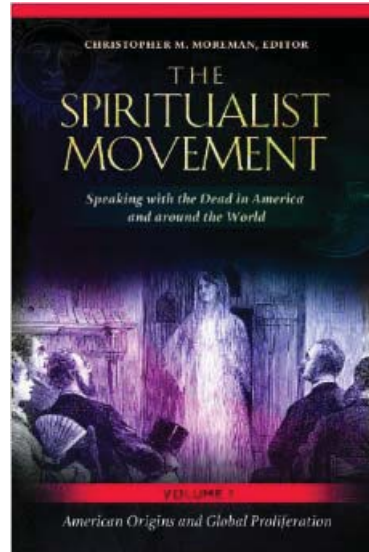
they reach a level acceptable within the particular group or culture involved. From this basis he proceeds to an account of what he calls the formal protocols of mediumship as exhibited in and learned from Spiritualist Church services and from encouragement and training in the development circles organized within many such churches.

It seems to me, however, without going into details, that while some well-known mediums (particularly those destined to become ‘platform mediums’ or public performers) have indeed begun their careers with a period of apprentice-participation nearly as long, though hardly as painful, as that undergone by many shamans, others equally renowned have not, but have discovered their talents in private home circles, and have never ventured far or at all into platform mediumship.

The second section of Volume 1 is devoted to Spiritualism’s Spread in European History, though the limited number of countries covered—Italy, Germany, Denmark, and Iceland—would not encourage one to think that its spread had been very wide.

Massimo Biondi devotes his chapter (3) on Spiritualism in Italy largely to the repeated denunciations of Spiritualism by the Vatican and the Catholic press. These began soon after the table-tipping and rapping craze that swept through Europe in 1853 reached Italy, and they went on, sometimes waxing or waning a little, until well into the twentieth century, and at times included excommunications and the banning of Spiritualist books and practices (though the scientific investigation of séances might still be tolerated, despite the frequent Catholic claims that the spirits under investigation were devils in disguise).

The Catholic Church was at this time increasingly under political, doctrinal, and even military pressure, and in 1869 Pius IX, hoping to strengthen his power, called the notorious First Vatican Council at which the doctrine of papal infallibility was proclaimed. The predictable result was the consolidation of an anticlerical and largely republican opposition, with which Spiritualists, as believers in free thought and free speech, were on the whole more at ease than they were with the authoritarian Catholic Church. During the later parts of the nineteenth century and the early parts



of the twentieth century a growing number and variety of Italian mediums appeared on the scene (Biondi has some interesting pages here on the early days of the celebrated Eusapia Palladino), and so did Italian savants and scientists prepared to investigate them seriously. However, the path since then has been, Biondi seems to think, chiefly downhill, and he remarks that Spiritualism has largely disappeared from the Italian scene.

Spiritualism in Germany is interestingly tackled by Andreas Sommer. His chapter (4) centers around a particular late-nineteenth century episode, which, however, he introduces against the broader context of earlier German romantic philosophy, and what, following Roy Porter, he calls the "Enlightenment crusade" (originating in eighteenth-century France) "to banish reports of supernatural phenomena." In Germany this crusade was represented from the 1840s onward by Hermann von Helmholtz, physicist and physiologist, the physiologist Emil du Bois-Reymond, and a group of their scientific friends, who more or less systematically gave time to bringing the gospel of scientific materialism to a wider audience. Among later adherents was Wilhelm Wundt, widely if perhaps erroneously regarded as the founder of experimental psychology in Germany, indeed the world.

This crusade had its scientific opponents, for example Karl Friedrich Zöllner, an astronomer and admirer of Schopenhauer, and Gustav Theodor Fechner, a surviving nature-philosopher of the old style, and a founder of psychophysics. In 1877 and 1878 Zöllner undertook a series of experiments with Henry Slade, an American medium who had left England in haste to evade a charge of fraud. Zöllner persuaded Fechner and two others, a physicist, Wilhelm Weber, and a mathematician, Wilhelm Scheiber, to join him in investigating Slade. Between them they witnessed many curious physical happenings under conditions they regarded as impeccable. Publication of their findings led to a sometimes unedifying war of words by supporters and principals of both sides, the details of which need to be read in Sommer's lucid analysis. Wundt maintained that conjuring can be shown to underlie the more startling phenomena of Spiritualism, but offered no indication how, and complained that scientists unnecessarily dignify Spiritualism by seriously investigating it and that doing so will corrupt the minds of the young. He emerges as a would-be panjandrum who thought that his *ipse dixit* on such questions, though unfortified by evidence or solid argument, should convince all reasonable men.

Unfortunately, Zöllner, in his reply, gave way at times to such indiscriminate fury that some thought him mad, while Fechner's calmer but firm response remained partly hidden in a private letter to Wundt. Wundt outlived them both and resumed his attack. But, as Sommer demonstrates, his continual evasiveness on crucial issues might well merit a less polite word.

Before long, apparent echoes of this dispute could be found in the United States. At that time it was customary for American graduates wishing to pursue an academic career to seek further education in German universities, and this was not less the case in psychology than in any other subject. It seems not unlikely that some portion of the hostility stirred up in U.S. academia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by William James's insistence that certain examples of supposed psychic phenomena were worthy of serious scientific study can be traced back to the pervasive influence of Wundt on German-educated staff members. That influence has long dissipated, but somewhat similar disputes are still a feature of the European and American scenes.

In Chapter 5, Jesper Vaczy Kragh discusses Danish Spiritualism from 1853 (when the table-tipping craze arrived there) until the present. Before long, as in the cases of Italy and France, it commonly took the reincarnationist form propounded by the Frenchman Allan Kardec. It had some links, not especially powerful, to political and social reform, and before the end of the century took a distinctly scientific turn according to which mediumistic phenomena can and should be investigated under strictly scientific conditions. Unfortunately, this laudable approach hit the buffers in the earlier part of the twentieth century when two 'physical' mediums, Einer Neilson and Anna Rasmussen, who had been taken up by the Danish Society for Psychical Research, came under strong suspicion, or more than suspicion, of fraud. Since then, it seems, Danish Spiritualism has persisted only in a relatively enfeebled condition.

Spiritualism in Iceland (Chapter 6 by Corinne G. Dempsey) is apparently in a more vigorous condition. From its beginnings in the early twentieth century it presented itself as a scientific rather than a religious movement. It had the good fortune to discover in its very early days a truly remarkable medium, Indridi Indridason (1883–1912), who produced a great variety of phenomena and was willing to submit to strict test conditions. His death at the early age of 29 caused a hiatus, but Dempsey attributes the survival and continued strength of Icelandic Spiritualism to the social respectability of its members and leaders and to its ties with other kinds of New Age movements. Possibly the need to fill in long dark winter nights may have had something to do with it.

Dempsey also notes two special characteristics of Icelandic Spiritualism. The first is a widespread belief that Spiritualism's resilience in Iceland is due to the existence there of certain people with a special gift for accessing the spirit realm. She collected a number of cases of skeptical persons who possessed this gift without realizing it and feared that they were becoming insane until they made reassuring contact with a Spiritualist community.

The second is the apparent prevalence there of the spirits of departed persons in need of rescue from the darkness of self-hatred in which they are lost. These unfortunate entities are prone to importune psychically gifted individuals for assistance, and it is a recognized function of many Icelandic mediums and their supposed spirit ‘guides’ to hold trance sessions devoted to helping such hapless souls. Clearly Iceland should be a regular port of call for psychical researchers.

Section Three of Volume 1 is devoted to some of Spiritualism’s key historical figures. It begins with a chapter (7) by Trevor Hamilton on F. W. H. Myers, William James, and Spiritualism. Myers and James were investigators of Spiritualism rather than Spiritualists themselves. Though Myers came in the end to believe in human survival of bodily death, his theoretical position was far more sophisticated and his canons of evidence much stricter than those of most Spiritualists, who found him something of a puzzle. James, a close friend of Myers, never attained any full conviction of survival, and had indeed a strong aversion to the sort of afterlife promised by Spiritualism—he described spirit teachings as “a kind of philosophy and water.” But both were important to Spiritualism, Myers for the vast case-collections embodied in his *Human Personality* (1903), and James, a world-famous philosopher and psychologist, for his readiness to state, in the teeth of much academic disapproval, that the strange phenomena involved (or certain of them) not merely deserved fuller investigation but cried out for it. Thus both merit their places in this book. Hamilton (the author of a biography of Myers) gives a good short account of Myers’s involvements in psychical research, and an excellent one of James’s.

Conan Doyle’s right to a place in this book could not be denied, and Roger Straughan (Chapter 8) does him full justice. Doyle was a man of absolute honesty who felt it a moral duty to lay his newly found belief in Spiritualism before the world. This he did with considerable success in the decade or two following World War I, but in the process he sacrificed a comfortable retirement, his health, and a good deal of his fortune. Whatever one thinks of his beliefs, and of the basis for those beliefs—and as a Conan Doyle *aficionado* I have to deplore how in his late pro-Spiritualism novel, *The Land of Mist*, he had the formidable Professor Challenger of *The Lost World* convert to Spiritualism on really quite feeble evidence—one has to admire the man, his industry, his dedication, and his many fine qualities.

I cannot quite see why Susannah Crockford’s Chapter 9, on the influence of animal magnetism on the development of Spiritualism in France from 1840 to 1870, is included in this section rather than in the preceding one on the spread of Spiritualism in Europe, or even in the concluding Volume 3, for though it contains much interesting information about Louis-Alphonse

Cahagnet and his 'magnetic' somnambules, most notably the remarkably gifted Adèle Maginot, and goes on to discuss the influence of Swedenborg (or his spirit) on Cahagnet, and the possible influence of Cahagnet on Allan Kardec, the founder of reincarnationist Spiritism, it is not exactly a specialized biography of any of them.

Chapter 10, on Jung and the Spirits, by Francis X. Charet, would I am sure be of considerable value to enthusiasts for and biographers of Jung (to neither of which categories do I belong), but it does not seem to me to be properly placed in a volume on the development, progress, and spread of Spiritualism.

The final section of Volume 1 presents four chapter-length case studies of Spiritualist Groups, Churches, or organizations from different parts of the world. Two of the chapters relate to what might be called the margins of Spiritualism, another seeks to test a particular sociological theory using a Spiritualist subject pool, and only one relates to what might be thought of as a more or less mainstream Spiritualist community.

The title of Rebecca Moore's Chapter 11, *Angels Among Us in Four San Diego Spiritualist Churches*, sufficiently indicates its contents. It appears that in these churches (to which the author and her assistants paid numerous site visits) traditional spirit guides (presumed to be discarnate human beings) have been largely replaced by intermediary angels, who similarly communicate through or are channeled by the various mediums involved. The function of these angels is to help, advise, teach, warn, encourage, heal, comfort, and so forth. It is certainly clear that angels are on the up and up, especially in some parts of the U.S.A. What is not clear is what rational grounds the faithful have for believing (as they do) that angels are actually present, both at the church services and wherever else they may be needed.

In chapter 14 Cristina Rocha writes about John of God, a Brazilian Spiritist healer, medium, and visionary, with a large international organization. John of God asserts (p. 209) "that he is the medium of the spirits of deceased doctors, surgeons, healers, saints, and people who were remarkable in their lifetimes." He (or his spirits) specialize, as do some other Brazilian mediums, in surgical operations, which are of two kinds, visible and invisible. Visible operations are carried out on stage with scalpels or scissors and without anesthetic or asepsis, which are held to be superfluous. Invisible operations may take place almost anywhere in or around the healing center and apparently without warning, though their occurrence may be signalled by pains, pins and needles, and even by the appearance of small cuts and bleeding.

It is clear that John of God meetings are hugely well-attended and

emotional, but although Rocha narrates in some detail the fortunes of one particular family during several visits and several operations (which deeply affected them), there is nothing within this chapter that would enable a reader to assess or even begin to assess the nature and extent of the ailments they (or indeed any other patients) suffered from, the extent and genuineness or otherwise of the presumed cures, the gullibility of the patients, or their openness to suggestion and placebo effects.

Chapter 13, *Spiritualism in a Globalized Ireland* by Olivia Cosgrove, is very different from the two preceding chapters. It attempts to test, with respect to the growing exploration of Spiritualism by the Irish, a Global Field Theory to the effect that in this highly interconnected and global modern world individuals are becoming increasingly aware that their lifestyle is just one option among many, leading to a growing sense of social detachment which they try to adjust by turning to a relatively nondoctrinal religion of their own choosing. In pursuit of this thesis, Cosgrove subjected the five willing subjects, out of 27 active Spiritualists approached, to a semistructured interview based on her review of the relevant literature. She interprets their answers as supporting the theory.

Chapter 14, by Paul Biscop, is entitled *The Anomalous Anthropologist*, presumably because the Canadian author is both a trained anthropologist and a practicing Spiritualist Medium, which certainly puts him in a good position to carry out fieldwork as a participant observer. His accounts of the organization, activities, and membership of a fairly typical Spiritualist church, of the beliefs of the members, and of the task and point of view of the mediums, are brief and to-the-point, and he is the only contributor to this volume to emphasize the centrality of good evidence to the whole Spiritualist enterprise (a topic to which I shall return).

Volume 2 has sections on Spiritualist beliefs, on Spiritualist practices, and on the evidence for life after death. Section 1 begins with a chapter by Stamford Betty which summarizes from an extensive literature fifty claims (the “Nifty Fifty”) widely made by communicating spirits as to the nature of the next world and of life therein. He is commendably cautious in his approach, but ends (p. 18) with a nice analogy:

[Spirit communications] are like maps. . . . When Lewis and Clark began their famous expedition from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean in 1804, they depended on a few extremely rough maps. As they proceeded westward . . . their maps got better and better. But it was not until they reached the Pacific that they really knew what they had been seeking.

In Chapter 2, Cathy Gutierrez writes interestingly on Spiritualism and the Dismantling of Hell, mostly with references to spirit communications

received in the 1850s by the New York State Supreme Court Judge John Edwards and the later English Spiritualist Florence Marryat. For Spiritualists the departed are subject to a law of progression—even the worst sinners are the victims of poor circumstances and adverse surroundings and will one day be rescued from their wretchedness. Christian ideas of original sin, and the Calvinist doctrine that baptism is a prerequisite for entry into heaven, were particularly obnoxious to women as child-carers in an age of high infant mortality. Well-known female mediums were in the fore of the denunciation of such ideas. The upshot was concepts of an afterlife with various grades or levels through which even the blackest souls could ultimately progress toward the light.

Nonetheless, according to some the bottom level could be a pretty frightful place, a kind of hell, into which the most criminal and degraded would be drawn through like-with-like affinities. Some spirit guides seemed to dwell almost with relish on the torments which these vicious souls might inflict on each other. Gutierrez gives various examples, and seems to think that being possessed by (or acting out the roles of) such wretched beings might have given the female mediums involved the opportunity of behaving in unrestrained ways that would normally have been frowned upon (to say the least) by respectable society.

The next chapter (3) by Andrew Singleton, asks how far Spiritualist ideas about the afterlife have influenced contemporary beliefs. He notes at the outset the important point that central to the Spiritualist movement is the idea that it can provide *proof* of life after death (which is what has led to the not-infrequent claim that Spiritualism is a *scientific* religion). And if contact with the dead can be thus demonstrated—by for instance the purported communicators through mediums giving verifiably correct information about their earthly lives—it lends weight to whatever statements the spirits may make about the next world and their lives in it. The next world, as Singleton points out, seems on this showing to be rather like this one, with some of the ills of the earth gone, and not much of the contact with God or Jesus expected by Christians.

I think it would be fair to say that a good many in Western society have some general idea of the basic beliefs and practices of Spiritualism. When these turn up in films or on television (which is not uncommon), most of the audience knows what is going on. But how many audience members have any degree of belief in the rather cozy Spiritualist ideas about the afterlife is another question, which Singleton approaches by citing the findings of various surveys along with data from interviews he conducted himself in Australia with 52 persons of assorted religious beliefs or none. Together these suggest to him that there are continuities between traditional

Spiritualist beliefs about the afterlife and what quite many people believe today, and that (p. 47) Spiritualism “must be credited, at least in large part, with popularising this personal, anthropocentric [as opposed to theocentric] vision of the life to come.”

Section 2 opens at Chapter 4 with a chapter by Elizabeth Roxburgh and Chris Roe who write about mental mediumship from the medium’s perspective. They adopt a process-oriented (rather than an evidence-oriented) approach to what they term the “pathways to mediumship,” and explore the phenomenology of how mediums experience communication with the departed. After some slightly, and to my mind unnecessarily, defensive remarks about the use of qualitative methods, they take up (p. 55) the matter of “mediums’ own understanding of how their abilities originated and developed.” They tackle this question by studying the auto/biographies of certain noted mediums, and by interpretative structural analysis of in-depth semistructured interviews conducted with ten approved mediums from the Spiritualists’ National Union (Great Britain). It could not be said that anything very novel emerges. For many mediums the pathway to mediumship began in childhood with visions (often veridical) of known or unknown persons or unknown scenes. Often they had invisible playmates. The pathway was much eased if the children concerned came from families in which such experiences were accepted and treated as normal. Families who feared or disapproved of such matters or thought them signs of possible insanity would upset or alarm the children, though later contacts with another medium or a Spiritualist church or a development circle might reassure them and put them on the pathway again.

Clearly these children often are, or are likely to become, gifted fantasizers or fantasy-prone personalities (a topic not mentioned by Roxburgh and Roe) of the sort first brought to extensive notice by Wilson and Barber (e.g., Wilson and Barber 1983). Gifted fantasizers not infrequently believe themselves to possess psychic gifts and may come from homes in which their talents and creativity have been actively encouraged. On the other hand quite often they turn out to have had repressive, lonely, unhappy, or even abusive childhoods, which caused them to create and live as much as possible in their own worlds of rich fantasy. I have talked with more than one medium whose background was apparently of this kind, and in fact a rather similar connection was proposed by Lawton (1933:490–494).

Roxburgh and Roe’s account of mediums’ experiences of communicating with the deceased is of interest mainly for the range of differing kinds of experiences reported. Mediums may see or hear spirits as real or see them in the mind’s eye or hear them speak into the mind’s ear, or smell or be touched by them, or all or any of these in combination. Or they may simply

feel a presence and know things about the individual concerned. Or again they may sense in their own bodies pains or unpleasant sensations indicative of the ante-mortem sufferings of the deceased. Or they may take on their mannerisms, or way of talking, or urges. Or relevant information may come in symbolic form, with symbols peculiar to the medium in question, or as flashes of relevant or analogous memories from the medium's own mind.

Nothing is said here about full trance mediumship, perhaps because it is rather rare, or perhaps because such mediums have only a scanty recollection of what passed during the trance.

In chapter 5, Joan H. Hageman and Stanley Krippner ask, "Are there cultural differences in the practice of mediumship?" It is tempting to reply, "Of course there are." However, what this chapter is concerned with is hardly what one would immediately suppose from the title. The chapter (pp. 69–70) "compares the absorptive and dissociative propensities between Afro-Brazilian mediumistic practices and other esoteric multicultural groups that involve ritualistic practices for spiritual transformation and/or healing." It reports data from the administration of the Tellegen Absorption Scale and the Dissociative Experiences Scale to 591 participants, mediums and non-mediums, from various religious or religio-philosophical groups from Brazil, the United States, and Korea. Various significant differences emerged between groups, though not between genders, but the authors' interpretations are so hedged about with caveats that, for a study involving so many subjects, the overall effect is disappointing.

Todd Jay Leonard writes (Chapter 6) about the backgrounds, religious and other, of 54 ordained Spiritualist Ministers and the circumstances in which they found their calling. Again nothing very surprising emerges. The majority of these ministers were middle aged and 70% of them were female. Only one in nine were full-time ministers, 12% were lifelong Spiritualists; most had tried out a variety of religions, with Catholicism being the most frequent. The "call" to become a minister most commonly took the form of a "message" heard by the recipient. It should be noted that achieving ordination involves a great deal of dedication and hard work.

Heather Kevan takes on (Chapter 7) the task of writing about Channeling. Channeling may be an offshoot of the Spiritualist movement but whether one should call it a part of that movement is an open question. Channelers in general do not link with spirits who establish their credibility by providing ostensible evidence of their identity with formerly incarnate human beings. They have no governing body to establish standards. The entities channeled present themselves as elevated or hieratic personages much given to spouting what often strikes cynics like myself as vapid twaddle. And as Kevan remarks (p.118), the "most obvious risk of channeling is delusion on

a grand scale.” Nonetheless, the practice of channeling, and the audience for it, seem to be steadily growing, and many people have apparently been cheered by the teachings and helped by the advice that have been channeled. Kevan’s task is thus to say the least a complicated and controversial one. She has produced one of the best chapters in the book, comprehensive, fair-minded, level-headed, clearly written, and thoroughly to be recommended.

The third and final section of Volume 2 is on Spiritualist Phenomena and the Debate over Evidence for Survival. It opens appropriately with Carlos Alvarado’s Chapter 8, on Mediumship and Psychical Research, which covers the period from the mid-nineteenth-century until the 1930s. To survey, as Alvarado does, the extensive relevant literature from this period in just 17 pages, would have struck me in the abstract as nearly impossible. However, he has made a remarkably good shot at it. Detail of course was impossible, but he outlines, and gives pointers to the literature on the history of mental and physical mediumship, methodological and instrumental problems confronting investigators in these areas, qualitative and quantitative assessment of the findings, and emerging theoretical issues over the question of survival of death, over the existence of some kind of psychic force, and over the concept of the mediumistic subconscious, particularly as set forth by F. W. H. Myers.

The following chapter (9), by Philip K. Roth, deals with the conflict and cooperation of Science and Spiritualism over much the same timeframe as Alvarado’s chapter. He notes (p. 152) that Spiritualism should not be conflated with “the broader investigative field” of psychical research, in part because many psychical researchers were not Spiritualists. Proposals that Spiritualistic phenomena should be investigated started early, and some scientists, most notably Sir William Crookes, began to put the idea into practice. Such attempts encountered growing hostility from the increasingly materialist representatives of orthodox science. However, there were those, such as Sir Oliver Lodge, who argued that science should not proscribe the investigation of certain sorts of alleged phenomena just because, if they really occurred, they would not fit in with currently accepted science. Roth goes into these old arguments in some detail, and the sad thing is that they still continue today on much the same terms.

Chapter 10, though it still sticks with issues to do with mediumship, moves from generalities to particular investigations. Its author, Gary Schwartz, describes some of his own (previously published) researches extending over a decade and a half and using 15 “research-oriented” mental mediums and some 50 “research-oriented” sitters who had personal and/or scientific reasons for participating. The experiments involved subgroups of sitters, and experimental designs were either single-blinded (medium blind

to the identity of the sitters), double-blinded (sitters in addition blind to the identity of their personal readings or medium blind to information about the sitters' deceased loved ones), or-triple blinded (for example the research assistants who received the transcripts and interacted with the sitters were blind to which readings appertained to which sitters). All the experiments eliminated visual clues, and some additionally eliminated auditory ones. Each sitter received transcripts of all the sittings and scored (on a 7-point scale) all the items of information in all of them as applied to themselves. Overall the scores were considerably higher for the sitters' own sittings than for the sittings of others.

Schwartz concludes that taking the results as a whole, the best explanation is what he calls the SOC (survival of consciousness) theory which he prefers to any theory of complex telepathy between persons still living, or (presumably) any theory of the post-mortem preservation of memories in some sort of non-conscious record. He apparently prefers the SOC theory because in some cases the information received by the mediums does not appear to be "dead" but (p. 163) "seems like communication with a living person. The information appears as if it is 'intentional.'" He gives what he regards as a couple of examples of this, curious but too long to be gone into here.

The following chapter (11), by Chris Roe and Elizabeth Roxburgh, takes up the topic of the cold reading and related strategies developed and used by pseudopsychics for convincing people that they are being told more about themselves and their concerns than the psychic could possibly have learned by ordinary means. It is a valuable survey, which I would happily recommend to anyone contemplating a visit to a psychic or medium. The authors do not advance any rules of thumb for guarding against being thus taken in, though reading their article would doubtless be helpful. Personally I would suggest that before reaching a conclusion about the nature of any *soi-disant* psychic's performance one should obtain or prepare a full transcript of all that was said and afterward go through it critically and carefully with the circumstances of the sitting in mind and if possible this chapter in hand.

The next two chapters switch from mental to physical mediumship. Chapter 12 is by Walter Meyer zu Erpen and concerns three Canadian home circles, one being the Philip Group, run in Toronto in the 1970s by George Owen, a mathematical geneticist, and his wife Iris. Philip was a deliberately created fictitious spirit from the seventeenth century, who nonetheless proved able to communicate through raps and table movements in the traditional manner. Another home circle, treated at much greater length, was one run in Winnipeg from 1918 to 1935 by Glen Hamilton, a local medical man of some distinction. To call it a home circle is an

oversimplification, since (p. 208) “In addition to the [non-professional] mediums and neighbours, the Hamilton group included doctors, lawyers, clergy, engineers, teachers, and other prominent members of Winnipeg society.” The circle was essentially one for physical phenomena, but communicators also spoke through the mediums, who were generally in trance. From the start (p. 210), Hamilton took precautions to preclude the possibility of fraud. Ultimately, these included “a battery of 11 cameras and remote control apparatus, shorthand recording of the proceedings, special scrutineers, and examination of the medium and sitters before and after an experiment.” The experiments in question were principally photographic ones involving flash exposures. In the earlier years they included apparently successful attempts to photograph small tables levitating without contact. Later came photos of teleplasms, the term given by Hamilton to the somewhat amorphous whitish masses (more often referred to as ectoplasm) that seemed to emerge from the medium’s mouth and nostrils and that sometimes incorporated small-sized quasi-photographic images of recognized deceased individuals.

The Hamilton circle soon became well-known and photographs of the teleplasms were published in various places. But the original publications are hard to obtain, and even if one has them it is hard to know what to say about the phenomena. It is apparent that Meyer zu Erpen has gone more deeply than anyone into the history, the records, the archives, and the photographic collections of the circle, and that he himself is quite convinced of the genuineness of the alleged phenomena. But this chapter is far too short for him adequately to convey the strength (or otherwise) of the basis for his conviction. It is a pity that his overview of the case, *The Quest for Immortality*, is not available in durable printed form.

Chapter 13 is somewhat curiously entitled *Becoming Bodies and the Birth of Ectoplasm*. It is mainly about supposed ectoplasmic manifestations in relation to female anatomy and female sexuality as exemplified by two well-known mediums of the earlier twentieth century, Eva C. (Marthe Béraud) and Margery (Mina Crandon). The author’s approach to these two cases is summarized early on in her chapter as follows (p. 230):

Although these otherworldly performances were probably fraudulent and the mediums who produced them often relied on erotic misdirection, this supernatural stage allowed these women to transgress rigid sexual and social boundaries, improve their material conditions and, for better or for worse achieve celebrity status among scientists, Spiritualists, and psychical researchers.

“Improvement in material conditions” probably applies more to

Eusapia Palladino, who is briefly mentioned, than to the others. Delgado seems particularly interested by the apparent quasi-parturient emergence of ectoplasmic structures from the mediums' vaginas, and rather readily interprets these structures and some others with uncertain points of origin as having a phallic character (including, p. 231, one of Palladino's that "after great extension had a hand at its extremity"). It is certainly true that Eva's and Margery's sittings could (as two erstwhile sitters intimated to me) have decidedly erotic overtones. But there is I think some danger that readers of this chapter might be tempted to generalize too readily on the basis of its contents. I have seen various supposedly ectoplasmic manifestations—the mediums, as it happened being mostly male, and the ectoplasm's source where visible the mouth—and, while a few (both mediums and manifestations) were so obviously fraudulent that I could not understand how anyone could take them seriously, and others were at best rather dodgy, there were some that were certainly quite puzzling. And this seems to mirror the overall history of the subject.

In chapter 14, Anita Stasulane writes about the Raudive Voices, those curious recordings named after the Latvian Konstantin Raudive, who investigated them and wrote extensively about them in the 1960s and 1970s, ostensible spirit voices that intruded upon certain radio transmissions. The chapter is essentially a useful concise biography of Raudive, with emphasis upon his involvement with the voices, but offers no assessment of the phenomenon itself. The author mentions, but does not pursue, the more recent expansion of this electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) into instrumental transcommunication (ITC), the supposed communication with spirits through the use of a whole range of electronic devices, including video recorders, video cameras, televisions, and word processors. I should mention, however, that my own, admittedly limited, experience of such phenomena has been uniformly far less than convincing.

Chapter 15, by Trevor Hamilton, is the most perceptive, lucid, and informative short account I have so far seen of the celebrated cross-correspondences, the huge and often intractably complex series of interlinked automatic writings (in one case there were also spoken communications) produced in the early twentieth century by a number of ladies connected with the Society for Psychical Research. These scripts purportedly emanated from several of that Society's deceased early leaders, who had created puzzles that could only be understood if the writings of several different automatists were compared. My only critical comment would be that the précis of the *Ave Roma Immortalis* case which Hamilton uses as an example of a complex cross-correspondence is so heavily abridged that few without access to the original will be able to follow it. As he points out,

the cross-correspondences had, because of their often highly literary and esoteric content, a relatively slight influence on the Spiritualist movement in general.

This brings us to the third and final volume, which is devoted to “the ways in which a number of groups have related or responded to the Spiritualist movement.” The links between some of these groups and the Spiritualist movement are tenuous. The first section begins with Andrew P. Lynch’s chapter on Catholicism’s response to Spiritualism, which to an extent follows on from Massimo Biondi’s chapter in Volume 1. Lynch points out (p. 11) that after the mid-nineteenth century, Spiritualism presented the Church with a tricky problem. Science was starting to challenge the religious worldview on a number of fronts. Thus the Church had to be careful in dismissing the spiritual claims of the mediums lest in so doing it seem to offer sustenance to the materialist camp. But equally it had to take a stand against Spiritualism because Spiritualist beliefs about the afterlife were in flat contradiction to those of Catholicism.

In 1962 came the Second Vatican Council, at which the Church instituted a sustained attempt to reach out to, and perhaps reach an accommodation with, a changed world and new religious movements, particularly the curious hybrid ones that had sprung up in some parts of South America and the Caribbean. But the incompatibility of Catholic doctrines about the afterlife with Spiritualist beliefs still remains an insurmountable barrier to rapprochement.

All this is (up to a point) relatively straightforward. In the next chapter (2), Roddy Knowles takes on the much more complicated task of expounding the Christian theological attacks on nineteenth-century American Spiritualism, particularly over the issues of bodily resurrection, post-mortem judgement, and the continuance of miracles into post-apostolic times. The complexity is worsened because the various denominations and sects, Bibles in hand, not merely differed with each other on such questions but were liable to have internal differences, too. Arguments spread widely and could become quite acrimonious, particularly in the early days of the Spiritualist movement when its growth in numbers alarmed Christians, and, as Knowles forcefully puts it (p. 20), they “found that Spiritualism had spewed steam through fissures of their theologies, calling increased attention to existing debates and launching dormant issues into the public forum.” Knowles does well to impose some order on this tangled historical episode.

Chapter 3, by Patricia Likos Ricci, is the longest and one of the most scholarly chapters in the set. It is essentially a brief biography of Mary Baker Eddy (1822–1910), the Founder of Christian Science, preceded and

accompanied by a good deal of relevant background information. What remains doubtful is whether the Spiritualist movement ever had any serious influence on the development of Christian Science or Christian Science on Spiritualism. It seems likely that in her earlier days, when Spiritualism was first burgeoning, Eddy “took on the symptoms of a ‘medium’” with some enthusiasm. Later she always denied that she was or ever had been a Spiritualist, though she admitted (p. 51) that her life had always been attended by “phenomena of an uncommon order, which Spiritualists have mis-called mediumship.” Her remarks on the subject tended toward the elusive. She could in fact (p. 52) “never extricate herself or Christian Science from an association with Spiritualism.” Thus insofar as Spiritualism had an influence on Christian Science, it was probably through harmful rumors that there was or had been just such an influence.

Chapter 4, by Jane Williams-Hogan, is about the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on the Spiritualist movement. Now there never has been any doubt among historians of Spiritualism that Swedenborg (1688–1772), and the influential New Church founded after his death, had a powerful influence on the beliefs and practices of the subsequent Spiritualist movement. Williams-Hogan outlines the teachings that Swedenborg drew from his own otherworldly visions, and notes how appealing the Swedenborgian account of the next world could be in comparison with the often much bleaker eschatology of many Christian denominations.

Although Swedenborg strongly discouraged others from attempts to contact spirits, for those who became aware of his claims the pull to experiment and follow his path (p. 71) became too strong, and well before Spiritualism emerged in the late 1840s there were small groups of Swedenborgians whose activities might be described as quasi-spiritualistic. Later there emerged certain well-known and as it were transitional figures, in that their Spiritualism, such as it was, was also—or so they thought—heavily Swedenborgian. Such were Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910) and Thomas Lake Harris (1823–1906). Both were strongly disapproved of by Swedenborgians, and it appears that Williams-Hogan dislikes them also, particularly Harris. She contrasts Swedenborg’s indifference to personal gain or fame with (p. 78) “the energetic recruiting done by Spiritualists: the economic gain they often sought, the attempts to control their disciples that they employed, and the self-promotion found in their written works, their lectures, and their preaching.” It might be pointed out, however, that Swedenborg had anyway no need of gain or fame, and that these remarks would apply only to a small number of Spiritualists (Harris amongst them).

The next two chapters, 5 by Alison Butler and 6 by Leo Ruickbie, are about the response of certain occult groups (notably ritual magicians) to

Spiritualism and its claims. Butler focuses particularly on Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and Dion Fortune (Violet Firth, 1890–1946), the former of whom regarded Spiritualist séances as invitations to demons to enter and take control, while the latter favored some kind of rapprochement. Both Crowley and Fortune might be described as renegades who had branched out from the ambience of the Order of the Golden Dawn. This chapter would have been easier to follow if Butler had incorporated more of the significant dates, especially of letters, into her text instead of consigning them to endnotes. Ruickbe's topic is the celebrated Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (founded in 1887), whose members by and large vehemently opposed Spiritualism. In this, Ruickbie thinks they were perhaps influenced by the teachings of Madame Blavatsky. According to the (majority) Golden Dawn point of view, the medium (p. 112) "does not communicate with the dead, but with elementals or mere shells." This did not, however, stop some members from experimenting with Spiritualistic practices—after all, the Golden Dawn was dedicated to contacting spirits, albeit supposedly of a higher kind.

Both these two chapters are interesting in their own right, but so far as the influence of the Spiritualist movement is concerned, their scope is very narrow.

One might expect that the scope of the chapters in the next two sections, headed respectively Gender and Race, would not be subject to this criticism, but such is not the case. Chapter 7, by Elizabeth Lowry, is about Mrs. Leah Underhill, eldest of the three Fox sisters around whom, in 1848, what are reckoned the initiating phenomena of the modern Spiritualist phenomena, the 'Hydesville knockings,' had broken out. The focus is on Underhill's autobiography, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism*, published in 1885. Lowry (who teaches composition at the university level) describes her approach to this volume as follows:

I analyze [Underhill's] unique manner of enacting a feminine identity capable of operating both within and counter to common institutional discourses of that era. Underhill controls and shapes public memory by contextualizing her 1885 autobiography within a chronology of personal correspondence and newspaper reviews, reclaiming agency by "talking back" to her critics . . . she is able to construct a domesticized feminine self by strategically negotiating often contradictory cultural prohibitions pertaining to gender and corporeality.

Nonetheless I think her analysis of Underhill's book is largely correct. That lady was exceptionally clever at subtle self-presentation and self-vindication while just about managing to avoid overstepping the margins

of what was, or was becoming, socially acceptable. But what, if anything, this has to do with the special influence of the Spiritualist movement on issues of gender I am not clear. The female author of a book on, say, life on the frontier in the mid-century, might have exhibited a similar cleverness without having had any contact with Spiritualism.

I am even less clear about this question with regard to the Chapter 8, in which Deborah K. Manson discusses three fictional Edgar Allan Poe stories from 1644–1645. In all three stories the male mesmerizers are able to build up a strong rapport and intimacy with their invalid male patients, and the stories illustrate how such relationships could develop without any naughty rumors being spread around as to their nature. Manson thinks that they foreshadow (p. 141) “the freedom from gender norms as well as the authority and inspiration that scores of women would experience through Spiritualism.” But why Poe’s stories should be thought in any special way to illuminate this development I do not know. The annals of mesmerism contain many long and detailed accounts, some going back a good sixty years before the dates of Poe’s stories, of prolonged treatments given by male mesmerizers to female patients with whom they were certainly on intimate terms, even though no intimacies took place.

This brings us to Section 3, which contains two chapters on the Spiritualist movement in connection with issues of race. The first of these, Chapter 9 by Margarita Simon Guillory, involves both race and gender. It centers around the city of Rochester, New York State, which, in the middle two quarters of the nineteenth century was a stronghold of (*inter alia*) both the abolitionist and the Spiritualist movements. In the case of abolitionism (concerning which Guillory gives a lot of information), Rochester antislavery societies were at first run exclusively by white males, though in the 1840s African American men began to play an effective part. White women formed their own societies, which made common cause with local antislavery men. African American women, however, were not offered membership in white women’s societies. Undaunted, they set up their own abolitionist societies and groups, which became involved in the wider abolitionist scene. However, the activities of these ladies has been largely passed over by historians of Rochesterian abolitionism. Their activities, says, Guillory (p. 161), have been “historically repressed.”

She seems to be of the opinion that something rather similar happened in connection with Spiritualism, and that (p. 156) “Spiritualist activities of African American women have been excluded from the historical annals of Rochesterian Spiritualism.” I have two problems with this. One is that, so far as I can see, she presents no evidence that there were any African American Spiritualists, male or female, in Rochester prior to the

foundation of a Spiritualist church there in 1926 (African American women have been the pastors of this church since 1947). The second is that the Spiritualist movement, though quite possibly not in its early days free of such discriminatory practices, has certainly never been noted for them. So why is it picked on here to illustrate them?

The following chapter (8), by Kathryn Troy, features the manifestations between 1857 and 1888 through various mediums of Black Hawk, a well-known Native American chief who had died in 1838. Troy has extracted a good many accounts of these sittings from Spiritualist periodicals of the time. Black Hawk's repertoire included speech (or rather speeches) and (in darkened rooms) footsteps of different kinds, movement of small objects such as musical instruments, touches (indicative of varying garbs), and once at least an alleged materialization in broad daylight. None of this amounted to adequate evidence of identity. Spiritualists thought that in the later years of his performances Black Hawk's messages became increasingly intelligible, increasingly spiritual, and increasingly helpful toward whites.

Troy suggests (p. 183) that undoubtedly "the Indian ghosts that allegedly appeared at séances were recognized on some level as a symbol of the sins and consequent guilt of the United States in its dealings with Native Americans." There may be some truth in this, but at the same time there may be truth in the old idea that the religions of many of these native peoples had points of resemblance with Spiritualism, so that Spiritualists who came to know something of them would have believed that North American Indians would make suitable spirit guides. After all, Indian spirit guides were also much favored in Britain where guilt over the treatment of North American Indians can hardly have been widespread.

Section 4 of Volume 3, the last section of the whole work, is headed *Other Cultural Issues*, and is a sort of mini-miscellany of contributions that do not quite fit in elsewhere. The first, Chapter 11, is Sophia French's *British Spiritualism and the Experience of [the First World] War*. French is impressively well-read and covers a lot of ground—Spiritualist remembrance ceremonies, the psychic photography of Ada Deane, the war-time Spiritualistic activities of Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the dilemma posed by the war for Spiritualists, who were in general strongly opposed to violence and war but consoled themselves with the thought that this could be the war to end all wars (a hope forever dissipated in 1939). Surprisingly, she does not tackle what seems to me to be the most interesting and indeed most important effect of WWI on British Spiritualism—not just the quite understandable increase among the general populace of interest in Spiritualism and the possibility of contacting the departed, but the remarkable emergence in Britain during the decade or two

following World War I of a surprising number of mediums widely agreed to be of unusually high quality. Why this should have been I do not know, but it is obvious to anyone who considers the immediately preceding state of things or (most particularly) the state of things now.

Chapter 12, entitled *Negotiated Seeing*, is by Chera Kee. Much of her article is concerned with the now more or less defunct practice of spirit photography, which she compares to the phantasmagoria shows that preceded it. Spiritualism claimed to be a scientific religion and the camera soon became a tool of science, and so it is not surprising that a marriage between them quickly came about. The resultant spirit photographers were soon producing photographs of their customers that showed not just the usual background studio props, but ghostly figures of spirit extras hovering hard by the customers. Of course customers might be aware that in principle it was not too difficult to doctor a photographic image and begin to wonder what exactly had gone on. In that event, as Kee observes, seeing became a process of “negotiating among the claims of what one saw, what one was told about what one saw, and what one believed, all at the same time.” All this is in some sense true, and one could throw into the mix negotiating with the claims or insinuations of the photographer or perpetrator. Something analogous is also true of Barnum-type performances and of quite a few Spiritual séances. But all this is quite obvious to reasonably level-headed persons, though they might not use the term *negotiation* in saying so. I would have preferred it if Kee had used her knowledge of the history of the photographic arts to spell out the methods of fraud successfully used by psychic photographers despite the efforts of clients to catch them out. There is a large literature on this.

Concerning Chapter 13, by Laura K. Hoeger, on the nineteenth-century French Spiritualist artist J. J. J. Tissot’s adaptation of traditional Catholic iconography, I do not feel qualified to write.

The final chapter (14) on *Mediums and Stars*, by Simone Natale, argues that “star mediums” are to a large extent accountable for the popularity of Spiritualism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Star” here is conceived in a showbusiness or cinematic way as a person who is a charismatic crowd-puller. And it is certainly true that there have been multiple connections between the stage and Spiritualism, and that some well-known or once well-known mediums have shown remarkable charisma and a gift for controlling large audiences. But as far as accounting for the erstwhile popularity of Spiritualism is concerned, the ‘star’ theory has limited application, unless indeed one is going to extend the reach of the varied meanings of that term to cover almost all likely cases. And that is very easy to do. Consider Mrs. Leonora Piper, perhaps the most outstanding

mental medium of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Some of her phenomena were truly remarkable, and she figured in several lengthy articles by various *savants*. Because of these articles, she was written about in popular books, and figured with increasing frequency in newspapers. But she was a quiet family person, who did not regard herself as a public medium, and never sat for large groups. Was she a 'star'? Or take John Sloan, who may well have contributed a lot to British interest in Spiritualism in the 1930s. He was a retiring Glasgow working-man who became well-known because as a physical medium (who, incidentally, made no charge) he was a central figure in one of the best-selling books on Spiritualism ever written, Arthur Findlay's *The Edge of the Etheric* (1931). Was he a 'star'? The answer is that neither Piper nor Sloan had star quality, the sort of charisma that pulls crowds and gains title roles, but both became well-known and were in some basic sense stars, because they were leading lights in a given, at least roughly definable constellation or context. Such a context does not have to be large or the star widely famous. The winner of a tiddlywinks tournament could be a star in that particular setting. And both sorts of mediumistic star, the ones who like big halls, bright lights, and applause, and the ones who are happier with a small audience and quiet surroundings, have contributed to the spread of Spiritualism when it has been spreading. The latter sort, however, has contributed most to the proper recording and publishing of the kinds of evidence that may be of longer-term interest.

I imagine that few persons other than reviewers (and perhaps not all of those) will aspire to read these volumes in their entirety. Nonetheless they contain some excellent chapters, and a good many that may safely be recommended. Though there are some that, to this reviewer, appear misplaced, other readers may think differently. Most people with a serious interest in the Spiritualist movement, whether their principal concern is with the curious phenomena or alleged phenomena that have been central to it, or with Spiritualism as a social or religious movement with many historical ramifications, will find much to interest them in this collection.

It would be easy to criticize the Editor for the absence of topics that one would like to have seen included, but this would be pointless, for, as he says, this collection is in effect an anthology, organized under headings but certainly no textbook. It is quite clear that the range of topics (which is in fact considerable) has been limited by the number of areas for which qualified persons willing to offer contributions have been available. However, there is a hint that there may be further volumes in the future. Let us hope so.

ALAN GAULD

References

- Aldhouse-Green, M. & S. (2005). *The Quest for the Shaman*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Brevior [Shorter], T. (1864). *The Two Worlds, the Natural and the Supernatural*. London: Pitman.
- Czaplicka, M. A. (1914). *Aboriginal Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Howitt, W. (1863). *The History of the Supernatural*. 2 Vols. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green.
- Lawton, G. (1933). *The Drama of Life after Death: A Study of the Spiritualist Religion*. London: Constable.
- Wilson, S. C., & Barber, T. X. (1983). The fantasy-prone personality: Implications for understanding imagery, hypnosis, and parapsychological phenomena. In A. A. Sheik, Editor, *Imagery: Current Theory, Research and Application*, New York: Wiley, pp. 340–387.
- Wundt, W. (1879). Spiritualism as a scientific question. *Popular Science Monthly*, 15, 577–593.