

ESSAY

## Some Directions for Mediumship Research

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**Abstract**—The study of mediums was part of a larger program of psychical research, begun in the late 19th century, intended to examine specifically whether human personality survives bodily death, and more generally whether the brain produces mind or consciousness, as most scientists since the late 19th century have assumed. Although a vast amount of high-quality research resulted from that effort, the study of mediumship was almost completely abandoned during the latter half of the 20th century, primarily because of the impasse reached over whether the phenomena are best-interpreted as attributable to deceased agents or to living agents. In this paper the author examines some types of mediumship research that have been considered particularly important for the survival question: cross-correspondences, drop-in communicators, and proxy cases. She argues that a revival of research on mediumship, particularly with proxy sittings, could contribute importantly to present-day psychical research and, perhaps ultimately, move us beyond the current impasse.

*Keywords:* mediumship—survival—proxy research—cross-correspondences—drop-in communicators

### Introduction

The program of research that came to be known as psychical research, launched in the late 19th century, was motivated by one primary question—namely, whether the assumption that mind or consciousness is solely the product of the brain is adequate to account for all of human experience (Cook [Kelly], 1992, Kelly et al., 2007). For many of the founders and early followers of psychical research, behind this general issue lay the specific and emotionally significant question of whether human personality survives bodily death. An integral part of the research, therefore, was the study of the phenomena that

gave rise to Spiritualism, in which some persons, called mediums, seemed to move or otherwise influence physical objects, or to communicate, through automatic writing, planchette, or trance speaking, information of which the medium was not consciously aware. The Spiritualists attributed the phenomena to the action of deceased spirits, but with the exposure of many fraudulent mediums (see, e.g., Gauld, 1968, Chapter 9), together with the growing recognition that much of the information communicated probably came from the medium's own subconscious mind and not from deceased persons (e.g., Myers, 1884), psychical researchers increasingly concentrated their research on a selected few mediums who were able to provide specific and verifiable information about identifiable deceased persons that the medium had no normal way of knowing.

The first 50 years of research on trance, or mental, mediumship produced a vast amount of evidence that led nearly everyone knowledgeable about it to conclude that the mediums obtained the information through *some* supernormal process, although there was considerable disagreement about what that process was (for excellent reviews, see Braude, 2003, Gauld, 1982). In this paper I will briefly review three particular types of evidence from mediumship that many people have considered particularly strong support for the hypothesis that human personality survives death. My primary goal is to suggest some directions that I believe researchers could take now to add to and extend the already impressive body of research on mediumship.

First, however, I would like to make some comments about why I believe research on mediumship is so important, beyond its specific application to the question of survival. It is the only phenomenon in psychical research that combines elements of spontaneous case studies, field studies, the study of special subjects or individuals, survival research, and experimental method. Mediumship usually develops spontaneously in a few gifted individuals; it must be studied more or less in its natural setting; and yet it is the only phenomenon directly relevant to the survival problem that can be produced and observed under conditions of experimental control. Mediumship therefore combines the significant emotional and psychological circumstances that often produce the strong psi effects seen in spontaneous experiences with the ability to control the conditions and thus reduce the uncertainties that too often accompany spontaneous cases with regard to the possibilities for normal explanations or sources of information. In a field in which spontaneous case studies, survival research, and experimental research have become for the most part widely segregated, a phenomenon that brings all these aspects together would seem to be singularly important for pursuing psychical research from a broader perspective.

Moreover, the study of mediumship may provide an important means of addressing variations of a question that underlies all of psychical research and parapsychology<sup>1</sup>: In any given psi experience or event, who is the *source*?

Should veridical mediumistic readings be attributed primarily to living persons (the medium? the sitters?) or to deceased persons? Should veridical crisis apparitions be attributed primarily to the percipient or to the dying person? Should successful results in a psi experiment be attributed primarily to the ostensible subject or to the experimenter? Or, in all of these, is it some interaction among all parties involved?

Keeping in mind the broad relevance and importance of mediumship for psychical research in general, I will now turn to mediumship more specifically as a means of studying the survival question. When evaluating mediumistic material, there are two major components involved. First, we have to determine whether the statements of the medium might have come from some normal process, or whether the most likely explanation is that they have derived from some supernormal process. We are all well aware of this, but it cannot be repeated too often that there are several primary normal processes that must be ruled out before we can say that a supernormal process was involved. First, of course, we have to rule out fraud. I think most mediums are honest, straightforward people whose primary goal is to help people, but we do have to be alert for any indications of fraud. I had a sitting many years ago with a medium who asked that the sitter write down on a card questions that he or she would like to ask deceased loved ones. This is a suspicious procedure in and of itself, and regrettably in this case suspicion was well-founded. Without describing the unfortunate details, I can say that the medium's machinations to obtain the card from me and read it were almost comical; but they are not amusing when one considers how many bereaved people he was deceiving. I think he was the exception rather than the rule among mediums, but there are other normal explanations that may be operating in many instances, and two in particular are the most important to rule out. One of these is fishing for information (or "cold reading"), whether done deliberately or inadvertently. Even when a medium does not allow the sitter to say anything but "yes" or "no" to a statement, a great deal of information and direction can be obtained in this way. The other normal explanation is that the medium makes vague or general statements that could apply to many people. It is only when we have ruled out normal explanations such as these that we can consider a supernormal hypothesis.

If we *do* decide that a medium's statements are most likely the product of some supernormal process, we can then go on to the second step, which is to consider what that process is and whether it involves the participation of a surviving deceased person or whether the information could have come instead from the medium's ability to obtain the information in a supernormal manner from terrestrial sources alone. These competing hypotheses constitute the survival hypothesis and the super-psi (or super-ESP) hypothesis, respectively. From the earliest days of research with mediums in the late 19th cen-

tury, researchers had recognized that telepathy between living persons was a serious alternative explanation to the deceased-agent hypothesis, and there had been herculean efforts by earlier researchers to identify and study mediumistic communications difficult to account for by a super-psi hypothesis. Three types of mediumistic communications that, for many people, began—even if only slightly—to tip the scale away from a super-psi interpretation and toward a survival one were the *cross-correspondences*, *drop-in communicators*, and *proxy sittings*. The cross-correspondences and drop-in-cases were thought to provide good evidence for survival because the motivation for the communications seemed stronger on the part of the deceased person than on the part of any living persons. Proxy sittings were thought to provide good evidence because, without any persons present who knew the deceased person, it seemed less likely that a telepathic “link” had been established between the medium and living people who knew the information contained in the communications.

Nevertheless, as knowledge about psi, including telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, grew, it began to seem that in psi phenomena, the *goal* of the task at hand may be more important than the apparent *complexity* of the task. The medium’s goal to provide evidence of survival might be sufficient to elicit the needed information, by clairvoyance or telepathy with living persons, in however complicated a way. Without knowledge of any limits of “normal” psi, it was impossible to say that a medium’s statements had crossed those limits and established the survival of a deceased person. It became, and remains today, largely a matter of personal judgment whether one decides that a medium’s statements are evidence for psi among living persons or for psi between a living medium and a deceased person. As a result, despite more than 50 years of high-quality research on mediumship, the research more or less ground to a halt, primarily because researchers had reached an impasse when it came to evaluating these alternative explanations (Cook [Kelly], 1987, Gauld, 1961). There seemed to be no way to discriminate between them, or to falsify one and establish the other. Although the general public today is showing a revival of interest in mediumship, primarily because of television shows about, and books by, a few high-profile mediums, few scientists have taken it up again as a topic for serious research.

I would argue, however, that intimidation in the face of the survival/super-psi impasse led to the suppression of one of our most valuable sources of information and phenomena relevant *both* to psi and to the survival question. However one interprets the phenomena, there is little doubt among people who have studied the evidence provided by the best mediums of the 19th and early 20th centuries that at least some of the information given was not obtained in any normal way. Ceasing to identify good mediums and methods for producing the phenomena, simply because the theoretical impasse seemed so diffi-

cult to surmount, was, in my view, a serious self-inflicted wound on psychical research. It will only be by the accumulation of more evidence that we may eventually begin to see our way beyond the impasse; and in the meantime, while accumulating this evidence, we may also learn much about conditions conducive to producing supernormal phenomena in general. As one researcher put it: “the accumulation of evidence is . . . a matter of great importance; it is impossible to have too much” (Saltmarsh, 1929:53).

The primary purpose of this paper, therefore, is to encourage renewed research on mediumship which produces evidence, like that from previous research, that *some* supernormal process is occurring. I have no wish to debate the strengths or weaknesses of either the survival or the super-psi hypothesis for any particular case or type of case, for the simple reason that I find myself at the same “impasse” that so many researchers before me have. Moreover, I agree with those who find the supposed dichotomy between living-agent and deceased-agent hypotheses to be less than clear-cut, since psi must be operating in either case. As Michael Sudduth (2009) has so well demonstrated, arguments that undercut living-agent psi are a double-edged sword and work equally well to undercut deceased-agent psi. Like Gardner Murphy (Murphy, 1945a), I doubt that the “questions [about survival] have been rightly stated,” and “think it probable that five hundred years hence the arguments both pro and con will sound childish and superficial, if indeed they sound relevant to the problem at all” (Murphy, 1945a:93).

Rather than enter into the theoretical fray, therefore, in this paper I wish simply to discuss the three lines of research that I think are most important for future research with mediums, particularly if we wish to advance our thinking about the survival issue. The cross-correspondences and drop-in cases are important because in them the motivation or purpose seems stronger on the part of the deceased person than on that of the medium or other living persons. Despite their importance, I will discuss these cases only briefly because they occur for the most part only spontaneously. Research with proxy sittings, on the other hand, can be undertaken deliberately, and for this reason it is a more productive method. I also believe it is the most important line of research to pursue now, not so much because it lessens the super-psi hypothesis, but because it lessens the likelihood of normal explanations such as cold reading and biased interpretation of vague statements.

### **Cross-Correspondences**

Cross-correspondences began to develop as a new mediumistic phenomenon shortly after the death of Frederic Myers on January 17, 1901. They purportedly represented an experiment developed on the other side primarily by the deceased Myers but also by his deceased friends and colleagues in psychical

research, Henry Sidgwick and Edmund Gurney. All three of them were well aware during their lifetimes of what we might now call the Catch-22 aspect of mediumistic communications: Statements by mediums are only useful for scientific purposes if they are veridical, that is if the information can be verified as true and accurate; but if they are to be so verified, this must be by the memory of a still-living person or by documents or other physical evidence. That being the case, the statements could always be said to have derived somehow from telepathy or clairvoyance. The cross-correspondences were therefore said to be an attempt to circumvent this argument by having two or more mediums—who were of course not in contact with each other—give statements that, when taken alone, made no sense, but when put together did. The argument was that the underlying meaning tying the statements together originated in the mind of one person only, and that was the deceased purported communicator.

There were five primary mediums, and a few others to a lesser extent, involved in the cross-correspondences. One was Mrs. Leonora Piper, a professional medium who had been working with members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) for nearly 20 years. The other four primary mediums were private individuals, however, and not professional mediums. Because all of the communications were obtained by automatic writing, they were usually referred to by SPR investigators as “*automatists*” rather than as “*mediums*,” and I will do so here as well.

None of the five primary automatists were in contact with each other. The cross-correspondences came to light particularly after Mrs. Holland (a pseudonym for Rudyard Kipling’s sister), who was then living in India, wrote automatically on November 7, 1903, a message purporting to come from Frederic Myers, who had died nearly three years earlier. The message was addressed to Mrs. Verrall, a friend of Myers’s whom Mrs. Holland had heard of but never met, and it ended with the instruction to send the writing to Mrs. Verrall at 5 Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge. Mrs. Holland had never been to Cambridge and had never heard of Selwyn Gardens, but this was Mrs. Verrall’s address. From this point on, Alice Johnson and other investigators from the SPR became involved, and cross-correspondences continued for several decades.

There is a voluminous amount of material relating to the cross-correspondences (for an introduction to the cross-correspondences cases and references to the main papers, see Gauld, 1982, Murphy, 1961, Saltmarsh, 1938), and most of it is extremely complex because it is often centered around allusions to classical literature, in which all the three primary deceased communicators, some of the automatists, and many of the SPR investigators were well-versed. One of the main objections to the cross-correspondence material, therefore, is the highly recondite nature of much of it; few people now can study the original automatic writing and put the various pieces together for themselves. But I will

describe one of the simpler cross-correspondences, just to give some sense of what was involved.

This material was reported by Alice Johnson in a 1908 paper (Johnson, 1908) on the automatic writing of Mrs. Holland and was called by her the “Roden Noel” case. Roden Noel was a minor poet in the 19th century. On March 7, 1906, Mrs. Verrall (in England) wrote automatically a poem that began “Tintagel and the sea that moaned in pain.” This meant nothing to Mrs. Verrall, but she as usual passed on her automatic writing to Alice Johnson.

On March 11, 1906, Mrs. Holland (in India) wrote a message, seemingly coming from the deceased Henry Sidgwick, in which Sidgwick said to ask AW (meaning Mrs. Verrall’s husband, Dr. A. W. Verrall) “what the date May 26th, 1894, meant to him—to me [meaning Sidgwick]—and to F. W. H. [meaning Myers].” The message went on: “I do not think they will find it hard to recall, but if so—let them ask Nora [meaning Mrs. Sidgwick].”

On March 14, 1906, in Mrs. Holland’s automatic writing appeared the words “Eighteen, fifteen, four, five, fourteen, Fourteen, fifteen, five, twelve,” and then the instruction to see the central eight words of *Revelations* 13:18.

On March 28, 1906, Mrs. Holland wrote (among other things) the words “Roden Noel,” “Cornwall,” “Patterson,” and “do you remember the velvet jacket.”

None of these things meant anything to the two automatists, but Alice Johnson eventually put it all together. The poem beginning with “Tintagel” in Mrs. Verrall’s script was reminiscent of a poem by Roden Noel entitled “Tintadgel,” a poem with which Mrs. Verrall was completely unfamiliar. The date of May 26, 1894, given in Mrs. Holland’s script, was the date of Roden Noel’s death. Although she had heard of Roden Noel and had read a couple of his poems (not, however, “Tintadgel”), she did not know him personally and did not know when he had died. But Roden Noel was known to both Myers and A. W. Verrall, and he was an intimate friend of Sidgwick, the purported communicator of this message, and Sidgwick’s wife Nora. Dr. Verrall and Mrs. Sidgwick recognized this date as being the date of his death. Mrs. Holland herself had not attempted to look up *Revelations* 13:18, but Alice Johnson did and found that the central eight words were “for it is the number of a man.” Taking this hint, she translated the numbers given in Mrs. Holland’s script into letters (e.g., the 18th letter of the alphabet is “R”), and they thus spelled “Roden Noel.” Finally, Alice Johnson learned that “Cornwall” was the topic of several of Roden Noel’s poems, A. J. Patterson was a mutual friend of Noel’s and Sidgwick’s from their undergraduate days at Cambridge, and Noel had frequently worn a velvet jacket. None of this information was known normally to Mrs. Holland.

There were other things written in connection with this case by the two automatists, and Alice Johnson discusses in detail the ways in which sublimi-

nal associations to Roden Noel might have been awakened in the minds of the two automatists, even though they had no contact with each other; but in sum it seems highly unlikely that any of the connections to Roden Noel's poetry, his date of death, or other details were known normally by the automatist who wrote them.

Nevertheless, this case illustrates the other of the two major weaknesses of the cross-correspondence cases (the first being the highly specialized nature of the material involved)—namely, the difficulty of ruling out normal sources of knowledge that the automatists may not have consciously remembered or even been aware of (Stevenson, 1983). In the Roden Noel case and in many other cross-correspondence cases, this explanation seems highly unlikely, but the possibility nonetheless remains and cannot usually be ruled out completely.

One way to alleviate this problem and bring cross-correspondence-like material under more control might be deliberately to ask communicators or controls to produce references to the same topics in the writings of other automatists. An example of this was a suggestion made in Boston by Richard Hodgson to Mrs. Piper's control, on January 28, 1902, to "try and make Helen [Mrs. Verrall's daughter and another automatist] see you holding a spear in your hand" (Verrall, 1906:215). The control at first thought Hodgson had said "sphere," and although Hodgson tried to correct this mistake, there still seemed to be some confusion on the part of Mrs. Piper's control about whether the word was "spear" or "sphere." Three days later in England (that is, on January 31, 1902), Mrs. Verrall (not her daughter) wrote automatically in Greek and Latin words that referred to both a "sphere" and a "spear." At Mrs. Piper's next sitting in Boston, on February 4, 1902, the control said (through Mrs. Piper's automatic writing) that he had been successful in making himself appear holding a "sphear"—the misspelling indicating that the control still was confused about whether it was to have been a "sphere" or a "spear." The cross-references were put together only after February 13 and February 18, when Hodgson sent Mrs. Verrall reports of the two relevant Piper sittings. There had of course in the meantime been no communication between Hodgson in Boston and Mrs. Verrall in England.

Experiments of this kind, in which a suggestion is made through one medium to produce certain specified information through other named mediums, would, if successful, be an important step toward bringing cross-correspondences out of the realm of spontaneous material that we simply have to wait to receive and into the arena of experimental material that we can obtain under appropriate conditions of control. Nevertheless, although they might add valuable evidence for some kind of supernormal process occurring in mediumship, they probably would *not* take us much further toward saying that the supernormal process involves the survival of a deceased person. In the original

cross-correspondence cases, the meaningful idea behind the various cross-references by the mediums apparently originated in the mind of a deceased person, and was in the mind of no living person. In these experimental suggestions for a cross-reference, in contrast, the idea would originate in the mind of the living experimenter, and therefore the hypothesis of telepathy from experimenter to mediums could always be invoked.

### Drop-In Communicators

Let us turn next to the cases christened by Ian Stevenson (Stevenson, 1970) as “drop-in communicators.” In such cases, a communicator completely unknown to any sitter present appears spontaneously in the sitting. Like the cross-correspondence cases, the motivation seems to have come from the communicator and not from any living person, since by definition no one at the sitting knows or recognizes the communicator. In such cases, it is only later (and sometimes many years later; see, e.g., Gauld, 1971) that investigators verify the accuracy of what the communicator said. And in the most important of these cases, the verified information contained in the communication was not obtainable through any single source, whether the memory of a living person or a document such as an obituary. Drop-in cases are thus considered important because, first, there is no motivation among the sitters to receive the communication, and, second, the information given was not obtainable from a single source, thus lessening the possibility that the medium had learned the information normally, but had forgotten (or falsely denied) having done so.

Drop-in communicators have been reported occasionally throughout the history of psychical research; perhaps the earliest were two cases reported by the SPR, one in 1890 and one in 1900 (see Myers, 1903(ii):471–477). As an example, I will summarize briefly a case that occurred in 1941, was first published in Iceland in 1946, and was finally published in the English literature in 1975 (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975a). At a sitting in Reykjavik, Iceland, on January 25, 1941, with the medium Hafsteinn Björnsson, at which three sitters were present, a communicator appeared who called himself Gudmundur or Gudni Magnusson. He said that he had been a truck driver and was driving over a mountain pass when his vehicle broke down. He had crawled underneath it, and had then ruptured something in his body. He managed to get home, but died while being transported across fjords by boat to medical care. He said that he and his death were connected with two towns, Eskifjordur and Reydarfjordur. He also said that his parents were living. The medium’s control, called Finna, described Gudni as being a young man with blond hair that was thinning on top. None of the sitters recognized this person, but when one of them described the sitting two days later to a friend, the friend said that a cousin of his was married

to a doctor in Eskifjordur. He wrote to this cousin, and subsequently nearly all the details given were found to be true, with some minor variations in detail, for a 24-year-old man named Gudni Magnusson who had died four months earlier in circumstances much like those described in the sitting.

There are quite a few drop-in cases just as impressive as this one—one such being that of Runki (or Runolfur Runolfsson), in which statements by the medium (again, Hafsteinn Björnsson) led not only to the identification of a man who had drowned 58 years earlier, but also to the discovery of a femur, presumably Runki's, buried in the wall of a house (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975b). Other cases include several occurring in a private circle that were investigated and reported by Gauld (1971). The Gudni Magnusson case, however, and the Gauld series are particularly important because there was a written record of the information given during the sittings, made before there was any verification of the case. In the Gauld series, detailed notes made at the time of the sittings had been preserved. In the Gudni case, several of the crucial details had been given in the letter sent to Eskifjordur to try to identify Gudni. Also, although there had been a newspaper obituary of Gudni, many of the important details given by the medium were not included in it, and there was no single source for all the verifiable information, other than the minds of Gudni's living parents. More drop-in cases of this quality would add greatly to the evidence for survival since the motivation behind the cases seems to come entirely from the deceased persons.<sup>2</sup>

Drop-in cases, however, suffer from two weaknesses. First, they are the easiest to fake. There are various means by which one can assess the likelihood that a particular case was faked, and in the best ones fraud seems highly unlikely. Nevertheless, Ian Stevenson and John Beloff (Stevenson & Beloff, 1980) investigated a medium who claimed to have produced numerous drop-in communicators, and they concluded that she was doing so fraudulently. The other major weakness of drop-in cases is that by definition they occur only spontaneously; we must wait for them to appear if and when they will. When they do appear, they are extremely important, but this is not a terribly efficient way to obtain evidence.

### Proxy Sittings

I turn finally to the category of cases that I think are the most important to pursue in mediumship research today. Proxy sittings, as the name suggests, are sittings at which the person desiring a communication from a deceased loved one is not physically present at the sitting; instead a third person, preferably someone with little or no knowledge about the deceased person, arranges the sitting with the medium and attends it as a proxy for the real sitter. Proxy sittings were originally conducted as part of the effort of researchers to get beyond the theoretical super-psi/survival impasse. The reasoning was that, because there

was no normal contact between the sitter and the medium, and because the sitter often did not even know whether or when a sitting would take place, the likelihood of a supernormal or telepathic interaction between the sitter and the medium was, if not eliminated, at least greatly reduced. At the time that most proxy sittings were conducted, in the 1920s and 1930s, this seemed a reasonable supposition. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, experimental studies of psi have since shown that even extremely complicated tasks can be carried out. The important factor seems to be the goal rather than the complexity of the task. The super-psi hypothesis was greatly challenged by proxy sittings, but it was not by any means put to rest.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, however, I do not want to dwell on these theoretical issues. There are, in fact, other reasons why proxy research is important, reasons that are perhaps even more urgent now than they were in the 1920s and 1930s, since we have had so little good-quality mediumistic material over the past several decades. Proxy sittings are important first of all because they eliminate one of the major normal explanations, which is that the medium obtains or infers information from the sitter, such as by the sitter's verbal or behavioral responses to statements or by the sitter's appearance. In a good proxy sitting, that is, one in which the proxy has little or no information about the sitter or the deceased person, the proxy cannot provide any feedback to the medium; what one gets are the medium's unadulterated impressions or imagery. "Cold reading" is eliminated.

Proxy sittings also provide a means of addressing the other major normal explanation for mediumistic statements, which is that most of the statements are general or vague enough that they can apply to many people or be interpreted in a variety of ways by different sitters. On this hypothesis, apparently successful mediumistic sittings are simply the result of chance, arbitrary selection of statements, and overinterpretation on the part of a sitter biased by grief and wishful thinking. There have been some notable attempts to assess the likelihood of this explanation by developing quantitative methods of evaluating mediumistic material, and these efforts have resulted in a large literature in parapsychology on methods for evaluating free-response material in general, not only in mediumship research but also in other free-response research such as Ganzfeld studies, remote viewing, or dream telepathy (see, e.g., Burdick & Kelly, 1977, Schouten, 1993, 1994). I will not try to review this literature here, but will briefly mention some of the methods introduced in mediumship research in particular.

### ***Quantitative Methods of Evaluating Proxy and Other Mediumistic Material***

The first attempt to evaluate a mediumistic sitting quantitatively was made by James Hyslop in 1919, when he introduced the idea of giving a list of state-

ments made by a medium at a sitting not only to the intended sitter, but also to “control” persons of comparable age, gender, and educational and social background, to see whether the controls would find just as much of the sitting to be accurate for them as the target sitter did. This first attempt was a massive effort: Hyslop listed 105 statements from a sitting that he had had with Mrs. Piper and sent them to 1,500 people, of whom 420 completed and returned the questionnaire. Hyslop was looking simply at the question of whether these 420 people would find overall that the 105 statements fit them as well as they fit Hyslop himself, and he found that they did not (Hyslop, 1919).

Similar studies in which controls evaluated sittings intended for someone else were conducted by Saltmarsh (1929), J. F. Thomas (1937), and Stevenson (1968), although no one has again used quite as many controls as Hyslop did. Stevenson, for example, made a list of 79 statements by a medium at a sitting intended for him, and gave this list to five male colleagues of approximately the same age, background, and profession as he. One of these, in fact, was his brother. Whereas 72% of the statements were accurate for Stevenson, only 46% were accurate for his brother, and only 30% were accurate for the other four controls. Stevenson introduced an interesting innovation, however, by classifying the statements on three dimensions: first, whether they were objective (that is, independently verifiable) or subjective (that is, requiring someone’s judgment); second, whether they were general or specific in nature; and third, whether they were matters of public knowledge or intimate personal details not in the public domain. To evaluate the criticism that sitters score statements more generously because they know they are intended for them, whereas controls score more stringently because they know they are *not* intended for them, Stevenson compared the objective statements, which required no judgment and could only be scored as accurate or not, with the subjective statements, which could be subject to biased responses. For him, 70% of the objective statements were accurate, for his brother 55% were accurate, but for the other four controls only 33% were accurate.

Before Stevenson, there had also been other attempts to assess the probability of a statement being accurate, that is whether it was so general it could apply to many people or, conversely, so specific it would apply to very few. Saltmarsh (Saltmarsh & Soal, 1930) was the first to attempt this, but his method was highly dependent on the subjective opinion of the judges assigning probability values to statements. Pratt therefore developed a method, in his research with Mrs. Garrett (Pratt, 1936, Pratt & Birge, 1948), to make the probability evaluations less subjective: He had a large number of people rate the accuracy of individual statements for themselves, and then applied a complicated statistical formula to determine the probability of a statement’s accuracy among the general population. Perhaps the most important aspect of Pratt’s method, how-

ever, was that he was the first to use all proxy sittings so that none of the people scoring statements had any idea which were intended for them and which were not. In previous studies in which controls were asked to evaluate statements, the controls knew the sittings were not intended for them. Although one can assume that in most of these studies the participants were motivated to evaluate the statements as objectively as possible, and although Stevenson (1968), as mentioned above, introduced an important way of assessing the objectivity of the evaluations, the basic principle introduced here by Pratt of giving sitters multiple readings for blind evaluation is an important procedural innovation, providing a simpler and more satisfactory way of evaluating the chance hypothesis.

There are two basic methods for evaluating free-response material: One can score the material item by item and calculate the combined accuracy of all the statements together. Pratt and the few others who have also tried to evaluate proxy sittings quantitatively (e.g., MacRobert, 1954, Schmeidler, 1958) used this item-based procedure. A second way of evaluating material is to rank the material globally, that is, by considering the material *overall* rather than statement by statement. West (1949) introduced this method into the quantitative evaluation of mediumistic material.

In my view this global method of rating or ranking entire readings should be adopted more widely for any future research with mediums, as it has been, for example, with Ganzfeld studies (e.g., Bem & Honorton, 1994). First of all, evaluating readings on an item-by-item basis requires highly complex and time-consuming methods both of scoring and of statistical evaluation. Moreover, many statements are not independent of others, which further complicates the scoring and evaluation. The global method is a much simpler and more straightforward way of determining whether a medium's accurate statements apply specifically to the intended sitter or whether they are general and vague enough to apply to many people. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this global evaluation allows for the likelihood that much of what a medium says in a sitting is in fact what might be called "filler" material. Just as in a Ganzfeld session, much of the medium's imagery and impressions may come from his or her own mind and have nothing to do with the intended target; but if, on the basis of a few important and highly specific statements, sitters can pick out their own readings from a group more often than one would expect by chance, then we have grounds for attributing this part of the medium's statements to some supernormal process.

Global evaluations like this, however, can be carried out only when sitters do not know which was their own sitting—that is, with proxy sittings. In the remainder of this paper I will give an overview of the history of proxy research, together with a few examples of actual proxy sittings, primarily to show just what is possible and the kind of results we might aim for in proxy-

sitting research. A general point I want to make in starting off, however, is that, despite the potential importance of proxy sittings for eliminating the common normal explanations of successful mediumship, very little such research has been carried out and reported; the vast majority of what has been done took place in the 1920s and 1930s, and even then it was limited primarily to two mediums, Mrs. Osborne Leonard and Mrs. Warren Elliott, and five researchers.

### **Research by Nea Walker**

The first report of a proxy case was made by Nea Walker, who was Sir Oliver Lodge's assistant in psychical research. Many bereaved people wrote to Lodge because of the books he published about his experiences with mediums, and Nea Walker handled most of this correspondence. One letter was from a Mrs. White, a woman who had lost her husband in 1920. Her initial letter led to a long series of proxy sittings carried out by Nea Walker on behalf of Mrs. White over a period of three years, with Mrs. Leonard primarily, but also with Miss Walker's sister, Damaris, who was an amateur, or private, automatist. Nea Walker published a detailed report of this case in 1927 in a book called *The Bridge* (Walker, 1927), which included not only full reports of the proxy sittings, but also reports of some anonymous sittings that Mrs. White herself had had with Mrs. Leonard and other mediums. Because the case involves so many sittings, with several mediums, and under various conditions, it is not easy to summarize; my overall impression is that many specific details were given, not only in regular sittings but more importantly in proxy sittings, and that Nea Walker was meticulous not only in controlling the conditions, but also in describing them.

The next report of a proxy case was also by Nea Walker (Walker, 1929). This was the Tony Burman case, and it was much less complex because there were only three proxy sittings by Nea Walker, one with Mrs. Garrett and two with Mrs. Leonard. Tony Burman had died in a motorcycle accident in 1926. On the day of his accident, but several hours before his mother learned about it, she was having a sitting with Mrs. Garrett. During the sitting, and about two hours after the accident occurred (but before Tony had actually died), Mrs. Garrett's control Uvani told Mrs. Burman that she saw her "littlest son," who was saying that there was "some trouble." A year later Nea Walker held the three proxy sittings for Mrs. Burman. The one with Mrs. Garrett and one of the two with Mrs. Leonard were successful. For example, among other things, Mrs. Garrett, who had no reason whatever to connect Nea Walker with Mrs. Burman, said that the communicator had tried to warn his mother a year earlier that "all was not well," this apparently being a reference to the sitting Mrs. Burman had had with Mrs. Garrett on the day of her son's accident. Also, Mrs. Leonard was nearly able to get the family name, in the groping manner that is so common in

mediumship. She began by saying it was a “B” name, then said Borrowman, and then later in the sitting she returned to this by saying Burry, Birry, Bur, not Bro, but Bur, Burnam. The proxy, Nea Walker, knew this name; but other details that came out during the sitting seemed to be about matters unknown to her. For example, the communicator mentioned an argument about a hat; he had had this argument with his father on the day of his death, although no one but his father knew this. There were also some comments about gloves that he should have worn. His not wearing rubber gloves at work had led to a dangerous poisoning of his hand, and his family had made a private “appeal” to the deceased Tony before the sitting that this incident be referred to.

Nea Walker made a third major contribution to proxy research in 1935, when she published another book, *Through A Stranger's Hands* (Walker, 1935). One important criticism about her first case, the White case, was that over the five years that she worked with Mrs. White, she had become closely involved emotionally with the case and had eventually learned a great deal about Mr. and Mrs. White.<sup>3</sup> In her second book, therefore, she addressed the question of whether she could have successful proxy sittings for people who remained distant to her, and this book is a detailed report of eight such cases involving sittings conducted from 1929 to 1933. The medium for all was again Mrs. Leonard. For this study Miss Walker chose, from among the many people who wrote to her and to Lodge, first, people who had included very little information about the deceased person in their letters, and second, people who seemed educated and intelligent since, as she pointed out, much depends upon the ability of the person annotating sittings to read them carefully and with an open mind. She also tried as much as possible to vary the age, gender, and mode of death of the deceased person. For this series, no more than three proxy sittings were held for any one case, and the families were not told when, or even whether, a sitting would be held.

There were interesting, specific, and apparently veridical details in all eight cases, although there was also much that was vague and not specific. I would like to give some excerpts from one of the cases, to give an idea of what they are like, the vague statements as well as the specific ones; but I first want to make one essential point, that these are *excerpts* only. One of the most important features, not only of this book, but also of all the mediumship research of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is that verbatim shorthand records were made during the sittings.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in many reports of proxy cases from the 1920s and 1930s, virtually the entire transcript of the sitting was published; whenever material was omitted (which was often necessary since sittings with Mrs. Leonard could run for a couple of hours or more), the reporter would give a description of what was omitted and why, usually because it was not related to the particular case in question or because it was non-evidential matter such

as remarks about problems of communicating, conditions in the afterlife, and so forth. Publishing entire, or near-entire, transcripts is important in mediumship research so that readers can see for themselves exactly what was said, when it was said, and in what context, both by the medium and by the sitters. For example, as I described earlier, in the Tony Burman case the medium mentioned a name that was very similar to “Burman”, and we can hope that Nea Walker, who knew this name, as an experienced sitter would have given no hint to the medium that she was on the right track in her attempt to get the name. But, without a complete transcript (and probably also a video recording of the proxy sitter), we cannot be certain that some such hint did not occur. This is of course the reason for keeping the proxy’s knowledge to a minimum; but even then having complete transcripts is important for other reasons. First of all, some statements are important or evidential only in their entire context, and may lose their meaning—or, conversely, take on undue meaning—when taken out of context. More importantly, perhaps, it is only with entire transcripts available that we can begin to analyze and understand a medium’s habitual thought processes, trains of association, expressions, habits, symbolic images, and so forth. Saltmarsh, for example, had noted that Mrs. Elliott had “an unconscious predilection for certain names and initials,” although he also noted that the frequency of her use of these names did not correspond with their frequency in the general population (Saltmarsh, 1929:97). Nevertheless, if, for example, we find that a medium uses the unusual name Jedediah in every other sitting, then its evidential value when it does finally correspond to a real person is considerably lessened.

With this cautionary statement about drawing conclusions from excerpts alone, I will now give a few excerpts from one case in Nea Walker’s second book (Walker, 1929). In November 1932, Lodge received a letter from a Dr. van Tricht, who six months earlier had lost his two children, a boy age 10 and a daughter age 2½. He and his family had been on a ship, returning from the Dutch East Indies, where he practiced medicine, for a holiday back in Holland. On the ship, the parents were in one room, the children and their governess in another. Fire broke out on the ship one night, and the parents were able to escape, but the children and the governess were not. All of these details were in Dr. van Tricht’s letter, and as Miss Walker herself said: “I would rather have had less information, but that could not be helped” (Walker, 1929:381). Nevertheless, an important point to remember with regard to proxy cases is that, even when the proxy has had some degree of knowledge about the sitters or deceased persons, and could have provided clues to the medium in some normal way, much important information *not* known to the proxy has also been given.

Almost immediately in the first sitting intended for Dr. van Tricht, Mrs. Leonard’s control Feda said that there was a boy here, a boy who went over

quickly, and (later in the sitting) that he had not been an invalid but healthy. She said the initial R had something to do with him (his name was Rudolf, a fact known to Nea Walker), and then she said: “The day before he passed over I have a feeling that there was something happened, arranged, only the day before, that he won’t say had made him pass, but had led to him passing” (Walker, 1935:387). Later in the sitting Feda said:

*Again I got “the day before”. Something was said, and done, and arranged, the day before. And, Mrs. Nea, if something had been done, acted on, that was suggested the day before, this passing might not have happened. This is true, though I don’t know if it’s good to say it. There was a suggestion made, . . . , the day before, that might have altered everything. . . . Anyhow, there are some things you can’t alter. It looked, afterwards, as if—“If only we had done what we thought of the previous afternoon, all would have been altered.” (Walker, 1935:393–394)*

And then still later in the sitting: “And they remembered about altering rooms, and one taking one, and one taking the other. Changing rooms was just before. People going from one room to another—‘You will have to take that other one’” (Walker, 1935:400). Nea Walker had no idea what all this referred to, but the mother later explained that the day before the fire she and the governess had discussed, in the presence of the 10-year-old boy, changing the room that the children and governess were in, but they had not yet gotten around to doing this when the fire occurred.

Feda also said “I don’t know if you would know if someone rather young—I can’t tell the sex—passed near the same time as himself. I am getting a second . . . it’s someone with him. Also very young. And there’s a link between them. They are together. Two young ones together” (Walker, 1935:391). Later she said: “And were there five of them in a group that had been all together? Five of them. They have been used to five people, all together, a group,” apparently a reference to the parents, children, and governess (Walker, 1935:394).

There were also several attempts at names. For example, at one point during the sitting Feda said: “I keep getting initials A. W. . . . It’s someone who’s passed over who’s looking after them over there. A. W.” (Walker, 1935:406); and then later she said: “And will you say Alfred has helped them” (Walker, 1935:412). At first the parents couldn’t place “Alfred,” but they later remembered that the family had befriended a man on ship whose name was Alfred L.—W. (the full name was not given by Miss Walker, nor had it been known to her before the sittings). He had survived the fire, but had been killed a few days later in a plane crash.

There were many other interesting details in this case, but I want to give one final example which illustrates the importance of having a verbatim transcript and of looking at a case in its entire context. During this sitting, Feda said:

Do you know Bob, or Bobby, in connexion with him? . . . Not passed over. Someone that he would have been with not long before he went over. . . . A man . . . a man who was very much with him, very fond of him, but not related to him. An older man, that this boy was very fond of on the earth. Not his father. Not related at all, and yet he was awfully fond of him, looking upon him, and up to him, almost as you would a relation. Petter, Payter, Petter, Pitter, Peter, Pellets. . . . Now I am getting a name sounding a bit like Peter or Peters . . . Peter and a place on the earth that it was very much to do with. (Walker, 1935:388–389)

During a second proxy sitting three weeks later (the transcript of which, unfortunately, was not printed), Feda again referred to an elderly man, Bobby, and Peter in succession, and after referring to the deceased boy's Christmas holidays a year earlier, kept giving the name "The Mount." Taking all these items together seemed to suggest a very close family friend with whom the family often visited, a man the children referred to as Uncle Bottie. Uncle Bottie's last name was Diemont (pronounced Dee-Mont), and Peter was the name of the boy the children often played with when visiting the Diemonts (Walker, 1935:389). Although "Bobby", "Peter", and "The Mount" looked at in isolation are not terribly impressive items, since they are common names, the clear and close association between them and the way in which they are presented in the entire context make them much more impressive.

#### **Research by H. F. Saltmarsh**

An even more sustained body of research with proxy sittings was reported in a 1929 paper by Saltmarsh. The medium Mrs. Elliott agreed to give three sittings a week for a year for this project. Eighty-nine of the 142 that she eventually gave were proxy sittings, and the rest were anonymous sittings with the real sitter present. The proxy sittings were extremely well-controlled, in that sitters sent an object belonging to the deceased person to the SPR, and it was labeled by code and stored securely by someone at the SPR. On the morning of a sitting, one object was selected at random in such a way that the sender of the object did not know that his or her object had been chosen, the proxy did not know whose object had been chosen (and in any case knew nothing about the pool of sitters and objects), and the person at the SPR who received and numbered the objects and kept the records did not know which object had been chosen on any particular day.

Although the research was well-controlled in keeping the proxy sitters completely blind, it was not as methodologically sound in the evaluation phase. One purpose of this research was to examine the hypothesis that good sittings are simply the result of "commonplace or vague statements which would be probably true of most sitters" (Saltmarsh, 1929:58), and to this end Saltmarsh

had the real sitters annotate their sitting, as well as a number of pseudo-sitters, or controls, who otherwise had no connection with the research. Unfortunately, the sitters all knew whether the readings were, or were *not*, intended for them. Saltmarsh tried to lessen any effect of bias in the scoring based on this knowledge by stipulating that the number of correct items had to be at least eight times higher for the real sitter than for the controls, a choice Saltmarsh fully acknowledged as being “to some extent arbitrary” (Saltmarsh, 1929:50). Saltmarsh himself assigned an overall score to each of these annotated records by a system in which he categorized statements as either (1) vague, (2) definite but true of many people, and (3) highly specific. Again, he recognized the subjectivity of this system, but he emphasized that, since he had done all the scoring, although the scores could not be viewed as absolute in any sense, they could be valuable for comparative purposes.

Perhaps some of the most interesting findings came from a series of 19 randomly chosen proxy sittings that were annotated by an average of four to five controls each. Taking the 19 sittings as a whole, the real sitters’ scores were more than 12 times higher than the control annotators’ scores. For example, in one case the real sitter had a score of 59, whereas among the five controls, one had a score of 3 and the other four had scores of 0. In another case, there were nine controls, and the real sitter had a score of 62, and control scores were 14, 11, and 7 0s. Again, it is unfortunate that Saltmarsh did not use blind scoring in this study; but the large differences in the scores of real and control sitters are at least suggestive that something more than bias in annotating was at work here.

Saltmarsh made a number of other interesting observations in this study that might ultimately prove useful in theorizing about the source of information given by mediums. First, his overall results showed that sittings at which the sitter was present got higher scores than the proxy sittings did. Nevertheless, as the above-mentioned analysis of proxy sittings showed, many of the proxy sittings were highly successful, even if at a lower level of scoring. Another interesting finding was that when Saltmarsh classified statements as to whether they referred to premortem information or to postmortem events, there were about an equal number of statements in both groups, but the veridicality of the statements was actually somewhat higher in the postmortem group, indicating (depending on one’s interpretation) either that medium had become aware of postmortem events by telepathy or that the deceased person remained aware of postmortem events concerning his or her loved ones.

### **Research by C. Drayton Thomas**

Another person who contributed importantly to proxy research was C. Drayton Thomas. In a 1932 paper, he discussed a series of 24 cases of proxy sittings that he had held with Mrs. Leonard, beginning as far back as 1917. In

most of these cases there were only one or two sittings, but in one there were four and in another 11. The cases also involved a variety of conditions: In half of the cases, Thomas had met and knew something about the deceased person or the family, although usually not much. The educational and social background of the people concerned varied widely, and the deceased persons ranged from young children to elderly people. Finally, as Thomas commented, there was “a rather bewildering variety of results” (Thomas, 1932–1933:139), of which he tried to make some sense in his paper. After having the person asking for the proxy sitting annotate the sitting, Thomas and three other members of the SPR (including Saltmarsh) assigned each sitting a value as to its evidential quality, and he then divided the cases into four groups: four cases that they considered good, four cases that they considered fair, seven that they considered poor, and nine that they considered either inconclusive or outright failures. In the paper, Thomas gave brief summaries of two cases from each of the four categories to illustrate their nature, and he then provided in an appendix a more detailed report of a ninth case, which the evaluators considered the best one.

The main purpose of the study had been to evaluate the major interpretations, telepathy or survival; but, as Thomas said, the key question running through his analyses was “Why should the results differ so widely?” (Thomas, 1932–1933:150). He considered several factors in addressing this question. For example, the involvement of the families seemed to make no difference: There were failures when the family was highly motivated and thinking strongly about the deceased person at the time of the sitting, and successes when the family did not even know that a sitting was taking place. Strong emotion is often thought to facilitate psi, but in the case in which there seemed to be the strongest emotion and desire to communicate on the part of the family, the sitting was a failure (Thomas, 1932–1933:151). Thomas noted that this was also the only case among the 24 in which the deceased person had died some years earlier, and he wondered whether elapsed time since death is a factor. There was also no difference in results among the 12 cases in which Thomas had some acquaintance with the family, as compared with those 12 in which he did not (Thomas, 1932–1933:159).

Thomas did, however, note some differences that might serve as hypotheses for future research. He noted a tendency for cases to be better when the deceased person was a young adult rather than a child, a middle-aged adult, or an elderly person. He also thought, on the basis of the information available to him, that in the successful cases the deceased person had been an educated and intelligent person; but he went further and suggested that it was not so much native intelligence alone that was a factor, but the possession by the deceased person of an alert, interested, and active mind (Thomas, 1932–1933:162–163).

In general, Thomas’s conclusion was that the success of sittings depends

primarily on characteristics associated with the deceased person. As he put it:

To those who are prepared to admit the possibility of human survival and communication, I ask, Is it not natural that some should have greater aptitude than others for the difficult and delicate operation of transmitting their thoughts through an intermediary, and of making suitable selection of evidential matter? We know how widely aptitude for selection and expression of ideas is found to vary in mankind. Some can select with finer judgment and can express themselves with greater precision; this being so on earth, one is not surprised to find indications of it in communications from the discarnate. And further, few of us can have failed to notice how widely people differ in their regard for relatives. Not all feel the same urge to set at rest the minds of friends who may be anxious about their welfare or desirous of hearing from them. Such differences may quite naturally persist in the life after death, some being very desirous of communicating, others much less so.

In this diversity of mental ability I find a cause for the wide difference shown in my series of proxy sittings, a difference ranging from complete failures to clear-cut success. (Thomas, 1932–1933:167)

In support of his overall conclusion that something about the deceased person, and not so much about the families or proxies, is the important variable, Thomas noted that, in his experience with Mrs. Leonard, communicators who failed at a first sitting were never successful when a second attempt was made, whereas those who were successful at a first sitting were often just as successful at subsequent ones (Thomas, 1932–1933:166–167).

After this paper on a series of proxy cases, Thomas went on to publish many other papers and books on various aspects of his work with Mrs. Leonard, but I will deal here only with three additional proxy cases that he published as individual case reports. The first of these cases, the Bobbie Newlove case (Thomas, 1935), is one of the most important cases in the history of mediumship in general. In September 1932, Thomas received a letter from a complete stranger, a Mr. Hatch, who lived about 200 miles away, saying that his 10-year-old step-grandson, Bobbie Newlove, who had lived with Mr. Hatch his whole life and was like a son to him, had died suddenly of diphtheria the month before. From November until the following June, Thomas had 11 proxy sittings with Mrs. Leonard for Mr. Hatch, at first without Mr. Hatch's knowing he was doing so and later at times unannounced to Mr. Hatch or his family. Numerous quite good details, about which Thomas knew nothing, were given in the course of these sittings, such as a description of a photograph in which Bobbie was wearing an unusual costume (Thomas, 1935:452), a remark about hurting his nose shortly before he died (Thomas, 1935:452), and detailed descriptions of his village and the location of his house in it, including the name Bentley, which was the name of the street where his school was located. He mentioned that there was a broken stile on the way to some place he used to go. His family knew

nothing about this, but they later learned that there had been such a broken stile on a path toward a place Bobbie often played, although the stile had been taken down shortly before his death (Thomas, 1935:455). At another sitting he described a place near his home, saying “There is a place ‘C’—close by, a long name sounding like Catelnow, Castlenow. There seemed to be two or three syllables, like a Ca sound, cattle or castle something” (Thomas, 1935:478). Mr. Hatch wrote that the last place Bobbie went, the day before he became ill, was Catlow, a small village near their town.

By far the most important feature of the case, however, is what Thomas called “The Problem of the Pipes.” In several of the 11 sittings, the communicator built up a picture of what had probably caused Bobbie’s death, giving facts and details that were completely unknown to his family until, after the 11 sittings were complete, Thomas visited the family on two occasions and together they verified what the communicator had been saying. Feda began this in the second sitting by saying that it was not just the diphtheria that had killed him, but something else that affected his heart and weakened his system (Thomas, 1935:483–484). In the third sitting, she elaborated by saying something had happened nine weeks before his death that was a link to his passing, and then she added: “Wait a bit, ‘pipes, pipes’; well, he says just this—‘pipes’. That word should be sufficient. Leave it like that” (Thomas, 1935:484). The family had no idea what this referred to. Feda returned to the topic in the fourth sitting, saying there was something that had made it easier for him to get sick and also then to be unable to shake it off. She then added: “I don’t know what you mean, Bobbie, you say you got yours from the pipes” (Thomas, 1935:485). In an effort to help the family understand this, Thomas asked Feda for more information in the fifth sitting. She said it was not at his home, but at a place he went to with which his family was not familiar; he described the place and said that another boy went there with him. Feda again said “through these—what he calls the pipes—he picked up the condition which was not the cause of the trouble in the first place, but it introduced a destructive element which resulted in diphtheria.” She then added: “Either before or after Bobbie caught it there—we think after—there was something done to apparently improve matters with regard to those ‘pipes’. There was something altered that probably now has improved the condition, made it safer” (Thomas, 1935:486). In the sixth sitting, Thomas again asked for more help with identifying and locating the pipes. Feda gave the description of Bobbie’s town and of a route going somewhat out of town (Thomas, 1935:490–492). Finally, in the tenth sitting, there was a more detailed description of the place associated with the pipes and how to get there (Thomas, 1935:494–499).

In June 1933, Thomas visited the family and read a diary that Bobby had kept, in which he said that on June 15, a date nine weeks prior to his death, he

had been with his “gang,” which his family learned was a secret society consisting of himself and a friend, Jack. They also learned that the boys had often gone to play at a place outside the town called The Heights (Thomas, 1935:485, 488). At a second visit the next month, in July, Thomas and Mr. Hatch, on the basis of the information that had been given in the sittings, located the place where Bobbie and Jack, unbeknownst to the family, had played, and also a pipe from which groundwater fed some ponds there. In September, Mr. Hatch discovered a second pipe there (Thomas, 1935:488), confirming Feda’s use of the plural word “pipes.” In November 1933, Mr. Hatch wrote to Thomas to say that the boy Jack had confirmed that he and Bobbie had played with the water at the pipes (Thomas, 1935:488); and in February 1934, Mr. Hatch received a letter from the local health officer confirming that the pools into which the pipes poured water were liable to contamination that could cause illness, although the water issuing from the pipes themselves was safe (Thomas, 1935:501).

As Thomas points out, there was no direct confirmation for the opinion of the communicators and, apparently, of Bobbie himself that these pipes had been a factor in causing his death (Thomas, 1935:501). Nevertheless, as Thomas also points out, this lack of direct confirmation is inconsequential, since the facts on which this opinion was based were given in the communications, were completely unknown to the family, and were verified by information given in the sittings. Most importantly, the only person in possession of all the information concerning the pipes and their possible connection to Bobbie’s last illness was Bobbie himself. As Thomas put it, “Anyone acquainted with these facts might have suspected that the throat infection . . . was traceable to the contaminated water. But no one on earth had the least suspicion of this until it was stated in the course of these sittings” (Thomas, 1935:501–502).<sup>5</sup>

The next case is also a fairly well-known one (Thomas, 1938–1939). It is particularly interesting, not only because of some quite specific details that were given, but also because Thomas, as the proxy, had no direct contact with the deceased person’s family; Professor E. R. Dodds served as an intermediary between the family and Thomas, again in the hopes that this additional barrier between the medium and the family would weaken the hypothesis of telepathy. The deceased person in this case, Frederic William Macaulay, had died in 1933, and three years later Dodds wrote to Drayton Thomas suggesting that he try to contact this person at some proxy sittings. A first attempt with another medium was unsuccessful, but beginning in June 1936 and continuing for a year, eight proxy sittings relevant to this case were held with Mrs. Leonard. Unfortunately in my view, rather than print the transcripts more or less as a whole, in succession, Thomas in this paper chose to group excerpts from the sittings related to three main topics: items relating to the communicator’s professional life, items relating to personal, intimate memories, and items relating to friends and

acquaintances. Nevertheless, it is clear from these excerpts that some specific details emerged, details of course unknown to Thomas or Mrs. Leonard. I will briefly describe three of these that seem particularly good because they are quite personal, yet also quite specific. At the third sitting, Feda said: “There is also a John and a Harry, both with him. And Race . . . Rice . . . Riss . . . it might be Reece but sounds like Riss” (Thomas, 1938–1939:265). The annotator, Mr. Macaulay’s daughter, explained:

The most interesting passage is “It might be Reece but it sounds like Riss”. This carries me back to a family joke of these pre-war days. My elder brother was at school at Shrewsbury and there conceived a kind of hero-worship for one of the “Tweaks” (sixth form boys) whose name was Rees. He wrote home about him several times and always drew attention to the fact that the name was spelt “Rees” and not “Reece”. In the holidays my sister and I used to tease him by singing “Not Reece but Riss” until my father stopped us, explaining how sensitive a matter a young boy’s hero-worship was. I think Rees was killed in the Great War. (Thomas, 1938–1939:265–266)

At the fourth sitting, Feda said: “I get a funny word now . . . would he be interested in . . . baths of some kind? Ah, he says I have got the right word, baths. He spells it B A T H S. His daughter will understand, he says. It is not something quite ordinary, but feels something special” (Thomas, 1938–1939:266). The daughter replied later:

This is, to me, the most interesting thing that has yet emerged. Baths were always a matter of joke in our family—my father [who was a water engineer] being very emphatic that water must not be wasted by our having too big baths or by leaving the taps dripping. It is difficult to explain how intimate a detail this seems. A year or two before his death my father broadcast in the Midland Children’s Hour on “Water Supply” and his five children were delighted to hear on the air the familiar admonitions about big, wasteful baths and dripping taps. (Thomas, 1938–1939:266)

A little later in the same sitting Feda said: “What is that? . . . Peggy . . . Peggy . . . Puggy . . . he is giving me a little name like Puggy or Peggy. Sounds like a special name, a little special nickname, and I think it is something his daughter would know. Puggy, Puggy or Peggy. I think there is a ‘y’ on it” (p. 269). The daughter replied: “My father sometimes called me ‘pug-nose’ or ‘Puggy.’”

Items like these three, and especially unusual nicknames, are in my view the ideal type of information to aim for in sittings: items that are both highly unusual and so personal that they are unlikely to be known by anyone outside a few close family members.

Another interesting feature of the Macaulay case is that the family had had a few sittings with another medium, Mrs. Brittain, shortly after Mr. Macaulay

had died, and Thomas outlines what seem to be references by both mediums, three years apart, to the same information (Thomas, 1938–1939:300–306). For example, Mrs. Brittain had said: “Now he will show something very important so that you will know it is really him. It is a black thing—a telescope” (Thomas, 1938–1939:302). Three years later, Mrs. Leonard said: “Does he hold something to his eye? Not an ordinary glass, but something he held up right close to his eye, like looking down a peep hole—sort of little tunnel” (Thomas, 1938–1939:303). The item in question, not at first recognized by his daughter, was a telescope used with a rifle. As the daughter explained, she later asked her mother whether her father had had a telescope:

She looked at me as if I were mad, and then, for the first time, I remembered that my father was, until about five years before his death, a most enthusiastic rifle shot. . . . I can't understand this complete lapse of memory on my part. He used the telescope on the range. (Thomas, 1938–1939:303)

This example of an initial failure to recognize the accuracy of a statement raises another problem, that of the limitations and idiosyncracies of individual *evaluators* of sittings. One person may not have (or remember) all the necessary information. Moreover, although some people may be loose or lenient in their evaluations, others err in the opposite direction. As Saltmarsh (Saltmarsh, 1929:136) remarked, the idiosyncracies of annotators “cuts both ways. Some annotators are so ingenious in finding correspondences that their results require a heavy discount, others are so refractory that they will not see anything but the most direct hits.” Other shortcomings of individual evaluators are even more difficult to account for. West (1949:100) gave an example of a woman who “said ‘no’ to the statement ‘strong clerical associations’ although her father is a clergyman and she has lived with him almost all her life.” One solution to such idiosyncracies may be to have more than one person annotate individual sittings; as Saltmarsh (1929:137) said: “It would seem that the only possible method of eliminating this error is to multiply the number of cases, sitters, and annotators, to such a degree that the individual variations average out.”

Another Drayton Thomas proxy case worth describing briefly is the Aitken case (Thomas, 1939). An unusual feature of this case is that there is also a drop-in aspect to it: At a sitting with Mrs. Leonard in 1928, the communicators asked whether Thomas had received a letter from a middle-aged man about his son. When Thomas said no, they explained that he soon would, that it was an accident case, connected with a motor car, and that the young man was killed outright or nearly so. They mentioned that the name Morton, or a like-sounding name, was involved, and they then said that the father who would write had once lived near a place where Thomas himself had once lived. Eleven days later Thomas received a letter from a Mr. Aitken, whose son had been killed

outright, not in a motor car accident but in an Air Force accident 11 months earlier. Moreover, as Thomas later learned, Mr. Aitken had lived for 12 years in Norton, where his son was born and lived, and this was a town that Thomas had lived in for two years more than 30 years earlier.

After this initial “drop-in” appearance and the subsequent arrival of Mr. Aitken’s letter, four sittings with Mrs. Leonard were held for Mr. Aitken, with Thomas as the proxy sitter, and some additional details unknown to Thomas were given. At one of these sittings, Feda said:

There was somebody else he [the deceased son] was interested in, that perhaps you [his father] don’t know . . . a name that starts with B, and I think there is an R in it . . . it’s not a long name—very much linked with him . . . it might be a Mr. BRICK. . . I feel this is something you could use for building. (Thomas, 1939:122)

At a sitting two weeks later, Feda again mentioned:

a name starting with BR—rather an important name with him . . . somebody he was linked up with shortly before his passing. . . . I also want to know if there is anything to do with him like a little ship . . . or a little model of a ship. . . . He is showing me something like a toy ship—a fancy ship, not a plain one—’laborate, rather ’laborate—with a good deal of detail shown in it—it seemed to be connected with his earth life—but some time before he passed over, rather early in his earth life. (Thomas, 1939:122)

After the first proxy sitting, the deceased man’s brother had, without telling anyone else, made a mental appeal to his deceased brother to send a message through the medium about a mutual friend of theirs in the Air Force who had recently been killed. The friend’s name was Bridgen, their parents did not know him, and before joining the Air Force he had worked at a firm that made scale models of ships, photographs of which he had shown to the two brothers. The living brother told Thomas that he had expected that, if the medium was unable to get Bridgen’s name correctly, she would get something about these model ships.

Another Drayton Thomas case that I want to mention briefly is also a very well-known case, the Edgar Vandy case (Broad, 1962:349–383, Gay, 1957, Mackenzie, 1971). This was not primarily a proxy case, although Thomas held two proxy sittings for Edgar Vandy’s brothers, one shortly after his death and one about ten months later. What is primarily interesting about this case is that there were several mediums involved (including one sitting held 23 years after Edgar Vandy’s death) and two primary sitters (Edgar Vandy’s two brothers), and there seemed to be many cross-references to common topics by all the mediums. In addition, similar cross-references appeared in the two proxy sittings that Thomas held with Mrs. Leonard. Like the Aiken case, there was also

a drop-in aspect to this case: One of the Vandy brothers wrote to Thomas shortly after his brother's death, saying only that he had recently lost a brother, that there was some doubt about how he had died, and that he would like Thomas to hold a proxy sitting for him. At Thomas's next sitting with Mrs. Leonard, although he had had no intention of having this be a proxy sitting for the Vandy brothers, there nevertheless appeared a communicator who seemed to be referring to topics that Thomas later learned dovetailed with topics that the two Vandy brothers had been hearing about from other mediums.

### **Research by J. F. Thomas and Lydia Allison**

The next case I can again refer to only briefly here because it is a long and extremely complicated one, and this is the John F. Thomas case (this Thomas being no relation to Drayton Thomas). After John Thomas's wife died in 1926, he began a long series of sittings with many mediums, which he eventually reported in a Ph.D. dissertation under the direction of William McDougall at Duke, and then in a book (Thomas, 1937). There were ultimately 525 sittings with 22 mediums in Boston and in London, 352 of which were proxy sittings, and the rest of which were sittings that Thomas or his son attended, nearly all of them anonymously. Eighteen of these sittings, including 16 proxy sittings, all with Mrs. Leonard, were published in Thomas's book in detail, with complete transcripts of some of them. Additionally, Lydia Allison, who held 21 proxy sittings for Thomas with four mediums in England, published transcripts of four of these proxy sittings that she had with Mrs. Leonard (Allison, 1934). Numerous quite specific and veridical details were given in the course of these many sittings, of which I can here give only one example. During Mrs. Allison's fourth proxy sitting with Mrs. Leonard, in June 1929, at one point she asked Feda where the deceased communicator and her husband had lived. (Although she had met John Thomas only once and knew little about him, Mrs. Allison did know that he lived in Detroit.) After some rather vague remarks, including "What do they pack in cases? . . . you can eat something that comes from there," Feda suddenly said:

What do they cut? Cutting something. Chopping and cutting. This isn't to eat at all. Because I am getting the feeling of steel and metal, then sharpness—cutting. I do get a feeling of metal. I think that must have a good deal to do with metal. Is there some factories there? Because I feel noises. Because I—clank, clank, clank—and fitting. They fits things together, stamping and cutting out. More of fitting. Some isn't fitted like parts of them is made. I feel some rather big pieces and what's the circles, wheels, that I see? Because I see wheels and circles and all sorts of round and square things and hundreds and hundreds of men working. No, . . . thousands and thousands; and the whole place is like a beehive of humanity working in these huge places. . . . It is noisy—

it's hammering on metal—ringing noises. They runs along, they runs along. Like this. [Imitating whirring sounds.] . . . Some are sent out incomplete and some complete. Because some are assembled in other places. Wait a minute. . . . What did you say about “D”? . . . Detra—Detra. Something beginning with “D”. Detra—Detro. He tried to say it. . . . Detra—he's trying to say the “D” word again. Detra—Detro—it is important but I can't get it. (Allison, 1934:132–133)

As Lydia Allison herself remarked, “To an American it seems almost incredible that Detroit and the automobile industry should not be immediately associated” (Allison, 1934:134). Nevertheless, she later asked Mrs. Leonard directly what she knew about Detroit. She had heard of it, but knew nothing about it or even where it was in America. To check this further, Mrs. Allison questioned a dozen well-educated English people, and similarly all of them had heard of Detroit, but none of them knew it was the automobile manufacturing center of America (Allison, 1934:134). We also should keep in mind that this was 1929, when the automobile industry was relatively new and worldwide communication was not what it is today. And, of course, we should not forget that in any case Mrs. Leonard had no way of knowing normally where Mr. Thomas and his wife lived.

Another interesting feature of the John Thomas series of sittings is the occurrence again of cross-references to the same topics by different mediums who knew nothing about each other, as in the cross-correspondence cases and in the Macaulay and Edgar Vandy cases. Thomas devotes an entire chapter of his book to this topic (Thomas, 1937:10, 166–188). I will briefly mention one example here, which involved three mediums at seven sittings with three different sitters, over a two-and-a-half-year period. Although only one of these seven sittings was a proxy sitting, I want to describe this case as an example of how research involving both proxy and regular sittings might be combined to produce good evidence of cross-references or cross-correspondences.

On July 6, 1926, Mrs. Soule in Boston said: “She [i.e. the deceased Mrs. Thomas] holds up her hand. A ring drops off her finger. Test—test—lost gift—special gift—special occasion—to bind us together. She wishes she had another one now to bind us together” (Thomas, 1937:174). The facts were that Mrs. Thomas, at the time of her older son's engagement, took the stone from her own engagement ring and had it reset for her new daughter-in-law; but the ring was unfortunately lost before Mrs. Thomas's death.

Two months later, this time in London, another medium, Mr. Austin, said: “The other lady [again, meaning Mrs. Thomas] left a ring in possession of her sister, a lady of abundant dark hair pulled back from her forehead, pale skin, very slight build” (Thomas, 1937:174). The facts here were that, after Mrs. Thomas had had the stone removed from her engagement ring, she gave the

setting to one of her sisters, her only sister who fit the description given. Neither Thomas's younger son, who was the sitter on this occasion, nor Thomas himself knew that she had done this.

Nearly five months later, again back in Boston, Mrs. Soule said: "Now I want to say a word about some of the tests I tried to send or give at other places—across the water there was a . . . little matter which seemed pretty good—to me— . . . RING . . . Yes, the engagement ring. It was what might be called a cross reference" (Thomas, 1937:174–175). This referred to the mention of the ring five months earlier, across the water, in London, by Mr. Austin.

A year later, in London, a third medium, Mrs. Garrett, said:

Now she [Mrs. Thomas] speaks of a ring, a plain ring, but she also speaks of another ring which I think she had meant to go to a daughter or a daughter-in-law. It was a ring of sentimental interest but also had value, and is set with diamond. (Thomas, 1937:175)

Such a statement, taken alone, would not be terribly interesting since most women probably have rings, even diamond rings, that they would like to leave to a daughter or daughter-in-law; but in connection with the other references to a ring by other mediums, it becomes more interesting.

In two sittings several months later, Mrs. Garrett again referred to a ring, including the statement: "It has a precious setting, but it was an old fashioned setting, and that ring seems to have belonged to somebody through marriage now, the ring evidently having been altered" (Thomas, 1937:175).

Finally, two and a half years after her first statement about a ring, Mrs. Soule in Boston made her third reference to the ring, saying: "It seemed like a mysterious disappearance. It was taken by someone with an idea of doing something with it and it was never done but it was never put back in the same place" (apparently a reference to the ring's loss, although since no one knew how it had been lost, the detail here could not be verified). When John Thomas, the sitter on this occasion, asked, "Which ring?", the communicator replied: "One with the stone, diamond, which was removed for another reason. I think you know why that was done and I was happy having it done that way. It was a sentimental idea of mine and you were in that, too. It was our engage—wait a minute—all in the same spirit of our earliest love" (Thomas, 1937:175–176).

### **Later Proxy Research**

Despite the extremely interesting and apparently successful proxy research carried out and reported in the 1920s and 1930s, this line of research, like most research with mediums, died away. Since that time, only a few studies have been reported, most of them not particularly successful.

West (1949) carried out a series of proxy sittings with 18 mediums, and in this series he introduced the method of providing sitters with not only their own reading but with several others, to see whether they could correctly, and blindly, pick their own. The results were not significant.

In 1953, five proxy sittings were held with the medium Arthur Ford. The five real sitters, not knowing which was their own, were asked to rate all of the statements on all five sittings, to see whether they would mark more statements as correct in their own sitting than in the others. Again, the results were not significant (MacRobert, 1954).

In 1958 Gertrude Schmeidler reported a study with the medium Mrs. Chapman in which there were four different proxy sitters and four different real sitters. Each proxy held a sitting with Mrs. Chapman for each real sitter, making a total of 16 sittings in all. As in the MacRobert study, the four sitters, not knowing which were their own readings, were asked to mark the accuracy of all the statements in all 16 sittings, four of which were their own and 12 of which were not. Schmeidler and one of her graduate students used the Pratt–Birge method (Pratt & Birge, 1948) to try to give probability values to the individual statements. Using Schmeidler's values, the results were significant, but using the graduate student's values, the results were only suggestive; and when a score was assigned simply on the basis of the number of items checked correct, without any probability weightings, the results were not significant (Schmeidler, 1958).

In 1966 Osis reported a complicated series of what he called "linkage" experiments. As in the Macaulay case 30 years earlier, Osis set up these proxy sittings so that there were one or more levels of intermediary persons between the real sitter and the proxy sitter, again in an attempt to make the hypothesis of telepathy more difficult. Although there were some interesting individual items, overall the results were not impressive (Osis, 1966).

Proxy research is not without its shortcomings. As Stevenson (1968) pointed out, "remov[ing] the sitter from the medium's presence . . . may diminish the motives of both the medium and [the deceased] communicator for communicating" (Stevenson, 1968:336). Stevenson himself, therefore, with his colleague Erlendur Haraldsson, introduced a variation on proxy research in which the sitter was present, but visually and acoustically isolated from the medium, and the experimenter sitting with the medium was blind as to the identity of the sitter (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1974). Ten sitters participated. Each of them was given all ten readings, not knowing which was the one intended for them. They were asked to rank them as to how well they applied to themselves. Four of the ten sitters ranked their own reading #1<sup>6</sup> ( $p < .01$ ), and two additional sitters ranked their reading #2.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, more recent studies like that of Haraldsson and Stevenson

(Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1974) have not been as successful, producing results that were either not significant (Jensen & Cardeña, 2009, O’Keeffe & Wiseman, 2005, Schwartz, Geoffrion, Jain, Lewis, & Russek, 2003) or only marginally significant (Beischel & Schwartz, 2007).

A colleague and I recently conducted some research involving proxy sittings that was successful. In a first pilot study with four mediums and 12 sitters, I served as the proxy. Scoring on an item-by-item basis, the sitters blindly evaluated their own reading as well as three control readings. The results were not significant. In a second, larger study with nine mediums and 40 sitters, my colleague and I each served as proxy for 20 readings. The sitters blindly evaluated their own reading as well as five control readings, but in this study they were asked to do so globally, rating each reading on a scale of 1 to 10. The results were highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ) (for details about this research, see E. W. Kelly and D. Arcangel, An investigation of mediums who claim to give information about deceased persons, unpublished).

### **Future Research**

This last study suggests that we can again produce significant results with proxy sittings, research that might eventually put us in a better position to develop new ideas for evaluating the survival hypothesis. Numerous questions suggested by previous investigators should be followed up on, particularly those addressing the issue of identifying the most conducive conditions for obtaining veridical information supernormally, *whatever* the source. For example (and these suggestions are given in no particular order):

- 1) Should the proxy be *completely* blind, which of course improves the evidentiality? Or does it help for the proxy to have some minimal knowledge or contact with the deceased person’s survivors, perhaps to “prime the pump”? William James, for example, believed that the latter might be the “best policy. For it often happens, if you give this trance personage a name or some small fact for the lack of which he is brought to a standstill, that he will then start off with a copious flow of additional talk, containing in itself an abundance of ‘tests’” (James, 1890:652).
- 2) Stevenson (1968) had suggested that the presence of the real sitter might increase the motivation for a deceased person to communicate, and in Saltmarsh’s study (1929) results were better when the sitter was present than during proxy sittings. Can we examine this question of motivation, yet keep the methodological advantages of proxy studies, by somehow combining proxy and non-proxy sittings, either in different sittings as Saltmarsh did, or simultaneously as Haraldsson and Stevenson (1974) did?

- 3) Gardner Murphy believed that “the most cogent type of survival evidence” would be that suggesting “post-mortem *interaction* of two or more communicators,” and he offered his hypothetical example of several people, unknown to each other in life, who learn after death that they all had some shared interest, such as collecting old Wedgwood china, and then communicate this fact through a medium (Murphy, 1945b:208). Some cross-correspondences, of course, seemed to be of this type<sup>8</sup>, but can we find a way to produce similar evidence without waiting for someone else (deceased or living) to take the initiative? Nea Walker had used a kind of “appointment” or “invitation” method. Because she had been sitting with Mrs. Leonard for many years, a group of her own deceased friends and relatives had emerged as regular communicators, comparable to Mrs. Leonard’s regular trance personality, Fedra. They served as a kind of master of ceremonies, bringing other deceased people to the sitting and, often, conveying their messages for them. Before a sitting at which she wanted a particular person to appear, Miss Walker would appeal to her Group, asking that they try to find a particular person and bring this person to a designated sitting. Can we modify this “invitation” method to encourage the kind of interaction that Murphy suggested?
- 4) Can we identify some factor or factors correlated with successful communications? For example, is the age or character of the deceased person a factor, as Drayton Thomas (Thomas, 1932–1933) suggested? Is the mode of death a factor, as it seems to be in cases of the reincarnation type (Stevenson, 1987/2001:165–166) and apparition cases (Stevenson, 1982:346–347), in which violent or sudden death figures prominently? Even if the real sitters are not present, does it make a difference whether they do or do not consciously know that a sitting is taking place? Does the proxy sitter make a difference? (In the study by Kelly and Arcangel, there was no significant difference between the two proxies.)
- 5) Some of the best mediums of the past have used a “token” object belonging to the deceased person as their preferred means of establishing contact with the intended deceased person (Gauld, 1982:132, Saltmarsh, 1929). Does the use of such objects improve the results?
- 6) Are the results better when the mediums go into trance (or some other altered state)? Most of the best mediums of the past were trance mediums, whereas few mediums today seem to be.

Clearly, there is much that we could do to advance mediumship research both methodologically and theoretically. A list of questions such as that above could be extended indefinitely, but this is a useless exercise unless we can iden-

tify mediums able and willing to work under proxy conditions. Many otherwise good mediums may in fact not be successful under such difficult conditions; but some, like Mrs. Leonard, may find that they can do well. If so, it is particularly important that they are also willing to contribute to a sustained effort. Stevenson (1968:335) cautioned against expecting too much from one sitting. As he put it:

Would a modern psychologist or psychiatrist usually expect to elicit information of a highly intimate nature about the life of a patient on the very first interview? . . . parapsychologists often err by expecting significant data to emerge at a first or only sitting instead of arranging for a series of sittings . . . we should expect evidence to emerge from investigations in which one or more sympathetic investigators arrange for the same sitter or sitters to participate in a rather long series of regular sittings.

One of the strongest impressions that I take away from the reports of the proxy sittings in the 1920s and 1930s is how much of a team effort this research was—on the part of the mediums, who were willing to persist over a period of years in cooperating with investigators; on the part of the investigators, who were also the proxy sitters and who developed a close and congenial relationship with the mediums by sitting with them regularly for years; and on the part of bereaved sitters who, as Oliver Lodge (1935:11) noted, understood “the importance of an outlook wider than their own immediate sorrow and need.” With such a collaborative effort, we may yet again produce important evidence from mediumship, perhaps even some that could ultimately move us beyond the survival/super-psi impasse.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I am drawing the distinction here between parapsychology, or the experimental study of psi, and psychical research, which I take to be a broader approach, as conceived by its founders, to general questions about the relationship of mind and body.
- <sup>2</sup> Stevenson (1970:53) mentioned that he had collected about 60 published reports of drop-in cases and was preparing a monograph on them. Unfortunately, by the time of his death he had not done this. I am working on the material that he left and plan to publish a report and analysis of the cases.
- <sup>3</sup> It did not seem to me that the readings improved over time, as Nea Walker’s knowledge about the Whites increased; and Miss Walker herself thought that the best evidential material came in her proxy sittings, not in the sittings Mrs. White had (anonymously) with Mrs. Leonard, at which Mrs. White could have provided feedback (Walker, 1927:154). Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of this question would be of interest.
- <sup>4</sup> Today audio and even video tape recordings should routinely be made as part of the effort to eliminate “cold reading” as an explanation for correct details.
- <sup>5</sup> This last sentence may not have been entirely correct. Bobbie’s friend Jack knew about the pipes and might have had some concern that the water there had been a factor in Bobbie’s illness.
- <sup>6</sup> In one of these four cases, the subject, a young woman, did not recognize anything

in what turned out to be her readings, and so she herself did not pick the correct reading. Nevertheless, when Haraldsson, still unaware of the identity of each sitter's actual reading, took all the readings to her family for their judgment, older family members immediately identified the correct reading as having numerous names and other details correct for persons that the subject was too young to have known.

<sup>7</sup> One other subject ranked the correct reading #5, but the other three did not rank their reading at all. Most sitters ranked only two to five readings, saying that the others had nothing meaningful enough to allow a judgment. The authors were thus unable to do a full-rank analysis, as they had planned. Similarly, a sum-of-ranks analysis, using only the ranking given to the correct reading (Solfvin, Kelly, & Burdick, 1978), is also not now possible.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the "Ear of Dionysius" case (Balfour, 1918; for a summary, see Murphy, 1961:252–270).

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