



Classic Text No. 110**Cesare Lombroso on
mediumship and pathology**

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With an Introduction by

Carlos S Alvarado

Parapsychology Foundation, USA

Massimo Biondi

Centro Studi Parapsicologici, Italy

Abstract

During the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, students of pathology such as Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), the author of the excerpt presented here, became involved in observing, investigating and theorizing about the phenomena of Spiritualism, and mediumship in particular. The Classic Text presented here consists of an excerpt from Lombroso's writings which focus on the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918), who greatly influenced Lombroso's beliefs. Lombroso illustrates neglected theoretical ideas combining the interaction of pathology and what seem to be real psychic phenomena that have not received much attention in historical studies.

Keywords

Cesare Lombroso, Eusapia Palladino, hysteria, mediumship, Spiritualism

Introduction

Psychiatrists and psychologists reacted in different ways to the phenomena of Spiritualism during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. This was particularly true of the case of mediumship, or the abilities many believed that some individuals had to convey communications from spirits. In addition to outright rejection of the validity of mediumship, many psychologists and psychiatrists framed mediumship within psychopathology. The purpose of this Classic Text is to bring attention to the writings of Italian criminologist and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso on this subject. It reminds us that, in his time, an underdeveloped and forgotten conceptual tradition

Corresponding author:

Carlos S Alvarado, Parapsychology Foundation, P.O. Box 1562, New York, NY, 10021, USA.

Email: carlos@theazire.org

combined what Lombroso and some of his colleagues believed to be true mediumship (in the sense of transcending conventional sensorimotor functioning) with ideas of pathology.

Mediumship and pathology

American Spiritualism developed rapidly in the middle of the nineteenth century during a period of fast religious, scientific, technological and social changes (Taves, 1999; Timmons, 2005).¹ The activities of mediums were one of the factors that affected the development and dissemination of Spiritualism. Working in or out of a presumed altered state of consciousness generally called a trance, some mediums specialized in messages or intellectual performances that purportedly came from the deceased. Mediums expressed information about deceased individuals via feelings, thoughts, visions and voices. Once received, the mediums could pass on the information verbally or through writing, or through other means such as poetry, paintings and the playing of music. In addition, there were mediums who produced physical effects including, but not limited to, raps, movement of objects, the appearance of writing on paper or on slates, luminous effects, and materializations of figures or parts of figures associated with the deceased by the sitters in the séance room. Some mediums did not specialize in this way but rather produced both mental and physical effects.²

Mediumship represented different things to different people. Most Spiritualists saw mediums as a conduit to a spirit world or as the harbingers of a new era (e.g. Edmonds and Dexter, 1853), while others saw them as in thrall to evil spirits or demons (e.g. M'Donald, 1866) or, more simply, as swindlers (e.g. Jewett, 1873) or frauds. Another group of individuals, among them psychologists and psychiatrists, saw mediums as individuals capable of producing 'real' manifestations that were not produced by spirit agency. That is, they believed that the mediumistic communications contained actual information about deceased individuals and that the physical effects occurred without the use of conventional means. They posited that the phenomena of the séance were the result of real psychic abilities of the medium without discarnate intervention.³

Another tradition at the time held that mediumship was a purely pathological phenomenon, in which the reported events were either the product of fraud, or of such processes as suggestion, dissociation, automatisms, or hallucinations that clouded the judgement of both mediums and sitters.⁴ Among the individuals who comprised this tradition were Frederic Marvin (1847–1918) and William Hammond (1828–1900) in the USA, and Pierre Janet (1859–1947) and Joseph Lévy-Valensi (1879–1943) in France (Hammond, 1876; Janet, 1889; Lévy-Valensi, 1910; Marvin, 1874). Alfred Binet (1857–1911) wrote in his book *Les Altérations de la Personnalité*: 'From time to time the most discrete authors cannot avoid saying that such [an] excellent medium had a nervous crisis ...' (Binet, 1892: 299).⁵ Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93), among others, believed some mediumistic phenomena showed hysterical contagion (Charcot, 1888), a topic that was developed by others in later years (e.g. Viollet, 1910).

In his book *Folie et Spiritisme* (1999), Pascal Le Maléfan traced the existence of different causal models of the pathology-mediumship relationship in the French medical literature on the subject. He argued that the figure of the medium in French Spiritualism affected French psychiatric nosology. Mediumistic trances, visions and automatic writing provided an analogy 'by which spiritist phenomena ... served to refine mechanisms, classifications, etiologies and interpretation systems in psychopathology' (Le Maléfan, 1999: 47).

However, Lombroso defended ideas that were held by a small number of individuals at the time. He postulated a different relationship between mediumship and pathology, one that admitted the coexistence of both pathology and the supernormal. This point of view was also present in some publications about cases in which the person under study was considered to have experienced both telepathy and hysterical symptoms (e.g. J.H.P.H., 1894). Along these same lines, others argued that 'distant intention' only worked with those whose nervous system was out of

balance (Bourru and Burot, 1887: 128), or who were in rare states of ‘extreme sensibility, abnormal, pathological …’ (Despine, 1880: 226).

An American journalist and writer, Francis G. Fairfield (1844–87), now mainly forgotten, believed that lesions in the nervous system accounted for genuine psychic phenomena (Fairfield, 1875). He wrote:

[T]his lesion develops as one of its exponents a peculiar sensory and motor aura (or atmosphere), which, entering into intimate molecular relations and contact with surrounding objects within a circle of greater or less periphery, eventuates in the phenomenon of clairvoyance in cephalic, and of table-tipping, rappings, and the like, in vital temperaments. (p. 29)

This aura, he said, came from the nervous system and was a function of nervous disorder.⁶

In Italy, psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1852–1929), who believed in real mediumistic phenomena, also discussed mediumship as a morbid phenomenon during the early part of the twentieth century. In his view, mediums showed a variety of disturbances of the nervous system, among them paralyses and limb infirmities (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1: 103–11). Furthermore, he saw conditions such as diabetes, obesity, renal disorders and neuralgia as part of a hysteria-related diathesis related to mediumship (Vol. 2: 302, 482). In his opinion: ‘Mediumship is a metahysterical condition’ (Vol. 2: 310).⁷

The investigation of mediumship, and particularly its veridical aspects, was the subject of psychical research, a movement that developed in the late nineteenth century, and attempted to explore psychic phenomena scientifically.⁸ A particularly important development was the founding of the Society for Psychical Research and the early investigations and theorizing done by its members. Founded in London in 1882 by a group of scholars and scientists, the membership also included some Spiritualists.⁹ Under its aegis, researchers carried out studies on a variety of phenomena such as thought-transference, apparitions of the living and of the dead, and mediumship (e.g. Gurney, Myers and Podmore, 1886; Guthrie and Birchall, 1883; Lodge, 1894; Myers, 1892). The last included unprecedented detailed investigations of mental mediums, particularly the Boston medium Leonora E. Piper (1857–1950; e.g. Lodge, 1890), who became known initially through the investigations of American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910; see James, 1886, 1890). Using the results of these and other investigations, classical scholar Frederic W.H. Myers (1843–1901) – also known as the Society’s main theoretician – developed his model of the subliminal mind. In his model, Myers redefined previous ideas of the unconscious to include psychic phenomena, the concept of a nonphysical mind, and contact with the spiritual world.¹⁰

Cesare Lombroso

Lombroso, who lived between 1835 and 1909, was a well-known Italian psychiatrist and criminologist.¹¹ He studied medicine at the University of Pavia between 1852 and 1858. On 13 March 1858 he graduated as a physician, and on 14 May 1859 he qualified as a surgeon. A week later he joined the Army of Piedmont (northern region of Italy, from which the process of unification of the Italian States began) as a military doctor. This provided him with firsthand knowledge about the poor hygienic conditions in which large segments of the population lived.

In those years Lombroso began his studies on pellagra and on the human and Italian ‘races’. During his university years he had been in an asylum in Vienna, where he began to develop his ideas on the congenital organic abnormalities of madness.

In 1865 Lombroso obtained a post as a university teacher of psychiatry. Later he had a temporary position teaching forensics (1873), and even later (1876) a formal one. In 1890 he took a position in psychiatry, and in 1905 in criminal anthropology. While Lombroso had many admirers and

followers (Villa, 2013), as seen when several of his followers got together in a celebration of his work (Anon., 1908), there is no question that he had many critics as well (e.g. Bougault, 1895). Writing about the 1876 appointment, which was a dual chair covering both forensic medicine and public hygiene at the University of Turin, Villa (2013) noted that others at the University questioned the originality of his chosen topics. Furthermore, even at the height of his fame and influence, some considered him a pseudoscientist (e.g. Anon., 1910b). In 1882, for example, he was expelled by the Società Italiana di Antropologia ed Etnografia for his deviant ideas. New scholarship has documented these perceptions of Lombroso and his work (e.g. Baima Bollone, 1992, 2002; Iannantuoni, Lodesani and Schiraldi, 2015; Knepper and Ystehede, 2013; Montaldo, 2011).

Lombroso proposed that there were born criminals and that they presented particular inherited physical and mental signs of degeneration and atavism, some of which included common facial bone structure, as well as abnormal tactile sensibility and arterial pressure. Furthermore, they showed abnormalities in their bones, especially the skull, and left-handedness, all of which he considered to be clear marks of atavism and degeneration. Lombroso started discussing this in *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876) – which went through several revised editions during the rest of the century – as well as in other publications (e.g. Lombroso, 1887a, 1891a). His work was considered to be a representative of late nineteenth-century degeneration theory (Pick, 1989).

Women and geniuses did not escape Lombroso's schema. In fact, he associated genius with pathology, pointing out that there had been frequent examples of geniuses going insane. He wrote:

The frequency of delusions in their multiform characters of degenerative characteristics, of the loss of affectivity, of heredity, more particularly in the children of inebriate, imbecile, idiotic, or epileptic parents, and, above all, the peculiar character of inspiration, show that genius is a degenerative psychosis of the epileptoid group. (Lombroso, 1896b: 359)

Lombroso, hypnosis and telepathy

Lombroso became interested in psychic phenomena during the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹² By this time psychical research had become known in Europe through the work of the SPR and through other developments (e.g. Aksakof, 1895; James, 1886; Ochorowicz, 1887; Richet, 1884). In Italy, as shown by Biondi (1988), there was a great deal of interest in Spiritualism and mediumship.

During the late nineteenth century, followers of the doctrine of Allan Kardec (pseudonym of Hippolyte-Léon Denizard Rivail, 1804–69; Kardec, 1857) began to establish Spiritist groups. The monthly *Annali dello Spiritismo in Italia* was circulated widely in Italy, and a few mediums began to appear, producing various phenomena, such as automatic writing and table turning. The adherents of Spiritualism were mostly educated people from artistic and literary circles (musicians, music critics, authors, playwrights, etc.) and physicians. There were a very few scientists, and some ordinary and illiterate people. The condemnation of the Catholic Church was strong. Spiritualism was denounced in the Church's journals, magazines and newspapers, as well as in powerful sermons heard every Sunday in the churches (Biondi, 1988, 2013).

Although not well known, Lombroso's involvement with 'occult' and unconventional themes came from his youth. When he was a university student, one of his teachers, Bartolomeo Panizza, had experimentally studied 'thought transmission' under hypnosis while he was a member of a medical commission in Milan in September of 1850; he was also one of the main Italian physicians (and a head of the University of Pavia), and Lombroso developed a friendship with him. When the official report of the medical commission concluded that thought transference did not exist, Panizza remained convinced of the contrary (Biondi, in press). Interestingly Lombroso (1932) wrote that Panizza was a superstitious man who had many irrational beliefs.

There are other examples of Lombroso's early interest in unconventional topics. While in Genoa for some months – during his years as a military physician – he studied homeopathy under the guidance of Dr Giulio Gaiter (1819–1901), well known in Italy for his belief in homeopathy. Lombroso maintained his interest in homeopathy until the end of the century. In 1896, he started to publish on the subject, as well as on mediumship, in his *Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali, ed Antropologia Criminale* (Lombroso, 1896a).

Towards the end of the 1870s, Lombroso showed interest in hypnosis, including its physiology and trance states. In 1882 he published a paper about the action of magnets and the transposition of the senses (Lombroso, 1882) and continued for years to study and publish on the topic. In those years, Lombroso paid attention to the phenomenon of 'psychological polarization', the supposed induction of opposite feelings and states of the mind of hypnotized people when a magnet was brought close to them. The phenomena had been discussed by French researchers (Binet and Fére, 1885), and, finding it interesting, Lombroso conducted some investigations of his own. In 1887 he participated in a medical committee whose remit was to analyse the phenomenon and which concluded, after new experiments, that it did not exist (Biondi, 2004). However, Lombroso himself continued to be convinced of its existence, as seen in his book *Ricerche sui Fenomeni Ipnotici e Spiritici* (1909a).

He also participated in a government commission to evaluate the theatrical shows of public magnetizer Donato, whose real name was Alfred D'Hont. Afterwards Lombroso was firmly convinced that public exhibitions of hypnosis had to be forbidden because of the potential risks that it had for the mental hygiene of the general public. Donato was also known for performing demonstrations of 'telepathy', and Lombroso may have also been exposed to these (e.g. Gallini, 1983).

In 1886 he wrote in 'Studi sull'ipnotismo' that some hysterical women have the skill to know in advance on what day and in what hour they will have a new crisis, which Lombroso interpreted as evidence that the brain had a nervous centre for this in 'civilized' people (Lombroso, 1886b; see also Lombroso, 1887c). Furthermore, he stated that if 'thought and will are phenomena of movement ... what difficulty would there be to think that motion is transmitted at a distance?' (Lombroso, 1887c: 25). He also collaborated with colleagues in works on hypnosis (e.g. Ottolenghi and Lombroso, 1889).

Lombroso (1887b) repeated his firm belief that thought was a vibration capable of exteriorization. It seems that he believed he had a rational theory to explain thought-transference based on cerebral emanations, a model discussed by many others during the nineteenth century (Alvarado, 2015).

Originally, Lombroso was not a friend of Spiritism, having gone on record against the Spiritistic theory (Lombroso, 1886a). But by mid-1888 he seemed somewhat open-minded as can be seen in the article that he published (Lombroso, 1888) in the Roman literary weekly *Fanfulla della Domenica*. Lombroso wrote that, although no particular era was ready for new facts, it could get used to them through their repetition. He also thought the following about reactions to his supposed discovery of a toxin in corn as the cause of pellagra:

Sixteen or twenty years ago, Italy judged the man who had discovered the pellagrozeina to be a fool, and even now the academic world laughs at criminal anthropology, hypnotism, and homeopathy. I wonder if I and my friends, who laugh at spiritism, are wrong, because we are unable to realize an error, and just like fools, being in the dark of the truth, we laugh at those who are not in that dark. (Lombroso, 1888: 2)

In January 1890 Lombroso met professional mind-reader Pickman (who was in Turin for some theatrical shows) and was able to study him. Lombroso (1890a, 1890b) presented a medical and psychological history of this individual, and performed some tests of thought transmission with

him. In these papers, Lombroso showed that he was aware of the work of Pierre Janet and others on telepathy, as well as of the publications of the SPR in general. In fact, by the end of 1890 Lombroso was listed as a Corresponding Member of the SPR (Anon., 1890: 680), so by that time he had access to their *Proceedings* and *Journal* and we may speculate that he was reading them. Interestingly, and relevant to the excerpt below which links genuine psychic phenomena to pathology, Lombroso (1890b: 217) wrote: 'Pickman is lucid because he is neuropathic with incipient ataxia ...'.

Lombroso, with colleagues Archelao Grimaldi and Efisio Ardu, also conducted an inquiry about thought transference (Lombroso, 1891b). By this time Lombroso had accepted telepathy as a reality and believed it was related to abnormal states of extreme sensitivity in persons showing a 'nervous excitability to an extreme degree' (p. 68), a condition he associated with a lack of attention to external stimuli. These disturbances, Lombroso believed, were typical of hysterics, but they also explained the high frequency of thoughts from dying persons, who he presumed had nervous energy disturbances in their cortices due to the emotions of dying (see also a review in a later article: Lombroso, 1904).

He also published accounts of cases of premonition (Lombroso, 1896a), luminous phenomena (Lombroso, 1897), and poltergeist and haunting phenomena (Lombroso, 1901, 1906b). In addition, he also discussed the publications of others about psychic phenomena (e.g. Lombroso, 1908b).

At the end of his life, in 1909, Lombroso published a book entitled *Ricerche sui Fenomeni Ipnnotici e Spiritici* (Lombroso, 1909a), which was translated into English and changed in various ways. The English title of the book was *After Death – What? Spiritistic Phenomena and their Interpretation* (Lombroso, 1909b). The Italian edition has two parts with several chapters in each. The first part is about hypnotism, and discusses the transposition of the senses, thought-transference, and hysterical and epileptic premonitions, among other topics. The second part is about Spiritism, and includes a chapter on the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918), one on apparitions, hauntings, psychic photography, and one on the belief about spirits of the dead among 'savage' and 'barbaric' people. In this book Lombroso stated that living agency was not enough to account for some phenomena.

In one of his articles, Lombroso (1906a) referred to the transitory appearance of the dead, which suggests his acceptance of discarnate spirits, and he returned briefly to the topic of spirit agency in his book: 'During trance ... mediums acquire muscular and intellectual energy which they have not before had, and which can only rarely be explained by the transfer of thought from the minds of spectators (i.e. by telepathy), and which therefore demand a special explanation, – that of aid from the spirits of the departed' (Lombroso, 1909b: 123). In the same book, however, Lombroso also expressed doubts about the explanatory power of exteriorized body energy to explain phenomena at a distance because he saw some physical phenomena as seemingly beyond the forces of the body (pp. 157–8).

Lombroso and the medium Eusapia Palladino

Lombroso had been sceptical about physical mediumship, but he eventually became convinced when he had séances with Palladino, who later became very influential in Italy and elsewhere. In fact, her mediumship, in spite of the occasional detection of fraud (e.g. Courtier, 1908: 521–40; Flammarion, 1907: 520–1), convinced many of the reality of her phenomena, among which were the movement of objects and materializations. Besides Morselli and Myers mentioned above, Palladino was studied by many important men in psychical research and science, including Filippo Bottazzi (1867–1941), Pierre Curie (1859–1906), Albert de Rochas (1837–1914), Carl du Prel (1839–99), Giovanni Battista Ermacora (1869–98), Camille Flammarion (1842–1925), Oliver J.

Lodge (1851–1940), Charles Richet (1850–1935) and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929). In addition to providing evidence for the existence of physical phenomena such as telekinesis and materializations, Palladino was influential in spreading images of fraud and in providing the context for the development of methodologies and theoretical explanations for physical phenomena (Alvarado, 1993, 2013).¹³

In 1891 Lombroso had sittings with Palladino, which convinced him that her telekinetic and materialization phenomena were genuine (Ciolfi, 1891; Lombroso, 1892a). Because of Lombroso's international fame, his conversion received a great deal of publicity, thereby attracting the interest of others to this medium. Soon afterwards, she was studied by a group of scholars and scientists in Milan, the first important investigation of her phenomena involving various conditions and scientific instruments (Aksakof et al., 1893). This was followed by several other investigations published in the 1890s (e.g. de Rochas, 1897; Lodge, 1894; Sidgwick, 1895) and the following decade (e.g. Bottazzi, 1909; Feilding, Baggally and Carrington, 1909; Morselli, 1908).

Lombroso continued having séances with Palladino in later years (e.g. Lombroso, 1909b). In his attempts to make sense of Palladino's phenomena, he presented two main lines of speculations, both of which are included in the Classic Text below. He argued for an exteriorization of nervous force from the medium caused by her unusual pathological state, similar to that of hysterics and the hypnotized. To some extent, but in a highly unorthodox way, the ideas of pathology presented in the excerpt were an extension of Lombroso's ideas about criminals, the mentally ill and women.

In fact, soon after he was convinced of Palladino's phenomena in 1891, Lombroso (1892b) had characterized the medium as a neuropath who suffered from epileptic and hysterical attacks. Nonetheless, Lombroso believed that the physical phenomena were real. Palladino, he wrote, 'presents very serious cerebral anomalies from which come without doubt the interruption of the functions of some cerebral centres, while the activity of other centres is increased, notably the motor centres' (p. 150). He assumed that the increased activity of the motor centres spilled over the medium's body to cause her physical phenomena, a notion that was not new to him, however, but basically a reformulation of older ideas that had been put forward by others to explain physical mediumship (Alvarado, 2006).

Lombroso's opinion about the origin of the forces manifested in the séances was criticized by a few scholars, such as the physicist and psychical researcher Giovanni Battista Ermacora (1858–98, Ermacora, 1892). Nonetheless, the idea influenced a number of subsequent authors who discussed Palladino such as Arullani (1907) and Bottazzi (1909). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Spiritualists reacted negatively and argued, in essence, that Lombroso's ideas did not explain the phenomena (e.g. Anon., 1893; Dias da Cruz, 1893).¹⁴

A number of writers noted that Palladino became personally close to Lombroso. One of these was Paola Lombroso, (1871–1954), Lombroso's daughter, who published an article about the medium in a popular monthly (P. Lombroso, 1907). A biographer of the medium, Tito Alippi (1870–1959), remembered that she called Lombroso 'Papà Lombroso', while the alienist called her 'my daughter' (Alippi, 1962: 148).

There is no question that Lombroso publicized Palladino's mediumship greatly through his writings and testimony (Lombroso, 1892a, 1892b, 1906a, 1908a, 1908b, 1909a). But it may be speculated that he also owed much to the medium, namely that she showed him the existence of 'a world different from the one admitted by neuro-pathologists' (Lombroso, 1892b: 146). According to Biondi (1988: 136–7), Lombroso changed from 'materialistic positivism, to a spiritistic positivism'. Furthermore, he expressed gratitude to the medium for the opportunity to see his mother materialized in séances.¹⁵

Our introduction, and Lombroso's excerpt, is but a reminder of the complexity of ideas about pathology and psychic phenomena. While most of those who pathologized mediumship in the past reduced mediumistic phenomena to abnormal functioning as well as to conventional explanations

of different sorts, Lombroso exhibited a variant position defending the existence of the supernormal nature of the phenomena (the actual occurrence of telekinesis and materializations) while accepting that the medium presented psychopathological symptoms. To make the topic even more complex, Lombroso eventually accepted the action of discarnate spirits as an explanation of mediumship. This reminds us that in the historical study of ideas about mediumship we need to consider such complex interactions between pathology, and human and spirit agency.

Lombroso's speculations included ideas, based on his own and others' concepts, about the nature of women, a topic discussed by Zingrone (1994). In summary, Lombroso's discussion of Palladino contains much from his previous ideas. In his writings, the medium took the role of the criminal, the mentally ill and women in general. That is, the medium provided him with a further opportunity to defend some of his ideas, while at the same time he was extending the materialistic paradigm that inspired them. Lombroso's work represents a particularly rich example of the blending of ideas from psychiatry, criminal anthropology and psychical research, and about the materialistic and the spiritual. As such, his work deserves to be studied in more detail.

The Classic Text

The excerpt presented here comes from Lombroso's *After Death – What?* (1909b: 102–19),¹⁶ published in the year of his death. It is taken from the fourth chapter, 'The Power and Action of Mediums'.

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Classic Text No. 110

Cesare Lombroso on mediumship and pathology

The left eye [of Palladino] presents the phenomenon of Claude Bernard Hörner,¹⁷ as in epileptics; the pupils corectopic [abnormally located] above and below; interiorly, they react poorly to the light, but, on the other hand, react well to adjustment. The arterial pressure, measured by the sphygmomanometer of Riva-Rocci, has given the following results: first trial, on the right 200, on the left 230; second trial, on the right 200, on the left 239. That is to say, she shows an asymmetry in arterial pressure that is common in epileptics, and, like these, exhibits marked tactal left-handedness, the esthesiometer [an instrument that measures tactile sensitivity] revealing great obtusity in the ends of the right fingers (5 millimetres) and less in those of the left (2.5). Her general sensitiveness, studied with the sledge of Rhumkorff, presents, on the other hand, right-handedness, registering her electric sensitiveness as 73 millimetres on the right and 35 on the left, and the pain-causing sensitiveness (*la dolorifica*) as 60 on the right and 30 on the left, revealing itself as being in every way more delicate than in normal cases, in which the general sensibility, tested in the same way, marked 45 millimetres, and the dolorific 20. The barometric sensitiveness is unequal, thereby making confession that the same weight, when tested by the left, is heavier than when tested by the right; it shows differences of weight of 5 grams. The osseous sensibility is, at the diapason, 5 on the right, 8 on the left; is lacking in the forehead; with the little dynamometer of Regnier-Mathieu

it marks 11 kilograms on the right and 12 on the left; when she was approaching the trance state, it marked 15 on both hands. With her right hand and arm extended she supports a weight of 500 grams for a minute and two seconds; with the left for two minutes. She has the hyperaesthetic zone, especially in the ovary. She has the bole in the oesophagus that women with hysteria have, and general weakness, or paresis, in the limbs of the left side.¹⁸ ...

She passes rapidly from joy to grief,¹⁹ has strange phobias (for example, the fear of staining her hands), is extremely impressionable and subject to dreams in spite of her mature age. Not rarely she has hallucinations, frequently sees her own ghost. As a child she believed two eyes glared at her from behind trees and hedges. When she is in anger, especially when her reputation as a medium is insulted, she is so violent and impulsive as actually to fly at her adversaries and beat them.

These tendencies are offset in her by a singular kindness of heart which leads her to lavish her gains upon the poor and upon infants in order to relieve their misfortunes, and which impels her to feel boundless pity for the old and the weak and to lie awake nights thinking of them. The same goodness of heart drives her to protect animals that are being maltreated, by sharply rebuking their cruel oppressors.²⁰

Before the seance, and sometimes when it has begun, she can give notification of what she will accomplish, although afterwards she cannot remember whether she has done what she promised or not, and frequently does not succeed in doing what she boasted she would do.

At the beginning of the trance her voice is hoarse, and all the secretions sweat, tears, even the menstrual secretions – are increased. Hyperesthesia, especially sinistral hyperesthesia, is succeeded by anaesthesia. Reflex movements of the pupils and tendons are lacking. Tremors and myostenia [muscle weakness] occur, the pupils and tendons are lacking. Tremors and myostenia occur, followed by amyostenia and paresis [partial paralysis] (especially dextral). When she is about to enter into the trance state, she lessens the frequency of the respiratory movements, just as do the fakirs, passing from 18 inspirations to 15 and 12 a minute; while, on the other hand, the heart beats increase from 70 to 90, and even to 120. The hands are seized with jerkings and tremors. The joints of the feet and the hands take on movements of flexure or extension, and every little while become rigid. The passing from this stage to that of active somnambulism is marked by yawns, sobs, perspiration on the forehead, passing of insensible perspiration through the skin of the hands, and strange physiognomical expressions. Now she seems a prey to a kind of anger, expressed by imperious commands and sarcastic and critical phrases, and now to a state of voluptuous-erotic ecstasy.²¹

In the state of trance she first becomes pale, turning her eyes upward and her sight inward and nodding her head to right and left; then she passes into a state of ecstasy ..., exhibiting many of the gestures that are frequent in hysterical fits, such as yawnings, spasmodic laughter, frequent chewing, together with clairvoyance and a word often extremely select and even scientific, and not seldom in a foreign tongue, with very rapid ideation, so that she comprehends the thought of those present even when they do not express it aloud or utter it in a mysterious manner. Morselli observed in her trance state all the characteristics of hysteria, namely, (1) loss of memory; (2) her personifications as John King, in whose name she speaks; (3) passional acts, now erotic, now sarcastic; (4) obsession, especially in the shape of fear that she may not succeed in the seances; (5) hallucinations; and so forth. Toward the end of the trance, when the more important phenomena occur,²² she falls into true convulsions and cries out like a woman who is lying-in, or else falls into a profound sleep, while from the aperture in the parietal bone of her head there exhales a warm fluid, or vapor, sensible to the touch. ...

After the seance Eusapia is overcome by morbid sensitiveness, hyperesthesia, photophobia, and often by hallucinations and delirium (during which she asks to be watched from harm), and by serious disturbances of the digestion, followed by vomiting if she has eaten before the seance, and finally by true paresis of the legs, on account of which it is necessary for her to be carried and to be

undressed by others. These disturbances are much aggravated if through the imprudence of any member of the company she is exposed to unexpected light, either before or after the sitting. ...

Nor are these morbid phenomena peculiar to Eusapia: they may be observed and verified in all the mediums.

The grandmother, mother, and one of the brothers of the famous medium Elena Smith²³ ... were subject to hypnotic and mediumistic phenomena. She herself had obsessions, hallucinations, from childhood up, and, later in life, fits of somnambulism, dysmenorrhea, and, in the mediumistic trance, complete anaesthesia of one hand and *allochiria* [confusion of sensations], so that if pricked in the right hand she feels the pain in the left, and also believes she sees on the left objects which are really on her right.

Mrs. Piper, when entering into a trance, begins with a slight convulsion, with peculiar shocks or starts, upon which follow stupor, stertorous breathings, a cry,²⁴ after which she incarnates herself and the spirits communicate with her on the left side (the usual Spiritistic left-handedness) ...²⁵ Her best communications are obtained at the beginning of the sitting. It must be observed that Mrs. Piper became a medium after her fright at a thunderbolt and after she had had two operations for the removal of tumors. ...

Politi,²⁶ when out of the trance, does not exhibit any anomaly: in the trance this medium has convulsions, anaesthesias, terrific zoomorphic hallucinations, delirious ideas of persecutions.

All this is affined to hysteria, – just as (says Morselli very truly) tabes and general paralysis, without being due to syphilitic processes, develop more in those who have been syphilitic, just as those afflicted with gravel and asthma, while they may not be by nature gouty or rheumatic persons, have an affinity for those troubled with these diseases, although they have never had suffering in the joints.

The foregoing diagnosis suffices very well for the conclusion that the whole thing is a true hysterical equivalent, a new form of hysterical attack, just as, in my opinion, the creative frenzy (or *oestrus*) of genius is an equivalent of the psycho-epileptic paroxysm on a neurotic and morbid background.

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Notes (by CSA and MB)

1. Some histories of Spiritualism in the USA include: Braude, 2001; Buescher, 2004; Carroll, 1997; Cox, 2003. There is also some literature about developments in other countries, such as: Biondi, 1988; Edelman, 1995; Oppenheim, 1985. A useful older overview is Podmore, 1902.
2. Many examples of mediumship, in the USA and elsewhere, appear in the references listed on Note 1. Examples of nineteenth-century discussions include Crookes, 1874; Edmonds and Dexter, 1853. There is much about mediumship in the works of, among others, Edelman, 1995; Galvan, 2010.
3. The idea that mediumship could be explained by unusual powers of the living medium was present in the early literature of Spiritualism; Alvarado, Nahm and Sommer, 2012.
4. For overviews emphasizing mediums, see: Alvarado, 2010; Alvarado and Zingrone, 2012; Le Maléfan, 1999; Owen, 1990; Zingrone, 1994.
5. All translations are by the authors (CSA and MB).
6. For biographical information about Fairfield, see Anon., 1888. The Spiritualist and psychical research literatures are full of ideas of nervous or vital forces to explain mediumistic and other psychic phenomena, as discussed by: Alvarado, 2006; Alvarado and Nahm, 2011.
7. On Morselli, see: Brancaccio, 2014; Guarnieri, 1988.

8. For discussions of psychical research in Italy, see: Biondi, 1988; Biondi, in press. Other countries are studied by: Gauld, 1968; Moore, 1977; Plas, 2000; Wolffram, 2009.
9. Much information about the SPR can be found in Gauld (1968), as well as in later writings, e.g. Alvarado, 2002; Cerullo, 1982; Oppenheim, 1985.
10. James's involvement with psychical research has been discussed by many, e.g. Alvarado, 2016; Alvarado and Krippner, 2010; Bordogna, 2008: Ch. 3; Junior, Araujo and Moreira-Almeida, 2013. Mrs Piper was very important for the development of the SPR and for psychical research in general; Gauld, 1968; Sage, 1904; Tymn, 2013. Myers summarized his ideas in a posthumously published book: Myers, 1903. His work has been discussed by: Gauld, 1968; Hamilton, 2009; Kelly, 2007.
11. On Lombroso, in addition to older sources (e.g. Anon., 1908; Kurella, 1911; G. Lombroso, 1921), see: Baima Bollone, 2002; Bulferetti, 1975; Gibson, 2002; Horn, 2003; Knepper and Ystehede, 2013; Villa, 1985.
12. For discussions of Lombroso's psychical research, see the writings of: Biondi, 1988: 127–40; Bozzano, 1908; Bulferetti, 1975: 352, 439–58; Tabori, 1972: 173–210; Zingrone, 1994. Bozzano (1908: 55) presents a bibliography of most of Lombroso's psychical research publications.
13. For overviews of the medium's life, séances, phenomena, evidential aspects of her performances, and theoretical attempts to explain them, see: Carrington, 1909; de Rochas, 1896: 1–315. See also discussions of Palladino's life and behaviours (Alvarado, 1993, 2011), and of her mediumship in the context of Italian developments (Biondi, 1988: 96–100, 121–9, 134–59). Her case has also been discussed elsewhere by such authors as: Alippi, 1962; Blondel, 2002; Inglis, 1992: Chs 35, 38.
14. For an overview of various concepts of force developed to explain Palladino's phenomena, see Alvarado, 1993. Most Spiritists and Spiritualists celebrated Lombroso's conversion, which they saw as a triumph for their movement. But they were critical of Lombroso's reluctance to accept spirit agency at the beginning of his involvement with the subject.
15. Lombroso (1908a: 379) wrote: 'I felt one of the most pleasing inward excitements of my life, a pleasure that was almost a spasm, which aroused a sense ... of gratitude to the medium who threw my mother again into my arms after so many years, and this great event caused me to forget, not once but many times, the humble position of Eusapia, who had done for me, even were it purely automatically, that which no giant in power and thought could ever have done.'
16. Most of the psychical research journals reviewed the book in a generally positive way, e.g. Anon., 1910a; Hyslop, 1910. As was to be expected, sceptics had many criticisms. A case in point was psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1863–1944), a well-known critic of Spiritualism and psychical research. Among his negative comments about the book, Jastrow (1909: 286) wrote: 'One can only pause dumbfounded, and ask, "After Lombroso – What?"'
17. The impairment of sympathetic nerve function that may produce a dropping of the eyelid, a constriction of the pupil, and other problems.
18. Here Lombroso had a footnote to Arullani, 1907. This hyperesthesia was mentioned in previous descriptions of hysterical symptoms, e.g. Richer, 1885: 34. A definition of the 'bole' was given around the time when Lombroso was writing: 'a sensation as if a ball –globus hystericus – is ascending from the hypogastrium toward the stomach, chest and neck, producing a sense of strangulation'; Dunglison and Stedman, 1903: 560. Some mentions of this phenomenon during the nineteenth-century include: Carter, 1853: 38; Charcot, 1879: 192, 219.
19. Other observers commented on the medium's emotional and mood swings, e.g. Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1: 130–1.
20. This, and some of the above-mentioned information, presumably came from the medium. However, as pointed out before (Alvarado, 2011; Biondi, 1988: 96–7), she was not a particularly reliable source of information.
21. According to de Krauz (1894), Palladino often showed hysterical laughter, a red face and an expression of ecstasy of erotic appearance. 'Eusapia, semi awake, throws herself on the arms of men who she finds likeable, the embrace manifests in general the desire for caresses' (p. 172).
22. Lombroso's observations about the positive relationship of trance depth to major phenomena are consistent with those made by Visani-Scozzi (1901: table between p. 392 and 393). Initially Morselli (1907:

- 340) made a similar claim, but he later doubted that there was an ‘absolute correspondence with the depth or the phase of her *trance state*’; Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1: 209 (original italics). The medium was sometimes reported to produce low-magnitude physical phenomena out of trance, e.g. Imoda, 1908: 410; de Rochas, 1896: 310–14.
23. Here Lombroso cites Flournoy, 1900. Hélène Smith was the pseudonym of Catherine Élise Müller (1861–1929), who was studied by Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920); see also Shamdasani, 1994.
 24. These convulsions were observed by early students of Piper’s mediumship, e.g. Hodgson, 1898: 537; Lodge, 1890: 444.
 25. Here Lombroso cites Sage’s 1902 book about Piper (which has been translated to English: Sage, 1904). Lombroso saw left-handedness and left-sidedness as an indication of atavism associated with criminality and madness (Lombroso, 1884; see also Kushner, 2013), something he affirmed indicated ‘that in criminals and lunatics the right lobe predominated very much more often than in normal persons’; Lombroso, 1903: 443. In a later paper commenting on Morselli’s (1908) book, Lombroso (1908a) expanded his views. He said that Palladino ‘usually left-handed, became right-handed at one sitting, and Morselli himself became left-handed’ (p. 378). These observations, as recorded in his book (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1: 351–2), referred to changes in dynamometric readings measuring hand-grip strength from which it was inferred that handedness had changed. Lombroso related this to Edoardo Audenino’s (1876–1944) ideas of the transitory acquisition of left-handedness in abnormal states, something Audenino (1907, 1908) mentioned in relation to hysteria and epilepsy. This, and both the left-handedness of mediums and their ‘reverse writing’ (a reference to mirror writing in automatic writing, a topic discussed by Myers, 1885), led Lombroso (1908a: 378) to speculate again on ‘the increased participation of the right lobe of the brain in mediumistic states’. Harrington (1987) and Alvarado (in press) have discussed these issues. For previous speculations about the brain hemispheres and Palladino, see Visani-Scozzi, 1901: 61–2, 64–5.
 26. On physical medium Augusto Politi (b. 1860), see: Biondi, 1988: 187–90; Egidi, 1952.

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