The Making of Jane Austen

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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

The First Jane Austen Dissertation

George Pellew and the Human Telephone

"Jane Austen Studies." David Lodge made fun of it in his academic novel, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (1975). The novel's blowhard protagonist, Professor Morris Zapp, concocts a plan to write commentaries on Austen's novels from every conceivable angle. Not "to enhance others' enjoyment and understanding of Jane Austen," he thinks to himself, but to "put a definitive stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject."[1] Zapp's plan for literary criticism is the project of a killjoy, one of Casaubon-esque *Key-to-All-Mythologies* proportions. It's hilariously wrongheaded, something Lodge's novel relishes sending up. Zapp seeks to quash Jane Austen studies, to serve as its terminus ad quem.

It's difficult now to imagine Jane Austen studies in its infancy, when the territory was a young scholar's for the taking. That's precisely the situation in which William Henry George Pellew (1859–92) found himself as a student at Harvard in the 1880s. There, George Pellew (as he was called) wrote himself into the history books of Jane Austen studies, earning a generous footnote. He is credited with having written the very first Jane Austen dissertation, a claim to the honor that's been oft repeated and that has gone long uncontested. The claim itself is worth our investigating further, and Pellew deserves greater mention in Jane Austen studies. But it's not only because what he did is important to the world of ideas. He also deserves to be a protagonist in an Austen-inspired campus novel.

Pellew's contribution to Austen scholarship was a very short book titled *Jane Austen's Novels* (1883).[2] It deserves the label pioneering. There seem to have been only two book-length studies devoted specifically to Austen prior to his, Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* (which went through several editions) and prolific novelist Sarah Tytler's (Henrietta Keddie) *Jane Austen and Her*

Works (1880), a book geared toward young readers. Pellew's book was early enough to be notable, both at the time and in retrospect. Today's Austen reception histories mention Pellew in passing. They often immediately go on to quote from a private letter to Pellew from novelist Henry James (1843–1916). James writes to thank Pellew for the present of his "thin red book" on Austen, half-praising it as "an attempt in scientific criticism of the delightful Jane." James admits he opened the younger man's book with trepidation: "When I read the first page or two I trembled lest you should overdo the science," but he happily declares he had nothing to fear.[3] For James, Pellew was "if anything, too mild" in his criticisms of Austen.

Jane Austen's Novels and the exchange of letters it prompted was a seminal moment for the author's entrée into higher education, yet few have looked more deeply into its circumstances. That deserves remedying, as the story of the first Austen dissertation might be said to resemble *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* more than it does literary criticism. We think of dissertations and of Austen in schools as staid, even stolid, affairs. Yet the world of academia and the world of popular culture for Jane Austen were sometimes not so far very apart in the late nineteenth century. At least that is what the story of Pellew and Austen suggests. There was a time when Austen's name flitted between town and gown in ways that show we've drawn too hard a line in our histories between the two arenas, particularly prior to the 1920s. Pellew would go on to be famous in ways that are stunningly peculiar, drawing Austen's legacy into the paranormal. If you choose to believe the least skeptical of these sources, then the man who wrote the first Jane Austen dissertation came back from the dead. Frequently.[4]

Before getting to those mystical details, the staid literary criticism part deserves its exposition. As a Harvard undergraduate, Pellew had taken a course, English Literature in the Eighteenth Century, with a man who would become his mentor and friend, Thomas Sergeant Perry (1845–1928). Perry was a "cosmopolitan Back-Bay Brahmin," the great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin, who delivered lectures that must have been the catalyst for Pellew's Austen work.[5] The warm dedication to Perry at the beginning of Pellew's Austen book suggests it (*Novels* 3). His well-informed, highly allusive fifty-page study of her novels reads her alongside authors ranging from Richardson, Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis, to Fielding, Smollett, Burney, and Edgeworth. Pellew shows impressive familiarity with the novels, verse, and nonfiction to which Austen was responding, making extensive comparisons of her, too, with Eliot and Brontë, usually to Austen's detriment. In ranking the three women in

this way, Pellew was by no means going against the grain. Eliot and Brontë were seen by most literary experts as Austen's superior in the 1880s. Yet Pellew was doing new things, too, as we saw Henry James note in his calling the book an attempt at scientific criticism of the delightful Jane.

Pellew certainly had his opinions about Austen and about her literary achievement. He gives us a window into his literary values when he remarks on how *Persuasion* is "to my taste, the most mellow and charming of all the novels." He criticizes *Pride and Prejudice* as containing "unsympathetic wit" but finds in *Persuasion* "for the first time in Miss Austen, an element of pathos" (*Novels* 33). He also takes up the commonplace belief that Austen's novels are without a politics, arguing that they aren't fully developed as art as a result. He sees her characters (especially the females) as limited (40). But what redeems that shortcoming is Austen's ability to describe "accurately what she saw" (47). He expresses disappointment that her fiction cannot "extort tears or compel admiration," but he concedes that "her novels give a real though unexciting pleasure" (50). (Here he echoes Charlotte Brontë's negative assessment of Austen as without passion, fast becoming a refrain in criticism of the day, but he gives it a more positive spin.[6])

Pellew's careful close readings of Austen's novels in his published work nevertheless suggest that he finds her brand of "real," "unexciting pleasure" to be highly compelling. He sympathetically links a sense of Austen's technical discussion of method with domestic confinement, as one of the few critics to study his book puts it.[7] He opines that her circumscribed life must have been tedious and commonplace. But he doesn't see that as preventing literary achievement. In her fiction, Pellew argues, "she anticipated the scientific precision that the spirit of the age is now demanding in literature and art" (*Novels* 49). She admirably avoids artifice. At a time when elite men—especially those in Pellew's circle of male champions—seemed either firmly pro or con Austen, Pellew's criticism sets out to be more measured. He seeks to do in literary criticism what he argues Austen did in her fictional method—to describe accurately and scientifically.

In life, Pellew was almost a male Emma Woodhouse. He was the definition of well born. His upper-crust father, Henry Edward Pellew, was born in England. His mother, Eliza Jay, was a Founding Father–descended American. Toward the end of his life, George Pellew's father became Viscount Exmouth. His mother—granddaughter of John Jay, first chief justice of the United States—didn't live to see it. She died in 1869, when George was just a boy. Widower Henry Pellew later married his late wife Eliza's sister,

Augusta, a union that was then illegal in England.[8] The Pellews' forbidden marriage prompted their immigration to the United States, where Henry became involved in charitable projects serving former slaves and families in poverty. Eliza's two young sons were enrolled in St. Paul's School in New Hampshire. George eventually matriculated to Harvard, taking an AB in 1880 and earning a law degree in 1883. By all accounts, he was a remarkable student, graduating first in the class of '80, writing the class ode, and distinguishing himself in classics and English.[9] His classmate Theodore Roosevelt is said to have found Pellew "*very* nice" (qtd. in Kenny 115).

Pellew's Austen book was completed when he was at Harvard's law school, ultimately winning the Bowdoin Dissertation Prize. A few subsequent Austen critics have largely misunderstood the term "dissertation," seeing Pellew's work as the culminating project for a doctoral degree in English literature. It wasn't. "Dissertation" refers here to a long essay. The Bowdoin Prizes, "some of Harvard's oldest and most prestigious student awards," were established in 1810, given to the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Adams, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and John Updike.[10] Yet Pellew's being awarded such a prize for a study of a British woman novelist—even if it was not the first English literature PhD awarded on Austen—is unquestionably significant. It was momentous in that it proved she had entered academia as an object worthy of extended study.[11] On the basis of his award-winning Austen essay, Pellew was awarded an MA.[12]

Pellew's mentor in this work was its dedicatee, the aforementioned Professor Perry, lifelong friend of Henry James. This connection explains how an unknown Harvard law student's thin red Austen book could prompt a response from a famous novelist.[13] Perry opened many other doors for Pellew, beyond what was customary for student and teacher. Perry refers to Pellew in print as "my friend."[14] Perry had been on annual appointments at Harvard, but he was dismissed after 1881, despite his own protestations, along with those of public figures and students, with whom he was popular.[15] Shortly after Perry was dismissed from Harvard, he went into a deep depression. At that time, Pellew became a boarder in Perry's Boston home, living with his wife and their two young daughters (Kenny 116).

Mrs. Perry's name would become the most enduring among them as the noted American Impressionist painter, Lilla Cabot Perry (1848–1933). The years in which Pellew lived in the Perrys' home were difficult ones for both husband and wife. Thomas, scrambling for money, wrote for periodicals and taught courses at Radcliffe, and Lilla had two miscarriages. She spent a great

deal of time lying down.[16] Eventually, Thomas's father died, leaving him a substantial inheritance, making frequent trips abroad possible for the family (Haralson and Johnson 429). Pellew seems to have become like family to the Perrys. One gossipy source claims the younger man kept a photograph of Lilla in his pocket and that she and Pellew were in love, a suspect conclusion reached through a reading of their cryptic, amorous poetry.[17] Pellew ultimately left the Perry household and the practice of law, but he stuck with his poetry.

Pellew was a poet of "contemplated emotion," a man angelically singular; at least that is the estimate of Pellew's friend and mentor, William Dean Howells (1837–1920) (introduction viii). Howells, the "Dean of American Letters," is a man who features prominently in studies of Austen's legacy, because he seems, throughout his life, to be everywhere Austen's legacy is. Howells, James, and Perry were all close friends, further explaining how up-and-comer Pellew entered Howells's circle. In a private letter to James in 1886, Howells mentions that Pellew has "come back to town, & I find him very interesting. He's a very able fellow, and distinctly a literary promise."[18] Howells took a special interest in Pellew, twenty years his junior; they had in common an enthusiasm for Austen. Howells would later spearhead the American arm of the Austen centenary memorial campaign for a plaque in Chawton, England, unveiled in 1917. George Pellew, however, wouldn't live to see it. He died in 1892, at age thirty-two. By then he'd published several books, but he never quite found his niche or his fame.

It is Howells, again, who gives us the most sustained account of Pellew's stellar qualities and his fall from social grace. Pellew had become a source of negative gossip, perhaps for indulging in drink. In a private letter from 1888, Howells writes so colorfully of Pellew that it's worth quoting at length:

> I've known Pellew for three years, and I've never met him in the state in which too many others seem to have met him. He was in and out of my house familiarly, and was the delight of us all, for from youngest to oldest, we felt his rare quality and admirable ability and learning, which were almost without alloy of egotism. He has had a hard time since he left college, and discouragement has been, I'm sure, a large element in any temptation to which he has yielded . . . [A]t times he has been quite shabby—slovenly he would be in purple: he would get a leg in one sleeve and an arm in another, and rest in absent-minded content. He often came with a single overshoe: I dare say his stockings were heedlessly put on. But he was always full of high discourse, to which one could not listen without profound respect for his extraordinary mind.[19]

Pellew would live just four more years, with Howells remaining steadfastly his supporter, in life and in death.

Conflicting accounts of Pellew's last hours have prompted questions. Some sources have him being thrown from a horse.[20] One account has him "falling into a construction site on the way home from a dinner party" (Kenny 114). News reports said Pellew struck his head and was killed by a concussion, after an inflammation of the eyes made him partially blind. This account adds that his watch and other valuables were found with him, with "no marks of violence," to rule out foul play.[21] Yet another account suggests Pellew was found dead outside of a gambling establishment, possibly with his head bashed in and neck broken. These details were then left out of a falsified coroner's report (Munves 148). Whatever its circumstances, Pellew's death was sudden and newsworthy. He was a young man of promise unfulfilled, who might one day have become a viscount and a literary lion. His death inspired not only printed obituaries but moving posthumous tributes.

The most enthusiastic encomium was from Howells. He extolls Pellew as the popular ideal of the literary man. To Howells, Pellew was friendly, unpretentious, and "just as one imagines De Quincey, Lamb, or Hunt must have been," often failing at the "practical and the commercial" side of life (introduction v). This tribute was eventually published as an introduction to Pellew's posthumous book of poetry. There Howells mentions Pellew's Austen essay, which he identifies as winning the Bowdoin prize and taking "one of the first steps in the direction of the new criticism—the criticism which studies, classifies, and registers." Just six years after its publication, with Pellew now dead, *Jane Austen's Novels* was being primed to take an honored place in a growing literary critical movement. According to Howells, Pellew's second book, *In Castle and Cabin; or, Talks in Ireland in 1887* (1888), was completed as "faithfully, directly, and impartially as he had studied the novels of Jane Austen" (vii).

What Howells neglects to mention—and certainly it was intentional—is Pellew's impassioned political writing. In private, in the 1888 letter quoted above, Howells praises Pellew's "masterly" woman suffrage pamphlet. Howells admits to his correspondent, "I must hereafter count myself a believer in the reason as well as the right of women's voting, and I must own that [Pellew] has persuaded me."[22] Pellew's *Woman and the Commonwealth; or, A Question of Expediency* (1888) is a remarkable book in support of women's right to vote. In his treatise, Pellew makes direct reference to Austen: "For one individual, or for any number of individuals, to assign arbitrary, definite limits to the

activity of another or of others, is an act of bigotry and injustice obviously indefensible on scientific principles. The so-called 'proper sphere' of women has, moreover, been perpetually changing. In the time of Jane Austen it was thought improper for women to write novels, twenty years ago it was thought improper for women to study medicine and anatomy, and even to-day there are many people who think it improper for women to lecture" (25–26). Each generation must overcome its prejudices, Pellew suggests; his embrace of Austen resonates with his antisexism. Pellew had served as secretary of the New York Woman Suffrage Party; he had corresponded with women's rights activist Lucy Stone (1818–93) and had addressed a Boston suffrage meeting.[23] He was ahead of his time in the "science" of Austen criticism, and he was precocious in linking Austen's name to women's suffrage in the 1880s.

Yet Howells's hagiographic essay steers away from discussing his friend's politics and lauds his rather regular poems. What comes through in Howells's essay is a portrait of the lovable, inquisitive man who wrote the verse. Howells claims children loved Pellew and that he captivated all in his orbit (introduction vii–viii). In the end, Howells can't imagine Pellew dead, fancying him somewhere "disputing with kindred minds, and making the celestial echoes answer the glad laugh with which he either won or lost a point" (xi). Howells, who also enjoyed imagining Austen as an immortal, had no way of knowing how prescient he would be with this posthumous vision of his young friend Pellew.[24] Pellew's early death and hidden-in-plain-sight feminism are not the only things he had in common with Austen. His afterlife, like hers, also took an unanticipated turn toward unlikely celebrity.

Pellew had other interesting friends, including the parapsychologist Dr. Richard Hodgson (1855–1905). Hodgson was a Cambridge-educated Australian bachelor who'd joined the English Society for Psychical Research, or SPR. He left England for America, sent by the SPR to serve as the secretary to its Boston branch (Kenny 113). Hodgson was a man of animal spirits, laughter, repartee, and gesticulation, with a decided love for poetry, which no doubt drew him to Pellew and vice versa.[25] The two men were said to have argued frequently over whether spirits might survive bodily death. Hodgson believed it conceivable, if not probable, but Pellew was skeptical. In what may have been either an ongoing joke or a dead serious matter between the two, Pellew promised Hodgson that if he died first, he'd try to return to offer evidence of the afterlife (Kenny 119).

According to some sources, Pellew did just that. Weeks after his sudden death, Pellew began to communicate with Hodgson beyond the grave.

(This tidbit has gone unnoticed in Austen studies, but it has long been known among parapsychologists, suggesting the two groups don't communicate often enough.) Pellew's beyond-the-grave communication came through "the most famous, most trustworthy, direct-voice medium who ever lived," Leonora Piper (1859–1950), known as the "human telephone to the spirit world."[26] Pellew's spirit was said to inhabit Mrs. Piper's body, using her hand to write down his words, in what was called "automatic writing." For years, Piper channeled Pellew's spirit through pen and paper. In the 1890s, the author of the first Jane Austen thesis became the era's most prominent visitor from the great beyond.

Piper—described as a "housewife" who never finished high school, a married mother of two—was paid for her services. In the early years, she earned a dollar, and in later years as much as twenty dollars per sitting (Gardner 215). In the "automatic writing" phase of her mediumship, she was a high-ranking member not just of a movement but of an industry. Just four years after the fad of automatic writing took off, it is estimated that there were two thousand automatic writing mediums in the United States alone (McCabe 137). The number of noted intellectuals who came to test Mrs. Piper's powers, to witness her at work, may now seem astonishing to us. Piper spent time in private rooms, putting on displays of her supernatural powers, particularly for members of the intellectual class who were investigating spiritualism. Piper came to prominence through the notice of William James, brother of novelist Henry. William James, the well-known Harvard psychologist, was a founder of the American Society for Psychical Research. James's association with Piper may have made her famous, but in Richard Hodgson she would find her most fervent believer.

Hodgson is said to have visited Piper three times a week to communicate with the dead, assiduously transcribing the details of each visit.[27] He had detectives follow her and her husband, to determine whether they were secretly researching the lives of their clients.[28] Early on in her mediumship, spirits had appeared to Piper while she was in a trance, and "controls," as they were called, took over her speech. One control was a Native American maiden who went by the name "Chlorine" (Kenny 113). Piper was especially susceptible to controls who had been famous, such as Martin Luther, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Sarah Siddons (Gardner 217; Kenny 113). She also channeled writers such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sir Walter Scott (who talked about the sun and planets), and George Eliot, whose spirit reported that she'd seen Adam Bede.[29]

SIXTH SECTION. THE NEW YORK HERALD. PAGES 1 TO 10.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 1899.—[COPYRIGHT, 1899, BY JAMES GORDON BENNETT.] PRICE FIVE CENTS.

MRS. PIPER A HUMAN TELEPHONE TO THE SPIRIT WORLD

VOICES FROM THE OTHER WORLD

Astonishing Claims Made for a Woman Who Has Convinced Scientific Men of Her Powers.

I.

"I WILL be Bedlam let loose!" cried the Professor. "Wait till our report comes out! Then the storm will break. We shall have unbelievers but loud mouthed disbelievers. Those we welcome, for they must prove our chief bulwark against what we chiefly dread, the horde of irresponsible and dishonest sympathizers and imitators, so called, who will turn to dishonest uses the results of our honest

It was he who, in 1884, climbed upon the stage at Koster & Bial's and exposed the fraudulent pretenses of Anna Abbott, the Georgia magnetic girl, and so drove her into obscurity.

He has brought dismay into many a spiritualistic sitting through his extensive knowledge of spiritualistic tricks, aided by a pair of eyes of unusual keenness. His vision is so good, he informed me, that when engaged at Johns Hopkins University in a series of optical experiments his own eyes were used rather than human beings, and raised the average of human eyesight.

He has studied sleight of hand. He knows how all the tricks of Herrmann and Keller were performed. He can perform many of them himself. As to slate writing and kindred illicit humbuggeries, he assured me that

under the close observation, first of Professor James, afterward of Dr. Hodgson and other competent persons. She and her husband, Mr. Piper, have lived in Boston. Her personal baggage has been searched, her correspondence read, her goings out and comings in closely watched. Yet, in all these years not the smallest circumstance has come to light reflecting in any way upon her honesty. Certainly no other medium has ever been subjected to so stringent an ordeal. And in view of the fact that, under far more meagre supervision, Dr. Hodgson himself, and other less competent inquirers, have succeeded in bringing home the charge of dishonesty to many professional mediums, it is a fact entitled to much weight that this medium should have passed through the most searching and prolonged inquiries without even a rumor of exposure or the discovery of any suspicious circumstance.

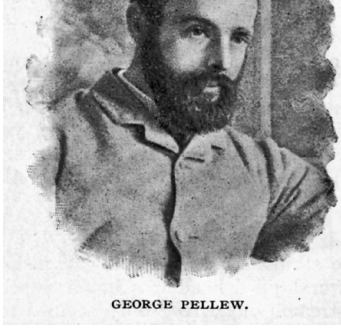
And so it was that she attracted an uncommon class of visitors. Many of the most intelligent people flocked to her. All were puzzled. Many were convinced. Among the rest came Professor William James, of Harvard University.

dreds of mediums and had found them all wanting.

"Mrs. ——(sisters all," he told me, "I can only say that one or two honest people may not be found in the professional ranks, but I will say that I have never met them."

Then he went on to relate how he had first heard the name of Mrs. Piper.

"One day in March, 1885," he said, "I experienced a strange sensation. I thought I felt the presence of my dead mother in the room. I saw nothing, I heard nothing, but irresistibly the consciousness came upon me that she was there trying to make me cognizant of the fact. Despite the vividness of the sensation I strove to throw it aside. I reasoned with myself that it was an ordinary phenomenon arising from a morbid mental state. It was a merely subjective illusion. It had no connection with any reality. But I could not get rid of the thought from my mind. Two days later there reached me a letter from an American friend telling me of a sitting he had held with a Boston medium, a Mrs. Piper, a name I had never heard before. She had mentioned my name and had directed this friend to transmit a message from my dead mother. It was to the effect that I must not doubt that she had



GEORGE PELLEW.

Figure 10.1. *Above*, "Mrs. Piper a Human Telephone to the Spirit World," *New York Herald*, 18 June 1899, sixth section, 1; *right*, George Pellew, *Cosmopolitan* 13, no. 5 (September 1892): 527.

Pellew's spirit was one of the first controls to communicate with Piper through automatic writing and one of the first identifiable as a once-living, nonfamous person. Recently deceased, he was a "clear and lucid" visitor from the dead.[30] Parapsychology, like literary criticism, was then enamored of appearing scientific. Most of the spirits who visited Piper are recorded in the parapsychological literature with pseudonyms or initials, to protect their identities. George Pellew was given both: the pseudonym George Pelham, and the initials G.P.[31] G.P. was said to recognize with accuracy whether a visitor was someone he'd known in life. Thirty friends visited and were correctly recognized by his spirit, among a hundred decoys.[32] Hodgson was convinced that his friend G.P. had returned from beyond the grave. Some believed that Piper was merely telepathic, reading her visitors' minds. She herself even offered this as a possible explanation of her powers. Others were entirely skeptical of all of it.

Some of Pellew's Harvard professors were skeptics, but others were apparently believers. A number of them came to visit Mrs. Piper to see whether their former student was indeed making contact from beyond the grave. Both Perrys—Pellew's Austen professor and his poet-artist wife—joined an early sitting with Mrs. Piper. They were said to have been "intrigued," and they ultimately invited the medium into their own home. The Perrys devised authenticity tests that Piper seemed to pass, suggesting it was Pellew who was speaking through her pen (Kenny 120). The Perrys would end up having fourteen recorded sittings with Mrs. Piper in their home, in order to talk to Pellew. These were events that one SPR writer claims had a "lasting influence" on the Perrys' lives (Munves 146). Given the frequency described, this certainly seems plausible.

One of Pellew's Harvard professors, in a session with Piper, brought up the subject of Jane Austen. Skeptical Harvard art professor Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908) asked G.P. to name the subject of his prize-winning essay. But G.P. "did not give the name of Jane Austen," instead offering that of John Jay, the subject of another book Pellew had written, about one of his maternal ancestors (Hodgson 525). But when Norton noticed the mistake and mentioned Jane Austen to G.P., that hint took hold. From that point on, Jane Austen herself began to appear in G.P.'s spirit writing. Hodgson reports that several times thereafter, at the end of a sitting, "when the writing became particularly dreamy, the name of Professor Norton appeared in connection with that of Jane Austen" (333).[33] University professors in the 1890s were

arguing over whether a medium's written references to Jane Austen were proof of their former student's spirit visits.

Other Austen critics came to test Piper. Most entertaining to imagine among them was Andrew Lang (1844–1912), who had himself written a book called *Letters to Dead Authors* (1886). That book included among its contents a fictional letter written to the spirit of Jane Austen. Lang, too, visited Mrs. Piper to test G.P.'s genuineness. He came away concluding that Pellew had *not* returned from the dead, believing Mrs. Piper deluded but honest, illustrative of "savage phenomena" and a "secondary personality."[34] Pellew's spirit was said to visit the living through Piper's writing for many years. But eventually he began to dash in and out of her communications, as if he had "passed on" a second time (W. James 38). Where Pellew left off, other dead stepped in. Just eight days after a robust Hodgson died suddenly while playing handball at a boat club in 1905, Piper began channeling Hodgson's spirit, too (15).

Records of Hodgson's afterlife as recorded through Piper come down to us from the alternately skeptical and credulous accounts of Henry James's brother William James, who painstakingly collated sixty-nine sittings with the spirit of "R.H." One of the subjects R.H. communicated about was "dear old G. Pelham [Pellew], who did so much for me—more than all the rest put together" (W. James 9). Hodgson's spirit explained why G.P. had disappeared from Piper's cast of trance characters: he'd risen to the seventh sphere, or what we would call heaven (Robbins 94). Later readers came to know about G.P. and Mrs. Piper from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *History of Spiritualism* (1926). In fact, Doyle would credit Hodgson's "George Pelham" séance records with being the first phenomena that made his "mind receptive and sympathetic" to spiritualism.[35] Piper, who retired on a modest trust fund from the SPR, was never charged with committing a fraud, quite a rarity in her line of work.

It's an odd fact of literary history that the first published full-length study of Austen that came out of a school setting and her first young student-scholar led to the author making an appearance in paranormal history. In recent years, scholars have written eloquently about Jane Austen's being imagined as a ghost and what that might mean to her celebrity and legacy.[36] But we tend to forget how tightly the scholarly and the pop-culture paranormal, like the scholarly and popular-education Austen, were once intertwined. George Pellew's bizarre afterlife brings Jane Austen's legacy not

only into the history of education but into the history of spiritualism. When we talk metaphorically about being haunted by Austen—when we imagine her speaking beyond the grave or ask, "What Would Jane Do?"—we might keep in mind that there was a time in the 1890s when professors set out to test whether their star student had returned to mention Jane Austen from beyond the grave, through another woman's pen. As skeptic Andrew Lang himself notes in 1909, Mrs. Piper's automatic writing was "more amusing than most novels."[37]