

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Phantasms of the Living** (2 volumes) by Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore. London: Trübner and Company, 1886. Both volumes free at <http://www.esalenctr.org/display/books/phantasms/>

Reports of experiencing ostensible psychic (psi) phenomena go back far in human history, with some of the earliest experiences apparently dating from the ancient Greek and Roman periods (Dodds, 1971). Serious attempts to systematically study psi experiences formally began in 1882 when the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded by a distinguished group of scholars associated with Cambridge University in England. Among this group were Edmund Gurney, a man with broad-ranging interests who served as the SPR's first honorary secretary (Beloff, 1977:12), and Frederic Myers, a classical scholar who also became a pioneer in the study of dissociation and subliminal consciousness (Kelly, 2001, Kelly & Alvarado, 2005). In addition to conducting field investigations and simple experiments, the early members of the SPR began amassing, examining, and appraising personal accounts of spontaneous psi experiences. A painstaking effort at the latter activity by Gurney and Myers, along with SPR researcher Frank Podmore, resulted in *Phantasms of the Living*, which may be considered one of the essential classics in parapsychology and psychical research.

This hefty two-volume collection contains just over 700 individually documented cases of spontaneous psi within its 1,306 pages. Each case is taken from personal accounts sent to various members of the SPR by correspondents from the general public, and many seem to depict an instance of extrasensory perception (ESP) involving two or more individuals, one of whom was often the correspondent. To help ensure that the cases were based on actual experiences that had been accurately and honestly reported, strict criteria were set by Gurney et al. for including a case in *Phantasms*. For example, a case had to have been a first-hand eyewitness account by the correspondent, and the ESP experience it described had to have been told to a third party before the details of the distant individual's situation were learned. As evidence of the latter, each numbered case in *Phantasms* is accompanied by corroborative statements from one or more individuals who either had been present with the experient when the experience occurred, or were told about the experience by the experient very soon afterward. It was also necessary to ascertain that none of the important details in the correspondent's account had been altered or embellished by

comparing it against the account of the third party and/or documented records. It is clear from the accounts that Gurney et al. went to great lengths to verify the details contained within each case. As eminent psychologist William James (1887) commented in his review of *Phantasms* in the pages of *Science*:

Nothing, in fact, is more striking than the zeal with which [Gurney et al.] cross-examine the witnesses; nothing is more admirable than the labor they spend in testing the accuracy of the stories, so far as can be done by ransacking old newspapers for obituaries and the like. If a story contains a fire burning in a grate—*presto* the Greenwich records are searched to see whether the thermometer warranted a fire on that day; if it contains a medical practitioner, the medical register is consulted to make sure *he* is correct; etc. (James, 1887:19, italics in original)

It also had to be determined that the ESP experience between the individuals involved in the cases could not have arisen merely by chance coincidence. In Chapter 13 of Volume 2, Gurney et al. describe their efforts to estimate the odds ratios of chance occurrence for the various kinds of experiences published in *Phantasms*, based on estimates of the frequency of experiences among a random sample of people, the size of the adult population of England at the time, the death rate among adults in the country within a 12-year period, and similar demographic data. Most of their odds come up in the range of trillions to one against chance.

The experiences described in the cases range from simple sensory-like impressions to detailed veridical hallucinations. The latter experiences differ from other types of hallucinations, in that the content of the hallucination seems to actually correspond to verifiable events taking place at a distance, rather than merely being an abnormal product of the experient's imagination (a common psychiatric interpretation of the term *phantasm*). An example of a veridical hallucination case is Case #20, in which a woman, Mrs. Bettany, recounts an experience from her childhood:

On one occasion (I am unable to fix the date, but I must have been about 10 years old) I was walking in a country lane at A., the place where my parents then resided. I was reading geometry as I walked along, a subject little likely to produce fancies or morbid phenomena of any kind, when, in a moment, I saw a bedroom known as the White Room in my home, and upon the floor lay my mother, to all appearance dead. The vision must have remained some minutes, during which time my real surroundings appeared to pale and die out; but as the vision faded, actual surroundings came back, at first dimly, then clearly. I could not doubt that what I had seen was real, so, instead of going home, I went at once to the house of our medical man and found him at home. He at once set out with me for my home, on the way putting questions I could not

answer, as my mother was to all appearance well when I left home.

I led the doctor straight to the White Room, where we found my mother actually lying as in my vision. This was true even to minute details. She had been seized suddenly by an attack of the heart, and would soon have breathed her last but for the doctor's timely advent . . . (Vol. 1, p. 194)

This account was later verified by both of Mrs. Bettany's parents, and in his corroborating statement (p. 195), her father added that neither he nor the family servants had any indication of his wife being ill prior to the crisis, a situation that argues against prior knowledge of the mother's situation through logical inference.

The cases in *Phantasms* are collectively interpreted by the authors in two ways. Since many describe an instance in which one person (the percipient) seems to respond to the situation being experienced by another person (the supposed agent) at a distance, they tend to be regarded by Gurney as cases of *telepathy* (or "thought-transference," in the terminology often used by the authors). In such an interpretation, it is assumed that the agent had somehow mentally "transferred" information or impressions pertaining to his or her situation to the percipient. However, in a note added to Volume 2 (pp. 277–316), Myers recognized the alternate possibility that the percipient could have become aware of the agent's situation through *clairvoyance* (which he initially called *telaesthesia*, or "distant sensing"; Myers, 1903). In this alternate interpretation, the percipient perceives or otherwise becomes aware of the agent's situation without the agent having necessarily transferred something, as in telepathy.

Although telepathy is offered by Gurney as the prime interpretation for the cases (apart from Myers' note) based on the results of early experiments in telepathy (reviewed in Chapter 2 of Vol. 1), the possibility that clairvoyance could be involved is raised by a point made by C. Lloyd Morgan (1887) in his review of *Phantasms* that, ". . . there are great difficulties in applying the thought-transference hypothesis to a great number of cases" (p. 281). Morgan cites the above case involving Mrs. Bettany and her mother as an example, which can be subject to either interpretation when examined closely. Although the mother is still conscious and could have served as a telepathic agent, there is no clear indication that she attempted to intentionally convey a thought, impression, or idea to another person at the time of experience (in contrast to the experimental and spontaneous cases in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of Vol. 1, which involved such attempts). While this does not explicitly rule out the possibility of telepathy (since it may be the case that telepathy can operate unconsciously as well as consciously), it does seem to argue against it. Furthermore, it is notable that Mrs. Bettany's description of her vision seems akin to the scenic image of a bystander, which appears more suggestive of clairvoyance than

telepathy. Another case which seems suggestive of a scenic image, and thus of clairvoyance, is Case #66, the account of which is partly reproduced below. According to Gurney et al., the account was given to the SPR by a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1884:

Twenty years ago [abroad] I had a patient, wife of a parson. She had a peculiar kind of delirium which did not belong to her disease, and perplexed me. The house in which she lived was closed at midnight, that is, the outer door had no bell. One night I saw her at 9. When I came home I said to my wife, 'I don't understand that case; I wish I could get into the house late.' We went to bed rather early. At about 1 o'clock I got up. She said, 'What are you about; are you not well?' I said, 'Perfectly so.' 'Then why get up?' 'Because I can get into that house.' 'How, if it is shut up?' 'I see the proprietor standing under the lamp-post this side of the bridge, with another man.' 'You have been dreaming.' 'No, I have been wide awake; but dreaming or waking, I mean to try.' I started with the firm conviction that I should find the individual in question. Sure enough there he was under the lamp-post, talking to a friend. I asked if he was going home. (I knew him very well.) He said he was, so I told him I was going to see a patient, and would accompany him. . . . (Vol. 1, p. 267)

Upon arriving at the house, the physician was able to enter and found his patient being served strong liquor by her maid, which had apparently contributed to her delirium. At the end of the account, Gurney added that:

In conversation with the present writer [Gurney], the narrator explained that the vision—though giving an impression of externality and seen, as he believes, with open eyes—was not definitely located in space. He had never encountered the proprietor on the spot where he saw him, and it was not a likely thing that he should be standing talking in the streets at so late an hour. (p. 267)

Apart from the scenic nature of the experience, accounting for this case in terms of telepathy is again complicated by the fact that there does not seem to be any clear indication of an attempt to intentionally convey a thought, impression, or idea from agent to percipient. In order to fit the case into the telepathy hypothesis, Gurney suggests that the physician's intention of getting into the house may have had an effect on the proprietor's mind, a suggestion that seems to stretch the hypothesis in such a way that the physician can be viewed as both agent and percipient. Whether this suggestion can be considered a more plausible alternative to the clairvoyance hypothesis, is an example of the possible dilemma faced by readers when attempting to interpret the cases for themselves.

It is cases such as these that seem to illustrate the inherent ambiguity

in attempting to distinguish telepathy from clairvoyance. Although not always recognized, this issue of telepathy vs. clairvoyance is one that persists into the present time, mainly due to the difficulty in designing an unambiguous experimental test for telepathy (Rhine, 1974). The issue is again raised by Gurney et al. in their attempts to interpret cases involving apparitions that were collectively perceived by more than one person (discussed below).

Regardless of their interpretation, the cases in *Phantasms* seem to collectively show patterns that have been found in other collections of spontaneous cases. For example, Gurney et al. note that the agents and percipients are biologically related in nearly half (47%) of the cases, although they add that, “. . . since in many cases the relatives of the percipient will have naturally belonged also to the circle of his intimate friends, it seems reasonable to conclude that consanguinity, as such, has little if any predisposing influence in the transmission of telepathic impressions” (Vol. 2, p. 723). Table 1 compares Gurney et al.’s findings on the relation between the percipient and the supposed agent in the *Phantasms* cases to those obtained in analyses of four separate case collections. The details of these four collections are as follows:



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1) Stevenson (1970, Chapter 2) analyzed 160 cases published in the *Journal and Proceedings* of the American and British SPR from the 1880s up to 1967. (It should be noted that 34 of these cases were included in *Phantasms*, making this the only collection shown in Table 1 that is not entirely independent of Gurney et al.) For convenience, these 160 cases were combined here with the analysis of 35 cases of ostensible telepathy received by Stevenson from correspondents (one case that lacked an identifiable agent was excluded; Chapter 6).

2) L. E. Rhine (1981, Chapter 17) analyzed 2,878 cases of veridical dreams, which had been compiled from a larger collection of more than 10,000 cases sent by correspondents to the Duke University Parapsychology Laboratory between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s.

3) Schouten (1981) analyzed 789 ESP cases sampled from a collection of about 1,000 cases gathered in a 1950 German newspaper survey conducted by G. Sannwald.

4) Persinger (1974, Chapter 3) analyzed 164 telepathy–clairvoyance cases published in *Fate* magazine between 1965 and 1969, which were personal accounts sent in to the magazine by its readers.

In Table 1, “Immediate Family” refers to parent–child, spousal, and sibling relations, while “Extended Family” refers to all other family relations outside the immediate (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, in-laws, etc.).

Table 1 seems to show a fairly consistent trend across case collections concerning the relation between the agent and percipient, in line with the relation observed by Gurney et al. But contrary to their initial conclusion, median and mean percentages taken across collections seem to indicate that consanguinity, as inferred by immediate family relation, may be a relevant factor in ESP experiences. In addition, these values are consistent with those obtained in a separate analysis by Schouten (1979:420) of 562 cases extracted from the *Phantasms* collection.

In examining the themes of the *Phantasms* cases (i.e. the circumstances which may have precipitated the ESP experience between the agent and percipient), Gurney et al. observed that:

It is the very large proportion of cases in which the distant event is *death*. It is in this profoundest shock which human life encounters that these phenomena seem to be oftenest engendered; and, where not in death itself, at least in one of those special moments, whether of strong mental excitement or of bodily collapse, which of all living experiences comes nearest to the great crisis of dissolution. Thus among the 668 cases of spontaneous telepathy in this book [not including the 34 cases added as a supplement to Vol. 2], 399 . . . are death cases, in the sense that the percipient’s experience either coincided with or very shortly followed the agent’s death; while in 25 more cases the agent’s condition, at the time of the percipient’s experience, was one of serious illness which in a few hours or a few days terminated in death. (Vol. 2, p. 26, italics in original)

This suggests that just over half (59.7%) of the cases in *Phantasms*, as analyzed by Gurney et al., contain a death-related theme. Table 2 compares the themes of the *Phantasms* cases (represented by Schouten’s 1979 analysis, which involved a more in-depth examination of themes) with those of the cases contained in the four other collections.

Median and mean percentages taken across all five collections seem to indicate that, in a manner fairly consistent with Gurney et al.’s initial observation, nearly half of the cases involve a death-related theme. Also of interest is that in nearly three-fourths ( $45.8 + 28.4 = 74.2\%$ ) of all the cases, the supposed agent is facing a death or crisis situation (e.g., serious illness, accident). In contrast, only 19% were about trivial (i.e. non-crisis) situations.

Some research suggests that ESP, both in spontaneous and experimental situations, may be negatively correlated with geomagnetic activity (e.g., Persinger, 1989, Spottiswoode, 1990). A study by Persinger (1987) found this

**TABLE 1**  
**Relation Between Agent and Percipient in Spontaneous ESP (% Cases)**

Analysis	N Cases	Immediate Family	Extended Family	Friends	Strangers
Gurney et al. (1886)	702	44.2	9.0	31.7	4.3
Stevenson (1970)	194	63.9	7.2	26.3	2.6
Rhine (1981)	2878	39.0	14.2*	14.2*	13.4
Schouten (1981)	789	55.9	11.0	28.0	5.1
Persinger (1974)	164	53.0	16.0	14.0	9.0
Median Percentage	-	53.0	11.0	26.3	5.1
Mean Percentage	-	51.2	11.5	22.8	6.9

\* In her analysis, Rhine placed extended family and friends in the same category, which she labeled "Remote Relationships" (pp. 218–219, 222).

same correlation between 109 cases in the *Phantasms* collection and early geomagnetic indices recorded between 1868 and 1886. This negative correlation compares favorably with the one obtained using another SPR collection of spontaneous cases from roughly the same period (Arango & Persinger, 1988).

In addition to veridical hallucination cases, *Phantasms* contains cases in which the percipient perceives an apparition of the supposed agent. As in veridical hallucinations, the agent is often facing a death or crisis situation at the time that his/her apparition is perceived by the percipient, and thus the experience is referred to as a *crisis apparition* case. In order to be considered a crisis apparition case and thus be included in *Phantasms*, Gurney et al. specified that the apparitional experience had to occur within the 24-hour time period surrounding the agent's situation (i.e. 12 hours before to 12 hours after). An example of a crisis apparition case is Case #28, in which N. J. S., a man "... [o]ccupying a position of considerable responsibility," gives an account of his experience of the apparition of F. L., a close friend and co-worker who had fallen ill several days before. An excerpt of the account is reproduced below, which was written by N. J. S. from a third-person perspective:

On Saturday evening, March 24th, N. J. S., who had a headache, was sitting at home. He said to his wife that he was what he had not been for months, rather too warm; after making the remark he leaned back on the couch, and the next minute saw his friend, F. L., standing before him, dressed in his usual manner. N. J. S. noticed the details of his dress, that is, his hat with a black band, his overcoat unbuttoned, and a stick in his hand; he looked with a fixed regard at N. J. S., and then passed away. N. J. S. quoted to himself from Job,

**TABLE 2**  
**Themes of Spontaneous ESP Experiences (% Cases)**

ANALYSIS	N CASES	THEME		
		Death	Crisis	Trivial
Schouten (1979)*	562	66.7	21.2	12.1
Stevenson (1970)	195	36.9	44.6	18.5
Rhine (1981)	2878	22.7	28.2	14.6
Schouten (1981)*	789	48.7	22.9	28.4
Persinger (1974)	164	54.0	25.0	21.0
<b>Median Percentage</b>	-	<b>48.7</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>18.5</b>
<b>Mean Percentage</b>	-	<b>45.8</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>18.9</b>

\*The values for Schouten (1979, 1981) were calculated based on values given in Table 16 (1979, p. 432) and Table 10 (1981, p. 29), respectively.

‘And lo, a spirit passed before me, and the hair of my flesh stood up.’ At that moment an icy chill passed through him, and his hair bristled. He then turned to his wife and asked her the time; she said, ‘12 minutes to 9.’ He then said, ‘The reason I ask you is that F. L. is dead. I have just seen him.’ She tried to persuade him it was fancy, but he most positively assured her that no argument was of avail to alter his opinion.

The next day, Sunday, about 3 p.m., A. L., the brother of F. L., came to the house of N. J. S., who let him in. A. L. said, ‘I suppose you know what I have come to tell you?’ N. J. S. replied, ‘Yes, your brother is dead.’ A. L. said, ‘I thought you would know it.’ N. J. S. replied, ‘Why?’ A. L. said, ‘Because you were in such sympathy with one another.’ N. J. S. afterwards ascertained that A. L. called on Saturday to see his brother, and on leaving him noticed the clock on the stairs was 25 minutes to 9 p.m. F. L.’s sister, on going to him at 9 p.m., found him dead from rupture of the aorta.

This is a plain statement of facts, and the only theory N. J. S. has on the subject is that at the supreme moment of death, F. L. must have felt a great wish to communicate with him, and in some way by force of will impressed his image on N. J. S.’s senses. (Vol. 1, pp. 210–211)

Apart from visual apparitions such as this one, some cases involve auditory apparitions in which the percipient seems to hear the agent's voice (e.g., Case #33, Vol. 1, p. 221), and at least a few cases have involved visual or auditory apparitions coupled with tactile sensations (e.g., Cases 293–295, Vol. 2, pp. 135–139). Some of the apparitional experiences are collective, in which the apparition is perceived by more than one percipient (e.g., see the cases in Vol. 2, Chapter 18).

Like the veridical hallucination cases, the crisis apparition cases can be interpreted in more than one way. In the last paragraph of his account, N. J. S. offered a personal theory that his encounter with the apparition of F. L. may have been due to some form of telepathic connection between F. L. and himself. Gurney et al. similarly offer telepathy as the prime interpretation for such cases, suggesting that during a moment of crisis, the supposed agent impresses an image of him or her self upon the mind of the percipient, which is then experienced by the percipient as an apparition. This telepathic approach to apparitions was apparently influenced not only by early experimental and anecdotal accounts of telepathy (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of Vol. 1), but also by quasi-experimental attempts by some correspondents to intentionally appear as an apparitional figure before an unsuspecting relative or friend at a distance (Cases 13–16, Vol. 1, pp. 103–109; Cases 685 & 686, Vol. 2, pp. 671–676). Case #13 is partly reproduced below as an example of such an attempt, with the account given by the Rev. W. Stainton Moses:

One evening early last year, I resolved to try to appear to Z, at some miles distance. I did not inform him beforehand of the intended experiment; but retired to rest shortly before midnight with thoughts intently fixed on Z, with whose room and surroundings, however, I was quite unacquainted. I soon fell asleep, and awoke next morning unconscious of anything having taken place. On seeing Z a few days afterwards, I inquired, 'Did anything happen at your rooms on Saturday night?' 'Yes,' replied he, 'a great deal happened. I had been sitting over the fire with M, smoking and chatting. About 12.30 he rose to leave, and I let him out myself. I returned to the fire to finish my pipe, when I saw you sitting in the chair just vacated by him. I looked intently at you, and then took up a newspaper to assure myself I was not dreaming, but on laying it down I saw you still there. While I gazed without speaking, you faded away. Though I imagined you must be fast asleep in bed at that hour, yet you appeared dressed in your ordinary garments, such as you usually wear every day.' 'Then my experiment seems to have succeeded,' said I. (Vol. 1, pp. 103–104)

Cases such as these, which were also mentioned by Myers (1903:689–690) in his book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, seem to suggest an intention on the part of the agent to precipitate the experience in the intended percipient, and thus seem, on the surface, to be in line with

the telepathy hypothesis. However, there are other factors that do not seem to conform very well to the hypothesis.

One of these factors is that, in many cases, apart from the intentionally generated cases, there often seems to be no clear indication that the agent held an intention to appear before the percipient, and in some cases, the agent may not have been aware that the percipient had seen the figure of him or her. L. E. Rhine (1957:42–43) noticed this same factor in veridical hallucination and crisis apparition cases from her own collection. Since the possibility that telepathy can operate on the unconscious level has not been explicitly ruled out, this factor may not clearly preclude telepathy, but seems to minimally argue in favor of clairvoyance.

Another factor, also noticed by L. E. Rhine (1957:43), is the manner in which the percipient often perceives the apparition. In Case #13 above, it is indicated by Z. that he had witnessed Moses' apparition in the garments that he was accustomed to seeing Moses wear every day. The same goes for the apparition of F. L. in N. J. S.'s account (Case #28 above). Similarly, in the accounts of people who have experienced veridical apparitions of deceased individuals, Broughton (2006) has noted that: "Often the clothing that the ghost appeared in was what the deceased customarily wore, not necessarily those in which the person died" (p. 150). This seems to suggest that the agent is not the only one who has a role in precipitating the apparitional experience; rather, it suggests that the percipient has a role, as well. In this case, the percipient seems to contribute to the details of the apparition (the clothes it is wearing) based on his or her own personal memories of the individual who is perceived. As Broughton (2006) suggests, some veridical apparitions of deceased individuals may be ". . . essentially a product of the mind of the percipient—an [*sic*] hallucination composed of images taken or constructed from the experiencer's memory" (p. 150). Offering preliminary support to this possibility is the experimental and anecdotal evidence suggesting that (long-term) memory has a role in ESP (Broughton, 2006, Irwin, 1979, Palmer, 2006, Roll, 1966, Stanford, 2006).

If this can be extended in any way to apparitions of the living (as in crisis apparitions), then it may suggest a slightly greater contribution to the experience by the percipient, and might begin to tip the scales a bit toward clairvoyance. On the other hand, it should be recognized that the apparent inconsistency between the clothing of the agent and his/her apparitional counterpart is somewhat in line with the percipient's subjective experience in at least some ostensible telepathic experiences. For instance, in ganzfeld telepathy experiments, rarely does it seem that the percipient's subjective experience represents an exact mental picture of the target that the agent is looking at. Instead, the percipient's experience seems more to comprise sensory details from his or her own memory that can

be associated in some way with the target, whether directly or indirectly. This suggests that correspondence in the experiences of the agent and percipient in telepathy may not always be exact. Examples of this can be seen in verbal transcripts of the percipient's subjective impressions from the first ganzfeld experiment by Honorton and Harper (1974:163–164), who also acknowledged the possibility that memory could have a role in ESP (pp. 164–165). If this point has merit, then it could leave some margin for the possibility of telepathy.

A third factor is that, in some cases, the experience is not limited solely to the intended percipient, and seems to require a stretching of the telepathy hypothesis in order for it to “fit the mold,” so to speak. There are two types of crisis apparition cases that seem to require a stretching. One type is a case where the apparition is perceived not by the intended percipient, but by another person, who witnesses the apparition in close proximity to the percipient. When this other person describes the apparitional figure, the percipient may recognize it as resembling a person who he or she knows (Case #355, Vol. 2, p. 256). An illustrative example is Case #242, reported to the SPR by a Mrs. Clarke in October of 1885:

In the month of August, 1864, about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I was sitting reading in the verandah of our house in Barbadoes [*sic*]. My black nurse was driving my little girl, about 18 months or so old, in her perambulator in the garden. I got up after some time to go into the house, not having noticed anything at all—when this black woman said to me, “Missis, who was that gentleman that was talking to you just now?” “There was no one talking to me,” I said. “Oh yes, dere [*sic*] was, Missis—a very pale gentleman, very tall, and he talked to you, and you was very rude, for you never answered him.” I repeated there was no one, and got rather cross with the woman, and she begged me to write down the day, for she knew she had seen someone. I did, and in a few days I heard of the death of my brother in Tobago. Now the curious part is this, that *I* did not see him, but she—a stranger to him—did; and she said that he seemed very anxious for me to notice him. (Vol. 2, p. 61, italics in original)

A very similar kind of case exists for apparitions of deceased individuals, where another person perceives the apparition in close proximity to someone who had known that individual in life. L. E. Rhine (1957) had coined the term *bystander-type case* as a label for them, noting that “. . . these cases are suggestive of the haunting cases, the main difference, however, being that in these the link is a person rather than a geographical location” (p. 39). In being so similar, the analogous cases for apparitions of the living, like Case #242, seem to represent a “crisis bystander-type case,” if such a label can be used.

To account for cases like 242 in terms of telepathy, Gurney et al. suggest an extension of the telepathic link by the intended percipient to the third person

bystander who witnesses the apparition. In a sense, the intended percipient now becomes a second agent, who in turn conveys the impression regarding the original agent to the bystander, who now becomes a second percipient. It is suggested that the reason the bystander is able to perceive the apparition, and the intended percipient is not, may be due to a greater psychic sensitivity on the part of the bystander. Again, the reader is faced with the dilemma of whether or not this hypothesis can be considered more plausible than the alternative hypothesis of clairvoyance on the part of the bystander.

In other cases, the apparition is collectively perceived by several persons, and it seems that the more witnesses there are in addition to the percipient, the more severely the telepathy hypothesis must be stretched. Gurney attempts to stretch the hypothesis by proposing a form of “telepathy by infection” among the witnesses. As Tyrrell (1953/1961) succinctly describes it,

. . . an agent, A, telepathically influences, in the first place, the primary percipient B, in whom he is interested, and that B, while creating his own sensory image, acts as an agent, in turn transmitting the apparition on to C, who repeats the process, retransmitting the apparition to D, and so on. (Tyrrell, 1953/1961:43)

Myers seemed to recognize the conceptual difficulty that arises with the complexity of stretching the telepathy hypothesis in this manner to account for collectively perceived apparitions, and in his added note to Volume 2 (pp. 277–316), he offers the alternative hypothesis of clairvoyance, along with what he calls a “phantasmogenetic” effect on the part of the agent. Myers (1903, Vol. 1) somewhat expounds upon this idea in his book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, in which he seems to suggest that the agent acts as more of a direct agent in creating the apparition through “. . . a psychical element probably of very varying character, and definable mainly by its power of producing a phantasm, perceptible by one or more persons, in some portion or other of space” (p. 264). However, he does not seem to regard this effect as one on physical space *per se*, for he states that,

. . . when the phantasm is discerned by more than one person at once . . . it is actually effecting a change in that portion of space where it is perceived, although not, as a rule, in the matter which occupies that place. It is, therefore, not optically or acoustically perceived; perhaps no rays of light are reflected nor waves of air set in motion; but an unknown form of supernormal perception, not necessarily acting through sensory end-organs, comes into play. (Myers, 1903(2):75)

Instead, Myers posits that the changes may occur in what he calls “the metetherial,” which seems to be an aspect of space parallel to, but also separate from, that occupied by matter. He does not seem to clearly outline its properties

or any other of its aspects, suggesting that it may have represented a working concept in progress.

In general, Myers' view seems to lie somewhere in between the telepathy and clairvoyance hypotheses:

I hold that this phantasmogenetic effect may be produced either on the mind, and consequently on the brain of another person—in which case he may discern the phantasm somewhere in his vicinity, according to his own mental habit or prepossession—or else directly on a portion of space, “out in the open,” in which case several persons may simultaneously discern the phantasm in that actual spot. (Myers, 1903(1):215–216)

This statement seems to acknowledge the possibility of telepathy in the case of one percipient (through an effect upon the percipient's brain), while also indirectly acknowledging the possibility of clairvoyance in the case of multiple percipients, who perceive the apparition in open space. In some respects, this phantasmogenetic effect by the agent sounds very much like a psychokinetic effect on the part of the agent.

A slightly similar interpretation is the one offered by Tyrrell (1953/1961) in his book on apparitions, which, through the metaphorical analogy of a stage production, seems to acknowledge possible contributions by both agent and percipient to the apparitional experience. This possibility is suggested by a quasi-experiment described by German Councillor H. M. Wesermann in 1819, in which he (as the agent) made several attempts to willfully appear to unsuspecting percipients in their dreams. In one instance where he assumed that the male percipient, Lieutenant N., would be asleep at a certain hour, Wesermann attempted to make the image of a deceased woman appear to him in a dream. However, Lieutenant N. was not asleep at the time, and the image instead appeared before him as an apparition, which was also perceived by another witness. Gurney et al. cite the account of this instance, as personally given by Wesermann:

The intention was that Lieutenant N. should see in a dream, at 11 o'clock p.m., a lady who had been five years dead, who was to incite to him a good action. Herr N., however, contrary to expectation, had not gone to sleep by 11 o'clock, but was conversing with his friend S. on the French campaign. Suddenly the door of the chamber opens; the lady, dressed in white, with black kerchief and bare head, walks in, salutes S. thrice with her hand in a friendly way, turns to N., nods to him, and then returns through the door. Both follow quickly, and call the sentinel at the entrance; but all had vanished, and nothing was to be found. Some months afterwards, Herr S. informed me by letter that the chamber door used to creak when opened, but did not do so when the lady opened it—whence it is to be inferred that the opening of the door was only a dream-picture, like all the rest of the apparition. (Vol. 1, p. 102)

Although the apparition witnessed by the two men seemed to largely conform to Wesermann's stated intention as the agent, there are a few aspects of the experience that seem to deviate from his intentions. As mentioned, Wesermann apparently assumed that Lieutenant N. would be asleep in his bedroom when he made his effort. Thus, one might expect that the apparition should have appeared in N.'s bedroom, but it did not; it appeared in the room where he was talking with S. And instead of appearing in a dream as intended by Wesermann, the figure appeared before N. as a waking apparition. The apparition also acknowledged the presence of S. with N., even though it does not seem that Wesermann was aware that S. would be present with N. at the time of his effort. Assuming that the effect of suggestion was not involved in this case, these deviations would seem to suggest a possible contribution of the percipients. As Roll (1974) commented of this case:

The Wesermann ghost also supports Tyrrell's theory that an apparition is usually the product not only of its creator but also of the perceiver. The lady ghost would have performed in an empty room had something not brought her to the anteroom—that something presumably being the unconscious minds of the officers reacting to Wesermann's attempts. In [psychical researcher Hornell] Hart's terminology, the three men had together produced a persona. This all sounds rather strange, but in fact, it is typical of ESP. Even in card tests, the result is rarely an exactly copy of the target but an interaction between the target, the mind of the subject, and often of the experimenter's mind too. (Roll, 1974:403)

Such an interpretation would seem applicable to crisis apparition cases, although for postmortem apparition cases, it confounds the possibility of ESP with that of survival after death. As Tyrrell (1953/1961) stated: "If an apparition represents a dead person . . . this is not sufficient proof that the dead person is the agent. A living agent *can* produce it" (p. 133). However, he goes on to note that: "On the other hand, the consensus of evidence goes to show that this kind of apparition must be produced by *some* agent; and in the majority of cases it is hard to find a plausible candidate other than the person the apparition represents" (p. 133). This raises another difficult issue apart from that of telepathy vs. clairvoyance, but given the limit of this review to Gurney et al.'s cases of apparitions of the living, it will not be addressed here, although the interested reader should perhaps consult the articles by Roll (1977; 1982, Sect. 2) and by Stevenson (1977, 1982) for broader discussions of the issue.

Somewhat similar to the veridical hallucination cases, the crisis apparition cases in *Phantasms* seem to show at least a few suggestive patterns found in other case collections. For example, many of the apparitions seem to represent a close relative of the percipient. The relation of the percipient to the supposed agent (whose apparition is seen) is shown in Table 3 for five other case collections of

**TABLE 3**  
**Relation Between Percipient and Agent in Apparition Cases (% Cases)**

Analysis	N Cases	Immediate Family	Extended Family	Friends	Strangers
Persinger (1974)	193	47.0	22.0	18.0	13.0
Osis & Haraldsson (1977)	418	60.3	12.2	6.9	20.6
Haraldsson (1988–1989)	100	53.0	-	10.0	11.0
Haraldsson (2009)	337	46.0	-	8.0	29.7
Arcangel (2005)	590	58.2	11.3	-	12.7
<b>Median Percentage</b>		<b>53.0</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>
<b>Mean Percentage</b>		<b>52.9</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>17.4</b>

The values for Osis and Haraldsson (1977) are calculated from their Appendix Table 2 (p. 218). The values for Arcangel (2005) are calculated from her Appendix survey (pp. 284, 291). Values not cited are marked with a dash (-).

apparitional experiences. The details of the collections are as follows:

1) Persinger (1974, Chapter 6) analyzed 193 crisis and postmortem apparition cases published in *Fate* magazine between 1965 and 1969, which consisted of personal accounts sent in by readers.

2) Osis and Haraldsson (1977) analyzed 418 apparition cases received from physicians and nurses in the United States and India between 1961 and 1973. These cases consisted of deathbed visions, in which the apparition of a living or a deceased person was perceived by a terminally ill or dying patient shortly before death.

3) Haraldsson (1988–1989) analyzed 100 cases of crisis and postmortem apparitions obtained through interviews with people who responded to a national survey in Iceland in 1974.

4) Haraldsson (2009) analyzed 337 additional crisis and postmortem cases obtained through interviews with people who responded to a questionnaire placed in five popular magazines circulated in Iceland in 1980–1981.

5) Arcangel (2005) analyzed 590 cases received through a multi-phase, worldwide survey of people who attended grief workshops and media events, responded to radio interviews, or participated in an online survey.

As in Table 1, “Immediate Family” refers to parent–child, spousal, and sibling relations, while “Extended Family” refers to all other family relations outside the immediate (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, in-laws, etc.).

Gurney et al. did not perform a separate analysis of their crisis apparition cases. However, they noted (Vol. 2, p. 723) that the agent and percipient were biologically related in 47% of the *Phantasms* cases, which includes the crisis apparition cases. If this value can be taken as a rough estimate of the relation between agent and percipient in the latter (while recognizing that it may be an overestimate), then a comparison of this value with the median and mean percentages for “Immediate Family” in Table 3 indicates that the values are in fairly close range. Of course, because of the possible overestimate, this should only be taken as a tentative pattern.

In analyzing 314 apparition cases from the *Phantasms* collection, Stevenson (1982:346) found that 28% of the agents in the cases had suffered a violent death. Similarly, Haraldsson (1988–1989, 2009) found that, in his 1974 and 1980–1981 surveys, the number of agents suffering a violent death was 23% and 30%, respectively.

As it may be clear from this review, *Phantasms of the Living* is a book containing spontaneous case reports that, when read closely, can potentially raise complex issues, ones that still remain largely unresolved within parapsychology even in the present time. However, this should not take away from the knowledge of the greater importance, as well as the enjoyment, that a reader can gain from reading these classic cases. As mentioned, Gurney et al. went to great lengths to verify the details in these cases, which make them difficult to dismiss as mere fabrication, suggestion, or misperception. Instead, the cases collectively offer evidence to suggest that ESP and apparitional experiences can and do manifest in the lives of people from all walks of life, a suggestion that is still echoed in the spontaneous cases being reported many years later (e.g., Feather & Schmicker, 2005, Stevenson, 1995). The anecdotal evidence available from spontaneous cases across time, coupled with the experimental evidence in parapsychology, seems to form the best case for serious consideration of the existence of psi phenomena.

The potential value of spontaneous cases in parapsychology has been addressed before by several researchers in the field, who have argued that such cases can: 1) illustrate the various ways in which psi can manifest in nature, 2) reveal more about the content and depth of the subjective experiences of agents and percipients, 3) highlight rare and interesting forms of psi phenomena that have been neglected by researchers in the past, and 4) be useful for uncovering general patterns across cases that can possibly be developed into testable hypotheses, among many other values (Alvarado, 1996a, 1996b, 2002, Irwin, 1994, Rhine, 1977, Watt, 1994, White, 1992). *Phantasms of the Living* remains

a source useful for demonstrating all of these values, and for that reason should continue to be brought to the attention of psi researchers of the current and future generations.

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