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Radclyffe Hall

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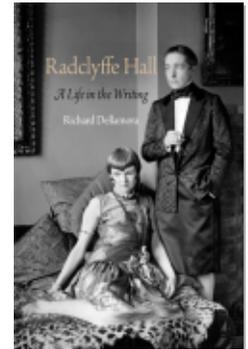
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Psychic Incorporation

War, Mourning, and the Technology of Mediumship

With the onset of World War I and the traumatic death of her first long-term partner in 1916, the relaxed view of the possibilities of desire between women evinced in Hall's poetry came to an end. In the following years, she lost contact with many of the artistic and often feminist women that her connection with Mabel Batten had opened to her. Instead, the next six years were anxious ones, dominated by guilt over the circumstances attending Batten's death and by Hall's attempt to repair the loss. During this period, Hall turned to members of another group, the Society for Psychical Research, in part to build a new set of friends, acquaintances, and supporters, and in part as the next phase of her effort to build a position for herself in the public eye, an effort connected in turn with her ambition, fostered and in that sense now consecrated by Batten, to become a successful novelist. Along the way, Hall found herself drawn into the second and most important of her long-term relationships, namely, that with Una Troubridge.

The Society for Psychical Research was a socially and intellectually elite group, founded at Cambridge University in 1882 to engage in the scientific

study of what today are referred to as paranormal phenomena. Entry into the Society provided Hall with a new source of cultural prestige as well as a way of potentially reconnecting with Batten, especially because the high number of war dead had resulted in a sharp increase in interest in séances, a principal area of research for the Society. At the same time, the Society's reputation was ambiguous. Popularly and in the mass circulation press, its members were regarded as upper-class eccentrics with a tenuous claim to intellectual seriousness. In terms of the Society's project, moreover, it was unclear whether its purpose was to prove or to disprove the hypothesis that individual human existence continues after death. At any rate, Hall's turn to the Society after Batten's death is symptomatic both of her loneliness and of the continuing marginality of her social position.

Hall's main piece of writing during these years is an extended report on the psychical research she undertook after Batten's death. The article appeared in the *Proceedings of the Society* in 1919. Batten figures largely in the research, while Troubridge is also a significant player. Accordingly and despite the attempt to provide an objective framework for the material in the idiom and structure of the psychical research essay, the study is inescapably autobiographical. This double aspect of the work—on the one hand, dry, jargon laden, wordy, and detached, and on the other, intensely personal, private, even scandalous—precisely matched Hall's psychic needs at the time. In this chapter, I analyze the essay in terms of its autobiographical performativity. The essay served to provide a narrative of Hall's recent and ongoing life and to define her most significant personal ties for the following decade and a half. This narrative structure is a double one: first a narrative occurs that accomplishes Hall's reconciliation with Batten. Accompanying this narrative is another in which Batten arranges for the love and care that she provided Hall during their relationship to be continued by Troubridge. During the sessions, however, Troubridge is constituted not merely as an assistant recorder and substitute caregiver. As the sittings continue, a narrative is fashioned that establishes her as an individual with her own psychic wounds and agency. The completed narrative tells the tale of three lives, henceforward to be permanently entwined, that of Batten, living beyond death; Hall; and Troubridge as her new partner.

The essay is also performative in relation to Hall's fashioning as a novelist. In the process of researching and writing the essay, Hall, with crucial assistance from Troubridge, transformed herself into a writer of prose narrative. Hall learned how to conduct research and work it into publishable

shape. She also found one of the major preoccupations of her work as a writer of fiction: namely, the fashioning of the genres of the short story and novel into instruments for conveying an embodied experience of trauma between text and reader. In these ways, the essay is doubly autobiographical. Autobiographical in recording the genesis of a committed personal relationship, the project of the essay actualizes Hall's function as a writer.

One obvious direction in which to read the essay is as a piece of mother-writing. In it, Hall successfully reclaims the love and attention of the much older Batten. Hall was convinced that Batten had provided her with the love refused her by her biological mother. As she wrote to Sir Oliver Lodge in 1918 in a letter apropos Batten's daughter, Mrs. Austin Harris, "I never expect to know again such grief as I experienced at the sudden death of Mrs. Harris's mother, who represented to me all the affection and sympathy and complete understanding which had been absent from my early life."¹ At the same time, the circumstances of Batten's fatal stroke bear witness to Hall's unconsciously motivated rejection of this sort of acceptance and love. In this situation, Hall acts out the role of "bad boy," which, in her unpublished autobiographical essays and incomplete novel, *Michael West*, she contends that her mother had early projected onto her. Already at the time of publication of *The Forgotten Island*, she was involved with other women.² And at the time of Batten's death, Hall was having an open affair with Troubridge.

The tendency to read the material as motivated by fantasies of the fusion of female psyches can easily be supported in terms of current interpretations of the psychology of the séance. Stephen Connor, for example, writing about the popularity of séances during and after World War I, argues that one of the attractions of the practice was that it created an intensely feminine cultural space. Associating the darkened, often all-female space of the spiritualist sitting with Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, Connor argues that women in séances were recalled by the experience of female voice in a darkened room to a pre-oedipal state, in other words, to a fantasy of fusion with a lost maternal other. And Jenny Hazelgrove, in her excellent history of the Spiritualist movement in England in the first half of the twentieth century, sees the double attitude of the Society toward paranormal phenomena as symptomatic of an unconscious play of attraction to and repulsion from a maternal other. Hazelgrove finds ambivalence to be key to the objectives of psychical research. On the one hand, there was the tendency, epitomized in the writing of Frederic Myers, to see psychical research as a way of accessing aspects of human experience, intrapsychic,

interpsychic, and even between the living and the deceased, which the methods of the modern physical sciences were unable to chart.³ On the other hand, another early leader, the Cambridge philosopher Henry Sidgwick, emphasized the need for dispassionate scientific inquiry: “We must remember that our *raison d’être* is the extension of the scientific method, of intellectual virtues.”⁴ Hazelgrove argues that psychical researchers (defined usually as male) were attracted to the phenomena associated with mediums as occasions of psychic fusion between those involved in a sitting. At the same time, however, psychical researchers anxiously recoiled against the potential loss of their own individuality.

In Hall’s case, one may wonder whether the dual role of (feminine) participant–(masculine) observer sufficiently met her masculine psychic needs, a point to which I return at the end of the chapter. Notwithstanding this question, Hall’s situation demands a rather different reading of the sésances than that provided by Connor and Hazelgrove. In the sittings, Hall assumed the role of scientific investigator, or, in other words, a connotatively male subject-position. At the same time, the object of her interest in the sittings was to reconcile herself with her deceased lover. In other words, Hall’s re-performance of the pre-oedipal tie posited by some commentators depends upon her occupying a masculine position within the sitting. In this way, both aspects of Hall’s sense of self, both her masculinity and her femininity, are affirmed in the séance. This affirmation takes place as a result of her crossgendered performativity within the situation. Cross gender both enables and limits the possibility of fusion. Moreover, the technology of mediumship continually reminds sitters of the distance that exists between themselves and the spirits with whom they try to communicate. Records of sessions are full of what might be called interference effects, that is, of interruptions or distortions of communication that emphasize the “thickness” of these modes, their obliquity, and their propensity to produce errors in interpretation.

The technology of mediumship requires a medium, a sitter, a recorder (in the case of the Society’s tests), a control, and a communicating voice. Hall worked with a medium named Mrs. Gladys Osborne Leonard. At the beginning of a session, Leonard would usually go into a trance. Communication would then be initiated by Fedá, her “Control,” or the spirit who guided Leonard’s work as a medium and who had chosen her as a passive medium of communication. Early in her development as a psychic, Leonard learned that Fedá was the spirit of an Indian girl, married to Leonard’s

great-great-grandfather. Fedra reported that she herself had died in child-birth at the age of thirteen.⁵ When communicating, Fedra speaks in a foreign accent, with imperfect English and the vocabulary of a child. She lacks words to convey concepts or complex emotions or states of mind. Often, she does not know the particular word or words that a spirit is trying to send to the listening sitters, and much time is consumed as the sitters work with Fedra to try to communicate what the spirit is trying to say. These difficulties are continual reminders that the sitters exist on a different plane of consciousness from that of Fedra and other spirits. The difficulties, interruptions, relays, blanks, and occasional failures all inhibit the likelihood of psychic fusion. Moreover, the language that controls do use is so simplified in character as to be generic. In other words, a sitter who prepared for a sitting by reading accounts of other sittings would already be familiar with the vocabulary and content of the messages that they were likely to receive from “the other side.”

In addition to the control are the communicating voices, “spirits” in Spiritualist rhetoric, “purported communicators” in the awkward usage of the Society for Psychical Research. Here too problems of translation arise since spirits usually communicate by conveying psychical messages to the control, who then must translate the messages into her own words for the benefit of the sitters. At times in the sittings with Leonard, Batten seemingly assumes the role of control herself and speaks in something like her own voice. These more direct attempts to communicate tend to produce highly emotional responses in sitters.

Leonard’s unconscious body served as means for physical communication by the control or spirit. Fedra often moves the body of Leonard as she tries to convey a point physically. At times, the motions are characteristic gestures of Batten herself. In other words, the technology of mediumship demonstrates the possibility that the body of one person can convey the bodily movements, affective signs, and sensations of another. I call this process enactment, and it seems to me to qualify Hall’s experience of her deceased lover in a particular way.⁶ Rather than speaking of fusion as the object of the séance, it is better to think in terms of identification by means of incorporation of the other through enactment. Again, the process is performative rather than merely one of assimilation or absorption of a fantasized other. When Fedra moves Leonard’s body to make a point of her own, to touch Hall, or to demonstrate a habitual gesture of Batten, she demonstrates that the body of one person can enact the experiences of the

body of another. As a result of the demonstration, Feda conveys the idea that the sitter herself can embody the experience of the loved one. Communicating this idea is the primary epistemological objective of the sittings, and it makes possible what I describe later in the chapter as the payoff of the séances that Hall arranged. By participating in the series, Hall was able to reenact within her own body the experience of her lover in extremity. Instead of losing her identity in that of the other, she experienced within herself the embodied experience of another.

Hall's report on the sittings appeared in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1919. The article was a longer version of a two-part paper that she delivered to members of the Society and the public in London in January and March 1918. Presented as a serious piece of speculative psychology, the essay is based on sittings that Hall and Troubridge conducted between August 1916 and August 1917 with Mrs. Leonard, who had come to attention soon after the onset of World War I. In her autobiography published in 1931, she saw her entire career as predicated on the need for her services occasioned by the war. Leonard had begun working as a medium with Feda's guidance in 1913. In March 1914, Feda instructed her to "begin work as a professional medium as soon as possible." By a variety of means, Feda repeatedly communicated: "Something big and terrible is going to happen to the world. Feda must help many people through you."⁷ In these words, Feda makes clear the therapeutic function of mediumship within a social context of widespread trauma.

Troubridge closely collaborated with Hall in taking and recording notes on these sessions, and in the journal she is credited with Hall as coauthor of the essay. This acknowledgment is important since it establishes the fact of collaboration from the outset of Hall's work as an author of prose. In part, this feature of Hall's work was an effect of the disability of dyslexia, which limited her ability to read and write.⁸ To compensate for the disability, Hall had become a very good listener. In the sittings, information was communicated principally through hearing, sight, and touch. She may have found very welcome a mode of transmission that did not depend upon the written or printed word. In addition, the practice of taking notes and carefully transcribing them later may have helped her overcome anxiety in relation to the written word. However, organizing the research continued to be a major focus of anxiety.

Hazelgrove's approach ignores the serious interest of Society researchers, both male and female, in paranormal phenomena. The Society's work

was not driven simply by its members' unconscious motives. In the late nineteenth century, both in England and the United States, an interest in aspects of the self outside the limits of the conscious ego fascinated psychologists and philosophers. Much of their interest focused not on the discursive content of the information thereby communicated but rather on the insights into human psychology that the phenomena might generate. In an article on automatic writing, for example, William James remarks that "the great theoretic interest of these automatic performances, whether speech or writing, consists in the questions they awaken as to the boundaries of individuality."⁹ Sidgwick was a distinguished Utilitarian philosopher. Those who joined this and other such groups as the Theosophical Society examined the phenomena of mental telepathy, automatic writing, accounts of ghosts and haunting, and Spiritualism. In doing so, they attempted to bring an open-minded but objective spirit, what they referred to as "an evidential point of view," to their studies.¹⁰ At times, they produce careful and lucid analyses, as, for example, when one investigator, Alice Johnson, attempts to distinguish "subliminal" and "supraliminal" awareness from evidence that she believes her correspondent can definitely not already have known at the time it was produced in the form of automatic writing (177).

In retrospect, the evidence produced by psychical researchers proved much less convincing than they had hoped. Since the evidence communicated in séances, for example, was usually already known to at least one of the sitters, the possibility of telepathic communication was readily available as an explanation. (The existence of mental telepathy was a phenomenon that members of the Society believed had been scientifically demonstrated in an early series of experiments conducted under the Society's auspices.)¹¹ Moreover, since the experiments were not controlled and reproducible, the evidence produced failed to meet the basic requirements of experimental research. In addition, the evidence provided by the controls is often trivial in character. And when voices from "the other side" attempt to communicate something of substance, the message is usually trite. For example, in Johnson's study of the automatic writing of the pseudonymous Mrs. Holland (in actuality, Alice Kipling),¹² the following bit of doggerel is communicated: "Believe in what thou canst not see, / Until the vision come to thee" (171). All of these factors reflect negatively on mediumship as a mode of epistemology.

One of the chief objectives of psychical research is to prove the continuing existence of the personality after death, but descriptions of life on "the

astral plane” are likely to appear inconsequential to those not directly concerned in the sitting. At one sitting, for example, Batten reports that she now enjoys horseback riding, that she has acquired a new pet, and that she has a swimming pool reserved for her private use. When Hall, in another session, becomes absorbed in the control’s laborious description of the interior of White Cottage, the intensity of her excitement in receiving this information is disproportionate to the actual content of the communication. Of much more interest is the psychological mechanism, called “dissociation of consciousness” by psychical researchers, that might account for this supposed communication from Batten through the control.¹³ Hall herself is so intent on being convinced of Batten’s survival after death that she does not analyze this possibility, but other psychical investigators do. Johnson, for example, suggests that “controls” may be “aided and abetted by the subliminal self (of which they may, indeed, be fragmentary manifestations)” (179).

Approaches to psychical research were strongly marked by gender. In the Theosophical Society, as Joy Dixon has shown, male members tended to emphasize the experimental, rational, and scientific character of their investigations.¹⁴ On the other hand, most mediums were women. Feminists have argued that this division of labor permitted women to make claims to spiritual knowledge and authority that would not have been tolerated in the churches, universities, or marital households of the day. Male members of the Society tended to be skeptical about such wisdom. For its part, Hall’s essay is written within the genre of scientific studies of spiritualist phenomena. In the essay, she presents herself as “an impartial judge of evidence.”¹⁵ This approach is consistent with her self-identification with mental qualities coded as masculine. But, as I have suggested, Hall is noticeably less intellectual in her approach than, say, Alice Johnson. And the *dramatis personae* of the sittings—with Mrs. Leonard as medium, Hall and Troubridge as sitters, and two female controls, Feda and Batten—are all women. The essay itself then, despite its framing in terms of “masculine” objectivity, is very much female-centered. This focus, moreover, takes the surprising, and at the time scandalous, form of what today might be referred to as a lesbian coming-out story. The narrative of the essay, in one line, is the cumulative revelation of two important sexual and emotional relationships in Hall’s life. This revelation helps explain why Hall’s lectures prompted a public scandal and efforts to force her to resign from the Society.

Mediumship can be regarded as a modern technology of the psyche, which gained prominence simultaneously with the invention of psychoanalysis. Both of these technologies focus on subjects in need of therapeutic

attention. And both depend for their success on personal interactions, in one case, in spiritualist sittings and, in the other, in psychoanalytic sessions. In both settings, the relations involve processes of identification that psychoanalysts refer to with the terms *transference* and *counter-transference*.¹⁶ In psychoanalysis, however, these processes are supplemented with other elements in order to help the analysand recognize the operation of this unconscious dynamic.

Hall's extended period of psychical research proved remarkably productive both in shaping her sense of self as a public person and a writer and in enabling her to commit herself to a long-term relationship with Troubridge. Her investment in psychical research, however, still left her very much in need. Unexamined aspects of her role as a participant, in particular the degree of her responsibility, directly or indirectly, for having provoked Batten's fatal seizure, limited Hall's ability to understand and evaluate the sessions. She entered into the sittings and pursued them with total absorption in a transparent effort to come to terms with the trauma prompted by Batten's death. The essay plots the narrative trajectory of the sittings that permitted her to act out this trauma. But no analysis of the trauma takes place. Hall's experience leaves open the question as to whether the technology of mediumship affords opportunities for this sort of self-reflection or not. There is, for example, a similar lack of self-reflection in the sessions, discussed later in this chapter, that Oliver Lodge undertook in attempting to communicate with his son Raymond, who was killed in action during the war. Instead, through the introduction of "Billy," Hall and Troubridge shift the focus of the second part of the essay to the third member of the romantic triangle.

Hall and Mabel Batten met in 1907, when Hall was twenty-seven and Batten was fifty-one and married to a much older man, George Batten. Hall fell in love with Mabel, developed a close friendship with the couple, and, after George's death, shared a flat with Batten in London and the White Cottage in Malvern Wells. They remained partners until Batten's death in May 1916. The later years of their relationship were, however, troubled by sexual infidelities on the part of Hall. On August 1, 1915, Troubridge, then twenty-eight, was introduced to Hall at a tea given by Batten's sister, Lady Clarendon. Eight years earlier, young Una had married Ernest Troubridge, a much older man with excellent prospects in the British Navy. However, both discontent with serving overseas on Malta as the wife of an officer and problems with her husband's sisters and children by a former marriage ensued. Early in 1913, she returned to England to enter psychotherapy with

Dr. Hugh Crichton-Miller. During the course of analysis and with his sympathetic support, she became aware that she might be bisexual or even primarily lesbian in orientation.¹⁷ Shortly after war broke out in August 1914, her husband was recalled to London and was court-martialed as a result of a botched naval expedition he had commanded. Although he was acquitted, his reputation was damaged, and his career in the navy effectively shelved (Ormrod, 60–62). In May 1915, he was posted to Belgrade, and his wife found herself the mother of a young child and living “deeply distressed and intensely lonely in a tiny house in Bryanston Street.”¹⁸

Troubridge had been introduced to Hall at an earlier date, but, at the time, Hall did not make an impression. Now, however, Troubridge was ready for a change. She found it in Hall’s charm, high spirits, and boyish good looks. In her memoir of Hall, Troubridge says that she was immediately entranced (Ormrod, 46–47). The three women—Batten, Hall, and Troubridge—grew close and traveled together, and the younger pair began an affair. The seriousness of Troubridge’s interest made this new connection a real threat to Batten and Hall’s life together. Batten understandably became jealous, and her resentment came to the fore on the evening of May 14, 1916. Earlier that day, Hall and Troubridge had visited Maidenhead to look at a bulldog puppy for Troubridge (Ormrod, 72ff). After debating whether to stay overnight, the pair returned by train to London. Hall arrived home late, and an argument over the younger pair’s involvement broke out. At its height, “Ladye, intending to make a dignified exit to show her disapproval, rose from the table and suffered an apoplectic seizure” (Ormrod, 74). Batten fell unconscious and remained in that state until her death eleven days later, on May 25.

Batten never spoke to Hall again, and, during the last days, Hall could not know for sure whether Batten could hear her words of love and repentance. After Batten’s death, Hall, overcome with remorse, was driven in her extremity to attempt to make contact with her through mediums. In August, she attended her first sitting with Leonard. In October, Hall and Troubridge began visiting her together, one to sit while the other took notes. Their psychical research had begun. It was to continue on a twice-weekly basis for the next six years and intermittently thereafter for many more.

The first order of domestic business in the sittings was to decide what was to become of the *ménage à trois* now that one of its members was deceased. In effect, if the shock of Batten’s death was not to drive Hall to break off with Troubridge, responsibility for Hall needed to be transferred

from Batten to Troubridge. This problem takes pride of place early in the essay. For example, the sitting of October 13, 1916, ends with the following exchange between Troubridge, who takes the sitting on this occasion, and Batten, who communicates through the control, Fedá:

U.V.T. [Troubridge] Tell Ladye she's got to help me take care of Twonnie [Hall].

F. [Fedá] She says, yes, she wants that, she puts her in your charge.

U.V.T. Tell her I will do my best.

F. She says she's afraid you hardly appreciate the magnitude of your task. It will be perfectly awful sometimes, terrible. (365)

Batten, responding through Fedá, obligingly entrusts to Troubridge the "task" of caring for Hall. It is exactly in these terms that Troubridge in her memoir of Hall characterizes their relationship (39). The brief exchange is telling in other ways as well. The use of the name "Twonnie," Fedá's mispronunciation of Batten's nickname for Hall, has a humorous but infantilizing effect.¹⁹ At the same time, the message includes a shrewd assessment of Hall's character. She did in fact cause Troubridge great pain in future years.

The second performative effect of the sittings is to reassure Hall of Batten's continued existence and unqualified love (Ormrod, 97). In order to assuage Hall's guilt, it is also necessary that Batten, at times at Troubridge's prompting (418), assure Hall that she experiences no suffering in the afterlife. This assurance contradicts other accounts of communication with the deceased, such as Johnson's, which emphasize the frustration felt by the deceased in attempting to communicate through mediums and controls. In Hall's case, the comparative ease of transmission correlates with her desire to be absolved of responsibility for having shortened Batten's life. Instead, both Hall in the psychical research and Troubridge in her memoir claim that Batten's stroke was the delayed effect of a serious automobile accident that took place in September 1914.

Hall writes of Batten's communications on this topic: "She certainly links up her death with her accident. This is a distinctly good point; because although to all appearances A. V. B. made a good recovery from that accident, there can be no doubt that she really never recovered from the shock, and several doctors have told me that it very probably hastened her end. It

is undoubted that the consequences of the accident accentuated her tendency to lead the sedentary life most favourable to the development of the high blood-pressure which was the ultimate cause of her death" (426).²⁰ An automobile accident, leading to life as a semi-invalid, leading to high blood pressure, leading to a stroke is a long, indirect route toward Batten's seizure on the night of her argument with Hall.

In *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall*, Troubridge suppresses the fact that an argument occurred that evening. While I do not want to deny the possibility that a physiological link exists between Batten's stroke and the earlier accident, Troubridge's assertion that such a connection exists is even more definite—and more open to question—than Hall's. Troubridge writes that Batten "was an invalid for . . . many months; she never, I think, completely recovered, and moreover, when she died of a stroke less than two years later, the doctors were of opinion that she had suffered the first seizure at the time of the accident" (44). Both Troubridge and Hall appeal to authority, "the doctors," to displace the cause of Batten's death from May 1916 to the auto accident of September 1914.²¹

Communications about the auto accident dominate the first half of Hall's essay. Within the scientific frame of the essay, these messages receive attention as "Evidence of Memory Retained by the Communicator" (361). In terms of emotional motivation, this material is important in relieving the traumatic effects of the circumstances of Batten's death. Through Feda's relay, Hall's experience of loss is displaced to the scene of an earlier traumatic event in which Batten had been seriously injured in Hall's presence. In Hall's account of the auto accident, the later trauma is registered in a real-life incident that in Hall's telling has the force of a dream allegory. Here is her account: "Now the circumstances of the accident were these: A. V. B. and I were passing the Cross Roads at Burford, in our Limousine car, when suddenly a smaller car dashed into the side of our motor with great violence; the lady who was driving the smaller car mistook, in her panic, the accelerator for the brake; consequently the force of the impact was enormous, and our heavy car was jerked backwards and forwards several times before it finally fell over on to a stone wall, which it partly demolished, and then our car partially rebounded on to the road" (425).

At the time of the accident, Hall appeared to be unhurt. When the limousine driver broke down hysterically, she took charge of removing the unconscious Batten from the wreck and moved her with the help of local people to a nearby house. Hall appears not to have recognized that she

herself was in shock nor to have received counseling or treatment afterward. Under the impact of Batten's death two years later, Hall is drawn back to the scene of the earlier crack-up, a scene for Hall of continuing, unrecognized trauma, exacerbated by the circumstances of Batten's sudden death a year and a half later.

Hall's return to the site of the accident bears the marks of the later crisis. The details of the incident, in which a panicky female driver blindsides the couple in their limousine and nearly kills one of them, allegorizes the crisis in Hall and Batten's partnership brought about by Troubridge's reckless disregard of the effect of her behavior on Batten's well-being and happiness.²² In May 1916, Hall and Batten's relationship indeed was at a "Cross Roads," and the description of the accident indicates both that Troubridge was the major instigator and that her insistence was unconsciously motivated. After all, the lady driver did know better than to keep stepping on the accelerator.

The irrationality of Troubridge's behavior is underlined in her account of the accident. Mistaking the date of the accident by several months, she writes:

During the early summer of that same year as their car (a heavy limousine) was passing the crossroads at Burford on the way to the White Cottage at Malvern Wells, it was literally charged from the near side by a small open car driven by a lady who met the emergency by mistaking the accelerator for the brake. The violence of the first impact was such that it flung the heavy car over against a stone wall which it demolished, while the aggressor proceeded to pound it repeatedly before her engine stalled. The big car ended up on its side, terribly shattered (the body-makers subsequently expressed surprised that anyone had come out of it alive). (43)

In Troubridge's account, the lady driver is "the aggressor." Troubridge emphasizes the unconscious, repeated character of the other woman's action. In the memoir, Troubridge also takes responsibility for pursuing Hall: "As for me, I thought little and felt a great deal. I was swept along on a spate of feeling, of learning the endless aspects of this strange personality, and all I knew or cared about was that I could not, once having come to know her, imagine life without her. I had, at twenty-eight, as much

consideration for Ladye or for anyone else as a child of six” (46–47). Despite her candor here, Troubridge destroyed her diaries for 1915 and 1916 in order to efface evidence of her sexual intimacy with Hall before the time of Batten’s death (Ormrod, 71). Troubridge had her own reasons for regretting the impact of her entanglement on Batten, a cousin known to her since childhood, who befriended her both at the time of her marriage and again later when it began to break down. Uncannily enough, the other driver, a Mrs. Lakin, resembled Troubridge in other ways as well. Although it is not usually mentioned, the trial proceedings of Hall’s suit against Lakin reveal that Lakin was accompanied in the car by both her sister and her young daughter.²³ Troubridge, who also had a sister, was encumbered with her own young daughter during the anxious months of 1916.

During the sittings, Batten relives the experience of the crash. Hall’s narration of Batten’s experience permits an indirect acknowledgment of Troubridge’s role. Hall writes:

And now we come to what I feel is one of the best points in the whole description. It is this: A.V.B. says through Fedra that when she was jerked there was something at the side which frightened her, something which only caught her eye; according to Fedra, A.V.B.’s own words are: “It was like a sudden flash.” At the time of the collision I did not think that A.V.B. who, as I have said, was turning towards me, had seen the approaching motor; I questioned her about this afterwards, and many were the arguments, which invariably ended with the assertion on her part that she knew perfectly well that she had seen something; she used to say: “I tell you I did see something, what I saw was like a sudden flash.”

After getting the evidential words regarding the “sudden flash,” through Fedra, I feel quite sure that I allowed a certain amount of excitement to come into my voice when I said “good!” At all events I recorded in my notes, as a fact against myself, that I had spoken excitedly. (427)

This passage is one of the few times in the transcript of the sessions when Hall acknowledges that she and Batten had “arguments” or disagreements, which, if my sense of the allegorical character of this narrative is correct, refer to the “sudden flash” with which Batten at some point in 1915 realized that her young cousin’s ties with Hall posed a major threat. Losing

her composure as an observer, Hall for her part reads the moment as one confirming that Batten continues to exist, to communicate with, and thereby to sustain Hall herself.

Batten's communication concerning the car crash begins with bodily movements. During the sitting of December 30, 1916, with Troubridge sitting and Hall taking notes, "Feda showed signs of being uncomfortable, moving about restlessly" (417). She then proceeded to hold the back of her neck and to twist her head slowly from side to side while grimacing. Troubridge and Hall identify this and other movements as one that Batten often made after the accident. Troubridge then asks Feda whether the control can "tell us what caused these feelings" (420). Batten responds by describing the sensation of being unconscious and gradually becoming aware of Hall's presence. Eventually, Batten indicates that this is the moment when she was coming to after the auto accident. Hall follows her account word for word, corroborating Batten's evidence with her own recollection of events.

Hall's involvement in psychical research occurred at a time when it was potentially of large and public significance. The massive scale of Allied casualties in World War I and the fact that these losses occurred across the divides of social class prompted widespread participation in spiritualist sittings. In this context, spiritualist practices focused on alleviating the traumatic experience of the loss of a loved one. Accounts of these sittings tend to have a narrative structure, one of whose climactic moments occurs when the immediate occasion of the loved one's death is dramatized for sitters who usually were hundreds of miles away from the site of injury or death at the time it occurred.

The leading model of the psychical archive in this mode is Sir Oliver Lodge's best-selling book of 1916, *Raymond or Life and Death*, subtitled *With Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection After Death*.²⁴ The book went through many editions over the following decade. In it, the control re-experiences the trauma that caused the death of Lodge's son Raymond, who was killed on the western front. The moment is very different from the customary archiving of loss. For example, the account of Raymond's death that appeared in *The Times* reads in part as follows: "At the time of his death, [he] was in command of a Company engaged in some early episode of an attack or attempted advance which was then beginning. He was struck by a fragment of shell in the attack on Hooge Hill on the 14th of September 1915, and died in a few hours" (Lodge, 3). An account such as this one was liable to leave members of Raymond's family in an

acute state of anxiety over the intensity and duration of his suffering. The description of the action, moreover, is vague to the point of irony, implicitly suggesting that his casualty occurred for no effective purpose.

The reenactment of this injury in a spiritualist setting is much different. During Lodge's first sitting with Leonard, Raymond's fatal injury is reenacted in Feda's voice and her control of the movement of the unconscious medium's body. The demonstration of the transfer of Raymond's trauma to Feda is crucial if the sitter is to be able to enact in his own body the experience of Raymond's extremity.

Feda feels like a string around her head; a tight feeling in the head, and also an empty sort of feeling in the chest, empty, as if sort of something gone. A feeling like a sort of vacant feeling there; also a bursting sensation in the head. But he [Raymond] does not know he is giving this. He has not done it on purpose, they [the other spirits who appear with him] have tried to make him forget all that, but Feda gets it from him. There is a noise with it too, an awful noise and a rushing noise.

He has lost all that now, but he does not seem to know why Feda feels it now. (127)

Feda speaks in the body in this passage. And yet her body is just as invisible to the sitter as is Raymond's. What the sitter sees and hears are bodily signs of what is happening to two "persons," neither of whose body is physically present. In short then, the bodily reenactment of the moment of the shell burst is a figure of a figure. This bodily figuration provides a mimetic example that can function as a model of the bodily reenactment the sitter is to experience.

Within a month of the publication of *Raymond*, Hall experienced the single most important moment of her psychical investigations. During the sitting of December 30, 1916, she experiences, again through Feda's simulation, her deceased partner's experience during the automobile accident. Hall associated Batten's injuries on this occasion with the blood clot that eventually caused her stroke, an association corroborated by a number of doctors. For both reasons, the accident acquired for Hall the kind of significance that Lodge and his readers found in Raymond's injury. On December 30, Feda began to make movements that Hall and Troubridge associated with Batten's characteristic gestures when she was in discomfort

during the years following the accident (Hall, 417). When questioned, Batten indicates that she is re-experiencing the moment when she was coming to after the auto accident. Hall follows her account word for word, corroborating Batten's evidence with her own recollection of events. Six months later, in another sitting,

Feda said suddenly: "Now she's going back to this," and began a stroking movement of the face, saying, at the same time, that all this had more to do with me than with "Mrs. Una." I, wishing to get a still clearer description, said that I did not quite understand; whereupon Feda said that it was not my face but A.V.B.'s, but that I knew about it. She said that this had not happened "only just a little time" before A.V.B. passed on, and that A.V.B. was most anxious to get it through. A.V.B. then endeavoured apparently to describe, through Feda, the sensations caused by a violent blow on the head, she spoke of a sensation of falling, a giddy feeling, that made you feel as if you must fall to the ground, she also impressed Feda with the feeling that everything was going black, as if one were becoming unconscious, as if, as Feda said, "you were going down, sinking, sinking." She then added, "This has nothing to do with her passing on, it was before." There followed a little more description regarding the blackness, a humming noise in A.V.B.'s head, etc., and then came these words spoken by Feda: "This happened a good time before she passed on, but she says that from that time everything that happened tended towards her passing on. What she's just described seemed like the first definite step towards her passing, yet she says she had an interval of time in between, when it seemed as if that condition had not contributed towards her passing on." (433-34)

The passage indicates how powerfully mechanisms of identification can operate within the technology of mediumship. The unconscious medium, Mrs. Leonard, becomes the vehicle of transmission of her control, Feda, who in turn demonstrates the capability of one human body to experience the sensations of another. Hall, witnessing this exhibition, unconsciously mimics it, producing in herself a vivid experience of what her deceased lover is undergoing. In this reenactment, Hall internally experiences the embodied memory of another.

Earlier, I mentioned that psychical research foregrounds the impediments that exist to unmediated access to the consciousness of another.

These interference effects frustrate the desire to access the past as “spontaneous, alive and internal experience.”²⁵ At the same time, Spiritualism feeds this desire since the sitter is invited to experience a new memory in a particular way: namely, as an auditory and visual enactment whereby, through a psychic mirroring, the sitter is able to experience in her or his own body what the deceased has experienced. The bodily reenactment of another’s trauma is a key demand, conscious or unconscious, of the sitting. Insofar as the sitter approaches this experience, she or he experiences something on the verge of a psychotic episode.²⁶ One becomes embodied both as another and as another who is deceased. In this way, limitations of time, space, mortality, and otherness are surmounted. This experience may be regarded as the payoff both promised by and feared from the séance. Nonetheless, this fantasy is by no means the only conceivable end point of spiritualist practice since the fantasy of experiencing within one’s own body the embodied experience of another is momentary. Moreover, the experience of becoming other might be read in various ways, for example, as a religious or near-religious act, in which the mourner takes upon him- or herself the burden of suffering experienced by the deceased and in that way is united with them.

The enactment within her own body of Batten’s experience is the psychological goal of Hall’s study. At this point, it might seem that her essay could end. Were the process to end here, however, “Mrs. Una” would be left outside the circuit of identifications; and the function of these sittings in mediating the relationship between the three women would remain unaccomplished. The need to achieve this objective implicitly shapes the second half of the essay and helps explain what otherwise might seem to be a massive digression, namely, a discussion, thirty pages in length, of “Billy,” a dog that attached itself to Batten in the afterlife. Again within the investigative framework, Batten’s communications regarding Billy take on great interest insofar as, for Hall, they demonstrate “Knowledge . . . of Matters Entirely Unknown to the Sitters” (487). In her view, material dealing with Billy shows that, at least in this case, Batten’s message cannot have been produced telepathically by the sitters themselves.

In the sitting of December 6, 1916, Batten communicates news of this pet to Troubridge and Hall. After a hint directed toward Troubridge, she recognizes the pet to be none other than Billy, a wire-haired terrier that had once been a pet of hers but which had died about eight months before her cousin’s death (489). Troubridge had not seen the dog, which her

mother boarded in the country, for the last eleven years. At another sitting a week later, Batten assures Troubridge: "He's very well, and will be in a very good condition for you when you come over" (490). (Batten anticipated that Troubridge would die in the near future.) Batten provides information about the dog's recent medical condition, of which Troubridge was unaware. Contacting a local veterinarian and others, Hall was later able to confirm the accuracy of these descriptions.

Since Batten had good reason to be disaffected from Troubridge, it is not immediately evident why she would be caring for her pet in the afterlife. This question occurred to Hall, who asked it "on March 9th, 1917, at a sitting taken by me, acting as my own recorder" (504). As usual, the question is situated within scientific terms as a question about why Batten had decided to use Billy as an evidential "test" (504). Batten responds by reaffirming her continuing investment in the "link" that exists between the three women even while she professes no awareness of the intimate character of the linkage. Hall continues questioning:

M.R.H. How could you have known that Billy was Billy?

F. She says: "That is difficult to explain. . . . I suppose, in this case, there must have been some sort of link between Billy and Una and you and myself, if only from the point of view of something that would be of interest. I don't know how those things come to one, but they do, and I found myself somehow automatically in touch with Billy. We have a far fuller knowledge of things here than I can ever hope to explain to you through Feda, it's much too big a thing to get through one brain."

M.R.H. Have you actually got Billy, then?

F. She says: "Yes, I have, and you may ask why I have. I think because Billy was a link and it was extremely useful to have Billy, in order to get that test through." (505)

Batten's evidence concerning Billy has to do with a number of injuries or ailments that he experienced at various times and particularly in his final years. One traumatic incident occurred shortly before his death. Miss Collis, who boarded Billy, confirmed that "a few weeks before the end, he had a bite from another dog on his back, which we were afraid would not heal" (497). Hall and Troubridge also interviewed the veterinary surgeon who had attended Billy. She reported that "far from healing, . . . [the wound] had been in a very bad condition from the first, having rapidly become

mortified; and she went on to say that the smell of the wound had been so offensive that it was unpleasant having to dress it, which she had done daily” (502). This mishap was the immediate occasion of Miss Collis’s decision to have the dog put down.

The attack on Billy provides Troubridge, by way of proxy, with an accident comparable in seriousness with the one experienced by the other two women. Batten too had experienced open wounds, in this case on her scalp, at the time of the crash. Just as the earlier sittings permit Hall to feel Batten’s pain, so to speak, through the mediation of Billy’s experience, Batten is able to feel Troubridge’s. In this way, Troubridge is united with the other women in suffering. The element of feminine sharing in this pain is underscored by the fact that Billy experiences it as a victim of aggression. Troubridge regarded herself to be the victim of her estranged husband, from whom she believed herself to have contracted venereal disease.²⁷

How is one to understand the apparent ability of the *dramatis personae* of the sittings to enter into one another’s consciousness? Psychological researchers suggested that the phenomenon can be understood in terms of processes of identification whereby aspects of subliminal consciousness or the unconscious are projected onto other human beings. The relationship between the control and the medium vividly enacts this possibility, which the sitter first psychically mirrors, then reads back as evidence of the presence of a deceased other. Hall and Troubridge, however, had another means of understanding psychic interfusion through contemporary theosophical beliefs. Indeed, the belief in a selfhood shared between these three women that I explore in the remaining pages of this chapter makes better sense in theosophical than in spiritualist terms. The key point of spiritualist conviction is belief in the survival of individual personality after death. Theosophists, however, are much more interested in the possibility that the self may inhabit different personalities living in different times and places.

In theosophical myth, individuals consist in part of a soul, which exists outside time and space, and a number of finite personalities. The latter are regarded to be incarnations of the soul at different times and places. This teaching provides a way of imagining the self as not constrained within the limits of the individual ego. Theosophy offered an alternative way of thinking about the self. Troubridge exploited this aspect of theosophical teaching in her own view of the sittings. To her, they indicated that the personalities of the three women were interfused. Hall writes: “UVT has recently evolved a theory that several people might form part of the same ego, which would

account for the occasionally strong ties that sometimes seem inexplicable” (July 6, 1918; Ormrod, 100–101). Hall’s later practice of dedicating her novels “To Our Three Selves” indicates that she came to accept this belief.

In Theosophy, the personalities of the self may vary in sex and gender. Theosophists thought of male-female gender polarity in terms of an infinite series of gradations.²⁸ They also thought of gender as a male-female dynamic that existed as an aspect of the soul itself. In this view, gender was a bipolar psychical principle structuring all existence. Theosophists, then, have a double view of gender. On the one hand, it is material, a sign of the locking of the self into a particular body with the constraints that bodies carry in different times and places. On the other hand, gender is psychic, an aspect of the soul and of life itself. There is a strong Manichean tendency within both Theosophy and Spiritualism. Spiritualists tend to talk about the self as imprisoned in a corruptible body before being released from “the earth plane” by death. But there likewise exists a countertendency to view material existence as necessary to the development of the faculties of the soul. Lodge, who endorsed the objective character of Hall’s investigations, writes:

It may be claimed as legitimate to assume that the association between life and matter here on the planet has a real and vital significance, that without such an episode of earth life we should be less than we are, and that the relation is typical of something real and permanent. . . .

Why matter should be thus useful to spirit and even to life it is not easy to say. It may be that by the interaction of two things better and newer results can always be obtained than was possible for one alone. . . . Do we not find, [for example,] that genius seems to require the obstruction or the aid of matter for its full development? (320)

This double view is consonant with a number of views in other modes of early twentieth-century speculative psychology: for example, with the concept of sexual inversion in sexology, in terms of which a male homosexual is defined as a person with “a female soul in a male body.”²⁹ This view is question-begging insofar as the sexologists who put it forward usually were materialists. Whence then appeared the idea of the “soul”? With its metaphysical belief in an undying soul structured by both male and female principles, Theosophy offered other, potentially attractive ways of understanding what sexologists called sexual inversion. The double view within

Theosophy of the interaction of spiritual and material realities in the development of selfhood also has something in common with Freud's concept of the bodily ego. Freud argues that the ego is an embodied, which means also an engendered, entity: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface. . . . A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring."³⁰ Hall was a woman whose bodily ego was defined in terms of her perception that she existed across lines of gender. Theosophy's view of gender as doubly male and female, psychic and material, provided Hall with a way of understanding her embodied self as continually activated in relation to gender difference. Finally, since the concept of crossing gender is crucial to foundational formulations of queer theory in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, Hall's theosophical understanding of herself also makes her queer.³¹ This characterization is accurate insofar as one can understand Hall by rereading her through the categories of later theoretical understanding. But I also mean that Hall reads herself as queer in terms of late Victorian and Edwardian understandings of the word. For example, when Vernon Lee, to whom Hall likely had been introduced, speaks of "the queer comradeship of outlawed thought," she is referring to a shared sense of sexual and cultural dissidence that Hall experienced as bred in the bone.³²

Given the foregoing, one anticipates that Hall's essay will give evidence to a sense of the play of gender within the individual. Sally Cline, however, reads this period of Hall's life as one of lesbian acculturation and affirmation (59–90). And, as I suggested earlier, the essay has a strongly, at the time scandalously, feminine air. Masculinity appears only twice, once in the figure of Billy, "a rover by nature" (489) who enjoyed solitary forays into the city. The affectionate portrait of Billy and the strong sense of the dog as a personality in his own right is presumably collaborative since Hall did not know the dog directly. As a metaphor of Troubridge herself, moreover, Billy suggests that rather than being simply the "femme" as described by Cline (67), Troubridge too regarded herself as, in part, a masculine woman, albeit not as masculine as Hall. In the memoir, Troubridge refers to herself as an invert, in Vernon Lee's phrase, as one of those "women" who "seem to be born to have been men, or at least not to have been women."³³ In dreams, a particular figure may refer to more than one object or person. The same holds true for "Billy," whose roving nature belongs to Hall. The most obvious "link" between, in Batten's words, "you and myself" and

“Billy and Una” is Billy/Hall himself. Troubridge was strongly attracted to Hall’s masculine good looks and “engaging and rather raffish smile.” “It was,” she writes, “not the countenance of a young woman but of a very handsome young man” (46).

There is one male figure whose brief appearance troubles the essay. Hall strongly identified with British men wounded or killed in service during World War I. At her first sitting with Leonard, one of these men immediately made himself known. Given the times, it was customary for séances to begin this way: “I addressed no conversation to Mrs. Leonard prior to my sitting, beyond thanking her for the appointment, and she went quietly into trance. Her control, Feda, began by describing a young soldier; I did not recognise him, and said so, asking if there were no other communicators wishing to speak. It seemed there were, for I very soon got the description of a great friend of mine who had died some months previously” (340).

If the figure of the young man is a projection of an aspect of Hall herself, then her failure to recognize him may be significant, and the sittings may begin with an act of self-estrangement or betrayal. It is possible that the drama of reunification between the three women that is accomplished in the course of the sittings occurs at the expense of the suppression of a key aspect of Hall herself, Billy notwithstanding.

When Hall died during World War II, after a long, debilitating illness, Troubridge found her body transformed:

“At one moment it was my beloved . . . wasted, drawn, lividly pale and at times distorted—the next, a stranger lay there on the bed. Very handsome, very peaceful, very calm, but with scarcely a traceable resemblance to my John.” So strong was this sense of strangeness that when she had been laid out, Una and the nurse “stood looking down at her and I said: ‘Poor boy; he must have suffered a lot before he died. . . .’ It seemed a young airman or soldier who perhaps had died of wounds after much suffering. . . . Not a trace of femininity; no one in their senses could have suspected that anything but a young man had died.” (Ormrod, 281)

These lines suggest a Manichean perspective on Troubridge’s part, with female corporeality identified with the mortal body, while male embodiment, even in the body with stigmata, is associated with physical integrity,

beauty, and, in the suggestion of flight, transcendence. At the beginning of her psychical research, Hall had to turn away the “young soldier” (Hall, 340) with whom she so strongly identified herself and desired connection. This figure had to be set aside if Hall was to be able to overcome both self-division and the differences that existed between herself, Batten, and Troubridge. The price of multiple feminine identifications, however, was the suppression of Hall’s sense of embodiment as a masculine woman. And that price was one that she would be unable to sustain.