

FREDERIC W. H. MYERS, PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND
 PSYCHOLOGY: AN ESSAY REVIEW OF TREVOR HAMILTON'S
*IMMORTAL LONGINGS: F. W. H. MYERS AND THE
 VICTORIAN SEARCH FOR LIFE AFTER DEATH*¹

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The history of psychical research is full of fascinating figures who devoted their lives, or significant parts of it, to the study of telepathy, apparitions, mediumship and other phenomena. A particularly important one, and the topic of the book reviewed here, was classical scholar and inspector of schools Frederic William Henry Myers (1843–1901). Myers, who was also an early pioneer in psychical research and in psychology, and the leading theoretician of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), was criticized and appreciated by many during his lifetime. The latter was typically the case among those open to psychical research. Examples include physicist Oliver Lodge (1903, p.6) who compared Myers to Francis Bacon, and psychologist and philosopher William James (1903), who believed Myers showed a “genius not unlike that of Charles Darwin” (p.30). In his Presidential Address to the SPR, French physiologist Charles Richet (1905, p.4) described Myers as the soul of the Society, while American physician Rufus Osgood Mason (1893) referred to him in the pages of the *New York Times* as a man of “acute intellect and scholarly attainments” (p.20).

There has been a small resurgence of interest in Myers in the last decade or so, as I will discuss further in the next section. His ideas are the centre of an important defence of the existence of the mind as separate from the body (E. F. Kelly, E. W. Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso & Greyson, 2007), and he has been included in recent reference works (Gregory, 1998, p.507; J. B. Taylor, 2007, pp.25–29) and in the section of brief historical articles of the prestigious *American Journal of Psychiatry* (Kelly & Alvarado, 2005). Some celebratory events accompanied the centenary of Myers's *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) in parapsychology forums. These consisted of a panel discussion of the book at the 2003 Convention of the Parapsychological Association,² and an article examining the content, context, reception, and other aspects of the book (Alvarado, 2004). While no one denies the great importance of Myers in the history of psychical research—he was involved in the founding of the SPR, in the empirical study of psychic phenomena and survival of death, and in the development of the concept of the subliminal mind—until now he has not been the subject of a full-length biography.

In this essay I will review Trevor Hamilton's biography of Myers, *Immortal Longings: F. W. H. Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death*. The book is organized in eight chapters. The first two, “Keswick to Cambridge”, and “Life, Love and Letters”, include information about Myers's early life,

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² The session included the following brief presentations: “*Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death: An Overview*” by Jeffrey Mishlove; “The Reception of *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*” by Nancy L. Zingrone and Carlos S. Alvarado; “Myers and Modern Parapsychology” by John Palmer; and “F. W. H. Myers and the Future of Psychology” by Robert L. Morris.

education and social milieu. His career as inspector of schools, as well as his first explorations in spiritualism, are discussed in the third chapter, "A Career in the Seen and Unseen World". Myers's actual psychical research appears in the rest of the book, mainly in Chapters 4 through 7: "Myers and the SPR in the 1880s", "Myers as a Psychologist", "Myers and the Great Mediums of the 1890s", and "Myers, Haunted Houses and Miss Goodrich-Freer". Finally, Hamilton assesses Myers and his work in "Myers, Science and the SPR", and in "The Legacy of Myers".

I will present my comments about the book in the context of what I refer to as "Myers Studies", or the scholarly attempts to understand the life and work of Myers from a variety of perspectives.³ My focus will be on Myers's psychical and psychological work, as opposed to his literary publications (on this aspect see J. W. Beer, 1998). In addition to comments on Hamilton's work, I will present some general information about Myers not included in the book.

MYERS STUDIES

Hamilton's *Immortal Longings* was preceded by several publications. This work reflects two general orientations briefly outlined below.

Like other research fields, parapsychology has a literature in which its practitioners write about their history and its pioneers. The writers of such literature tend to focus on the current use and validity of phenomena and theories, and the anticipation of current ideas. Myers has been discussed in his role as an SPR pioneer (e.g. Salter, 1957), in terms of his ideas supporting the existence of the mind separate from the body, which is a topic of current concern (Kelly et al., 2007), and on the anniversary of his best-known publication (Alvarado, 2004). Recent authors of historical publications about dissociation (Dorahy & Van der Hart, 2007) and hypnosis (Pintar & Lynn, 2008) have also discussed Myers, if only briefly.

We may also mention the work of Emily Cook, now Emily Kelly (Cook, 1992, 1994; Kelly, 2001, 2007), which falls between the practitioner and the historical approach. She has argued that psychology needs to return to fundamental questions and that Myers offered possibilities for the empirical study of such issues (Kelly, 2007). Furthermore, she stated: "In the century since Myers's death, many of the observations he made have been powerfully reinforced by subsequent research" (p. 115). Kelly's main contribution, her as yet unpublished doctoral thesis, is a pioneering study entitled *The Intellectual Background and Potential Significance of F. W. H. Myers' Work in Psychology and Parapsychology* (Cook, 1992).

Other works have as a goal the understanding of Myers in his own context, regardless of the validity of the concepts and phenomena involved and of their relevance for present-day concerns. The first important study of Myers's personal life and intellectual context, as well as of aspects of his work, appeared in Alan Gauld's *The Founders of Psychical Research* (1968). Gauld presented Myers in the context of English nineteenth-century crises of faith and the development of spiritualism. Furthermore, here we find for the first time

³ It may not be proper to refer to the few published studies of Myers as comprising an area I am referring to as "Myers Studies". Such an area barely exists and is poorly developed.

a detailed description and analysis of Myers's work in psychical research, including his early and later experiences with mediums, his role in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886), and his ideas about the subliminal mind. This book remains today a basic source of information about Myers, and a classic in the modern historiography of psychical research. Frank M. Turner (1974) also explored the intellectual context of Myers, presenting him as one of several Victorian figures located between the realms of science and religion. That is, Myers and others were disenchanting with Christianity, but were not able to accept fully the tenets of scientific naturalism.

In addition, there are historical works that touch on various aspects of psychic phenomena which, while not devoted completely to Myers, have informed readers about his work and his role in the development of psychical research in England (e.g. Cerullo, 1982; Luckhurst, 2002; Méheust, 1999; Oppenheim, 1985).

Furthermore, Myers, who used to be almost completely ignored in the traditional historiography of psychology and psychiatry,⁴ has started to be recognized in books and papers about these specialties. Henri F. Ellenberger mentioned Myers in his celebrated *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970), and even referred to him as "one of the great systematisers of the notion of the unconscious mind" (p.314). But regardless of this praise, Ellenberger did not devote a chapter to him as he did for Janet, Freud, Adler and Jung, a situation that we may regret today but one that reflected the state of the historiography of psychical research at the time.⁵ The only study to date with a chapter about Myers from the perspective of the history of the subconscious mind is Adam Crabtree's *From Mesmer to Freud* (1993). Following Ellenberger, but improving on him in terms of details and general perspective, Crabtree located mesmerism, spiritualism and psychical research as important factors influencing the development of the concepts of the subconscious mind and dissociation.

Some assessments have been negative. In his concise history of British psychology, Hearnshaw (1964) presented Myers as lacking a truly scientific spirit, being guided in his quest by personal yearnings. Similarly, Starobinski (1970) argued that Myers was naive because he was motivated by an "obstinate desire to obtain experimental proof of the existence of a 'spiritual world'" (p.337). But such perspectives are far from being universal. Goldstein (1963) wrote that "Myers's theory of the subliminal self, along with the incipient psychoanalytic movement, helped to overturn the view of nonconscious states as static or pathological" (pp.588–589). In a more general evaluation, Kelly (2001) argued that, more than his model of the subliminal mind, Myers's

⁴ In a section of notes at the end of a chapter of his influential book, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, E. G. Boring (1957, p.502) briefly mentioned Myers, saying that he was very influential. However, he did not discuss Myers in the text and referred to psychical research as work at the periphery of the new psychology. The latter view has started to change in recent years, as seen in the works of Crabtree (1993), Plas (2000), and others (e.g. Alvarado, 2002; Shamdasani, 1993). For a short review see Alvarado (2005).

⁵ One must not be too hard on Ellenberger. His pioneering work did much to show the importance of mesmerism and spiritualism in the development of ideas about the subconscious mind. The same lack of detailed discussions about Myers's concept of the subliminal mind is evident in Tallis's (2002) book, and in overview histories of psychical research (e.g. Beloff, 1993; Gutierrez & Maillard, 2004).

contribution to psychology included ideas about the mind-matter relationship, as well as the need to develop unique psychological methods of study and to consider comprehensive theoretical models that accounted for a wide range of human phenomena.

In addition, there are sections about Myers and psychology and psychiatry in publications with different emphases, such as those on dissociation (Alvarado, 2002), hypnosis (Gauld, 1992), and psychology at the end of the nineteenth-century (J. B. Taylor, 2007) (see also Crabtree, 2003; Shamdasani, 1993; Taves, 1999; Williams, 1985). The growing industry of studies about William James has included considerations of Myers's ideas and their influence on James (e.g. Leary, 1990; Taves, 2004; E. Taylor, 1996).

The end result of these publications has been the still-in-progress creation of a new image of Myers as an important nineteenth-century figure in the study of dissociation and the subconscious mind. Hamilton's *Immortal Longings* covers many of the above-mentioned issues. But it is different from these publications in that it espouses a more general view than anyone else who has written about Myers.

EARLY YEARS

Hamilton presents us with a fascinating and detailed discussion of Myers's early development, education and social environment. Before the Introduction, Hamilton presents three family trees (pp.xi-xiii), Myers's and the trees representing his mother, Susan Marshall, and his wife, Eveleen Tennant. The main individuals in these family trees are discussed in these chapters.

The author cites the opinions of different people about Myers's character and personality. Some of them are not flattering to Myers. In fact, one of the things I like about this book is that, while Hamilton defends Myers from some attacks, he is also critical of him on occasion. In his view "Myers was a snob" (p.265) and "had a strong histrionic side to his character" (p.266). But there is no question that most psychical researchers who knew Myers liked and admired him. An example not mentioned by Hamilton was Charles Richet, who presented his impressions in his book *Le savant* (1923). "What I admired in Myers," Richet stated, "was his scrupulous scientific integrity" (p.78). Richet also praised Myers for his detailed memory and wrote: "His courtesy, his good graces, his erudition, were enhanced by a very delicate sense of humour that made his conversation charming" (p.78).

Hamilton writes that Myers had a tendency to "push on towards his goal" and that this "could involve a certain economy with the truth" (p.93). This observation is presented in the context of an incident involving Lord Rayleigh. But unfortunately the existence of such "tendency" is not substantiated with other incidents. In fact it is puzzling that Hamilton does not develop this point, because it has obvious implications for the reader's assessment of Myers.

Myers started his life with some social advantages. Hamilton writes: "Myers was born . . . into an environment of powerful cultural, social and political connections . . . The milieu was positive, supportive, stimulating and hierarchical, and, in conjunction with his outstanding natural gifts, fostered in the young Myers a considerable, even overweening, sense of his own worth and status" (p.16). Such a sense was not only an issue of self-perception. His early

work was recognized by others as well. By the time he was 22 years old, Myers had obtained "two first classes at Cambridge, a clutch of other awards, and a burgeoning reputation as a scholar and a poet" (p.33). Other information presented focuses on Myers's education, family life, his alleged homosexuality, the influence of Josephine Butler, and his work as an inspector of schools. Myers was also interested in women's education and suffrage. In fact, an 1870 report of a meeting of the National Association for Women's Suffrage printed in *The Times* stated: "A resolution declaring that by the deprivation of the Parliamentary franchise not only do women suffer much grievous social injustice, but the State loses an influence which would tend to soften and purify laws and morals, was adopted unanimously on the motion of Mr. F. W. H. Myers . . ." (Women as Suffrage, 1870, p.12). In an article published in *Macmillan's Magazine* about lectures for women, Myers (1868) wrote: "That a man should be pleased with ignorance in a woman is a folly; that a woman should therefore acquiesce in ignorance is a crime: for the first duty of women . . . is to please, not men, but God, who has set us here to help each other and to glorify Him, tasks which need all the wisdom that life or death can teach" (p.163).

In a discussion of Myers's "Career in the Seen and Unseen World" the first is a reference to his work as an inspector of schools, and the second to his work on psychic phenomena. From early on Myers was interested in unusual phenomena: "Myers had shown an interest in mesmerism and abnormal behavior in the 1860s. Indeed, as early as 26th June 1863 he had visited a lunatic asylum . . . In February 1867 he visited the London Mesmeric Hospital, and in his diary for the same month there is a reference to Henry Sidgwick's being involved in mesmeric experiments. There were also a number of diary references to his mesmerising or being mesmerised" (p.83). One wishes there were more details about these events. As seen in the pages of the journal, *Zoist*, and in such works as Joseph W. Haddock's *Somnolism & Psycheism* (1851), there was much mesmeric activity in England. Mesmerism and hypnotism were topics that Myers would write about at length in later years. For example, in a paper on the subject co-authored with Edmund Gurney, they wrote:-

It is the key which seems likeliest to unlock the mysteries of attention and memory; of sleep, dreams, and hallucination; of 'double consciousness' and of religious ecstasy. It is by thus throwing the mental machinery slightly out of gear that we discern the secrets of its adjustment, or (to use a more fanciful metaphor) "the soul that rises in us, our life's star," acquires from this displacement a sensible parallax, and reveals laws of its motion which direct introspection could never discover.

[Gurney & Myers, 1885, p.422]

Myers had séances with many mediums during the 1870s as a member of what Hamilton calls—referring to the Cambridge moral philosopher and former teacher of Myers, Henry Sidgwick—the Sidgwick group. This group included Eleanor Balfour, Edmund Gurney, Walter Leaf and others. The author describes the group as follows: "Very few people . . . had . . . the time, leisure, status and finance to work with mediums in the very intensive way that the Sidgwick group did in the 1870s." (pp.95-96). These séances were held with Fay, and with other mediums (Wood, Fairlamb, the Petty family) including Henry Slade, who was at the centre of many controversies in England when

he was taken to court (e.g. The Slade Prosecution, 1876). Some of these early séances in which physical phenomena were reported were discussed by Mrs Sidgwick (1886), who concluded that the evidence for physical mediumship was deficient.

MYERS AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

Discussions of the SPR—sometimes neutral, critical, or appreciative—were common in many popular and scientific publications. For example, the August 1882 issue of the *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* included the following news item:—

A "Society for Psychical Research" has been started under the presidency of Mr. Henry Sidgwick. Several men of note who have leanings in the direction of Spiritualism, but who have hitherto avoided declaring themselves so openly, are connected with it: Mr. A. J. Balfour, M.P., Prof. Balfour Stewart, Mr. R. H. Button, Hon. Roden Noel, Mr. F. Myers, Dr. Lockhart Robertson, and others. It makes one rub one's eyes to find a society founded in 1882 gravely announcing a "Committee on Apparitions, Haunted Houses", etc., presided over by Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood. It is a pity that the Cock Lane ghost is extinct. There is a committee on "Thought Reading", headed by Prof. Barrett.

[*Science and Art*, 1882, p. 282]

Myers was to become an important contributor to the SPR, a topic discussed by Hamilton. In fact, he was described at one point as "one of the leading spirits of the Psychical Research Society . . ." (Our London Letter, 1893, p. 5). This is supported by my analysis of the single-author papers appearing in the *SPR Proceedings* between 1882 and 1900, which shows that Myers published more papers than other authors did (see Table 1). In addition, reports published in the *SPR Journal* indicate that he was a frequent presenter and discussant at the Society's meetings.

We also find Myers early on writing articles for the general public in intellectual reviews, some of which were written with other authors. These articles, which publicized the work of the SPR in England, and elsewhere, were about topics such as automatic writing (Myers, 1885b), thought transference (Barrett, Gurney & Myers, 1882), and a future life (Myers, 1891b). I wonder how Myers's articles (particularly those written solely by him) compare in style and structure with other articles appearing in similar publications designed to present scientific topics to the public in Victorian times, a period that had a considerable popular scientific literature (Lightman, 2007).

Many ideas guided Myers's work. In addition to the issue of survival of death, Hamilton mentions that Myers had a "strong strain of Platonic mysticism in his intellectual repertoire . . . and had been encouraged to apply the concept of Darwinian evolution to the spiritual sphere through contact with Alfred Russel Wallace" (p. 137).

The book contains good summaries of Myers's involvement with such topics as automatic writing, telepathy, and the veridical hallucinations that led to the production of *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886), the first major study of the SPR. It was in the context of crisis apparitions that Myers "began to display his considerable gifts of organisation, pattern identifying and classification" (p. 139).

Hamilton also discusses Myers's introduction to *Phantasms of the Living*, in which the whole enterprise was justified. Myers defended the scientific

character of psychical research, and pointed out what he believed were the connections of the field to anthropology and religion. The introduction could be further analysed from the point of view of the rhetoric of science to identify the specific arguments that Myers used to convince his readers to take seriously the topic of the book. For example, Myers assured readers that the authors of the book did not want to upset the order of things:—

It is necessary . . . to state at once that we have no wish either to mystify or to startle mankind . . . we wish distinctly to say that so far from aiming at any paradoxical reversion of established scientific conclusions, we conceive ourselves to be working (however imperfectly) in the main track of discovery, and assailing a problem which, though strange and hard, does yet stand next in order among the new adventures on which Science must needs set forth, if her methods and her temper are to guide and control the widening curiosity, the expanding capacities of men.

[Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, p. xxxvi]

Table 1

Papers in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research by Single Authors, 1882-1900
(N = 152)

Author	%
Frederic W. H. Myers	21
Henry Sidgwick	7
Edmund Gurney	6
Richard Hodgson	5
William F. Barrett	4
Eleanor Sidgwick	3
Balfour Stewart	3
J. Milne Bramwell	3
Oliver J. Lodge	3
Andrew Lang	2
Frank Podmore	2
Other	41*

* This includes several authors with one per cent each, such as Thomas Barkworth, William Crookes, Alice Johnson, C. C. Massey, W. R. Newbold and Charles Richet.

Note: This analysis does not include anonymous papers, articles by more than one author, correspondence, book/article reviews, conference reports or news. Papers with more than one part were counted individually.

Myers's studies of automatic writing were of key importance for the development of his ideas. His early writings on the topic mention the concept of a subliminal self (e.g. Myers, 1885a). But Hamilton covers a wide range of topics in which Myers was involved, such as hauntings, apparitions of the dead, and mediums. The latter include mental mediums Leonora E. Piper and Rosalie Thompson, and physical medium Eusapia Palladino. In addition, there is a section discussing *Human Personality*.

MYERS AND PSYCHOLOGY

From the historical record it is clear that Myers did not represent orthodox psychology. In fact, in a letter Myers (1891a) wrote to Charles Richet he referred to his "psychological heterodoxy". Hamilton discusses many reasons why Myers was at odds with nineteenth-century psychology. Differing from the views of many that the subconscious was mainly concerned with pathology, Myers believed, Hamilton writes, that: "From the subliminal emerged the insights, the skills, the inspirations, that one associates with genius and the highest creative achievement" (p.191; see also Williams, 1985). Relevant to this, Méheust (1999, pp.52-53) has argued that Myers did not reduce the subliminal as an impoverished region of the mind, as Janet did, nor to primary processes, as Freud did with his theory of the unconscious. In Méheust's view, Myers's originality consisted in including "levels of existence that are superior and inferior at the same time from the waking ordinary consciousness" (p.53). If we add to subliminal manifestations such phenomena as telepathy, and also add discussions of survival of death, a topic generally neglected by psychologists, one can see why they did not like Myers's system of thought at all.

Another problem for psychologists was what Hamilton refers to, in the title of a chapter section, as "The Cosmic Myers" (p.195). This included "pre-existence in a Platonic sense" and the idea that "the soul, after death, progressed through a number of spheres where eventually . . . the soul united with the ultimate principle while still retaining its individuality" (p.195).

Myers's more metaphysical ideas led Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1903) to caution his readers about the need to distinguish Myers's subliminal psychology from his "philosophical-religious system" (p.295). Another European commentator, Italian alienist Enrico Morselli, commented in his book *Psicologia e 'Spiritismo'* (1908) that Myers's writings showed traces of "primitive mysticism, of deistic sensibility, of ethical candor, which combine spiritism-science with spiritism-religion, 'cold and serene research of the facts', with 'the aspirations of the soul, the basis of every moral and religious life, sublime, strengthening, and comforting truth'" (Vol. 1, p.42). Nonetheless, both Flournoy and Morselli praised Myers's empirical approach.

There is no doubt that Myers was an important nineteenth-century theorist of the subconscious, as well as of phenomena related to this construct such as automatisms, creativity, dissociation and dreams. However, there are aspects of this perspective that, probably for reason of space, are not fully articulated by Hamilton. Therefore I will discuss some additional issues below.

First, Myers's reviews of psychological literature, such as those covering the influential French studies with hysterical and/or hypnotic subjects (Carroy, 1991), were valuable beyond the expression of his own views. They probably assisted in the transmission of knowledge about those studies into the English-speaking worlds. This included the work of Pierre Janet (Myers, 1889b) and Alfred Binet (Myers, 1892a). We may also include here Myers's discussion of Breuer and Freud mentioned by Hamilton (p.190). According to Hearnshaw (1964), Myers's (1893, pp.7, 12-13, 15) presentation of Breuer and Freud's early ideas about hysteria earned him the "distinction of being the first Englishman to give an account of the work of Freud" (p.159) in England.

Second, there is no question that Myers was cited by many in a variety of psychological works. Examples of these include such books as William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), Pierre Janet's *L'automatisme psychologique* (1889), Joseph Jastrow's *The Subconscious* (1906), and Charles L. Tuckey's *Treatment by Hypnotism and Suggestion or Psycho-Therapeutics* (1907). He was also mentioned in articles, such as those discussing hypnosis (De Sarlo, 1893), one of which was devoted to Myers's ideas (Mangin, 1902).

The attitudes of several students of the subconscious mind towards Myers's concept of the subliminal can be seen in *Subconscious Phenomena*, a book containing several articles about concepts of the subconscious mind by influential workers in the field originally published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (Münsterberg et al., 1910). The book opened with an acknowledgment that the concept of the subconscious was controversial, and that there were no generally accepted definitions or agreement about the phenomena that illustrated its functioning. Three of the participants in the discussions mentioned Myers's concept of the subliminal and criticized it. Théodule Ribot stated that Myers' concept "bears the stamp of a peculiar biologic mysticism" (p.35). In Morton Prince's opinion it is "a wasteful expenditure of intellectual energy to indulge in metaphysical speculations regarding the existence and functions of a mystical subliminal self (Myers), transcending as it does all experience and everything that even a 'subconscious self' can experience" (p.74). Finally, Bernard Hart said: "Myers ascribes to the subconscious various supernatural properties which take his conception altogether beyond the limits of science" (p.127).

Those open to psychical research, such as Mason (1897), were more positive towards Myers than those who opposed the movement. But even those who reduced psychic phenomena to such conventional explanations as dissociation made use of Myers. However, theirs was a *selective use*.

A prominent example of this can be found in the writings of Pierre Janet. In Janet's classic study *L'automatisme psychologique* (1889) he mentioned many phenomena, including mediumship, to support the concept of dissociation. In this context, Janet cited Myers to provide examples of cases or phenomena (pp.78, 122, 393, 394, 402, 405). Furthermore, Janet wrote: "To my knowledge, the author that has contributed the most to develop the scientific study of spiritistic phenomena certainly is M. Fr. Myers. This author . . . has presented a very ingenious theory, at once psychological and physiological of mental disaggregation . . . [Myers's theories] are more developed than previous ones." (p.403).

Interestingly, and for reasons similar to those of Janet, Alfred Binet (1892) also cited and praised Myers in the context of his discussion of secondary personalities and referred to him as one of the authors "who has better understood the true nature of spiritist phenomena", having summarized in a precise way the "theory of multiple personalities at a time in which the studies of M. Janet . . . had not started yet" (p.299). Both French authors focused on the fact of the subconscious and on dissociation, neglecting the supernatural discussed by Myers as an integral part of his system of thought. Such neglect, commented on by Myers (1892a, p.420), shows a common pattern in the way Myers was cited in some psychological works. In addition to Binet and Janet, other

students of the subconscious used Myers as a source for what they found acceptable—namely the existence of the subconscious—but stripped Myers's discourse of such aspects as the occurrence of telepathy and the issue of survival of bodily death (e.g. Jastrow, 1906; Sidis, 1898).⁶

Hamilton also discusses Myers's participation in the international congresses of psychology held between 1889 and 1900. But the author could have presented more details, such as summaries of Myers's participation in the discussions in the congresses. An example of a particularly interesting moment was the following that took place during the 1889 congress held at Paris (*Statistique des Hallucinations*, 1890). In addition to Myers, others such as Joseph Delboeuf, Pierre Janet, Charles Richet, Henry Sidgwick and Julian Ochorowicz were present. Richet reminded the group that some members of the congress wanted to discuss the phenomena of "transmission of ideas" (p.152), while Janet asked the representatives of the SPR present at the discussion to summarize their work. Myers followed Janet and talked about aspects of the SPR's thought-transference work. Examples of dialogues such as this are important because they show Myers interacting with other figures in the congress, illustrating his transcendence of SPR circles.

I agree with Hamilton's comments about the congresses, but I wish he had used as sources the proceedings of the conferences (e.g. *Congrès International de Psychologie Physiologique*, 1890; Janet, 1901) as opposed to relying only on published accounts of some of the congresses in the *SPR Proceedings*. While an analysis of the first two congresses, held in 1889 and 1892, suggests that psychical research was "accepted", this does not mean there were not some dissenters from this view. Wilhelm Wundt (1892/2000) was not happy with Henry Sidgwick as president of the 1892 congress for fear that telepathy would be overrepresented, a charge that Sidgwick (1892) rebutted in his Presidential Address. Hamilton mentions that there were protests at the 1900 congress, and that is certainly visible in the conference proceedings (*Discussion*, 1901). He states that the "1900 congress was the last at which there was any significant consideration" of psychic phenomena and, among other factors, "this reflected the growing professionalism of psychology" (p.185). As discussed by many in the past, the rejection of psychical research from the congress in 1900 represented the "expulsion of intruders" (Paicheler, 1992, p.248), and what Le Maléfan (1995) has referred to as the separation of "the acceptable from the unacceptable in psychology" (p.624). I would frame the issue as one of boundary work, in which members of particular fields or groups engage in active separation from individuals, ideas, or methodology "for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative residual non-science" (Gieryn, 1999, pp.4–5). Such demarcations were partly an attempt to acquire prestige and control over the domain of human experience and behaviour through the elimination of competition. The history of psychology presents several such episodes in relation to psychic phenomena (e.g. Alvarado, 2009b; Coon, 1992).

⁶ Another author who used Myers's writings selectively was Joseph Grasset (1906), who had a different (reductionist) model of the subconscious from Myers. He referred to Myers as a leading author on the topic, and one who had provided him with valuable source material (pp.8–9).

While discussions of psychic phenomena in the congresses declined considerably after 1900, to the point of disappearing, they were still present at a low level at the 1905 congress, held in Rome under the presidency of Giuseppe Sergi. For example, Richet (1906) defended psychical research, arguing that the field — which he called metapsychics — would eventually develop more and obtain general acceptance. Favre (1906) reported work testing the effects of the human hand on the growth of grains and microbes.

THE RECEPTION OF MYERS'S WORK

Studies of how Myers influenced others are needed. An interesting one is Powell's (1979) discussion of the role of the concept of Myers's subliminal in the acceptance of psychoanalysis in the United States. Eugene Taylor (1996), among others, has discussed Myers's influence on William James. According to Fuller (1986) both Boris Sidis and Morton Prince incorporated some of Myers's ideas in their thinking. Sidis was cited by Bruce (1910) as saying to him that "Myers . . . first opened my eyes to the close relationship between psychology and medicine" (p.452). However, and as mentioned above, in many cases this influence was stripped of its supernormal content.

In reality we have not done justice to the study of the reception of Myers's work such as *Human Personality*. Most contemporary writers have limited their discussions to English-language material, and then to individuals such as James, Mallock, and Stout, as Hamilton has done (pp.279–280), neglecting lesser-known authors and the popular press (e.g. Chadwick, 1903; De Wyzewa, 1903; Jankelevitch, 1904; Riley, 1905; Review of *Human Personality*, 1903). *Human Personality* also received a two-part review in the *New York Times* written by physician Rufus Osgood Mason (1903). In his view, even if it would take a generation for the value of Myers's work to be recognized, "he has called the attention of the thinking world to a new line of human development, and sooner or later it will be recognized" (p.BR1). The book was also mentioned in American newspapers. Among these was the announcement that Longmans, Green "will publish next month the long expected book" (Book Gossip in London, 1903), as well as advertisements listing the chapters of the book (Advert, 1903). There is a need to widen the range of study to other authors who reviewed *Human Personality*. The current boundaries have limited our understanding of both the positive and the negative reception of Myers's work.⁷

Much of the material ignored to date was published in languages other than English. Hamilton briefly mentions that Myers was rejected by some in countries such as France and Germany (p.187), but his work does not cover these aspects of Myers's reception. There is actually much to be learned about the international reception of scientific work, as can be seen in studies of Darwin's reception in many countries (Glick, 1988).

The abridged French translation of Myers's *Human Personality*, *La personnalité humaine, sa survivance, ses manifestations supranormales* (Myers, 1905), was reviewed in many generally ignored forums. These include

⁷ See also my bibliography of online psychological research and psychology materials about Myers (Alvarado, 2009a), which includes many generally ignored reviews of *Human Personality*.

L'année psychologique (Maxwell, 1906). Maxwell believed that Myers was original only in the way in which he presented and supported his ideas, but in Maxwell's view Myers's ideas were not very different from spiritistic doctrine.

Going beyond *Human Personality*, many French publications included mention of Myers's work. An example was Erny's (1895) book *Le psychisme expérimental*. An anonymous writer in the newspaper *Les temps* stated that "Myers . . . is one of the more universally recognized authorities on matters of subconscious psychology. The scientific research work he founded and inspired with systematic and exact observations of second sight, of correspondences of thought, is one of the most solid that there are." (Nouvelles de l'Étrangere, 1904). Myers was mentioned, and criticized, in an article about novelties in psychology published in the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (Bordeau, 1906). This author credited Myers with having rejuvenated animism and with providing a scientific framework for its support. This entailed bringing together mysticism and an empirical approach, something that made Myers a "positivist Swedenborg". Another critic, philosopher Émile Boutroux (1908), wrote a paper about the subliminal self in which he stated that Myers showed the existence of subconscious processes, but said that some of the facts Myers used were "very difficult to prove" (p.114).

An author writing in *La Ciudad de Dios*, a Spanish journal published by members of the Augustine order, discussed Myers as an example of a new theorist about personality (Gutiérrez Marcelino, 1890). In Italy, De Sarlo (1893, p.173) mentioned Myers, together with Janet and Max Dessoir, as examples of individuals interested in dissociation and automatisms.

Another area of note is the reaction of English spiritualists to the SPR and Myers's work. Their reaction to *Human Personality* deserves more attention than it has received so far. Some interesting comments about the book appeared in *Light*, both positive (The Myers Book, 1903) and negative (Robertson, 1903). Hamilton covers some of the critiques that spiritualists, such as Roden Noel (p.158), made of Myers' ideas. He further points out that Myers, and particularly the early Myers (1884, 1885a), was perceived as "undermining the spiritualist position by attributing most of their phenomena to a psychological source" (p.159).⁸ Spiritualists' reactions were not surprising: they were defending their beliefs against a newcomer to the neighborhood, the young psychical research movement as represented by the SPR since 1882. Their reactions, as Hamilton is aware, were part of an overall response to the perception that much of the SPR's work was critical of some of the claims of spiritualists. I would add to this that spiritualists' reactions can also be seen against the background of previous developments. Spiritualists were used to, and perhaps tired of, those who reduced their beliefs to the conventional workings of the nervous system (Carpenter, 1853), and to the action of thought transmission and psychic forces unrelated to spirits (Mahan, 1855).

But Hamilton also argues that the SPR-spiritualism relationship had other facets. To some extent, the empirical work of psychical researchers brought support to spiritualists in the sense that evidence was provided for some of the psychic phenomena in which spiritualists believed.

⁸ This also applies to critiques presented by French spiritists (e.g. Vincent, 1886).

MYERS AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

As Hamilton says, regardless of Myers's "emotional longing" for survival of death, his work was empirical: "Phenomena had to be probed, examined and discarded, no matter how comforting, if they failed to meet the standards of evidence required" (p.256). Myers (1900) himself wrote: "No attachment to Christian tradition, no recognition of the need and value of high intuitions, should blind us to the fact that only on truths scientifically demonstrated can a world-philosophy or world-religion be based." (p.110). But Hamilton points out that, regardless of his recognition of the importance of science, Myers's "own writing sometimes soared too far from that disciplined base" (p.187).

Defending the SPR from Robert Thouless's criticism to the effect that its members did not understand the concept of experimentation, Hamilton remarks: "An experiment is not just a designed intervention into the natural order. It can also be deliberate and careful observation intended to reveal particular information." (p.256). It is important to state here that many of the uses of the terms 'experimental' and 'experimental psychology' during the nineteenth century were different from the current use in psychology, or from its use when Thouless was writing. Furthermore, many, such as Ribot (1870), used the terms to mean an empirical approach to psychological problems. Myers (1886) wrote about "experimental psychology" as "the attempt to attack the great problems of our being not by metaphysical argument, nor by merely introspective analysis, but by a study, as detailed and exact as in any other natural science, of all such phenomena of life as have both a psychical and a physical aspect" (p.1). But as Henry Sidgwick (1892) noted in his Presidential Address at the Second Congress of Experimental Psychology, the term 'experimental' was used in different ways by different psychologists. The situation was one in which many groups had their own definitions that were used, more importantly, in the quest for scientific legitimacy.⁹

As chronicled by Hamilton, Myers made many empirical observations during his career, such as attending séances for physical phenomena, and studying cases of automatic writing, and apparitions, among other phenomena. "Myers travelled ceaselessly at home and abroad to investigate promising cases" (p.247). His analyses of published observations of hypnotic, hysterical, apparitional, mediumistic, and telepathic phenomena (e.g. Myers, 1886, 1889a, 1893, 1903) show he had a particular ability not only to summarize countless observations of phenomena made by others, but to organize such observations in a coherent way so as to support the existence and capabilities of the subliminal mind. The way Myers analysed cases is what Gillian Beer (2000) refers to as a mid-nineteenth-century "literary, non-mathematical discourse" (p.4) used by some scientists in their writings. This style allowed for a wide range

⁹ Carroy and Schmidgen (2006) wrote about the differences between the German and French approaches to psychological experimentation. The situation was further complicated by the fact that spiritists also used the term 'experimental' in works partly based on non-veridical mediumistic communications (e.g. Kardec, 1863). In a paper he delivered at the 1900 International Psychology Congress, spiritist Gabriel Delanne (1901) referred to "experimental psychology" in a discussion of observations of telepathy and apparitions. A similar situation existed regarding the terms 'psychology' and 'psychological'.

of material to be classified and compared, and in addition it was accessible to non-scientists. Hamilton states that Myers "was trying to use Darwinian classification methods to show that the normal, abnormal and paranormal phenomena were related manifestations of the same core process" (p.4). In fact, Myers had been compared to Darwin before, both by James (1903, p.30), and by American journalist B. O. Flower (1903, p.193). But regardless of brief remarks about classification and comparison of phenomena (Gauld, 1968, pp.277–278; James, 1901, p.16; Méheust, 1999, pp.47–48; Podmore, 1901, pp.30–31), the fact is that no one has analysed Myers in detail to assess how he organized his ideas, or to reconstruct the sequence of his thinking and reasoning, as has been done for other figures in the history-of-science literature (e.g. G. Beer, 2000).¹⁰

Myers emphasized bibliographic research in a good part of his work, frequently reorganizing and reinterpreting the work published by others, as in the case of hypnosis (e.g. Myers, 1886, 1903, Vol. 1, chapter 5). He was less of a 'hands on' hypnosis researcher (for exceptions see Myers, 1886, pp.6, 14–15) than others who actually used hypnosis frequently to produce specific manifestations (e.g. Beaunis, 1887; Janet, 1889). But Myers was not unique in his approach. Théodule Ribot, for example, made fundamental contributions to the orientation of the new French psychology during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in a similar fashion. Brooks (1998) has stated that while Ribot inspired scientific psychology in France, "his psychological works consisted of observations culled from the works of others—primarily physiologists and psychiatrists — and interpreted systematically from a biological and evolutionary point of view" (pp.67–68). Brooks further wrote about Ribot—and this also applies to Myers—that "it was his general, philosophical, conception of the field of psychology that allowed him to rise above compartmentalized scientific disciplines and to unite elements from various sources" (p.96). While I believe Myers was more original than Ribot in his combinations of data as well as deeper in his analyses, it would be interesting to compare their analytic styles systematically, keeping in mind their conceptual differences.

THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF MYERS'S IDEAS AND OF MYERS STUDIES

Hamilton asks at the end of his book: "Was Myers' quest successful?" (p.302). He argues that the fact that Myers became convinced of survival of death was a personal form of success. Another form of success was that, through *Human Personality*, Myers "kept alive . . . the key issues of the mind–body relationship. He has been a force for good in terms of opposition to over-simple mechanistic and reductionistic approaches to the human psyche." (p.302).

However, the story is different when it comes to the acceptance of Myers's work. In a letter William James wrote in 1901 he mentioned Myers and stated: "Fifty or a hundred years hence, people will know better than now whether his instinct for truth was a sound one" (H. James, 1920, p.157). More than a hundred years have gone by and Myers still is not part of the mainstream. He

¹⁰ Similarly, it may be possible to study Myers using Holmes's (2004) concept of the 'investigative pathway', that shows the "expression of the distinctiveness and continuity of the individual scientific personality" (p. xx) slowly developing over time as the individual progresses in his or her work.

may have been strongly defended by Kelly et al. (2007), and featured in other forums (e.g. Kelly & Alvarado, 2005; J. B. Taylor, 2007), but this does not mean that Myers has gained general acceptance in the modern context. In fact, it is unusual to find modern papers citing Myers either to justify or to provide theoretical context for research (an exception is Alvarado & Zingrone, 2007–2008). Of course, it is always possible that the situation may change. As has been pointed out before (Alvarado, 2004; Kelly et al., 2007), there are many areas in psychology and parapsychology today that are consistent with, and that may be explored by following, Myers's ideas. Kelly et al.'s *Irreducible Mind* (2007), in which areas of modern psychology are reviewed and critiqued using Myers, is an important and necessary beginning that brings attention to Myers's relevance. But such an effort, if it is going to change psychology *à la* Myers, needs to be followed by actual research designed to test Myers's ideas where possible. What is needed now is the development of a research programme that will provide new empirical evidence for Myers's tenets with the potential of expanding his system of thought.

Many ideas from Myers's writings could guide a modern research programme. These include the speculation of a "transition from hyperaesthesia to telaesthesia, so that when peripheral sensation is no longer possible, central perception may be still operating across obstacles otherwise insurmountable" (Myers, 1903, Vol.1, p.276). An important hypothesis, and one that has the potential of helping us to integrate the supernormal, the normal, and the pathological, is the following statement:—

It may be expected that supernormal vital phenomena will manifest themselves as far as possible through the same channels as abnormal or morbid vital phenomena, when the same centres or the same synergies are involved . . . [Assuming] there be within us a secondary self aiming at manifestation by physiological means, it seems probable that its readiest path of externalisation—its readiest outlet of visible action,—may often lie along some track which has already been shown to be a line of low resistance by the disintegrating processes of disease. Or, varying the metaphor, we may anticipate that the partition of the primary and the secondary self will lie along some plane of cleavage which the morbid dissociations of our psychical synergies have already shown themselves disposed to follow. If epilepsy, madness, &c., tend to split up our faculties in certain ways, automatism is likely to split them up in ways somewhat resembling these.

[Myers, 1903, Vol. 2, p. 84]

But regardless of the validity of Myers's ideas, and of the possibility of developing a psychology following his lead, we need to remember that Myers is also important for history, as I have pointed out throughout this essay. Even considering previous historical studies concerning Myers, there is much more work to be done. Further study will bring a better understanding of the man, his work, his influence, and his place in psychology and psychical research.

The variety of topics studied in relation to such figures as Charles Darwin (Kohn, 1985), Sigmund Freud (Rozen, 2001), and Wilhelm Wundt (Reiber & Robinson, 2001) can provide many suggestions about research directions that may develop our historical understanding of Myers. Some possibilities are detailed studies of: (1) early personal and intellectual factors affecting Myers (e.g. Josephine Butler, classical training); (2) later influence of particular individuals on Myers's thought (Carl du Prel, Pierre Janet); (3) guiding

concepts in Myers's work (e.g. previous ideas about the subconscious mind, ideas of evolution); (4) development of Myers's ideas (from early 1880s writings to later years); (5) Myers's analytical methods (e.g. study of gradations of the phenomena, classifications); (6) comparisons of Myers's subliminal to the concepts of the subconscious of others (e.g. Janet, Prince); (7) specific topics discussed by Myers (e.g. apparitions of the dead, physical phenomena); (8) Myers's writing style (e.g. rhetoric, use of metaphors); (9) Myers's use of knowledge from other areas (e.g. psychology, neurology); (10) relationship between Myers and other figures (e.g. Henri Bergson, Charles Richet); (11) reception of Myers's work (e.g. in different countries, in areas such as religion); (12) the influence of Myers on other individuals (e.g. Oliver Lodge, Théodore Flournoy); (13) the influence of Myers on movements or fields (e.g. spiritualism, psychical research); and (14) the dissemination and popularization of Myers's ideas (by authors such as Frank Podmore and Rufus Osgood Mason).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While Hamilton could have included more details in his discussions of some topics, his work is successful in presenting an overview of Myers's life and work. In fact, no author before Hamilton has presented such a global and integrative perspective of Myers. Hamilton combines well the personal and intellectual aspects of Myers with his psychical and psychological work. Furthermore, he covers areas of Myers that have previously been neglected, or only briefly discussed. In fact, I would recommend that Hamilton's work must be the first step in obtaining a good panoramic view of Myers for anyone who wishes to embark on more detailed studies.

One can only hope that the general tapestry woven by Hamilton in *Immortal Longings*, together with previous work by authors such as Gauld and Kelly, will help others to move forward both in the empirical explorations of the phenomena and concepts that mattered to Myers, and in the historical studies of his accomplishments and related areas.

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