

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Eusapia Palladino: An Autobiographical Essay

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Abstract—This paper consists of commentaries about and the reprint of an autobiographical essay authored by Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918) and published in 1910. The details of the essay are discussed in terms of the writings of other individuals about the life and performances of the medium. The essay conveys a view of Palladino as a person who suffered much in life and had a mission to help scientific research into mediumship. Typical of the positive emphasis in autobiographies in general, the medium did not discuss negative aspects of her performances. Due to the fact that the essay appeared during Palladino's visit to New York City in which many authors branded her as a fraud, it may be speculated that the purpose of this autobiography was to elicit sympathy from the American public. While some of the statements that Palladino made about phenomena are consistent with the statements of other authors who have written about her, there are several statements that show alternate or incomplete versions of particular events in her life. The differences suggest that Palladino's essay and other discussions about the medium's life are not reliable when it comes to specific details and to biographical accuracy.

Keywords: Eusapia Palladino—physical mediumship—history of psychological research—Cesare Lombroso—Enrico Morselli—Hereward Carrington

Introduction

The autobiographies of mediums, as seen in works such as those published by D. D. Home (1863) and Gladys Osborne Leonard (1931), provide us with useful biographical information. Furthermore, autobiography illuminates the strategies, as well as the realities and fictions with which these unique individuals choose to represent themselves. Even allowing for idealized or fictitious accounts, the way mediums depict themselves may provide us with much information about their goals and relationships, and their sense of mission, and as such are documents of importance to historians (e.g., Tromp, 2006). Furthermore, they may also reveal the human dimension of mediums, their fears, hopes, tribulations, and expectations. Keeping these issues in mind I present in

this paper a short autobiographical statement written by an important medium known for her production of physical effects, the Italian Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918).

The autobiographical essay appears below after some general information about research conducted with the medium and about her life. My intention is not to condemn nor to defend Palladino's behaviors. Neither am I concerned with evidential issues surrounding her mediumship. Instead I will discuss a little-known autobiographical essay to explore how Palladino presented herself. A secondary purpose of this paper is to provide information about the medium taken from generally neglected sources, such as French and Italian accounts of her mediumship.



Palladino and Psychical Research

Palladino is well-known to students of the history of psychical research. This is evident in studies of her mediumship (e.g., Alvarado, 1993, Blondel, 2002) and discussions in modern overviews of the history of psychical research (e.g., Beloff, 1993:114–120, Biondi, 1988:96–100, 121–129, 134–159, Gutierrez & Maillard, 2004:82–100, 117–138, Inglis, 1992, Chapters 35&38).¹ In addition to discussing the medium's phenomena and her interaction with researchers, previous authors have mentioned the many occasions on which she was caught in fraudulent activity (e.g., Carrington, 1909a:182, Courtier, 1908:521–540, Flammarion, 1907:520–521, Samona, 1910:287). Nonetheless, many of her investigators believed she could produce real phenomena.

Although there were earlier reports of her phenomena (e.g., Chiaia, 1890, Ciolfi, 1891), the first systematic scientific investigation of her mediumship was conducted in Milan in 1892 (Aksakof, Schiaparelli, du Prel, Brofferio, Gerosa, et al., 1893). Most of the seances took place in the presence of Imperial Councilor to the Czar Alexander Aksakof, philosophers Angelo Brofferio and Carl du Prel, physicists Giorgio Finzi, Giovanni Battista Ermacora, and

Giuseppe Gerosa, and astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli. Physiologist Charles Richet and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso also attended some of the seances.

Some of the best-known later investigations included those conducted in Cambridge (Sidgwick, 1895) and in Naples (Feilding, Baggally & Carrington, 1909) by representatives of the Society for Psychical Research, in Paris by the Institut Général Psychologique (Courtier, 1908), which included both Pierre and Marie Curie, and in New York by Hereward Carrington and others (Carrington, no date, Part 2, 1954). In addition, many other investigations of her phenomena were conducted over the years (e.g., Bottazzi, 1907, Lodge, 1894, Morselli, 1908, de Rochas, 1896, de Schrenck-Notzing, 1925).

Palladino produced a wide range of phenomena, which have been classified and listed by Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1907:342–359). He referred to subjective (mental) manifestations, such as high suggestibility, trances, divination of thought, and changes of personality in communications from her spirit control John King.² However, most of the classification consisted of objective or physical phenomena. Morselli mentioned movement of objects with and without contact with the medium (e.g., table movements), changes in the weight of objects (e.g., the weight of the medium), thermal manifestations (e.g., cold winds), sounds (e.g., blows and raps), effects on matter (e.g., imprints of limbs or faces on plaster), luminous phenomena (e.g., luminous points that seemed to be suspended in space), and invisible and visible materializations (e.g., hands felt or seen).³

To illustrate some phenomena reported with Palladino, we need to remember that the medium usually sat on a chair on one side of a table with her back to the cabinet, which consisted of a corner or a section of a room separated from the rest with a curtain. Small objects were placed on a table in the cabinet. In such a setting the following were commonly reported:

The table on which the toys had been placed, and which we will call No. 1, made a noise in the interior of the cabinet, from which it at last came out completely. Then there began to arrive on the seance table many objects from table No. 1: a sheet of paper, a little wooden sheep, and a mandoline; the latter was accompanied by the curtain which covered the handle; the curtain, being pushed back by M. Foà, came back and covered the handle of the mandoline, and a hand, which was not that of the medium or of the sitters, pulled the hair of the person who had pushed back the curtain. At the same time we heard a scratching on the strings of the mandoline. (Aggazzotti, Foà, Foà, & Herlitzka, 1907:367–368)

Palladino's mediumship has traditionally been considered important for various reasons. Carrington argued in his book *Eusapia Palladino and Her Phenomena* (1909a:4) that her case was crucial for the defense of mediumistic physical phenomena. Years later Charles Richet addressed the same issue

when, writing in his influential *Traité de Métapsychique* (1922:38–39), he stated his belief that even if Palladino was the only medium in existence, her performances would have established the reality of telekinesis and materializations. Carrington (1909a) also stated: “No other medium, producing ‘physical phenomena,’ has been studied with so much care, for so long a period, and by so many scientific men, as she” (p. 1). This was not only important for the development of research techniques, but because Palladino’s seances convinced many of these individuals—men such as Oliver Lodge, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, Charles Richet, Albert F. von Schrenck-Notzing, and Julian Ochorowicz—of the reality of the phenomena. In addition, and as I have argued before (Alvarado, 1993), Palladino provided an opportunity in the form of phenomena, statements, and behaviors that assisted the creation of negative images of mediumship and the development of concepts of force in psychical research.⁴

Biographical Fragments

Palladino was born in Minervino Murge, in the province of Bari in southern Italy. Her birth certificate, published in the Italian magazine *Luce e Ombra*, shows that she was born on January 20, 1854 (Nota, 1918). Her name was Eusapia Maria, and her parents were Michele Palladino, a farmer, and Irene Barbieri. She was married twice, first in 1885 and later in 1907 (Nota, 1918). Asked by a lady years later why she chose her career as a medium, Palladino stated that hers was not a career. Rather it was her destiny (P. Lombroso, 1907:392).

Information about her life given by Palladino has appeared in many publications (e.g., P. Lombroso, 1907, Flammarion, 1907:67, C. Lombroso, 1909:39–40, Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:117–124, de Rochas, 1896:13–22). They all refer to a child whose mother died giving her birth, and whose father was murdered by brigands, a child who lived with strangers at the time her mediumship was discovered. But we must remember, Massimo Biondi (1988:96) said in his history of Italian spiritism, that no one recorded the details of Palladino’s early life at the time. Furthermore, Biondi has stated that the medium had the “curious vice of recounting the facts of her life in different ways to various persons that asked her about it” (pp. 96–97; this and other translations are mine). This is consistent with observations to the effect that Palladino contradicted herself frequently in her conversation (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:117). While there are some differences and omissions in the various accounts, they all mention the medium’s hard early life separated from her family.

Palladino was said to belong to the “most humble class of society” (de Rochas, 1896:3). Others pointed out that she was illiterate (e.g., Flammarion,

1907:67). In his book *Psicologia e "Spiritismo,"* Morselli (1908) wrote that: "Her education has in fact always remained very low . . . she barely writes her own name, and is not able to talk in other languages but a mixed dialect of Apulian and Neapolitan" (Vol. 1:124). He further argued that Palladino's talk was truncated, rarely presenting complete phrases (Vol. 1:117). However, in some accounts she was described as clever and highly perceptive of people's intentions (e.g., Courtier, 1908:180). In fact, Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:129–130) assured his readers that, contrary to some affirmations, the medium was not stupid. In his view she had learned much from the high-society people for whom she performed. Furthermore, he believed that she was difficult to surprise and that she could find her bearings quickly in new situations.

The medium was described as having mood swings going from happiness to melancholy, and from calmness to rage (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:130–131). On one occasion she was seen to pass suddenly from a state of crying in devotion on her knees, as she remembered her father, to a burst of laughter (Brisson, 1898:2). Furthermore, she has been frequently described as presenting a variety of symptoms indicative of hysteria (e.g., C. Lombroso, 1909:107,111,113, Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:126–128).

Regardless of her humble beginnings and possible mental instability, Palladino had a strong sense of self, as exemplified by some stories told about her (P. Lombroso, 1907). In addition, she had a sense of her uniqueness. Courtier (1908) stated that she often said: "There are many doctors and professors, many counts, princes and kings, but in the world there is only one Eusapia!" (p. 480).

The accounts also refer to her early phenomena. Before she developed as a medium she was said to have experienced spontaneous manifestations in childhood which included "hearing raps on pieces of furniture on which she was leaning, having her clothes or the bed-covers stripped from her in the night, and seeing ghosts or apparitions" (C. Lombroso, 1909:39–40). De Rochas (1896:15) referred to hallucinations of eyes seen from the age of eight.

There was a period between 1872 and 1886 in which the seances given were for her "few and loyal friends" (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:123; on early seances see Alippi, 1962:130–132). Two early influences were spiritists Giovanni Damiani and (later physician) Ercole Chiaia. According to Biondi (1988:96,124), the first provided advice and direction, while the second became the medium's manager.⁵ Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:123) has stated that Palladino saw Chiaia as a father.

Writing in 1872, Damiani stated, presumably referring to Palladino:

We have here in Naples a medium of extraordinary and varied powers. Her name is Sapia Padalino, a poor girl of sixteen,⁶ without parents or friends. She is a medium for almost every kind of spiritual telegraphy known, one of which however is peculiarly her own, and consists in writing with her finger,

and leaving behind marks as of a lead pencil, while no such article is in her possession or even in the room. She will also take hold of the hand of the sitters, and cause the same phenomenon of leaving traces as of lead pencil under their fingers. In her presence discharges are heard as from pistols; lights are seen across the room like the tail of a comet. She is a seer, a clairaudient, and an impressional medium. (Damiani, 1872)

Another early report was presented in 1889 at the Congrès Spirite et Spiritualiste International held at Paris. The author made reference to phenomena such as the levitation of the medium and to bluish flames that emanated from her (Chiaia, 1890).

Chiaia brought Palladino to the attention of Cesare Lombroso in 1888. In response to an article by Lombroso in an Italian newspaper, Chiaia challenged him in the same publication to investigate the case of a woman of low social class in whose presence furniture elevated in the air, and sounds were heard on walls and on other surfaces, among other phenomena.⁷ Chiaia probably saw an opportunity to get publicity and recognition for his medium because of Lombroso's prominence. By that time Lombroso was well-known for his writings on such topics as pellagra, mental illness, and criminals (see *L'Opera di Cesare Lombroso*, 1908).

Lombroso did not take the challenge immediately but sat with the medium a few years later in 1891, and became convinced of the reality of her phenomena (Ciolfi, 1891). This led to the above-mentioned Milan Commission, and to many other studies of her mediumship. In later years Lombroso gave much publicity and endorsement to the medium in his writings (e.g., C. Lombroso, 1908, 1909).

Palladino earned money through her performances, as seen in the roubles she was paid when she went to Russia (Remarks about Eusapia Palladino, 1907:225). In addition, Palladino had a fancy for gold and was given jewels by her rich acquaintances (P. Lombroso, 1907:393). But while she made money from her mediumistic performances, she did not accumulate wealth. Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:124) stated that the medium told him that she was living in poverty. She lived in a small room and had a dry goods store that she ran with little success. Not only did Palladino say that she did not work for money (P. Lombroso, 1907:392), but she was cited in the same article as saying that she did not need much money to live, being happy to live among people from her region dressed "in a petticoat and eating macarroni" (p. 393).⁸

Palladino was said to have suffered from diabetes (C. Lombroso, 1908:176, P. Lombroso, 1907:394, Morselli, 1908, Vol. 2:301). Morselli (1908, Vol. 2:301) commented that her condition was accompanied by nephritis and that, after five years of not seeing her, she looked pale and worn out.⁹ By May of 1911 the medium's diabetes was reported to have worsened (Carrington, 1957:18).

Although Palladino held seances after this date (Alvarado, 1982, 1987), she was in rapid decline. She died in 1918 due to nephritis (Miranda, 1918:142). The medium was so well-known that her obituary notices were published in prominent newspapers outside Italy, among them *The [London] Times* and *The New York Times* (Death of Eusapia Palladino, 1918, Palladino Reported as Dead in Rome, 1918).

The Autobiography

The excerpt presented here is an article authored by Palladino that does not seem to have been cited by modern writers who have discussed her mediumship (for an old citation, see Eusapia Paladino: An Unsolved Mystery, 1910). The account, entitled "My Own Story," was published in the February 1910 issue of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (Palladino, 1910). The magazine was founded in 1886. By the time the Palladino article was published, the magazine had passed through different owners and had had different editorial emphases. During the period in question, the magazine was owned by William Randolph Hearst, who bought it in 1905 (Bekken & Beinhoff, 1995, Landers, 2010). Hearst, a well-known controversial newspaper publisher (Nasaw, 2000), used *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and other publications to present sensational reports of political events. However, the magazine covered other topics as well. According to Schneirov (1994:267), the most frequent topics in the publication for the 1909–1910 period were art, literature, and high culture, as well as politics and current events. That the magazine targeted a wide audience is clear in the content of the volume in which the Palladino article was published (Volume 48, including December 1909 to May 1910). This consisted of many poems and short stories, and of a variety of current events and general interest articles about such topics as babies, Charlemagne, children who will become kings, England's budget, industrial Mexico, the North Pole, peace and battleships, and vivisection. The advertisements at the end of the issue with Palladino's article also reflect the general target audience of the magazine. There were announcements of such products as corn syrup, garden tools, pianos, land in the State of Texas, stockings for men, temperature control devices for the home, and varnishes.

The article about Palladino was summarized as follows in the *American Educational Review*: "The Italian peasant woman, whose demonstrations of a supernormal force, are the marvel and the despair of science, tells the story of her life and work" (The Reader's Index, 1910:317). Its publication took place in the context of Palladino's visit to New York City during November 1909 and June 1910, a trip organized by Hereward Carrington (no date, Part 2, 1954; see also Alvarado, 1993). Before the visit, the American public had been exposed to Palladino's performances through newspaper and magazine reports of her European seances (e.g., Flammarion, 1897, "In a Séance with Eusapia

Paladino,” 1908). A prominent example of the latter was Carrington’s (1909b) widely cited article “Eusapia Palladino: The Despair of Science.”

Unfortunately, the visit to New York City was a disaster for Palladino’s reputation. A good proportion of the discussions about her mediumship in the press and in magazines emphasized fraud (e.g., Jastrow, 1910, Krebs, 1910, Münsterberg, 1910), and some of them appeared before the publication of the autobiography (Davis, 1909a, 1909b, Leuba, 1910). Although there were defenses of her mediumship (e.g., Carrington, 1910), as I have argued elsewhere the publicity she received was mainly associated with the idea of fraud (Alvarado, 1993).

Her article appeared with an introduction presenting information about previous seances held with Palladino in Europe and with an insert written by William James (1910). He was skeptical that any valuable investigation could take place in the United States unless there was money to have scientists have several sittings with her. But he ended on a positive note: “That her phenomena probably are genuine seems to me established by Flammarion’s, Morselli’s, Bottazzi’s, Courtier’s, and the Society for Psychical Research reports. I shall be much surprised if later experts find that the whole repertory is composed of tricks.” Nonetheless, James’ note reflected the bad associations Palladino’s mediumship had obtained due to the problem of fraud, as seen in his mention of her tricks and his view that the way she operated was “detestable.”

Palladino’s Account

As a child I knew much hardship. My mother died soon after my birth. I had no grandmother nor aunts, and so was placed by my father in [the] charge of a family who had a farm near my native village of La Pouille. My father gave these people money. He was good, but I needed a mother—no child ever needed a mother more than I. When I was about a year old I had a bad fall. A dent was made in my head, and over this dent the hair has always been white. People have told me that when I am in the trance-sleep a current of air comes from the dent, that the air is cold, and that it has a connection with the things that happen during the seances. It may be so; I do not know.

When I was still very small I was put to work at many little occupations about the farmhouse. I had no play like most children, no companions; it was work always. Before I was ten years old my father was killed by brigands. He had not been able to do much for me, but when he went, so went the little money he had been paying, and that made matters worse. The people with whom I lived did not care for me. I had never known love, and yet I was very sensitive to the dreary coldness which always exists when love is absent. Inwardly I was a shivering

child. Outwardly I was reserved and silent, except when I was angry.

There was a man who had been my father's friend. He was kind-hearted, and he knew that I was unhappy. Because of this he took me to Naples and found a home for me in the house of a husband and wife who were prosperous, but who had no children. They wanted to adopt a little girl. But I did not please them. I did not try. I would not comb my hair, nor eat with a fork. When they endeavored to teach me I would rage, would weep violently, would run from the house. Not until I was hungry would I go back. When I had found something to eat I would steal away to bed and go to sleep with eyes swollen from my tears.

At first my foster-mother would coax and scold me. Afterward she came to let me alone in my excitements. I was too emotional and untamed for her. I know now that she and her husband were good people, and that it would have been well for me if I could have lived with them, in their way. But I could not. One day when I refused to take my piano-lesson my foster-mother told me that if I would not obey her I must leave. She said she would tell my father's friend to come and take me away.

I did not wait for that. Quivering with anger, I ran to my sleeping-room, gathered some things into a bundle, and went into the street. I hurried along half blindly. My knees felt weak, and I trembled. I had not seen my father's friend for a long time, and did not know whether I could find him. I passed through many thoroughfares, and inquired of many people. They could tell me nothing. Nowhere in all Naples could I find my father's friend. But a woman to whom I spoke asked me questions, eyed me, and at last told me to come with her. I had no care now as to where I went, but in a little while we stopped in front of a house in a good quarter of the city. The people within seemed to be much interested in me. Again I answered questions. I told them where I was born, and they uttered exclamations. Years before, they had lived in the same vicinity. They said that I could stay, if I worked hard enough. I learned from their talk afterward that they intended to put me in a convent.

But that was not to be, and it was well. I should have run away. I should have broken all the rules. I could never have become a nun. It was not so written. I could never obey fixed laws. My own will guides me. It is enough. If I suffer from it, very well; it is my own suffering. As far as others are concerned, I would do them no injury, and I believe in God.

While waiting to put me in the convent, my new friends set me to work in their kitchen. I had much to do, and I did it in such a rapid, furious way that they would look at each other, and talk among themselves.

I had no patience; I could not rest. Often I would grow excited without cause. Suddenly I would weep. When I went to sleep at night I would have strange dreams. I have always had them, and sometimes when bad luck is coming I dream of serpents. My friends told me that I frightened them by the way I cried out in my dreams. They saw the priest sooner than they had intended, and it was arranged that I should be taken to the convent on a given day. I had made up my mind that I would not go.

The night that brought the turning-point for me was like any other. In the front rooms of the house there was company. I heard much talk and laughter as I cleaned the pans. It may have been the noise and gaiety that made me breathe fast and shake all over. Why should I, Eusapia Palladino, be nothing but a drudge, one who existed in the dismal shadows, while others laughed at life? I recall that night well. I wanted to break things, to fly out into the darkness, to move swiftly through space to a strange land that I had dreamed of, where, I thought, the people would be like me.

Suddenly my name was called—"Eusapia! Eusapia!" I went to the door of the brightly lighted room, thinking that they wanted me to bring them something. "Wash your hands, take off your apron, brush your hair, and come in here," they commanded. I obeyed them in wonder.

They were sitting around a small table. Their hands were on it, with their fingers touching. Two of them moved aside for me, and I was told to do as they were doing. "She is a strange girl," said my mistress to a gentleman. "Perhaps she can help us. We will see." The lamps were turned down, and we sat in silence.

The gentleman bore down upon the table with his hands. The other side of it rose and then dropped back. It was nothing. He tried many times. Always the table dropped back. I began to have a half dizzy feeling, a swimming of the head. My arms and body seemed to stiffen and shake, as if from a bursting force pushing for release. It was almost pain at first. But relief came. I breathed easily again, and looked up at the others, who had risen and were speaking eagerly. The gentleman was saying, "It is amazing; it is a miracle!"

I was as astonished as they. I could not believe that I, Eusapia the dishwasher, had done things that the clever gentleman called miracles. They told me about these things. They said that the four legs of the table had risen from the floor at once, that some books, untouched by anybody, had moved about, that a decanter of wine on a side-table had risen in the air. They wanted me to try again, but I was afraid. And yet I was happier than I had ever been. In spite of the excitement around me, I was calmer. When I lay down to sleep I felt no more tremblings, and that night I had no strange dreams.

The next day people kept coming in. I found that I was not expected to do my work, but to sit with my mistress in the front room, while her friends gazed at me, and talked of things I did not understand. Nearly every evening at this time there was company. We always sat around the table, and many times, after I had forgotten where I was, they told me that the table had risen, that objects had floated in the air. I did not know why, and did not care. I only knew that I had no more work in the kitchen to do, and that after each of the times we sat around the table I had a feeling of calmness and relief.

In those old days it was my ambition to be a laundress. Even after guests had begun to come nearly every night to the house in Naples, I was thinking of this. I wanted to be independent—away from anybody who could say, “Eusapia, do this, do that; Eusapia, go there, come here.”

But one evening there were guests whom I had never seen before, and who did things that were done for the first time in my experience. They looked everywhere, arranged the furniture to suit themselves, and two of them, taking places on either side of me, held my hands and feet. When I had gone to sleep and wakened again, one of the gentlemen, who patted my cheeks, took from his pocket a handful of gold coins. I was dazzled, and could hardly believe that the gold was all for me. When we counted it afterward we found that it made a thousand francs—a fortune! I thought no more of being a laundress. The gentleman was Aksakof, counselor of state to the Czar of Russia.

My powers grew stronger. I will tell you why John King came to me. But an English lady who had been married to a Neapolitan, and who believed in spirits, came first. She knocked at my door one morning and asked for Eusapia Palladino. I bowed and pointed to a chair. She leaned forward as she talked, and told me an odd thing. She said that a message had come to her from the spirit world, and this message was that John King desired to incarnate himself in the body of the medium called Eusapia, if she was willing. It was the first time I had ever heard of John King, but I welcomed him. He was with me at the next sitting, and since then he has never left me. I could not do without his aid.

I have heard that I imagine him. It is not true. Very rarely do I see him, but often he speaks to me, advises me, warns me. He calls me his daughter, and has helped me much in life. He is my guiding spirit, my second father. He was my real father in a previous existence on this earth, and he watches over me as a parent would his child. When I call to him, saying, “Come, my father, come,” he never fails me. He comes. There are strange occurrences, and people marvel. I care not who believes. I know.

I will say here that no other spirits have ever spoken to me. I have seen none. John King has kept them away from me. Sometimes I believe that I feel the presence of my mother, but the influence is not strong, and I have never been altogether sure that she can come to me.

After the visit of Aksakof to me in Naples, people called on me every day to ask for sittings. Learned men and journalists began to come from distant places. But I grew tired of séances. There were matters which I found more interesting. I married. I helped my husband in his shop, cooked and sewed for him. I enjoyed these things, and began to feel that I was like other women. But professors arrived from Paris. Lombroso came. At first I did not like him. He did not believe. He gazed at me with suspicion, asked many questions, and bound me with cords at one of the first séances. I was uncomfortable. And then Lombroso was always taking me away from my husband and my house. But he was very kind and gentle, and I grew to love him, Lombroso, who has passed beyond, and now knows many things that he was trying to learn!

My life became crowded. No more could I tend the shop or think of what my husband might like for dinner. I was taken here and there, into houses and rooms I had not seen before. The professors would tie me. Once they put my hands into iron rings, which I did not like. Several times they had a machine to weigh me during the trance-sleep, and they told me afterward that I had seemed to lose many pounds, which I would regain in a moment. Sometimes the room would be dark, and sometimes it would be light. Sometimes there would be no cabinet. The professors could make the arrangements to please themselves. I did not care, except that I wanted to do as they desired, and knew what conditions would bring the best results. I prayed to God that I might satisfy them, and begged my father, John King, to be with me always.

I traveled. I was taken to Milan, Rome, Carqueiranne, Geneva, Bordeaux, Paris, Cambridge, Warsaw, St. Petersburg. I had not realized before that the world was so big and had so many people. Always the people stared at me, and said things to each other that I did not understand. But always they were kind. Now I come to America, and I weep.

The boys who laugh, are they your journalists? I desire to meet only men. I am not at my ease among those who lack weight in the front of their foreheads, where the soul is. I must have attention, concentration. I have received that from the learned men of Europe. Among them, above all others, I like to sit. I prefer men to women, but it is not a question of sex or country, but of intellect and earnestness. I do not object to doubt. I am accustomed to it. It fades away. I know when they come into the room with me who are the doubters. I like to convince them, and for this

reason it is these that I ask to hold my hands and feet, to look everywhere, to do anything they please to satisfy themselves.

And yet the results are best when I have sympathy, and I am much less exhausted at the end. I am an instrument, to be played upon, like a piano. I give forth what I get from others. If some of those who dominate at a sitting are rude persons, I have discovered that the manifestations are rude and violent. Instead of easy movements, objects are banged about. I cannot control these things.

If the influences at a sitting are not kind and sympathetic, I do not allow myself to sink away into the deep trance-sleep. I am afraid. The connection of hands might be broken, and this hurts me. Other acts which would be injurious to me might be performed. I must be on my guard. I do not dare to trust even John King to protect me when I am so helpless. The deep trance brings the best results, but much can be done before I have begun to sleep, or when I am in the light trance which leads to the deep trance if continued without the resistance of my will. In the light trance I have a consciousness of what is happening. In the deep one I know nothing.

In the light trance I know when I am tired. It happened once in Naples that when I was in this state I felt exhaustion and said that I desired to stop. But my sitters did not want me to, nor did John King. The influences impelling me to keep on were very strong, but my throat was dry from weariness. Some plates had come from a sideboard to the table. A moment later a water-bottle came, but it did not settle on the table. It moved through the air to my lips, and was tilted up. I drank, and was much refreshed.

In the light trance I am anxious to please those who are around me. I am impatient for developments, just as they are, and sometimes, without thinking of what I am doing, I try to start the manifestations. I may press the table with my hands, touch it with my leg. These movements have been called tricks. But in Paris I saw an air-ship start. It was pushed along the ground. Then it soared. "It is a miracle," the people said, and yet the beginning was a push.

Before a séance I may be indifferent, but when the people are around me I have a strong desire to accomplish what is expected of me. It affects my body. I have a feeling of numbness. Goose-flesh rises. In the small of my back I feel the flowing of a current. This ascends to my arms. I move them constantly, because motion on my part seems to help, and that which is desired takes place. It is now that I feel relief. There are thrills. I rest easily, comfortably. Afterward, when I allow myself to sink into the deep sleep, I feel no more, but when I wake up I am depleted—

almost powerless even to lift my hands. And all the next day I must rest.

There are people who say that what has happened must have some easy explanation. They dislike to be mystified, forgetting that the world and the simplest things are mysteries. They seek for causes, and say that I use hooks, strings—that I have human aid. You may judge for yourself. The scientific men who are trying to make discoveries take me alone to the room they have provided. Everybody but themselves is barred out. Often they have women examine my clothing thoroughly. I tell them the best results come when I have a cabinet. They arrange it. I do not see it until I reach the room. They may enter it at will. Two or three of them may sit in it during the séance.

Once in Paris, I was told afterward, they placed wires on the table in positions that would cause a bell to ring if the four legs of the table rose from the floor. If all the legs did not rise, or if I touched the table with my foot or leg, the bell would not ring. It rang often. These scientific men are so careful! But when the séance is over they say they cannot understand. I wish they could. I want to help them. If I should be the means of bringing about some great discovery, I should be very proud, and would feel that my life on this earth had been useful.

This is why I am willing to submit to any test—in the darkness or light, with a cabinet or without it. I will go anywhere. For serious men, who treat me kindly, I am willing to do whatever is suggested. When they obtain results that satisfy them I am happy. But I can never tell. It depends, I think, upon those around me. Before a séance I do not think of it, except to hope that it will be good. In my daily life I sew and cook whenever I get a chance. I like to make little dishes. When the séance comes I do my best. It is my work.

I have been asked why I always request the cabinet. This is because I am accustomed to it. When I have it, new surroundings seem less strange. In the first days I knew nothing of cabinets, but they were provided, and now, from habit, I have come to expect them at my séances. Sometimes I have done without the cabinet, but I have a feeling that it is useful. I will try to explain this to you by an illustration. When I blow out with my lips, the air spreads. You feel it only slightly against your cheek. But when I roll a paper and blow through that, the air comes strongly to you. This, I believe, is the usefulness of the cabinet. It seems to concentrate the force.

I have been asked, too, why I prefer darkness to light. My answer is much the same. In the beginning when they wanted to get good results they turned down the lamps. It was so arranged by those who made the preparations, and now I have grown to want the darkness. I think it is the

best condition. It brings me greater ease and peace. Light seems to have a disturbing effect upon my mind and body, and the influences are less concentrated. Sudden light, when I am sinking into sleep, is injurious to me. I feel pain in my eyes and head. My heart flutters. I find it hard to breathe. I tremble. But when gentlemen insist upon having the light I am willing, if it is not changed, to have the glare beat upon me.

I have been asked many times for my own explanation, but I have none. I know only that I can feel the force; that it seems to flow out of me; and that I obtain it in part from others. When the chain of hands is broken I can do nothing. Strong men give me added power. The movement of objects corresponds to the movements of my body and to the direction of my will before I have sunk into the deep sleep. After that, as I have said, I know nothing. Perhaps some day we will know all about this force. Only God and his people know now, and perhaps—the devil. (Palladino, 1910:294–300)

Remarks on Palladino's Account

Before I discuss the content of Palladino's essay, we need to consider that in all probability the article was not produced solely by her. Because the medium supposedly did not write or speak English, I presume it was taken by dictation and translated and edited by others, probably members of the staff of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.¹⁰ Other accounts of the medium's interactions with journalists in New York have included mention of the use of an interpreter (e.g., Paladino Tells About Her Stunts, 1909). In addition, parts of the account are in language that I believe is unlikely to have come from Palladino, even in Italian. This is the case because, as pointed out by Morselli (1907), "Eusapia . . . speaks even Italian very badly, and expresses herself in a corrupt vernacular. . . ." (p. 344).

Because Palladino tended to be dramatic in her interviews with the press (e.g., Eusapia Paladino Explains Herself, 1909), and because some of what appears in this article cannot be corroborated independently, the account should be read with caution. Furthermore, and as pointed out before, the article appeared in the context of the medium's visit to New York City and a generally negative reception of her mediumship. While there is no evidence to support the speculation, it does not seem far-fetched that her autobiographical comments may have been part of the large publicity campaign that characterized her American performances, perhaps as an attempt to present a sympathetic view of the medium's life. If this was the case, *Cosmopolitan Magazine* was a good forum. The wide range of the topics covered in this publication would have assured a wide readership, particularly in New York, where the magazine was published and where Palladino's American seances were held. After all,

magazines were an influential cultural agent in the United States, bringing a variety of ideas and images of different sorts to the American public (Ohmann, 1996, Schneirov, 1994).

Biographical Details

Many of the points discussed by Palladino in her essay are different from previous accounts given by the medium and recorded by other individuals. For example, she wrote that as a child she moved to different houses and that she escaped from one of them. The account given to Paola Lombroso (1907:392) states that she was driven away, not that she escaped. She went to a house of a family from her area of origin who offered her shelter until she could enter a convent.¹¹ Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:119) mentioned that Palladino simulated that she escaped and that when she was discovered she was put out of the house and ended with a family of acquaintances where she was a nursery maid.¹²

We also learn from the autobiographical essay that in one of those households she was once called into a room where a seance was being held. The essay read: "They were sitting around a small table. Their hands were on it, with their fingers touching. Two of them moved aside for me, and I was told to do as they were doing." According to Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:120), who presumably obtained his information from the medium, she was asked to take the place of a missing sitter.

A detail recounted by Palladino that has different versions is her statement that as a child she fell down and that this produced a dent in her head. In a biographical sketch written with information provided by the medium, it was said that once when she was a year old she was "allowed to fall in such a bad way that a hole was made in her head . . . On this scar a lock of hair has grown that has always been white since infancy . . ." (P. Lombroso, 1907:392). However, there were other versions also credited to the medium. One author recorded that the scar was presumably produced by an accident caused by delirium induced by typhus fever (de Rochas, 1896:14), while another wrote that it was produced "by a blow which her mother-in-law had given her with a saucepan, or, according to another version, for which she is also responsible, by a fall from a window when she was a year old" (C. Lombroso, 1908:167).¹³

Another imprecise piece of information stated by the medium was that she got married. But she neglected to say that, by the time the article appeared (1910), she had been married twice. According to information from the civil registry, she got married in 1885 and in 1907 (Nota, 1918).

That Palladino's account was incomplete is clear from the fact that she did not include two figures important for her early development as a medium that I mentioned in the Introduction: Giovanni Damiani and Ercole Chiaia. However, Palladino mentioned in her essay that she developed love for Cesare Lombroso,

who was very important for her personally and for her work (Alippi, 1962:148).

Palladino also referred to Aksakof, who was said to have given her money after an early seance. He was an important figure in Europe, particularly in Germany, who founded the journal *Psychische Studien* (1874), published important works, and founded and edited the influential *Bibliothek des Spiritualismus für Deutschland*.¹⁴

In the essay, Palladino refers to her desire to help researchers to make discoveries. In her words: "This is why I am willing to submit to any test. . . . I will go anywhere. For serious men, who treat me kindly, I am willing to do whatever is suggested." There is no question that the medium submitted to many observations and tests during her career. The literature about her contains many examples of her agreeing to specific controls (e.g., Carrington, 1909a:206). But this was not the whole story.

On occasion the medium was a difficult research subject, a topic that she, perhaps understandably, does not mention. She often resisted control. Myers (1895) complained that "Eusapia persistently threw obstacles in the way of proper holding of the hands; she only allowed for a part of the time on each occasion the only holding of the feet which we regarded as secure—i.e. the holding by the hands of a person under the table. Moreover, she repeatedly refused any satisfactory test other than holding."¹⁵

In addition to resisting control, the medium could create difficult situations through other behaviors. For example, Carrington (1909a) stated that once when he checked the position of the medium's feet during a seance she became irritated: "The medium expostulated for three quarters of an hour, and it was a long time before she again consented to resume and again attempted to go off into the trance state" (p. 222). Morselli (1908) has stated that Palladino showed dramatic mood changes, and took offense at "minimal indecision about the reality of her 'phenomena'" (Vol. 1:131). Such moods, Morselli continued, could make her very pleasant or unbearable. This could go to extremes, as Lombroso (1909) illustrated when he wrote that if Palladino felt that her reputation was insulted "she is so violent and impulsive as actually to fly at her adversaries and beat them" (p. 112).

Furthermore, another behavior that made Palladino a difficult research subject was her well-documented propensity to commit fraud (e.g., Carrington, 1909a:182, Courtier, 1908:521–540, Flammarion, 1907:520–521, Samona, 1910:287). She alluded to unconscious fraud in the following passage of her essay: "In the light trance I am anxious to please those who are around me. I am impatient for developments, just as they are, and sometimes, without thinking of what I am doing, I try to start the manifestations. I may press the table with my hands, touch it with my leg. These movements have been called tricks." Discussions of unconscious fraud were frequent in the Palladino literature (e.g.,

Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:264–266, Ochorowicz, 1896). But some of Palladino's tricks do not seem to have been unconscious (e.g., Flammarion, 1907:520–521). Carrington (1909a) stated that she sometimes tricked for “her love of mischief” (p. 327) and “for the love of the thing” (p. 328).

Comments about Phenomena

Other parts of the essay are about phenomena. Palladino's reference to a “half dizzy feeling” and a “swimming of the head” may have been a reference to her first (or an early) trance. The fact that she stated in the next paragraph that she was told of phenomena that took place in her presence suggests that she had no recollection of the events.

She wrote about the effects of trance. In her words: “The deep trance brings the best results, but much can be done before I have begun to sleep, or when I am in the light trance which leads to the deep trance if continued without the resistance of my will.” Lombroso (1909:114) stated that Palladino's most important phenomena took place at the end of her trance, something consistent with Visani-Scozzi's observations (1901, table between pages 392 and 393). Morselli (1907:340) also related the trance to major phenomena. But in a later publication he expressed scepticism about an “absolute correspondence with the depth or the phase of her *trance state*” (Morselli, 1908, Vol. 1:209). In addition, the medium was reported to produce physical effects when she was not in trance (Imoda, 1908:410, de Rochas, 1896:310–314), but these effects tended to be of small magnitude.

As other mediums have done in the past, Palladino commented on influences from sitters. She wrote that “results are best when I have sympathy.” This was also noticed by Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:190), who wrote that if a single individual had doubts and disbelief in the phenomena, it was enough to negatively affect the production of the medium. Others, who saw Palladino open to suggestion, commented on the influence of the experimenters' ideas on and expectations of the phenomena (Ochorowicz, 1896, de Rochas, 1896:259).

Palladino wrote in the essay about the effects of light on her: “Sudden light, when I am sinking into sleep, is injurious to me. I feel pain in my eyes and head. My heart flutters. I find it hard to breathe. I tremble.” Other observations also showed the apparent effect of light. In a seance, “the strong red light . . . fell directly on to the medium's eyes, which occasioned in her a fit of hysteria; she wept and cried out as if demented, hitting her face repeatedly with her fists. This was a genuine fit of hysteria. . . .” (Aggazzotti, Foà, Foà, & Herlitzka, 1907:367). Another writer stated:

In proportion as her trance increases, her sensibility to light increases. A sudden light causes difficulty in her breathing, rapid beatings of the heart, an

hysterical feeling, general irritation of the nerves, pain in the head and eyes, and a trembling of the whole body, with convulsions,—except when she herself asks for light . . . (Flammarion, 1907:142)

The medium wrote: “Several times they had a machine to weigh me during the trance-sleep, and they told me afterward that I had seemed to lose many pounds, which I would regain in a moment.” There were times when she was put on a balance and asked to increase and decrease her weight, which she did successfully (Aksakof, Schiaparelli, du Prel, Brofferio, Gerosa, et al., 1893:10–12). In later studies she was said to increase in weight during table levitations (Courtier, 1908:441).

Another of Palladino's assertions, also mentioned in the literature, was the breeze coming from the above-mentioned scar in her forehead, and what she described as a dent in her head (e.g., de Rochas, 1896:165, Venzano, 1907:106). Carrington (1909a) wrote about his observations together with E. Feilding and W. W. Baggally:

I examined the famous scar, both with my fingers and optically, and held my hand at a distance of about three inches from her head. The cold breeze was distinctly perceptible. We all felt this in turn, holding Eusapia's mouth and nose, so that she could not breathe. We held our own breaths, and again placed our hands over the famous scar. We felt the breeze as distinctly as ever—it being considerably colder than the temperature of the room. (Carrington, 1909a:198; see p. 205 for observations of cold breezes from the medium's forehead)

Conceptually related to the breeze is the topic of forces or emanations coming out of the body to produce mediumistic phenomena (Alvarado, 2006, 2008). Nonetheless, as I have argued before (Alvarado, 1993), Palladino's mediumship contributed to the development of these ideas in a variety of ways, among them by providing descriptions of her sensations and by the aftereffects of the seance, generally interpreted as the expenditure of her vital force. In her essay, the medium stated: “I have a feeling of numbness. Goose-flesh rises. In the small of my back I feel the flowing of a current. This ascends to my arms. . . . when I wake up I am depleted—almost powerless even to lift my hands. And all the next day I must rest.” Closely related to this, de Rochas (1896) said that the process began with the medium's desire to produce the phenomena. This was followed by feelings of “numbness and gooseflesh in the fingers” which increased and were accompanied by feelings “in the inferior region of the vertebral column like a current” (p. 22), a sensation that went through the arm to the elbow, where it stopped slowly. Then the phenomenon was said to take place. In later years Ochorowicz (1909) published notes taken in 1894 in which

he stated that the medium “felt a shiver passing down her back by the arms, up to the fingers, which became numbed . . . ,” after which she had a “disagreeable *prickling* in the fingers” (p. 387).

The aftereffects were also discussed frequently in the literature, as can be seen in the following description: “When the lamps are again lighted, she is seen to be very much changed, her eye dull, her face apparently diminished to half its usual size” (Flammarion, 1907:92). Another observer said that, after the seances, Palladino showed photophobia, hyperesthesia, and hallucinations (C. Lombroso, 1909:115). Furthermore, sometimes her legs were paralyzed and she vomited. The latter was also observed by Faifofer (1903:577).

Concluding Remarks

Autobiographies in general (Bjorklund, 1998), and Palladino’s essay in particular, raise questions about the purpose of these documents, particularly when controversy is involved, as was often the case in the medium’s career. Can we accept that the account was shaped mainly by the events in Palladino’s life, or did the story or legend that grew around the medium construct the narrative? The discrepancies between the present account and previous ones cited throughout the present article suggest the latter.

Palladino’s essay is highly selective, leaving out much information about her life and performances. It also presented alternate versions of events, as is realized when the essay is compared to previously published accounts she gave to others. Such impressions are particularly frequent in accounts of the medium’s life, making her essay, and previously published accounts, dubious in terms of factual information.

Furthermore, Palladino emphasized positive views of herself through statements such as those about her efforts to help science. While she allowed many tests and controls throughout her career, it is also true that the medium was problematic because of a tendency toward trickery and her occasional resistance to control.

Written during the controversial New York visit in which the press generally presented negative views of her mediumship by emphasizing fraud, the essay offers a positive view of herself to the American public through accounts of her difficult childhood and good intentions. Although I do not have evidence to assert that the autobiography was a public relations scheme designed to alter the negative images of fraud elicited by her American performances, it is possible that the essay performed such a function. And accounts of her sufferings and good intentions may have elicited sympathy in some members of the general public, even if this was not by design.

While there are aspects of the essay that cannot be independently corroborated, there is enough information in the literature about her mediumship

to support some of her statements. This includes the breezes felt issuing from her forehead scar and her physical depletion, among other topics discussed in the previous section.

Eusapia Palladino continues to raise interesting questions for those of us interested in the life of mediums and in the variety of individuals who have influenced psychical research in the past. Regardless of issues of biographical accuracy, or whether the article was meant to persuade or to describe, the essay reprinted here gives us a personal perspective about how one such individual presented herself.

Notes

- ¹ For overviews, see Carrington's (1909a) book and the shorter discussions of Alippi (1962), Dingwall (1950, Chapter 5), and Tietze (1972). The literature about the medium includes discussion of particular seances (e.g., Alvarado, 1987), phenomena (e.g., Cassirer, 1983), and evidential discussions in the form of critiques (e.g., Wiseman, 1992) and defenses (e.g., Braude, 1997, section 2.3). A unique bibliography about Palladino was compiled by Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:122–124, Vol. 2:xvii–xviii). Many references are also listed by Alvarado (1987, 1993).
- ² Fodor (circa 1933:190–191) presents information about the spirit control John King, who was supposed to have been the pirate Henry Owen Morgan. He is said to have communicated and manifested physically through several mediums (e.g., Olcott, 1875:454–456). De Rochas (1896:16) stated that John King referred to the medium as his daughter and gave her advice on how to take care of herself.
- ³ The variety of manifestations listed by Morselli may be better appreciated when it is noted that, in addition to blows and raps, sounds included those presumably made by musical instruments, hands and feet, and voices. In addition to hands, materializations included dark "prolongations" from the medium's body, arms, dark indeterminate forms, and well-formed faces, heads, and busts.
- ⁴ The idea of forces emanating from mediums as a cause of physical phenomena preceded Palladino's mediumship (Alvarado, 2006, 2008).
- ⁵ Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:121) has speculated that Damiani's action consisted of a "suggestive action operating day to day" that impressed the idea of spirit action on the medium. In the first scientific report of Palladino's mediumship, Chiaia was thanked for developing the medium's faculties through years of "zeal and patience, in spite of outcry and denigration" (Aksakof, Schiaparelli, du Prel, Brofferio, Gerosa, et al., 1893:63). Years later, Richet (1922) referred to Chiaia as the "courageous and perseverant protector of Eusapia" (p. 530).
- ⁶ Biondi (1988:96) has reminded us that the young Palladino was 18, not 16.
- ⁷ The letter first appeared in Italian in the newspaper *Fanfulla della Domenica*. It has been reprinted in Italian (Alippi, 1962:133–138), and translated into English (Flammarion, 1907:136–140) and French (Chiaia, 1889).
- ⁸ Furthermore, she stated: "I just do not get any pleasure by being the famous Eusapia and being the fable of all people: I have acquired many good friends, . . . and this is the only profit that I have obtained" (P. Lombroso, 1907:393). While the medium's comments about her simplicity seem overdone, she was described as generous and as a person willing to help others (P. Lombroso, 1907:393). Some writers stated that she showed much mercy toward the unfortunate in general and particularly for abandoned children (Cavalli, 1918). According to Courtier (1908:180), Charles Richet asked

Palladino what she wanted as a present after some seances, and she asked for an artificial leg for an amputee she knew in Naples.

- ⁹ Morselli (1908, Vol. 2:302,482) saw the medium's diabetes as part of the pathological nature of mediumship, sort of a diathesis related to hysteria and other conditions such as renal problems, obesity, neuralgia, and other disorders. In his view: "Mediumship is a metahysterical condition" (Vol. 2:310).
- ¹⁰ Palladino did not always have good feelings for journalists, whom she accused of spreading false information about her (P. Lombroso, 1907:392).
- ¹¹ Courtier (1908:479) wrote that Palladino lived with a grandmother who mistreated her, and that she later lived successively with two families. Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:119) mentioned she lived for a while with her paternal grandmother and that when she was eight years old she moved to another household. He mentioned two households in which she lived after leaving her grandmother. Carreras (1918:135–136) stated that she was in two or three places while in Naples, including the house of a man named Migaldi, a postal worker, where seances were held. In 1872 Achille Tanfani took her to Rome to the family of a man named Pietro Cartoni, where she was for nearly a year before she went back to Naples.
- ¹² Morselli (1908, Vol. 1:119) interpreted the simulated escape as part of the senseless behaviors and ambulatory subconscious automatisms of some adolescents girls for whom "mediumship can be a psycho-neuropathic substrate."
- ¹³ One commentator stated that after the accident she was "subject to fits of epilepsy, catalepsy and hysteria, and showed anesthesia of touch" (Arcelin, 1900:522).
- ¹⁴ On Aksakof, see Anastay (1903), Ravaldini (1985), and Wolfram (2009). He was one of the investigators of the famous Milan Commission. In fact, he is said to have invited the medium to have seances with the Commission (Aksakof, Schiaparelli, du Prel, Brofferio, Gerosa, et al., 1893:39), and to have suggested to Richet to go to the Milan seances (Richet, 1933:151). Palladino's concern for Aksakof is perhaps expressed in a letter he wrote to Chiaia in 1907 from St. Petersburg about the medium's visit to Russia. He said that he was in bed for three months and that "our dear Eusapia often comes to see me and keep me company" (Remarks about Eusapia Palladino, 1907:224).
- ¹⁵ This was a reference to the SPR-sponsored seances held at Cambridge in 1895 (Sidgwick, 1895). Because these seances have been criticized for, among other things, producing a bad psychological environment for the medium (e.g., Ochorowicz, 1896), it may be argued that resistance to control may have been a reaction to the situation. Although such speculation may have some truth, there is no doubt that Palladino could be a difficult subject, and she was so on other occasions.

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