Zener Cards, Electrograms, and Old Billy M'Connell

A Bibliographical Essay on the Subject of Extrasensory Perception

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A student once approached me at the reference desk because he was unable to find a book in the stacks, and was also looking for more on the same subject. In looking up the book in the catalog, I explained that he could explore more via the subject headings listed with the book. However, as it turns out, the book he had found – the name of which escapes me but the subjects included physics and related sciences – was not precisely what he was trying to research. He was, he explained, looking for books not about physics but about extrasensory perception. This led to an overall shift in my approach, down research avenues I had not previously considered, and inspired this paper, which, should the question arise again, can serve as a more rigorous and wider-ranging reply to this particular reference request. It will serve as an introduction to the sources available for research, a tour through potential research paths and what will be found along the way.

Extrasensory perception, or ESP, has a long and colorful history in the United States that begins in the nineteenth century and continues until the present. ESP is a form of parapsychology, "the study of the ability of the mind to perform psychic acts" (2011, Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia), and refers specifically to the mind's ability to take in information by means beyond the five senses. ESP is generally divided into three main areas: clairvoyance, the ability to sense an object beyond the range of the senses; telepathy, the ability to sense another person's thoughts; and precognition, the ability to see what is to happen before it occurs. Parapsychology, which also includes the study of telekinesis, the ability to make an object move using just the mind, is generally considered of dubious merit by the mainstream scientific community, but it has enjoyed

a number of waves of interest over the last 130 years by various groups in society, and study of it has persisted despite academic disdain.

"Parapsychology" as a term was first coined in German by Max Dessoir in 1889, and adapted into the English by Joseph Banks Rhine of Duke University in the late 1920s. Rhine also coined the English phrase "extrasensory perception," based on an older German term (2009, The Parapsychological Association). In the meantime, the term "psychical research" was used to refer to the study of parapsychology. The first Society for Psychical Research was founded in London in 1882 by Frederic Myers and others, and the American Society for Psychical Research in 1885 by James Hyslop. The rise of interest in the paranormal came out of the Spiritualist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, especially as it related to life after death and the "spirit world" that might exist. The study of parapsychology and ESP was always related to psychology, but mainstream psychologists did not always prove open to the suggestions and research put forward by parapsychologists over the years. However, study has continued in such places as the Rhine Research Center in Durham, N.C. and is published in that center's *Journal of Parapsychology*.

ESP and parapsychology offer a lot to write about. From my research, I have concluded that a student would be able to approach this topic from several angles:

- chronologically: parapsychology in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries;

- geographically: parapsychology in Great Britain, America, Germany, or elsewhere;
- scientifically: the relationship between parapsychology and psychology, in terms of area of study as well as the researchers themselves;
- socially: social attitudes and reactions to parapsychology, which could also include popular representations of parapsychology, long a popular topic in literature and film;
- gender studies, exploring the high incidence of women as mediums in the nineteenth century; and
- religious reactions and influences, including the role of various religious groups in study and discussion of the paranormal.

In all of these, I would recommend that the student start with encyclopedias as a means of gaining a clear sense of the terms at hand and potential next steps. I began with the entry on "extrasensory perception" in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition* (2011), which led me to further entries on "parapsychology," "clairvoyance," "telepathy," "precognition," "psychokinesis," and the names "Max Dessoir," "J.B. Rhine," "Frederic Myers," and the "Society for Psychical Research." The *Encyclopedia Americana* (2011) and *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* (2011) supplied further names and terms. General encyclopedias are useful because they are written to be neutral, fact-based explanations of terms and people, with limited but ostensibly reliable information.

However, the *Encyclopedia Americana* entry was written in a way that struck me as odd, which leads me to an important issue that the study of a topic such as ESP must

address. The *Americana* entry on ESP was written by Gertrude Schmeidler, who, I discovered through further research, was at one time a president of the Parapsychological Association. While she undoubtedly has a very good knowledge of the field, she must be acknowledged to be very credulous about a subject that is not universally believed to be based in scientific fact. In fact, Schmeidler is known for her theory of "sheep" versus "goats," the idea that test subjects who were open to the possibility of ESP, the "sheep," were more likely to register higher success rates in ESP tests than those who rejected the idea of it, the "goats." This tendency can be extended to the scientists who test it as well as those who write about it – those who do either tend to be more willing to believe in it. So in writing about ESP, one key factor in both the research and the discussion has to be to acknowledge that the sources may be somewhat or very prejudiced towards belief in ESP, and what effect this will have on the research. *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (third edition, 1991; later republished by Gale in 2001), for example, is a valuable source in that it covers people and topics that students may not find discussed elsewhere, but it does not hide its bias toward belief. *The Skeptic's Dictionary* by Robert Carroll (2003) may offer a good counterpoint but it is equally tilted the other way.

A number of questions should therefore be considered by the researcher before writing commences: In evaluating these sources, should bias eliminate what might be a very useful source? Does reporting evenhandedly require reporting both as true? Or should the researcher make her feelings known up front? If the writer of a source believes in it, will that affect the view of the work by others? Should that be taken into account? Source evaluation is an important step in any research process, and it is complicated here by the fact that the topic of all this research has been highly

contentious almost since its inception as a scientifically tested subject. So in studying ESP, the student – who may or may not believe that there is merit in it – must decide what value she will ascribe to sources whose bias toward believing in ESP is so clear, and how to work with them. In this paper, I have erred on the side of accepting these pro-ESP sources, because I do feel that they will include more information on such a topic than might be found in more critical sources. As it is fairly safe to assume that most works on the subject will be plainly biased one way or the other, ESP not being a topic that attracts who Schmeidler might name "cows," those who remain ambivalent, I will only mention the bias of a source when it is otherwise unclear.

Once the student has worked out these issues for herself, there exists a wealth of knowledge available to those writing about ESP, and a number of different directions the research can take. As mentioned above, *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* is a rich – though biased – source for basic information and terms. The third edition can be found under call number 133.03 E56S at Pratt's Brooklyn library in the reference section (http://cat.pratt.edu). At this point, I would advise the student to use the call number as a guide to further exploration, as Pratt's catalog brings up the following possible reference sources under 133.03 in addition to *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (133 indicating "Specific topics in parapsychology & occultism" under the Dewey Decimal Classification system followed by Pratt):

- 133.03 C381 – *The encyclopedia of the unexplained: magic, occultism, and parapsychology* (1974, Rhine, as the "special consultant on parapsychology")
- 133.03 E568 – *The encyclopedia of the paranormal* (1996, Stein)

- 133.03 G665 – *The paranormal : an illustrated encyclopedia* (1992, Gordon)
- 133.03 M266M – *Man, myth, and magic : the illustrated encyclopedia of mythology, religion, and the unknown* (1994, Cavendish)

These sources will all lead to new names and terms as well as different and possibly contradictory explanations of those terms. The 133 area of the library in general will provide several potential sources beyond reference works like encyclopedias. In Pratt, these sources include 133 F771, *Foundations of parapsychology: exploring the boundaries of human capability* by Hoyt L. Edge et al (1986) and 133 G233F , *Forty years of psychic research; a plain narrative of fact*, by Hamlin Garland (1936), both of which could serve as useful overviews of the field of parapsychology, made even more broad in scope by the fifty-year gap between their publication dates and what that might indicate about the continuing interest in the field.

While Pratt's catalog will suffice for a local search of immediately available sources, the student should also consult the Library of Congress's (LOC) catalog for a wider variety of source types and titles (http://catalog.loc.gov). The Library of Congress, as the repository for all published American titles as well as one of the nation's premier research libraries, contains a much vaster collection of resources than any other library in the country. A student will find books in the Library of Congress catalog that might not appear anywhere else, such as *Electrograms from Elysium; a study on the probabilities in postmortuary communication through the electronics of telepathy and extrasensory perception, including the code of anagrams in the purported sender's name* (1954, Feely), call number BF1290.F4. The LOC's catalog also includes non-text sources such as the sound recording, "An interview with J.B. Rhine: psychology and parapsychology" (1975, Rhine). As with Pratt's catalog, the LOC catalog

can also provide more sources via the call number, which, in the case of the LOC's particular classification system, known as Library of Congress Classification, would mean the range from BF1001-1389, "Parapsychology" (which may continue into BF1404-2055, "Occult sciences").

Though the LOC catalog can be clunky and hard to navigate, its sources are invaluable to the researcher, in terms of surveying what exists if not also as a potential research destination.

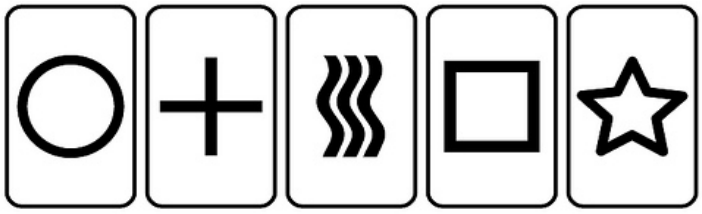
Also worth a mention is the 2003 collection of documents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation on ESP, *Extrasensory perception*, found via the federal government's Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (http://catalog.gpo.gov/). The only result from a search of "extrasensory perception" is a fascinating look at how the federal government perceived ESP over the years.

A good next step, given the list of names the student has now compiled, is to explore a biographical dictionary or database. *Gale Biography in Context* (http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/bic1/?userGroupName=nypl) is a particularly useful reference tool because it compiles entries from multiple biographical sources in one convenient search engine, including the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. Researching names that have been found in other sources will lead to more names and terms, in a path such as the following[1]:

[1] Biographical sources for these names include the following, via *Gale Biography in Context* (2011): *Dictionary of American Biography* (1995); *Contemporary Authors Online* (2002); and the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Gale version, 2001).

Starting out with **J.B. Rhine (1895-1980)**, who coined the term "ESP" and was known for his experiments in it at Duke University in the late 1920s through the 1970s, led to **William McDougall (1871-1938)**, a noted psychologist who taught Rhine before co-founding the research center with him at Duke, and **Karl Zener (1903-1964)**, a close colleague of Rhine's and McDougall's who came up with the series of cards that became a staple of ESP testing (see Figure 1[2]). By repeatedly quizzing test subjects' ability to guess forthcoming symbols, parapsychologists hoped to show that some people were more able to correctly predict them than others, and that that was proof of extrasensory perception. This brings us back to **Gertrude Schmeidler (1912-2009)** and her theory of "sheep" and "goats."

Figure 1: Zener Cards



Frederic Myers (1843-1901), who co-founded the Society for Psychical Research in London, was one of the first major proponents of ESP and the scientific possibility of the spiritual world, coined the word "telepathy," and may have contributed to the writing of a book after his death, brings up the large community of "spiritualists" in late nineteenth-century London, including mediums like **Lenora Evelina Simonds Piper (1859-1950)**, **William Stainton Moses (1839-1892)**, **C.E. Wood (1854-unknown)**, **Annie Fairlamb Mellon (1850?-1938?)**, **Margaret Verrall (1859-**

[2] Image retrieved from http://www.binauralhealing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Zener-Cards02.jpg

1916), **Alice K. Fleming**, **aka Mrs. Holland (1868-1948)**, and **Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918)**, a medium who was later revealed to be a fraud through investigations by the psychical community. Other names of the era that come up include **Harry Houdini (1874-1926)**, **William James (1842-1910)** and **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)**, all of whom were noted believers in the spirit world, among their other areas of interest. The original **Society for Psychical Research (SPR)**, founded in London in 1882 by Myers and others, leads to the **American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR)**, founded by **James Hyslop (1854-1920)** in 1885. Hyslop's work as a student and teacher of philosophy was overshadowed by his better-known work in psychical research; he was especially intrigued by multiple personalities, which he attributed to spirit possession.

This wider list of names leads to our next resource. If we search "James Hyslop" in WorldCat (www.worldcat.org), the Online Computer Library Center's (OCLC) worldwide catalog network, we can further explore the topic of ESP through multiple avenues: not just the books he wrote, but archival collections of his papers and those of the ASPR. According to WorldCat, Hyslop's papers can be found at Columbia University, and ASPR collections – including correspondence by Hyslop, **Walter Prince (1863-1934)**, **Richard Hodgson (1855-1905)** (more names to research in biographical sources), and others, as well as reports and photographs on subjects such as "apparitions, automatisms, coincidental dreams, psychic healing, hauntings, occult miscellany, obsession, slate writing, predictions, physical phenomena, out-of-body experiences, telepathy, telekinesis, and spirit photography" (2011, WorldCat) – are held

at New York State Historical Documents, in Albany, NY. Another collection, Hyslop's "Papers, 1896-1927," are kept at Duke University.

WorldCat is a great resource for delving deeper into the research of a topic because it not only tells you what books, articles, or archival materials are available, but where they can be found. Much like the LOC, it can therefore come in handy at various points of the research process, both the initial information-gathering stage and later, once the researcher is ready to assemble a select list of actual resources and begin writing. An initial search on WorldCat for ESP and related terms leads to a wide variety of sources. The following is a table listing the results of keyword searches, narrowed by material type. Though not every source will likely be of use, it can help the researcher to see what is available.

Table 1: WorldCat Search Results, as of 12/6/2011

Material Type **Term**	Books (includes e-books, theses/dissertations, microform)[3]	Articles Chapters	Archival materials
ESP	2,010 *Fiction: 417* *Non-fiction: 1,589* *Biography: 66*	156	42
Telepathy	2,455 *Fiction: 526* *Non-fiction: 1,923* *Biography: 50*	512	38
Clairvoyance	1,937 *Fiction: 144* *Non-fiction: 1,790* *Biography: 99*	219	40
Precognition	577	119	17

[3] Note: As some of these works are not exclusively categorized as non-fiction and biography, there is some overlap in totals.

	Fiction: 124 *Non-fiction: 451* *Biography: 16*		
Parapsychology	10,987 *Fiction: 572* *Non-fiction: 10,415* *Biography: 488*	2,252	154
Society for Psychical Research	744 *Fiction: 2* *Non-fiction: 742* *Biography: 18*	1,386	49

These results show that results for the "Society for Psychical Research," for example, are much more concentrated in articles (from the original society's *Proceedings*, the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, *Science*, and other journals) than in books.

As seen in the table, WorldCat also allows users to narrow searches by what is termed "Content," meaning fiction, non-fiction, or biography. This comes in handy when the research is based around studies of ESP as a historical subject, like Stanley Krippner's series, *Advances in Parapsychological Research* (1977-1978) or is more about fictional representations of the pseudoscience, such as Charlaine Harris's popular series about Sookie Stackhouse, a waitress who can read minds (2001-2011). Narrowing the search for "clairvoyance" to books and then to biographies leads to *The spirit rappings, mesmerism, clairvoyance, and psychometry, or, The life and times of old Billy M'Connell, the witch doctor, the great prototype of the modern professors of the imaginative sciences* (1851, "One born among the witches"), which can be found at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, MD, as well as the more recent *Pathway to spirit: a journey to clairvoyance and enlightenment* (2004, Caulfield), the only copy of

which held in the United States is in the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. These two books suggest two very interesting routes a researcher could take.

WorldCat can also be searched by subject; Hyslop's "Papers, 1896-1927" include the following related subjects in the Library of Congress Subject Heading terminology utilized by WorldCat:

- Hyslop, James H. -- (James Hervey), -- 1854-
- Hodgson, Richard, -- 1855-1905.
- American Society for Psychical Research.
- James H. Hyslop Foundation.
- Parapsychology -- Research -- History.

Any of these will provide more resources in several different directions. Continuing the archival theme, further investigation into WorldCat's records on the ASPR leads to the *Guide to the Archives of the American Society for Psychical Research*, (1986, American Society for Psychical Research and Matlock), a bibliography of archival collections of the ASPR that can serve as a valuable guide for students looking to delve into archival materials for their research.

WorldCat can provide a lot of information about a lot of different sources, including articles that are listed in databases. However, WorldCat does not provide direct access to these databases, which are mostly subscription-based and require that a user be a member of a university or large public library system. Once given access, these databases can be used in a variety of ways and reveal new avenues of research. As mentioned earlier, *Gale Biography in Context* is a biographical database that was accessed via the New York Public Library; the following databases – *JSTOR*, *Project MUSE*, *Reader's Guide Retro*, *Science Direct*, and *Scopus* – were accessed via Pratt Institute.

JSTOR (www.jstor.org), a digital archive of scholarly journals, is best for a search of topics in the humanities. Searches can be narrowed by language, item type, date range, discipline, and journal title. Searching for "parapsychology," narrowed to item types "article" and "review," language "English," leads to 1,045 potential sources, ranging in years from 1924 (Thouless, R; Soul beliefs and hypotheses. *Mind* 33, No. 131; pp. 262-274) to 2010 (Richmond, A; Time travel, parahistory and the past artefact dilemma. *Philosophy* 85, No. 333; pp. 369-373). Not every returned result will be available to the student, but this can be resolved by narrowing the search to "Only content I can access." A search on a similar database, *Project MUSE* (http://muse.jhu.edu), another collection of journals largely based in the humanities and social sciences, also allows for a narrowing by item type, year, discipline, language, and journal title. One review, found by searching for "telepathy" (which, when narrowed by type and language, returned 327 results) leads to the book *The invention of telepathy, 1870-1901* (2002, Luckhurst), as reviewed by Pamela Thurschwell in *Victorian Studies* 46, number 3 (Spring 2004). Reviews are particularly useful because they can lead the researcher to the titles of books that she might not have come across otherwise, as well as provide a sense of how a book was received in the scholarly community. Thurschwell's positive review gives credence to the book as a new source, and notes that it fits into the recent trend of interest in the Victorians' fascination with the occult (p. 503), which could prove to be a fertile paper topic right there. *Project MUSE*'s journals tend to be more literature- and history-heavy, which can limit its usefulness if the student is more interested in the scientific aspect of ESP, but the value of the academic discussion of the subject should not be overlooked.

For more science-based results, *Science Direct* and *Scopus* serve to list academic articles by those in the sciences. A search in *Science Direct* (www.sciencedirect.com) can be narrowed by content type, journal title, topic, and year of publication, but not by language, which seems like an odd oversight and will lead to search results the student may not find useful. Searching for "clairvoyance" returns results ranging from 1833 ("Lectures on medical pathology," *The Lancet* 19, Issue 498, 16 March 1833, pp. 769-779) to 2011 (Bigelsen and Schupak, "Compulsive fantasy: Proposed evidence of an under-reported syndrome through a systematic study of 90 self-identified non-normative fantasizers," *Consciousness and Cognition* 20, Issue 4, December 2011, pp. 1634-1648). Limiting the search even further, to include only those that refer to ESP, "psychical research," and "Rhine," brings up "Prerequisites for a clairvoyance hypothesis," (1935, Willoughby, *Journal of Applied Psychology*). *ScienceDirect* and *Scopus* (www.scopus.com) are helpful not just as directories of peer-reviewed, full-text articles, but for their ability to show citation links between these articles. Through these links, this 1935 article can lead us, via *Scopus*, to this 2003 article citing it, "ESP: Extrasensory perception or effect of subjective probability?" (2003, Brugger and Taylor, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*). This article proves even more fruitful, having been cited by twelve other articles, in journals such as *Schizophrenia Research* and *Applied Cognitive Psychology*. The scientific study of ESP and related topics can be more easily managed through these databases, and includes hundreds of potential sources.

One final database that is worth mentioning in the study of ESP is *Reader's Guide Retrospective* (www.ebscohost.com/academic/readers-guide-retrospective), an index of citations from popular periodicals that will not lead the user to the article itself but will direct the student to where the information is to be found in what are likely undigitized

print or microform editions of those periodicals. For example, searching for "parapsychology" leads to the citation for "Evidence of life after death" (1900, Hudson) from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the old name for what is now known as *Harper's Magazine*. There are dozens of results like this one, sources that can provide contemporary discussion of a topic like little else, but that might otherwise remain forgotten on a microform reel. The work involved in retrieving articles via microform, like that of researching in archives, is of course greater than simply clicking on an article and reading it, but the rewards of finding such an article or piece of interesting correspondence are undoubtedly higher, and is indeed the point of such detailed researching.

One last point I would make to a student researching ESP is to make use of the bibliographies put together by previous researchers, which can be found in most of the sources I have discussed here. Anyone who has written a scholarly work on any subject has done a serious amount of research already, and though every researcher will likely find him or herself pulled in one particular direction, exploring where others have gone before can lead to sources that otherwise ignored and can inspire new paths that might not have been considered before. Of the resources I have here mentioned, articles found in *JSTOR*, *ProjectMUSE*, *ScienceDirect* and *Scopus* especially will likely list thorough bibliographies of works relating to the subject.

ESP is a fascinating and strange topic. The sheer fact that a person came into the library looking to research it is interesting in itself (did he believe in it? Was he just curious?), but as I helped this particular student, I myself discovered the vast range of

information, old and new, that existed on such a remarkable subject. ESP has gone through periods of heightened interest over the years but has never disappeared, and there are now and will likely long remain people who want to prove that it does in fact exist. And whether it does or does not, there will probably also be people who like to read or write about it in fiction (writers of which, though not expressly discussed here, may also find this essay of use in their own research into the topic they intend to fictionalize). Whatever the future may hold for ESP, the present includes a great variety of potential resources for the curious student.

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