NOTE ON THE TERM TELERGY

by CARLOS S. ALVARADO and WIM KRAMER

In recent comments about issues of terminology in parapsychology, Michael Thalbourne referred to the possibility "that 'telepathy' could involve psychokinesis—the sender somehow manipulating the brain processes of the receiver. It was Frederic Myers (1903) who proposed that such a situation should be called not 'telepathy' but 'telergy', but when did you last hear that word spoken?" (Thalbourne, 2005, p.230). Thalbourne's comments provide an opportunity to discuss briefly the use of the term telergy in the psychical research literature.

MYERS'S USE OF TELERGY

The first mention of telergy in SPR publications appears in the "Third Report of the Literary Committee", written by Edmund Gurney and Frederic W. H. Myers. They mention *psychical telergy*, which was defined as "an action of mind on mind at a distance" (Barrett et al., 1884, p.135).

Myers used the term telergy in several of his later publications. In his important "Note on a Suggested Mode of Psychical Interaction," published in *Phantasms of the Living*, Myers (1886) wrote: "For if such a phenomenon as telepathy, such a cause or agency as telergy, exists at all, we may surely suppose that it exists in many forms, and manifests itself in many operations, of which we have not at present any inkling whatever" (pp.282–283). In the same note and referring to crisis telepathy, Myers argued that "the same telergy which is directed in a moment of crisis towards a man's dearest friend, may be radiating from him always towards all other minds, and chiefly towards the minds which have most in common with his own" (p.302).

In a paper about phantasms of the dead, Myers (1890) defined telergy as "the power of propagating influences or phantasms at a distance" (p.320). Later he speculated on the "telepathic impact," or the influence of one person on another. Myers (1891, p.131) wrote:–

> I am in no way able, and I am in no way bound, to say more definitely what kind of influence this *telergy*, or telepathic impact, may actually be. I will not call it (unless for mere brevity's sake) a force or energy; for we have no certain proof that it can overcome inertia or do mechanical work. It may determine the exercise of pre-existing forces in some fashion to which words like these do not apply. I will only say that we have here, as it seems to me, an overt and provable effect of the will on another mind which resembles that hidden and improvable effect of the will on its own mind which we are endeavouring somehow to come at.

In a later paper, his glossary of psychical research terms, Myers defined telergy as "a hypothetical force or mode of action, concerned with the conveyance of telepathic impressions, and perhaps with other supernormal operation" (Myers, 1896, p.174).

Writing in his classic *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death (HP)*, Myers defined telergy as the "force exercised by the mind of an agent in impressing a percipient—involving a direct influence of the extraneous spirit

on the brain or organism of the percipient" (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, p. xxii). This was somewhat different from the 1896 definition in the sense of designating spirit action on the physical organism of a percipient. Later, while discussing his "Scheme of a Vital Faculty" in the second volume of *HP* (Vol. 2, pp. 505–554; on this see Alvarado, 2004a), Myers referred to "extradition of will-power beyond the organism; telergy; self-projection" (Vol. 2, p. 507). This was part of a section on phenomena controlled by the subliminal mind, and particularly, phenomena of 'mental expenditure'. Myers emphasized here the projection of action beyond the body limits, a topic he discussed later under the heading of "Extradition of Will-power beyond the Organism" (Vol. 2, p. 521).

Myers argued there was a parallel between heat and telergy (Vol. 2, pp. 526–527). While heat acted on the spiritual world, telergy acted on the metetherial, defined by Myers as the "spiritual or transcendental world in which the soul exists" (Vol. 1, p. xix).

In the ninth chapter of *HP*, "Trance, Possession and Ecstasy", Myers (Vol. 2, p. 197) argued further:–

> The percipient's mind must somehow receive the telepathic impression; — and to this reception we can assign no definite physical correlative;—and also the percipient's motor or sensory centres must receive an excitation; — which excitation may be communicated, for aught we know, either by his own mind in the ordinary way, or by the agent's mind in some direct way, — which I may call telergic, thus giving a more precise sense to a word which I long ago suggested as a kind of correlative to telepathic. That is to say, there may even in these apparently simple cases be first a transmission from agent to percipient in the spiritual world, and then an action on the percipient's physical brain, of the same type as spirit-possession. This action on the physical brain may be due either to the percipient's own spirit, or subliminal self, or else directly to the agent's spirit. For I must repeat that the phenomena of possession seem to indicate that the extraneous spirit acts on a man's organism in very much the same way as the man's own spirit habitually acts on it. One must thus practically regard the body as an instrument upon which a spirit plays.

General Neglect of the Term

There are many indications suggesting that, with some exceptions to be mentioned later, the term telergy was not incorporated into the psychical research vocabulary, or at least was not a term in general use after Myers suggested it. This is the case in discussions of telepathy by English and American authors (e.g. Carrington, 1914; Holms, 1927; Hyslop, 1919; Sidgwick, 1922). This can also be seen in the writings of psychical researchers from other countries such as France (e.g. Richet, 1922) and Germany (e.g. Driesch, 1932/1933; Prübusch, 1929; Tischner, 1925). Similarly, in The Netherlands the use of the term telergy was not widely used by mainstream Dutch parapsychologists. W. H. C. Tenhaeff discussed at length the different meanings, terms and definitions used for the phenomenon that parapsychologists in general call telepathy, and the differences between 'mind reading' and 'thought-transference', but he did not mention telergy (Tenhaeff, 1933). Similarly, P. A. Dietz (1936) did not mention the term.

However, our search of the literature shows that while the term was never widely used, it was not completely neglected and sometimes it was used with different meanings.

USES OF THE TERM TELERGY

Oliver Lodge (1908) stated that the "action of one mind on another brain is labelled telergy" (p.183). He later stated that there are cases suggesting a distant action on a brain or on other parts of the nervous system. This would involve parts . . .

> . . . not essentially or necessarily associated with consciousness, and not arousing any consciousness, but stimulating the parts usually controlled by the subconsciousness . . . Assuming that such a thing is possible, assuming that a mind can operate, not only as usual on its own body, not only telepathically as supposed on another mind, but directly and telergically upon another body, then that is exactly what is meant by a case of incipient or partial possession. [Lodge, 1920, p.176]

In her discussion of Mrs Piper's mediumship, Sidgwick (1915) stated:–

> I do not wish to be taken as affirming dogmatically that no influence of a telergic kind can ever be exercised by an external mind, i.e. that an external mind can never affect our nervous system in the same way our own mind does. I think there is practically no evidence for it at present. But we know so little about the whole subject . . . that dogmatism is best avoided. It is even possible that telepathy and telergy may merge into each other. [p.320, footnote]

Barrett (1919) believed there were examples of mediumistic phenomena in which telepathy merged into telergy. In such cases there seemed to be possession, in the sense of a "distinct psychical invasion of some extraneous power or personality" (p.255; see also Barrett, 1918, p.175). Similarly, Balfour (1935) argued that in some mediumistic communications the "process is telergical, not telepathic. The self of the medium is off the stage altogether, and what we are left with is the controlling spirit using the physical organism of the medium to convey its message to the sitter" (p.164). He argued that Mrs Piper showed more evidence of telergical control than Mrs Willett.

Constable (1918) used the term to refer to "the power in us all which *must be* for telepathy to exist" (p.41). Constable was criticized for altering the meaning of the term (Review, 1918), but he argued that he had followed Myers's use of the concept (Constable, 1919).

Following Myers (1896) and using virtually the same wording, Carrington (1930/1931) merely stated that telergy was used to refer to a "hypothetical force or mode of action concerned with the conveyance of telepathic impressions, and other supernormal manifestations of the kind" (p.251).

The Dutch parapsychologist K. H. E. de Jong used the term telergy in several of his publications. However, he believed that the term telepathy was not correct to describe the actual phenomenon. In his view telepathy indicated a sensitivity at a distance with a passive internal state. de Jong (1936, p.168) argued that it was better to use Myers's term telergy instead because it conveyed the idea of an active process of thought-transference and mind-reading (de Jong, 1936, p.168). He also explicitly stated that the term 'pure telepathy', as used by Rhine, was not strictly correct and should be replaced by telergy to express clearly the active process involved (de Jong, 1936, p.183). de Jong continued to express these views in later publications (de Jong, 1947, 1951).

In the first Dutch *Parapsychologische Woordentolk* (Parapsychological Dictionary), compiled by Paul Dietz, de Jong and George Zorab, it was stated: "Myers's original idea with this term was to express something that can be

seen as a 'physical form of telepathy' and that both living or deceased (spirits) 'agents' might be able to actively influence the mind of another person (recipient) with both mental- and/or motor-response effects" (Dietz, de Jong & Zorab, 1956, p.77; this, and other translations, are ours). Thus telepathy was seen as a pure mental (psychological) process, while telergy was both mental and physical.

Although Myers (1903, Vol.2, pp.544–546) discussed the idea of vital forces projecting from the body (see also Alvarado, 2004a), telergy for him was essentially a non-physical process involved in telepathy and spirit communication. The term telergy acquired a different meaning with French psychical researcher René Sudre (1926). Like many before him (see Alvarado, 2004b), Sudre believed in what he called a psychic fluid. This was a force coming from the body of special people such as mediums, basically an "unknown substance-energy capable of imitating the forms of life and of raw matter and of accomplishing mechanical, physical or chemical tasks of the greatest variety" (p.209). Sudre used the term telergy to designate "phenomena by which the psychic fluid accomplishes . . . an exterior task on ordinary matter" (p.226). This included telekinesis, physical or chemical phenomena such as lights and thermal variations, and seemingly molecular effects such as some raps and apports. Sudre considered telergy was the "objectivation of forces," while teleplasty (or materialization) was the "objectivation of forms" (p.268). Most of telergy, he thought, was "but a chapter of teleplasty" (p.268). Sudre (1956/1960) continued using the term telergy in this sense in a later textbook.

Similarly, in a glossary published in Argentina it was stated that telergy was a general word to group the phenomena of telekinesis and materialization. It meant the "projection at a distance of psychic energy and its organizing potential" (Depascale & Rinaldini, 1927, p.137). The authors of another glossary published in Holland stated that telergy "is also used as a synonym for telekinesis" (Dietz, de Jong & Zorab, 1956, p.77).

While Sudre did not use telergy as a synonym of psychic force, others did. Fanny Moser (1935, Vol.2, p.835) referred to telergy as the force or principle involved in materializations. In her view telergy could also affect human beings (pp.835–836).

Spanish Jesuit priest Oscar González Quevedo (1969/1971) considered that telergy was a "phenomenon of disaggregation and liberation of the motor, plastic . . . forces of man" (Vol.1, p.40) that was manipulated and shaped by the subconscious mind. Following on the old psychical researchers (Alvarado, 2004a, 2005b), González Quevedo argued that this force could produce light, raps, movements and materializations, being the basis of ectoplasm. González Quevedo works in Brazil, where he has been influential on some parapsychologists and on popular culture. There one can find other discussions of telergy following his ideas, some of which are on the Internet (Fenômenos de Efeitos Fisicos, n.d.; Telergia, n.d.). Furthermore, Krippner (1990) wrote about the Brazilian healer Jose Macedo de Arruda: "Macedo uses the word 'telergy' to describe his work. In a typical healing session, he will ask people to close their eyes and will hold his hands a short distance from their body. He will then pray in an attempt to generate and transfer the 'telergy'." (p.209).

Still another meaning of telergy was that used by William E. Cox (1994), who argued that it referred to the "practice of allegedly transferring ESP ability" (p.23).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The term telergy was never used as widely as other words such as telepathy. Myers's own use of the term changed over time, becoming more specific in his later discussions. Furthermore, the term telergy has been used in a variety of ways. Examples range from a mental (or spiritual) influence on the nervous system sometimes getting into possession, active telepathy, to the work performed by a force emanating from the body, and to refer to the force itself. Finally, the term has also been employed at least once to refer to the transfer of ESP abilities from one person to another.

While some of these concepts have been discussed in the recent literature (e.g. Thalbourne, 2004, p.10), the term telergy does not seems to be used regularly in the parapsychological literature any more.

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THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST PSYCHIC AND OTHER MISREPRESENTATIONS

by PETER LAMONT and MICHAEL MURPHY

Few aspects of the life of Daniel Home have escaped controversy. One notable debate has concerned his use of the name of Dunglas, and the associated claim that his father was the natural son of the tenth Earl of Home. Biographers of Home have disagreed upon the validity of this claim, and the suggestion that the claim was false has been presented by sceptics as part of a general argument that Home was untrustworthy (e.g. Hall, 1984; Stein, 1993). That said, even one of the most ardent defenders of Home's psychic abilities felt that his claim to descent from Scottish nobility was erroneous. George Zorab (1978) attempted to put the matter to rest in an article in the *Journal* entitled, "Have we finally solved the problem of D. D. Home's descent?" It turns out, however, that both Home's critics and Zorab's solution relied upon inadequate evidence and questionable interpretation. This brief Research Note presents the evidence and comes to a quite different conclusion.

In an attempt to determine the truth of the matter, Home's early life, including the dates of his emigration to the United States and that of his family, have been presented as relevant evidence. According to Zorab (1978), Home claimed "that his parents emigrated to the United States, and that he and his aunt followed them and settled there six months later when he was nine years old in 1842". Zorab claims that Home stated this in his autobiography, and that he was "wilfully incorrect" in doing so since he was "about 15 when he left". Zorab's reason for claiming this is based, in turn, on an assumption about the age of Home's younger sisters as being too young to travel. Thus, Home "must have been nearly 15", and old enough "to dream about being the illegitimate child of an aristocratic father". Zorab further assumes that this was a fantasy "that led him to claim he had been baptized Dunglas". Zorab's claims, however, are almost entirely without basis. Home did not state that his parents emigrated to the United States before he did, nor did he state that he settled there six months later. More significantly, he never claimed to be "the illegitimate child of an aristocratic father", but rather that his father had been the illegitimate son of an earl (Home, 1872, p.48). Zorab's other claims are the product of guesswork that, as it happens, is contradicted by direct evidence.