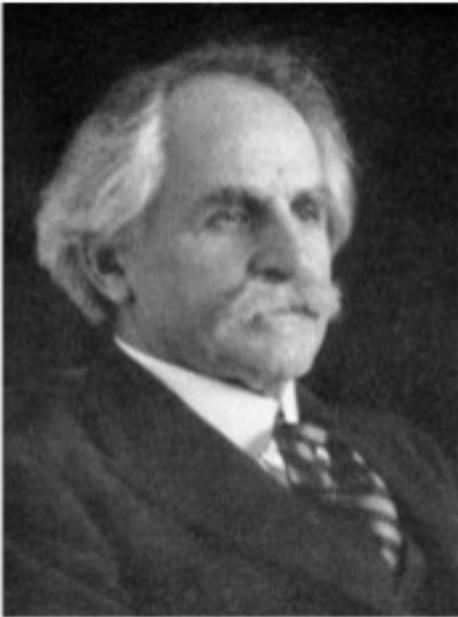


Hamlin Garland

The author of 52 books and a Pulitzer Prize winner, Hamlin Garland (1860-1940) was intimately involved with major literary, social, and artistic movements in American culture. He was awarded honorary doctorate degrees by the University of Wisconsin, Beloit College, Northwestern University, and the University of Southern California. The latter institution now houses the Hamlin Garland collection in its Doheny Memorial Library. The Hamlin Garland Society exists today to disseminate information on Garland's literary works, and his early home in West Salem, Wisconsin is a national historic landmark and museum.



As a student of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Garland took pride in his agnosticism and skepticism. When, in 1891, he was asked to join the American Psychical Society (APS), he was surprised and amused that he would be asked to participate in investigations of what he referred to as the "dark side of the moon." But after it was pointed out to him that the organization wanted young, open-minded skeptics as their investigators to offset what might be seen as credulity

among some of the older investigators, Garland consented. The APS was formed by members of the American branch of the Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) who apparently were frustrated by the fact that Dr. Richard Hodgson, executive secretary of the ASPR, was keeping all the best cases for himself to investigate.

While visiting Santa Barbara, California during December 1892, Garland met Mary Curryer Smith, a direct-voice medium (Out of privacy concerns, Garland assigned her the pseudonym "Mrs. Smiley" in his reports). Like many other skeptics, Garland assumed that direct-voice mediums were nothing more than talented ventriloquists, but he was anxious to find this out for himself. He was in for quite a surprise as he witnessed dynamic physical and mental mediumship with Smith, all under test conditions. He was so impressed that he arranged for Smith to travel to Boston to be studied by other members of the APS. In a sitting at the home of Professor Amos Dolbear, a fellow APS investigator who was head of the department of astronomy and physics at Tufts College, the two men and Mrs. Dolbear witnessed about two dozen books fly off the shelves in Dolbear's library and then saw "shadowy hands" stacking the books on the table in front of them. They heard from two male spirits, one calling himself "Mitchel," who claimed to be Smith's chief guide, and the other "Wilbur," one of her guides. Wilbur further identified himself as Jefferson Thompson, a brigadier general in the Confederate army who died in Jefferson City, Missouri after the American Civil War. According to Garland, he spoke in a manly voice and as clearly as if he were a living human being.

"For two mortal hours this invisible kept us wondering at his power and laughing at his 'wise-cracking'," Garland wrote. "He was philosophic as well as humorous. At intervals he played jokes upon us. At my request he touched

my face on the side away from the psychic and six feet from her. As a still stronger test I asked that the small end of the cone touch me on my right nostril. This was done with such gentle precision that it seemed a caress."¹ During all of the activity, Garland monitored the medium's position and noted that she remained in a "deathly trance" while Professor Dolbear sat dumbfounded.

When, in 1907, Garland was asked by John O'Hara Cosgrave, the editor of *Everybody's Magazine*, to attend a sitting with Daniel Peters, a young New York medium, he welcomed the opportunity. Cosgrave informed Garland that his friend, Dr. Turner, had observed Peters and was mystified by his "psychic stunts." He wanted an experienced researcher to observe Peters. A sitting was arranged at Turner's home. Mrs. Turner, three other physicians and their wives, and Garland all gathered at the Turner home for the sitting.

Peters explained to those gathered that he had recently graduated from law school and was working as a legal assistant in the offices of a big Wall Street corporation. He was concerned that he would be fired if his superiors were to find out about his mediumistic gifts. He added that he had become aware of his powers about four years earlier. The group sat around a table. Peters instructed them to clasp hands. He then linked his little fingers with the little fingers of Dr. and Mrs. Turner on each side of him. The lights were then turned out, but Garland observed that pale patches of light appeared around the windows.

Strange things began happening. Dr. Turner's tie was removed by invisible hands and placed around Mrs. Turner's neck. Hands unbuttoned Dr. Turner's shirt and stuffed pencils between his shirt and his body. The medium's vest was removed and placed on Garland's lap. All the while Dr. and Mrs. Turner reported their fingers still linked with Peters' fingers.

Garland asked if the invisible hands could lift the table out of the circle and deposit it on the floor. "With all hands clasped we sat in deep silence waiting," Garland wrote. "Turner an-

nounced an increase in the convulsive tremor of the psychic's limbs."² The table then rose and was dropped softly outside the circle. Both Dr. and Mrs. Turner reported having maintained their grip on Peters' hands and were certain they were not victims of the skeptic's usual explanation that the medium had linked their hands together. The lights were turned on and the table was behind Mrs. Turner, who was wearing her husband's tie.

The table was put back in place and the lights again turned off. Peters told them all to think of a signature. The sound of writing on a tablet in the middle of the table could be heard, as could the paper being torn from the tablet, after which it was folded and placed in front of Dr. Turner. When the lights were turned on, Turner recognized it as his deceased brother's signature. Similarly, Garland found the signature of his deceased father-in-law written in the peculiar up-and-down script that he well remembered. "I had not been thinking of him," he explained. "I had not attempted to visualize his signature, and no one in the circle knew his writing or that he was related to me. There was something inexplicable in this fact."³

At a second sitting with Peters, Garland took extra precautions, searching all of his pockets and then tying his wrists to the arms of the chair with dental floss. Garland sat next to Peters this time and hooked the little finger of his right hand to the little finger of Peters' left hand. When the lights were turned out, Garland observed a faint, bluish, smoke-like cloud develop in front of the medium and a hand darted out of the cloud, grasping Garland's left wrist. The hand picked up a glass of water on the table and lifted it to the medium's mouth so that he could drink. Other phenomena similar to the first sitting took place.

In a third sitting with Peters, Garland nailed Peters' sleeves to the chair with upholstery tacks while again wrapping dental floss around his wrists. Still, the phenomena developed.

A month later, Garland sat with Peters in his Sunday evening family circle, which called for the

medium to be in a cabinet. "After a few moments' silence, I observed a cloud of glowing vapor slowly forming on the floor just in front of the portieres," Garland recorded. "It resembled, as it rose, a cone of fire-lit steam, like that which rolls from a locomotive smokestack on a winter morning. It expanded as it slowly rose, and at last out of it the dim figure of a man emerged. He spoke in a foreign tongue, and I observed that his voice resembled that of the psychic. The Pole who sat beside me on the couch called out, 'It is my brother!'"⁴ Garland noted that the materialization appeared to be almost an exact twin of the man claiming to be his brother.

When this form faded out, the materialization of "Evans," Peters' spirit guide, took place. "This dimly seen figure appeared enveloped in a cloud of vapor, but his voice was distinct," Garland further noted. "At his invitation I went forward to shake hands with him. He seemed taller than the psychic, but his manner of speech was distinctly similar to that of Peters. I could not see his face. The hand he offered me was draped in an exceedingly fine, faintly shining material, cobwebby in texture, which appeared to melt away between my fingers and his. The hand was narrow and pointed. I felt its bones for a moment. When I released it, the figure vanished like a bubble. It made no sound when it appeared and none as it disappeared. One instant it was there, the next instant it was not."⁵

When Peters emerged from the cabinet, Garland noted that he appeared distraught. Peters yelled in a commanding tone, "Come out!" Garland then observed the form of a man appearing outside the cabinet. He stood at attention like a soldier and wore a turban of gray-white material and was draped in the same type material. "He gave the impression of a form suspended – unfinished – in the air and yet with bulk," Garland wrote. "Whether the psychic commanded him to greet me or not, I cannot now recall, but the phantom (as if to show he was alive) bowed to me three times gracefully, slowly, and solemnly, while the psychic with both his hands out-

stretched and with bent, trembling legs, crept slowly toward the figure. At the same time the phantom moved toward the psychic as if drawn by some magnetic force. They met in the center and appeared to coalesce like two drops of mercury. The figure vanished seemingly into the body of the psychic who reeled backward through the curtains and fell like a log on the floor."⁶

Peters later explained to Garland that he struggled to hold on to the form as long as he could so that Garland could study it, and that he could feel the force go out from his forehead and solar plexus before he collapsed. Garland anticipated that the skeptics would say he was duped by a skillful arrangement of sheets and wires. However, there was no doubt in his mind that this was not the case. Moreover, Garland considered that his observations were in harmony with similar reports by Sir William Crookes of England and Dr. Charles Richet of France, both world-renowned scientists.

Over the next three decades, Garland witnessed a variety of phenomena with different mediums, including materializations, slate writing, trance voice, direct voice, and clairvoyance. However, while ruling out fraud and recognizing that something supernormal was taking place, he remained skeptical as to whether spirits were responsible for the phenomena. As with a number of other researchers, Garland took the "intellectual" approach, which held that the phenomena somehow resulted from some not-yet-understood aspect of the medium's subconscious. Indications were that he secretly accepted the spiritistic hypothesis but that he was reluctant to publicly acknowledge it. He ended his 1936 book, *Forty Years of Psychic Research*, with a somewhat guarded statement. "I concede the possibility of their (spirits') persistence, especially when their voices carry, movingly, characteristic tones and their messages are startlingly intimate," he wrote. "At such times, they seem souls of the dead veritably reembodyed. They jest with me about their occu-

pations. They laugh at my doubts, quite in character. They touch me with their hands.”⁷

Following the publication of *Forty Years*, Garland began investigating a mystery which he documented in his final book, *The Mystery of the Buried Crosses*, published in 1939. Garland had been given some 1,500 crosses and other artifacts allegedly unearthed by Gregory and Violet Parent between 1914 and 1924. He was told that Mrs. Parent began communicating with “dead souls” in 1914, just after she recovered from a serious illness. The communicating spirits directed her to buried treasures and artifacts all over southern and central California. They were said to be buried by North American Indians during the missionary period of California. Through a direct-voice medium, Sophia Williams, Garland then communicated with the deceased Violet Parent, as

well as long deceased missionary priests and was led to additional crosses and artifacts buried around California and Mexico. Among the other spirits communicating with Garland through Williams were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Professor William James, and Dr. Gustave Geley, all psychical researchers who said they were there to help Garland in his search.

Garland seems to have concluded *Buried Crosses* more convinced that the communication was coming from spirits than from the subconscious of the medium, but made no statement directly professing such a belief.

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¹ Garland, Hamlin, *Forty Years of Psychic Research*, The MacMillan Co., 1936, p. 62.

² _____, pp. 158-159.

³ _____, p. 160.

⁴ _____, p. 171.

⁵ _____, p.172.

⁶ _____, p. 173.

⁷ _____, p. 392.