

minated by increasing communication and collaboration with foreign parapsychologists.

### *Puerto Rico*<sup>10</sup>

Early psychical research in Puerto Rico was strongly influenced by the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement that had also spread to other countries. Mediumistic séances in which raps and communication with the spirits were common drew attention mostly from people with a religious interest.

It was perhaps this influence that led Agapito Morales to publish in 1904 a more critical examination of these phenomena. In his booklet *Breve Tratado de Hipnotismo, Magnetismo, Espiritismo y Sugestoterapia*, Morales contended that all those occurrences could take place without assuming the action of spirit agencies. He interpreted possession as being autosuggestion and attributed paranormal phenomena to our own psychic faculties. He considered that all of the experiments made until today demonstrate that there is an invisible force in our being that is capable, for instance, of playing a guitar, lifting a table, or lifting our own bodies. According to him this force is under our control. He also believed that mediumistic communication could be explained by means of telepathy between the medium and the sitter.

Another major influence in the formation of a more empirical and critical approach to parapsychology was the work of Francisco Ponte, a dentist who became president of the Puerto Rican Federation of Spiritists. Ponte visited Europe in 1912 to familiarize himself with the work of several Spiritualistic centers, as well as psychical research centers. He had had the opportunity to participate in mediumistic séances in Italy with famous mediums such as Lucia Sordi and Eusapia Palladino. During these séances he witnessed manifestations of apparent telekinesis and materializations (Alvarado, 1987; Ponte, 1914).

Later Ponte returned to Puerto Rico and tried to reproduce the same phenomena with local mediums. He reported some of his findings on materializations of body parts during séances to Walter Franklin Prince, then Research Officer of the ASPR. Ponte's work was important because of the critical and empirical approach he brought to his research on séance phenomena (Alvarado, 1979a).

<sup>10</sup> This section on Puerto Rican parapsychology partly summarizes information contained in an article by Alvarado (1979a).

The theoretical ideas of Ralph U. Sierra are also interesting. Sierra, who was interested in the psychology of ESP, believed that to develop telepathy it was necessary to develop first an internal state of tranquility so that the electrical activity of the brain did not interfere with the telepathic process (Sierra, 1966).

Some of the most important developments, however, took place during the last two centuries. At the educational level, it is important to note the work of Celinda Madera who, during the 1970s, offered a series of courses and lectures at different campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. Madera's courses focused on the humanistic and transpersonal aspects of psi. She herself had received training at Duke University's Parapsychology Laboratory (Alvarado, 1979a).

In 1974, Nestor A. Rodríguez Escudero, a lawyer, published a series of essays about parapsychology and Spiritualism in his book *Los Caminos de Dios*. He discussed a great variety of paranormal phenomena. His main objective was to show that parapsychology demonstrates the spiritual aspect of man (Rodríguez Escudero, 1974).

Another development in 1977 was the creation of the Instituto de Investigaciones Psicofísicas at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus. Founded to conduct investigations in parapsychology and related areas, the Institute carried out studies of various parameters of Kirlian photography and of the effects of hypnosis on ESP. However, these research investigations were never made available for publication. During this period Alfonso Martínez Taboas began to publish a newsletter *Explorando lo Paranormal*, a semipopular magazine later edited by Carlos Alvarado starting in 1976.

Martínez Taboas and Carlos Alvarado wrote articles on parapsychology in Spanish for the Spanish journal *Psi Comunicación*; they also published in other journals. Their articles covered a wide range of topics. Among these, Alvarado wrote on experimental studies of OBEs (1976), historical precedents of the so-called psychic discoveries behind the Iron Curtain (1978), the use of historical knowledge (1979b), and on J. B. Rhine (1980). Martínez Taboas published a review of the problem of repeatability in parapsychology (1979), critiques of psychological and physiological concepts of poltergeist research (1977, 1980, 1984; Martínez Taboas & Alvarado, 1981), and a discussion of the concept of parsimony applied to parapsychology (1983).

The work of Martínez Taboas and Alvarado has been very important in the effort to bridge the language barrier between the Spanish researcher and the non-Spanish-speaking researcher. This

is particularly true of Alvarado's book reviews (1984a, 1985) and his discussion of language-barrier problems in parapsychology (1989a). Moreover, Alvarado, a former research assistant at the Division of Parapsychology (now the Division of Personality Studies) at the University of Virginia, has maintained a constant flow of information on parapsychological activities in Latin America to research centers in the United States for the last eight years. In addition, among the Ibero-American parapsychologists, he is the one who has published most extensively in the English-language journals and the only one ever to be elected a member of the Board of Directors of the Parapsychological Association.

#### Mexico

Mexico has been known for a long time as the land of the sacred mushroom or peyotl, a plant used by the Indian shaman to induce an altered state of consciousness, which allegedly facilitates the manifestation of psychic powers. This country has also been a major source for many parapsychological researchers interested in unorthodox psychic healing practices. Famous curanderos (healers) such as María Sabina and Doña Pacilita have been extensively investigated by Stanley Krippner and other famous parapsychologists (Krippner & Villoldo, 1986).

Although Mexico has been a major source of study for many parapsychologists from foreign countries, psychical research has not flourished there as it has in other countries such as Argentina and Spain. Moreover, even though the country is located on the southern border of the United States and has been subject to very strong American cultural influence in almost every aspect of life, the dominance of the United States has not been a factor in the development of parapsychology. Even though in the United States there are more parapsychological research centers than anywhere else in the world, very little is known in Mexico of their research. Most of what is known about serious parapsychology comes from Latin American countries such as Brazil. For example, the writings of Quevedo are well known in Mexico, and also most of what is known generally comes from popular magazines.

Early efforts to study psychical research within a scientific framework in Mexico began in 1919 with the isolated efforts of such researchers as the German-born medical doctor Gustav Pagenstecher, the first researcher to conduct serious psychical research in Mexico. Pagenstecher was a very well-known and respected physician in the

Mexican medical community as well as in political circles. In the course of his career he delivered speeches before two presidents of Mexico, Díaz and Obregón (Allison, 1943).<sup>11</sup>

A respected member of the medical profession, Pagenstecher said he had been a materialist for forty years when he had his first encounter with the paranormal. It was during a hypnosis treatment of one of his patients who had insomnia that he discovered the remarkable psychical gifts of María Reyes de Zierold. Pagenstecher began a series of psychometric experiments with her in 1919. The results were so striking that he brought them to the attention of the Mexican medical society, which appointed a commission to verify them. Pagenstecher also decided to write to the ASPR and send some of the results he had obtained. The results induced Walter Franklin Prince, Research Officer of the ASPR, to go to Mexico to investigate the case. After a series of experimental sittings with Zierold, Prince was so impressed with the results that he decided to publish them in the *Journal of the ASPR* in 1920 (Pagenstecher, 1920). Prince later published another paper in which he discussed the experiments in which he participated (Prince, 1921b). Moreover, the ASPR published a monograph by Pagenstecher entitled *Past Experiences: A Study of Psychometry* (Pagenstecher, 1922).

According to William Roll (1967), Pagenstecher contributed to two major areas in parapsychology:

[He was], as far as I know the first investigator to use hypnosis as a means to cultivate ESP in a gifted subject. . . Pagenstecher's studies were also, I believe, the first to indicate that the (parapsychological) association of objects may be governed by the same laws that govern the (psychological) association of ideas. (p. 238)

Pagenstecher showed great courage in undertaking these experiments. He jeopardized his professional standing as well as his medical practice by trying to substantiate the claims for Zierold's psychic abilities. The Medical Commission appointed to investigate the case was skeptical of the reported phenomena. Fortunately, however, the Commission's leading experts obtained successful results in the experiments in which they participated (Gomezharpe de Trepoño, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Obregón was a revolutionary military leader, later President of Mexico. Walter Franklin Prince (1921a) relates an interesting psychic experience witnessed by Obregón, about a precognitive dream Obregón's brother had about the death of their mother.