

Cagliostro Revisited:

THE MAGIC OF MEDIUMSHIP

Part I

By Jule Eisenbud

From *Parapsychology and the Unconscious*  
Reprinted by permission of  
North Atlantic Books, 2320 Blake Street  
Berkeley, Calif. 94704

IN THE winter of 1916 a 26-year-old woman with a long history of multiple personality was brought to a Boston medium for a series of sittings. Her mentor was Dr. James H. Hyslop, ex-Professor of Logic and Ethics at Columbia University and one of the moving spirits of the American Society for Psychical Research. Some years earlier this Doris Fischer (a pseudonym) had come to the attention of Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, then an Episcopal minister and later Research Officer of the American Society for Psychical Research, who took her into his home for investigation and treatment. Dr. Prince's 1310-page two-volume report of the relationships between Doris' five personalities and the vicissitudes of their treatment is one of the most fascinating and complete in the history of the subject.<sup>1</sup> We shall not go into this, however, as we turn to what happened when Dr. Hyslop, who suspected that some, perhaps all, cases of multiple personality were instances of undeveloped mediumship, arranged with Dr. Prince to have Doris on loan

so he could test his hypothesis with a medium he had used before in similar cases, Mrs. Minnie Meserve Soule, who was known—and referred to by Hyslop—under the pseudonym of Mrs. Chenoweth.

During the sittings, which lasted over several months (and which are described in Hyslop's 860-page third volume on the Doris case),<sup>2</sup> a number of evidentially interesting personality characterizations appeared on the scene, both through the medium's automatic writing and her just as automatic and seemingly externally inspired speech. These included, among others, Doris' mother who had died some years before, a thoroughly Jamesian William James (the only one of several appearing through different mediums who seemed at all like the original) and a San Francisco hooligan who commandeered the body of the medium (or so it seemed) to beat Hyslop with "his" fists and who got into a violent argument with another of the personalities coming through. But by all odds the most remarkable of the characters that emerged episodically during the sittings was identified finally by Hyslop as the bogus Count Alessandro Cagliostro, a notorious 18th-Century figure who has fascinated and baffled generations of biographers.

JA-86

Widely regarded as an outrageous poseur and con man who got himself up in the flamboyant garb of a modern rock singer, he was also known as a healer to the poor and leader of a masonic sect of higher spirituality. His somewhat pantheistic conception of the Divinity led ultimately to his downfall (as it had a century earlier to Spinoza's). Contemporaries and later commentators and biographers regarded him either as the incarnation of evil (for example, Thomas Carlyle in one of the most turgid outpourings of venom ever printed)<sup>3</sup> or, because of his benefactions and widely disseminated spiritual doctrines, the incarnation of saintliness. But, outside of a couple of completely discredited allegations (one by a former assistant who was fired when he was found taking money from the poor to whom he was delegated to distribute medicaments) and some unsubstantiated innuendoes in Carlyle's 1833 diatribe,<sup>\*</sup> nothing published during Cagliostro's lifetime or up to the time of Doris' sittings with Mrs. Chenoweth even hinted at the role in which whoever or whatever it was that emerged during these sittings cast him or itself. In the sitting about to be described, Cagliostro came through as a Nietzschean proponent of the kind of instinctual freedom that was not to find such outspoken defenders for another half century (until the 1960's, that is). With some condensation and minor editing I shall give just enough of the way things went during this session to convey the flavor of what

<sup>\*</sup>"He that will undertake to smooth wrinkles and make even withered green parchment into fair carnation skin, is he not one whom faded dames of quality will delight to honour? Or again, let the Beautifying Water succeed or not, have not such dames (if calumny may in aught believed) another want? This want too the indefatigable Count will supply—for a consideration."

must have been a startling experience for the conventionally straitlaced trio of Doris, Mrs. Chenoweth and Professor Hyslop.<sup>2</sup>

The character who was bit by bit identified as Cagliostro (and whom I shall refer to noncommittally by that name) seems first to have appeared as an apparition to Mrs. Chenoweth in what was termed her subliminal trance state (as differentiated from the trance states in which she expressed herself orally in the words of a given communicator or in automatic writing). "I don't like him," she began. "He has a long cloak with a hood falling back from his head. I can't tell you if he is a monk or not. He has most alarming eyes and they look as though they would pierce through me. [This feature of Cagliostro was noted in several contemporary accounts of him.] I see right through him at places. I see the window curtain beyond him. I want to call him a magician [which Cagliostro was and was often called]. I can't tell you how I know that because he doesn't move . . . . It is like a secondary picture you know . . . . I would almost expect him to swallow a sword or something like that." Here Mrs. Chenoweth pauses, groans and cries for some moments, and then what is referred to in the record as her "oral control" takes over. Speaking very slowly at first but gathering momentum as the sitting progressed, she (or who- or whatever appears to be speaking through her) began to utter a series of statements of which I shall select only a few of the most significant: "To plunge into the vortex of activities and secure the competence which belongs to the victor is life, life! Call me a thief but call me



not a coward; call me a liar but call me not a fool . . . . They lie who claim to love the life of the celibate. The starved, the burdened, the ignorant, they lie who say they love such lives for Jesus' sake. Imbeciles! They love it not. They fear to be [pause] happy, rich, because they fear they will be damned. They hope to swap their narrow selves for glorious big heaven. Fools! Take, have, be! Let heaven be peopled with idiots who belong there . . . . What makes a woman weep when she loses her virtue? Fear that those around her will condemn her, fear of opinion." At this point Hyslop, somewhat gratuitously (not to say pruriently, perhaps), asks the communicator whether he has had experience in taking a woman's virtue away. "None of your damned business," Cagliostro snaps back. "Who are you that I should say what my past has been? Woman, they [sic] love the experience. It is the world that gives them hell. Reform the world." Here Hyslop, who has been furiously taking notes during this interchange, cannot refrain from interjecting a bit of moralizing: "We could hardly reform it if men gave them your kind of experience." "Yes," responds Cagliostro, "the hypocritical chatter, nonsensical standards, foolish prohibitions, damn it! Freedom, freedom, freedom without fear . . . . Who says that natural experiences are wrong? Men, men, men who stand up in cells."

At the next session two days later, Cagliostro again took over as Mrs. Chenoweth's oral control. Right away he set off along somewhat different lines, but the tone of what was to follow was consistent with what had gone before. "Jesus Christ was an impostor

. . . . Great pretender. He never rose from the dead. Hallucinations on the part of those who said so. All pure fabrication. Mahomet was a pretender . . . . Who believes for an instant in the miracles? . . . The fool world believed it because it wants to swallow lies. Get up with a proposition as false as hell itself and you will get some followers . . . . What do you suppose Jesus was crucified for? For being a savior? For being a pretender . . . . I tell you there is more falsity under the cloak of religion than in the life of a libertine who is true to the instincts of his nature. Go to hell!"

Now the remarkable thing about this material is not just the appearance out of the blue of a communicator who gives a lively representation of a character with ideas about sexual morality and religion completely out of tune with his time, but the fact that, as it developed, it was almost 60 years before anything came along publicly to support such a characterization. At issue was not simply the question of the communicator's identity, which, when established piecemeal by Hyslop, eventually became clear, but the nature of the personality behind the identity. True, there had been allegations during his lifetime that in his wanderings throughout Europe Cagliostro had swindled people, left a trail of unpaid bills and gulled the credulous with dubious "cures." Such stories ("Call me a thief . . . call me a liar") inevitably grew up around a mysterious master of the occult who claimed to be the possessor of the secrets of an ancient Egyptian masonic order, to have conversed with Christ on the Mount of Olives and, worst of all, whose extravagant life-style had never



been satisfactorily accounted for. But never did these, or any of the definitely-established facts repeated by his many biographers up to the time of the sittings, support the representation of him as a public defender of sexual freedom—especially for women!—or as a reckless blasphemer who wouldn't have lasted 48 hours in the Church-dominated Europe of the time. W. R.H. Trowbridge's *Cagliostro*, the only complete biography of Cagliostro in English up to the time it appeared in 1910, cites over 50 prior sources in several languages without indicating that such characteristics were ever attributed to the subject. Even Carlyle, who claims to have gone through everything he could find on Cagliostro, could come up with nothing worse to call him, despite what were apparently his own salacious fantasies, than Prince of Liars, Archquack and Quack of Quacks. All the more intriguing, therefore, to discover that material bearing out the characterization of Cagliostro that came through Mrs. Chenoweth was available, even though in all probability not consciously known to her or to anyone she could reasonably be expected to be acquainted with, since 1885. The story is this:

On the 27th of September (some say December) 1789, the luckless Cagliostro was arrested in Rome and brought to trial by the Holy Inquisition on charges of freemasonry, heresy and propagating magic and superstition. According to the Inquisition-biographer quoted by Trowbridge (who begs off giving all the "tedious" details of the trial), Cagliostro pleaded that "everything he had done in his life had been done with the consent of the Almighty and that he

had always been faithful to the Pope and the Church." He was nevertheless condemned to death (freemasonry alone was enough to insure this) but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He died a few years later (1795 is the year usually given but the dates of Cagliostro's birth and death are both uncertain) in an abominable Roman prison, completely broken in body, mind and spirit. This, in essence, is what Trowbridge gives.

I first learned of the other side of the picture in a biography that appeared in Italian in 1972. In Robert Gervaso's *Cagliostro*, whose 1974 English translation I read,<sup>4</sup> a number of details of Cagliostro's trial were given that were considerably at variance with Trowbridge's version (and, as far as I know, with all subsequent English and foreign versions). Some highlights: Cagliostro was accused of having had "carnal commerce with various spinsters" and of having seduced a number of women, including somebody's "nubile daughter" in France. When asked by some of his disciples, according to the account, if they should practice chastity, he replied, "What do you mean—chastity? Have all the sex you want and enjoy it and pay no attention to all that rubbish about chastity." He was accused of having forced a certain lady to submit to his desires six times "with promises and threats," of having "tied a white ribbon on his member several times in the presence of the maid and saying, caressing it: 'Look, isn't it beautiful?'" as well as of "putting an eggcup on his male member and saying to the maid, 'This is the true bishop whom you must adore.'" "B.P.A. A"

Cagliostro was also charged with

## Cagliostro Revisited:

# THE MAGIC OF MEDIUMSHIP

The first hint that the communicator is more than a random intruder surfaces when his sensuality engenders disgust and disdain.

## Part II

By Jule Eisenbud

From *Parapsychology and the Unconscious*  
Reprinted by permission of North Atlantic Books  
2320 Blake St., Berkeley, Calif. 94704

*I*N 1916 Dr. James H. Hyslop, one of the moving spirits of the American Society for Psychical Research, arranged for Doris Fischer, a 26-year-old woman with a long history of multiple personality, to have a series of sittings with a Boston medium, Mrs. Minnie Meserve Soule, known under the pseudonym of Mrs. Chenoweth. Hyslop had used Mrs. Soule previously to test his hypothesis that many, if not all, cases of multiple personality were instances of undeveloped mediumship.

During the sittings, several personalities emerged — Doris' mother, for one — but the most remarkable was finally identified by Hyslop as the bogus Count Alessandro Cagliostro. Nothing published before the sittings about this notorious 18th-Century figure hinted at the kind of characterization that emerged. He came through as a Nietzschean proponent of the kind of instinctual freedom that wouldn't surface again until the 1960's. This communicator expressed ideas about sexual morality and religion completely out of tune with his time. Not until the early 1970's

did information come along publicly supporting such a characterization. In Robert Gervaso's biography *Cagliostro*, published in English translation in 1974, the baffling bogus count comes across as a debauchee and blasphemer.

These events leave the familiar alternative explanations: Either some kind of discarnate intelligence was operating through Mrs. Chenoweth, or someone — not necessarily the medium — was demonstrating what is customarily called super-ESP.

**T**HERE IS little I can say here to get the perennial controversy over these two explanations off dead center — which is where Murphy left the issue almost 40 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Certain features of the case, however, seem admirably suited to illustrate aspects of the material that may not be immediately apparent. Right at the start our attention is drawn to what at first appears to be the lifelike quality of Cagliostro's performance. This aspect of mediumistic episodes finally tipped the balance for many investigators in scores of cases toward a discarnate-intelligence hypothesis. Here we have to go entirely by feel, for there are no objective measuring devices to rate a communicator's performance. But just reading Caglio-

F-86



having on many occasions uttered blasphemies, such as "that idiot God" and "the blood of the Madonna" and of having answered a certain Marchesa, when she asked him about the formula of some pills, "They're made of God Almighty's shit." Mary was a good-for-nothing and the Virgin birth a complete hoax. Priests and cardinals were "nancy-boys" and the saints imbeciles. He was accused of having said to his wife when she wanted to go to the church and pray to the Virgin and the saints: "What saints, what Virgin? That's a load of rubbish; you'll find all the saints you want in my arse!"

Gervaso gives as the source of this material an Italian manuscript acquired in 1855 by the National Victor Emmanuel Library of Rome. In response to my request for further information about this, he wrote that the material in the National Library was only a digest of the charges brought against Cagliostro by the Holy Office and that the original was still held in secret in the Vatican. He did not state whether the material he provided in his book (much of which—as in my account of it—is somewhat edited direct quotation) was obtained from the secret Vatican material, was merely from the digest at the National Library or came from sources (which I have been unable to discover) published prior to his book. As far as I can determine, at all events, no publication of the material appeared in English prior to Gervaso's.

We cannot be certain, however, that Mrs. Chenoweth—despite Hyslop's assertions as to her character and the limited range of her knowledge and interests—did not come by this material normally. She might, for instance, have

read it in a source that Trowbridge (and Gervaso 60 years later) somehow missed; or she could conceivably have seen it at the National Library in Rome (although I imagine that even the digest would have been reserved for scholars). All things considered, however, it seems a reasonable presumption that Mrs. Chenoweth did not have normal access to the material in question. For the moment, at any rate, and in order to get on to other matters, this is the presumption I shall adopt. This leaves the hypotheses of chance, unconscious inference and some kind of paranormal acquisition of the material.

Chance and inference can probably both be safely dismissed when the specificity of some of the correspondences between the seance utterances of Cagliostro and the National Library material is considered. Chenoweth's Cagliostro, for example, talks about nonsensical standards, foolish prohibitions, the hypocrisy of celibacy. The allegedly real Cagliostro is accused at his trial of deriding "all that rubbish about chastity." Chenoweth's Cagliostro calls the clergy (who claim to love the life of the celibate) imbeciles. The trial Cagliostro is accused of calling the saints imbeciles. He also calls the clergy "nancy-boys" while the Cagliostro of the sittings calls them "sissy-cats" ("those cowed monks with women's dresses on [who] are subduing every instinct of nature"). Allowing for the vagaries of translation, this is close. We are left, then, with the familiar alternatives: either some kind of discarnate intelligence operating through Mrs. Chenoweth or what is customarily called super-ESP on somebody's (not necessarily Mrs. Chenoweth's) part.

→ A "1.981"



stro's material gives the impression of a live intelligence at work, an intelligence other than the medium's.

A second look, however, gives us pause. For all its liveliness, Cagliostro's material is all too plainly unidimensional. Here, after all, is supposed to be a person who spent much of the last possibly five or six years of his life in solitary confinement, from all accounts in almost unimaginable misery, wracked with pain and, in the few moments of sanity left to him, undoubtedly consumed by memories and emotions that could only have added to his agony. Under what kind of compulsion, now, would such a personality return to rant and rave about issues that one would imagine might be the least of his concerns? There is nothing here like Shakespeare's conventional ghosts who show up on battlements or at banquets burning for revenge, or even like communicators who seem to be searching for something (if only a lost limb).<sup>2</sup> In such cases there is at least some suggestion of purpose, that *sine qua non* of life. With Chenoweth's Cagliostro, despite all the talk about "Life, life," it is definitely as if whatever intelligence is directing these things had ordered a computer to slice through a complete life and personality and dish up merely a narrow segment fulfilling a limited prescription. It is like the story of the street hawker who tried to press on a Vienna tourist a skull he claimed was that of Beethoven. When the tourist protested that the skull was far too small, he was assured that the skull was that of Beethoven as a child. Here we have Cagliostro as, in a sense, a child — a child with, curiously, no knowledge, no memory, as it were, of the future that was to destroy him. Yes,

there is one perfunctory reference to such a future when Hyslop, trying to confirm the suspected Cagliostro's identity, came boring in with leading questions. "I refuse to be questioned," was the response. "I paid my price." To Hyslop's query as to what that was came the absolutely flat, unemotional, "Life and liberty," after which we hear nothing more about what one might think would be the most pressing thoughts of someone who had lost both in a tragic miscarriage of justice. "Life and liberty" comes out here with all the affect of a C-minus grade school student's answer to some routine question about Patrick Henry.

The second feature that invites our interest is that, as Hyslop emphasizes, Cagliostro is as foreign to Doris and Mrs. Chenoweth as any character out of history could be. He is a party-crasher, a communicator of the so-called drop-in type.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it is this very feature that, as Hyslop hastens to point out, argues against the possibility of telepathy from the sitters. In fact, there seems to be no reason for the communicator's presence at the seance at all.

The first hint we get that Cagliostro is something more than a perfectly random intruder is that Hyslop himself is anything but indifferent to him. His attitude from the beginning is one of high moral disdain. He refers to Cagliostro in his notes as a rake and a debauchee and to the material he provides as "ugly." He is an unwelcome invasive spirit with "an immoral character" and a much to be deplored "sensuous view of life," a view which is "fatal" to spiritual development. Curiously, however, Hyslop, who has apparently devoted much of his life to spiritual and moral

## CAGLIOSTRO REVISITED

71

represented, would as likely as not be a sexist of prime rank. Here, in fact, in this hint of almost militant feminism, is a suggestion that somewhere in this personation could be a faint voice struggling to express itself, that indeed Cagliostro could be a kind of composite figure seen in dreams, an amalgam of conceivably quite different strains.

If we try to trace the provenance of this peculiar "residue," we are inevitably led to what would appear at first to be another unlikely source, Doris' mother, who had died when Doris was 17. A communicator purporting to be the mother comes through, not too surprisingly, as everything a mother should be — loving, caring and concerned about "my baby," which is what the mother did in fact call Doris in life. It is when we turn to this long-suffering life itself, however, that we begin to suspect something missing in this Hallmark card picture. The first thing that catches our attention is a bit of information in the rundown on Mrs. Fischer given by Prince in the first of his two massive volumes. At the very start of her miserable marriage to the callous brute who, drunk or sober, beat her and made her take in wash and do it even on Sundays — a mortal sin in the home from which she came, she had stopped going to church and had in fact become cynical about religion. But we also learn that her well-off, strict Methodist father, the very model of what religion meant to her as a child, had disowned her when she had eloped at 16 with the man he had correctly sized up as worthless, and that he had turned a deaf ear to all her later pleas for reconciliation, even when the fast-growing family (Doris was the last of 13 children) was

reduced to little better than squalor. If anything could finally have hardened her against religion, on top of her having slipped into mortal sin from which there was no escape, it was certainly this.

But there is something more, something the empathic Prince tries to tell us about Doris' mother in a way that would not offend his average reader, some of whom, we must bear in mind, could still remember the days of the hoop skirt. "All of Mrs. Fischer's strongest instincts," he writes, "were thwarted from the time of her marriage." She was, however, of a "peculiarly imaginative temperament and found relief in the midst of her sordid tasks in daydreams filled with the life-elements which she yearned for and of which her real existence was so barren."

Can we not see a hint of a Cagliostro in the "life-elements" that Prince, in his veiled way, tells us filled Mrs. Fischer's daydreams? Thus even if a Cagliostro would not have totally assuaged the sense of mortal sin that had never ceased to plague her (despite her cynicism she never stopped encouraging Doris toward a deep reliance on the Bible), he at least could legitimize the adolescent sexual longings that led to her elopement with Doris' father, for which her own father never forgave her.

If there were such a link between Mrs. Fischer and the Cagliostro who appeared almost a decade after her rather sudden death (witnessed only by Doris and a husband lying in a drunken stupor), how could it come about? Bypassing for the moment the possibility of some sort of direct connection in a still moot spirit world, it would most likely come through Doris herself, all



development, seems repeatedly to encounter communicators at seances who, like Cagliostro, do not share his views. And "those who have not cared for spiritual realities and culture when living," he writes, "or who have led vicious and low lives, are the ones most likely to give trouble." Occasionally such sinners can be won over to a spiritual view of life when they return at seances but Cagliostro, it seems, is beyond redemption. He "had not wanted a spiritual life when living and there is no reason he should obtain it after death."<sup>14</sup>

In spite of himself, thus, Hyslop seemed to find himself locked into some sort of epic Manichean struggle against the forces of evil. But that there could be an internal dynamic connection between the spiritually inclined professor and the low "sensuous" characters who kept turning up at the seances he attended was not yet widely appreciated as a psychological possibility, any more than that the unceasing preoccupation with vice of Anthony Comstock, New York's Canadian Mountie of sin and smut and Hyslop's contemporary, was anything more than just righteous zeal. An additional bar to insight was the notion, prevalent at the time (and even much later in the seances of the experimentalists), that persons participating in such procedures were always dutifully playing the roles assigned to them. It never occurred to anyone in 1914 that observers and notetakers may have had just as active a part in what was going on as the designated sitters.

In Doris' case, similarly, the dynamic possibilities in the vast chasm ostensibly separating sitter and sinner were never suspected. Herewith the description of this 26-year-old maiden given by

Walter Franklin Prince, her first mentor and adoptive father: "Jests which contain an element of coarseness... revolt her. She would not in the least know how to go about a flirtation, and the conduct of certain oppositely inclined ladies is so incomprehensible that she terms it 'crazy.' Her sole conception of the advantages of the matrimonial state is that it gives 'someone to take care of' and that it usually brings children, of whom she is passionately fond. But that she might marry seems hardly to occur to her. . . . A purer, more guileless soul it was never the writer's good fortune to know."<sup>15</sup>

Although Prince remarks at one point about Doris' "notable lack of sex instinct," there is no indication that he regards this "deficiency" (as he terms this lack) to be in any way connected with the possible inhibitions of strong opposite tendencies. Thus when it happens that this person of unblemished purity is, in her first shot at a procedure that is after all aimed at flushing out unsuspected aspects of the personality, confronted with a rake and debauchee who tells her that everything she stands for is humbug, that life is to be lived, not fled from, that purity and chastity are nonsense, there is not even a momentary flicker of anything remotely resembling insight. That this confrontation may have been something more than just the luck of the draw, however, is suggested in Cagliostro's curious answer to his own question, "Who says that natural experiences are wrong?" His "Men, men, men who stand up in cells" is (even allowing for Mrs. Chenoweth's tendency sometimes to repeat words or phrases) hardly something we would expect from a character who, as

appearances notwithstanding. That such a connection is far from implausible we know from the fact that parents' most secret and most deeply guarded fantasies can somehow filter down to children, who may act them out in the most extraordinary ways<sup>6</sup>. Parapsychologists should be the last to be mystified by such seemingly inexplicable contagions and certainly ought not be surprised that Doris could be carrying the seed of her mother's moral rebelliousness. Prince seems to have been dimly aware of such an obscure link but he was unable to put his finger on its role in Doris' development. "She must have been absorbing impressions from her earliest infancy," he tells us, "and her sympathies for her harassed mother must have early awakened." Even the mother's "repressed sorrows during the period of gestation must probably be taken into account," he suggests.

Certainly Doris had ample opportunity to absorb her mother's repressed sorrows — and fantasies. Given to "reverie and excess of imagination," the mother often played the game of "supposing" with Doris. Can we not then see here, under the surface of this sorrowing woman, all the elements of deeply hidden fantasies — the "life-elements" that Prince hints at darkly — that could be satisfied only by someone of Cagliostro's supposed frank sexuality?

We now recall one of Doris' alternating personalities, a saucy, impertinent imp who called herself Margaret and whom Prince himself likened to the thoroughly amoral Sally Beauchamp of Morton Price's classic *Dissociation of a Personality*.<sup>7</sup> Margaret was undoubtedly an undeveloped miniature of the unabashedly sexy Eve Black of *Three*

*Faces of Eve*<sup>8</sup> who captivated a generation of readers and moviegoers. From everything we know about this character type, which is invariably seen in cases of multiple personality, Margaret could only have been pulling the good Dr. Prince's leg when she told him how amazed she was that he "had not learned that doctors find babies on riverbanks and take them to expectant mothers in satchels." (Stupid questions get stupid answers, she probably thought.\*) At any rate, there is little question that the generic Margaret, like Eve and all their sisters in spirit the world over, would have found Cagliostro much to her liking.

As did, it seems, none other than Mrs. Chenoweth, who was most displeased with certain of the communicators who were ganging up on Cagliostro in an apparently successful effort to exorcise him. From his very first appearance, in fact, something like a medieval morality play began to be enacted with the mother, a communicator known as George Pelham and several others making great speeches about safeguarding the purity of the "little visitor" (the 26-year-old sitter Doris), Hyslop all the while getting in a few licks from the sidelines. Pelham (who was not at all like a character by the same name who gave brilliant performances with the greatest medium of the day,

\*A truer picture of what was swirling around in the maelstrom of sexual fantasies engulfing Doris and her alternating selves is revealed in the suggestion of the one known as Sleeping Margaret, who claimed to have emerged and to have seen everything just before Doris was dashed to the floor, that it was the child's interrupting something naughty going on between her parents that caused the drunken father to pick her up and do that. "But how could you understand [what was going on] when so young?" asks the incredulous Prince. "Wasn't your mind that of a child of three?" "No," Sleeping Margaret (who always has her eyes closed) responds matter of factly, "I was not a child in mind."



Mrs. Leonora Piper) insisted that "he [Cagliostro] must be kept away from the child even if by the same method as you would keep a beast away." Mrs. Chenoweth, in trance, appeared to be quite indifferent to all this until it really looked as if the harassed Cagliostro was about to depart forever. Then she broke out into loud lamentations about what was going on and demanded that the much excoriated Count be brought back. In her subliminal state (that is, in trance but without any communicator in control of her utterances) she started to show signs of distress ("stretching her hand in the air and then putting it on her breast as if in pain") and then began castigating the exorcisors. "You give him back [pause]. You give him back. . . Give the Count back to me." When Hyslop asks who wanted the Count, she answers, "We all do. We are lost. We are lost, we are lost, we are lost [pause]. Oh, Devils, to take him away from us. [Distress and crying]. . . I won't stand it [pause]. I don't want your old God. I want the Count. [Crying] Give him back."

So we have more than ever reason to suspect that Cagliostro may not have been simply the unwelcome intruder he seemed at first. He could very well have been, as suggested earlier, some sort of dream figure omnibus for the repressed unconscious hankerings of all the principals at the sittings, including now the medium herself who may, deep down in

her own femininity, have shared the hidden yearnings of Doris and her mother — and yes, of Hyslop himself\* — for the uninhibited life of the senses. In her outburst, thus, Mrs. Chenoweth might have been giving voice to one anguished cry for all of them: "Life, give us life, give us freedom to live, to have, to be!" If such were the case, the peculiar tendentiousness of Cagliostro's performance now becomes comprehensible. The performance was, as it were, made to order.

\*There is a curious bit in a sitting several days before the one at which Mrs. Chenoweth gave vent to her angry feelings about Cagliostro's exorcism when, in trance, she saw earrings and bushy, curly hair superimposed on Hyslop's visage. In his note Hyslop dutifully admitted that this vision — almost as irreverent as a mustache and crossed eyes on a portrait of George Washington — fitted well a picture that might have been of Cagliostro. This may have been Mrs. Chenoweth's way of expressing a startling insight that she could not otherwise convey.

## REFERENCES

1. Murphy, G. "Difficulties Confronting the Survival Hypothesis," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 39, 1945.
2. Haraldson, E. and Stevenson, I. "A Communicator of the 'drop-in' Type in Iceland: The Case of Runolfur Runolfsson." *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 69, 1975.
3. Stevenson, I. "A Communicator Unknown to Medium and Sitters." *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 4, 1970.
4. Hyslop, J. H. "The Doris Fischer Case of Multiple Personality, Part III." *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 11, 1917.
5. Prince, W. F. "The Doris Case of Multiple Personality." *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, Part I, 9, 1915. Part II, 10, 1916.
6. Johnson, A. M. and Szurek, S. "The Genesis of Anti-social Acting Out in Children and Adults." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 21, 1952.
7. Price, M. *Dissociation of a Personality*. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1930.
8. Thigpen, C. H. and Cleckley, H. M. *The Three Faces of Eve*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1957.

This is Part II of a three-part article.



## NEED FOR A NEW LAW?

**B**ROWARD County (Fla.) Chief Judge Miette Burstein has received several complaints that prisoners come reeking into her courtroom. In August 1985 she demanded that newly arrested, stinking prisoners must bathe beforehand. But Sheriff Nick Navarro said he may have trouble obeying her order. "There's no law against B.O.," he said.

## Cagliostro Revisited: THE MAGIC OF MEDIUMSHIP

OO

The sitters never suspected that their communicator might be bogus — even though his character does not square with historical fact.

## Part III

By Jule Eisenbud

From *Parapsychology and the Unconscious*  
Reprinted by permission of North Atlantic Books  
2320 Blake St., Berkeley, Calif. 94704

**I**N 1916 Dr. James H. Hyslop, one of the most distinguished American psychical researchers, held a series of sittings in Boston with Doris Fischer, a 26-year-old woman with a long history of multiple personality, and the medium Mrs. Minnie Meserve Soule, known under the pseudonym Mrs. Chenoweth.

Of several personalities that emerged, the most remarkable was identified by Hyslop as the bogus Count Alessandro Cagliostro. The lifelike quality of his performance lends credence to the idea that some kind of discarnate intelligence was operating through Mrs. Chenoweth — but his ranting about sexual freedom seems unlikely in a communicator who spent much of the last five or six years of his life in solitary confinement, in misery and wracked with pain. Under what kind of compulsion would he return to rave about issues that one would imagine might be the least of his concerns? Yet the sittings turned into a sort of morality play with Hyslop espousing spirituality and the

communicator Cagliostro on the side of instinctual freedom.

It is clear that Cagliostro is as foreign to Doris and Mrs. Chenoweth as any character out of history could be. He is a party-crasher, a communicator of the so-called drop-in type. But he may not have been simply the unwelcome intruder he seemed at first. He may have been a sort of dream figure omnibus for the repressed unconscious hankerings of all the principals at the sittings.

**N**OW COMES a superclimax, a real NO. Henry double-switch. We have to face a possibility that Hyslop, in his holy war against the powers of evil, never stopped to consider. He apparently knew something of Cagliostro (as did many persons in his day) and was able to make the identification through the latter's references to the French Revolution, Marie Antoinette and her royal spouse, the scandal of the Queen's necklace, and Cardinal Rohan (who had played the role of unwitting dupe in it). He knew also that Cagliostro was alleged (although quite fallaciously, according to Trowbridge whom he apparently had not read) to have been a Sicilian named Joseph Balsamo and

MH-606



Mrs. Chenoweth pronounced this name with the accent on the first syllable (which he found to was much impressed that be correct only after intensive research). But he never seems to have had the faintest wild suspicion that the Cagliostro of the sittings may not really have existed, that he may have been as bogus as the Count himself.

The bald fact, however, is that, as was pointed out earlier, the material turned up by the Inquisition was completely discordant with the data about Cagliostro drawn from all reliable contemporary sources, none of which — even those taking note of every other type of often repeated calumny about the man — mentions the slightest licentiousness or religious cynicism in him. Thus, with all his fakery and bombast, and despite allegations (now discredited) that he had prostituted his beautiful wife Lorenza to gain favors from the rich and powerful, Cagliostro, to the surprise no doubt of all his biographers, was known as a devoted and loyal husband. Alexandre Dumas, who presumably knew all the backstairs talk about Cagliostro there was to know when he wrote *The Queen's Necklace* in 1850, cast Cagliostro as a model of propriety. He would only have courted ridicule if such a picture was far from the image that was current. The historian Funck-Brentano, gossip-monger-in-chief of the French Revolution and all its backwaters, who according to Trowbridge was not above repeating inaccuracies about Cagliostro, could say nothing damaging about him in this department in his 1902 *Cagliostro and Company*. And even as late as 1966 Luigi Barzini, in his chapter on Cagliostro in *The Italians*, states

that Cagliostro had no known mistresses and was a faithful husband. The most damning indictment of the Inquisition's allegations, however, is that only three years before these found their way into the record Cagliostro was brought to trial by a tribunal of the French Parliament and charged with having been implicated in the affair of the Queen's necklace. He was acquitted (after five months in the Bastille) but not before the authorities, not satisfied merely to interrogate witnesses, wantonly ransacked his house and turned everything upside down and inside out looking for whatever might put their prisoner in a bad light. They found nothing.

In view of these facts, the material allegedly turned up by the Inquisition and kept secret in the Vatican archives for almost 100 years cannot be taken at face value. Indeed, it is hardly likely that a maid or manservant could be the repository of items of such prime marketability about one of the most gossipworthy personages in Europe — Cagliostro was probably better known to the multitudes than cardinals or kings — and have kept these to themselves until nothing less than a threat of torture was brought to bear. (We are told that the rack was kept purposely in plain sight during the Inquisition hearings.) Is it not more likely that such grotesque goings-on as were alleged, if they were actually true of Cagliostro or even dreamed up by someone, would have been passed about from lackey to lackey, from tavern to tavern, long before the Inquisition got hold of them?

Instead, all we have on the negative side from the numerous biographers who have combed the field are the

## CAGLIOSTRO REVISITED

*quod erat demonstrandum*. Thus we find ourselves clutching at any straws that come our way in order to fill up the huge chasm between explanation and fact.

One such in the present case is a peculiar correspondence between the real-life mother of Doris and the historical Cagliostro. The ever questioning Prince, after describing the development of the former's religious cynicism, continues, "... But she must have read her Bible a great deal since it was discovered after her death worn and discolored with handling. The leaf containing the 14th chapter of St. John was almost in tatters. Yet no one ever saw her reading the book — she must have done it at night while the family slept." Now St. John is said to be the patron saint of masons, but Cagliostro is one of the first to have adopted him as his protector. The reason for his veneration of the author of *The Revelation*, we are told, was the great similarity between the Apocalypse and the secret rites of Cagliostro's masonic order, the rites that, notwithstanding this similarity, ultimately spelled his doom. The link to the sittings could again, of course, have been Doris.

The next question inevitably is: Was the medium capable of all we have attributed to her, of the histrionics as well as the information gathering that would have been necessary to concoct the Cagliostro we have seen? We must remember that Cagliostro's performance was not all just speeches but included subtle attitudes and behaviors as well, such as his dismay and anger at having been flushed out, his almost snarling resentment at having been duped into revealing himself (sug-

gesting an historically authenticated episode in which he was actually caught by entrapment by the spies of the Inquisition) and his ill-concealed contempt for Dr. Hyslop.

But this is precisely what mediumship — and mind — are all about. To imagine that Mrs. Chenoweth needed special paranormal cognitive and organizing powers that could have been achieved only through some improbable-unless-proved-otherwise something called super-ESP (plus perhaps the mind of a Shakespeare) is to misread completely everything that is known about plain run-of-the-mill ESP, ESP in everyday life and unconscious ESP in dreams. The notion of super-ESP is a fiction derived from the feeble glimmers of this latently omniscient and omnipotent faculty seen in the laboratory; and this is, when all is said, just supernonsense, just another example of the extreme difficulty some persons have in untethering their minds, when thinking and theorizing about psi, from the physical world and its constraints. The only thing that counts where unconscious ESP is concerned — and all forms of psi, for that matter — is meaningfulness, not time, distance, complexity or anything else. The prime requisite for this is simply unconscious need, not the mental equivalent of the muscles of a weight lifter.

And meaningfulness is all that counts in the medium's development of the histrionic ability required to organize diverse information into a performance simulating the smallest details of an alleged returnee's mannerisms, speech and diction. If a professional actor can do this, it is difficult to see why a professional medium should find it beyond his



incessantly repeated stories — and even some of these are dubious — of Cagliostro's swindles, his fake cures, his bombastic claims to secret knowledge and little else. On the positive side, however, there is a surprising plethora of material which allegations of sexual improprieties, even if just whispered behind the hand, would have called into question. We must remember that Cagliostro was a master of all the known healing arts and much more, that he did perform remarkable cures, did minister gratis to the sick and needy and spread his gospel, so threatening to the church, for the spiritual regeneration of mankind. It is not so astonishing therefore that a late biographer, Francois Ribadeau Dumas, reviewing the judgments of students of Cagliostro, could only come up with characterizations such as "a creature of light," "an extraordinary genius," "as sublime in love as in wisdom," and, from chief Cardinal of France Rohan (who was also the Archbishop of Strasbourg where Cagliostro had spent a couple of years), "the most extraordinary man, the most sublime, whose knowledge is equaled in this world only by his benevolence." These and similar encomiums were scarcely the kind to have been accorded a known rake and debauchee. To his many followers, in fact, the bogus Count was known as "the divine Cagliostro," an appellation inscribed on the pedestal of the statue of him by Houdon, the most celebrated sculptor of the day. Replicas of this statue in bronze and marble were to be found in shops and manor houses throughout Europe.

So there is more than just a remote possibility that the trials were rigged — to this day a standard feature, includ-

ing sexual denigration, of politically motivated procedures. It is possible that Mrs. Chenoweth had unwittingly joined the ranks of other mediums who have given remarkable performances of persons who had never existed or whose existence was not as represented. Thus we have more reason than ever for suspecting that the Cagliostro figure of the sittings was not just a wandering soul that had lost its way, or even, as certain of the other communicators (and Hyslop too) seem to have believed, a minion of the powers of evil sent to prey on a virginal lamb of almost unexampled purity, but was, for all his liveliness, a pasteboard figure with no more living reality than Othello or Iago, a pastiche of legend, different biographical sources, false leads and conceivably even a retrocognitive dash of the real McCoy.

If this is so — and there are good reasons for believing it to be — we are left with questions that may never find satisfactory answers. The first, surely, would be pertinent even if the central figure in all of this were a genuine revenant (which the evidence, however, belies). It is, simply, why Cagliostro? Why not any figure of legendary libertinism, for instance Cagliostro's equally notorious — and from Hyslop's standpoint equally "vicious" — contemporary, Casanova?

This is essentially a question applicable to all psychological decisions (and to biological and physical ones as well). Why this and not that? Why this way and not that way? No matter how many presumptive determinants we dredge up, more can be imagined, and we can never really get to the point where we can say, with true Euclidean certainty,

or her capabilities, especially when released from the straitjacket of everyday consciousness. This is what mediumship and the unconscious mind are all about.

The least that can be said about Mrs. Chenoweth's Cagliostro is that it is an intriguing last-minute entry into the



#### WHAT BURNS HIM UP?

By Lewis Medina

**B**ENEDETTO SUPINO, aged 16, and his relatives in Farmia, Italy, are desperately seeking a scientific solution to a fiery problem. In the presence of the youth, electrical circuits go berserk and inexplicable fires break out.

It all started in October 1983 when Benedetto went to help his father Vittorio in a carpenter shop near the Gaeta Gulf. Everything electrical in the shop short-circuited and when the alarmed Vittorio took his son into a boat factory the same thing happened.

Soon Benedetto's inflammatory powers increased. If he touched plastic or even rubber, it burned. He was seriously burned when he was asleep and his bed ignited.

Dr. Sandro Bartolomeo, a neuropsychiatrist, believed the townspeople were simply superstitious when he heard the

battle of the biographers. As for the single-minded Hyslop, had he ever stopped to wonder how it was that the Cagliostro he so painstakingly identified was so unlike the Cagliostro of tradition, he too might have scooped the field. This essay, for better or worse, is the result of the fact that he did not.

tales of Benedetto's fires. But after he saw the youth, he declared, "This boy has something that normal medical science cannot explain."

The Supino family sought the help of the Catholic Church, thinking Benedetto had the devil inside him, but the exorcism didn't work. Spontaneous fires continued to plague the boy.

Finally the relatives asked the government for help. The National Investigation Agency of Italy agreed to look into the case. The results are not yet known.

The opinion of Dr. Maximo Inardi, a parapsychologist, provides an explanation of sorts. After examining the Supino youth, Inardi said that Benedetto accumulates electrical energy in his body and cannot control its unexpected discharge.

#### ANWAR SADAT IGNORED PSYCHIC WARNING

**R**EUTERS News Service reported in April 1984 that a daughter of slain Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had a premonition of his death but he ignored her advice to crack down on political opponents.

"I began to have dreams about his assassination. I saw bullets hitting him," said Camelia Sadat, who was born to Sadat and his little-known first wife Ekbal. Miss Sadat, a graduate student in Boston, was interviewed for the Sunday magazine *Parade* and stated that the last time she saw her father—in August 1981—he was still resisting making mass arrests to deal with growing internal dissent. She quoted him as saying, "God knows if I am going to be alive next year or not." — *W. Ritchie Benedict.*