



Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts

George M. Johnson

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How did people respond to the overwhelming loss of loved ones during the First World War? Many took their lead from iconic early twentieth-century writers, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, J.M. Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, Virginia Woolf, Wilfred Owen, and Aldous Huxley, among others, who embraced some form of mysticism as a means of coping. These figures had experienced profound losses and even trauma in their early lives, sensitizing them to losses of loved ones during the war and making these writers receptive to the possibility of communicating with spirits. Most of these writers had become fascinated with the work of Frederic Myers and other key psychical researchers regarding potential extensions of personality, including telepathy, clairvoyance, and automatic writing, phenomena which supported the possibility that personality survived death. *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond* skilfully weaves psychology, history, psychobiography and literary analysis to show that these writers' engagement with mysticism and spiritualism in particular was not deluded, but at least in some situations constituted a more ethical, creative and therapeutic form of mourning than drawing solace from state-sanctioned representations of mourning such as war memorials.

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