

# CRYPTOMNESIA AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY\*

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‘Originality is the suppression of sources’

—George Watson (1978)

## INTRODUCTION

The canons of research in parapsychology require us not to favor a paranormal explanation for a case unless we have eliminated—either completely or as nearly so as makes no difference—all possibilities for the subject to have obtained through normal means the knowledge shown in the experience. This rule applies whether we are concerned with a telepathic dream, a death-coinciding apparition, a mediumistic communication, a claim to remember a previous life or any other experience in which the paranormal communication of information appears to have occurred.

Communicated information must be verified as correct, which means that it must (usually) exist somewhere, either in a printed form or in the mind of a living person. (Other sources, important as they sometimes are, need not detain us here.) Each of these two types of deposit has advantages. On the one hand, information existing only in someone’s mind is less accessible to other persons than is printed material; but it is also subject to the weaknesses of memory—both of forgetfulness and embellishment. On the other hand, written documents remain stable, but some types, such as newspapers and books, often have wide distribution so that it may become formidably difficult to exclude the possibility of the subject’s having seen a particular source of information. Thus the same source that verifies an apparent paranormal experience may also suggest a normal explanation for it.

Subjects of an experience in which information has apparently been communicated paranormally always deny that they had any prior knowledge of this information. It is a strength of experimental work in parapsychology that properly designed experiments can always exclude previous knowledge on the part of the percipient of the information acquired. We can similarly eliminate such knowledge in the majority of spontaneous cases in which the events communicated occurred at a physical distance from the subjects and close to the time of their experiences, so that information about the events could not have reached them normally; and if the events were not contemporaneous with the perceptions, but occurred in the past, there should have been no publicly available record or route of other normal transmission available to the subjects.

When we appraise the likelihood that the subject of a case that seems to include a paranormal communication might have had normal access to relevant sources of information, we cannot rely exclusively on the subject’s own

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testimony. It has been possible to show that some apparently paranormal communications derived, or almost certainly derived, from the subject's prior normal exposure to such sources. In the majority of these cases the subjects had completely forgotten their earlier exposure to the information. In such cases—when we can assume the honesty of the subjects—we say that they exhibited cryptomnesia. This term was defined by the psychologist James Drever (1952, p. 55) as 'memory without identification or recognition as previous experience, [the] original experiences being forgotten or repressed, and their reinstatement appearing as a new experience.' Some psychologists prefer the phrase *source amnesia* to the term *cryptomnesia*.<sup>1</sup>

I propose in this paper to review the better-known instances of cryptomnesia with a view to seeing what general lessons we can derive from them and whether we can develop from their study guidelines for judging cryptomnesia to be a likely explanation for cases that we investigate in the future.

#### PROPOSED RULES FOR INTERPRETING A CASE AS ONE OF CRYPTOMNESIA

I have already said that the proponent of a paranormal interpretation of a case has the obligation to exclude normal processes of communication. If we read a report of such a case and remain unconvinced by the evidence for such exclusion, we may reject the paranormal explanation or suspend judgment. If, however, we assert positively that the case is one of cryptomnesia, the obligation for providing supporting evidence falls on us. We should be able to identify a normal source (or sources) of information and show that the subject was (definitely or probably) exposed to this source or sources. We should, I believe, follow some rules that I shall offer for fairly attributing a case to cryptomnesia. These rules may assist in the assessment of individual cases; but I hope that they may additionally stimulate disciplined research in a subject about which we still know relatively little.

Much of our first understanding of the subject of cryptomnesia derives from the period of the early investigations of mediumship, during which time tenacious enquirers exposed several instances of cryptomnesia; and it has never ceased to be a hazard in the study of mediumship. More recently, the subject has become increasingly important with the development of popular interest in cases of regression during hypnosis to 'previous lives'. Some uncritical participants in such experiments—hypnotists and subjects alike—are apt to think that the little reading a subject claims to have done in school, or subsequently, could not possibly account for the rich detail deployed in a 'previous life' set in, say,

<sup>1</sup> We could include many habits and behavioral memories under the heading of cryptomnesia. For example, few adults who know how to walk can remember how, as infants, they first learned to do this. Yet writers on the subject usually employ the word *cryptomnesia* to designate only cognitive information of whose acquisition a person is consciously unaware.

Because most of the information figuring in reported cases of cryptomnesia has been printed, it is easy to forget that cryptomnesia may also occur in cases involving information perceived aurally; with the increase in aural means of communication, such as radio or television (which is audiovisual), we may expect to find in the future more cases of cryptomnesia showing aural sources.

I have not learned exactly when the word *cryptomnesia* was first used, but Myers (1903, vol. 2, p. 136) credited Flournoy with having introduced it, although he did not state where. Flournoy (1900) used the word in his study of Hélène Smith's mediumship.

fifteenth-century France; and they are equally apt to overlook other sources from which the subject might have learned pertinent details. On the other hand, some critics of these cases assume that if a book that contains some details of the 'previous life' has been published somewhere, this alone suffices to explain the 'previous life'. They then make no effort to study the correspondence in detail between book and 'previous life', to learn whether the subject had in fact read the book in question, or to assess the likelihood that he or she might have done so. Naïve incredulity can impede us just as much as can naïve credulity.

I shall propose three rules for establishing cryptomnesia as an interpretation for a case. In order both to show how I came to offer these rules and to test their usefulness against specific cases, I shall review many of the best-known cases of cryptomnesia in the field of parapsychology. Along the way I shall mention, for the sake of comparison, some cases of unacknowledged borrowings by writers, who were accused of plagiarism.<sup>2</sup> And finally, I shall discuss some parapsychological cases for which cryptomnesia has been suggested, but for which it is not in my opinion, a satisfactory interpretation.

It would be embarrassingly unfitting for the author of a paper on cryptomnesia to forget the sources of his own information. I have therefore taken pains to expose all of mine; and this is all the more necessary because for reasons of space I must summarize many cases briefly while hoping that interested readers will wish to study further details of them in the original reports.

Before beginning my review of relevant cases, I shall mention two of my three proposed rules. Readers will find the third rule, which I shall discuss below, easier to understand and accept after considering the value of the first two in assessing the specific cases that I shall mention.

To introduce my first rule, I shall remind you that our concept of plagiarism (and unconscious literary borrowing) refers to the form in which ideas are expressed, not to the ideas themselves. Therefore, my first rule is:

- (a) There must be a correspondence in detail between the information expressed by the subject and that normally available to him from another person or in some other source, such as a printed document, moving picture, or television program.

In practice this rule usually means that we should demonstrate a similarity of words, phrases, and images (and of the order in which they are expressed) between the subject's production and their presumed normal source. Mistakes

<sup>2</sup> Writers who have been found to have used extensively another writer's images and words without acknowledgement are usually accused of plagiarism. But the word *plagiary* derives from the Latin *plagiarius*, which means a kidnapper. The English word *plagiarism* is therefore best reserved for instances in which a writer deliberately uses another writer's work without acknowledgement. In the literary cases that I shall mention, the proper interpretation seems to be that of unconscious borrowing. (Nevertheless, some of the authors concerned were accused of plagiarism.)

It is not always easy to distinguish unconscious borrowings and plagiarism, as the case of Coleridge warns us. Lefebvre (1977) has described how the use of opium obtunded Coleridge's intellectual faculties and moral judgment regarding his borrowings from other authors. Thus he appears at times not to have known that he was using other writers' material; and at other times he seems to have known this, but not felt that it was wrong. He defended himself against charges of plagiarism in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817/1926, pp. 86–87), which nevertheless itself contains lengthy passages that Coleridge borrowed or plagiarized.

occurring in the presumed original and repeated in the apparent reproduction should have weight along with the similarities. (In some brief communications, as I shall explain later, mistakes occurring both in the communication and in the possible normal source may be given greater weight than usual.) In sum, we should judge that R (the alleged reproduction) is more or less closely a copy of O (the presumed original). R does not need to be an *exact* copy of O, but we should be able to say that O was its source, since the information found in R is also contained in O.

My second rule derives from our definition of cryptomnesia. We say that cryptomnesia is remembering a particular content, while forgetting how it was learned, or even that it was learned. This means that the subject really did at one time learn it. So my second rule states:

- (b) There must be evidence that the subject did at one time learn the information normally, or that it is more probable than not that he did so.

The second clause of this rule lessens the stringency of the first. Proof in such a matter is exceedingly difficult to obtain, and I think we should leave room for judgments based on evidence falling short of it. What I mainly hope to exclude by this rule are irresponsible assertions that a particular source or sources *might* have been the source of a subject's statement without any effort being made to show that the subject had in fact been exposed to or had access to the source.

I wish that we could apply these two rules independently of each other. But in actual practice we often cannot do this, and we shall see that in some instances we may be justified in favoring cryptomnesia as an interpretation for a case even though we have no direct evidence that the subject ever saw a printed passage that we have provisionally identified as its normal source.

#### REVIEW OF CASES

Coming now to actual cases, it is pleasant to record that the earliest reported instance of cryptomnesia of which I am aware conforms to both of these rules.<sup>3</sup> Coleridge learned about the case on a visit to Göttingen, and our record of it comes from his *Biographia Literaria* (Coleridge, 1817/1926, pp. 70–72). Coleridge's case is with some difficulty recognizable in transmogrifications by later authors who, trusting their own memories when they should not, illustrate paramnesia (distortion of memory), if not cryptomnesia. The case is discernible, I think, in a passage of Melville's (1851/1926, p. 476) *Moby Dick*. Melville's account is markedly condensed, although accurate; but I have read other reports of the same case, *rechauffé*, in which there occurred such errors as attributing the case to the French neurologist Charcot, transforming the source of the subject's utterances from a Protestant pastor to a rabbi, and changing the main language

concerned from Hebrew to Aramaic. In view of such distortions it may be of some value to put the essentials of the case into a modern record in Coleridge's own words:

A young woman of four or five and twenty, who could neither read nor write, was seized with a nervous fever; during which. . . . She continued incessantly talking Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. . . . Sheets full of her ravings were taken down from her own mouth, and were found to consist of sentences, coherent and intelligible each for itself, but with little or no connection with each other. Of the Hebrew, a small portion only could be traced to the Bible; the remainder seemed to be in the Rabbinical dialect. All trick or conspiracy was out of the question. [Pp. 70–71]

Coleridge then described how a young physician, determined to understand the case, investigated the girl's background and eventually learned that at the age of nine she had been taken into the household of a Protestant pastor with whom she remained as part foster child, part servant, until his death. The physician eventually traced a niece of the pastor's from whom he learned something of his habits and who had fortunately preserved some of her uncle's library. Coleridge's account continues:

. . . it had been the old man's custom, for years, to walk up and down a passage of his house into which the kitchen door opened, and to read to himself with a loud voice, out of his favourite books. A considerable number of these were still in the niece's possession. . . . Among the books were found a collection of Rabbinical writings, together with several of the Greek and Latin Fathers; and the physician succeeded in identifying so many passages with those taken down at the young woman's bedside, that no doubt could remain in any rational mind concerning the true origin of the impressions made on her nervous system.<sup>4</sup> [Pp. 71–72]

#### Cases of Cryptomnesia between 1870 and 1910

The earliest case of cryptomnesia reported in the literature of psychical research was, I regret to say, one that Myers (1895) had considered indulgently as perhaps having a paranormal origin. I refer to the communication through Stainton Moses at Shanklin, Isle of Wight, on 10 February 1874 of the deaths in India of Bertie Henry D'Oyly Jones and two young brothers (Moses, 1879, pp. 61–63). Myers did not accept this case casually; he had the records of the deaths of the Jones children verified in the registers of the India Office. Unfortunately, he had overlooked the possibility of Stainton Moses's having seen an obituary of the children in a newspaper. Moses himself, aware of the possibility that he might have acquired information about the children normally, had searched for obituaries in the *Indian Mail* and the *Pall Mall Budget*. The latter

<sup>3</sup> I omit from this survey the still earlier case reported by Monboddo (1782), as well as some later ones in which an adult spoke (perhaps during an illness) a language learned in childhood but not used again until the incident in question. In these cases the subjects had forgotten how to speak the language in their normal state, but not that they could once do so; they are not true instances of cryptomnesia, in which we require that the subject no longer remember (in his or her ordinary state) how the information was acquired or that it had been acquired. Readers interested in instances of these half-forgotten languages that were surprisingly spoken in adulthood will find references to them in Stevenson (1974c).

<sup>4</sup> Our gratitude to Coleridge for recording this case need not blind us to the limitations of his report. His information appears to be all secondhand, thirdhand, or even further away. He did not learn about the case until more than a year after it occurred and did not publish his account until eighteen years after that. And finally, he provided no texts, either of the young woman's utterances or of the books from which the pastor was said to have read aloud within her hearing. Thomas (1903) made these criticisms many years ago.

periodical had reported the deaths of the children, but had not given their full names, as had the mediumistic communication. Podmore (1897) found that these names and everything else in the communications had been published in the obituary columns of *The Times* on 4 February 1874, six days before the pertinent séance. (It should be added that the mediumistic communication contained nothing more than *The Times* obituary provided.)

Podmore (1897) as well as Flournoy (1911) treated another and even better known case for which Stainton Moses was the medium, that of Abraham Florentine, with similar reserve. A short communication (at a séance also in the Isle of Wight) on 1 September 1874 gave the communicator's name, his age at death, the date of his death, the place of his death (Brooklyn, New York), and the detail that he had been a veteran of the War of 1812 (Moses, 1874, 1875). The brevity of the communication, similar in this feature to that about Bertie Henry D'Oyly Jones, made an obituary in the newspaper seem a probable normal source. It was only in 1921, however, that Dingwall (see Note, 1921, 1922) found obituaries of Abraham Florentine in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of 5 August 1874 and the *New York Daily Tribune* of 6 August 1874. There was ample time between these dates and 1 September (when the communicator manifested) for one or both of these newspapers to have crossed the Atlantic and been seen by Stainton Moses. Cryptomnesia seemed even more probable because both newspapers gave the same age of Abraham Florentine at the time of his death as had the communicator himself at the séance; and this age was discrepant with information given by the communicator's widow to an early enquirer about the facts (Moses, 1879). It seemed unlikely that the widow would have been wrong about her husband's age at death; and so it seemed reasonable to suppose that the information given by the communicator had derived from the medium's having seen one or the other of the newspapers that had given the same (apparently incorrect) information. This conclusion may have been correct, but its foundation was not. Many years later I learned, by consulting a copy of Abraham Florentine's death certificate and by arranging for an examination of the record of his burial at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, that his widow had been wrong about his age at death. The newspapers and the communicator had been right after all (Stevenson, 1965).

The communications about the Jones brothers and Abraham Florentine satisfy my first rule, but not the second one. The newspapers containing the reports of the communicators' deaths might have been seen by Moses, but we have no evidence that he did see them. On the other hand, the communicators gave no more (and no less) information than the newspaper obituaries contained. For these cases I should say, therefore, that cryptomnesia is possible, perhaps even probable, but unproven.

In the next case, that of Hélène Smith (Flournoy, 1900, 1901), we have a more ample communication and a possible printed source identified, but still no definite evidence that the medium had seen that source.<sup>5</sup> Hélène Smith's

<sup>5</sup> Flournoy investigated several instances of possible cryptomnesia on the part of Hélène Smith. Here I shall consider only one of these, and of it, a part only: the names and date that were given for the previous incarnation of the 'Hindu cycle'. Further details of it and of the other instances of possible cryptomnesia in the mediumship of Hélène Smith can be found in Flournoy's (1900, 1901) books.

portrayal (during a trance) of the Arabian Princess Simandini, who had married a Hindu prince of Kanara, Sivrouka Nayaka of Tchandruguiri, included details of names and a date (1401) that occur in *Histoire générale de l'Inde* by de Marlès (1828). So far as Flournoy could determine, only two copies of de Marlès's book existed in Geneva (where Flournoy and Hélène Smith lived) at the time the case developed. Both were covered with dust, and it seemed unlikely that Hélène Smith had seen either of these, although she might have seen another copy elsewhere. Although Flournoy could find no evidence that Hélène Smith had ever read de Marlès, the occurrence of the same probable historical errors in both his book and in Hélène Smith's narration of the corresponding events makes it likely that the second derived from the first.<sup>6</sup>

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, three cases of unconscious borrowings by authors received widespread attention. Of these, the first was also the saddest, because the 'plagiarist' was the heroic blind and deaf Helen Keller. In her autobiography (Keller, 1903/1920), written when she was still in her early twenties, she described an extensive 'plagiarism' of which she had been the unconscious perpetrator at the age of twelve. She had written a short story the details of which seemed to come flowingly into her mind with a force that she innocently mistook for creative power. Her story was admired in her family and sent to an editor, who also liked it and published it under the title 'The Frost King'. Not long afterward someone drew Helen Keller's attention to the similarity between 'The Frost King' and a story entitled 'The Frost Fairies' by Margaret T. Canby, which had been published (in 1874, before Helen Keller was born) in a book called *Birdie and His Fairy Friends*. In Helen Keller's own words:

The two stories were so much alike in thought and language that it was evident Miss Canby's story had been read to me, and that mine was—a plagiarism. It was difficult to make me understand this; but when I did understand I was astonished and grieved. [P. 65]

Helen Keller then tried to remember whether anyone might have read<sup>7</sup> 'The Frost Fairies' to her, but could recall nothing relevant. Her teacher, Miss Sullivan, was also unable to recall 'The Frost Fairies', but she pursued the matter further. Eventually she discovered that a copy of *Birdie and His Fairy*

<sup>6</sup> Chari (1963, 1976) conducted a searching inquiry into the possible existence of a Prince Sivrouka Nayaka who might in 1401 have built a fort at Chandragiri. (Here I adopt Chari's English romanization of the name.) The existence of three different Chandragiris made this inquiry more difficult, but, briefly, it has been impossible to identify an Indian prince called Sivrouka Nayaka whose life corresponds to the statements made in Hélène Smith's communication. Chari concluded that de Marlès (who gave no primary source for his statements) had probably picked up some distorted legends and given them a certitude they did not deserve. If this verdict is correct and de Marlès recorded errors that other historians did not repeat, but which found their way into Hélène Smith's communication, the likelihood is increased that she had, after all, somewhere seen a copy of de Marlès's book. I discuss further below the additional weight we may give in our appraisals to mistakes that occur both in a communication and in a presumed printed source for it.

<sup>7</sup> I use the word *read* loosely here, because communication with Helen Keller occurred through the making of letters and other signs on the palm of her hand.

*Friends* had been owned by a woman, Mrs. S. C. Hopkins, with whom Helen Keller had stayed four years earlier, when she was eight years old. During Miss Sullivan's absence on vacation, Mrs. Hopkins had tried to amuse Helen Keller by reading various books to her, and she felt sure that *Birdie and His Fairy Friends* had been one of these. Helen Keller added to her account of this episode a further detail of psychological interest. Although she remembered nothing of having had 'The Frost Fairies' read to her—even after she knew that this must have happened—she thought that its containing words with which she was unfamiliar, and which she would have intended to ask her absent teacher to explain to her later, had been a factor in impressing the story on her memory, even though she later completely forgot the occasion of this impression.

In 1904 a young journalist and theatre critic of Berlin, Siegfried Jacobsohn, was shown to have used in two of his articles some twenty lines verbatim that had been published by another journalist, Gold, in 1897 (Taylor, 1965). Jacobsohn had a reputation for both integrity and talent; he had no need to borrow from Gold. He acknowledged that he had read Gold's article, but denied any conscious intention to use it. He knew that he had a remarkably retentive memory and thought that in the context of writing an article on a topic similar to that of Gold's article the latter's words and phrases had come into his mind and he had put them into his article without recognizing their original source. Although Jacobsohn suffered horribly from the opprobrium of being accused of plagiarism, he also had defenders (Harden, 1904; Schnitzler, 1904), who thought his borrowing from Gold had been unconscious and therefore an instance of cryptomnesia.

At almost the same time as the Jacobsohn affair, C. G. Jung (1905/1957) published an article on cryptomnesia in which he showed that Nietzsche had used in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* a series of scenes and images that occur in volume four of Justinus Kerner's *Blätter aus Prevorst*, which had been published in the middle 1830s (Kerner, 1833, pp. 57–58). Jung learned that as a youth Nietzsche had been keenly interested in Kerner, and it is almost certain that he had read *Blätter aus Prevorst* at that period of his life, but probably not later. When, years later, Nietzsche was writing about hell, the symbol of a volcano occurred to him as the entrance to hell; this in turn evoked by association other images used by Kerner, so that Nietzsche employed some of them without being aware that he was doing so. The images had lain dormant in his mind for so many years—about twenty-six by my calculation—that he did not recognize them as other than his own when they came to the surface of his consciousness.

Flournoy (1911) published still another case of borrowing that might have been unconscious or might have been plagiarism. He reproduced in parallel columns paragraphs from a work *Terres Lointaines* by P. Seippel published in 1897 and corresponding sections of a work *Unum Sint* written by a Russian writer, Madame de P. (not otherwise identified by Flournoy), and published in 1900. Madame de P., with whom Flournoy discussed the matter, denied that she had ever read or even seen *Terres Lointaines*. Nevertheless, a comparison of the texts published by Flournoy would convince most readers that portions of Madame de P.'s text somehow derived from Seippel's. The relevant section of Seippel's book had been published in the *Gazette de Lausanne* (August 31, 1896), and as Madame de P. was a frequent visitor to western (French-speaking) Switzerland, Flournoy

supposed that she might have seen Seippel's chapter in the newspaper, even though not perhaps in his later published book.

In this survey we are still in the first decade of the twentieth century. We have seen that psychologists and parapsychologists were beginning to discriminate between cryptomnesia and conscious plagiarism. We shall see later, however, that the distinction between these is not always so simple as we could wish. Before coming to more complicated examples, I shall mention next the first case published by a parapsychologist in which the subject acknowledged that cryptomnesia must have occurred.

The case is not, however, a parapsychological one. It consists merely of assertions by a man who claimed to remember the United States presidential election campaign of 1840, in which William Henry Harrison was elected President. This election campaign was, for a variety of reasons, one of the more notable ones in American history, and the subject of this case was quite sure, as he reminisced about it, that he was narrating details of his own experiences. His listener, however, realized that since the narrator had not been born until 1847, he could not possibly remember the presidential campaign of 1840 from firsthand knowledge. Confronted with this chronology, the subject remembered that as a child he had listened to his uncles' vivid narrations of their experiences in the election campaign, and he then realized that he had later unconsciously adopted them as his own (Hyslop, 1906, pp. 371–73).

A case of possible cryptomnesia occurring during these years led Richet (1905–07a), in reporting it, to coin the word *xenoglossy*. The subject, a French woman, wrote in a partial state of dissociation long sentences in Greek, a language of which she had no conscious knowledge. Richet found that many of the Greek sentences existed in a Greek-French dictionary; but he obtained no evidence that the subject had ever seen the dictionary. The case, the first well investigated one of apparently paranormal xenography, understandably excited controversy and skepticism among Richet's contemporaries in the S.P.R. (Lodge and others, 1905–07; Richet, 1905–07b).

With the next case we come to the first one (known to me) in which the subject herself was able to indicate the normal source of apparently paranormal communications. The case, generally known by the name, Blanche Poynings, of the alleged communicator, remains to this day a model for investigators to emulate (Dickinson, 1911). During hypnosis, the subject stated numerous details, including many correct proper names, about the life of Blanche Poynings, who was a minor figure at the court of King Richard II. (The communications took the form of messages transmitted from a discarnate personality.) After verifying the accuracy of the details communicated by Blanche Poynings, Dickinson, the case's investigator, found an opportunity for probing the subject's memory of books about the court of Richard II that she might have read. This led the subject (through a planchette) to mention *Countess Maud* by Emily Holt. This book, published in 1892, contained all the correct facts included in the Blanche Poynings communications, although the subject had characterized Blanche Poynings differently from the novelist's depiction of her. The subject subsequently recalled having read the book, or at least having examined it, when she had been twelve years old. The correspondence between numerous details in the communications and those in the book, together with the

admission by the subject that she had seen the book, removes all doubt that it was the source of the correct factual material in the communications.

The subject was a young woman of unspecified age at the time of the communications. If we suppose that she was about twenty-five at that time, the contents of the book remained dormant in her mind for more than a dozen years before being used as the factual ingredients for the staging of apparent communications from Blanche Poynings. It is worth adding that, from Dickinson's account of the case, we learn that the subject retained and afterward included in the communications at least twenty-three proper names, most of them of little-known persons.

#### *Cases of Cryptomnesia between 1910 and 1950*

During the next few decades after the first years of this century, psychologists and parapsychologists appear to have written little about cryptomnesia. At least, I have found little in the sources that I have consulted. The topic did not, however drop completely out of sight, as the note (Note, 1921, 1922) concerning the pertinent newspaper reports in the case of Abraham Florentine shows.

In 1936 Lewis reported the experience of an English army officer who had caught himself, so to speak, in an act of cryptomnesia (Lewis 1936). The officer and his wife were travelling in a part of England they had never visited before when they came to a wayside pool, which they both seemed to recognize. Knowing that they had never seen it before, they began to think they must have lived in that region in some previous life. A seeming recognition of other objects in the area enhanced their conviction of having lived there. When they returned to London, they went again to an art gallery that they had visited just before starting on their tour. There they saw a picture of a wayside pool, which they had seen at the time of their first visit to the art gallery, but had completely forgotten in the interval. The picture adequately accounted for their experience of *déjà vu* when they had been at the pool on their tour.

An instructive case, one of apparently unconscious borrowing, came to public attention in 1950 (Skelton, 1956; Taylor, 1965). In 1949 the poetess V. Sackville-West published a poem entitled 'The Novice and Her Lover' in the *Poetry Review*. Almost immediately afterward she noticed that another poet, Clifford Dymont, had published (also in 1949) an almost identical poem, 'Saint Augustine at Thirty-Two', in a collection entitled *Poems 1935-48*. The two poems were startlingly alike. Dymont's first version of his poem, which he had published in 1943, contained 100 words, and of these, 88 occurred in Sackville-West's poem and in almost exactly the same order.

This case first became known through correspondence in the *New Statesman*. I can here provide only the briefest summary, selecting for emphasis points that seem relevant to our main theme—cryptomnesia and parapsychology<sup>8</sup>. When Sackville-West first noticed the close similarity between the two poems, she could not remember ever having seen Dymont's poem before. But it turned out that she had, as the further developments in the case demonstrated.

Dymont thought that he had written his poem 'early in the war' (second World War), which could reasonably mean (for an Englishman) between 1939 and 1942. He first published 'St. Augustine at Thirty-Two' in 1943 in the *St. Martin's Review*. In 1944 he republished it in a collection of his poems, *The Axe in the Wood*, and a copy of this book went to Sackville-West for review. Dymont received a letter from Sackville-West (dated 8 November 1944) in which she commended several of his poems and said, in particular, how much she had appreciated 'Saint Augustine at Thirty-Two'. Even so, Sackville-West thought that she had written her poem 'in about 1942 or 1943', which would (probably) have been before the first publication of Dymont's poem in 1943. But Sackville-West had no memory of composing her poem, although she remembered sending a copy to a friend. She was unable to document from any written record exactly when she had written it. It seems extremely unlikely that her composition antedated Dymont's, because when, in 1944, she read and praised Dymont's poem she did not recognize it as her own. Yet five years later, in 1949, when she saw Dymont's poem again, she did. Sackville-West's composition therefore almost certainly derives from her reading of Dymont's poem. She denied that she had made a copy of Dymont's poem, and she could find no copy of it in a commonplace book where she sometimes put copies she made of other poets' poems. Two students of the case, however, have suggested that she did nevertheless copy out Dymont's poem, which had appealed to her, but carelessly did not attach Dymont's name to her copy. Later, when the editor of the *Poetry Review* asked her for a poem to publish, she chose this one written in her own handwriting without realizing that it was not one she had composed herself. Sackville-West admitted to having 'a most erratic memory', so this explanation may be correct. If she had copied out Dymont's poem, the action of doing so might have fixed the text of the poem in her memory, but I am inclined to think that it would also have fixed in her memory the fact that she had done so. On the other hand, if she had never copied Dymont's poem, her memory would have retained it only from her having read it once or twice in 1943-44. This interpretation implies that an exceedingly brief exposure led to the almost exact remembering of nearly 100 words in the order in which they were written. I have dwelt on this feature of the case because I shall later consider the different lengths of exposure to material remembered that we find in cases of cryptomnesia in parapsychology.

With the next case we return to parapsychology. The case is that of a man identified as Mr. A. (Pickford, 1943), who was the medium for a 'family circle' group of spiritualists in Glasgow. During the séances he underwent a change of personality, at least to the extent of a marked alteration in his voice, and communicators spoke through him. These were usually well-known German composers, such as Haydn, Beethoven, and Weber. The communicators showed some knowledge of music and of the ostensibly communicating composer. They would use a few words and expressions of the German language, but no full-scale xenoglossy occurred. The case came to Pickford's attention in 1937, when Mrs. A. consulted him about her husband's communications, apparently with the motive of convincing Pickford that her husband was a great medium. Pickford had a lengthy interview with her and subsequently one with Mr. A. Two years later he had a follow-up interview with Mrs. A. She was confident that her husband had no normal knowledge of the German language, of the communicat-

<sup>8</sup> Further details about the case will be found in Skelton (1956) and in correspondence in the *New Statesman* of 21 January 1950 (p. 62) and 28 January 1950 (p. 100).



ing composers, or of their music. But Pickford was able to learn from Mr. A. that he had had a tendency to dissociations extending back many years. This had started not later than the First World War, during which Mr. A. had served in the trenches in France. Mr. A. had had fugue states during this period, which were sufficiently severe so that at times he lost contact with his own unit and wandered out of the British lines, into the German ones, and—miraculously—out again. He seems to have remained on the German side long enough to have picked up a few words and phrases of German. Mr. A.'s memories of these wanderings remained vague. Later, after the war, he continued wandering, probably at times in a dissociated state. He remembered that he had spent much time reading in public libraries, and he 'thought that he had spent some time studying biographies of the great German composers, for whom he felt a special sympathy' (Pickford, 1943, p. 365). Unfortunately, Pickford was not allowed to make copies of the séance records, and so he could not ascertain whether the communicators' utterances corresponded closely or loosely with what Mr. A. might have read about them in libraries. Nevertheless, the case is one of the few in which evidence has been found of a medium's learning in a dissociated state information that came again to expression during a later dissociated state.

#### *Cases of Cryptomnesia between 1950 and 1980*

A revival of interest in cryptomnesia dates from the publication of the case of Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1956/1978), which was followed at first slowly, but in the 1970s more rapidly, by the publication of many other cases in the same genre: regression during hypnosis to an apparent previous life. This is not a paper on experiments in hypnotic regression, and I propose to introduce only those cases that help us to understand better how normally acquired information may be expressed by persons who do not remember how they obtained that information. I shall argue later that the Bridey Murphy case is almost certainly not one of cryptomnesia, and certainly not a proven one, according to my rules. But it was alleged to have been explicable by cryptomnesia (Gardner, 1957; Kline, 1956). The publication of the report of the Bridey Murphy case stimulated not only further experiments in hypnotic regression to possible previous lives, but also a number of reports of experiments in which the contents of presumed previous lives were traced to information learned by the subject under normal circumstances.

In one of these cases the hypnotized subject spoke a language eventually identified as Oscan (Rosen, 1956). (This language did not emerge explicitly as part of a 'previous personality'.) The subject himself was led—we do not know by what techniques—to remember that he had read the words of Oscan that he later reproduced in a library, where he had been daydreaming about his girlfriend. He had seen the words when his eyes had happened to fall on a copy of Buck's *A Grammar of Oscan and Umbrian* (1904), which lay open on a table before him. The portion of the text thus absorbed was a ten-word section of 'The Curse of Vibia', which dates from the third century, B.C.

More systematically, Zolik (1958, 1962) conducted two experiments that employed the method used so successfully fifty years earlier by G. L. Dickinson. He first asked hypnotized subjects to go back to a 'previous life', which they seemed to do; he later instructed them (hypnotized but not regressed to the

'previous life') to scan the memories of their (present) lives and inform him of the origins of the ingredients used to compose the 'previous lives'. Zolik believed that they had done this successfully. However, a careful reading of Zolik's reports leaves doubts in my mind about just what he accomplished. The correspondence between the content of the hypnotically induced 'previous lives' and the presumed normal sources of information (for the two cases Zolik published in detail) is far from being close. Moreover, Zolik did not independently verify the sources mentioned by the subjects, so a possibility remains that they were responding to the compelling instructions of the hypnotist fully as much when they named the sources as they had been when they had earlier produced the 'previous life'.

Zolik has, however, had successors, and several of them have been more successful than he was in showing (with matching details) correspondences between a hypnotically induced 'previous life' and normal sources of information (Björkhem, 1961; Hilgard, 1977; and Kampman and Hirvenoja, 1978).

One of the two cases reported by Kampman and Hirvenoja seems particularly valuable. A Finnish girl of about twelve or thirteen was regressed during hypnosis to eight 'previous lives', including one as an English girl called Dorothy who lived in the Middle Ages. The 'Dorothy personality' sang a medieval song in English. Seven years later the subject was again hypnotized and asked to remember the source for the English song. She then remembered that she had seen it in the Finnish translation of a book (*The Story of Music*) by Benjamin Britten and Imogen Holst (1958). The medieval song is the well-known one beginning 'Sumer is icumen in'. Britten and Holst reproduced eighteen of its words in their book. The subject had evidently seen the book and assimilated the song in her memory shortly before the first hypnotic session at which the 'Dorothy personality' emerged. There was nothing unusual in her building up the 'Dorothy personality' from whatever English materials lay at hand, so to speak, in her mind. This is the way in which hypnotized subjects asked to produce a 'previous life' follow instructions. What is remarkable was the subject's ability to identify seven years later the exact book in which she had seen the medieval song.<sup>9</sup>

It would not detract from the success of Dickinson and Kampman if we could know in how many cases an unsuccessful search for normal sources of information has been made with a hypnotized subject who had previously communicated details about an apparent previous life. (I know of one case in which such a search failed to uncover a normal source; this is the case of Jensen [Stevenson, 1974c].) Failure to find a normal source does not eliminate cryptomnesia as an interpretation of a particular case, but it may help to prevent a too facile closure of its study.

<sup>9</sup> In two accounts of this case, Kampman (1973; Kampman and Hirvenoja, 1978) suggests somewhat different ages for the subject, and his first account of the 'Dorothy personality' does not mention the medieval English song.

I have examined a copy of the relevant page of the Finnish version of *The Story of Music* (entitled *Musiikin Vaiheet*), and found that it reproduces the same eighteen (English) words of the song that appear in the English edition. (My thanks to Rita Castrén-Näre for providing me with a copy of this page.)

My next two examples come from mediumship. In the first of them Edmunds (1966) showed a close similarity between several paragraphs of scripts written automatically (in March 1949) by Geraldine Cummins, for which the purported communicator was Colonel P. H. Fawcett, and an article written by Colonel Fawcett himself and published in the *Occult Review* in 1923. (Fawcett was an English explorer who disappeared in the Brazilian jungle in 1925; he had an interest in psychical research.) Edmunds, like Flournoy, printed extracts from the original article and from the scripts in parallel columns in order to facilitate their comparison. The correspondence between the scripts and the article is not exact. It is not so close as that between Sackville-West's poem and Dymont's; but it is not far short of that. The ideas developed are quite similar, and in many places the same phrases and words occur in reference to the same topics in both texts. The similarity between the texts cannot be regarded as accidental.

At the time these similarities were discovered, Geraldine Cummins herself (1966) advanced three interpretations for them, and I cannot think of any other worth adding. The first was that Colonel Fawcett, having survived death, was communicating through Miss Cummins and, having retained ideas that he had written down when alive, was repeating them in the scripts, often with the same words and phrases. Miss Cummins suggested a plausible link between her own interest in the vitality of trees (a theme of the similar texts) and that of the deceased Colonel Fawcett that might have led him (as a discarnate communicator) to quote his own remarks on the subject in the scripts.

The second possibility was that Miss Cummins had read Colonel Fawcett's article in the *Occult Review* and that portions of her memories of it had emerged in her scripts through a normal (if subconscious) process of association when she thought that she was receiving a communication from the deceased Colonel Fawcett. But had she ever read Colonel Fawcett's article? Miss Cummins herself admitted that this was possible, but she thought it unlikely and certainly had no memory of having done so. If cryptomnesia is nevertheless the correct explanation for the case, the length of the interval between normal exposure to the information and its later emergence—twenty-six years—may be a record in that respect. (But in the case of Nietzsche [Jung, 1905/1957] the interval was about the same length.)

Miss Cummins also suggested a third explanation for the resemblances between the two texts: telepathy between herself and Miss E. B. Gibbes, who was her companion and the investigator of her automatic scripts for many years. Miss Gibbes had almost certainly read the article in question by Colonel Fawcett. Miss Cummins found no difficulty in suggesting that telepathy could account for the similarities in the words and texts. She wrote that she had once telepathically obtained from the poet W. B. Yeats 'almost word for word an outline of a dramatic plot he was working on'. I cannot make a judgment about this claim without knowing how much material was conveyed 'almost word for word'. However, it is, I think, highly unusual for anyone to claim the telepathic communication 'word for word' of much information. The longest such communication I can recall consisted of only two stanzas of verse, each of four lines (Suringar, 1923).

The second case, reported by Berendt (1970), contains much less detail than the preceding one; yet it has some value as an example of the cryptomnesic

retention of aurally perceived information. Berendt had a sitting with a London medium, subsequently had some slight correspondence with her, and then had another sitting (also in London) approximately two years after the first one. On the occasion of the second sitting, the medium did not consciously recognize Berendt. Nevertheless, she immediately reverted to the theme of the first sitting. This concerned the murder of one of Berendt's friends, of the details of which the medium could have had no normal knowledge. This friend's murder was at, or close to, the surface of Berendt's mind on each occasion, and this may have facilitated communication about it by telepathy between Berendt and the medium. Yet because on the second occasion the medium *began* the sitting with the theme of the earlier one, Berendt concluded that she had *unconsciously* recognized him and that this stimulated, through normal associations, the emergence of the theme developed during the first sitting two years earlier.

#### THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT FACILITATE CRYPTOMNESIA

If my survey of cases has been reasonably comprehensive and has included, as I hope it has, nearly all cases that have been investigated by parapsychologists, then the most important conclusion we can draw from it is that the materials available are too scanty to justify any but the most provisional general statements about the circumstances that favor the occurrence of cryptomnesia. Apart from the paucity of the cases in number, the reports frequently fail to provide the detail we should like to have about the correspondences between the communication and its presumed normal source. And we are rarely told what we should like to know about the subjects' states of consciousness in these cases, either when they first assimilated the information or at the time of its later emergence from the depths of their memories. But these gaps in our knowledge need not defeat us. A full exposure of ignorance can be the first step in a program of research. With these disclaimers, and adding here and there a few more illustrative cases, I shall next summarize the little we can now say about how cryptomnesia occurs and how the memories involved in it become expressed.

#### *The Amount of Information Involved in Cryptomnesia*

Readers will have noticed in the examples I have given that the cryptomnesically retained and correctly communicated information was often extremely brief. Several cases corresponded to two or three lines only of a newspaper obituary; the Oscan curse retained by Rosen's subject consisted of ten words only; and the medieval song of the 'Dorothy personality' studied by Kampman and Hirvenoja had (in its printed source) only eighteen words. On the other hand, we have also found several other examples in which the information was much more abundant, and Dickinson's case included a copious store of proper names.

From the cases considered we may perhaps draw a warning to be alert concerning the possibility of cryptomnesia when a communication about a past event is short. We cannot, however, say the opposite. We do not now know the limits of the amount of material that might be retained cryptomnesically and afterward brought up, either verbatim or condensed and otherwise transformed.



*The Sensory Modality of Cryptomnesically Embedded Material*

In most of the cases that I have reviewed the subject obtained the pertinent information through reading, which means from a printed source. We have seen, however, that in the case reported by Coleridge it came in spoken words that the subject heard. And in Helen Keller's case it came in the tactile stimuli by means of which her teachers read books to her. With the widespread extension of radio and television, we should expect future cases of cryptomnesia to derive from forgotten exposure to material of these media. Unfortunately, the amount and the transiency of much of what is broadcast will probably make it increasingly difficult to identify exact sources of cryptomnesically retained information from this source.

*The Duration of Exposure to the Source of Information*

The duration of the subject's exposure to pertinent material may be brief. Helen Keller can have had 'The Frost Fairies' read only once to her. Almost certainly Dickinson's subject read *Countess Maud* (the source for the seeming communications from Blanche Poynings) only once. And I have mentioned how unlikely it is that Sackville-West can have read Dymont's poem 'St. Augustine at Thirty-Two' more than once or twice before she retained it almost verbatim.

Bose (1959) reported the case of a boy in Calcutta, India, who said that he remembered the suicide of a particular village woman about which he gave details that persons around him thought he could not possibly have learned normally. But exhaustive inquiries led to the discovery of a piece of newspaper (stuck to a windowpane) in a house where the boy had stayed for a few days some years earlier. A report of the suicide was printed on the piece of newspaper, which had been issued at about the time of the boy's visit to this place. It is not known whether the boy read the report of the suicide in the newspaper or heard adults talking about it; in either event his exposure to the information was almost certainly brief.

Some experimental psychologists have studied the retention of information to which subjects have been exposed briefly. But their experiments, such as those of Potter and Levy (1969), seem usually to have been directed at studying short-term memory, whereas in considering cryptomnesia, we are often concerned with information that the subject learned months or years before its later emergence.

An experiment that Bayer (1973, pp. 57-58) conducted tested the ability of a subject to retain over a period of two weeks information to which she had been briefly exposed only once. Bayer held up before this subject a series of about thirty completely blank white cards (each about 8 centimeters square) and instructed her to see on each successive card some object that he suggested to her, such as a ship, a hat, a car, etc. Bayer made a list of the suggested objects and wrote a number corresponding to each object on the back of each card. He then shuffled the cards and presented them again to the subject, with the numbers on the back concealed from her and without knowing himself what object he had previously suggested she should see on each card. The subject then called out the objects previously suggested for each card without a mistake. Two weeks later Bayer called on the subject unexpectedly and repeated the experiment, which the subject again performed without an error. In this case we must suppose that the

subject had identified each blank card by some slight mark on its surface and was able to associate that mark with the object suggested, so that when she later recognized the mark of a particular card she could also recall the object she had earlier 'seen' on the blank card. Telepathy from Bayer seems improbable from the design of the experiment. Bayer's subject was not hypnotized, but in an ostensibly normal state of consciousness.

A case that I studied may include the briefest exposure to learned material in the history of this topic. It is one of mediumistic communicators manifesting with a ouija board. The principal medium, Mrs. Southey (pseudonym), habitually held séances with a friend, Mrs. Crowson (pseudonym), whose hand also rested on the pointer of the board. The letters indicated by the pointer were dictated to a third person or into a tape recorder and later transcribed into legible and intelligible words and phrases. In this way a rather large number of drop-in communicators were recorded and their existence subsequently verified. I visited and sat with Mrs. Southey and Mrs. Crowson on two occasions. Their honesty seemed not to be in question; another senior member of the S.P.R. who also visited them agreed with my evaluation on that point, and I hope readers will accept it as valid, so that I may go on to state what I think the correct source of some of these drop-in communicators must have been. It struck me first as somewhat odd that the existence of many of the drop-in communicators was verified in the obituary columns of the (London) *Daily Telegraph*. It was impossible also to overlook the close similarity between some of the drop-in communicators' statements about themselves and the brief obituary notices of the *Daily Telegraph*. Like the communications of Abraham Florentine and Bertie Henry D'Oyly Jones, those of this type with Mrs. Southey usually gave no more and no less information than the verifying obituary provided.

I enquired about the availability of the *Daily Telegraph* to Mrs. Southey and Mrs. Crowson. Mrs. Southey neither subscribed to the *Daily Telegraph* nor read it. But Mrs. Crowson's husband did subscribe to it, and he did its crossword puzzles. She told me that she did not read the newspaper regularly, but she sometimes picked it up to see whether she could finish off a crossword puzzle that had defeated her husband. The obituaries in the *Daily Telegraph* were (and are) printed on the same page as the crossword puzzle, or vice versa according to which interests you most. Workers of crossword puzzles tend to fold the paper twice so that they have before them the quarter of the page where the crossword puzzle is printed. With the *Daily Telegraph* this leaves a margin around the puzzle often covered by obituary notices. When I found that several of the obituary notices that had verified the drop-in communicators had been printed on the back page not far from the puzzle, I considered it reasonable to suppose that when Mrs. Crowson (who also had her hand on the ouija board's pointer) had attempted to finish the puzzle for her husband, the obituary notices had come within her field of vision. I do not think that she had read them in the sense in which we usually think of reading; but she had nevertheless assimilated them. Other obituary notices placed elsewhere on the page she might have absorbed by glances as she picked up the paper and settled in her chair to do the puzzle.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I think it important to add that other communications through Mrs. Southey (assisted by Mrs. Crowson) seemed to me to show evidence of paranormal processes, even though the drop-in communicators verified through the obituary columns of the *Daily Telegraph* did not.

I shall cite one example to illustrate the possible normal means of acquiring information to which I am referring. At a sitting held (by Mrs. Southey and Mrs. Crowson) on 28 September 1966, the following communication was received:

Norman Denis. My name is Norman Denis of Salisbury, Of the Society of Jesus, Rhodesia. Fellow of the Linnean [unintelligible word].

On 24 September 1966, the *Daily Telegraph* included the following among the death notices:

Dennis, on Sept. 19, suddenly at Salisbury, Rhodesia, Norman, of the Society of Jesus, and Fellow of the Linnean Society, aged 54. Requiem Mass at Farm Street Church, W.1. on October 15, at 12 noon.

On 24 September 1966 the crossword puzzle was in the lower right-hand corner of the page, the notice of Norman Dennis's death in the upper left-hand quarter.

Goodrich-Freer (1899, p. 113) reported a somewhat similar case. She saw in her crystal ball an obituary notice in *The Times*. She subsequently remembered that the evening before she had used the page of this newspaper containing the obituaries as a shield against a hearth fire that was too hot. The obituary notice was in front of her eyes and an impression of it was retained in her mind, without her being aware of this at the time it occurred.

It would seem, therefore, that with some persons brief exposure to information may suffice for it to be remembered and later brought to expression when other conditions are right for this to happen. Some psychologists may not believe this, but many advertisers evidently do. Of this I can give an example from the experience of medical house officers in the United States. It is well known that pharmaceutical manufacturers aim advertisements at house officers in the hope of training them to prescribe the advertisers' drugs in preference to those of their competitors. Equally well known is the house officers' habit of throwing away nearly all this material without more than glancing at it. The University of Virginia Hospital provides a barrel conveniently placed in the mail room to receive these unread discards. One advertiser decided to fight this defiance by having the name of its drug printed boldly and vertically on the outside of the envelope at the left-hand margin; in this way even as the vexed house officer tried to throw the envelope into the waste-paper barrel his eyes would almost inevitably fall on the name of the drug the manufacturer wanted him to prescribe.

#### *The Duration of Retention of Information before its Later Emergence*

On this subject I can say little. Most of the recognized examples show retention over a period of a few weeks only. However, in the Cummins case (if it is best interpreted as an instance of cryptomnesia) and in the Nietzsche case the interval between normal exposure to the information and its later emergence was twenty-six years. And it was about twelve years in the Blanche Poynings case and seven in the Jacobsohn case of literary borrowing.

#### *Are Some Persons More Likely to Exhibit Cryptomnesia than Others?*

Little can be said under this heading also. It is in no way helpful to assert, after the fact, that persons who have shown cryptomnesia have had superior

memories. The subjects of cases of cryptomnesia appear to have shown a wide range in the excellence of their memories. Some subjects, like Jacobsohn and Daniels (whose case I shall consider below), have acknowledged that they had (or claimed to have had) superior memories; other, like Sackville-West, have disparaged their memories.

The general quality of a person's memory may have little bearing on the development of a case of cryptomnesia, since interest plays such a large part in what anyone remembers; we may be quite forgetful of content that we find dull while we remember well something else that we find exciting. Apart from this, we need to learn more about persons who remember material without knowing later where they learned it, or even that they had learned it. A person liable to become the subject of a case of cryptomnesia may have hypermnnesia for content and amnesia for source.

The subjects of cases investigated by parapsychologists in which cryptomnesia has been demonstrated have nearly all been persons capable of entering rather profound states of dissociation—whether the self-induced ones of mediumship or the other-induced ones of hypnosis.<sup>11</sup> We should allow for the possibility that persons with this much capacity for dissociation may also be persons with an unusual facility for remembering information to which they have been briefly exposed. I am not saying that everyone with hypermnnesia is capable of dissociation,<sup>12</sup> only that persons capable of dissociation may also have hypermnnesia, at least at some times.

#### *The Subject's State of Consciousness When Exposed to the Information*

For this aspect of cryptomnesia also we have almost no substantial information. As mentioned above, most of the persons who have provided the evidence we have for cryptomnesia have been capable of entering dissociated states. And they may also have been the sorts of persons who, in a state of partial dissociation, assimilate information without later being aware that they have done so. But of direct evidence to support this conjecture, I can offer almost none. Only in Pickford's case and in Berendt's do we have evidence that the subjects obtained the information that they later produced in communications while they were in a dissociated state earlier. To these examples, we may perhaps add Rosen's subject, who recalled that he had been 'daydreaming' in a library when he read and absorbed in his memory the Oscan curse. Perhaps we can conjecture also that Goodrich-Freer and Mrs. Crowson (using a ouija board with Mrs. Southey), who reproduced newspaper obituaries, had assimilated these when they were in states of slight dissociation; certainly they were not deliberately reading the obituaries at the time.

#### *The Subject's State of Consciousness When the Information Emerges*

Concerning the bringing of the material into expression, we know that states of

<sup>11</sup> I omit from consideration here the cases of unconscious literary borrowings. At least one of these, that of Sackville-West, might have amounted to nothing more than forgetfulness about having copied down a poem by another poet. We know little about the circumstances involved in any of these cases.

<sup>12</sup> The mnemonist whom Luria (1968) studied could remember for years information to which he had been briefly exposed. There is no evidence that this subject was in a state of altered consciousness either when he was exposed to the material to be remembered or when he remembered it years later.

dissociation, whether voluntarily induced or brought on by the suggestions of a hypnotist, facilitate the expression of information ordinarily latent in the mind.

Another case of apparently unconscious borrowing, which I shall now summarize, lends weight to the idea that the information figuring in cases of cryptomnesia may be expressed during a state of inattention to external stimuli that I think we can regard as a minor type of dissociation. In 1972 an American scientist (Daniels, 1972) publicly acknowledged that in writing a book he had unintentionally used substantial portions of the works of other authors who had written books on the same topic as his. It was not, he confessed, a matter of only using other persons' ideas. In footnotes of his book Daniels had acknowledged these debts; but he wrote that it had 'come to my attention' that he had also used their very words. As he himself stated:

... far too many of the words, as well as the ideas, of the cited author were used. In one case, there are as many as 55 consecutive words; in others there are sentences, parts of sentences, or key phrases that are actually the same as those used by the author cited.

Daniels then went on to explain how he thought these borrowings had occurred. He had been reading the books in question (because they bore on his topic) during the drafting of his own book. He had made some notes of what he read, but had not copied any material from them. Nevertheless he retained many of the actual words of what he had read as he worked on his own draft. He stated further:

When I wrote my own section, far from simply reporting on Cremin's [an author from whom he had borrowed] work, and that of others, as I thought I had been doing, I was actually reproducing parts with the help of brief notes and the fresh reading [of the works from which he lifted sentences]. I have certainly been aware that I had an extraordinary ability to remember material when I wanted to, but I have never before realized that I did it *unconsciously* [emphasis added].

The state Daniels describes himself as having been in when he was composing his book may have been unfamiliar to him; but it is quite familiar to many students of literary and musical composition. Many authors and composers have described their works as almost being written for them by expressive forces that they had only to release in order for the work to be set down on paper. Its ingredients had often lain within the author's or composer's mind for some time and the act of creation consisted in conferring new and beautiful forms on the latent material. The coming of 'Kubla Khan' to Coleridge while he was in an opiate-induced sleep provides an extreme example of how mental contents may become assembled by creative forces during states of dissociation. Few writers can attain Coleridge's powers of synthesis, but even lesser writers have performed creative work when in a state not totally different from his when he composed 'Kubla Khan'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Fruman (1971) and Lefebvre (1977) argued with some plausibility that Coleridge may have deliberately misled readers when he claimed that 'Kubla Khan' came to him in a dream. Coleridge's Preface to the poem is somewhat implausible. There is evidence, moreover, that he revised the poem with the craft of which he was a master. It seems possible that Coleridge, who was short of funds when he published the poem, may have wished to excite interest in it by describing it as an effusion that came to him complete during a state of drug-intoxication.

Although a state of partial (or complete) dissociation may facilitate the expression of cryptomnesically held material, it is not necessary for this emergence. Flournoy (1911, pp.449-452) made this point seventy years ago when he reviewed a series of drop-in communicators who had seemed to him probably derived from readings in encyclopedias. The sitters denied that they had ever heard of the communicators before they manifested and also—more to the present point—denied that any of them had been in a state of 'somnambulism' when the group received the communications. I agree with Flournoy's insistence that cryptomnesically held material may emerge during a state of consciousness that seems in no way abnormal.

#### FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE RULES FOR JUDGING WHEN CRYPTOMNESIA HAS OCCURRED

I wish now to return to two of my three rules for saying that cryptomnesia has occurred, and to refresh your memory I shall state the first two again: (a) a close correspondence must exist between the apparent source and the reproduced material, and (b) we should have evidence not that the subject *might* have somewhere seen the source, but that he had actually done so or had probably done so. The first rule has the weakness that opinions may differ concerning what we should consider a 'close correspondence'. If readers will study carefully, in the original reports, the examples of cryptomnesia that I have given, they can form their own judgments on the matter, but I should be surprised if they did not agree with me that most of these examples illustrate 'close correspondence'. The degree of correspondence, however, varies considerably from case to case, and this brings me to the topic of the interdependence of my first two rules.

#### *The Interdependence of the First Two Proposed Rules*

I said earlier that cases sometimes occur in which we should not apply these two rules inflexibly and independently of each other. I think we may sometimes conclude that cryptomnesia has probably occurred even though we cannot obtain evidence that the subject had ever seen the presumed source of the communicated information or otherwise learned the information normally. We may do this when the verbal correspondence between the communication and the presumed normal source is extremely close. In some of the cases that I have cited, especially the instances of unconscious borrowing, such as that of Sackville-West, we should, I think, have concluded that the subject had seen the original, even if we had not known from other evidence that he or she had done so. How close the correspondence between the two texts should be before we make such a judgment I shall not venture to say. I think most readers will agree, however, that the more closely the texts resemble each other, the more likely is one to have derived from the other.

It will be easier to make a judgment of this kind in two circumstances. First: when a communication, say of a drop-in communicator, provides of *factual* material no more than what a single newspaper death notice can verify, we may be justified in thinking that the medium had somehow seen the obituary, even though this seems unlikely. For example, although it may seem unlikely that Stainton Moses in England could have seen New York newspapers that carried

the death notice of Abraham Florentine, the factual similarity between the death notices and the communication makes me judge this more likely than it would have been if the two compared passages had shown wider disparities.

Second, we may reach a similar conclusion when the presumed normal source contains a mistake repeated in the later communication, provided we know that the source was available to the subject of the case. I shall give an example of such a mistake.

In a case of a drop-in communicator that I investigated in the 1960s, an English medium practising in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, produced a communication from a man who said that he had lived in Bristol and had been accidentally killed. (From the communicator's accent he was assumed to be English, so Bristol, England seemed to be in question, not any of the Bristols in the United States.) Some of the communication was given vocally by the medium, and some in presumably automatic writing. The communicator said that his name was Albert Sargeant. He gave his address and the date of the accident, as well as a few other details about it. The principal sitter of the session had verified the details through correspondence with the office of the mayor of Bristol (Wood, 1958, p. 92). Knowing that the medium had been implicated in fraudulent séances, but thinking that this did not preclude his also having some paranormal powers, I decided to look further into the case. I wrote to the communicator's widow and shortly received a friendly reply from her. She confirmed the accuracy of the communication, and added: 'You will notice the name was spelt "Sargent."' (The correct name was 'Sargeant'.) She sent me a copy of the report of the accident in the *Bristol Evening Post*, from which I could see that all the information communicated—no more and no less—occurred in the brief newspaper report, including the misspelling of the communicator's name. Having learned a lesson from the case of Abraham Florentine, I verified in the Registrar General's Office in London that the communicator had indeed died on the date his widow gave me and that his name was spelled 'Sargent'. If I add that the medium came from the west of England and probably subscribed in the United States to newspapers from there, few will disagree with my conclusion that this case was a fraud.

Beloff and I followed similar lines of reasoning in studying another medium, who specialized in drop-in communicators (Stevenson and Beloff, 1980). In this case a close similarity of style and sentiment expressed by different communicators suggested that the medium herself had contributed at least a substantial portion of the communications. Then we observed that everything verifiable contained in one communication was printed within eight lines of a book that we found in a library regularly used by the medium and her husband. Next we found that an error in another communication occurred in another book in the same library.<sup>14</sup> And finally, for a third case we found close similarities of both content and the organization of that content between the communication and four pages of a biography to which the medium and her husband had easy access in a library of a nearby town; the biography in question contained no mistakes that the

scripts reproduced, but the scripts did contain several egregious errors (proved from another source). Although we had no evidence that the medium had read the books in question before she obtained her communications, an accumulation of the evidence that I have mentioned, and some other evidence, made us feel justified in concluding that the information in the books had somehow come normally before the medium's eyes.<sup>15</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS WARRANTED BY PRESENT KNOWLEDGE OF CRYPTOMNESIA

At this point I shall pause to summarize what I think we can say with confidence about the possibilities for the occurrence of cryptomnesia.

First, after a brief exposure to information seen or heard, some persons have preserved it more or less intact in their memories and brought it into consciousness years later. Sometimes the persons who have done this have been aware of normally assimilating the information at the time they did so; in other cases they seem not to have been aware of this. There are also intermediate levels of awareness of the assimilation, examples of this coming from subjects who had no conscious memory of their exposure to the information, but who could later—usually in a hypnotic or dissociated state—indicate its source. The demonstration of cryptomnesia in some persons invites, but does not warrant, the conclusion that anyone may become a repository for any information to which he has at any time been exposed. Flournoy (1911), who should justly be regarded as one of the founders of serious studies in cryptomnesia, adopted this stance, but his position derived from a small number of cases. (The number of well-studied cases has increased since his time, but not greatly.) Nevertheless, most parapsychologists probably agree with Flournoy, which may account for their usual lack of interest in any case depending for verification on a printed source to which the subject might have had access.

As parapsychologists we are surely committed to believing that, in principle, information may be obtained paranormally about past events no less than about present or future ones. If we believe that some persons show paranormal knowledge of the future, we should be prepared to believe that some persons may have paranormal knowledge of the past. In order to give my point some emphasis, let me remind you of just one case in which, in my view, the subject demonstrated paranormal knowledge of past events. I refer to the case of the communications of 'G.P.' through Mrs. Piper (Hodgson, 1898). The 'G.P.'

<sup>15</sup> I earlier mentioned that the (probable) errors in de Marlet's *Histoire générale de l'Inde* and the similarity between these errors and the statements occurring during Hélène Smith's 'Hindu cycle' increase the likelihood that she had somewhere read a copy of de Marlet's book, even though there is no direct evidence that she had done so.

In a case of hypnotic regression to a presumed previous life, the subject, who seemed to relive being tried for witchcraft in the sixteenth century, gave numerous accurate details of an actual trial in Chelmsford, Essex (Moss with Keeton, 1979). However, the subject set the trial in the year 1556, when in fact it occurred in 1566. This same error in dating occurred in a nineteenth-century reprinting of a sixteenth-century chapbook that reported the trial, and some later writers on witchcraft copied the error into their books. Although an immediate source of the subject's knowledge of this trial has not been identified, her inclusion of the error in dating increases the likelihood that her information did derive from a printed or other source that had repeated the error (Wilson, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> Since publication of our original article on this case, Beloff and I have learned that another book that has been available in the library regularly used by the medium and her husband contains much that is correct in this particular script and also contains another of its errors.

communicator showed a detailed knowledge of persons known to the deceased George Pelham but complete strangers to Mrs. Piper. The case consisted of more than the medium's stating the names of Pelham's friends, which she might perhaps have accomplished by telepathy from them; in many instances she correctly placed these friends in relationship to George Pelham and showed knowledge about details of their personal lives of which she could not have had normal knowledge. The authenticity of this series of sittings has never been questioned. The results are open to two interpretations of paranormal processes: (1) communications from the surviving, discarnate mind of George Pelham or (2) dramatized presentation by Mrs. Piper's mind of detailed information that she obtained from living persons, some of whom were not present during the pertinent séances. On either of these interpretations, Mrs. Piper showed paranormal knowledge of past events.

As Ducasse (1960) once remarked, in somewhat different words, a sure way of avoiding the discovery of anything new is to make the assumption that every new case we encounter can be understood only by supposing that it fully resembles some case we already know. On the contrary, advances in science usually come from someone's insisting that two cases (or other phenomena) that superficially appear the same have, in fact, important differences. The differences can usually be seen only through a careful study of small details.

For my part I accept that paranormal knowledge of the past is just as likely as that of the present or future. (I do not mean to deny that the study of paranormal knowledge of the past is even more difficult than the study of precognition.) The task I set myself, therefore, is that of identifying the ways in which paranormal knowledge of the past could be expressed under conditions that satisfy our requirements for calling it paranormal. This brings me to mention my third rule for judging a case to be one of cryptomnesia.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING ALL FEATURES OF A PARTICULAR CASE

Earlier I said that responsibility for a paranormal interpretation of a case rests with the subject and investigators, who must show that they have excluded normal means by which the subject might have obtained the information expressed in a communication. The evidence provided may not convince others, and if it does not, a stance of suspended judgment on their part seems to me entirely acceptable. But if observers leave the ground of being uncommitted and assert that the case definitely has a normal explanation, such as that of cryptomnesia, I think they have the duty of showing the actual steps in the occurrence of this process. It is not enough to say how it *might* have happened. (Similarly, for the graver charge of fraud, we require that alleged fraud show not just how it might have occurred, but that it did actually occur or is very likely to have occurred.)

If advocates of cryptomnesia accept this responsibility, they must account for all (or at least most) of the features of a case satisfactorily. So my third rule is:

- (c) All elements in a case must be considered in its assessment, not selected parts only.

I think this rule is well established in parapsychology. To give an example, I need only remind you that we do not discard the evidence for 'G.P.' having been

a discarnate communicator because we conclude that 'Phinuit', who gave a completely unverified account of the terrestrial life that he claimed to have lived, was a secondary personality of Mrs. Piper. In the statement of my third rule, I intend, therefore, that we should consider all portions of a communication or a set of communications that are presented together. This is what I mean by the word *case* in this rule. However, we may conclude that different elements of the whole that we are considering have different sources. In principle at least, a communication could derive from a mixture of paranormally derived material to which had been added, by association in the mind of the medium perhaps, material that the medium had learned normally.

We shall find this third rule easy to follow when a communication and a verifying obituary are each compacted into a few lines. There are, however, several types of cases that are much less amenable to such a facile solution, and it may be helpful to draw up an inventory of them.

#### CASES THAT CRYPTOMNESIA DOES NOT EXPLAIN

Before describing types of cases that are, in principle, invulnerable to the interpretation of cryptomnesia, I shall remind you of one of my opening statements: in presenting a case as being paranormal we should be able to show that the subject had not obtained normally the knowledge he communicated. Thus cryptomnesia is only one normal explanation for a case that we must guard against.

The types of paranormal knowledge of the past that seem to me, in principle, to eliminate the possibility of cryptomnesia are the following.

(a) Cases in which the subject states facts about a person that could not have derived from printed (or other normally available) sources. This could occur when no printed or other normally available sources exist whatever; and it could occur when such sources exist, but are normally inaccessible to the subject, because the subject is too young to read, has no access to radio or television, or lives so far from the person described or communicating that it is unlikely the subject could ever have learned about him. The obvious examples here are many cases of the reincarnation type in which the subjects are young children when their case begins (Stevenson, 1974b, 1975, 1977, 1980). Not to vaunt these cases too much, I should remind readers that a disadvantage of verifying the subject's statements with unrecorded sources is the fallibility of human memory.

There are mediumistic cases in this group also, and I think the case of the 'G.P.' communicator through Mrs. Piper provides an excellent example. So also do some cases of psychometry that show paranormal knowledge of past events on the part of a sensitive (Osty, 1923; Pagenstecher, 1922).

(b) Cases in which some, but not all, of the correct facts communicated are verified in a printed newspaper report or other publicly accessible source; the remaining correct facts are verified only by oral testimony or unpublished diaries and similar material inaccessible to the general public. Among the cases in this class we can include those of Klaas Kraaijenbrink (Zorab, 1940), John Wightman (Tyrrell, 1939), Robert Passanah (Stevenson, 1970), Harry Stockbridge (Gauld, 1971), Robert Marie (Stevenson, 1973), Runolfur Runolfsson (Haraldsson and Stevenson, 1975a), and Gudni Magnússon (Haraldsson and

Stevenson, 1975b). It is worth pointing out in connection with some of these cases that if part of the veridical information communicated did not come from printed sources, there is no strong reason to believe that *any* of it did, although it is possible—as the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception supposes—that the medium concerned selected here and there from different sources whatever was needed for the fabrication of the communications.

The case reported by Zorab (1940) exemplifies the reverse of those in which a communication repeated an error in a printed source. The newspaper report about the accidental death of the communicator (which was printed before the communication) had several details bungled that were correctly given in the communication.

(c) Cases in which the facts are unknown to any single living person. These may be of two subtypes. In the first, no living person could know the information; this condition would be met if successful results were obtained in the tests of survival with ciphers (Thouless, 1946–49a, 1946–49b) and combination locks (Stevenson, 1968, 1976a). In the second subtype the information could, in principle, be known to a living person, but almost certainly was not. I should include in this group certain cases of drop-in communicators in which all the correct information communicated was verified in two or more independent sources (see, for examples, the cases of Robert Passanah [Stevenson, 1970] and Runolfur Runolfsson [Haraldsson and Stevenson, 1975a]). And I should also include cases such as that proposed by Murphy (1945) of communications from a group of discarnate persons who had not known each other when living or known that they had shared an unusual common interest—for example, the collecting of Wedgwood china.

(d) Cases in which the subject displays an apparently unlearned skill, such as that of *responsive* xenoglossy (Stevenson, 1974c, 1976b; Stevenson and Pasricha, 1980). I do not know of any case in which a person learned a foreign language to the level of being able to converse intelligibly in it and then forgot that he had done so.

When we can be sure that the subject of a case did not learn normally the words of a foreign language spoken in a *recitative* xenoglossy, the case may qualify for this group, as I think that of Swarnlata Mishra does (Stevenson, 1974b).

The case of Patience Worth (Prince, 1927/1964; Litvag, 1972) also belongs to this group because, in my view, from what is known of the subject's reading before the case developed, cryptomnesia cannot account for the linguistic features of the case.

#### CASES OF POSSIBLE BUT UNPROVEN CRYPTOMNESIA

As I remarked, the preceding types of cases (when we accept their authenticity) seem to me, in principle, inexplicable as instances of cryptomnesia. It remains to mention a small group of cases in which cryptomnesia cannot be ruled out, but has not yet been demonstrated. I refer to cases in which the subject shows knowledge of numerous recondite details about a previous place and time, this knowledge going beyond anything we can explain by what we can learn of the subject's reading or other exposure to the communicated information. I include in this category the case of Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1956/1978), that

of Edward Ryall (1974), and the less well known case of Nyria (Campbell Praed, 1931). In none of these cases has a person corresponding to the facts stated about a deceased person been identified, and so they cannot be said to be verified with regard to that important feature. The interest of each case lies in the quite obscure details about the periods concerned shown in the communications. In the case of Edward Ryall, and to a lesser extent in that of Bridey Murphy, the correct statements are mixed with a number of errors and probable inventions. These do not necessarily cancel out the value of the correct details communicated. No source or sources have been identified as having provided normally the correct facts to the subjects of these cases. Obviously such sources do exist or it would not have been possible to verify the correct details. The verifications, however, have required many sources, often ones accessible only to scholars. It is thus easier in these cases to imagine a hoax with concealed research than vast reading followed by complete forgetfulness of it. Under the circumstances we cannot say positively that the cases are not instances of cryptomnesia, but if my proposed rules have validity they have not been shown to be such.<sup>16</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main lesson we should learn from a study of cases of cryptomnesia is so obvious that it may seem otiose even to state it, but I shall do so anyway: We should be constantly vigilant for the possibility of cryptomnesia in any case when communications about past events are offered for our appraisal.

There are, however, additional ways in which we may profit from the study of cryptomnesia. One of these is adherence to the advice that we should attend as much to the differences as to the similarities among cases of the same general type. This lecture honors Frederic Myers, one of our pioneers who struggled to keep the materialists of the nineteenth century from massively applying their explanations in physical terms to all phenomena that fell within their purview. It was necessary to rescue, so to speak, some of these phenomena and isolate them for separate study that allowed for different interpretations. We would emulate Myers and his collaborators poorly if within the field of study that they established, we should forget this lesson and ourselves impatiently force one interpretation on cases that are somewhat similar but really diverse.

The catalogue of suspected and proven cases of cryptomnesia that I have presented may discourage some parapsychologists from studying cases of

<sup>16</sup> This statement indicates some change in my views concerning the best interpretation of Ryall's case since I wrote the Introduction (Stevenson, 1974a) to *Second Time Round* (Ryall, 1974). At that time I reserved the right to change my mind about the case in the light of later evidence. I do not now believe that the proper names of John Fletcher and his family and friends derive from memories of a previous life. (The search for family names in the parish and other records had barely begun at the time Ryall's book was written and published.) Obviously also, the mistakes Ryall made cannot have that source either. It remains possible, however, that he had *some* memories of a previous life and that these are in *Second Time Round*, perhaps even comprising most of it, but mixed—now inextricably—with later accretions from normal sources and literary inventions to complete the narrative.

Before his death Ryall communicated to me and other correspondents a considerable body of additional detail about his claimed previous life that he had not included in *Second Time Round*. I hope in the future to publish some of this material together with a more complete appraisal of his case than would be appropriate in this paper.



ostensibly paranormal knowledge of the past. But I think only persons otherwise unfit will desist. More robust investigators will continue and can pursue many fruitful lines of inquiry.

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