

# Gifts from the Grave?

by Robert Forrest

Many artists, whether they be poets, painters or musicians, have stated how they felt that their work was somehow given to them, as if they were simply the instrument of some 'higher power', as it were.

Van Gogh recorded how sometimes pictures came to him as if in a dream. Blake spoke of those occasions when he found himself writing poetry even against his will, and, in similar vein, George Sand wrote that some of her work seemed not to be the immediate outcome of her own will. Tchaikovsky told how in the writing of 'The Tempest' he seemed to be possessed by some supernatural force. Tartini's "Devil's Trill" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" were the products of almost trance-like states where active consciousness was dormant. (1)

The well of inspiration, as Coleridge called it, is one of the mysteries of human life. No-one, least of all the artist, it seems, knows just how or from where the powers of inspiration arise.

But even more mysterious, though clearly related, I think, are the cases which seem to belong more to the realms of psychological research than to the study of inspiration itself. Where the 'artist' definitely disclaims responsibility for his or her work, and insists that not only did that work seem to be given by some higher power, but actually was given by a higher power.

One of the most intriguing cases of this is Rosemary Brown's music. (2)

Rosemary Brown claims the spirits of Liszt, Chopin, Beethoven, Debussy, Schumann, Bach, Rachmaninov, and Brahms are using her to communicate their music to the world from beyond the grave. Rosemary Brown's own musical training is alleged to have been limited, yet the communicated music has

been pronounced 'true' to the styles of the communicating musicians by various musical authorities. It has been deduced by some, therefore, that Rosemary Brown could not have composed this music herself, and that it must have come from beyond the grave.

A similar type of phenomenon occurs in the case of Matthew Manning whose communicated drawings from Durer and Picasso are particularly notable. (3) Again, Matthew Manning's own artistic abilities are said to be limited.

There must be many other similar cases. One was reported in the English newspaper The Sunday People for December 5th, 1976, of a lady who claimed to be guided at the easel by the spirit of Turner, and yet another case is that of Thomas P. James (4) who was supposedly contacted by the deceased Charles Dickens for the purposes of completing the unfinished novel of The Mystery of Edwin Drood. (An interesting parallel here is Rosemary Brown's task of completing the Unfinished Symphony for the deceased Schubert.)

So where does this inspiration come from? Does it come from beyond the grave, or does it have a more earthly, if equally mysterious origin?

Where for example is the dividing line between the cases just mentioned and such cases as Tom Keating's excellent Samuel Palmer fakes which rocked the art world not long ago?

The advocates of spiritualism will naturally point out that Keating was an excellent artist anyway, whereas, for example, the artistic talents of Matthew Manning were minimal.

But I have a nagging suspicion here. My mind keeps reverting to chapter 12 of Ostrander and Schroeder's book Psi: Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain (1970). Here are outlined the experiments of a Dr. Raikov, who, by hypnotising his subjects into believing themselves to be a sort of reincarnated 'Old Master', succeeds in evoking hitherto unexpected artistic talents. Raikov calls this 'artificial reincarnation'.

Now my thought is this: is there such a thing as auto-artificial reincarnation? Can a person, under certain circumstances, tap the same depths of subliminal creativity by some process of autosuggestion? Can for example the spiritualist trance or its equivalent open the same creative doorways as Raikov's method of artificial reincarnation?

It is an interesting thought (and I would be the first to say that perhaps it is no more than this!) with facts that go both for and against it: Matthew Manning's medical diagnoses from the spirit world (a parallel with Edgar Cayce here?) suggest that auto-artificial reincarnation is not the full answer. On the other hand, Rosemary Brown's alleged communication from Einstein is jibberish, showing that it probably had its



origins very much within the boundaries of Rosemary Brown's non-mathematical head. As a professional mathematician, it is my opinion that wherever this pseudo-mathematical communication did come from, it was certainly not from the spirit of a deceased Einstein.

It is perhaps an interesting point that whereas the subliminal mind can drum up unexpected artistic faculties in this way, it cannot so easily drum up mathematical or scientific ones. I have come across one or two attempts at spiritualist scientific communications, but invariably they are little more than elaborate mumbo jumbo.

John Livingston Lowes masterful and minute analyses of the origins of Coleridge's poems "Kubla Khan" and "The Ancient Mariner" (5) has an interesting parallel in the annals of spiritualism. I am talking here of Theodore Flourney's study From India to the Planet Mars (1900: new English edition 1963).

Part of Flourney's study was to analyse the origins of the medium Helene Smith's famous Martian Cycle of communications, in which she claimed to have visited Mars in trance states, received communications from Martian beings, described and drew Martian landscapes, and even learned the Martian language!

It is the Martian language which is particularly relevant to the issues of the baffling ingenuity of the subliminal creative faculty, for Flourney showed conclusively that insofar as this Martian language was an elaborate concoction based upon French, therefore it was simply a fantastic product of Helene Smith's own brain, as indeed was the whole of the Martian business.

Again relevant to a study of the devious workings of the subliminal mind, consider reincarnational cases such as Bernstein's 'Bridey Murphy' and Stearn's 'Susan Ganier'. (6) Do these cases in fact show us anything more than the existence of a usually dormant and surpassingly agile subliminal faculty of creating a 'novel' as it were from the forgotten trivia of life? (I am fully aware that such an hypothesis is not the full story of reincarnation. It would appear inadequate to deal with the Shanti Devi case (?) for example. Nevertheless, I do feel that dormant creativity does have a large part to play in the history of reincarnation.)

Again, consider the case of Patience Worth, who began to 'manifest' through the ouija board of Mrs. Pearl Lenore Curran in 1913 and who within the space of a few years gave to the world a deluge of poetry and prose, proverbs and prayers all written in allegedly authentic seventeenth century English.

The versatility of the entity Patience Worth was fantastic, and, of course, seemingly way beyond that of Mrs. Curran herself. She could compose poems on any given subject spontaneously. She could compose two poems simultaneously, even when asked

to give a line of one poem, then a line of the other, and so on alternately. On one occasion she was asked to compose a poem the lines of which began with each letter of the alphabet, in order, with the exception of X. The poem was delivered at speed, the last two lines showing her contempt of the task:

"Yes, this thy servant upon the path of folly,  
Zealously endeavouring that she follow a fool."

Patience Worth also communicated a poem whilst Mrs. Curran sat down to write a letter to a friend.

But though these abilities were seemingly beyond those of Mrs. Curran, they are hardly supernatural. See for example the chapter "The Momentary Muse" in Paul Tabori's book The Art of Folly (1961), where the reader will find many accounts of poets, very much on this side of the grave, to parallel Patience Worth's antics.

So did Mrs. Curran simply find, through the use of her ouija board, another key to the depths of her own submerged creativity? Whilst I think that certainly explains a large part of the origin of Patience Worth's output, I would not claim it to be the whole story. The alleged genuineness of her seventeenth century English, plus a knowledge of the Bible apparently beyond that of Mrs. Curran, for example, both tend to go against such a theory. On the other hand, Patience Worth did use some words which belong to a later period than her own, which makes for complications on a simple spirit front.

Subliminal Creative Faculties: the picture, or at least part of it, is this. Within each of us, below our relatively sluggish conscious minds, lies a submerged pool of creative energy, of a truly bewildering extent and intricacy. The odd thing is that in most people, this pool, with all its richness of talent, should remain submerged beneath the (relatively) talent-less conscious mind, being rarely tapped by the majority in the course of their daily lives. But this energy can be tapped in ways which have become embellished with spiritualist or reincarnational bric-a-brac. Why has the process become so embellished? I think perhaps because of the very mystery of the comparison between the glittering creation and the normal drabness of every-day surface consciousness. The artist who is used to tapping the creative pool feels that inspiration is 'given' to him and not 'made by' him. How much greater is the mystery then to an ordinary housewife or a schoolboy or a shop assistant who suddenly find themselves the source of creation?

But if this creative pool is there, why is it submerged? Why has consciousness 'pushed it under', as it were?

I can only think of one answer to this, and it is an answer that I do not particularly relish. It is the old idea of the survival of the species creating consciousness to get on with the day to day processes of living. To filter out and suppress



anything which detracts from the successful pursuit of 'life' in its basic sense.

Look at the reports of artists as they describe the feelings of the joy that accompanies creativity. Tchaikovsky wrote, for example, of "that immeasurable sense of bliss which comes over me directly a new idea awakens in me.... I forget everything and behave like a madman."

If everyone were submerged in the pursuit of 'creation', the world would collapse in a furor of distracted poets, caring more for the products of their brains than the processes of survival. (There are those who, looking at the world as it is today, and at the 'low' nature of so-called civilised life, would deem poetic anarchy a good thing. They may be right. I will not take sides at this stage, merely being content to put forward the ideas.)

But to finish with Patience Worth, W.F. Prince wrote in his book The Case of Patience Worth (1927):

"Either our concept of what we call the subconscious must be radically altered, so as to include potencies of which we hitherto have had no knowledge, or else some cause operating through but not originating in the subconscious of Mrs. Curran must be acknowledged."

It would be extraordinary indeed if, one day in the future, it transpired that some of the most valuable research into the nature of the creative mind was performed by mediums and psychical researchers.

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- (1) An Anatomy of Inspiration by Rosemary Harding. 1967. Contains excellent material on all this, including comparisons of feeling of possession of both artists and mystics.
- (2) Unfinished Symphonies. Rosemary Brown. 1971.
- (3) The Link. Matthew Manning. 1975.
- (4) See chapter 14 of Frank Edwards' Stranger Than Science, 1959.
- (5) The Road to Xanadu. J.L. Lowes. 1927.
- (6) The Search for Bridey Murphy. Morey Bernstein. 1956.  
The Second Life of Susan Gavier. Jess Stearn. 1968.  
For some interesting cases of subliminally fabricated 're-incarnations', see Ian Stevenson's booklet Evidence for Survival from claimed memories of Former Incarnations, 1961.
- (7) An Inquiry into the Case of Shanti Devi. L.D. Gupta, N.R. Sharma, T.C. Mathur. 1936. But many accounts of this interesting case are available.