

Chapter Three

Past–Life Regression

There is no lack of plausible explanations for what we are about to consider. The greater the mystery, it seems, the swifter the flow of theories, and the subject of past–life regression is perhaps one of the most beguiling mysteries of all. The idea of going back over one’s own life and reliving events as they occurred: this is a difficult enough achievement to swallow. But to discover the lives of other people, people who are now dead, and to be able to go over the events of their lives in just the same way, to hear those people ‘talk’ again as once they might have done? To be able, now, to communicate with people from previous centuries: what kind of explanation can we find for that?

As this chapter will show, there *are* ways of understanding this phenomenon. Nothing can remain mysterious for ever, and if our knowledge is still limited, it is only a matter of time before experience and experiment fill it out. Meanwhile, we must be patient and methodical because, from what we have discovered to date, it seems we are about to reconstruct all our notions of the mind and mortality.

Verification procedures

Hypnosis is not an exact science with laws and regulations to follow, and memory is notoriously unreliable. Past–life regression combines the two, and we should insist on the most scrupulous methods of investigation. The memories of a subject’s own life, which are often recalled with all the tears, laughter and anger of the original event, always appear utterly true to life. But as they occurred during the subject’s own lifetime, they can always be checked against the facts and other people’s recollections.

The memories of a past life are, however, more difficult to verify. We can begin with the more obvious methods. If someone appears to be regressing to the life of an ancient Egyptian, we would expect him to understand and respond only in the language of the time. If he speaks perfectly good English, he cannot be back in the memories of someone who had no knowledge of the English language. The following case demonstrates this quite clearly.

A young woman in her early twenties came to one of my regression groups and proved to be an excellent subject for hypnosis. I began to take her back over her own life, and she responded by recalling vividly each moment to which she was taken. Then suddenly she stopped. It was obvious that she no longer understood our questions, so we asked her mother if there had been anything wrong with the girl at the age we had reached. She told us that her daughter had been brought up in Brazil and had spoken no English until the age of seventeen. Now, this fact had not been mentioned before, and none of us had even known the woman had grown up in Brazil; her English now was perfect. After a short lesson in Portuguese, we took the woman back to that same point and then addressed her in her native language. She understood immediately and continued to go back over the events of her childhood.

That young woman was experiencing the events of her life all over again; if she had not been, she would have been able to understand our English throughout the process of recall.

Language is a key factor in establishing the validity of a regression. A subject must be able to speak the language of the character to whom he or she has regressed, exactly as that character would have spoken it. For example, a Dutch woman who has lived in Britain for over twenty-five years came to one of our sessions. Her friends back home in the Netherlands always told her that she now spoke Dutch with an English accent. But when they heard the tape of her regression back to the times before her departure from the Netherlands, they were amazed to hear her speaking just like a native again.

Similarly a past-life regression should bring about a change in the speaking patterns of the subject. The accent will probably be different, but also the syntax will most likely have altered. A middle-aged bank manager from Hampshire will not sound the same, or use the same modes of speech, as a nineteenth-century Mancunian labourer, and under hypnosis a true regression will

bring out such changes. If a subject fails to understand slang expressions from the period to which he or she is claiming to be regressing, then again some doubt must be cast.

Above all, it is very important to remain critical and to resist the temptation to 'interpret' what someone says under hypnosis. We always try to avoid leading questions, even where this leads to protracted questioning or dead ends. For example, without hypnosis, we once asked a woman what she remembered about September 1939.

'Oh,' came the immediate reply, 'I was twenty-one that month and I had a beautiful blue dress for my party.'

Perhaps if we had slanted the question in a more obvious way, she would have recalled that World War II started that month! But people's memories are more often concerned with everyday matters, and it is only when they are prompted that they start to look beyond their personal circumstances. In regression, however, we cannot prompt, or we will quite fairly be accused of manipulation. This difficulty is compounded when dealing with memories from times when news was not as readily available as it is today. An eighteenth-century farmer would have known little of national significance, and the distribution of news would have incorporated inaccuracies and distortion. So we must be patient.

However difficult the task, there is always a way of conducting research on a past-life regression. It is often long and arduous, but as the case of Ray Bryant in Chapter 1 showed, it can repay the effort many times over. And as the following case shows, the truth will come out somehow.

A dental student volunteered for regression and was soon going back over events from her life. Later on in the session, she began to chatter away in a language which no one could understand. We suspected she might be regressing to a past life, and as the language sounded vaguely Germanic, one of the observers agreed to investigate all possible dialects of the Central European countries, ancient and modern. No progress was made, despite the research, until the student's mother heard a tape of her daughter's regression. She recognized the language immediately. It was the baby-language the girl used to babble away in as a child.

Fantasy and imagination

There are some people who hold that all past-life regressions are pure fantasy. If the fantasy happens to coincide with verifiable truth, then that is all it is: coincidence. It is impossible, these people say, for memories to live on; therefore, the only explanation must be that it is the imagination at work.

There is some truth in this theory. Think of the games you used to play as a child, where a back garden or a bedroom floor could become an enchanted, foreign country, peopled by knights, princesses, fairies, cowboys and others. Remember how real those games seemed, how powerful the dramas that were played out. That was imagination, but at such an age it could easily assume the same importance as reality.

Under hypnosis, an adult can rediscover the imaginative delights of the unconscious mind and can once again convince himself that fantasy is in fact reality. There is nothing deliberate or misleading in this; it is just that the imaginative capacity of the unconscious is far more powerful than we are used to in everyday life. Adults, too, have greater knowledge and experience than children, so when they come to fantasize in the relaxed atmosphere of hypnosis they can produce quite startlingly lifelike dramas.

It is, however, fairly easy to spot a fantasy at work. Take the young woman who claimed, under hypnosis, to be called Josephine. Unsurprisingly, she was sailing to France to see an emperor named Napoleon. We began to question her. Was the ship she was sailing on clinker- or carvel-built? She did not understand the question, and admittedly it was rather technical. Instead, we asked her to look over the side and tell us whether the planks overlapped or simply met one another. Back came her reply:

'It is not made of wood; it is all metal.'

We can be pretty certain that Napoleon preceded the first all-metal ship by a good few years!

Similarly, one session we held in the Midlands was attended by a local journalist. He had come to write a story on regression and ended up by regressing himself. He said his name was Brian

Boru, the famous king of ancient Ireland, and the details he produced were marvellously lifelike and evocative. The session had, in fact, become quite fascinating until a journalist from another paper asked:

‘If you wanted to go to England, how would you travel there?’

He replied immediately: ‘Sure, I’d go to Shannon and fly.’

Such feats of imagination are common under hypnosis, but they are not intended to deceive; indeed, the person who produces them is usually astounded. It is always possible to identify them, however, even if it takes lengthy questioning. Many take their theme from Hollywood films or classic tales, and the following example shows just how realistic a performance they can produce.

An American woman in her twenties, on her first visit to one of my regression groups, gave us a tale straight out of Tennessee Williams. She said she was a girl living in the Everglades in the early nineteenth century. At one point she mentioned that her brother was in the army and visiting France with the American Expeditionary Force. We asked her if she had ever seen him in uniform, and she said she had. She was then put to a time when she was looking at him in his uniform, and asked to describe it. She gave a pretty accurate picture of a uniform of the period but did not describe the badge. We then told her the badge should contain stags and a crow, which in fact would be quite untrue. She accepted this and even described it as though she were seeing it herself. Her tale, fascinating as it was, was a fantasy.

In another regression, that same American woman told us she was being kept virtually a prisoner in the home of an uncle. She said she was being forced to sign papers at regular intervals, handing properties over to her uncle. We questioned her on this:

Q: ‘Why does he not ask you to sign one giving him all at once?’

A: ‘The King would not allow it.’

Q: ‘Who is the King?’

A: ‘Edward I.’

That seems reasonable, doesn’t it? Except that if you were living in the time of Edward I, you would know him as King Edward—for who could tell he would be the first of many?

Sometimes the fantasies which people produce under hypnosis can be as entertaining as those for which no ‘rational’ explanation can be found. Just because they are fantasies, the powers of the unconscious which called them up are no less impressive for that, and everyone who has produced such a tale in one of our sessions has been amazed to find such creativity within themselves. But the role of the imagination can always be identified by simple methods such as those used on the previous cases. It cannot be identified in the cases which follow. The lives that are recalled are not from the pages of some bestselling book, nor are they copied from some Hollywood film. They are real people, living ordinary, often uneventful lives, whose memories have somehow been preserved after their death. It is time, then, to discard the theory of fantasy, for it cannot explain what we know.

Parallel universes

In the 1920s the world of physics was shaken to its foundations by the development of a new theory. Called the quantum theory, it redefined the nature of matter and consequently revolutionized our understanding of the world. Essentially, it stated that the atomic world is far from comprehensible and rational. A sub-atomic particle such as the electron does not follow any path or route which can be pre-determined; it is, as far as we perceive it, thoroughly unstable and unpredictable. We have the equipment to identify an electron, to plot its position at any one moment, but we have absolutely no idea where it will be next. The same goes for all other sub-atomic particles, and for atoms: we cannot predict their movements with any confidence at all.

In other words, what seems to us a solid and reassuringly concrete world is in fact a hazy jumble of incomprehensible particles.

Now, as if this were not enough to shatter our complacency about the world and about ourselves, a new theory based on quantum physics was put forward by the physicist Hugh Everett in 1957. It was called the theory of parallel universes. For every movement of an atomic or sub-

atomic particle, a multitude of different movements could have taken place, all equally unpredictable and arbitrary. And if each such movement were equally likely or unlikely, each must in fact have happened. So alongside our universe, the universe we see and experience every day, there must be an infinite number of parallel universes which are just as 'real' as our own, with observers as 'real' as we consider ourselves to be.

Crazy? It sounds so, of course, but then the quantum theory itself is shocking enough. And if the theory of parallel universes remains a possibility amongst physicists, we are certainly in no position to dispute it. But what I am trying to tell you in this book is shocking: people have experienced the lives of the dead. If we are to comprehend something as momentous as that, we must be prepared for the unusual.

So, somewhere, a world might exist where Hitler won the last war, where the person you married decided to marry someone else. Where your favourite song was never sung. Could there be a link between us and these parallel universes? We cannot tell, but perhaps it may give us a clue as to why one woman, when regressed under hypnosis, insisted that Queen Victoria was on the throne as late as 1915. Consciously, she knew that Queen Victoria had died in 1901, but under hypnosis she could not be shaken from her belief that she was still alive fourteen years later.

The following case study could serve to illustrate several of the theories for hypnotic regression which we will deal with later. It could possibly be a case of cryptomnesia, where everything the mind has ever experienced or read is stored in the unconscious; it could be a case of reincarnation. But we will look at it here to see whether it casts any more light on the theory of parallel universes.

Ann Dowling originally came to our hypnotic regression sessions because of recurrent nightmares which, from early childhood, had always followed the same pattern. In one, she was sitting in a bare room, absolutely terrified; in another, she was in a dank, dirty basement with a rough-looking man who was threatening her with a knife. These nightmares were so frightening that her parents, and then her late husband, had to waken her to stop her screaming.

Under hypnosis, we found the key to her nightmares. Her first regression was to a little girl called Sarah Williams, living on the streets of Everton in the early 1800s. Her father had died, and instead of going into an orphanage she had run away from the authorities. Her mother had died giving birth to her, and as far as she knew she had no other relatives.

When we first found her, Sarah was sitting at home, cold, hungry and apprehensive. Night was falling, and her father had not returned from the docks, where he worked as a labourer. As the evening wore on, the little girl became more and more agitated, looking out of the window in the hope of catching sight of her father. Suddenly, she said a man was coming to the door. There was a pause, and she seemed to be listening to what he had to say. Then she broke down completely.

A: 'E... e... says me dad isn't comin' 'ome.'

Q: 'Who says that?'

A: 'E says 'is name's Johnson.'

Q: 'What exactly did he tell you?'

A: 'E... said a 'orse done somethin' to me dad... me dad isn't comin' 'ome an' I got to go wi' 'im... a 'orse done somethin' terrible to me dad.'

She was asked whether any neighbours could help, and she said that a Mrs Vaughan lived next door, but she didn't want to go and see her; she would wait until her dad got home. Lonely and afraid, the poor girl was unable to comprehend a world without her father, the only person she was close to; the only person, it seemed, who cared for her.

A: 'E wouldn't leave me, e love me, e'll come 'ome, e loves me.'

It was a pitiful sight, and a very moving experience for everyone present. But Sarah's plight grew worse. We brought her forward twenty-four hours and found her still in the same room. The house, however, was practically bare of furniture, and she was hungry. We asked her what had happened to the furniture, and she said that Mrs Vaughan and the other neighbours had 'borrowed'

it, but that her father would get it back when he came home. Not only had they stolen her furniture, they had obviously not fed her.

With her father dead, Sarah was forced out onto the streets and for years survived on her wits, receiving charity occasionally but usually living on scraps of food and sleeping in whatever shelter she could find. Over a hundred hours of regression brought out the fascinating and sad details of her poverty-stricken life, and extraordinary information such as this, when we sent her to 12 July 1835:

Q: 'What are you doing today Sarah?'

A: 'Do... I gotta stay in, can't go out today.'

Q: 'Why not?'

A: 'It's them.'

Q: 'Who's them?'

A: 'Them Irish. They're mad, fighting all over the place. They must've been 'avin' that 'oly water again.'

Q: 'It can't be that bad.'

A: 'It is. They've 'ad to fetch the soldiers out.'

Q: 'What day is it?'

A: 'It's Sunday. That's why the've 'ad the 'oly water.'

On that weekend in July 1835, the records show that there was serious rioting in the neighbourhood of Marybone, Tithebarn Street, Vauxhall Road and other parts of the town. The military were called out on 12 July. It was a Sunday.

Another time we put Sarah back to January 1839 and found her huddled in a ball, shivering and very frightened.

Q: 'What's the matter, Sarah?'

A: 'It's awful, blowin' roofs off and howlin'.'

On 6th January 1839 a hurricane descended on Liverpool and continued until the following afternoon, wreaking havoc with life and property.

Taken to 1848, Sarah produced this memorable piece of local gossip:

Q: 'Anything happening in Liverpool, Sarah?'

A: 'They're all talkin' about 'im.'

Q: 'Talking about who?'

A: ''im Queen's 'usband. She's mad, you know.'

Q: 'What makes you say that?'

A: 'Everyone knows it. He's been carrin' on wi' Mayor's wife. He keeps comin' to see 'er. 'E's 'ad to give 'er a cradle for t'babby.'

The records show that on 30th October 1848 the Mayoress was presented with a miniature silver cradle for having given birth during the term of office of her husband, Thomas Berry Horsfall.

We did manage to locate the source of Ann's second nightmare:

Q: 'Where are you?'

A: 'In... a... basement.'

Q: 'Where is this room?'

A: 'In a house.'

Q: 'I know it's in a house, but in which town? Where is this house?'

A: 'Oh... oh... it... Chaucer Road.'

Q: 'Chaucer Road. But where? Which town?'

A: 'Don't know. (She begins to shout.) Don't like this room. Don't... like this room.'

Q: 'Who is with you?'

A: 'Lindy... and Tony... and Jimmy... an' Jacky.'

Q: 'Why are you afraid?'

A: 'Don't like this room!'

Q: 'I know you don't, Sarah, but why are you so frightened? Why don't you like this room?'

A: 'It's that man. It's that man!'

Q: 'What man?'

A: 'Oh... oh... oh.' (She begins to cry.) 'Get the kids out.'

Q: 'Alright, Sarah, we'll get the kids out.'

A: 'Oh... he's got... he's got a big... it's like a knife.' (She screams.) 'He's hitting me... He's coming... He's coming!'

Like all other volunteers who experience past-life regression, Ann Dowling was put through a marathon each time she underwent hypnosis. Questions were thrown at her one after the other; she was switched from one period of Sarah's life to another, and often she was taken to further characters who emerged from the sessions. Throughout such ordeals, Ann never stumbled, never made a mistake and, when telling of the life of Sarah, immediately spoke with the vocabulary, accent and grammar of a nineteenth-century Liverpoolian waif.

One of the characters Ann also regressed to was a rather pompous eighteenth-century slavery captain. The following exchange shows just how accurate Ann could be as regards dates:

Q: 'What year is it?'

A: 'You don't know the year, man? It is the year of Our Lord 1782.'

Q: 'What month is it?'

A: 'What month is it? Where the devil are you from? It is Sunday 16 June.'

Q: 'I suppose you have been to church then?'

A: 'You don't find many churches in the middle of the Caribbean.'

In all the sessions we conducted with Ann Dowling, and of all the characters who emerged from her unconscious, the factual errors she made were insignificant. For a woman who left school at an early age, her knowledge of dates, weather reports and historical events is quite staggering.

The theory of parallel universes is exciting, for it turns our present knowledge of the world upside-down. It might be possible to enter one of those parallel universes, but as yet we cannot be sure; if physicists are exploring its potential, we should certainly keep an open mind.

To explain the astonishing past-life regressions of Ann Dowling, however, we must surely look further, because one question still remains: did Sarah Williams really exist?

Cosmic memory

In the last section we considered a theory which still forms part of the current discussion of nuclear physics. The theory of cosmic memory has an equally scientific base. According to the first law of thermodynamics, 'heat is a form of energy', and energy can be neither manufactured nor destroyed. It can only be changed from one form into another.

Those who believe in cosmic memory take this principle and apply it to the process of thought. The brain produces brainwaves which may be measured on an instrument and which are in essence a form of energy. If energy can be neither manufactured nor destroyed, the brainwaves we produce every day must exist in some form beyond their immediate conception. Every thought, every experience that was ever recorded, continues to exist *somewhere*, perhaps, rather like short-wave radio broadcasts, they are to be found on some 'wavelength' in the ether. But perhaps, too, they find their destination.

Is there a central recording device which stores the memories of time and which passes out its information to those who are receptive to it? Are the cases of past-life regression recorded in this book examples of individuals who have somehow contacted a form of cosmic computer?

A difficult theory to accept of course, but as we should know by now, difficulty is no reason for rejecting an explanation. One fact in its favour is the uncanny chronological accuracy of regresses.

Under hypnosis, subjects are asked to go back to specific dates, and every time they go straight to that date, with an accuracy which does seem to suggest the logical functioning of a computer.

We have no specific case studies which either prove or disprove the cosmic memory theory; it could apply to all or none. Pat Roberts' story provides a useful test.

Pat was twenty-six when she first came to one of our regression sessions. She lived with her husband in one of Liverpool's suburbs and knew little about local history. She proved an excellent subject for hypnosis and, when asked to go back to times before she was born, began to recall the life of a girl named Frances. We asked her what her surname was, but she continually avoided giving us an answer:

Q: 'What is your second name, Frances?'

A: 'You keep asking this, don't you? My father is Joe, the cobbler, and he lives in Bankfield Street.'

On another occasion she was more specific:

Q: 'Do you know what your address is? The number on your door and the street?'

A: 'Got something to tell people if I get lost.'

Q: 'What is it?'

A: (She begins to sing a rhyme.) 'Frances-Mary-Rodriguez-10-Bankfield-Street-Bootle.'

Gore's Liverpool directories for the years 1888 and 1889 show that number 10 Bankfield Street, Bootle, was the home of a cobbler name Joe Rodriguez.

In later years, when Frances' fortunes had improved considerably, she was never fully accepted by the middle-class society in which she then moved. The reason obviously lies here, in her Portuguese maiden name.

From Pat's sessions we discovered that Frances did not go to school—by no means uncommon in mid-nineteenth-century Britain—but she did gain some education:

Q: 'Have you ever been to school?'

A: 'Mm.'

Q: 'Where?'

A: 'Just to that lady. Don't like her.'

Q: 'What's her name?'

A: 'Mrs Van... Van... something. I don't know.'

Q: 'And where does she live?'

A: 'Don't know. My dad took me.'

Q: 'Did you walk?'

A: 'No. It was a long way. But I couldn't do my letters and I told my dad I didn't like it. He said I didn't have to go there any more.'

Again, Gore's directories for the 1850s record that an Elizabeth Van Gelder ran a 'ladies seminary' at 28 Aigburth Street, near Smithdown Lane. From Bankfield Street this would have been about a three-mile walk.

Frances married when she was fairly young, and when asked about it, she said she was married in 'the little relief church' in Bootle. The staff of Bootle Reference Library hadn't heard of such a place but spent several weeks trying to locate a reference to it. Finally they came across the church of St Mary's erected in 1827 to accommodate the overflow of worshippers from another church of the same name at Walton-on-the-Hill. The 'relief church' was destroyed during the last war, and today there is no trace of St Mary's. The librarian in Bootle assured us that until we had raised this query she had never heard of 'the little relief church' and that in the twenty years she had worked there no one had enquired about it.

One member of our group asked Frances if she had ever been for a ride on an overhead railway:

A: 'The Dingle... Seaforth... the Dockers' Umbrella.'

Q: 'That's right. Have you been on it?'

A: 'Yes, I have. It's a bit rickety, isn't it?'

Q: 'Yes.'

A: (She begins to sing.) 'On the Dingle Seaforth Overhead Line, the Overhead Line... That's a song, you know.'

Now, according to most records, this line (which is now defunct) came into operation only in the 1890s, so how could Frances have ridden on it, as she claimed, in the 1860s? A little research revealed what few still realize, that in 1855 the dock branch of the Yorkshire & Cheshire Railway was opened eighteen feet above the level of the dock quay. So 'the dockers' umbrella', as it was affectionately called, was operational, just as Frances said.

Pat Roberts' past-life regression sessions produced a wealth of remarkable detail, which we went to great lengths to check. She spoke of a 'mission church', which did exist as the Bootle-cum-Lineacre Mission in Ash Street, on the site of the present Baptist church. In the 1850s, the period to which Pat was referring, worshippers used to meet in people's homes and various halls; the venue always known as 'the mission'. Pat mentioned the names of coffee-houses and stores that have long since disappeared. She mentioned moving from one house in Canning Street to another, and Gore's records confirm a move from 32 to 65 Canning Street. She referred to herself as Frances during some regressions, and Franny in others; the records tally on this difference.

She also spoke of personal feelings, such as her resentment against her middle-class environment after her second marriage, to an accountant named Frederick Jones:

Q: 'Now that you have married into what is effectively a rich family, are you moving in different circles?'

A: 'Trying to.'

Q: 'What about the big societies or ladies' groups?'

A: 'No, I'm not accepted.'

Q: 'Because of your accent?'

A: 'Mm, and my sallow skin.'

Q: 'Does that anger you?'

A: 'They can take me or leave me, I couldn't give a bugger.'

The mention of her skin, of course, would refer to her Portuguese lineage.

But perhaps most poignant of all is Frances' last appearance. The parish register shows that in the churchyard of St Mary's Bootle there stood a headstone bearing the name 'Frances Jones, died 17th of September 1913.' The headstone, along with the church, was destroyed during World War II, ten years before Pat's birth, so she cannot have seen it, even if she had known of a woman called Frances Jones. But it is the inscription which tells the real tale: 'Gone but not forgotten.'

We have proved, beyond all reasonable doubt, that Frances is not forgotten. She comes back to us through the unconscious memories of Pat Roberts, together with all the actions and accents and language she would have used then. How does Pat have access to those memories? Is it by some form of contact with a cosmic computer? If so, perhaps anyone could reach out and revive the memories of Frances Rodriguez. As yet, however, we have never had any cases of people regressing to the same character.

The cosmic memory theory is a step, a useful pointer along the route of discovery we have undertaken. We cannot rely on it to answer our questions, but it does give us an idea of the enormity of the subject we are tackling.

How many more secrets does this hidden mind of ours conceal?

The collective unconscious

The psychiatrist CG Jung based much of his theory of the mind around the idea of the collective unconscious. According to this, the past experience of the human race is incorporated into the brain structure which each person inherits as a baby. This experience is inherited in the form of archetypes, or typical modes of human behaviour. Examples of these are the animus and anima—the ‘male’ and ‘female’ influences—the wise old man and the great mother. Many others, he felt, exist within the unconscious, creating a pool of behaviour types which exert influence on the conscious mind.

Each individual, according to Jung, creates his own ‘persona’ out of his experiences of the world, and presents to other people the character he wishes himself to be. This persona arises from the individual’s personal unconscious, but it is also influenced by the archetypes of the collective unconscious which co-exist alongside. The opposite of the persona, which Jung called the ‘shadow’, consists of all those characteristics of the personal and collective unconscious which the individual wishes to keep hidden from other people.

A well-balanced person, therefore, would not repress too much of his character, creating a shadow self bulging with unreleased traits; he would be confident enough of the persona he presented to the world every day to allow it to show weakness as well as strength.

To put it simply, many different personality types are stored deep within every one of us, all capable of being aroused and brought to the surface. In the mind of every hero is a coward; for every kind person, a sadist; for every wit, a dullard.

The case of Sue Atkins is a perfect example of what could be the collective unconscious and conflicting personality types at work. She is highly intelligent, speaks several languages fluently and is the senior editor of a major English-French dictionary. The characters to whom she regresses—an illiterate orphan boy named Charlie and a stern seventeenth-century Jesuit priest—are almost diametric opposites of the kind of person she is herself.

Charlie lived at the beginning of this century, in a village he calls Willingford. We have been unable to trace such a village, even though he gives detailed descriptions of his surroundings—a river, with caves nearby in which he once hid with a band of gypsies. The village church was called St Michael’s. (The village of Wichenford, near Worcester, has the river Severn close by sandstone caves and a church called St Michael’s, so Charlie could be mispronouncing the name.)

Charlie is as unlike Sue as could be. He speaks a rough-and-ready sort of English, swears and shows no signs of any great intelligence. Here he is showing a typically blasphemous approach to the church:

Q: ‘What is the name of the church?’

A: ‘St Michael’s. I know who St Michael was—he was the angel with the sword.’

Q: ‘What kind of church is it?’

A: ‘Well... it’s just a church. It smells inside and it smells outside and it’s got bodies all around it.’

Q: ‘What religion is it?’

A: ‘Just a church. Got bodies all around it; it’s planted in the middle of bodies. You got to walk through dead bodies to get in and then they give you pieces of somebody’s dead body if you’re old enough. And then they say, I am the resurrection and the life. And it seems to me a load of old b...’

Even raucous Charlie couldn’t bring himself to be quite blasphemous enough in the end. At another point, Charlie talks about religion:

A: ‘You can call people bleedin’ bastards, but if you call them bleedin’ Jesuses, it comes down—that’s what St Michael’s for—I once called somebody a bleedin’ Jesus, and the teacher took me out and put me ’ead into school bucket... right there... and it were winter, and she put it in three times, and then she said, “spit out that word” and I spat it out, right back into bloody bucket.’

With Father Antony Bennet the subject of religion reoccurs. (If Jung’s theory is to be accepted, it must be a particularly difficult theme for Sue Atkins.) Antony is very different from both Sue and Charlie. Born in the first half of the seventeenth century, he had a conventional and restricted

upbringing, becoming a Jesuit priest on the wishes of his father. By the time he was middle-aged, however, he had begun to express doubts and fears.

Q: 'What are you doing?'

A: 'I am praying for strength.'

Q: 'Strength for what?'

A: 'Strength to live.'

Q: 'Why is it difficult to live?'

A: 'I have fears. I fear the emptiness.'

Q: 'What are you afraid of?'

A: 'Afraid of God's absence. If God turns His look away from you.'

Q: 'But you have done nothing to make God turn from you.'

A: 'I have doubted.'

Q: 'Don't you think He will understand?'

A: 'I have led a barren life. We must surmount the barren.'

Q: 'How do you mean?'

A: 'My life of prayer is empty.'

Q: 'Why? Have you done no deeds?'

A: 'Deeds are of no account. I have... every priest knows from his confessional... succour to his people... that into one's spiritual life... can become barren... deserts, and a priest is God's help... waters the desert of his people... but there is no one to water my desert. God has turned away.'

Q: 'Why do you think that, Father?'

A: 'I fear God because He is not looking. I fear God because I must live although He is not looking.'

Q: 'But why should God not look at you?'

A: (He is now very upset.) 'God has left me! God has left me!'

Q: 'God has not left you.'

A: (He sobs.) 'God has left me. I fear the Antichrist.'

At a later point, when the priest was seriously ill, he seemed to have come to terms with his predicament:

A: 'I have no fears about the future. God will take me to Him, and that will be the beginning. I know it will be the beginning. I am not afraid. I believe in God. I am tired of this earth, its weariness, the quarrelling and the fighting and the worldliness.'

Or is there the unmistakable tone there of someone trying very hard to convince himself?

Interestingly enough, Sue feels no affinity with the impudent Charlie, and in fact rather dislikes him. But there is one character in her regressions she despises so much she refuses under any circumstances to experience it a second time. The character is a lewd prostitute living in the nineteenth century, whose life, language and habits are all so at odds with Sue's that she found her one encounter too upsetting to repeat.

The experiences of Sue Atkins under hypnosis seemed to show that her unconscious mind had an opposite for everything in which she believed. Her own personal philosophy, her vocation, her spiritual beliefs, even her language—all these were mocked by the characters she carried within her. Perhaps the struggle between Sue's persona—her every day character—and her shadow self is at the root of these regressions; again, we cannot be sure. Perhaps, as has been suggested elsewhere, the characters of Charlie and Antony are *inherited* personalities, passed on through her genes just as her physical make-up was passed on? Scientists have no evidence that the DNA structure of cells can accommodate this kind of information, but they are not one hundred per cent certain. If it were possible for psychological traits to be inherited alongside physiological features, could the characters of Charlie and Antony be passive elements co-existing alongside the dominating inherited character which is Sue's? Just as red hair in one person may be a recessive strain, unlikely

to produce red hair in any offspring, a personality could be recessive, only reappearing some generations on.

We are, of course, dealing in speculation now, and going against the grain of current scientific thinking. In our search for understanding, however, nothing can be excluded from consideration, and we will deal with this theory of genetic inheritance a little later on.

But to illustrate the main Jungian thesis of this section, we will go over some of the more interesting cases relating to conflicting personality types. Cases of this kind, where the character who emerges from regression seems to differ so completely from the person under hypnosis, are a tiny minority of the regressions I have recorded; they should not be taken as typical.

Dianne is an intelligent, well-educated and polite young woman who has a responsible job in a law firm. She teaches in her local Sunday School. Under hypnosis she regresses to someone called Ella:

Q: 'Ella, are you married?'

A: 'No, I've got enough wi' this bloody lot.'

Q: 'Which bloody lot?'

A: 'Those bloody kids. Me mother's buggered off.'

Q: 'Where's your father?'

A: 'He's bloody drunk ag'in.'

Ella, it seems, lived on a barge, on the Grand Union Canal and was only ever known as 'Ella the Boat'. She could neither read nor write and appeared to have absolutely no knowledge of the world at large. She was coarse, vulgar and uneducated, the antithesis of Dianne.

On one occasion we found her lying in a strange bed with a king-sized hangover. She had no idea where she was or whom she had slept with. All she could remember was drinking the previous night at a canal-side inn, celebrating the wedding of one Margaret Bower.

A similar case occurred with George. Throughout his adult life he had been shy and unable to mix with women. Under hypnosis, he regressed to someone called Martin and in doing so switched quite naturally to a gruff and uncouth style of delivery. Martin said he was eighteen years old and apprenticed to a blacksmith in a Cheshire village. He had many girlfriends, and one in particular called Kathy, who was attractive, with long blonde hair. When we sent him to any time he was in Kathy's company, he found himself on the banks of a stream which he called Grinley Brook. As we listened to his half of his conversation with Kathy, we were struck by the confidence which contrasted so strongly with George's own shyness. Throughout the memories of Martin, right up to his death in a fire at the forge where he ran his own business, the same strong character showed itself time and again. Though he married Kathy, he went philandering at every opportunity he could find.

Wishful thinking? Undoubtedly the discovery of Martin has helped George overcome his crippling shyness towards women; by adding just a hint of that arrogant personality to his own, he has changed his outlook on the world. But observers of his regression are all reluctant to ascribe it to wish-fulfilment. The ease with which George slips into the memories of Martin, the authentic descriptions of his surroundings, the honest responses under quick-fire questioning—these are all involuntary.

Mike is a hard-working American executive, a no-nonsense man who drinks little and maintains a firm control over his life. At his first regression session he immediately took on the character of Stephen, a Dublin down-and-out and drunkard. No actor could have portrayed Stephen more realistically, as he stumbled from drink to drink, cadging money and eating in soup kitchens. Full of wit and charm when he wanted, Stephen's was a sad tale, ending in severe alcoholic illness and poverty. During the lengthy sessions we conducted with Mike, all kinds of fascinating detail about Dublin life emerged—much of it later verified against the records, and the picture we finally assembled was one of the most thorough we have. But what was most remarkable was the contrast between sober, hard-working Mike and drunk, scrounging Stephen. A coincidence?

Philip is another successful businessman. Intelligent and well educated, he has a horror of drugs of any kind, but under hypnosis he regressed to Silas, an East Anglian tramp who spent his summers wandering about the countryside eating hallucinogenic mushrooms! According to Silas, the mushrooms gave him a feeling of euphoria, and he would sit for hours ‘watching the flowers grow’. A character like Silas would not appear in the records, so we have had no luck in tracing him, but he is able to provide very accurate descriptions of districts Philip has never visited. We came across a book of nineteenth-century place-names in East Anglia which showed that many of them were different from their modern counterparts; when we put some of the old names to Silas, he responded as he had not done to suggestions of twentieth-century names. Again, an interesting regression in itself, but with the added curiosity of the personality distinctions.

Andrew Selby, a civil engineer for the water board in London, is a perfectionist in everything he does: home repairs, decorations, rewiring, plumbing, painting—everything he turns his hand to, he has to do painstakingly well. There is nothing he will not tackle, nothing defeats him. But one aspect of his character puzzled him: he felt uneasy in the company of disabled people and could not understand why he should feel so uncomfortable about physical disability.

Under hypnosis he regressed to Geoffrey, a helpless victim of what would appear to have been cerebral palsy. He was confined to a wheelchair, had difficulty in speaking and showed all the uncontrollable body movements characteristic of spasticity. After the regression, Andrew found he had lost his fear of disability, perhaps because he can claim to have experienced it himself. And he retained his other abilities too: if anything, the experience has heightened his determination to let no task beat him.

Our last example is John Kingsale, the premier baron of Ireland, who regressed very easily when he attended one of my sessions. Because of his class, we expected him to regress to a character we could easily research from his family tree. Instead, he brought out the memories of a farm labourer called Tom Jenkins, who supplemented his meagre income with a spot of smuggling. When we first came upon him, it was night-time and he, with the rest of his gang, was waiting at a small cove in Sussex. No one present, including Lord Kingsale, had ever heard of the cove, but a quick check in a gazetteer showed that it did indeed exist. The gang was waiting for a boatload of contraband from France but was surprised by a cutter full of revenue men, all armed with pistols. Tom was shot in the chest and killed.

The theory of the collective unconscious is a fascinating one, and of great importance in understanding the modern psyche. It must have some bearing on the cases we have discussed here, and it probably answers some of the questions which hypnotic regression arouses. But it cannot help us when we come to this point: many of the cases mentioned so far have revealed information which the subject could not have previously known. The influence of the unconscious archetypes cannot extend to producing accurate historical data, so, necessarily, the regressions must be based on a different source.

It is that source we are still trying to find.

Spiritualism

The belief in the spirit world is not as widespread as once it was. In the 1920s and 1930s it was very fashionable to attend a séance now and again, and if people did not commit themselves utterly to the belief, they did at least pay it a good deal of respect. Even now, there are several mediums who appear regularly in our newspapers, and many more who make a good living from apparently putting people in touch with the dead. But perhaps we live in a more cynical age, for the salad days of spiritualism seem to have passed.

Like the theory of reincarnation, spiritualism states that there is a continued existence of some human element after death. But spiritualists insist that the life force—or whatever it is that survives the death of the body—inhabits another kind of universe and can communicate with us only through intermediaries, or mediums.

These mediums do seem to see the people who, as they say, are ‘on the other side’. The question is: are they seeing them in the same extraordinary way as my regression subjects ‘see’ individuals from the past? The following example might illuminate us.

During the period when I lectured on extra-sensory perceptions for Liverpool Education Authority in a series of adult education classes, I regularly invited clairvoyants to demonstrate their abilities to my students. There was no question of trickery or foreknowledge in any of them. They were not stage performers, just genuine individuals who were quite sincere in their beliefs.

On one particular occasion I invited a friend of mind who was highly regarded within spiritualist circles. In the audience was a mother and a daughter. They did not resemble each other physically and seldom sat together in the classroom; in fact, not many people knew they were related. The spiritualist began to tell the mother about her late husband and came out with such an accurate portrait of the man that she was quite shocked by what she heard. He described a healthy, vigorous man, just as the woman remembered. Later on, the spiritualist addressed the daughter, not knowing of the family relationship. He described her father as she last knew him, which was when he was sick, with an amputated leg. Again, the portrait was accurate. When the daughter was very young, her mother and father had divorced, and she had been brought up by her mother alone. Many years later, the daughter searched out her father and found him disabled, with only one leg. Her mother never saw the man in that state and had memories of him only as a fit young man.

If the spiritualist had been communicating with the dead man, he would have known that the women were related. What seems to have been happening, then, was that he picked up on their conscious or unconscious memories and produced portraits of what he thought were two separate individuals.

The ability to key into other people's thoughts is interesting in itself, and we will talk about telepathy in the next section, but 'seeing' a person in the way that spiritualist 'saw' the dead man is very different from hypnotic regression. People come away from my sessions having experienced the life of another person, having seen what that person saw, smelt the same smells, felt the same emotions.

Spiritualists do not, of course, accept the telepathy explanation. They insist that a subject under regressive hypnosis becomes a hyper-sensitive medium, able to bypass the normal spirit guide and be taken over by a free-roaming spirit. Like several of the other theories we have been considering, spiritualism could apply to every case of regression. But it has one main weakness as far as we are concerned. If a wandering spirit takes over the unconscious mind during hypnotic regression, it must get trapped there, because all successful regressees have been able to go back to such memories once they have been discovered. Not only that: their sense of chronology and the accuracy of those memories remain unimpaired no matter how long the gap between regressions. Now, since most people seem able to regress to several different lives, they must have several wandering spirits trapped in their unconscious minds. You don't have to be a mathematician to realize that the population of the spirit world would be lowered pretty quickly at this rate.

The impulse to put one's faith in spiritualism is understandable. Remember, we are dealing with an incredible phenomenon: ordinary people, like you or me, are reliving the past lives of people who are dead. They are going through experiences which often change their lives and certainly change the way they think. Their everyday world view is not sophisticated enough to cope with such events, and they often struggle to make any sense of it at all. But one of my intentions with this book is to show that, no matter how extraordinary it is, hypnotic regression can be assessed without leaping to hasty conclusions.

The case for spiritualism, it seems to me, is too thin. It may have an appealing glamour, but it doesn't seem to get at the heart of these cases of hypnotic regression. There is still something missing, some intangible element that causes the past to be brought back to life. So that when the words 'You are going back...' sound the start of another session, the person in the chair once again enters a world which only he can know. If we can probe the mystery, we might make it a world which we all can share.

Telepathy

Telepathy is a catch-all word which describes a variety of interesting functions of the mind. Think of the times when the name of an old friend enters your head for no reason, and then within a few days you hear from him for the first time in years. And what about those times when you decide on an action at exactly the same time as someone else undertakes it? Or when two people start

speaking at the same time and find they are saying the same thing? Like the experience of *déjà vu*, these telepathic moments are unsettling.

A recent experiment with dolphins seems to suggest that they have a more advanced telepathic ability. Two dolphins were placed in tanks of water separated by material which would not allow sound waves or any other kind of vibrations to pass from one to the other. In the tanks was a series of buttons which operated coloured lights. When one dolphin lit any light, the other consistently activated the same one.

It is likely that a certain amount of this kind of telepathic activity goes on at my hypnotic regression sessions, partly because each one lasts several hours and consists of a small group of people sitting together in one room. But is telepathy sufficient to produce some of the dazzling tales we have witnessed so far? And if it is, why do the regressions so often consist of quite banal information, often crudely presented and not always completely accurate? Specialists are frequently to be found at my sessions—writers, historians, scientists—but their knowledge very rarely enters the answers of subjects under regression.

At a session in America, attended by several teachers of English literature, a woman under regression said she was reading a book of poems by one particular author. The teachers in the group all denied that this author had published any work by the year in which the woman found herself. They concluded, therefore, that the regression was a fantasy. When the woman came out of her regression, she agreed with the opinion of her colleagues. But later, when we checked in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, we found they were all wrong: the author had published a volume of poetry by the date stated during the regression.

Obviously, subjects are able to produce accurate information under hypnosis without having to rely on telepathy. But in order to satisfy our sternest critics, we make every effort to extract details during a regression before undertaking research; this way, we cannot be accused of passing information from one mind to another.

One case where telepathy did occur was itself illuminating. Peter Moss, the historian who has written a book featuring a selection of my regressions, was present when Ann Dowling was being taken back to the life of the street urchin Sarah Williams. Peter was called out of the room by the telephone, and during his absence Sarah mentioned someone in Everton called Doubleday. When Peter came back, he said the phone call had been from an editor at Doubleday, the American publishers.

On the other hand, there have been hundreds of occasions when everyone in the room has been willing a subject to give the right answers, always to no avail. The person who stated under hypnosis that Queen Victoria was alive in 1914 could not be shifted from her opinion, even though everyone in the room knew she was wrong. I brought her out of hypnosis to discuss her mistake, and she couldn't understand how it had come about. But then, once she was put back to that character, she repeated the mistake.

We shouldn't ignore telepathy. We may find in the future that our capacity for it is considerably greater than we imagined, and that it can be put to good use. For the present, it is a phenomenon that needs careful research.

But while it can be proved to be operating in certain circumstances, it is by no means the key we are seeking. Just as the Rosetta stone opened up the world of Egyptian hieroglyphs, there is an answer somewhere to the riddle of hypnotic regression. When we reach it, I'm sure we'll be dazzled by its simplicity. For the present, we're blinded by the light of our extraordinary experience.

Genetically inherited memory

Inherited memory is an idea deeply rooted in our culture. We expect to inherit the worldly goods of our parents—anything from a country mansion to a set of dinner plates, and we preserve the memory of other relations by the trinkets which are passed down for our safe-keeping. But we are already accustomed to the idea from birth, for we soon know that our physical appearance is directly inherited from our parents, who are themselves carrying genetic instructions from their parents and their grandparents, and so on.

‘He’s got his mother’s eyes’, ‘the image of his father’, ‘hair just like grandad’—we’ve all heard these comments and remarked on the likenesses existing within families, but how often do we consider the mechanism which brings about this astonishing replication? The genes of your father and your mother, combining within that first cell in your mother’s womb, contain all the information needed to predict exactly how you will look. What kind of computer software can we produce to match the sophistication of the genetic process?

But it’s not just our looks which are passed on. Family traits are identified in people, particularly as they grow older, and the legendary stubbornness of a grandmother, or the mechanical skill of a father, or the meanness of a great-grandfather, is supposedly revived in a later generation. Our knowledge of this region of genetics is still uncertain, but some family characteristics are too sharply defined to be mere coincidence. What, then, of the possibility that, alongside physical and psychological traits, memory itself can be inherited?

The animal kingdom provides a useful starting point for this discussion. How do birds know how to build nests? What makes young starlings fly south in the autumn and return the following spring? Who tells the salmon to return to their place of birth to spawn? Ornithologists have no evidence of birds instructing each other in the art of nest-building, and yet each generation of birds is capable of finding a good site for a nest, locating the appropriate building materials, cementing the structure firmly together. We humans would need a course of detailed evening classes to attempt such a feat of civil engineering!

Somehow, then, the bird ‘picks up’ the information it needs. It could be by telepathy, as in the case of the dolphins we discussed earlier, but it seems unlikely that the animal kingdom is talking to itself so systematically without our noticing it. No, somehow, each bird is born with the inherited knowledge of how to build a nest, knowing too that when the weather begins to turn cold there are warmer climes for it to inhabit. But is this knowledge intrinsic to the genetic make-up of birds as a species—that is, is it an instruction which is replicated in every bird—or is it a specific memory passed on from one bird to another? If so, then each bird would build its nest in the fashion of its mother and father, just as its mother and father learned the skill from their parents.

Again, the present scientific view is that there is no capability within the DNA structure of the cells which can incorporate the memory of the individual. DNA is a chain of molecules which acts as the source of genetic instructions; it cannot, say the scientists, continue to evolve according to the experiences of the individual. We are left, once more, with a familiar imponderable: if something *can’t* happen, why is it that so often it appears that it does?

During the course of my sessions of hypnotic regression, I have come across several cases which could be said to support the theory of genetically inherited memory. One such is that of Liz Howard.

Ironically, Liz is a human biologist by profession. The events of her regressions caused her considerable confusion, for they seemed to run counter to everything she had ever known about biology and genetics. The most important fact, however, was her maiden name: Fitton.

Under hypnosis, Liz regressed to a character called Elizabeth Fytton, whose family lived at Gawsworth Hall in Cheshire. She said she was a handmaiden to Anne Boleyn in the sixteenth century, and proceeded to give us a very graphic and detailed description of life at the Court of Henry VIII. For example, we asked her about the Queen’s hands, knowing that legend has it that she had six fingers on one hand. Elizabeth Fytten denied this but, when pressed on the subject said: ‘Oh, that. Everybody says she has too many fingers in too many pies.’ Thus are legends created, perhaps?

We questioned Elizabeth very thoroughly, using a dictionary of historical slang to test the authenticity of the regression. For example, we asked her about a ‘gander-mooner’, and she replied, correctly if less than politely, that it referred to the accepted custom of the day for the husband to be unfaithful to his wife during the month after childbirth. On a hundred other such questions, she responded correctly to words and phrases now long gone from our vocabulary.

The present owners of Gawsworth Hall are Tim and Elizabeth Richards. Fascinated by the stories of Liz Howard’s regression, they attended sessions and contributed to our research. Liz herself had never visited the Hall, a sixteenth-century manor now open to the public, but still

managed to give an accurate description of how it would have looked 400 years ago. Tim and Elizabeth confirmed her descriptions from their family records.

For example, Liz insisted that the Hall was black and yellow, rather than black and white as one would expect. A few weeks before that particular regression, the Richards had discovered that yellow had been the second colour of the Hall during the sixteenth century, changing to white only at a later date.

After giving a detailed description of the local church, Liz visited it, only to find it 'the wrong way round'. The Richards pointed out a bricked-up doorway at the opposite end of the church, which the Fyttons would have used. Liz also insisted that the beams were a different colour, which confused her until she was shown a piece of the original beam coloured as she had said.

As Elizabeth Fytton, Liz correctly named various members of the Fytton family and gave numerous details of events which the Richards had confirmed from their own records.

This remarkable series of regressions encouraged Liz to put her experiences into writing, and she has since achieved success with historical novels such as *Elizabeth Fytton of Gawsorth Hall*. She could, in fact, be said to be the only historical novelist writing from memory! Here is her written testimony to me of the regressions:

How time flies! Can it really be more than four years since I came to you with the strange tale of a dream which came true? And how could any of us possibly have foretold where my insatiable curiosity would lead? Those hypnotic regressions, created in a unique atmosphere where your skill blended with my open mind, have become an integral part of my life. There is still no concrete explanation for what happened on that couch over a period of more than two years. I insisted that my name was Elizabeth Fytton and that I lived at Gawsorth Hall, during Tudor Times! Giving descriptions of Cheshire buildings in the sixteenth century, and life at the Courts of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I. Wasn't it all too ridiculous? If you remember, I refused to believe a word of my hypnotic ramblings, regarding the pictures in my head, no matter how realistic, as pure fantasy. Despite the emphatic detail of people and places catalogued by 'Elizabeth Fytton', who would have thought that hours of painstaking research would only prove my unconscious mind right? How such a wealth of information could have been absorbed and stored while the conscious mind remained completely ignorant of the fact will always be a mystery. Or is there really another explanation, as so many wish to believe? Reincarnation, or inherited memory?

As the idea of reincarnation is beyond the bounds of my own beliefs, and as there are no scientific means available for examining such a theory, I concentrated on the possibility of inherited memory. After much delving into the biochemistry of the central nervous system, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that, though the subject is still on the far horizons of man's understanding, there is a possibility that an excessive and unaccountable amount RNA in ova could be the vehicle for memory transfer. Should this be the case, any such inheritance would obviously pass solely through the female line; an interesting thought when considering my own experiences. However, this is still only a theory, and for the time being we can only continue to wonder.

Liz is right, of course: there can be no certainty in the mysterious world of hypnotic regression. But one strong objection to the theory of genetically inherited memory is that, logically, it should be impossible for subjects to recall death under hypnosis. For if they are calling on memories which they have inherited, then those memories can go only as far as the date of giving birth; they certainly cannot incorporate a death. But as we have already seen people do relive deaths under hypnosis, just as Dianne, in the following case, has.

Dianne is a young married woman from North Wales. As a child she would regularly disappear from her home and was invariably found by her family sitting at the grave of an aunt called Jacqueline who had died at the age of five, well before Dianne was born.

Under hypnosis, Dianne regressed to someone called Jacqueline who, it soon transpired, was the same aunt who had died as a child. Dianne produced a highly detailed account of Jacqueline's five years of life, an account which was verified throughout from family records. When we brought her to the time of her death, she produced all the symptoms of TB meningitis, symptoms which were confirmed by a doctor in our midst. But most poignantly of all, when the moment of death arrived, Jacqueline was heard to murmur: 'Cora, don't cry.'

Cora is Dianne's mother, Jacqueline's sister. She and other members of the family had always borne a grudge against the doctor who failed to diagnose Jacqueline's illness and who was probably responsible for allowing it to develop so quickly. When asked about the moment of Jacqueline's death, Cora said her sister had been silent and that the only words spoken were by other members of the family, cursing the doctor. I put Cora under hypnosis, and she regressed without difficulty to that moment in her own childhood when her sister was dying. True enough, she began to curse the doctor who had accused Jacqueline of malingering. But then, she told us what she could hear her sister saying: 'Cora, don't cry.'

Was Dianne merely recalling family woes which must have been discussed countless times in her youth? If so, how could she be so accurate about her aunt's life, and how could she reveal Jacqueline's dying words, when even her mother had forgotten them? Or is it possible that poor Jacqueline's memories have somehow been inherited by her niece, to be recalled from her unconscious mind with the encouragement of hypnosis?

I have known one other case similar to Dianne's. A young woman from Chester regressed to a character who said she had just left a finishing school in Brighton and that her favourite subject was sketching. She was told to keep this ability when she came out of her regression and, to her amazement, the young woman drew a beautiful sketch of a garden once she had been aroused from hypnosis. Yet for as long as she can remember, she has had difficulty even in drawing a straight line! A couple of years later I asked her whether her artistic talents remained, and she said that they had flourished for some months after the sessions, but she had then stopped sketching. All subsequent attempts to revive the ability failed: the gift had deserted her.

Mary Starling, who knew nothing of music, regressed to a little blind girl who could play the piano. She too was told to retain the ability. The next time after the session when she found a piano, she sat down to play but could produce nothing, despite the strong feeling that she was capable of it. Mary became frustrated and understandably screwed her eyes tightly shut in concentration. As soon as her eyes were closed, she found herself playing a few simple tunes, quite spontaneously.

Finally, there was the young woman from Stockport who, although left-handed all her life, regressed to a right-handed character. When aroused from hypnosis, she found to her delight that she had become ambidextrous.

The theory of genetic inheritance can explain many things, but it cannot answer that one objection of the impossibility of inheriting the experience of death. Of course, given the fantastic numbers of people who could theoretically be said to be one's ancestors—remember our discussion of history and family trees earlier in the book—there might be some cause for suggesting that memory could be inherited racially, rather than just from one's parents or grandparents. Even five or six generations back, the numbers of one's ancestors was huge, and thus the capacity for memories which, together, could incorporate a whole race would be great.

We will leave this theory with the extraordinary case of the twins whom I regressed for a BBC TV programme on regression. The researchers for the programme had received two very similar letters from identical twins, each suggesting she should try regression. The twins were in their twenties, married and both teachers.

Each woman was regressed out of the presence of the other, and their memories of their own lives proved identical. Then they were taken, again individually, to pre-birth memories, and both regressed to the same characters. The differences in their regressions were absolutely minor: for example, one twin said she was living in the first house of a street in a Welsh village, the other said she was living in the last house of the same street. In the end, we regressed them together, in their own homes. For over an hour, they answered questions under hypnotic regression in turn, always remaining consistent and always, as far as we can tell, accurate. Afterwards, the twins said they had resented the fact that another person was answering the questions for them.

It was an eerie moment, hearing those two women speaking as one. After many years of research into the subject I remain gripped by the phenomenon of regression, and the sight of a regression duplicated before my very eyes was astonishing. It was a graphic illustration of the power of the argument for genetically inherited memory, an argument which we are still

unqualified either to accept or to dismiss. But still, the objections of death linger, the limits of the theory remain unsatisfying, and I find myself looking beyond for further knowledge.

It is there somewhere. We have found the dead, we have brought their memories back to life: soon, surely quite soon, we will understand how it happens.

Cryptomnesia

Earlier in the book I talked about the 'hidden mind'. In fact, everything we've been discussing so far relates to abilities that still remain hidden from us, but with this phrase I was describing the mind's incredible capacity for information. The example I used in that earlier chapter was of a tape-recorder at a party, which records an indecipherable *mêlée* of voices, compared with the conscious mind, which filters out all unnecessary conversation. The unconscious mind is that tape-recorder: it listens, it records and it stores information.

If we were incapable of weeding out the essential from the non-essential, if we had to be consciously aware of *everything* around us, we would be drowned in experience, too busy responding to external stimuli to take the most trivial decision. But also, if we were incapable of remembering information, we would never learn from experience. That's why we rely on the conscious mind to be aware of what is important, and on the unconscious mind to record indiscriminately every experience that comes its way. This mental function is known as cryptomnesia.

In the modern world, every individual is bombarded with information every day, from the moment of waking to the return of sleep. Books, newspapers, radio, television, conversations, work—all these sources of data demand our attention, but only selected ones are retained by our conscious memories. What books did you read last year? What clothes did you buy? How many magazines and newspapers did you get through? This kind of information no longer needs to be retained by your conscious memory, and instead it is stored, logged, in the memory-banks of the unconscious.

Consider the number of times a minor detail from the past 'comes to mind' unexpectedly. Or how a previous experience can be recalled long after it has been forgotten. The information is there; what is in question is our ability to retrieve it.

Many people believe that the cases of hypnotic regression which emerge from my sessions are all examples of cryptomnesia. They state, as an *a priori* condition of their argument, that the memories of a dead person cannot reappear in someone else's unconscious at a later date; therefore the answer must be cryptomnesia.

I do not like this kind of *a priori* argument. But before I tackle its relevance to our discussion, I'd like to show how cryptomnesia can and does manifest itself in hypnotic regression.

A Birmingham nurse came to one of my sessions with a real desire to regress. Her family were convinced she was the reincarnation of an aunt who had died a year before her own birth. They believed this because the nurse had such astonishingly accurate memories of the accident at a picnic which had precipitated her aunt's death.

Under hypnosis, the nurse did take on the character of her aunt. She produced some extraordinary details of that fateful picnic, all of which were verified: she named the place, described the colour of the rug, the make of the car, the identities of the people present, the times of departures and arrivals. The performance was realistic and impressively accurate. But when we took the nurse back to the other times in the life of her aunt, again under hypnosis, her replies became muddled. She named the correct relations, marriages and important occasions of the rest of her parents' family but consistently gave the wrong answers about their occupations, and several other subjects. Her dates were hopelessly wrong, both of her family and of world events.

It was then that I regressed her to the first time she had ever heard about the picnic. She was five years old, sitting under the dining-room table at home, pretending to be in a tent. No one knew she was there, as a large tablecloth was hiding her from her mother and another aunt in the same room. The two women were discussing the picnic and accident in great detail, and the little girl, keeping as quiet as a mouse, was listening to every word.

Hearing about the accident at such a young age must have been a shock to the girl, causing her to return to it at a later date in her life. But until she did, the exact memory of that overheard

conversation remained in her unconscious mind, down to the very last detail. And when she finally brought it out again during one of my sessions, she was as convincing in her portrayal as could be.

So, yes, cryptomnesia is an answer to some of the regressions I have witnessed. But naturally we lay as many traps as possible in order to identify them, such as sending the subject back to the first time they ever heard of a particular character. And it is usually not difficult to recognize an example of cryptomnesia, particularly since films and novels so often form the staple diet of such regressions. The following case is quite typical.

Judy had difficulty in regressing and was held up for a long time by psychological blocks within her, resisting the course of hypnosis. Finally she solved them and began to regress to what seemed to be a pre-birth memory.

She said her name was Susanna Peterson and that she lived in Rochester, Kent, with her mother and father. The period was around the 1860s, and she thought her father was an academic or a writer. She was a happy, if lonely, young girl who enjoyed embroidery and other quiet hobbies.

As we questioned her more, we discovered that the family's real name was Petrovitch and that they were Russian refugees pretending to be British. At some point, Susanna was sent to Gillingham to live with her aunt and uncle, perhaps because, as we found out later, her mother was mad. When she returned to her home, she found it in flames and discovered that her mother had perished in the fire.

Later we found Susanna in a hospital run by nuns. It was difficult to tell whether she was a patient or a nun, although she did have something wrong with her left leg. She was very lonely at this stage and felt that she was being singled out for punishment by everyone else in the hospital.

A Russian family pretending to be British, a mad mother burned to death, a lonely child mistreated in a convent... the very fact that it was so traumatic made us suspicious of this regression, and soon we began to unravel the clues. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* provided the first answer—not only does it have a mad woman dying in a fire, it even has the name of Rochester. Then Judy started to tell us of her own fantasies and how they corresponded with details of the regression; she recalled, too, how lonely she had been as a child and as an adolescent. And the Russian element? Her father, it transpired, is fascinated by the country and has even learned the language. Finally, not one detail of Judy's regression has been historically verified.

As with the cases of fantasy and imagination which we discussed earlier in this chapter, there was certainly no attempt by Judy to mislead us or to be dishonest. But instead of just making the details of her regression up, she was innocently recalling events from her own life and from a book, and merging them into a fantasy which even had herself convinced. Unwittingly, her unconscious mind revealed information which her conscious mind was unable to decipher.

As the next case shows, we always have to be on our guard against the extraordinary influence of cryptomnesia.

A woman regressed to a character called Amelia, living in the same district as she did. Understandably, she was very accurate when answering questions on local details but she fell down when it came to dates. For example, she said she was married in a church which did exist, but at a time before it had even been built. Amelia was a small fiery woman, married to a merchant sea-captain. At one point she recalled attacking a carter who was beating his unfortunate horse, because the animal was unable to pull a heavy load.

I sent the woman back through the memories of her own life, to the first time she had ever heard about this character, read about her or seen her in a film. It was obvious she had never before come across Amelia.

Many years later, watching the film *The Lady Killers*, I recognized the merchant sea-captain's wife. Everything brought out in the regression was there, including the incident with the carter and his horse—except the character was not called Amelia. The woman had obviously adopted the story but had changed the name. If we had asked her to go back to the first time she had heard of this incident, she would undoubtedly have recalled seeing it in the film. However, as we only asked her to think of the name Amelia, her unconscious mind failed to make the connection.

From the years I have spent with hypnotic regression, I have witnessed countless cases of cryptomnesia, many of which took some time to recognize. All of them, however, were fascinating

examples of how the mind can store information for years, only to bring it out again with complete accuracy. Such cases are entertaining and show us how much we still have to learn about the capacities of our minds.

But the fact that so many of these cases occur does not mean, as some people would argue, that *all* hypnotic regression is cryptomnesia. If it were, then at some point in his life, now utterly forgotten to him, Ray Bryant must have absorbed huge amounts of detail about the Crimean War; Liz Howard must have picked up stories about the Fyttons of Gawsworth Hall; Pat Roberts must, unbeknown to herself, have studied the local history of Liverpool; Ann Dowling must similarly have done a history course, and then forgotten it. For the cryptomnesia explanation to apply to all our cases, the impossible must have occurred.

But perhaps, when faced with the unknown, it is preferable to believe in the impossible rather than to face a more unsettling truth. As I suggested above, those who ascribe all the phenomena of my research to cryptomnesia tend to rule out any possibility of an alternative explanation *from the very start*. I am unwilling to be so certain. Common sense alone shows that there has to be another reason for many of the regressions we are considering: they are simply too specific for us not to be able to recognize if an unconscious memory was at work.

For, above all, these cases are real. You cannot listen to someone over a period of a hundred hours or more, talking of another life in another age, and still hold the view that he is recalling the page of a long-forgotten history book or remembering the details of an historical drama. It just isn't possible. And if I refuse to believe in the impossible, surely I must believe in something? Surely we are ready, at last, to comprehend?