

RESEARCH

An Important Subject at the Institut Métapsychique International: Jeanne Laplace. The 1927–1934 Experiments

GIULIO CARATELLI

MARIA LUISA FELICI

mluisa@tin.it

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Abstract—Jeanne Laplace is a psychical subject who was studied extensively by Eugène Osty and his assistants at the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI) in Paris during the years 1927–1934. Since childhood, she had remarkable abilities, probably strengthened by two nervous “shocks” occurring when she was twelve and eighteen years old. Her abilities were rather regular in their manifestation though variable in their quality from one day to another, but they could be solicited at will. Before IMI, she had participated regularly for seven years as a medium in a spirit circle, until a reader of the *Révue Métapsychique* in 1926 introduced her to Eugène Osty, director of the Parisian institute, who at once convinced himself, after having tested Jeanne Laplace, of her abilities. To obtain paranormal knowledge, she had to feel a kind of “link” with the “target” person. The paranormal information occurred mainly through visions, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile hallucinations. In order of importance, after the visions, the paranormal information occurred as “impulsive words.” Two remarkable séances were conducted at IMI in Paris with the English researcher Harry Price. Her abilities were also studied by Henri Desoille in the form of paranormal diagnosis of diseases. Jeanne Laplace, at the IMI in Paris, showed herself to be a gifted subject; nevertheless some critical points remain concerning mainly the execution of the séances and the method of evaluation used.

Keywords: Institut Métapsychique International—Jeanne Laplace—Eugène Osty—Harry Price—Henri Desoille—clairvoyance—metagnomy—paranormal knowledge

Introduction

Jeanne Laplace, a French woman, when at the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI) in Paris, between the 1920s and the 1930s, had the opportunity to be studied constantly, for a long period of eight years, by Eugène Osty and his assistants. Many séances were recorded, then duly illustrated, word by word, with details and other information. They remain highly interesting,

precious documents today, as a check, comparison, and further judgment about the possible mechanisms of the origin and course of some extraordinary abilities that allow the subject the acquisition of reliable paranormal information.

Jeanne Laplace probably inherited her paranormal abilities from her maternal grandmother, who distinguished herself with premonitions concerning her sons, and also from her mother, who, from nine years of age, showed similar gifts. Her cousin also showed paranormal abilities, but in all these women the extraordinary ability was rather spontaneous and substantially focused on dramatic familiar events. Jeanne, instead, with the passing of time, showed a regular and powerful exercise of her paranormal abilities. When aged six and in Paris, while she was sitting at a table, she began to cry suddenly, shouting that Aunt Clotilda was dead. This relative lived in the Jura region and all of them knew that she was healthy. The following day, however, a cable communicated to the relatives that their aunt had died suddenly the previous day. On another occasion dating back to the same period, Jeanne was given by a person in business affairs with her father a chocolate fish as a gift. Her parents insisted that she thank the generous donor, but she, without showing joy or gratitude for the received gift, told the man she could not love him because he beat his wife. Apologies were made to the man for such presumed puerility and infantile imagination, but afterward it became known that Jeanne was right that day: The matrimonial life of that man, considered quiet by many people, was actually often rather stormy (Osty, 1934:73–76).

At the age of twelve, Jeanne suffered from scarlet fever, a pathology which caused a strong cerebral reaction. If we strictly follow what Eugène Osty refers to in relation to this situation, we have the clear feeling that the disease the young Jeanne had had included an experience of a kind of *Near-Death-Experience*: In fact, it seemed to her she rose up to the ceiling of her room, and was forced to enter what seemed to be cotton–wool. There she had the perception of her dead forefathers waving her to meet them and at the same time she had another perception, that she was reaching another world, and that she would not return to this one. Suddenly the whole set of images vanished with a sense of detachment and afterward she regained consciousness. At that point the doctor ascertained that the condition of Jeanne’s health improved. After that serious pathology, the manifestations of clairvoyance were more numerous and also more remarkable. A serious flu, again with cerebral involvement, affected her when she was eighteen, again increasing the activity and the strength of her abilities, as if such nervous “shocks” determined, somehow, neurophysiological conditions that supported the process of paranormal knowledge (Osty, 1934:76–77).

The painful loss of Jeanne’s fiancé, during the First World War, was the final turning point and added a moral stimulus to the pathology ones. One of her girlfriends, in order to relieve her friend’s pain, brought her to a spiritistic-

like circle where a medium acted with the help of some assistants. There the medium told her that she had lost her aunt, that is Aunt Clotilda, and that Jeanne could consider herself a medium. Therefore he invited her to sit at his side and put her hands on the table. This table, with the joint touch of the two subjects, moved, and through the interpretation of a conventional code, expressed intelligible communications. Jeanne participated regularly for seven years as a medium in that circle, adapting herself to its habits, rites, and doctrines, until in 1926 a reader of the *Revue Métapsychique* introduced her to Osty (Osty, 1934:77).

Osty (1874–1938), an active and ingenious paranormal researcher, medical doctor, and director of the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI) in Paris, gained the direction of the Institute in 1925 after the dramatic and sudden death, by a plane accident, of Gustave Geley, the first director.

Founded in 1919 by several researchers to scientifically investigate paranormal phenomena, the IMI was distinguished in the following decades for high-quality research into mediumistic and ESP phenomena, saw a declining period starting from the 1950s, and then had a complete reorganization in 1998 with President Mario Varvoglis, presenting itself once more as a prestigious institution focusing on the most serious French parapsychological research (Varvoglis & Evrard, 2010).

Osty was soon persuaded, through some preliminary tests, that Jeanne indeed had the gift of metagnomy, a word coined by Boirac (1917:224), indicating the knowledge of facts by the mind beyond what we can commonly know, also called paranormal knowledge. That is by extraordinary means she could “know” the past and the future, the life, the personality, and the events of other human individuals. Osty therefore arranged an experimental protocol that did not leave any doubt as to the individuation and the assessment of the indications coming from that paranormal knowledge (Osty, 1934:77–78).

Also in 1926, the year in which he met Jeanne, Osty published an important work dedicated to Pascal Forthuny (1872–1962), making him very famous.



JEANNE LAPLACE

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This fame could have attracted other gifted individuals toward IMI, such as Miss Laplace. Forthuny had for many years been expressing surprising abilities of clairvoyance and precognition that lasted for almost all his life. In particular, in 1926 Osty planned with Forthuny the precognition experiment “chaise-*vide*” or “chair-test,” in which the subject tries to describe the physical and psychical characteristics and essential life events of an unknown individual who afterward occupies a specific seat within a free and completely casual seating arrangement for the public (Osty, 1926). Also typical of his ability, during the public experiments in which he did not go into a trance but put himself in a state of “concentration,” or a light altered state of consciousness, he would trace the past of individuals he had never met. There are some similarities with Miss Laplace, and Osty’s work with the latter, in the years 1927–1934, can be considered parallel to the investigations with Forthuny.

There is information about Miss Laplace and her involvement at IMI in the following sources: Osty, 1937:93–94, and *Société des Amis de l’Institut Métapsychique International*, 1949:60, 1952:79.

General Experimental Conditions

Miss Laplace always worked as a medium in an apparently waking condition, or “awake-like”: In fact, if hypnotized by Osty, she lost all of her paranormal abilities. She passed from the normal to paranormal exercise of her psyche without any apparent change: Transformation of her mental dynamics occurred spontaneously and the psychophysiological condition useful to the manifestation of her parapsychological ability was obtained almost instinctively. She fell into an “altered state of consciousness–like” condition, that could be defined as “trance,” though it did not seem quite evident, and, during a *séance*, she passed regularly through a succession of particular conditions somehow comparable to a “trance.” The first particular condition needed more time to appear than the following ones. The only effort made by Miss Laplace was to stop the ordinary movement of her mind, to think of nothing, to become a mental vacuum. She felt the beginning of the useful psychophysiological condition and the coming out of her ability through a certain feeling in the solar plexus: In fact, she said that at a certain point she felt a sense of heat deep in the epigastric area. Then, such heat came out from her body and directed itself toward the “target” person, setting up in that moment a sort of “fluidic” symbolic conjunction or conduction. When this did not occur, she said the repetition of attempts was completely useless, as it was not possible to set any “link.” The quality of her paranormal performances was variable from one day to another, her ability needed continuous exercise, and any break was dangerous in the sense that then a number of days were necessary to bring back the former optimal quality. Illness, similarly, had an effect of weakening her abilities (Osty, 1934:216–220).

Once the “link” with the “target” person was established, Miss Laplace experienced paranormal information through visions, that is various hallucinations, various and vivid mental images she believed she saw outside herself, projected onto a “virtual screen,” in black and white or colors, motionless or in motion, dumb or speaking (therefore with the addition of auditory hallucinations), with moments of pause. Sometimes those images could be allegoric and submitted immediately into her consciousness for the job of “translation” of their meaning. When the past or the present was involved, that “virtual screen” was about 30 cm from her; when the future was involved, that “screen” moved some meters away, and such distance reflected basically the distance in time of the predicted event. Some of the paranormal information came also through gustatory, olfactory, and tactile hallucinations. After the visions, awareness of the possible paranormal information occurred as “impulsive words,” which Osty somehow has discriminated from the “automatic word.” The “impulsive word” is considered by Osty as an intelligent process, aware of its aims and its procedures. Practically, observing a person “target” of the clairvoyance, or touching a given object, Jeanne saw nothing, she heard nothing, nevertheless she began at once to speak as if the physical organs of her phonation were moved by an intelligent force outside her; she became aware of the content of that information at the same time as the persons present (Osty, 1934:220–225).

Miss Laplace, like other subjects, could make mistakes, but Osty never considered any of her séances useless. On the other hand, the mistakes have always been useful for Osty to understand, through the analytical study of their differences, the factors causing them, and the mental “game” of paranormal knowledge (Osty, 1925:327–377, 1927:261–274, 1930:97–116, 1934:78–79).

The series of séances, managed and directed by Osty with Miss Laplace, lasted a period of eight years; they rarely would be private, that is carried out in front of one consultant and with a secretary present, but were mostly public, in front of a group of participants, about twenty to thirty individuals, for the most part doctors bringing other people to the séances. During these public séances the “target” person of the proof of paranormal knowledge of his life proposed himself personally or was proposed to Miss Laplace by one of the assistants, or was chosen spontaneously by Miss Laplace, with the basic condition being that up to that moment that “target” person was completely unknown to her. Moreover, at the séances an IMI secretary wrote down the responses given by Miss Laplace and then read them to individual protagonists of the test, sentence by sentence, for the necessary checks of their content. Only at that point did the subject learn about the correctness of her “impressions.” Obviously, any addition made by Miss Laplace at that point was not considered, as it could be judged a fruit of possible suggestion (Osty, 1934:77–78).

She often used objects put at her disposal by the consultants. They did not have a “psychoscopic” or “psychometric” meaning (Buchanan, 1885, Denton & Denton, 1863), that is objects impregnated with some “fluidic irradiations” emitted by the owners and by the events in which they were present, and then “translated” into specific information about the past. Instead, those objects were considered to have an intermediary and “supporting” function. According to the ideas proposed about the problem by Osty, they mainly help individual concentration and address, with a kind of thread, paranormal knowledge of the subject toward the “target,” that is arousing the subject’s “metagnomic” abilities able to bypass the obstacles of space and time and to catch things or facts not present in the objects. In conclusion, no hypothesis of “force” recorded in the objects was able to influence the subject. Among the objects to be used, Osty remarks, a great variety of them could be useful for the optimal course of a séance, according to the personal preferences of the individuals gifted in paranormal knowledge, which were tested every time: organic fragments (hair, nails, and so on), gloves, pieces of clothes and lingerie, jewels, papers, photos, and so on, in conclusion owned objects, or objects only touched, as if the length of the contact did not seem to be a meaningful factor; and once the ability for paranormal knowledge began, such objects could be taken away or even be destroyed, without interrupting the paranormal ability and the flow of communications regarding the “target” person (Osty, 1913:142–165, 1925:207–214, 1929:506).

Many proofs are and remain undoubtedly of great interest and include long and detailed reports about the character, life, and experiences of the consultants.

The private séances with one consultant but always with a secretary present for the recording of the paranormal responses, had however a greater probability of success as opposed to the public séances, and, in these latter, the paranormal responses given by Miss Laplace were generally of lesser quality (Osty, 1934:214).

Osty has remarked that Miss Laplace had come to IMI as a “spiritic medium,” convinced she was a simple “receiver” and therefore not responsible for the phenomena she produced. She was certain that the “spirits” used her with the aim of communicating with living people. For his part, Osty, though, looked for an unquestionable communication with a dead man, and never did anything to change her mind, for fear of seeing a decrease in the special ability of Miss Laplace; and nothing was ever done concerning it in the context of the séances at the Parisian institute. Nevertheless, she found herself in a new research context, and its rigorous investigation of her did not presume any specific doctrine, and the researchers had not solicited her abilities in the same way and for the same aims to which she was accustomed in the seven previous years. In the new context, at IMI, only one aim was present: to recreate, through

the subject's abilities, the extraordinary phenomena and to investigate their true genesis. The teachings arising directly from this specific research exercise soon changed the idea that Miss Laplace had formed about her ability and practice, persuading her that her own visions were purely subjective, in which the allegory prevailed, and that the actual source of those images (visual, auditive) and other feelings referred to paranormal information that was always in her mind. Therefore, Miss Laplace had found it inopportune, in the exercise of her clairvoyant abilities developed remarkably at IMI, to involve some "spirit guides" or similar entities, though in some odd moments the old habits of talking about and referring to deceased people made their appearance, and, in any case, she always kept the inner conviction that paranormal knowledge proved the possibility of survival of the individual spirit (Osty, 1934:234–235).

Some Experiments at IMI

Here are some typical and synthetic tests carried out at the IMI.

On February 9, 1927, in a public séance, Mrs. Of. was present for the first time. She was told, among other facts concerning her life and temper, by Jeanne that she had a clever and jealous dog, that liked to be spoiled and pouted like a child, small-sized and well-groomed (exact description), that it had something yellow or blue around its neck (the dog had a blue collar), that she saw a little shape of a tender and lovely female child, but that in that moment that child had grown up, she had been very important for her, she was of "oval-shaped" physical aspect like medals, that her name was *Ginette* or *Gisèle* (her name was *Gisèle*). She was very frail and needed much care, with a predisposition for chest complaints and pulmonary congestion (the young girl had already suffered three pulmonary congestions); regarding her studies, she had difficulty with math, arithmetic was very tough for her (in fact, she had not yet learned her multiplication tables). As far as the lady was concerned directly, Jeanne told her she had married twice (which was correct) (Osty, 1934:80–81).

On March 2, 1927, at a public séance, through an object brought by a doctor present for the first time at IMI, Jeanne "felt," among other things, that a part of the doctor's life had been dedicated to a military career (true), that someone had sung often around him (verified as his mother), that he loved mimosa (true) (Osty, 1934:83).

At a public séance on December 20, 1933, she was given by Mr. K. a lock of hair and immediately she had some "impressions," assessed afterward as being mostly exact, among which was that the consultant's life was marked by the Navy (in fact he had been for more than two decades a naval officer), that he was a very irascible person (true), that he had some pain in his left kidney (true), that his life was also marked by journeys (true), that he had a predilection for blond women (true), that he loved elephants (in fact, he owned, in his salon, a

majolica elephant, which he liked very much) (Osty, 1934:88–89).

During the public séance on March 6, 1934, after two tests of paranormal knowledge, carried out through the touch of objects, Jeanne suddenly turned right, asking if someone had lost a paper, a document having no value in itself, but that could have value from the point of view of a job. Something that had occurred during that week and was more than a paper, it could also be an anatomic part. She added that it would have been left in the Boin. At that point Dr. F. Moutier, who was sitting in the queue of persons situated to the right of Miss Laplace, admitted in public that those precise words concerned him personally. In his laboratory, two days before, he had forgotten an anatomic fragment in a fixative liquid, a circumstance that had caused a little deterioration of the piece. And the name of the fixative liquid was “Boin” (Osty, 1934:145–146).

In the public séance on April 10, 1934, suddenly Miss Laplace shouted that she “felt” a name as *Isabeau* or *Yseult*. Then she wanted to specify *Yseult*, to whom she asked to speak. A lady, present for the first time at the Parisian séances, stood up and said her name was really *Yseult*. She immediately received the following correct “impressions”: about her mother’s death and the father’s new wedding, her desire to travel to a country such as Sweden, her love and practice of music, her repudiation of perfumes, and an engagement broken when she was twenty-three (Osty, 1934:146–147).

Séances at IMI with Harry Price

Harry Price (1881–1948), enthusiast since youth about illusionism, afterward dedicated himself actively to psychical research, including unmasking the tricks mediums could use to produce their phenomena. Strict, tenacious, and tendentially skeptical, he dedicated his life to the investigation of mediums, psychics, hauntings, and poltergeists, and in the end he convinced himself that at least some paranormal phenomena were true.

Osty was not present during Price’s experiments, two private séances with a secretary whose task it was to write out in shorthand all the indications noted by Jeanne Laplace. The second séance included three different experiments.

Price had remarked that Miss Laplace spoke the French language with a very clear intonation and there was little ambiguity about her utterances; besides, she did not attribute her paranormal “impressions” to any kind of “spirit guide,” “control,” or “trance personality” (Price, 1928:485–486).

The first part of the séance on January, 29, 1927, with Price situated in front of Miss Laplace and the young Osty daughter acting as secretary, was carried out with the experimental help of one of the English researcher’s personal gloves (previously left by Price on the reception table at the Institute) and brought by Osty to the salon of the séance. The glove was then put in Miss Laplace’s hand. A

succession of impressions regarding Price followed, also in reference to his future. Price judged after that they could be drawn from what Jeanne knew about him and from the fact that she was in personal touch with him for more than one hour. Two correct claims however hit him: The first concerned the fact, real, that in that moment of his existence he was reflecting over his past and, unusual for him, was suffering from insomnia; the second was that his grandmother had been for him a real second mother. In fact, his mother died when still young and his grandmother had replaced her and her role in the family. After these revelations, Price decided to give Jeanne a photo, extracted by chance from among many others present in his pocket-book. The image, not showing any kind of written words or marks, represented a young woman's face, seventeen years old at the time of the shot, though she looked younger, fifteen or sixteen years old. The young girl, Miss Mollie F., a member of a family in touch with him, was completely unknown in Paris. As far as the "impressions" drawn by that image, thirty-four in total, Price could afterward verify, on the basis of his own information and also after some necessary further details were received from the F. family, that Miss Laplace had manifested on the whole a very convincing proof of presumed paranormal knowledge through clairvoyance. From that small half-length photo, in fact, she had drawn, among others, the age, the aspect, the temperament, the aptitudes, and the tastes of the original subject, that is the young lady. Surprisingly, she had drawn her first name, Mary, which Price did not know. This was an element that seemed to give him proof, on the other hand, that Jeanne had not obtained those "impressions" from his mind, telepathically. In addition, against the telepathic hypothesis, Price put out the evidence that he had ignored other data, for example Jeanne's claim about a "hidden trouble" that the young girl's father had (in effect, he suffered from cardiac trouble, but kept that hidden from his family) (Osty, 1934:153–157, Price, 1927, 1937a:257–269, 1940:156).

On July 7, 1928, the first experiment of the second séance was carried out by Price and Miss Laplace, with Miss Galloy, Osty's sister-in-law, acting as a secretary. Price extracted from the right inside breast pocket of his coat, randomly, among other papers, a letter contained in an envelope, written by Mrs. H. C., a young widow. Price folded it in such a way that the last white sheet hid all the written pages. Miss Laplace, who as always did not seem to show any apparent condition of "trance" or apparent modification of the consciousness state, took in her hand that letter, without unfolding it, and afterward, without looking at it during the experiment, gave her mental "impressions." There were not less than sixty-one, and Price estimated that forty-eight of them were substantially correct, a quantity that would exclude the hypothesis of simple coincidence. Many of the facts listed by Miss Laplace were completely unknown to him, a circumstance that once again led him to exclude the telepathic hypothesis, and therefore Price had to gain further and more precise information to confirm them. As far as this proof

is concerned, Price considered the first part of one “impression,” that is the 56th, extremely meaningful and not due to a banal attempt to give a casual name. Miss Laplace “caught” the name *Bob* or *Bill*, or anyway a name ending in *y*. In effect, *Billy* was Mrs. H. C.’s nickname, and all her friends knew her by that name, even though it is a male name (Osty, 1934:157–161, Price, 1928:486–490).

The second and third experiments of that day also gained positive results.

In the second experiment Price used a typed document placed in his pocket, a contract in the English language (a language not known by Miss Laplace), obtaining twenty-six “impressions,” of which twenty-one were considered absolutely correct, two had no link with the document as far as he knew, and three were ambiguous or based on the future (Price, 1928:490–492).

As far as the third experiment is concerned, Price used a typed letter sent to him by Dr. R. J. Tillyard, resting until that moment in an envelope in his pocket, written only on the internal side, and folded with the blank side on the outside. Price extracted the folded letter from the envelope and gave it to Miss Laplace, making sure she could not see the address, nor if it was handwritten, typed, or printed. Price obtained not fewer than fifty-three “impressions” from her, and, according to his precise analysis, this latter experiment was also successful, although the last part of it was not as positive as in the previous experiments. Price supposed that Miss Laplace was tired and that perhaps the conditions of the manifestation of her paranormal abilities had been disturbed by a break (between the second and the third séances) to have tea. Dr. Tillyard, for his part, judged that the description of his own personality and job given by Miss Laplace had to be considered “excellent.” Price, who did not know some events regarding Dr. Tillyard, concluded that in this case also the hypothesis of telepathy (that Price himself was a source from which the subject could have obtained information through paranormal ways) could be mostly excluded (Price, 1928:492–495, 1937a:269–277, 1937b:49–51, 1940:153–155,298).

But what appears most interesting regarding Dr. Tillyard was the fact that in the context of this third experiment, Miss Laplace had explicitly indicated a precise prediction for the future, repeated twice: In her 23rd “impression,” she said that the writer of the letter would die by railway or car accident and that the wheels and the ruts were not good for him; in the 49th “impression” the subject once more had said that the writer of the letter would be subject to a dramatic death, that is he would be struck down by a brain congestion and would fall on the ruts or under a car. Moreover, in her 30th “impression,” Miss Laplace had said that such person would not have much time to live, only some years (de Vesme, 1937:78–80, Price, 1928:493, 1937a:271–272, 1937b:50; 1940:40,154–155,298). We remember that the prediction was made in 1928. At the beginning of 1937, Dr. Tillyard died as the consequence of a car accident near Canberra, Australia, where he was living (de Vesme, 1937:78, Price, 1937b:49, 1940:40,155,298).

The Paranormal Diagnosis

Henri Desoille was, at the time of his study of Miss Laplace, in a medical internship in the Hôpitaux de Paris. Afterward, he became professor at the Faculty of Medicine of Paris and directed the Chair of Labour Medicine from 1949 on. He was a member of IMI from 1937 to 1953, after that an honorary member. Desoille wondered about the problem of the paranormal diagnosis of diseases; in his opinion, it seemed sufficiently clear that there was a reality to the phenomena of clairvoyance or metagnomy, though the intimate mechanism was unknown and the phenomena still appeared rather irregular and capricious. Waiting for better knowledge of the mechanism and of the reasons for the extraordinary manifestations, he asked himself what their practical use could be. In particular, how can the clairvoyant's information support a doctor in his professional activity, from the point of view of the diagnosis and prognosis of various diseases? Desoille immediately observed Miss Laplace with this particular aspect in mind. He noticed that some of her predictions could have no practical utility. For example, the precise pre-visions of the oncoming death of a patient, whose apparent condition did not show any change (had she caught pathological changes acting in that moment that somehow escaped the doctor?); also, others were disputable, as they could come from the normal perception of symptoms that were much evident. Also, problems of interpretation were present, and from such a perspective Desoille observed that it was necessary that the subject learned to distinguish what he "felt" from what he interpreted. It was up to the doctor to interpret clairvoyant's impressions, and, moreover, it was necessary that the clairvoyant owned the technical rudiments regarding medicine so that he could be more precise about his paranormal information. In conclusion, Desoille noted that the clairvoyant rarely gave useful information to the doctors, because they were rather far from having the ability of doing a medical examination carried out according to proscribed professional rules. A practical usefulness, however, could be the "detection" of an infection still in early stages, but after this information was passed to the doctor any followup verifications were immediately and unfailingly up to the doctor (Desoille, 1929).

Osty, for his part, in a long and specific paper divided into three parts, tried to deepen the specific problem of the diagnosis of diseases in subjects supposedly gifted in paranormal knowledge, an argument often marked by positive and meaningful outcomes, and to define the extent, the mechanisms, and the favorable and unfavorable conditions for such behavior. All the people tested by Osty had a mediocre or middle general education and had no medical knowledge. Osty observed that those subjects were different in their variable output over time due to "intra-organic" and external causes, but similar in their more or less evident

attitude that they could detect others' pathological conditions. The diagnosis given by them could be sudden, spontaneous, and unsolicited (in séances carried out for other aims, for example, a paranormal and general knowledge of others' lives, or outside the circle of the séances), or solicited directly in appropriate séances. The diagnosis, with an essential premise that the involved subject had to know nothing about the ill person and the disease, could regard people both present and far away, and, in this second condition of distance, could use an object (generally a handwritten paper) of the ill person. The perceiver touched the object or sometimes only observed it. The experimenter, for his part, could know the ill person and his disease, or be ignorant of that disease or ignorant of both the person and the disease. The quality and the quantity of the diagnosis were variable, and the output of the subject was rather better if the "target" person was in his presence and if such a diagnosis was spontaneous. Moreover, the diagnosis could be made not only about actual diseases, with a relative prognosis, but also about past diseases (retrospective diagnosis), as well as future diseases (premonitory diagnosis) (Osty, 1929:503–507).

Osty looked carefully at the problem of mistakes, which appear in various degrees in the subjects he tested who were reputed to have paranormal abilities. They were not educated in medicine, meaning that the paranormal diagnosis did not translate technically into anatomical, physiological, and pathological realities, but aimed generally to characterize the conditions of the disease through the indication of the symptoms. Such lines often were insufficiently precise to indicate the pathological condition if it was not already known by a medical source or if it could not be specified afterward by appropriate clinical tests. The paranormal diagnosis, therefore, would represent in the best cases only approximations of a different quality, marked by possibly correct indications but also including fragmentariness and omissions, according to the personal ability of the involved subject and the weight of favorable conditions. For example, some mistakes could derive from the fact that the "relationship," the "link" between ill person and the subject, was not established, and sometimes by the psychic subject not being able to say simply "I do not feel anything," or because the subject as a consequence of habit might be immediately dragged by an uncontrolled "ideogenesis" leading invariably to fictitious productions. Or, on the basis of the belief that the subject was gifted with paranormal knowledge and a remarkable "detector" of others' thinking, it is possible that the ill person or the experimenter could become psychically susceptible and send out paranormally some incorrect information based on their false beliefs, fears, or hopes about the action of the disease (Osty, 1930:97–114).

In conclusion, Osty thinks that the use of subjects gifted in the field of the diagnosis of diseases is undoubtedly interesting as a metapsychic topic, but only for research into their extraordinary abilities of paranormal knowledge. In usual medical work it is not really important, except when a doctor might be inspired

by some of the indications to afterward follow through and try to verify them through medical testing. A useful approach, according to Osty, could be to educate a good and believable subject, showing an inclination for the detection of disease, in anatomy, physiology, pathology, and therapeutics, thereby improving his/her paranormal abilities (Osty, 1930:140).

In addition to Miss Laplace, Osty availed himself of the contributions of numerous subjects in the field of paranormal diagnosis: Miss de Berly, Mr. de Fleurière, Pascal Forthuny, Mrs. Peyroutet, and many others (Osty, 1929, 1930).

In the part of his paper dedicated to the diagnosis and prognosis regarding acting diseases, Osty quotes two occasions involving Miss Laplace (cases VII and IX).

On February 16, 1927, during a public séance at IMI, she was asked to exercise her ability about a lady present for the first time. She was given by Miss Laplace true information about her husband's professional job, also premonitory, then Miss Laplace told her that she had weak ankles and was subject to feet twists. The lady in question confirmed then to Osty the typical weakness of her ankles and the frequent twists of her feet. Before that, on November 6, 1926, Mr. H. T., 25 years old, was put by Osty into the presence of Miss Laplace for a paranormal reading about general knowledge of his life and personality. Miss Laplace mentioned with regard to the man's health, that she felt malaise in one of her arms, certainly unpleasant but momentary. Two days before, Mr. H. T. had received an injection of anti-typhic vaccine to a shoulder and, consequently, on the day of the séance his corresponding arm was painful (Osty, 1929:512–513).

In the second part of his paper and regarding Miss Laplace, there are more numerous quotations about diagnoses related to the category of past diseases (cases XXXV, XXXVIII, XL, XLI, XLV, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX, LIV). In addition to the basic distinction between spontaneous and solicited diagnosis, characterized by a time factor (when the diagnosis of past disease is done, such diseases do not exist anymore, and sometimes the ill person is dead at the time of the diagnosis), Osty also stated the distinction between retrospective diagnosis concerning persons put in the presence of the subject, retrospective diagnosis concerning persons not present, and retrospective diagnosis concerning dead persons (Osty, 1930:5–6).

Concerning these last three different typologies of diagnosis, we present, for each one, an example involving Miss Laplace.

Case XXXV regards Mr. D., unknown to Miss Laplace, who, in the séance of February 23, 1927, at IMI, proposed himself for a proof of clairvoyance. Among the many indications verified as exact, Miss Laplace said that when a child he was characterized by weak health and that a hand was hurt, by a cut or a puncture. She did not feel any danger for him from this accident, nevertheless he had to pay attention to insolation. This was important during his life, as a dangerous

congestion could appear in his head. On the whole, the sitter had, nevertheless, good health but his left kidney had some trouble. Regarding the indications given by Miss Laplace, the person had at once confirmed that his health had been delicate in childhood, adding that in that moment he was suffering from problems in the kidneys. As far as the wound on his hand was concerned, he had made a hole in it with a chisel and for this reason he had had trouble with it for a long time. Regarding the insolation, he had been hit so strongly that for eight days he had been in a near-delirious condition (Osty, 1930:10).

Case XL, at the IMI, concerns a Miss D., unknown to the subject, who in the public séance of February 2, 1927, was put before Miss Laplace for her to obtain paranormal information. Among the many and precise indications she gave about Miss D., Miss Laplace also spoke about the health condition of the consultant's mother, who was not present. She said that she was still living and represented, more than a mother, a sister to Miss D. The mother had not had good health in her life, but many pains. Due to a disease or to a surgery, she had bad health. Previously, for a certain period, she was calm and reasonable, but now she was no more so, due to the disease and to a surgery that had changed her life. She was easily upset, despairing and crying about anything. In effect, the lady's mother had suffered, when she was about 30, an inflammation of the uterus and ovaries and for this reason these organs were removed. Due to this, a transformation in temper made the lady unquiet and irritable, subject to frequent crises of light anxious melancholia (Osty, 1930:12).

Case XLVIII, at IMI, concerns a public séance of March 16, 1927, when Dr. H. D. brought a lady who was introduced to Miss Laplace as a possible object of paranormal knowledge. Miss Laplace gave different indications about her life. In particular, Miss Laplace had the vision of a portrait inside a medallion which she felt concerned the distant death of a man with a "musical" and swinging voice. Such a man had died under dramatic conditions due to head congestion, but he could have been saved. More, Miss Laplace saw "H", "a", "u", "t", "e" letters, that is Haute, perhaps Hautes-Pyrénées or something similar, as well as the letter "G". Afterward, the lady said that her husband, whose name began with "G", had died some years before in Haute-Saône of a head infection. He was a doctor himself and had said that his disease had been treated badly. His voice was musical indeed (Osty, 1930:17).

Conclusions

Miss Laplace, at IMI in Paris in the years 1927–1934, showed herself to be a very gifted subject, always available in every single experimental occasion for the aims of the research, able to constantly give a certainly meaningful quantity of heterogeneous information of paranormal origin and also to give precious observations and personal remarks about her own extraordinary abilities and

the dynamics of their course. Therefore she was a useful source for a deepening and a cognitive widening of the different conditions, both interior and exterior, in which those abilities had manifested. Though she had participated previously for seven years in a spirit circle, adapting herself to its rites and beliefs and attributing the produced “communications” to the deceased spirits, during her activity at IMI Miss Laplace never attributed her abilities and manifestations of paranormal knowledge to disembodied spirits, “spirit guides,” or similar entities.

The séances done with Harry Price, in the context of IMI, testify further in favor of the reliability of her clairvoyant abilities.

Nevertheless, some critical points remain involving the quality of the proof obtained in such experiments, mainly the method of judgment used, which was to interrogate subsequently the “target” person to validate little by little every statement given by Miss Laplace, without carrying out any other investigation. The answers of the “target” person may not be objective for many reasons and often are not reliable owing to psychological and social inhibition.

Some séances could have been carried out with a public not carefully selected, with the possibility that not all people present at the tests were completely unknown until that moment to Miss Laplace. Also, the high number of individuals present may provide for a situation in which a sudden indication (and rather approximate) indication from the psychic subject could easily fit one individual in so large a group.

The psychic subject, in addition, on the basis of long practice and experience, memory, and a good capacity for observation, is able to extract precious information from certain nonverbal clues. This is the so-called “cold reading”—understanding of personality traits and socioeconomic level, through the observation of elements such as the general and physical physiognomy, the face, the hands, the posture, etc., as well as clothes, jewelry, etc., and then observing verification from the individual through the catching of reactions such as movements of the eyes and the dilation of pupils.

It must be considered in any case the many occasions on which the “impressions” given by Miss Laplace have been anything but generic, as well as those in which the individual “targets” were not present and some details of their life were completely unknown to the individual present. Also in these cases the problem of the rigorous validation of the “impressions” given by the subject remain. Osty was given by Dr. Eugène Lenglet (a medical doctor, future president of IMI from 1940 to 1946) in a public séance on December 20, 1933, before the execution of the experiences, some envelopes containing hairs and a card-case in black leather. In the pocket and in a closed envelope he had the diagnosis, already written, of the diseases of the people directly linked to the objects. Then Dr. Lenglet retired to a reading room of IMI and Miss Laplace was brought into the

room for the séances. Afterward she gave the “impressions” concerning the card-case and a wisp of hair extracted from one of the envelopes. Then Dr. Lenglet came into the room of the séances, with the envelopes containing the above-mentioned diagnosis written in advance, for the evaluation of the two tests, which were judged substantially positive for the accuracy of some indications. This séance, though not perfect in its experimental conditions, appears more rigorous than others and may be considered a double-blind experiment (Osty, 1934:90–92).

Under strict controls and with the necessary precautions (we remember that Osty was a doctor and the assistants at the séances at the IMI were mostly medical doctors), Miss Laplace was studied with every possible care by Osty, including in the delicate and always extremely disputed field of the paranormal diagnosis of the diseases, and after that by Henri Desoille, who was previously interested and had thought there might be a possible practical use of those abilities he had observed in Miss Laplace.

Miss Laplace’s diagnoses, however, could be marked by synthesis, mistakes of different degree, omissions, and approximations, and so on; nevertheless, mistakes were often included in the whole context of other general indications about the personality and the life of the consultant which were sufficiently exact, and therefore the diagnosis acquired a further general validity. Furthermore, Miss Laplace always limited herself to simple advice to the interested person and invited them to consult in short order an appropriate specialist for the medical treatment of the case, without pretending at all to substitute herself for their diagnosis and in no way to practice medicine herself.

Osty reputed that the possible use of such gifted subjects for the diagnosis of diseases was doubtless interesting for metapsychic research, but only for the particular aim of a deeper and detailed study of those with the extraordinary abilities of gaining paranormal knowledge. And Osty showed himself in essential agreement with Desoille about the fact that, in usual and daily medical practice, the paranormal diagnosis of the diseases did not show any concrete and real importance, except when the doctor with all necessary precautions decided to use some of indications from the psychic subject, while controlling the value of her diagnosis and using the precision and all the complements required of them by medical profession rules, conduct, and ethics.

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