

ESSAY

## Advantages of Being Multiplex

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**Abstract**—This is the study of the creative potential of mediumship. It emphasizes a neglected and under-conceptualized form of creativity in the realm of personality development. Examples include the cases of mediums Pearl Curran, Hélène Smith, and Matthew Manning. Artists with mediumistic propensities are stressed, such as Keats, Rimbaud, Blake, Yeats, and James Merrill. There is discussion of Myers’ theory of genius and how this bears on the concept of personal transformation. Myers’ theory is used to shed light on Surrealism, outsider art, and the lives of Socrates and Joan of Arc. All this is comprehended under the Keatsian rubric of “soulmaking.”

*Keywords:* mediumship—creativity—multiplicity

### Introduction

*If we are multiplex beings, let us gain the advantage of our multiplicity.*  
—Myers, 1886–1887:19

The term *mediumship* suggests communication with the dead, receiving impressions from another world, from gods and spirits. I will lay aside this question-begging sense of the term, and use terms such as *sensitive* or *automatist*. An action may be said to be automatic (“self-moved”) when “it is determined in an organism apart from the central will or control of that organism” (Myers, 1896:168). The suggestion is that there are other centers of will and other “control” systems. This apparent experiential plasticity of the ego-sense, the agility with which the self under special circumstances may reconfigure its identity, is a psychological fact of great interest. This is the sense of *mediumship*—and its relationship to creativity—I want to focus on here.

Mediumistic performance may be associated with creativity in at least two senses: There are mediums who produce or perform “creative” works, and there are individuals noted for their literary or artistic gifts who reveal “mediumistic” or dissociated traits (e.g., in Ghiselin, 1952). My aim here is to

clarify the relationship between mediumship and creativity in light of F. W. H. Myers' views of genius, automatism, and the subliminal mind (Myers, 1903). Myers' theory points to new domains of creative performance; for example, Surrealism, the art of the insane, and so-called "outsider" art. The broad question is how mediumistic, or dissociated, states increase the potential for personality development.

### Definition

On the term *creativity*, following Myers let us say that a performance is creative if it produces something extraordinary and original in a particular domain, and if the product is subsequently widely agreed to be useful, or to embody some intrinsic human value such as beauty, truth, wisdom, and so forth.

Great names such as Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Mozart spring to mind but can be intimidating. Myers' theory of genius, while fully affirming the value of the giants and founders of culture, also points us toward numerous gradations and qualities of the creative process. Creativity can occur in the anonymous valley as well as on the peaks. Myers' theory puts us in touch with the whole of our psychic life and the range of creative performance proliferates. It is this expansion of the range of creative performance that I want to underscore, especially in the domain of personality development. There is a question, experimental and deeply philosophical, of applying one's genius to the art of what we may speak of as *self-creation*. May we not utilize our highest creative capacities as a means of heightening or reforming the human personality? This seems a neglected topic of scientific investigation, although it is anticipated in the science fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1966).

### The Medium as Artist

Two types of experience show linkage between mediumship (or certain forms of automatism) and creativity. In the first, a medium or sensitive may "channel" a work of art, music, philosophy, or literature. It sometimes happens by chance that in playing with the ouija board, or attempting automatic writing, one discovers the ability to write poetry or draw or compose music.

One famous example is the American Pearl Curran, a Midwestern housewife of modest education. Mrs. Curran's life changed at age 31 when an experiment with a ouija board produced a personality calling itself Patience Worth, a self-declared 17th-century Englishwoman (Prince, 1964).

From 1913 to 1937, Pearl Curran produced via ouija board and speech automatisms 29 volumes of recorded communications from "Patience Worth." With spice and attitude, Patience poured out plays, novels, poems, witticisms,

repartees, proverbs, a consistent virtuoso literary and linguistic performance. What is especially striking is that this new, creative personality seems to have sprung suddenly and completely into being from, or through, the relatively staid, apparently ordinary Pearl Curran.

Patience produced works in a variety of styles from 19th century Victorian to early Anglo-Saxon; no one quite knows how she was able to pack her novels with so many historically and linguistically apt items and references. Her novel *The Sorry Tale*, about the life and times of Jesus, was hailed by critics, and according to the *The New York Times* was “constructed with the precision and accuracy of a master hand.”

The manner in which she produced her oeuvre was extraordinary: She rapidly improvised poems on any theme suggested. Her mnemonic feats rivaled those of so-called “savants”: She could pick up on a composition broken off mid-sentence, and return to the same word and continue with the same fluency days or weeks later. When challenged to vary composing works in different styles, she complied. When Walter Prince asked Patience to dictate a poem to her husband John Curran *and* simultaneously write a letter to a friend, she passed the test.

None of this serves to prove survival of the dead. It does, however, enlarge our conception of what creative faculties may be latent in ordinary human personality. Given the evidence we have, the English pragmatist Schiller (1928) and more recently the American philosopher Braude (2003) describe “Patience” as a “secondary personality” of Pearl Curran. She is also a particularly vivid literary creation. Unfortunately, this makes things more difficult for survivalists, as Braude has rightly pointed out: If a living person can subliminally acquire the information it needs to effectively impersonate another personality, dead or non-existent, then our confidence in even the best survival cases is weakened.

We may still look at the case of Patience Worth as a remarkable piece of evidence for a distinct domain of study: mediumship in service to the creative advance of personality itself. “Patience Worth” was a distinctly original personality of unusual creative capacities. She dictated a 60,000-word poem called *Telka* in 35 hours amid distractions, talking, and writing with others on other subjects. As a linguistic object, this poem has unusual properties. “It is the locutions of *Telka*, and in particular the vocabulary and the uses of that vocabulary, that are, I believe, miraculous” (Prince, 1964:357). For one thing, 90% of the text is in Anglo-Saxon, which is very difficult for most writers and periods of English literature (except possibly Wyckliffe’s *Bible*). The language of this mediumistically produced poem is consistent with a composite of 17th century dialects. More to the point, Yost says: “It [the language of *Telka*] seems not to be the language of any period of England nor of any locality of England.” It is a language that apparently has never been written or spoken anywhere.

According to Yost, “it is her construction, more even than her vocabulary, that is peculiar and individual. She has no reverence for parts of speech, and little respect for the holiest rules of syntax. ‘I be dame,’ she says.” Take another example from *Telka* where Patience turns the adjective *soggy* into a verb *soggeth*, adding archaism to syntactical transposition. Yost points out that *soggeth* is recorded nowhere else in the history of the English language; it is a pure child of Patience.

Caspar Yost sees this singularity of linguistic performance as proof of the uniqueness of the Patience Worth persona. With regard to the syntactical originality of *soggeth*, it’s important to note that originality by itself does not constitute creativity or indicate genius. Syntactical originality, though a possible feature of literary creativity, is neither sufficient nor necessary. Creativity, or genius, in a full-blown Myers-like sense, demands more than oddness or cleverness. In fact, the sentence in *Telka* with *soggeth* is pretty flat writing.

But this is not to say that Pearl Curran was not in her own way highly creative, if not, in a nonliterary sense, a “genius.” Her stunts of composition, though impressive, seem to me to fall short of meriting the qualifier creative and seem better described as anomalous. The creative aspect of Pearl’s mediumship I want to call attention to is not literary or esthetic but involves another domain of creative intelligence. The creativity here is therapeutic and existential, and consists of Pearl experimentally producing an original and unconventional self; wittier, bolder, earthier, wiser, playful, coyly archaic, and all decked out in Anglo-Saxon idiolect and syntax. Pearl creates Patience, an alternate self who becomes a famous literary performer. It is worth noting that gradually Pearl starts to become Patience, as Prince (1964) reminds us in his account. Becoming this new personality thus exemplifies a domain of creative performance.

The creative act here seems to consist of Pearl subliminally producing a new point of view, a new organizing center for her consciousness. The new center somehow allows new capacities to emerge. When Pearl becomes Patience, she marshals the information she needs, perhaps paranormally, to synthesize her new personality and ratify her story. Prince (1964) concluded that either survival or a hugely expanded view of the human subconscious were the two possible interpretations of Curran’s literary output.

### **Hélène Smith: The Medium as Performance Artist**

The career of the medium Hélène Smith (nee Catherine Elise Muller) was especially rich in this special type of creative performance. There are two detailed studies of her life and work (Deonna, 1932, Flournoy, 1899). I will not discuss her reputed paranormal talents. Despite Flournoy’s carefully argued criticisms of them, she did (if reluctantly admitted by Flournoy) display some extremely puzzling capacities. Smith’s automatic drawings and paintings

are quite striking, apart from the totally unconscious way she produced them. Deonna (1932) has reproduced many of these in his massive study of her automatic art.

Smith described how she produced her artworks in a statement to *Light* (October 11, 1913):

On the days when I am to paint I am always roused very early—generally between five and six in the morning—by three loud knocks at my bed. (Raps or “typtology” was part of her mediumistic repertoire.) I open my eyes and see my bedroom brightly illuminated, and immediately understand that I have to stand up and work. I dress myself in the beautiful iridescent light, and wait a few moments, sitting in my armchair, until the feeling comes that I have to work. It never delays. All at once I stand up and walk to the picture. When about two steps before it I feel a strange sensation, and probably fall asleep at the same moment. I know, later on, that I must have slept because I notice that my fingers are covered with different colors, and I do not remember at all to have used them. . . . (Fodor, 1966:350)

Smith apparently painted without a brush, proving herself a finger-painter extraordinaire. Her paintings, as far as I can see in reproductions without color, are well-composed, smoothly executed with defined images that exude a surreal religiosity that compares favorably with the paintings of Frida Kahlo.

Other aspects of H  l  ne Smith’s creative performance include her myth-making, or mytho-poetic, talents. She was, to begin with, a physically imposing person, tall, beautiful, and highly intelligent. Beyond her everyday functional identity, Catherine Muller became H  l  ne Smith: medium, clairvoyante, sensitive, automatist, table-tilter, and all-round communicator with Otherworlds. H  l  ne claimed to communicate with Mars, learned to speak Martian, and invented a written Martian language; she produced visionary paintings of Martian cities and landscapes. Her performance was extremely effective, and the dark-haired beauty with black eyes entranced many followers.

The more circumspect Flournoy, however, succeeded in showing how the literal content of Smith’s performances, her claims—being the reincarnation of Marie Antoinette, in touch with Cagliostro, talking with Martians—were false. H  l  ne and her followers were outraged by Flournoy’s deflating critique and punished him by refusing to continue research with him.

H  l  ne was no doubt taken in by the intensity of her own psychic powers, which did occasionally, but not consistently, bend the parameters of ordinary reality. It’s hard to imagine receiving such massive amounts of subliminally mytho-poetic uprush. Her immediate psychological reality must have been subjectively overwhelming, or at least incredibly rich.

The literal failures of her assumed identities took nothing away from H  l  ne’s creative capacity in the special domain we are focusing upon here.

We admire a writer who creates an interesting or entertaining character; as we do an actor who enacts an invented or improvised role. The art of H el ene is uniquely personal, intimate, and integral. As a performance artist, she used her mediumistic talents and mytho-poetic imagination to create *for herself* a series of roles, stories, and adventures; she performed these roles by living, breathing, and identifying herself with them. She used them to expand her own identity, thrusting into the background her old, relatively mundane persona, and making herself over into a new personality, and one that was larger than life. But to succeed she must convince her audience, which she needs to validate her new reality. H el ene was a pioneer in the domain of personality-creation, of what Keats called “soulmaking” and Jung called “individuation.”

### **Matthew Manning: Mediumship as Creative Evolution**

H el ene Smith was in some ways like the contemporary Matthew Manning. Both were versatile and did automatic writing, drawing, and painting; developed their capacities as time went on; and were driven by a sense of purpose. Deonna (1932) discusses what he calls Smith’s belief in her “mission.”

Manning is more critical and consciously experimental in his approach to his ostensibly psychic endowments. He combines active intelligence with creative channeling in the arts and published an account of his psychic evolution. Several points in his narrative bear on the problem of creativity. For one, he seems to have succeeded in redirecting disturbing emotional forces into automatic writing, forces that had at first expressed themselves as teenage poltergeistery. He was in school writing an essay when he suddenly felt something seize his hand. Later he wrote:

If it looked as though disturbances were imminent, I would sit down and write. Later, it became clear to me that the writing was the controlling factor. It appeared that the energy I used for writing had previously been used for causing poltergeist disturbances. (Manning, 1974:144)

Manning writes that he developed telepathy and a sensitivity to auras and electrical forces. These strange forces about his person occasionally misbehaved and bent keys or did other mischievous things. He also began to tune into spirits, in particular the ghost of Robert Webb from the 18th century, a spirit who still felt like he owned the house that Manning was living in. Sometimes a notable ex-carnate such as Bertrand Russell dropped in and delivered a message, which Manning did not take at face value. Manning produced hundreds of automatic drawings and paintings, claiming to emanate from great artists such as Durer, Goya, and Picasso. What I have seen of his Goya-like productions seemed authentic.

It seems unlikely that these drawings, done in the styles of the original artists, were indeed the products of their deceased agency, and anyway we are more concerned with *Manning's* creative performance. It is as though Manning, at this stage of his psychic evolution, went from being a poltergeist agent to a kind of open mike for the spirits of great artists to express themselves in the present. The story of Matthew Manning illustrates the growth potential of mediumistic creative powers. Manning, moreover, unlike H  l  ne Smith, appears more prone to combine creative mediumship with critical thinking. The critical attitude toward his own psychic talents, as it seems from his narrative, served to drive (not inhibit) their creative development. This of course must be a delicate operation; there is the risk that too much critical intervention may impede the flow of intuition.

### Creative Cooperation

In 1923–1924, Hester Travers Smith and a Mr. V. jointly produced 25 scripts by means of automatic writing that claimed to derive from the deceased mind of Oscar Wilde. Neither had any particular prior interest in Wilde; Mr. V. was mainly looking to learn automatic writing.

The writing style of the scripts was clearly suggestive of Wilde's clever epigrams and startling turns of phrase. The script itself strongly resembled Wilde's handwriting and contained references to his life that were consciously unknown to the automatists. This interesting material, according to Eleanor Sidgwick's (1924) account, falls short of supporting the survival of Wilde, but more to our purpose supports the idea that mediumistic, or dissociated, states of mind may on occasion enhance creative performance. In this case, moreover, the creativity seemed to depend on a special cooperative relationship.

V. was not altogether successful in learning to write automatically, and it was not until Hester rested her hand lightly on V.'s hand that the scripts came. It is not clear what the guiding intelligence was, or if there was one intelligence responsible for producing the scripts. It does seem that the partnership or convergent dynamic of V. and Hester enabled them to do what they could not singly do. Clearly, some latent capacities require group support before productivity becomes possible.

Mr. V. was not aware of having seen Wilde's handwriting prior to his automatic performance, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that he did, perhaps only half consciously in a bookstore. If we knew he did, it would detract from the survival hypothesis, but not from the creative value of the attempt to produce a convincing persona of Oscar Wilde. The scripts revealed a knowledge of astronomy that Wilde was not known to possess but that Mr. V. did possess. This would seem to show it came not from the deceased Wilde but from V.

It also reveals the opportunism of the creative process. Mr. V. subliminally draws upon his own unconscious memories of astronomy to flesh out the portrait of the character he is creating. This happens in other creative activities; fiction writers draw upon personal experience to create literary characters or imaginary portraits. Mr. V.'s subliminal intelligence apparently slipped up here, as far as consistency in portraying Wilde.

### Impersonating the Dead

Finally, consider the most extraordinary, and perplexing, form of mediumistic creativity. Like fine actors who convincingly impersonate fictional characters, superb mediums such as Leonora Piper and Gladys Osborn Leonard have been able to convince their "audience" that they have truly impersonated—or transmitted—personalities known to be deceased.

In order to accomplish this startling effect, they apparently draw upon the full resources of their subliminal selves, psychically scanning the environment for the information needed to recreate a verisimilar deceased personality. Good mediums can reproduce voice, tone, mannerisms, characteristic turns of phrase, and other personal traits of a deceased person so that the sitters of a seance are duly amazed, may be intellectually persuaded, and are sometimes deeply moved.

Both interpretations are evidence for high mediumistic creativity. Suppose the medium has in fact succeeded in being possessed by an identifiable exanimate personality; such a performance may well seem creative. It involves the synthesis of many skills, some of them paranormal. In part, what is created in the audience is a sense of emotional and rational conviction that so and so has indeed survived death. On the other hand, we might equally suppose the medium has only created a convincing facsimile, a compelling illusion of a deceased person. This seems no less a creative feat, raising deception to a paranormal art. This *prima facie* function of mediumistic performance—producing conviction of the reality of survival—ranks as something we should honor with the title "creative." As such, mediums such as Leonora Piper and Gladys Osborn Leonard deserve to be ranked as geniuses in their domain.

### The Artist as Medium

People primarily thought of as mediums display various creative behaviors. Now consider examples of some poets with mediumistic tendencies. The focus on poets is arbitrary but has an advantage: Poets are well-suited to the task of describing the subtleties of their psychical lives.

But first a glance at the Muses, imaginative figures deeply embedded in Greek mythology. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (Evelyn-White, 1959:181), we read:

“And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under Helicon.” The muses declared: “Miserable wretches, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things.” And then they “breathed into me a divine voice. . . .” This last phrase illustrates the idea of *inspiration*—being “breathed into” from an external source. The Muses (goddesses, nine in all, and daughters of Memory) symbolize this external source.

The text shows there is a discontinuity between poet and source of inspiration; in terms of Myers’ psychology, a discontinuity between supraliminal and subliminal strata of mental life. Also, Hesiod divined a fact that Myers would later confirm: the subliminal mind is both “evolutive” and “dissolutive,” a source of true insight but also of rubbish and prevarication.

The Muses are ingrained in Western literature. From Homer to Milton we find their invocations, an indicator of the ties between mediumism and creativity. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, “the greatest blessings” of healing, music, and poetry arise through “god-given madness.” Plato preserves Hesiod’s and Myers’ distinction between kinds of manic inlet to the subliminal: the god-given “evolutive” and the ordinary “dissolutive.” The functional meaning of the Muse was rediscovered during the Renaissance, the Romantic period, and by 20th century Surrealists.

This recognition of genius as something initiated from outside personal mental life was a popular conceit of the Romantic poets. In one of his letters, John Keats remarked on the psychology of creativity:

. . . at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—. . . (Gittings, 1970:43)

What is “negative capability” that Keats thinks defines creative achievers? It is an ability to escape the constraints of Myers’ “supraliminal” mind, the part of us that “itches” to reduce things to their factual and rational character, in short an essentially unpoetic, uncreative way of relating to the world. The poet with negative capability is open to all the possibilities and can tolerate, and even prefer, uncertainty, ambiguity, mystery, and doubt, which well describe the character of the subliminal world, the subwaking region of ideas, dreams, and visions.

Other poets have given away precious secrets in their letter writing. The boy-wonder French poet Arthur Rimbaud left a letter with his theory of “creative dissociation” (Grosso, 1997). Rimbaud describes his method for becoming a seer and clairvoyant; based on a *dereglement*, a “de-ruling” (the

opposite of what computers do), a derailing or disordering, of our ordinary sense modalities. Rimbaud strove to retain the esthetic essence of extreme experiences and to dismantle the routines of the conscious ego. He sums up his view with the laconic formula: *Je est un autre* or “I am another” or “there is another me.” There is, in short, more to the poet than his supraliminal self. Rimbaud’s poetic method was based on systematically disrupting the workings of the supraliminal mind.

More than one great poet has been known for his mediumistic inclinations. Consider the visionary, mediumistic, revolutionary, and extrovertive mystic William Blake, who wrote: “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s; I will not reason & compare; my business is to create” (Keynes, 1972:629). Creativity for Blake was the necessary expression of his freedom and a response to the dictates of inspiration. Blake wrote his friend Butts that his prophetic poem *Milton* was written “from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will”, and later added, “I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be other than the secretary; the authors are in eternity” (Damon, 1958:202).

According to Damon (1958:201), Blake “struggled his whole life through to join the Conscious and the Subconscious.” This is what Myers understood to be the essence of genius. Blake was conscious of responding to the dictates of the subliminal when he wrote: “. . . I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily and Nightly” (Damon, 1958:205).

The life of genius is not without cost. “But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels,” Blake declares, we will suffer “dismal torments” and be shunned as traitors in “Eternity.” Eternity for Blake is the afterworld, the world of imagination. Blake’s refusal to bury his talents has implications for psychotherapy; we do not care for our souls when we bury our talents, and we pay an emotional price when we fail to create our own “system.” Inspiration not acted upon is a sin against the Holy Ghost; as he puts it in one of his Proverbs of Hell: “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.”

Our next example of mediumizing genius is William Butler Yeats, who greatly admired William Blake. Like Blake, Yeats, as he writes in the opening pages of *A Vision* (Yeats, 1962), is driven to use an often strange and barbaric symbolism with the express purpose of uniting “the sleeping and waking mind.” Effecting a union of the sleeping and waking mind is exactly what Myers means by genius.

Yeats entertained a theory of magic based on the “the great memory,” the transmarginal or subliminal memory (Yeats, 1961). The “magic” consists of using symbols to evoke the powers of the great memory, and thus connect, coordinate, and unite our sleeping and waking mental regions. Yeats’s idea of magic and Myers’ of genius converge.

In *A Vision*, Yeats declared that his recent “poetry has gained in self-possession and power” and adds, “I owe this change to an incredible experience.” The incredible experience was that on October 4, 1917, his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees surprised him by attempting automatic writing. Profound and exciting utterances came forth, and an unknown writer (or writers) said: “We have come to give you metaphors for poetry.” Thus commenced an extraordinary partnership in creativity that Yeats pursued with his wife for three years. “Exposition in sleep came to an end in 1920, and I began an exhaustive study of some fifty copy-books of automatic script.” These copybooks were the raw materials from which he produced some of the greatest poetry and prose of the 20th century.

Recall the case of V. and Hester in the production of the “Oscar Wilde” scripts: It was a joint effort; when Hester rested her hand on V., the brilliant literary persona of “Oscar Wilde” emerged. Note the analogy with Yeats and his wife, though not exact because Yeats’s wife wrote without her husband’s hand on hers. But the script was the product of a joint effort, transcending them both, who were more like secretaries to the psychological entity who they jointly produced. The performance was a partnership in dissociation, a species of joint mediumship.

My last example of this is one of the great 20th century American poets, James Merrill, and in particular his masterpiece *The Changing Light at Sandover* (Merrill, 1993), also produced jointly, through a ouija board by himself and his long-time friend. Harold Bloom wrote: “I don’t know that *The Book of Ephraim*, at least after some dozen readings, can be over-praised, as nothing since the greatest writers of our century equals it in daemonic force. . . .” In the opening pages of that book, Merrill (1993) describes the instant the ouija board comes to life:

YES a new and urgent power YES  
 Seized the cup. It swerved, clung, hesitated,  
 Darted off, a devil’s darning needle  
 Gyroscope our fingers rode bareback  
 (But stopping dead the instant one lost touch) (p. 102)

So, as with V. and Hester, and Yeats and his automatist wife, we note another illustration of creative partnership. If either Merrill or his partner took his finger off the cup, it stopped dead. But when the poet and his companion were one in spirit, results were electrifying.

Yet even the most fragmentary message—  
 Twice as entertaining, twice as wise  
 As either of its mediums—enthralled them. (p. 103)

By establishing a certain rapport between individuals, it may be possible to draw on sources of genius otherwise impossible or elusive to employ. Sometimes creative performance seems possible only in the right partnership, the right group dynamic. The subtle group dynamics of the creative process merits further study.

### Myers' Theory of Genius

So much for a rapid sketch of two types of empirical linkage between mediumship and creativity. Along the way, I have made several references to Frederic Myers, whose theory of genius (Myers, 1903(1):70–120) provides some useful guiding ideas. Genius occupies a high place in Myers' view of human personality, constituting the "true normality" of the species. The basic intuition is that "genius" is what happens when the "supraliminal" and the "subliminal" strata of our mental life combine, and give birth to new and often useful and illuminating arrangements of ideas and actions. Genius, according to Myers, is the "co-operation of the submerged and the emergent self" and a person of genius "effects a successful co-operation of an unusually large number of elements of his personality" (1903(1)72). Genius implies "co-coordinating the waking and sleeping phases of (one's) existence" (1903(1)73).

Genius is not just about inspiration, however; enlarged receptivity to the submerged self is not the whole picture. Myers puts the stress on volition. The new elements of personality made available to us by inspiration must be shaped and molded by intentionality. "The differentia of genius," he wrote, "lies in an increased control over subliminal mentation" (1903(1):74). Producing works of genius requires patient, steadfast attentiveness—a well-honed will. Genius is a paradoxical state that combines "subliminal uprush" with "increased control" of the subliminal.

Myers' theory enlarges the scope of the activities of genius. The spirit of genius embodies a trend toward greater integration, "a power of utilizing a wider range than other men can utilize of faculties in some degree innate in all" (1903(1):71). Myers here democratizes the capacity for genius; we all possess the germ and principle as part of our innate human endowment.

We associate genius with conventional domains such as art, religion, science, and philosophy, but Myers increases the range of possible experience: ". . . genius may be recognized in every region of thought and emotion. In each direction a man's everyday self may be more or less permeable to subliminal impulses" (1903(1):116).

Every moment of mental life whose superficial character is more or less adapted to the demands of the physical environment also possesses a subliminal depth that is normally hidden from us, although we may count on it being alive at the margins of waking life. What Myers called "subliminal uprush"

is possible any moment in any mode of experience: emotional, intellectual, or moral. Raw material is everywhere for genius to work upon.

For Myers genius is an evolutionary process. Reacting strongly to Darwinism, Myers strove to be broadly compatible with the evolutionary outlook, believing that there was a *nisus* or drive in us toward realizing a wider, more comprehensive consciousness. This for Myers was probably rooted in his classically nurtured, neo-Platonic intuitions, and by collating all the relevant empirical data he made it a well-grounded hypothesis. Myers admitted to “enthusiastic” leanings, sensing an upward evolutionary arc at work, in a spirit akin to Aurobindo or Teilhard de Chardin, who emphasize the development of our mental and moral faculties.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the species as a whole is utilizing its genius potential; when progress occurs, it does so in isolated, unpredictable individual cases, and occasionally concentrates in times and places.

Myers’ theory of genius puts us in touch with phenomena of heroic sanctity, mysticism, and supernormal faculty. Mediumship, as a form of dissociation from the habits of ordinary consciousness, may increase receptivity to these higher and more expansive domains of experience. According to Myers, the fully realized humans of the future will enjoy mastery of the multiple strata of our submerged, latent capacities, and in fact during the 20th century developments continued the legacy of a Myers-like evolutionary psychology.

### Surrealism

My first example of a new domain of creative performance is Surrealism. Surrealism, and its chief theoretician Andre Breton, is generally thought to have been inspired by Freud; Myers, however, was also a significant source. In 1933 Breton published *The Automatic Message* expressing Surrealism’s indebtedness to the “gothic psychiatry” of F. W. H. Myers (Breton, 1997). Myers’ work on automatism provided the psychological mechanism that Surrealists would exploit in novel ways. “Surrealism has above all worked to bring inspiration back into favor, and we have for that purpose promoted the use of automatic forms of expression . . .” (Breton, 1997:16).

Why promote these forms of expression? Breton had little interest in their otherworldly applications, what he calls the soul “dissociating” from the body. He was more interested in transforming premortem experience: “. . . the Surrealists’ aim is nothing less than to unify the personality” (Breton, 1997:17). This of course is precisely what Myers meant by “genius,” the interpenetration and ultimate coordination of dream and waking life. This is how Breton puts it in the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak” (Breton, 1972:14).

Surrealism was based on the assumption that it is possible to forge new psychophysical realities by fusing the waking and subliminal strata of our mental life. Surrealism was a school and theory of art; it was also a political program committed to creating a new social consciousness that would be deeply in touch with its dream life. Surrealism was one way that the project of creative mediumship branched out into the 20th century.

### Outsider Art

Another, related domain of dissociative creativity is “outsider” art (Hall & Metcalf, 1994). This umbrella term covers the work of children, primitives, the incarcerated, the elderly, folk art, *art brut*, psychotic art, and generally all forms of art and image-making produced by the untaught, the culturally deprived, the isolated, and the marginalized. We may characterize these forms of spontaneous expression as subliminal; it is the creativity that occurs in the face of denial of supraliminal intelligent resources. Outsider artists are less inhibited and more like automatists than conscious craftspeople.

Sometimes creative automatism is like a seizure. Scottie Wilson ran a used goods store in Toronto. “One day in the back of his shop, he picked up a fountain pen and began doodling on a tabletop. He drew until the entire surface was covered, and he continued to draw for the next thirty-seven years of his life” (Petullo, 1993:105). Wilson’s work resembles but is more dazzling than Paul Klee’s; eventually he had shows in London galleries but refused to sell his artworks. He did succeed, however, in eking out a living charging people to look at his artworks. Scottie kept drawing with colored pencils until his late 70s when he died. It certainly appears as if he were seized by something starkly dissimilar and external to his 35-year old personality, and that it transformed him, driving him to a surprising artistic career.

The case of Augustin Lesage (1876–1954) also illustrates the phenomenon of possession by the “muses.” Lesage was a coal miner living in Northern France, a man without anything in his experience or background that could account for his fate as an artist. Sometime around 1912 Lesage had an extraordinary experience. He writes:

I was in the mine, in a long tunnel, I was working by myself . . . —suddenly, I hear a voice talking to me. I look around on all sides of me . . . I was alone. I was stupefied! I was afraid, and my hair stood up. Then I heard: “Don’t be afraid, we are near you. One day you will be a painter”. (Notter et al., 1988:12)

The voices continued to urge him to paint and persuaded him to order art supplies from a shop in nearby Lille. To his consternation he received one piece of canvas 10 feet square and a few very small brushes. The voices forbade

him to cut the canvas up. Under the guidance of his voices, he commenced his first canvas. He began without drawing or plan in the upper right hand corner and a year later completed his first artwork, in which he combined miniaturist technique with massive symmetrical architecture, which requires high degrees of careful and directed control. Lesage, like William Blake, claimed no responsibility for these works, which have grown in fame. "A picture comes into existence detail by detail," he said, "and nothing about it enters my mind beforehand. My guides have told me: 'Do not try to find out what you are doing.' I surrender to their prompting. . . . I follow my guides like a child" (Maizels, 1996:56). As Lesage became more famous and more sophisticated, he seems to have declined in his ability to deploy his subliminal muses.

Adolf Woelfli (1864–1930) is well-known in the field of outsider art (Spoerri, 1997). In some ways, Woelfli shares with H el ene Smith a profile of extraordinary multi-modal creativity shaped by persistent automatisms. With a Blakean compulsion not to be "enslaved" by others, Smith and Woelfli were driven to create vast, autonomous worlds. Their outer circumstances differed markedly: Woelfli was an institutionalized paranoid schizophrenic for most of his life; H el ene Smith was a vital, attractive woman who made an impressive success of her psychic talents.

Woelfli, given to violent acts and sexual aggression, spent much of his time in solitary confinement at the Waldeau Psychiatric Clinic in Berne, Switzerland, and was pronounced "mentally incompetent." He was institutionalized in 1895 for sexually molesting a young girl because (as he explained) the parents of his true love rejected him on account of his inferior social class.

Woelfli's childhood was beset by poverty and parental ignorance; he lost both his parents who had turned to a life of crime. He was farmed out to State institutions during a low point in the history of Berne. His behavior was violent, aggressive, and he heard voices (paranoid delusions) during the early stage of incarceration. Woelfli was severely cut off from the external world. In 1899, he spontaneously began to write and draw. Encouraged by staff to continue doing so in the clinic, these activities seemed to channel his violent impulses. (Recall that Matthew Manning channeled his destructive poltergeist into automatic writing and drawing.)

Woelfli's productivity was enormous. From 1908 to 1930 he worked on a massive narrative that is a mythology of Adolf Woelfli, a mixture of authentic personal history and cosmic fantasy, a carefully unified whole, woven together with prose, poetry, illustrations, and musical compositions. This mentally incompetent madman left behind him 45 volumes, 16 notebooks, altogether 25,000 packed pages, along with hundreds of drawings that now hang next to the work of Paul Klee in Switzerland.

Notable is the enormous measure of precise control over all this material,

reflecting Woelfli's will to create a secondary world for himself in the face of the devastation of his given world. The theme of this epic outpouring of obsessive genius is the constant destruction and resurrection of the central protagonist who is the author himself. It is about survival in this world, about molding with Renaissance gusto the form and image of one's own existence. He accomplished all this with a few pencils and paper doled out by the State while forced to inhabit day in and day out the same small cell.

Morgenthaler (1921/1992) was fascinated by Woelfli's relentless creative output and observed the inmate at his worktable while he drew and wrote. Woelfli would talk about the content of work, but he had no idea how he produced it. Morgenthaler observed that Woelfli worked from no previous sketch and that he drew spontaneously. Despite this, the entire ongoing oeuvre seemed guided by a single compulsive unifying intelligence (MacGregor, 1989:215). Woelfli's performance illustrates what Myers meant by creative subliminal intelligence. Myers, unlike Lombroso and Freud, would judge Woelfli's performance as evidence for an innate capacity for creative process.

Morgenthaler and Hans Prinzhorn rejected Lombroso's insistence on pathologizing genius (Lombroso, however, was a pioneer collector of the art of the insane) and were the first to emphasize the esthetic, therapeutic, and psychological value of the creativity of mentally disturbed patients. In this they confirmed Myers' inclinations, for Prinzhorn, like Myers, saw the creative imagination, what he called *Bildnerie* and *Gestaltung*, "imagery" and "figuration," as an irreducible creative human capacity.

The German investigators felt they had identified a basic property of consciousness; an inborn capacity of mind that is independent of linear, computational intelligence: a strictly internal process "not subordinated to any outside purpose," according to Prinzhorn, "but directed solely and self-sufficiently toward their own self-realization." All expressive gestures, all figuration, in any medium, aim "to actualize the psyche and thereby to build a bridge from the self to others." The purpose of figuration, or the creative imagination, is to enable us "to escape into the expanse of common life from the restrictions of the individual . . ." (Prinzhorn, 1995:13). Creativity is thus essentially tied to the making of human society, and sometimes in psychotic states creative urge works toward healing.

### **Creative Mediumship and "Soulmaking"**

So far we have focused on certain conventional forms of creativity such as poetry and the plastic arts. But Myers' theory of genius allows for subliminal uprushes to occur in a wide range of experiences; in effect, any state, situation, or mode of experience is more or less "permeable" to inspiration. Myers calls us to survey and prepare to explore the greater arena of creative process.

To indicate this briefly, consider the examples of Socrates and Joan of Arc, two creative giants, one in the domain of wisdom, the other of extraordinary leadership. Socrates, the archetypal philosopher and martyr to Western rationalism, throughout his life is guided, in big and small matters, by a daimon, or inner voice, a creature of subliminal intelligence (Myers, 1888–1889:522–547). We have no direct, written statements from Socrates about his inner life, but in the *Apologia* Plato represents Socrates as saying that the daimon was silent about his being condemned to death, from which the philosopher inferred that death could not be a bad thing. In short, even in dying Socrates was consciously attuned to his subliminal self and was guided by it. What makes Socrates so extraordinary is that he seems to have perfectly fused his conscious critical intellect with his subliminal daimon. In the vast majority of human beings, the two are almost always thoroughly disjointed and disconnected, often at great emotional and spiritual cost.

Or take another highly exceptional being, Joan of Arc, the virgin teenager who turned the tide of the Hundred Years War and set France on the road to nationhood. Since Joan was a child in Domremy, and throughout her brief life, she was guided by subliminal intelligence. In Lang's (1895) account of Joan's voices, again we find a case in which the superficial awareness of everyday life is interfused with subliminal messages.

All the major events of Joan's life were influenced by the voices (sometimes accompanied by lights and visions of the saints). She first heard voices when she was 13, at first telling her to pray and go to church. She referred to them as "my voices," "my counsel." Soon they began to prod her about her mission to save France. They helped her gain the confidence of the Dauphin by assuaging secret fears he had about his legitimacy (Lang, 1895:199). D'Aulon, her companion throughout her career, testified that Joan told him she was being "counseled" by her voices on military tactics and general strategy.

In the course of difficulties, her voices encouraged her to "bear all cheerfully" and to believe that her "martyrdom" would lead to "paradise." Obliquely, they predicted the exact time of her death. The voices came to her spontaneously, and if they failed her she summoned them with prayer. She claimed they woke her from her sleep and kept her company even in the din of court proceedings as she defended herself against the wiles of her accusers. When she temporarily recanted her mission, her voices encouraged her to recant her recantation, and do her duty. As in the case of Socrates, the subliminal voices seemed to place integrity of purpose above life itself. It is clear from the records that Joan's surface life was in deep dialogue with her subliminal will—her "voices," her "counsel." The genius of Joan of Arc served a nation's emancipation, and seemed to embody collective, not personal, needs.

We need to recall the fact that Joan grew up hearing widespread rumors

about a young maid coming to rescue France from the English oppressors. In fact, there were predecessors, models of mystical and prophetic women known to play roles of leadership in the affairs of state, including, for example, Hildegard of Bingen (1118–1179), Elizabeth of Schonau (1128–1164), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210–1297), and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380). All these figures may have played a role in mobilizing Joan's subliminal self. This is conjecture, but it is based on enough empirical data to make it at least plausible. It is conceivable that a purely random suggestion, or series of suggestions from Joan's environment, may have helped crystallize a disposition in Joan to save her country from its English occupiers. In an unrepeatable and unintended experiment, all the right elements may have come into place, which drove and guided her extraordinary exploits.

But let us return to less grand and more down-to-earth examples of creative performance. The restless, ever opportunistic, *nisus* of genius also expresses itself in personal venues. There is one area of performance we do not usually associate with conventional notions of creativity. And yet this could prove the most interesting form of creative mediumship: namely, in the formation of human personality, the project, as Rimbaud said, of coming "into the fullness of one's dream" (Rimbaud, 1957:28). To put this in perspective, the historian Burckhardt suggested the Renaissance as a time when people began to think of their *lives* as works of art, as a domain of self-perfection; the sentiment is typified by Aretino's motto to "live resolutely" and aim to become, as Castiglione put it, a "universal human" (Burckhardt, 1935:147–150).

More systematic notions of the ethos of self-creation and creative authenticity emerged among 20th century existentialists, particularly Heidegger and Sartre. For our purpose, a famous letter of John Keats to his brothers in 1819 on "soulmaking" will serve to clarify the main idea. Keats had been reading and musing on the fact that the world is a place beset by troubles, a "vale of tears." No matter what obstacle we think we have overcome, he says, we are still likely to encounter "a fresh set of annoyances." He writes: "Call the world if you please 'The Vale of Soulmaking'" and adds: "There may be intelligences or sparks of divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself." This can only come about through "the medium of the world." "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" (Gittings, 1970:250). Keats, like Myers, Breton, Yeats, Prinzhorn, and Jung, saw what he called "self-identity" as the goal of "soulmaking"—the integrated embrace of experience; the fusion of opposites into something original and self-realized.

There are many ways to mine the Keatsian idea of "soulmaking." Braude (2002) has shown in what sense sustaining an induced negative hallucination, which is a kind of selective dissociation, puts creative demands on the subliminal

intelligence. To tell one lie to yourself effectively, you must tell many more interrelated lies, and that calls for creative ingenuity, at least if you hope to maintain your fiction long-term.

The form of creativity that Braude has analyzed may be extended to apply to a wide range of behaviors. We say, for example, that a person has a “blind-spot” about one thing or another; fanatic physicalists, to give an appropriate example, simply cannot see the mountains of psi-supportive data before them. It seems to me that negative hallucinations of a cognitive type are rampant in psychological life. There is probably a measure of negative hallucination in every fanatically or perhaps even *too* firmly held position. I would go further and say there must be at any given moment in our lives all sorts of unconscious restrictions on what we permit ourselves to see.

On the other hand, selective omission (more or less subliminal) may be a factor in shaping a healthy, expansive personality as well. Making oneself, shaping one’s personality, what the ancient Greeks called *paideia*, or “education,” is perhaps the most practical, the most demanding, of the personal performance arts. Consider how we might all profit from inducing in ourselves various “negative hallucinations”: for example, not to think of discouraging thoughts when they are counterproductive, or allow oneself to be hampered by corrosive doubts, or frightened by overblown fears, or undermined by envy or jealousy, or rendered ineffectual from endless regret, or paralyzed by too many scruples and inhibitions. In short, if we could learn to mobilize the subliminal scanner to selectively shield us from awareness of the ideas and associations that we decide in advance might derail or needlessly complicate our path, it would be a tool in the art of sculpting our personalities.

The idea of conscious re-creation of one’s personality became more than a Renaissance or Romantic fantasy when the early mesmerists began to discover what was called divided consciousness, secondary personality, or artificial somnambulism. One of the first things that became evident was that the secondary personality—that often emerged in response to some crisis—often seemed to possess traits superior to the primary. In a famous example, a peasant with an inflamed lung, Victor Race, a subject of the Marquis de Puysegur’s mesmeric manipulations, manifested a personality that was more alert, articulate, confident, and perceptive than the non-mesmerized Victor. (Puysegur is generally credited with having been the first to elicit a “secondary personality” from a mesmerized subject.)

Though ordinarily a simple and tongue-tied peasant, he would, in the somnambulant state, converse in a fluent and elevated manner, expressing such sentiments of friendship. . . . Victor assumed management of his own case, diagnosing and prescribing for his illness, and predicting its course. More than this: On being brought into contact with other patients, he seemed able to do the same for them. (Gauld, 1995:41)

Victor eventually began to take on the characteristic form of his secondary personality, thus providing a model for how a personality can be re-created from subliminal resources.

A psychological situation was artificially induced that offered opportunities for the re-integration, healing, and even enlargement of Victor's primary peasant personality. Early investigators such as Janet and Binet came to understand the therapeutic potential of their subjects' multiple selves, as others more recently have. For example, Adam Crabtree offers this stunning reflection: "It is my opinion that it could conceivably be therapeutically beneficial to assist the creation of a full-blown personality that embodies mixed elements already existing within the individual in a disorganized way" (Crabtree, 1985:225). I am struck by how well this statement of Crabtree's describes the everyday business of the artist, which is to confront and create order out of chaos.

In Myers' view of genius and the *Gestaltung* of Prinzhorn, we find the idea that there is a creative, transformative principle, or we might invoke the *esemplastic* faculty, a word invented by Coleridge for the imaginative power to form things into unities. Like an artist or scientist incubating, "sitting on" a question or problem, with all the pieces coming together in a flash of inspiration—in a similar way it might be possible to incubate a new personality, and produce what is needed to flourish under a new identity.

### Concluding Observations

My purpose has been to widen the scope of the concept of mediumistic creativity. I have stressed what I call the domain of personality-creation. The idea that we possess the power to transform our personalities lies at the foundation of Myers' hypothesis of the subliminal self:

I hold that we each of us contain the potentialities of many different arrangements of the elements of our personality, each arrangement being distinguishable from the rest by differences in the chain of memories that pertains to it. The arrangement with which we habitually identify ourselves—what we call the normal or primary self—consists, in my view, of the elements selected for us in the struggle for existence with special reference to the maintenance of ordinary physical needs, and is not necessarily superior in any other respect to the latent personalities which lie alongside it—the fresh combinations of our personal elements which may be evoked, by accident or design, in a variety to which we can at present assign no limit. (Myers, 1888:374–397)

According to this remarkable statement, our "normal" self is largely a cut-out from a much greater subliminal self, but a cut-out ideally adapted to biological survival; whereas the potential for other arrangements of our personality factors has no assignable limit. Each of us harbors a multitude of

possible centers of new, richer, and profounder selfhood, ranging across all human forms of experience. We have reviewed a small number of examples from the literature of genius and mediumship. The possibilities of human transformation are far richer than mainstream psychology seems prepared to admit.

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