

THÉODORE FLOURNOY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we review the main contributions of Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920) to psychical research. Flournoy always advocated the scientific study of psychic phenomena as an important area that should not be ignored. After a short discussion of Flournoy's attitudes to psychic phenomena we focus on his main work, his study of Hélène Smith (1861–1929) published in *Des Indes à la Planète Mars* (1900), in which he summarized communications about previous lives in France and India, as well as those coming from the planet Mars, which Flournoy attributed to subconscious abilities involving imagination and cryptomnesia. In addition, we review his other investigations of mental mediums, observations of physical mediums, and writings about telepathy and precognition. We argue that Flournoy's work with mental mediums made him a significant contributor to the study of the capabilities of the subconscious mind, work that was important to the theoretical concerns of both dynamic psychology and psychical research.

INTRODUCTION

Many psychologists have been involved with psychical research from the beginnings of the discipline (e.g. Plas, 2000; Sommer, 2013). An example, and the focus of the current paper, was a Swiss psychologist said in 1902 to have “done more than any other recent writer to elucidate the genesis of mediumship” (Podmore, 1902, Vol.2, p.313). We are referring to Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920). Flournoy's work in psychical research was undertaken in the context of the early interaction between psychology and psychical research, and there were various approaches to this topic and different agendas. On the one hand, many psychologists actively rejected what during Flournoy's times was called metapsychic, psychic, spiritualistic, and the supernormal, as seen in phenomena such as telepathy, apparitions, and mental and physical mediumship (Alvarado, 2009; Coon, 1992; Sommer, 2012). These students of the mind and behaviour reckoned that psychic phenomena could be explained by conventional principles, such as fraud, coincidences, problems with human testimony, dissociation and sensory cues (e.g. Janet, 1889; Jastrow, 1889). But others drew on psychology to study psychic phenomena, as was evident in the early work of researchers affiliated with the Society for Psychical Research (e.g. Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886). Many members of this Society investigated the capabilities and manifestations of the subconscious mind in examination of phenomena such as hypnosis and various examples of dissociation (Alvarado, 2002; Gauld, 1992).

While there were many psychologists, physicians and philosophers who studied manifestations attributed to the subconscious mind, such as secondary personalities, automatism and the effects of suggestion, there were very few

who took psychical research seriously and treated it as a legitimate topic for investigation. We are discussing Flournoy in this paper as an example of an eminent professional who did. Our purpose is to present an overview of his psychical research work, hoping to remind modern readers of his interest in the subject and his various contributions. Secondly, we argue that Flournoy was similar to Myers in that he argued that some phenomena, particularly mediumship, had conventional explanations based on the workings of the subconscious mind, but that other manifestations required the acceptance of some supernormal principle. There were, of course, important differences between the two men's thinking. But for our purpose we want to argue that Flournoy's work illustrates the interaction of psychical research and the study of the subconscious mind in early psychology.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Flournoy was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1854.¹ His father, Alexander Flournoy (1818–1890), was a stockbroker, and his mother, Caroline Claparède, came from a family of ministers, judges and teachers. He earned bachelor degrees in literature (1872), mathematics (1874), and natural sciences and engineering (1875) and began studies in theology, which he later abandoned. Flournoy also studied medicine but never went into practice.

During a stay in Germany Flournoy studied philosophy in Leipzig (1878–1879). He attended courses taught by Wilhelm Wundt, and witnessed the foundation of Wundt's psychology laboratory in 1879. From Leipzig, Flournoy went to Paris (1879–1880) and returned thence to Switzerland, where he married Marie Burnier (1856–1909) in 1880. His other interests at this time included philosophy, particularly the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). He died on 5 November 1920.

EARLY STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

After having studied medicine and other fields of knowledge, Flournoy finally devoted himself to psychology. Aside from his own studies, he corresponded regularly with many psychologists, such as Alfred Binet (Alexander, 2011) and William James (Le Clair, 1966). Along with his cousin Édouard Claparède, Flournoy co-edited the *Archives de Psychologie*. He was also the President of the Sixth International Congress of Psychology, which met in Geneva in 1909 (Claparède, 1910a), an event that brought together many scholars in the field. Flournoy was therefore aware of the progress in his area, and of the main theoretical models in vogue.



Figure 1. Théodore Flournoy

¹ The following summary is based mainly on Claparède (1921). See also Alexander (2011), Ellenberger (1970, pp. 315–318), Goldsmith (1979), and Nicolas and Charvillat (1998). Flournoy's psychical research is discussed by Caratelli (1996, Chapter 3), Cifali (2001) and Shamdasani (1994).

As a man of his time, Flournoy was exposed to the materialistic ideas prevalent during the nineteenth century (Janet, 1888), as well as the tendency, represented in France by Théodule Ribot (1879), to develop an empirical psychology based on systematic observation, rather than on philosophical or introspective analysis (Flournoy, 1890). This attitude also included abandoning metaphysical ideas such as the nature of the spirit and the relationship of the spirit with the body.

After his first book (Flournoy, 1890), Flournoy's first triumph in psychology was his appointment to the Chair of Experimental Psychology at the University of Geneva in 1891. He was the first professor of psychology in Europe to become a member of the Faculty of Sciences instead of the Faculty of Philosophy, which was a recognition of the scientific emphasis of the new psychology.

A short time later, in 1892, he established his laboratory (Flournoy, 1896). In his opinion, a laboratory allowed the expansion of students' education in a way that "pure and simple academic teaching could not" (Flournoy, 1896, p.9).² However, Flournoy did not believe that psychology was just laboratory experimentation. According to him, the laboratory should have a broader and holistic function. The laboratory's main purpose was "that of a centre of collection, of co-ordination, of synthetic summary, of all the research of any kind which has the human being as its concrete and lively unity, soul and body, brain and thought, in its endless varieties of age and race, normal and pathological, individual and social" (Flournoy, 1896, p.9). For this reason, much of his work focused on case studies (e.g. Flournoy 1895a, 1901a, 1915), including work with mediums (Flournoy, 1897, 1900a).

Various publications made Flournoy's laboratory well known. In addition to the case studies, other examples are studies of reaction time (Flournoy, 1892) and environmental influences on ideation (Flournoy, 1895b). Also deserving attention is Flournoy's (1893) research on synaesthesia, which was one of the most comprehensive early studies of the subject.

THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH CONTEXT

Flournoy's interest in supernormal phenomena needs to be seen in the context of the interest in these topics in his times. They included not only mediumship, which was much popularized in the nineteenth century via the development of spiritualism (A. Braude, 2001; Edelman, 1995), but also a variety of manifestations such as apparitions, clairvoyance, healings, poltergeists, premonitions, and thought-transference. By the time Flournoy began his work in the late nineteenth century, the field of psychical research had developed in various countries, as seen in the founding in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research (Gauld, 1968), and in the creation of other influential groups and journals to discuss the topic (see the studies of Biondi, 1988; Monroe, 2008; Oppenheim, 1985; and Wolfram, 2009). In addition to William James, a number of individuals prominent in different areas of science conducted important psychic investigations, among them the English physicist Oliver J. Lodge and the French physiologist Charles Richet (W. James, 1909; Lodge, 1890; Richet, 1884).

² This, and other translations, are ours.

Psychical researchers also showed interest in the existence and capabilities of the subconscious mind and its manifestations, including dissociation (Alvarado, 2002; Gauld, 1992). This is evident in the work of many investigators (e.g. Gurney, 1887, Richet, 1884), and especially in the writings of Frederic W. H. Myers about the capabilities of the subliminal mind and its relation to phenomena such as creativity, hypnosis, hysteria, dreams, telepathy and mediumship (e.g. Myers, 1892, 1893).³ Myers, the leading SPR theoretician, believed in spiritual survival after death, and postulated that the subliminal mind regulated all the phenomena mentioned above, and was in contact with the spiritual world. In his vision, telepathy and clairvoyance were “survivals from the powers which that spirit once exercised in a transcendental world” (Myers, 1903, Vol. 2, p.267).

Some of the work on psychic phenomena conducted during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—being strongly influenced by the spread of spiritualism—tended to assume the survival hypothesis; that is, the idea that some supernormal experiences demonstrated the existence of life after death. This idea permeated the work of some students of psychic phenomena who were active during Flournoy’s lifetime, and explains in part why his work centred on the study of mental mediums, one of the main issues on the agenda of psychical research at the time. His two main works on the subject, primarily about mediumship, were *Des Indes à la Planète Mars: Étude sur un Cas de Somnambulisme avec Glossolie* (1900a) and *Esprits et Mediums: Mélanges de Métapsychique et de Psychologie* (1911a). See also the English-language versions (Flournoy, 1900b, 1911b).

GENERAL ATTITUDE TO PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

In his best-known work, *Des Indes à la Planète Mars*, Flournoy (1900a) explained his use of the term ‘supernormal’. It was limited to “designating the facts that do not fall into the current frameworks of our sciences, and for which explanation needs principles that are still not admitted” (p.342). He acknowledged the topic was a controversial one in science. The supernormal, Flournoy (1900a) said, should be approached following two principles:—

One, which I name PRINCIPLE OF HAMLET . . . can be summarized in these words: Everything is possible. The other, which is fair, gets the name PRINCIPLE OF LAPLACE . . . I state it as: *The weight of proof must be proportional to the strangeness of the fact* (p. 345).⁴

There is no question but that Flournoy always defended the scientific study of psychic phenomena as an important area that should not be ignored (Flournoy, 1901c, 1909, 1911a). This was made clear in a presentation he gave at the Fourth International Congress of Psychology, held at Paris in 1900 (Flournoy,

³ For a review of Myers’s ideas see Gauld (1968) and Kelly (2007). See also Myers’s *Human Personality* (1903).

⁴ The Principle of Hamlet refers to the line in Shakespeare’s play: “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5). The Principle of Laplace presumably refers to a statement by Pierre-Simon Laplace (1814, p.50) saying that we should not deny phenomena we cannot explain, but “we must examine them with an attention all the more scrupulous as they seem more difficult to admit”.

1901c). Flournoy was aware that some members of the Congress viewed psychic phenomena as ‘compromising’ and consequently did not like the topic being represented at the meeting. He wrote that discussions of the subject were “prudently hidden under the ingenious rubric of *related matters*” (p. 102). Apparently unhappy with this attitude, Flournoy wrote, “among us you will forgive me when I call a spade a spade, and admit that in reality underneath ‘related matters’ are hidden spiritism, occultism and other dark beasts of contemporary scientific psychology” (pp. 102–103). Instead of negative attitudes, Flournoy, in his presentation at the Congress, insisted that psychic phenomena should be the object of impartial investigation.

While positive about the investigation of psychic phenomena, Flournoy did not favour the survival hypothesis or other general spiritual approaches to psychical research. This is clear in his reaction to Myers’s ideas. He admired Myers’s work, as can be seen in an article published in the *Archives de Psychologie* (Flournoy, 1903b; see also Flournoy, 1911a, Part 2, Chapter 2). Nonetheless, he distanced himself from Myers when he stated that the latter’s views went beyond regular scientific ideas, taking flights into mystical views (Flournoy, 1900a, pp. x–xi). Flournoy (1903b) distinguished Myers’s subliminal psychology from his “philosophical-religious system”, meaning those ideas about discarnate agency and the spiritual world. He had high regard for the first, but much reservation about the second. Flournoy argued that only future work could confirm Myers’s acceptance of discarnate action and that if this happened Myers would be remembered, along with Copernicus and Darwin, as a great contributor to human knowledge. While there is no doubt that Flournoy was influenced by Myers (e.g. Flournoy, 1900a, pp. x, 379), actually each author influenced the other. Myers’s (1903, Vol. 2, pp. 131–144) considerations concerning Héléne Smith in *Human Personality* show how his own ideas about the creative power of the subliminal mind were based in part on Flournoy’s findings.

Skepticism about spirit agency was also shown by Flournoy (1911a) in his book, *Esprits et Médiums*, in which he wrote that the cases he had studied, while superficially looking like the action of spirits, had shown to him that they were not. He believed they were to be explained as the function of “processes inherent to the mediums themselves and to their entourage” (p. vii). In this process dissociation allowed the imagination to act and create discarnate roles through the use of the “resources of the subconscious (emotional complexes, latent recollections, instinctive tendencies ordinarily constricted, etc.)” (p. vii). But as we will see later, Flournoy also accepted telepathic processes, an idea discussed by others before him (Alvarado, 2014).

STUDY OF AND SPECULATIONS ABOUT HÉLÈNE SMITH

Des Indes à la Planète Mars

Flournoy was receptive to the study of mediums for various reasons. For one, he began his career during a period in which psychology showed much interest in dissociation and other manifestations of the subconscious mind (e.g. Janet, 1889, Myers, 1892). This was a time when the levels of the mind were studied using hypnosis, and cases of dissociative fugue, somnambulism, and

double and multiple personalities were observed (e.g. Bourru & Burot, 1888; Janet, 1889).⁵

But Flournoy's interest in mediumship (for reviews see Le Maléfan, 1999, pp.136–152; Shamdasani, 1994) was also a natural consequence of the nineteenth-century emphasis on mediums in spiritualism and spiritism, and of mediumship's influence on psychical research (Alvarado, 2013a). In addition, Flournoy's interest also came from nineteenth-century discussions of mediumship in terms of medical and psychological concerns (Le Maléfan, 1999).

In an article entitled "Genèse de Quelques Prétendus Messages Spirites" published in the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, Flournoy (1899a) discussed two cases of communications received through mediums which he interpreted as the product of the "medium's subconscious imagination, working on recollections or latent concerns" (p.144). He postulated that some cases of mediumship comprised fictitious accounts produced by the medium's subconscious mind combining memories and a "curious capacity of dramatization and personification" (p.157).

He deepened those analyses in *Des Indes*, writing about the importance of mediumship as a topic of study:–

In the same way as teratology illustrates embryology and explains it, and that both contribute to illuminating anatomy, we can expect similarly that the study of mediumistic facts will contribute to giving us one day an accurate and productive view of normal psychogenesis, which in turn will take us to a better comprehension of the appearance of these curious phenomena, and the whole of psychology will attain a better and more precise conception of human personality. [Flournoy, 1900a, p. 415]

In *Des Indes* Flournoy presented his studies of medium Hélène Smith (a pseudonym for Catherine Élise Müller).⁶ Flournoy first had séances with her in December 1894, continuing into 1895. He wrote:–

The medium in question . . . is a tall and beautiful person around thirty [years of age] of natural complexion, with hair and eyes almost black, with an intelligent and open look . . . Of a modest background, and of irreproachable morals, she earns her living honourably as an employee in a commercial firm and her work, perseverance and capabilities have raised her to one of the more important posts.

[Flournoy, 1900a, pp. 1–3]

Smith's manifestations were varied and complex. In the first sessions observed by Flournoy, the medium tended to restrict her phenomena to different forms of hallucinations, especially visual and auditory, as well as physical phenomena such as the so-called spirit raps. In subsequent sessions the medium expanded her initial phenomenology, with personifications of alleged discarnate spirits, and mediumistic writings containing specific information about the deceased and also phrases in foreign languages.

In order to demonstrate an alteration of consciousness on the part of the medium objectively, Flournoy examined physiological measures using a

⁵ Many authors have discussed the interest in the subconscious mind and its manifestations during the 19th century (e.g. Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970).

⁶ Lemaitre (1897) presented an early report about Smith. Flournoy (1899b, 1899c) also discussed the case in articles. There were analyses of the case after Flournoy's book (Flournoy, 1901b; Deonna, 1932; Henry, 1901; Lemaitre, 1907), some of which have been in more recent times (e.g. Giacomelli, 2006; Engels, 2008; Maraldi, Alvarado, Zangari & Machado, in press).

These concepts also helped Flournoy to explain another set of mediumistic writings in an ancient Hindu language, which related to a supposed incarnation of Smith as an Indian princess. Although there were disputes over this case, Flournoy, with the help of leading experts, showed that there were inconsistencies between the mediumistic writings and the historical information presented through the archaic language used by the medium, which he believed indicated its artificiality. The same explanatory principle was applied by Flournoy to pictorial representations of Mars “made by the medium, including landscapes and other imagined forms of life in this planet”. He suggested that these scenes appeared to be derived from Hélène’s old exotic memories of life in tropical or Eastern countries. The influence of Eastern thought in Hélène’s productions is noteworthy (Maraldi, 2010).

Flournoy also offered explanations based on suggestion for Smith’s experiences. In his view the process was an interaction between the “enormous suggestibility and autosuggestibility of mediums” and the “doctrinal ideas from the surrounding environment, and the latent emotional tendencies of the subject herself” (Flournoy, 1900a, pp.413–414).

Flournoy noted that many of the descriptions of Mars seemed strongly idealized, presenting a naïve and even childish character. Everything was very harmonious, beautiful and non-problematic among the Martians. Among them there were no wars or confrontations. Economic and political problems of high importance on Earth seemed to have little meaning. In response to Flournoy’s scepticism, the medium came to produce a new series of ‘communications’, which Flournoy later called the ‘Ultra-Martian’ cycle (Flournoy, 1900a, Chapter 7). Descriptions of the Ultra-Martian inhabitants were more obviously bizarre and grotesque, with animal-like attributes. The houses were very simple and there was no vegetation. All these descriptions seemed to indicate that the Ultra-Martian cycle referred to a primitive and inferior world different from Hélène’s beautiful visions of Mars. According to the author such a response was a curious example of how the mechanism of suggestion played an important role in the medium’s productions, which consciously or unconsciously was akin to satisfying the demands of those around her who yearned for a proof of immortality and extraterrestrial life.

Flournoy explored how the mechanisms of suggestion and dreaming appeared to have played an important role in the formation of the medium’s secondary personality, her guiding spirit known as Leopold. Constantly present and active at the sessions, Leopold served as the spokesman for the other communicating spirits and at the same time as a spiritual guardian for Smith, always intervening when necessary to protect her and advise her, and to save her from fatigue and other vicissitudes of her activities as a medium, as well as the harassment of consultants or any attacks from sceptical participants. Flournoy interpreted Leopold as the personified expression of an instinct for self-preservation and survival.

Leopold’s first appearance in the life of the medium was related to a traumatic childhood event, when she was attacked by a vicious dog and rescued by a man wearing a black cloak whose face she was not able to see. Leopold claimed to be this man and Flournoy noted that this secondary personality was probably an evolution of other automatisms that came to the medium’s defence when

she was faced with very intense emotional shock. While Smith was reluctant to admit that Leopold was the man who saved her in childhood, this same apparition, similarly dressed, appeared on later occasions when she was in danger.

After investigating the case for several years, Flournoy was able to divide the period of his research into three main cycles, or 'subliminal romances', as he called them: the Martian cycle, the Hindu cycle and the Royal cycle. In the second cycle, Smith claimed to be the reincarnation of a Hindu princess, whose name was Simandini. This princess had fallen in love with a prince named Sivrouka, whose current reincarnation was none other than Flournoy! This fact would not go unnoticed by writers of a psychoanalytic orientation (Cifali, 1994; Shamdasani, 1994). Several of the dramatizations portrayed romantic scenes between Simandini and Sivrouka, with Flournoy as an involuntary protagonist at the sessions, almost as if he and the medium were reviving their past life together.

To Flournoy the subconscious activity was the expression of a natural and spontaneous creativity. In some predisposed individuals more susceptible to hypnosis (such as Smith) this latent imagination could emerge without barriers, spontaneously producing the most diverse phenomena.

Interestingly, Flournoy stated in *Des Indes* that he believed he had "perceived a little telekinesis and telepathy" in some of his séances with Smith (Flournoy, 1900a, p. 415). But he did not document this in detail and basically presented it as an impression.

Flournoy's Article After Des Indes

Flournoy (1901b) wrote more about Smith in an article published in the *Archives de Psychologie* entitled "Nouvelles Observations sur un Cas de Somnambulisme avec Glossolalie". He discussed some new phases the phenomena had taken that were not observed by him directly, such as elaborations in the Ultra-Martian cycle, and the development of Uranian and Lunar communications and written languages. According to Flournoy, after the publication of *Des Indes* Smith went through several phases. These included periods of irritation (reactions to public discussions about her), recovery, an 'Americanist' period (of new public séances starting with American ladies, and of denying séances to many others, including Flournoy).⁷ In a later phase, during which she had quit her job and was financially supported by a woman of means, she showed no interest in science and devoted herself completely to mediumistic activities.

The Martian, Ultramartian, and Uranian languages were seen by Flournoy in "Nouvelles..." as psychological creations having similar phases. The medium started with new words which she understood and repeated, and then moved on to written characters and full automatic writing. Each of the languages, Flournoy stated, showed "the same psychological order which oversees in the infant the acquisition of diverse modalities of language: the phonic nervous arc (auditive-motor) precedes chronologically the graphic arc

⁷ For the way the medium reacted to *Des Indes* see her correspondence with Flournoy (O. Flournoy, 1986). Hélène Smith (1902) argued that she was "the direct cause of his [Flournoy's] fame".

(visual-writer)" (p.192). This interesting comparison, which deserves more discussion and study, was an attempt to relate mediumship to psychological processes and also to support the idea that Smith's manifestations, working in superficially different ways, could be reduced to non-supernormal mechanisms.

Perhaps because he could no longer study Smith, Flournoy speculated that the investigation of a medium by the same researcher over a long period would "inevitably end in shaping the suggestible subconsciousness of the subject" (p.116). This he saw as a negative effect because it could limit the medium to producing what she was used to producing, thus causing a blockage in her faculties. In his view this hypothetical problem could be solved by having other investigators continue the work. Flournoy argued further that if Smith could produce genuine supernormal phenomena these could be inhibited by him on account of the sceptical position the medium saw him as having, particularly after the publication of *Des Indes*. Such observations may have resulted from the fact that Flournoy was no longer welcomed at Smith's séances, but they are also consistent with the psychological assessment of the séance milieu that Flournoy had expressed earlier.

In the article Flournoy continued to present more thoughts about Leopold and other manifestations, and to argue that while non-mediums showed a strong separation between their imaginal and dream life, this was not the case with mediums, who had no stable barriers between the two realms. But overall he continued to uphold the conclusions he had reached in *Des Indes*, and most of the ideas in this article were elaborations and restatements of his earlier writings.

OTHER INVESTIGATIONS OF MENTAL MEDIUMSHIP

Flournoy (1899a) had reported two other cases of mediumistic communications that he believed were the "product of the subconscious imagination of the medium, working with memories of latent worries" (p.144). He said that many such cases remained unexplained and that it was difficult to support a psychological explanation of mediumship because in practice there was an "abyss, in individual cases, between the a priori assumption of such an origin and its clear demonstration" (p.144). Nonetheless he believed that the analysis of some cases could show that the 'unconscious Self' could produce apparent spirit communications.

One case involved a 48-year-old professor of accounting, Michel Til. In 1897 he developed automatic writing and eventually received a message saying that his son Edward had stolen some cigarettes from his employer at work and was going to be fired. When Til talked to his son's employer he found that this was not true. Soon after, the communicator admitted to Til via further writing that he had deceived him. Til eventually got rid of the 'spirit' and went on to develop auditory communications on moral and religious topics. Til believed that the communication came from a deceiving spirit. But Flournoy interpreted the case psychologically when he received the following information. He reported that Til had informed him that his son, who was smoking his employer's cigarettes in the office, presumably with the employer's consent, had used the cigarettes improperly. Flournoy also learned that Til had heard at second hand that his son's employer was looking for an employee and that the spirit

communication had been received an hour after this information was obtained. This suggested to Flournoy that Til put all of this together and that his worries were expressed under the guise of a spirit message. In summary, Til's case, and another case reported in the same article, were interpreted by Flournoy as:—

a kind of small romance, developed subliminally, by means of data from memory and perception, under the impetus of a more or less intense emotional state, and with the help of this curious faculty of dramatization and personification that, without going out of ordinary daily life, everyone can see at work in the phenomenon of dreams.

[p. 157]

Flournoy also explored the capabilities of the subconscious in other case investigations. Some of his publications referred to manifestations of supposed spirits through tables and as hallucinations (Flournoy, 1904b, 1907). Flournoy (1904b) discussed a group that was receiving communications via table-tilting. A communication came to one of the sitters, a man called Bertin, that was said to be from a cousin named Alexander, who was in a mental asylum. The 'spirit' claimed that he had died, but this was found to be untrue. Alexander's stay in the asylum was being paid for with money that was to be inherited by Bertin in the event of the patient's death. Interestingly, Bertin had a dream before the séance that the cousin had died. Such information led Flournoy to postulate that both the dream and the séance communications expressed Bertin's subconscious desire to obtain benefits from Alexander's death. The messages coming from the movements of the table were seen by Flournoy as the manifestation of this suppressed wish via a motor automatism.

Flournoy also commented on the issue of pathology and mediumship, a topic discussed by many before him (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2012; Le Maléfan, 1999). He believed it was insufficient to describe mediumship only in terms of hysteria or other pathology, as suggested by psychiatrists of his time (e.g. Sollier & Boissier, 1904). Flournoy (1900a) argued that mediumship could also be present in mental health conditions, and he was one of the first to defend the proposition that mediumistic manifestations should be understood as specific phenomena, and not simply fitted into pre-existing classifications (Shamdasani, 1994). Regarding Hélène Smith, for example, Flournoy (1900a, p. 36) commented that "everything in her breathes health". He had also observed that she was "very intelligent and very gifted" (p. 39).

It is important to note, however, that Flournoy (1911a) did not reject entirely the possibility of an association between mediumship and psychopathology for certain cases. In this respect, he argued that although psychic and spiritualist practices should not be considered in isolation as symptoms of some deleterious illness, there could nevertheless be a danger "for morbid temperaments and weak or superstitious minds which are inclined to give a supernatural interpretation to all obscure phenomena, or to seek revelations from the Beyond through practices which lead directly to mental disorganization" (p. 505).

But Flournoy was also interested in the demographics and in the features of mediumship. In his book *Esprits et Médioms* (1911a, Part 1), he reported a survey of mediums that he began in 1898. He sent questions to members of the Société d'Études Psychiques de Geneva and received 72 replies, 23 from men and 49 from women. Among other topics, those questions were about when and

under what circumstances the respondent realized that he or she possessed mediumistic faculties, how these experiences changed over time, observations of mediumistic faculties in other people and in the medium's family, and the influence of physical, medical or moral conditions upon mediumship. In this study, unique for its time, Flournoy studied the medium from a psychological and social perspective instead of an exclusively parapsychological one.

Not all the respondents were mediums. Flournoy stated that, while some seemed to be mediums proper, others were people interested in psychic phenomena but with no experiences of their own, as well as 'sensitives' who had had some experiences, but were not practising mediums. The replies led him to conclude that mediumship seemed to be hereditary, that most mediums did not have faculties from childhood but developed them later, and that physical exhaustion and anxiety were not conducive to mediumship.

Flournoy classified the cases in his inquiry as prophetic, telepathic, clairvoyant, inspirational (revelations of moral, philosophical, and scientific character, literary and artistic performances apparently beyond the medium's abilities), and 'efficient', meaning physical effects such as healing and apports. The manifestations, Flournoy commented, could be combined so that any medium could show more than one type. "However, we find an evident tendency to specialization and stereotype, and some subjects have their faculty exclusively confined to certain genre of phenomena" (p.188).

Flournoy's investigations of mediums led him to affirm what was probably his greatest contribution to psychology and psychical research, which was the conviction that "in all of us there are spiritogenic processes . . . ephemeral products which are singularly difficult to distinguish from the intended permanent spirits of spiritualism" (Flournoy, 1909, p.366). He believed that the studies of the last half of the nineteenth century about hypnosis and personality changes:—

have revealed a complexity of nature in the human soul, and the possibilities of internal dissociation or polymorphism . . . it is no longer sufficient that an individual is not conscious of being the author of startling manifestations of which he is the theatre, to conclude that he is truly the channel or instrument of independent Spirits. The passive attitude, a kind of abdication of oneself, which the medium adopts in the hope of encouraging the arrival of Spirits, tends very naturally to abolish the sense of initiative, of personal causation, of productive activity, of voluntary control—call it what you want, this immediate data of inner experience—which normally accompanies the exercise of our thinking and, up to a certain point, the creations of our fantasy. But the loss of that feeling does not impede in the least that the inferior psychological processes continue their pace, even more beautiful, to the subject's knowledge, and to engender products which seem to impose on him from the outside, as they emerge from their own resources and do not have another author but himself.

[Flournoy, 1909, pp.367–368]

Veridical communications were explained by living agency. Flournoy (1909, p.374) speculated on the contribution of telepathy and the medium's subconscious imagination to explain veridical communications they received via mediums, without any need to resort to a spiritualistic hypothesis, an idea that was not new to him (Alvarado, 2014; Alvarado, Nahm & Sommer, 2012). Flournoy represented a newer version of these speculations, with greater emphasis on the dynamics of the subconscious.

OBSERVATIONS OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMS

Flournoy also had séances with mediums such as the famous Italian, Eusapia Palladino. He sat with her in 1898 and in 1903. In addition to Richet and Flournoy, Myers and the philosopher Émile Boirac were present. Under what Flournoy considered were good control conditions he saw phenomena “unexplained by our current physics or physiology” (Flournoy, 1911a, p. 406). Flournoy referred to movements of the curtains, and sounds coming from a zither, which also moved. He felt “touched, kicked, grasped on the arm or on the side as if by a large hand or invisible pliers . . . while the medium’s limbs were clearly seen and were in positions in which they could not reach me” (p. 406). “As far as I am concerned,” Flournoy wrote, “I have to say that the Palladino phenomena . . . are today beyond doubt in my eyes . . . there is a considerable weight of evidence in their favour” (Flournoy, 1911a, p. 437).

Flournoy was open to ideas such as Enrico Morselli’s psychodynamic theory to explain Palladino’s phenomena (Morselli, 1908). This postulated that Palladino could project a biological force that was controlled by her subconscious mind, and could be combined with telepathically-acquired information from the sitters. This idea was part of a conceptual tradition of magnetic, vital, and psychic forces prevalent in spiritualism and psychical research (Alvarado, 2006), and Flournoy, writing about Morselli, considered that it was both “*necessary* and *sufficient* to cover all the variety of supernormal phenomena attributed to Eusapia” (Flournoy, 1911a, p. 420). But, unlike Morselli, he was not completely committed to the idea.

Flournoy also had the opportunity to observe the telekinetic phenomena of the Polish medium, Stanisława Tomczyk. He wrote about this to William James, in a letter dated 1 April 1909: “I saw her depress a letter-scales, make a ball roll, etc., in conditions excluding all imaginable fraud and every known process” (Le Clair, 1966, p. 214). Flournoy stated his conviction publicly when he wrote in a later publication:—

I consider I have established in the presence of that medium, among doubtful or openly fraudulent cases, very obvious phenomena of telekinesis, which involved some supernormal capacity apparently of the same genre of Eusapia’s and which come to support the latter. [Flournoy, 1911a, p. 436]

A medium who did not impress Flournoy was the Italian Francesco Carancini, who produced a variety of physical manifestations. A report of séances held at the University of Geneva published by Claparède (1910b) was negative and included observations of fraud. In fact, Flournoy (1911a, p. 437) wrote that his experience with Carancini was so different from what he observed with Palladino that it assured him of the genuineness of the latter’s manifestations.

TELEPATHY AND PRECOGNITION

As mentioned by one of us in a recent publication (Alvarado, 2013b), at a meeting of the Society of Physics and Natural History of Geneva held on 18 December 1890, Flournoy presented his observations on the work of the SPR on veridical hallucinations (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886). He defined them as those hallucinations that “correspond to a real event out of the range of the senses of the subject” (Flournoy, 1891, p. 135).

Claparède (1921) recollected the visit to Flournoy's laboratory in 1893 of a man named Krebs and his daughter, who worked in a circus presenting an act of 'second sight' and thought-transference. According to Claparède, the daughter could not guess successfully when her father "was prevented from uttering the slightest sound. The second sight was reduced to a trick . . . of verbal telegraphy" (p.68). We have not found evidence that Flournoy conducted other tests of this phenomenon in his laboratory.

In a later paper Flournoy (1905) analyzed a 'prophetic dream', which he believed may have been telepathic after he had discarded possible conventional explanations such as subconscious inference, coincidence, suggestion and fraud. The case was an old dream reported by a Mme. Buscarlet from Geneva, who had met a Mlle. Olga Popoï and a Mme. Nitchinof, headmistress of the Imperial Institute of Kasa, which was devoted to the education of young ladies. Buscarlet had only a casual acquaintance with Nitchinof, but Popoï was close to both women. While in Geneva Buscarlet had a dream in which she saw a carriage go along a country road carrying the dead body of Popoï, who had a bonnet with yellow ribbons. In the dream Popoï told Buscarlet that Nitchinof was going to leave the Institute on the 17th. Buscarlet wrote the account of the dream in a letter to a friend. Later on she learned that Nitchinof died on the 16th and that her body was taken from the Institute on the 17th. The dream took place about six weeks before the death.

Flournoy remarked (p.62) that the case had two interesting aspects:—

On one hand remarkable exactitude of the recollections about the essential content of the oneiric prediction, and on the other hand a considerable alteration of related circumstances, in terms of a simplification of the topic of the dream, and a dramatization of the case as a whole to make it more impressive.

He was pointing out that the content of veridical dreams could show alterations presumably produced by the normal process of recollection or by other aspects of the mind of the experient.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen, Flournoy investigated various psychic phenomena during his lifetime. While he wrote much about mediumship, his only systematic studies were the work with Smith recorded in *Des Indes*, and to some extent his survey of mediums. The rest consisted of sporadic séances, such as those held with Palladino and Tomczyk, and analyses of accounts given to him, as in the cases of Til, Bertin and Buscarlet. Unlike other contemporaries engaged in psychical research, men such as Lodge, Hyslop and Richet, Flournoy did not contribute much to advance the evidence for psychic phenomena. His main contribution, both to psychology and to psychical research, was conceptual, and referred to the development of the concept of the capabilities of the unseen mind. This he did mainly through his study of Smith's mediumship (Flournoy, 1900a, 1901b), but also with a few other case studies (Flournoy, 1903a, 1904a, 1904b, 1915). His contribution of the construction of this idea, while purely psychological, was developed and nurtured in the context of psychic investigations, as were the psychological ideas of Myers, and to some extent, those of others such as Janet and Richet. Flournoy is thus an important example of this kind of involvement, one which is sometimes difficult to classify as belonging

to psychology or to psychical research, showing that the boundaries of the two specialties were not as clear as we find today (on this theme see Alvarado, 2002; Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000; Sommer, 2013).

Flournoy's psychological contributions have been acknowledged by some historians of psychology. The influential historian of ideas concerning the unconscious mind, Henri F. Ellenberger, referred to Flournoy's study of Hélène Smith as a "great step forward for dynamic psychiatry" (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 121). In Eugene Taylor's (1995, p. 45) view, "Flournoy's work can be seen as a milestone in affirming the objective validity of a growth-oriented dimension within personality". From the early days after the publication of *Des Indes* to more recent developments, Flournoy's investigation of the Smith case has been cited by many to illustrate the capabilities of the subconscious mind for producing fictitious manifestations. It is an example of the vast influence that exemplary cases can have on the development of ideas and research, as seen both in psychology and in psychical research. Flournoy's case of Smith "became a key addition to the other paradigm cases of mediumship and multiple personality that defined the era" (Taylor, 2009, p. 41).

Shamdasani (1994, 2003) has noted that Flournoy's ideas about the subconscious mind were an alternative to Freud's theories in the early twentieth century, one that emphasized the more creative and constructive aspects of the unconscious. In this respect, his psychological analysis of the case of Smith certainly deserves a special place in the history of psychology, appearing as it did before better-known concepts such as Jung's active imagination.

Flournoy's greatest contribution both to psychology and psychical research—the idea that the medium's subconscious talents produced behaviours in the medium simulating spirit personalities—paved the way to much speculation about the dramatization abilities of the subconscious mind, something discussed by many in later years in the psychical research literature. Examples include Hyslop (1906), Richet (1922), and Sudre (1946). Writing in 1922 in his celebrated *Traité de Métapsychique*, Richet (1922, pp. 45–47, 56–57) cited the Smith case to differentiate the normal functions of the mind from the psychic, or 'metapsychic' ones, arguing that it was necessary to "eliminate from metapsychics everything that may be explained by normal psychology" (p. 56). Other authors followed this tradition, informed in part by Flournoy, whose ideas affected many later discussions of the difference between supernormal and psychological mediumistic phenomena (e.g. Hyslop, 1906; Quevedo, 1964/1972; Sudre, 1946; Tocquet, 1963). Today modern students of the issue of survival of death and of parapsychology in general still pay attention to Flournoy when they discuss mediumship and the role of the subconscious mind (e.g. S. E. Braude, 2003, pp. 162–166; Irwin & Watt, 2007, pp. 22–24). However, interest in *Des Indes* has transcended discussions of spiritualism and psychical research. In addition to studies of various aspects of the history of psychology (e.g. Shamdasani, 2003, pp. 127–128; T. James, 1995, pp. 265–271), other examples include discussions of the case in relation to imaginary languages (Cifali, 1988) and ideas about Mars (Crossley, 2011).

Another of Flournoy's contributions to psychical research was his defence of the idea that telepathy could combine with the above-mentioned subconscious dramatization powers to produce veridical communications. Here, as in his

discussions of the creative abilities of the subconscious, there were precedents to the idea (Alvarado, 2014), but Flournoy nonetheless contributed to supporting the concept, one that has been very influential and central in discussions of survival of death in psychical research.

While it is true that his main analyses of mental mediums, such as those involving the concept of cryptomnesia, represented the reaction of the establishment to reject the supernormal, to create boundaries separating spiritualist claims from those of science (as argued by Méheust, 1999, pp.209–210), his work involved other aspects as well. We need to remember that Flournoy believed in psychic phenomena, examples being telepathy and telekinesis. So Flournoy also belonged to the psychical research community that was trying to establish the occurrence of those manifestations. Such writings, however, had less impact and, in truth, were less original than the other work for which he is mainly remembered, particularly his analyses of the Smith case.

Finally, Flournoy—like Lodge, James and Richet—also brought his scientific and academic prestige to psychical research. The fact that he defended psychical research in psychological forums (e.g. 1901b, 1901c, 1909) gave some prestige and standing to the field. But regardless of this, Flournoy remains an important representative both of early psychology and of psychical research, and particularly of the interactions of the two fields. Following on the work of historians who have argued for the importance of psychical research for the development of aspects of psychology (e.g. Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000; Sommer, 2013), Flournoy's work is a reminder that some ideas and studies of early psychology took place in the context of interest in and research on psychic phenomena.

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