

A Historical Review of Second Sight: The Collectors, their Accounts and Ideas

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When similarly rapid judgements as to probable events are formed and thrown on the screen of the external world in combination with physical forms which fancy weaves in association with those judgements, both eye and mind see, as it were, beyond the bounds of space and time into that state where all is One Eternal Now, and thus the Seer is wrapt, as he believes, into the future to behold things that are to come, and which people, for want of a better word, term the 'Second Sight' – though literally and in truth, as an old writer observed, the vision if really afterwards realised, should rather be termed not the second, but the first sight of that event. (Morrison 1908: 18)

Second sight is the name of a special psychic ability believed to be a natural faculty of mind. It is usually associated with people living in the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, though it is also experienced in the Lowlands.' Some regard it as an inborn hereditary gift while others feel it is a spiritual gift from God, whereas still others regard it as an affliction, even a curse. According to MacInnes (1989: 12), the term 'second sight' was used in the English language as early as the seventeenth century. Long before then, there was – and remains – a rich variety of expressions pertaining to the faculty in the Gaelic language, spoken by the indigenous people of the Highlands and the Western Isles of Scotland (MacInnes 1989: 19-20). The Gaelic word for seer is *taidhbhshear* and what is seen in the vision is the *taidhbhsè*. According to MacInnes (1989:12), there is no exact equivalent of the term 'second sight' in Gaelic. One rarely used Gaelic term, *An Dà Fhradharc*, means 'two visions' or the power of sight. However, the most common Gaelic term referring to second sight is *An Dà Shealladh*, which literally means 'two sights'. One is the normal sight and the other is the ability to have *awake* prophetic visions of future events which occur spontaneously and are rarely directed at will. There have been some recorded accounts of people who have had second sight experiences while in a hypnagogic state as well as in a dream state and some of these accounts will be discussed.

The form of the visions can be a direct representation of a person's fate. Sometimes the visions can be of happy events such as seeing a marriage procession before the couple have even met or know about one another. People have also had visions of seeing someone prior to meeting them for the first time. The visions can also be of

seeing buildings before they have been built. People foresaw a rocker-range on South Uist, long before one was built there by the military. However, people who have second sight mostly have visions concerned with sad events such as accidents and deaths. Such visions can involve seeing the actual event before it occurs (e.g. seeing a huge wave engulfing a fisherman before he and his crew are drowned, or seeing a baby dead in the mother's arms shortly after the baby is born). Another example is actually seeing a funeral procession at night, or sometimes during the day and, by recognising the people carrying the coffin, knowing who has died. Shortly after the vision, the funeral actually occurs. In some cases, the person having the vision reports being knocked to the ground or pushed aside while the procession goes past. In other cases, the funeral procession is not seen but heard passing by.

Clairvoyant experiences which involve mentally seeing an event at a distance (e.g. seeing a crew on a boat drown at a distance) and telepathic experiences which involve two people thinking about something at the same time (e.g. a mother and her son both 'knew' at the same time that the mother's eldest son had been hurt in an accident) can also be considered instances of second sight. According to MacInnes (1989: 18) there are regional differences in the types of experiences regarded as second sight. He notes that in both the North-West Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, clairvoyance or detecting things at a distance is not considered second sight, whereas in the Central Highlands, both precognition and telepathy are regarded as second sight.

The form of the visions can also be a symbolic representation of a person's fate. An example is actually seeing a death shroud on a person before that person dies; how much of the body is covered indicates how soon the person will die. Other examples of second sight include visions of people before they die, or shortly after they die (a woman seeing a neighbour in solid form might not realise that the person has died until she receives news that he died some miles away). Also considered to be examples of second sight are visions of people seen at the moment of death (a father unexpectedly sees his son when at the same time he has been killed in battle many miles away).

The 'visions' need not be exclusively visual; they can be expressed through other sense modalities as well. For example, a fisherman, on hearing a woman crying by the shore, tried to find her but to no avail. Several weeks later, a boy was drowned and the mother was crying over the loss of her son at the very spot where the fisherman had heard her. Morrison may be right to say that the 'Second Sight' is a kind of 'first sight': the person has a prophetic vision of a death and to him it is the first time he has knowledge that the person has died.² When he receives news of the loved one's death, it is a verification that the vision is true. Therefore what we call the normal sight may actually be to him the second sight. This article will survey investigations into second sight from their beginnings in the seventeenth century up to the present day.³ The focus will be on the methods used by the previous investigators, the accounts they collected and the ideas regarding their interpretation. Particular attention will be given to their theories about the nature of mind and the possible hereditary aspect of second

sight. The article will conclude with an overview of the current state of knowledge in this field.

THE REVEREND ROBERT KIRK

Robert Kirk (1644–1692), minister of Aberfoyle in Perthshire, was well-known for his scholarly works such as translating the psalms into Gaelic and producing a Gaelic edition of the Bible. Among scholars of Folklore, Kirk is known for his classic work, *Secret Commonwealth and A Short Treatise of the Scottish-Irish Charms and Spels*,⁴ in which he recorded accounts from his own parishioners of second sight and sightings of fairies. Kirk wanted to document not the belief in fairies but their actual existence, thereby showing that there was an other world, a spiritual dimension, and thus demonstrate to non-believers the existence of God. The fairy was conceptualised as being between man and angel, having an existence independent of a person, unlike an apparition which was believed to be part of the personality of a deceased person.

Kirk had no intention of proving the existence of second sight. Rather, by showing the existence of this other world, he believed that second sight would be seen as a natural part of this spiritual dimension and in keeping with the Christian faith (Kirk 1691: 1). As observed by Kirk, second-sighted people reported seeing fairies in their visions of funeral processions and also during their visions of winding sheets or death shrouds before the death of a person:

They are clearly seen by these men of second sight to eat at funerals, Banquetts: hence many of the Scottish-Irish will not tast meat at those meetings, least they have communion with, or be poisoned by them: So are they seen to carry the Bier or coffin with the Corps, among the middle-earth men to the grave. (Kirk 1691: 52)

Also the seer may see a *comb-imiche*, a '*doppelgänger*' who resembles a living person whom he recognises in every detail and yet the seer can distinguish the *real* person from his double. Another Gaelic name for the '*doppelgänger*' is *co-choisiche* which means co-walker (MacInnes 1989: 19). The seer after seeing this person's double will know that he will meet the real person soon. In other cases, the seer sees his own double which indicates to him that he will soon die:

Some men of the exalted sight (whither by airt or nature) have told me they have seen at those meetings a double-man, or the shape of the same man in two places, this is, a *Superterranean* and a *Subterranean Inhabitant* perfectly resembling one another in all points, whom he notwithstanding could easily distinguish one from another by some secret tokens and operations . . . They call this Reflex-man a *coimimeadh* [*sic*] or Co-Walker, every way like the man, as a Twin-brother and Companion, haunting him as his shadow and is oft seen and known among men (resembling the Originall) both befor and after the Originall is dead, and was els often seen of old to enter a house; by which the people knew that the person of that liknes was to visit them within a few dayes. (Kirk 1691: 52-53)

Kirk was a seventh son and believed to have both the gifts of healing and second sight. These gifts were generally believed to be inborn (Kirk 1691: 5; Stewart 1822: xiv). The method of healing by laying on of hands was described by Kirk and the chance of the child having the healing gift was thought to increase once seven sons were born. The second sight was generally regarded by Kirk to go through the male line, particularly transmitted from father to son. Though Kirk gives only a few accounts of women seers (1691: 105), it can be speculated that due to the religious climate at the time, women were frightened to admit having second sight lest they be persecuted as witches.

However there were several methods of acquiring the second sight. Of one such method Kirk writes (pp. 63-64):

[H]e must run a tedder of hair (which bound a Corps to the Bier) in a Helix about his midle from end to end, then bow his head downward; [as did Elijah I King 18.42.] and look back thorow his legs until he see a funerall advance, till the people cross two/Marches; or look thus back thorow a hole where was a knot of fir. But if the wind change poyns while the hair tedder is ty'd about him, he is in peril of his Lyfe . . .

This unusual method was believed to permanently give the person second sight. Another method thought to be more temporary involved physical contact with another person. Once the faculty of second sight was transferred, in the act of having a vision, the person would see the *Subterranean* or fairy (p. 64):

The usuall method for a curious person to get a transient sight of this otherwise invisible crew of Subterraneans . . . is to put his foot on the Seers foot, and the Seers hand is put on the Inquirers head, who is to look over the Wizards right shoulder . . .

SIR JOHN AUBREY

A contemporary of Kirk was Sir John Aubrey (1626-1697), who published the first questionnaire-style investigation of second sight in 1696. Aubrey was a Fellow of the Royal Society and was well-known for his numerous works including a biography of Shakespeare. Aubrey published two letters which were sent to him from a correspondent concerning the second sight in the northern parts of Scotland. In the first letter, his correspondent tells Aubrey that he received help with collecting experiences of second sight from two people, one a friend and the other being someone whom he hired. His friend went to Ross-shire to collect experiences while his researcher received information from a minister living near Inverness. In the second letter, Aubrey's correspondent discusses additional information collected from the minister and from a student of Divinity. In both letters, the correspondent told Aubrey of information he had obtained from these people in response to a series of questions he put to them. As these questions are still relevant today, they are given in full below (Aubrey 1696: 151-177) and then the responses to these questions are discussed.

1. If some few credible well-attested Instances of such a Knowledge as is commonly called the Second-Sight, can be given?
2. If it consists in the discovery of present, or past Events only? Or, if it extends to such as are to come?
3. If the Objects of this Knowledge, be sad and dismal Events only; such as Deaths and Murders? Or, joyful and prosperous also?
4. If these Events, which Second-Sighted men discover, or foretell, be visibly represented to them, and acted, as it were, before their Eyes?
5. If the Second-Sight be a thing that is troublesome and uneasy to those that have it, and such as they would gladly be rid of?
6. If any Person, or Persons, truly Godly, who may justly be presumed to be such, have been known to have had this Gift or Faculty?
7. If it descends by succession from Parents to Children? Or, if not, Whether those that have it, can tell how they came by it?

In response to the first question, several instances of second sight were given. In some experiences, people reported foreseeing positive events (p. 172):

Thus, they foretell of happy Marriages, good Children, what kind of Life Men shall Live, and in what Condition they shall Die. Also Riches, Honour, Preferment, Peace, Plenty and good Weather.

Although the second sight experiences described were usually spontaneous, sometimes the seer used the faculty intentionally to help people locate their loved ones, to find out if they were well, and also to help locate lost objects. However, in most experiences of second sight, people reported foreseeing sad events (p. 153):

Near 40 years ago *Macklend* and his Lady, Sister to my Lord *Seaforth*, were Walking about their own House, and in their return, both came into the Nurses Chamber, where their young Child was on the Breast: At their coming into the Room, the Nurse falls a Weeping; they asked the cause, dreading the Child was Sick, or that she was scarce of Milk: The Nurse replied, 'the Child was well, and she had abundance of Milk'; yet she still Wept; and being pressed to tell what ailed her; she at last said, '*Macklend* would dye, and the Lady would shortly be Married to another Man.' Being enquired how she knew that Event, she told them plainly, 'that as they came both into the Room, she saw, a Man with a scarlet Cloak and a white Hat, berwitz them, giving the Lady a Kiss over the Shoulder; and this was the cause of her Weeping.' All which came to pass after *Macklend's* Death: the Tutor of *Lovat* Marry'd the Lady in the same habit the Woman saw him.

What is striking about this experience is that the figure of a man that the nurse saw between the Lady and the Lord was three-dimensional, a quality characteristic of second sight visions. In the next example, a woman had a vision in which she foresaw a man covered in blood a day before it occurred (pp. 162-163):

[A] young Woman in a certain House about Supper time, refused to take Meat from the Steward who was offering in the very time Meat to her; being asked why she would not take

it? replied, she saw him full of Blood, and therefore was afraid to take anything of his Hands. The next Morning, the said Steward offering to compose a difference between two Men, at the Ale-house door got a stroke of a sword on the Forehead, and came home full of Blood. This was told to me by an Eye Witness.

Other examples involve foreseeing events, sometimes in three-dimensional form, years before they actually occurred. In the experience below, a man tells his master of his prophetic vision of a seemingly unlikely event (pp. 163-164):

For Instance, one told his Master, that he saw an Arrow in such a Man through his Body, and yet no Blood came out: his Master told him, that It was impossible an Arrow should stick in a Man's Body and no Blood come out, and if that came not to pass he would be deemed an Imposter. But about 5 or 6 Years after the Man died, and being brought to his Burial-place, there arose a Debate anent his Grave, and it came to such a height, that they drew Arms and bended their Bows, and one letting off an Arrow, shot through the dead Body upon the Bier-trees, and so no Blood could issue out at a dead Man's wound.¹

In another experience two men both saw a death shroud or winding sheet on a woman they knew. One man thought that she would soon die but the other one reassured him that her fever had broken and she would recover (p. 168):

... the one a Gentleman, the other a common Fellow; and discoursing by the Fire-side, the Fellow suddenly begins to Weep, and cry out Alas! alas! such a Woman is either Dead or presently expiring. The Gentlewoman lived 5 or 6 Miles from the House, and had been some Days before in a Fever. The Gentleman being somewhat better expert in that Faculty, said, 'No', said he, 'she's not Dead; nor will she dye of this Disease.' 'Oh' saith the Fellow, 'do you not see her all covered with her Winding-sheet?' 'Ay,' saith the Gentleman, 'I see her as well as you do; but do you not see her Linnen all wet? which is her Sweat, she being presently cooling of the Fever.'

A common feature of these visions reported to Aubrey is that they were before the seer's eyes. The foreknowledge of another's fate depends upon exactly what is seen. The form of the vision leads in one of two ways to foreknowledge of another person's fate. Either the vision contains a direct representation of that fate, or it conveys information about it in a symbolic form (p. 154):

... they see those things visibly; but none sees but themselves; for instance, if a Man's Fatal-ent be Hanging; they'll see a Gibbet, or a Rope about his Neck: if Beheaded, they'll see the Man without a Head; if Drowned, they'll see Water up to his Throat, if unexpected Death, they'll see a Winding-sheet about his Head: All of which are represented to their View.

Because what is seen is so troublesome to the person, many wanted to be rid of the second sight. Those that were religious found refuge and help through personal prayer and sought comfort by going to the clergy to receive blessings to help 'cure' them of the second sight. Regarding whether second sight descended in families, Aubrey learned from the second letter that it ran in several families. In regard to the question, how they

came to have the second sight, people said, ' . . . by Compact with the Devil; some say by Converse with those Daemons called Fairies.' (p. 156). People also reported that some offered to teach the faculty to others, suggesting that second sight was not universally looked upon as a burden.

MARTIN MARTIN

Martin Martin (c.1660-1719) was a native of Skye who received medical training at the Universities of Edinburgh and Leyden. His observations of second sight were informed by a sensitivity to his Gaelic culture and tradition. Martin's writings reflect his belief in the existence of second sight. Nevertheless his scientific training likely influenced his methodology of carefully collecting accounts of second sight and in some cases obtaining corroboration from those witnesses who could vouch for the authenticity of the experience. Thus he can be looked upon as a forerunner of today's proof-oriented researchers for whom documentation of the experience is all important. He defined the second sight as:

. . . a singular Faculty of Seeing, an otherwise invisible Object, without any previous Means us'd by the Person that sees it for that end; the Vision makes such a lively impression upon the Seers, that they neither see nor think of any thing else, except the Vision, as long as it continues: and then they appear Pensive or Jovial, according to the object which was represented to them. (1703: 300)

Martin goes on to give several accounts similar in character to those mentioned by Kirk and Aubrey, as well as giving other types of accounts which will be highlighted. He carefully recorded his observations about when a seer has a vision and also some qualities about the nature of these experiences. His description of the appearance of the seer in the act of having an awake vision (p. 300) gives tentative support for the externality of the vision as opposed to its being in the mind's eye:

At the sight of Vision, the Eye-lids of the Person are erected, and the eyes continue staring until the Object vanish. This is obvious to others who are by, when the Persons happen to see a Vision, and occur'd more than once to my own Observation, and to others that were with me.

The time of day the vision is seen is an important quality which helps the seer know how soon the vision will be fulfilled:

If an Object is seen early in a Morning (which is not frequent) it will be accomplish'd in a few hours afterwards. If at Noon, it will commonly be accomplish'd that very day. If in the Evening, perhaps that Night, if after Candles be lighted, it will be accomplish'd that Night; the latter always in accomplishment, by Weeks, Months, and sometimes Years, according to the time of Night the Vision is seen. (pp. 301-302)

In addition to the time of day, the seer also relies on the content of the vision. For

instance, in the case of death shrouds, the height of it on the person indicates to the seer how soon the person will die:

When a Shroud is perceiv'd about one, it is a sure prognostick of Death, the time is judged accordingly to the height of it about the person; for if it is not seen above the middle, death is not to be expected for the space of a year, and perhaps some months longer; and as it is frequently seen to ascend higher towards the head, Death is concluded to be at hand within a few days, if not hours, as daily experience confirms. (p. 302)

Martin observed that members in a family could have the second sight though it did not necessarily descend directly from parents to their children. It is unclear how many families Martin observed in order to arrive at this finding. Just because this is true for one case, does not mean it is true for every case (see below). In contrast to Kirk's claim that seers were mostly men, Martin observed that both men and women had second sight. This was also observed by several of his contemporaries (Pepys 1699: 383; Fraser 1707: 1) as well as later investigators (e.g., MacGregor 1901: 25; Polson 1926: 107). Martin gives an account in which both men and women seers had first seen him in their visions before actually meeting him. Children were also observed to have second sight and Martin gives an account which he witnessed himself:

I was present in a House where a Child cried out of a suddain, and being ask'd the reason of it, he answer'd that he had seen a great white thing lying on the Board which was in the Corner: but he was not believ'd, until a Seer who was present told him that the Child was in the right; for, said he, I saw a Corpse and the shroud about it, and the Board will be us'd as part of a Coffin, or some way employ'd about a Corpse; and accordingly, it was made into a Coffin, for one who was in perfect health at the time of the Vision. (p. 306)

Animals too were believed to have second sight, especially horses.

A Horse fastned by the common Road on the side of *Loch-Skeriness* in *Skie*, did break his Rope at Noon day, and run up and down without the least visible cause. But two of the Neighbourhood that happen'd to be at a little distance, and in view of the Horse, did at the same time see a considerable number of Men about a Corpse, directing their course to the Church of *Snizort*; and this was accomplish'd within a few days after, by the Death of a Gentlewoman who lived thirteen Miles from that Church, and came from another Parish, from whence very few come to *Snizort* to be Buried. (p. 307)

Martin described other accounts; for instance, having a vision of a spark falling on the arm or breast of a person signifies the death of a child. Also if a seer has a vision of an empty chair next to a person it is a sign that someone will die in that chair. Though the 'visions' are usually visual they can be expressed through the other senses. Martin claims that death can be foretold through the smell of fish or flesh burnt by fire. Auditory visions can also forewarn of death. Several women heard the cry of a woman present who was later to die.

In support of Aubrey's findings Martin also observed that people gifted with second

sight could foretell more positive events such as future marriages; furthermore they could also see particular details about them:

If a Woman is seen standing at a Man's left hand,⁶ it is a presage that she will be his Wife, whether they be Married to others, or unmarried at the time of the Apparition. If two or three Women are seen at once standing near a Mans left hand, she that is next him will undoubtedly be his Wife first, and so on, whether all three, or the Man be single or married at the time of the Vision or not . . . (p. 303)

Martin set out to address three main objections to the second sight given by sceptics of his time. These are still relevant today:

Object. 1. These Seers are Visionary and Melancholy People, and fancy they see things that do not appear to them, or any body else.

Object. 2. There is none among the Learn'd able to oblige the World with a satisfying account of those Visions, therefore it is not to be believed.

Object. 3. The Seers are Imposters, and the People who believe them, are credulous, and easily imposed upon. (pp. 308-309)

In answer to the first objection, Martin notes that people who have second sight are not mentally ill nor do they have illnesses affecting the mind. They also do not overindulge themselves in drink or food and generally they have simple diets. He also says (p. 308) that 'both Sexes are free from Hysterick Fits, Convulsions, and several other Distempers of that Sort: there's no Madman among them, nor any influence of self-murther [*sic*] . . .'⁹ To counter the second objection, Martin notes (pp. 308-309) several phenomena which, though they had no known scientific explanation, were nevertheless still accepted: 'For instance, Yawning, & its influence; & that the Load-stone attracts Iron, and yet these are true as well as harmless, tho' we can give no satisfying account of their Causes. And if we know so little of Natural Causes, how much less can we pretend to things that are supernatural.' Concerning the third objection, Martin describes the seers as generally 'illiterate and well-meaning people' who did not receive any financial gain from their predictions nor any elevated social or personal status. Only when the vision is fulfilled do people believe in the faculty. He then asks why would people who do not have the second sight and others of a high educational and social standing, continue to believe in the existence of it throughout history. He writes (p. 309): 'if the Seers were deceivers, can it be reasonable to imagine, that all the Islanders who have not the *Second Sight*, should combine together, and offer violence to their Understandings and Senses, to force themselves to believe a Lye from Age to Age . . .'⁹

THE REVEREND JOHN FRASER

A contemporary of Martin, John Fraser (1647-1702), minister of Tiree and Coll, recorded accounts of second sight similar to those related by Martin. Some of the accounts reflect again the literal nature of vision as well as its externality. One such experience,

recorded from John MacDonald, described a vision of his master, Lauchlan Maclean of Coll, who, by his appearance, he *knew* would be drowned. In vivid imagery John MacDonald described how at the time he:

... seeth his Cloaths shineing like the Skins of Fishes and his Periwig all wett, tho' indeed the day was very Fair, whereupon he told privately, even then to one of *Cols* Gentlemen that he feared he should be Drowned, This Gentleman was *Charles M'lean* who gave me account of it. The Event followed about a year thereafter, for the Laird of *Coll* was drowned in the water of *Lochy* in *Lochaber*. I examined both *Charles M'lean* and *John M'donald* and found that the Prædiction was as he told me; and the said *M'donald* could produce no other warrand, than that he found such Signes frequently before, to foregoe the like Events . . . (Fraser 1707: 6)

Fraser was unique for his time in that he tried to give a scientific explanation for the process of a vision, hypothesising that the image passes through the brain, eye and ear and is somehow stored.

THEOPHILUS INSULANUS

A near contemporary of Fraser, Theophilus Insulanus, who was believed to be a Mr William Macleod,⁷ a tacksman of Hamarra (Hampir) in Glendale, Skye, recorded quite a number of accounts from seers and eye-witnesses in the Highlands and Islands (Theophilus Insulanus 1763: 5-8). As with Kirk, his central aim was to convince both the sceptics and atheists of his day of the reality of God and a spiritual world in which souls are immortal. The accounts of second sight, especially those of apparitions, were presented as evidence for this spiritual reality.

He recorded a wide range of experiences, including many similar in character to those previously discussed: funeral processions, death shrouds, precognitive visions, clairvoyance, telepathy, hearing cries before the death of a person, visions of *doppelgängers*, and apparitions. Some experiences from this range bring out new qualities. These will be highlighted below, followed by some examples of completely new types of experiences. In the first example, a woman while on her deathbed, confided to Theophilus Insulanus the story of her first second sight experience, at the age of seventeen. What is very interesting about this experience is that she immediately acted on her vision:

... sitting by the fire-side she saw one Kenneth Maccaskil, who lived at a distance, having a sheep belonging to herself . . . bound on the other side of the fire, and a knife in his hand cutting her throat, and the blood running in a plate for that purpose; and then the scene disappeared: upon which she made all the haste she could to his house, and, finding the door shut, forced it open, when lo! she found the thief in the fang, challenged her mark on the sheep, and then went off; but the thief following her, she became afraid it was with intention to murder her; which instead of attempting; he gave her three or four ells of new linen, which he said was price enough for her sheep, and then strongly recommended to her to keep the whole a secret . . . (Theophilus Insulanus 1763: 2-3)

In the next case, several people shared a collective precognitive vision.⁸ Theophilus Insulanus recorded the accounts of both Angus Campbell, a tacksman in Harris, and his son. During a fine sunny day Angus saw:

. . . nine vessels, with an easy leading gale, coming, under sail, to a place called Corminish, opposite to his house, where they dropt their anchors, having their long boats after them, and the crew of each walking the decks; and that his children and several of his domestics took particular notice of a large sloop among them: as the place where they moored in was not a safe harbour, nor that sound a frequented passage to the western ocean, he despatched an express to his servants, who were at a distance about their labouring, with a view to send a boat to those ships, either to bring them to a safe harbour, or pilot them out to sea, as they choosed [*sic*]; and, after his servants came up, all of them saw the vessels, as formerly described; but while they were deliberating what to do, the scene disappeared gradually. In two years thereafter, the same number of ships, the remarkable sloop being among them, came and dropt [*sic*] anchor at Corminish, which was attended with all the circumstances above related . . . (pp. 4-5)

In the following case a woman not only saw her *doppelgänger* but also saw it mimic her own behaviour:

. . . a young woman in the family of Grishirnish, a dairy maid, who daily used to herd the calves in a park close to the house, observed, at different times, a woman resembling herself in shape and attire, walking solitarily at no great distance from her; and being surprised at the apparition, to make further trial, she put the back part of her upper garment foremost, and, anon! the phantom was dressed in the same manner, which made her uneasy, believing it portended some fatal consequence to herself. In a short time thereafter she was seized with a fever, which brought her to her end . . . (pp. 20-21)

Theophilus Insulanus recorded a number of cases where people saw apparitions of a dead person, which, he argued, is proof of the survival of the human spirit. The Gaelic word *sambhla* means likeness and refers to either seeing an apparition of a dead person or seeing an apparition of a person before they die (A. MacDonald 1889: 41; MacInnes 1989: 20). Another term which is commonly used to describe people about to die is *fey*.⁹ In the following case, recorded by Theophilus Insulanus, a lady saw her husband walking up the stairs to his bedroom so she told her servant to make a fire for him. However, unbeknownst to her, her husband had been drowned some distance from the home:

In the year 1756, Richard Sinclair, then a merchant in the town of Thurso, returning at even home with his servant, as they came to the river close by the town, found it was swelled by a fall of rain, and much increased by the tide, which was in: the latter seemed averse to ford, which his master observing, lighted and gave him his own horse, and mounted his servant's horse, with which having entered the river, was soon carried by the flood out of his saddle, and was drowned. His wife knowing nothing then of the matter, as she was going from one room to another in her own house, saw Mr Sinclair go up the stair to his own room, and called to a servant maid to bring him a candle and make up a fire; but after the servant had

brought the light in great haste, found no person within: in less than an hour the noise went through the town, that the gentleman has drowned . . . (pp. 28-29)

In contrast to visions which actually describe a future event, Theophilus Insulanus recorded accounts of visions which impart the knowledge of death symbolically, as in omens. For instance, foretelling death takes the form of seeing light or fire which signifies a person's spirit will soon depart from this Earth. A man saw a 'pillar of fire' coming out of his neighbour's chimney. That same evening the neighbour's daughter was drowned. Other omen-type experiences which symbolise a future death involve hearing specific types of sounds such as saws preparing a coffin. At other times, sounds are heard in a specific location, for instance in a closet or chest where an item belonging to a deceased person is kept and will soon be needed for their funeral. In one case a woman:

. . . heard a great noise as if the wall was fallen, which so alarmed her, that she went in directly into the said closet, and examined every thing about it, which she was surprised to find in the same order she had left them: In a few days, a person died in her neighbourhood, and some articles for his sowe [shroud] and coffin were taken out of that closet; after which no more noise was heard therein. It is very frequently observed, that the articles employed for a sowe and coffin, are so haunted, as to make a noise for some time before they are put in use; according to many attestations. (p. 13)

Another symbolic experience which presages a death is a vision of an adult person reducing to a child and then returning back. In one such example, a man and his servant both saw in a similar vision the minister of Diurinish reduce to the size of a young boy of six or seven and then return to his normal size. Shortly afterwards, the minister became ill and died.

Although second sight experiences are generally associated with awake visions, Theophilus Insulanus interviewed several people who had prophetic dreams. This was observed by later investigators as well.⁶⁰ In one case, the Reverend Mr Macleod, a minister from Lewis, had a vivid dream that a man dressed in a particular way informed him that a neighbour had died. In the morning, the minister told his wife about the dream. Shortly afterwards, a man dressed in the manner seen brought the news that the minister's neighbour had died.

SEERS

Individuals become known in the community to have the second sight. Some had one meaningful experience while others had many experiences over the course of their lives (see, e.g., Stewart 1822: appendix xxxv). Their reputation is based upon how accurate the seer's information is perceived to be by individuals and the wider community. People went to well-known seers to seek their advice on many issues, for example, to find out whether a missing loved one was still alive or had died, or even to know about their own fate. Perhaps the best known seer is *Coinneach Odhar* (Kenneth Mackenzie),

the Brahan Seer. He was believed by some to have been born during the seventeenth century in the Isle of Lewis (MacKenzie 1899: 11) though others have argued that he lived even earlier, during the 1570s (MacInnes 1989: 22). Hugh Miller and Alexander MacKenzie discussed several legends about how *Coinneach Odhar* came to have the second sight as well as the various prophetic visions of the seer that were reported to be fulfilled, and those still waiting to come true (Miller 1852: 156-158; MacKenzie 1899: 11-15). Other well-known seers of the time were clergymen: the Reverend John Morrison (1701-1774), Seer of Petty, the Reverend Lachlan MacKenzie of Lochcarron (1754-1819) and the Reverend John Kennedy of Killearnan (1819-1884) (Macrae 1908: 107-146; MacInnes 1989: 21).

JOHNSON AND BOSWELL

There were several people who kept accounts of their travels in the Western Isles in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the best known are Dr Samuel Johnson and James Boswell. It has been argued by Margaret Bennett that their observations do not accurately reflect the culture and life of the people in the Western Isles at the time.¹¹ Nevertheless, Johnson and Boswell did include a discussion of second sight in their account which is consistent with that of their contemporaries (1776: 97). They described second sight as 'an impression made either by the mind on the eye, or by the eye on the mind, by which things distant and future are received and seen as if they were present.' From hearing the accounts of second sight, they came away willing to believe in its existence. For other travellers with a more sceptical disposition such as Carr (1809: 270-273), the fact that Johnson and Boswell came to believe in second sight made them take it more seriously.

THE SPR ENQUIRY: ADELA GOODRICH-FREER AND FATHER McDONALD

The first attempt to conduct a large scale survey of Scottish Second Sight was made in the 1890s by several leading members of The Society for Psychical Research. The SPR was founded in London in 1882 with the aim of scientifically investigating claims of psychic phenomena. One of the first main projects undertaken by the SPR was the *Census of Hallucinations* (ed. E. Sidgwick *et al.*: 1894), which examined crisis apparition experiences involving hallucinations of a person at the moment of death or soon after death. Such experiences were also written about in the literature of Scottish Second Sight; thus it is not surprising that the SPR also embarked upon a separate enquiry into Second Sight. The following summary of this controversial enquiry draws on a detailed account of it provided by John Lorne Campbell (1968: 21-92). In 1893, F. H. Myers and Henry and Eleanor Sidgwick – three leading members of the SPR – prepared drafts of a circular and a schedule (list of questions), which were approved of by Lord Bute, a wealthy member of the SPR who funded the study. Myers also received help from the Reverend Mr Dewar, a minister from the Isle of Bute, who was a native Gaelic

speaker and well acquainted with the people and clergy from the Highlands. The list of questions is given below:

1. Is 'Second Sight' believed in by the people of your neighbourhood?
2. Have you yourself seen or heard of any cases which appear to imply such a gift? If so, will you send me the facts?
3. Can you refer me to anyone who has had personal experience, and who would be disposed to make a statement to me on the subject?
4. Do you know of any persons who feel an interest, and would be disposed to help, in this enquiry? (Campbell 1968: 29)

Dewar with the assistance of two others sent out around 2000 copies of the circular and schedule, along with the objectives of the SPR, to a wide range of professionals: '720 ministers, 260 doctors of medicine, 118 Factors, 66 Inspectors and Serjeants of Police, 22 Sheriffs, 51 Fiscals, 21 Secretaries of Highland Clan Associations, 23 Scottish members of [the] S.P.R., 22 Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors of Schools, 21 members of the Celtic Class in Edinburgh University, 304 to Teachers, 31 to Newspaper Editors in the North, 350 to Landowners etc.' (Campbell 1968: 32).

Despite a second mailing including copies of a personal letter from Lord Bute, the final response rate was disappointing. By April 1894, Dewar had received only 157 replies, of which 42 indicated a belief in second sight. It was realised that further progress was dependent on obtaining first-hand accounts through interviews in the Highlands and Islands. Dewar – the obvious candidate for the task – could not devote the time needed to complete the enquiry. Instead Adela Goodrich-Freer, another member of the SPR, was selected to assist him. Dewar furnished Goodrich-Freer with valuable introductions throughout the Highlands and Islands, in particular, to Father Allan McDonald, a priest of Daliburgh and later of Eriskay and a man who was to become a key person in the SPR enquiry.

Father McDonald diligently wrote down in Gaelic and English, old hymns, poems, songs, place-names, and stories from tradition-bearers who had entrusted him with their memories, experiences of their history and folklore. His work, which was a labour of love, resulted in eight notebooks, including two containing accounts of second sight. These notebooks were of great value to various scholars of the time to whom he would generously lend them out. His accounts of second sight, including his own, helped provide valuable information to Adela Goodrich-Freer, the woman who took over the enquiry from Dewar.

Goodrich-Freer made several visits to the Western Isles from 1894 to 1898. She wrote two reports for the SPR on her travels and observations though she never formally published her findings in the journal of the SPR. The enquiry was never completed and subsequently there is continued debate about Goodrich-Freer's integrity within both the folklore and psychical research communities. It has been argued by Campbell and Hall (1968: 223-246, 310-323) that she copied second sight experiences from Father McDonald's notebooks and published the accounts in the folklore literature in her

own name. They also claim that she lied about having knowledge of Gaelic and coming from a Scottish family where several members had second sight, including herself. She gave numerous lectures to various societies and rarely publicly credited McDonald or Dewar for their information. Whether in fact Goodrich-Freer copied the information, the fact remains that although the SPR enquiry showed that in the 1890s there was a belief in second sight, it failed to illuminate the nature of these experiences and how they fitted into the wider fabric of psychic experiences known at the time. Even more importantly no attempt was made to see how these experiences affected the lives of the people and the meaning they had to the person and to the community.

The range of second sight experiences that Father McDonald recorded is indeed impressive. When Dewar visited McDonald in August 1894, he wrote to Lord Bute describing the types of experiences he was told about. He was surprised not to come across any crisis apparition of the living cases, though, as we have seen, they do exist in the literature on second sight.

Father McDonald's cases of second sight have been reproduced by Campbell and Hall (1968: 249-323); two will be highlighted below. The first case concerns an experience of a *manadh*, which is regarded as a warning. The *manadh* can come in various forms, the most common being in the form of light (MacInnes 1989: 16). However, in some cases it takes the form of hearing something before the event occurs:

John MacKinnon, Eriskay (Iain beag mac Iain 'ic Mhurchaidh), had gone to bed and after sleeping for some time wakened and continued awake. He heard the door of his house open and a man rushing in hurriedly, saying, 'Iain bhig! Iain bhig! greas ort!' ['Little John! little John! Hurry up!'] He knew the voice to be that of his nephew Malcolm MacKinnon who lived in the next house. He got up as quickly as he could, and went over to Malcolm's house, but found it closed, and no person awake. He walked round the house but there was no sign of a light or any person being up ... He went back then to his own house ... awaiting Malcolm's return ... He waited, but in vain. He asked the wife if she had heard the call. She said she didn't. Two days after, Malcolm rushed into the house, hurriedly exclaiming, 'Iain bhig! Iain bhig! greas ort!' He was not in at the time. A brother-in-law of his called Donald (Bàn) Currie, was being drowned out in front of the house. He was returning with a boat load of sea-weed. This occurrence explained the matter. The voice was considered a 'manadh' or warning. (Campbell and Hall 1968: 263)

What is interesting about this experience is that when John MacKinnon heard distinctively his nephew's voice crying for help, he believed it to be real and acted accordingly. What differentiates this experience from being purely an auditory hallucination is that the *actual* event occurs. Therefore it would seem that his precognitive vision caught a glimpse of the future. Is this an isolated case or are there other cases like this one?

The second case seems to support the latter possibility and concerns a first-hand experience of a girl who had seen the *raidhbhse* of a couple before actually meeting them:

Marion MacRury, Ru' (Bàn), Eriskay, about 12 years ago when only a child was in the enclosure in front of the School House door Eriskay with Margaret MacAskill a sister of the interim teacher Harriet MacAskill – the head teacher Miss MacKay having had to go home to Buckie in bad health. It was broad daylight on a Saturday. She noticed the head of a man and a woman outside the wall coming round on the south side. She asked Maggie MacAskill who they were. Miss MacAskill said she didn't see anyone. Marion MacRury then noticed them come in by the east gate and the man had a waterproof and the woman had a grey shawl on her arm. She had never seen either of them before. She saw them pass a yard or two from her into the School House front door and she drew Maggie MacAskill's attention to them again. Maggie didn't see them but rushed into the house to tell her sister Harriet. They found nobody in, and Marion MacRury was taken in and told she had seen a taibhse [*sic*] and Harriet MacAskill got a bible and closed it to Marion's face so that the wind might go in her eyes. If it wasn't for that says Marion I might be as bad as the Red Tailor (Bowie), Harbour, but I never saw anything since.¹⁷ Miss MacKay the teacher died a month or two after leaving Eriskay for her home. Maggie MacAskill and Marion MacRury were in the school enclosure another day and saw two people coming round just as the other two she had seen had come. They turned out to be real characters this time, viz. an uncle of Miss MacKay's and Mrs Malcolm MacAskill from Pollacharra, South Uist. The man came across to see about the effects of his deceased niece and Mrs MacAskill came to see her daughters. At the most there could not have been more than three months between the vision and the realisation. I can't find out if the vision was prior to Miss MacKay's death or not. (p. 291)

A lesson one can learn from the SPR enquiry is the importance of respecting people one is learning from. Father McDonald was part of his community. He knew the language, customs and traditions and was entrusted with first-hand accounts of second sight experiences. His example suggests that the best psychical researcher studying second sight experiences is a person whose genuine sensitivity to the community engenders a special relationship with the people.

ALASTAIR MACGREGOR

Although previous investigators have observed that second sight ran in families, no mention was made specifically as to which members in the family had experiences and about the kinds of experiences they had. Alastair MacGregor's training was in medicine and in the late 1890s, he wrote about some of his family's second sight experiences, including those of his great-grandfather, his sister and himself (MacGregor 1901: 42-56, 141-156).

His father told him about his own grandfather, who was the minister at Dull, who had a collective vision of a funeral procession with a young couple who were getting married at the time. All three of them saw the funeral procession and the young woman had recognised some of the coffin-bearers. The minister, believing it to be a *real* procession, went down to get the key to the churchyard to let them in, only to find that there was no-one there. The following week the actual funeral took place.

His father was later to take over the same parish as his grandfather. Originally he was a sceptic about second sight but eventually became a believer. Being the local minister, people would confide to him about what they had seen. His father was trained both in science and theology and applied this training by carefully recording the date and account of an experience when it was told to him. He then made a note when the vision came true. Unfortunately MacGregor never mentioned whether he kept his father's diary. However, what is important is the method of recording the experiences before the event happened and also his observation that experiences were in his family.

JOHN GREGORSON CAMPBELL

John Gregorson Campbell (1836-1891), who was a minister of Tiree, a folklorist and a Gaelic scholar, wrote of the traditional beliefs about second sight in the Highlands and Islands. Like other writers, Campbell related several accounts of funeral processions. In his accounts, the place where the funeral procession is seen will be a location where the actual procession will later pass. Visions of processions and the many other experiences pertaining to funerals and the preparations for them are, according to Campbell, accounted for through the following belief:

The doctrine is, that the whole ceremony connected with a funeral is gone through in rehearsal by spectres which are the shades, phantoms, appearances, taishs, doubles, swarths, or whatever else we choose to call them, of living men, not merely by the shade of the person who is to die, but by the shades of all who are to be concerned in the ceremony. The phantoms go for the wood that is to make the coffin, the nails, the dead clothes, and whatever else may be required on the occasion; the sounds of the coffin being made are heard, of presses [cupboards] being opened, of glasses rattling; and the melancholy procession has been met in the dead of night wending its way to the churchyard . . . (Campbell 1902: 150-151)

The *tamhasg* – i.e. spectre of the living or *doppelgänger* – is not a person's spirit but can be likened to an alter ego. This alter ego is linked to the person, though it has an existence independent of him or her. If one sees it, one is not supposed to talk to it otherwise it will demand that you meet it regularly. According to Campbell, the tradition had it that the penalty for not keeping these meetings was a physical thrashing by the *tamhasg*. Also he notes (p. 143) that the *tamhasg* is related to the wishes of a person: 'Strongly wishing . . . causes at times a person's likeness to be seen or heard at the place where he wishes to be and the original . . . may be affected through his double.'

The *tàradh* is the experience of having a vision of a living person before you actually meet them. Campbell related the case of a Scottish man who had a recurring vision of his future wife while stationed in Africa years before he met her in the Isle of Mull:

A native of Coll, Hugh, son of Donald the Red *Eoghan MacDhòmhnuill Ruaidh*, while serving with his regiment in Africa, said he saw, almost every evening, for a period of five years, glimpses of the woman whom he afterwards married, and whom he never saw in reality till his return from the wars. Wherever he sat, after the day's march, the figure of a

woman came beside him, and sometimes seemed to touch him lightly on the shoulders. On each occasion he merely caught a glimpse of her. When he left the army, and was on his way home, he came to the village at Dervaig, in Mull, from the neighbourhood of which the ferry across to Coll lay. He entered by chance a house in the village, and his attention was unexpectedly attracted by the sound of a weaver's loom at work in the house. On looking up he saw sitting at the loom the identical woman whose figure had for five years haunted him in Africa. He married her. (p. 147)

Campbell also relates an experience which would be regarded now as a 'crisis telepathy' experience which occurred over a great distance:

Sixty years ago, a seer in Ruaig, Tiree . . . was one day employed in the harvest-field, tying sheaves after the reapers, a work assigned to old people. One of his sons was away in the Ross of Mull for a cargo of peats. All of a sudden the old man cried out 'Alas!, alas! My loss!' *och! och! mo chreach!* His children gathered around him in great anxiety. He told them to wait a minute and in a short time said it was all right, his son was safe. It turned out that at the very time of his exclamation, the boat in which his son was on its way from the Ross of Mull, was run into by another boat at the Dutchman's Cap (*Am Bac Mòr*; a peculiarly shaped island) on the way, and his son was thrown overboard, but was rescued in time. (pp. 149-150)

In the Highlands, and especially in the Islands, fishing was and still is an integral part of the life of many communities. It is not surprising therefore that many second sight experiences were connected to the dangers of the sea. Campbell related accounts of visions forewarning of a tragedy concerning particular boats. Local people would heed the seer's warnings and in some cases not sail in them or even destroy the boat.

Omens foretelling death, as we have already discussed, come in various forms and were part of the lore in the community as observed by Campbell. The *dreag* or *fairy light* as it is referred to in Tiree or the *Uist Light* or *Solus Uithist* in Skye and the Islands is seen as a ball of light. Sometimes the *dreag* is seen falling over the boundary of the croft, which symbolises that someone will die in the croft. Another name for the light is the *corpse candle* which signifies the *flame of the soul* of a person. It can be seen along the road to a funeral, over a loch where a person will be drowned or even over a person soon to die. If the light is seen close to the ground the funeral will take place soon but if it is seen far from the ground, it will not be immediate (MacBain 1887: 331). Other omens announcing death can come in the form of hearing three knocks at the door; when the person goes to the door nobody is there. Also according to tradition, certain animals can symbolically bring news of death. Hearing the cock crow late at night is considered as a sure sign that a family member or relative will soon die.

The mourners' lament or cry for a loved one can be heard before the death of the person.⁹ In Ireland, the Banshee was heard in particular families warning of death (Lysaght 1986: 53-63). Campbell related a case from Tiree:

Weeping and crying were heard at midnight near the mill-dam in Tiree, on a dark and rainy night, by a young man going for a midwife for his brother's wife. He heard the same sounds

on his return. The woman died in that childbed, and it was observed that at the very spot where the young man said that he heard the sounds of lamentation, her two sisters first met after her death, and burst into tears and outcries. (p. 167)

Although Campbell does provide a good description of the beliefs and accounts of second sight, as we shall see later, his personal views were those of a sceptic regarding the *psychic* nature of second sight.

WENDY WOOD

The Scottish writer, Wendy Wood (1892-1981), devoted time to collecting accounts of second sight and gathering research material to write a book on it. She was sensitive not only to the phenomenology of second sight in others but also to her own experiences. Though the book was never completed, Wendy Wood's papers (c. 1930) are valuable for their description of the historical literature and accounts recorded at the time, including her own. Around thirty accounts were collected, of which eighteen were first-hand accounts from people in the Highlands and Islands. The others were obtained from appeals in newspapers. Unfortunately only a small number of these experiences were actually described by Wood, including visions of death-shrouds, funeral processions, *doppelgängers* and visions of people before actually meeting them. A handful of these pertain to her own experiences from the late 1920s and 1930s.

Wendy Wood was concerned with establishing the genuineness of second sight:

Whether Second Sight is an extra-sense, to be classified under the science of psychology, or whether its nature is entirely occult or spiritual, is only worth considering after definite proof of its existence . . . By proof I mean a case which I know to have been spoken of before the event, in identifiable detail, by one who could not have come by the knowledge in any other manner; while the vision is later repeated in totality with the correct details . . . (File 12)

What is interesting about Wood's approach was her intention to get proof of second sight through selecting first-hand accounts in which people had spoken to others about their experience before the actual event occurred. She also recorded experiences after she heard them, sometimes even without a person's knowledge, though Wood maintained the confidentiality of her informants and respected their wishes not to be named. Anonymity had its social advantages:

The doubtful ability of being able to foretell a neighbour's decease, may, especially in remote country districts, result in complete isolation . . . The Mother of a lady with whom I am well acquainted, when she saw a shroud or other sign of death on anyone present, felt faint and always asked for a drink of water. It became generally known that her physical disability was due to some such message, and her presence became less welcome to nervous friends, to those who were at the moment not feeling in perfect health, or who thought that the lady in question looked upon them with even slight disfavour. Indeed, I know many who used to

go up across the hill to avoid passing her on the foot path, for fear she might have ominous tidings.

Such avoidance is a new phase in Highland life; the older attitude being that the warning came as a favour giving time to prepare for death . . . (File 12)

Wood observed that this connection between someone having a vision and later becoming ill was not unusual. Another case she mentioned was told to her by a man from North Uist. The man told of how a fifteen year old boy with whom he was travelling had a vision of a funeral procession and shortly afterwards became very ill.

Wood recorded a striking case in which a man saw a *doppelgänger* of his friend's son. Believing it to be a real person, he went to touch the man only to find it was not *real* in the material sense.

I met what I thought to be MacA—'s son just at the corner of the road there. Not in anyway was he unlike the real thing . . . He had on the same grey trousers and blue jacket and no hat and cap . . . But as he came closer it would just seem that he interested me, and I looked hard at him, and, well now, I just can't tell you how, for I kept my eyes some way between his old yellow muffler and his face, but he seemed to be moving very smoothly, and I was puzzled and put out my hand just to touch his arm as you would be if you were going to speak – just, like that – and though I was looking at the very cloth I was touching, that could nearly have counted the strands, yet my fingers went right through it and couldn't get a grip or a touch. I felt very bad at that, indeed yes, I did, and thankful that I had not spoken to him or he would have been at me again some other evening . . . (Files 10 and 14)

Although Wendy Wood recorded first-hand accounts, she also received accounts from other researchers such as Alexander Polson. She also wrote about several of her own second sight experiences both in her unfinished work as well as in her autobiography. In the following excerpt – from her papers – written in November 1930, she wrote about having a vision of a funeral procession in August 1930:

I landed for the first time on Harris with two companions age 12 and 15. The boat having landed us at six in the morning, we were at our destination, the little village of Strond, by seven o'clock and having had breakfast went for a stroll on the headland that protected the small bay. Looking across at the few cottages on the other side of the water (distance being some 200 yards and the day clear and sunny) I saw seven men dressed in black standing about outside a certain cottage. They were moving about restlessly and now and again I caught sight of a long black object before the cottage, though I did not recognise it as a coffin, never having seen one placed outside before, yet I was aware that I was looking at a funeral, and called my companion's attention to it. To my amazement they could neither of them see anything of the sort. There was no person in sight they assured me . . . while I continued to see the figures on the other side as clearly as I saw the palm of my own hand, the two girls firmly maintained that neither man nor woman was to be seen across the bay, though they gave a detailed description of every cottage . . . While I was speaking, one man left the others to go up the path towards a house that stands a little above the cottages. I pointed him out to the children, glanced back at the group before the strolling man had

reached the house, and the whole lot had disappeared. Their disappearance gave me a sort of shock, being so un-natural in comparison with their reality, but I knew no-one in Strond and laughed the matter aside though I mentioned it to the doctor whom I met a few days later and also to a friend . . . The doctor said that a death at the house seemed unlikely, and I asked him and my friend to keep the matter quiet, a request which was quite un-necessary as such information is never handed about, which is one of the reasons why such cases are harder to prove. I am planning to return to Harris this March, but feel afraid that on my reappearance, the funeral may make place. (File 11)

According to her published autobiography, Wood was able to fulfil her aim of documenting the vision before it occurred through telling other people about her own vision before it came true (Wood 1970). She spoke both to the local doctor and friends about her vision shortly after she had it. At the time, the doctor told her that the man in the croft which the vision referred to was in good health. He also said that since the vision occurred in the morning, the *actual* funeral would take place eight or nine months later. This is contrary to the tradition as observed by Martin (1703: 301). According to Wood, she received a letter from the doctor eight months later stating that the events foreseen had come to pass. She also received a letter from her friend. These letters indicate that Wood had told them of her vision beforehand and that the funeral later happened. According to Wood, the doctor wrote:

I remember you told me what you saw and the cottage at which you saw it. At that time there was no one ill at that cottage, as I remarked at the time. I.G. the owner of that cottage, has since died. I am afraid I cannot give any satisfactory explanation, but that it is a gift possessed by only a few I feel sure. (Wood 1970: 170)

In her letter, the friend wrote:

As regards the phantom funeral you saw at Strond last summer, it passed in reality the day before I arrived home. I.G. who lived in that long thatched cottage died. My uncle was the man you saw who went to fetch his jacket. (He was helping to build the house that later stood on the hill). (pp. 170-171)

THE SCHOOL OF SCOTTISH STUDIES

From the 1950s to the present, numerous staff members and students of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh have interviewed people about second sight experiences. Great care is taken over the confidentiality of the material imparted to the fieldworker during the interview. In recent years, release forms have been given to the informants to find out their wishes regarding their tapes and how the material can be used. Many of the informants have given permission to place their recordings in the School of Scottish Studies Archives and some have also given permission for their material to be published in the School's journal, *Tocher*.

The people who were interviewed came from diverse traditions and communities

throughout different parts of Scotland, from the Highlands, Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney, and the Lowlands. Some fieldworkers have also travelled to different countries such as Canada and the USA.

The second sight experiences recorded over the years by fieldworkers in the School of Scottish Studies are similar in character to the classical accounts of second sight already discussed. What follows is a brief summary to show the range of experiences recorded. Some of the accounts of second sight which have appeared in *Tocher* will be highlighted. The cases dealt with meaningful events, some of which were happy though the majority concerned foreseeing very sad events. There are a number of accounts from people who had visions of a funeral procession and walked to the side of the road to let it pass. Others were less fortunate and reported being physically pushed aside by one of the mourners. Some of these visions of funeral processions were transferred to another person. In most cases this was done through physical contact, e.g. having the person step on the seer's foot or placing his hand on the seer's shoulder. Most of the time this method seemed to be successful, though not always. The majority of the other visions (not of funeral processions) that were transferred to another person also involved physical contact. In some of these cases people reported that they retained their ability of second sight throughout their whole life.

Other types of precognitive visions which were recorded involved seeing a death shroud on a person before his death. In some cases, the person felt faint or ill after having the vision. One such account was recorded in South Uist by D. J. MacDonald in his fieldwork notebook and later published. During a wedding reel, a man saw a death shroud on his brother's new wife. Feeling pale, he went home and his mother asked why he returned so early.

'Chuir, 'ars' esan, 'ged a tha mo bhràthair cho toilichte a nochd, mun tig ceann bliadhna bi e gu math mi-thoilichte; cha mheal e a bhean òg ro fhada. 'Nuair a bha iad ann a' ruidhle na bainnse, chunnaic mise a leine-bhàis air bean-na-bainnse suas chun na h-ambaich.'

'The reason was,' he said, 'that although my brother is so happy tonight, before a year's end he will be very unhappy; he will not enjoy his young wife for very long. When they were dancing the bride's reel I saw her shroud on the bride up to her neck.' (D. J. MacDonald 1972: 194-5)

Margaret Bennett has conducted fieldwork about many aspects of Scottish customs which has resulted in an excellent book, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave*.¹⁴ According to tradition, the time of day a child was born determined if that child had second sight. Bennett recorded Iain Nicolson in Uig, Skye, in 1988:

But I heard if it was at midnight [you were born], that you were apt to see things. But I know of one that was in Skudiborg, A— BH—, a brother of J— G— that was in Baile nan Cnoc there. They were in a hotel . . . [in Uig, Skye. A Man] gave him a glass of whisky and he saw the grave clothes on him. And he was shivering; takes the glass out of his hand. But the man lived maybe a month or two after that — but he saw it! (Bennett 1992: 179-180)

Though second sight is generally thought of as being an *awake* vision, it can, as we have seen, come to some people in the form of dreams. An account illustrating this type of second sight was recorded from Peter Morrison of North Uist, by Donald A. MacDonald. There had been an accident in which a woman drowned when trying to gather kelp. Although people had searched for her, her body had not been found. Shortly after the drowning, Peter Morrison's grandmother had a dream in which the dead woman was trying to tell her where her body was, warning her if they did not come soon it would be lost at sea. She awoke three times during the night from the same dream, the deceased woman's appeal becoming more urgent each time. On each occasion, she woke her husband to tell him of her dream and ask that he go out on the boat to look for the body.

Well, *dhuig* i 'companach a rithist ÷ *thuir* i ris: 'Tha'n aislig,' as is, 'air mise dhusgadh an treas uair. Dé tha thu 'dol a dheanadh?'

'O chan eil mise 'dol a charachadh,' as esan.

'Mar a bheil,' as ise, 'tha mise 'falbh dha'n choimhearsnachd.' 'S chaidh i sen a thaigh Dhòmbmail Thàilleir. Dh' fhalbh iad le cnap do dh' eathar ÷ dh'iomair an dithis aca mach [a] Lòn Cait ÷ fhuair iad am boirionnach 'san tìurr ÷ a' làn a' dol feithe 'nuair a ràinig iad. Thug iad dhachaidh i ÷ chaidh a tiodhlagadh 'san dùthaich.

Well, she woke her husband again and said to him: 'The dream has woken me,' said she, 'for the third time. What are you going to do?'

'Oh, I'm not going to budge,' said he.

'If you won't,' said she, 'I'm going for the neighbours.' And she went to Donald the tailor's house. They went out in a fair-sized boat and the two of them rowed her out to Lon Cait, and they found the woman in the wrack, and the tide was beginning to lift her when they got there. They brought her home and she was buried among her people. (D. A. MacDonald 1974: 319-320)

Though second sight experiences are generally of a visual nature, some can take the form of having knowledge about people's safety at some distance from the informant. One such experience was recorded from James Morrison, East Tarbert, Harris, by Morag MacLeod from the School of Scottish Studies in 1968. A small boat from Strond went out fishing for lobsters at Haskeir, off North Uist. There was a bad gale and the crew had to let the boat drift. People from Harris thought the worst, that no-one would be seen again. However there was a woman who knew that all on board the boat were safe and so she went to Strond to tell the people there not to give up hope:

Och, cha do chreid iad idir i, na càil colach ris, ÷ dh' fhan i ann go robh a' feasgar ann ÷ *thuir* i gu robh ise a' falbh a neis, gun d' thug i seachad an teachdairreachd a bh' aice, ach nach robh càil a dh' fhios aice càite a robh muinntir an eathair, ach bha fhios aice gu robh iad beò fhatbast. 'S chaidh i dhachaidh. Cha robh iad gha creidsinn an deidh sen.

Cha 'reid mise nach robh iad ceithir la adrift ma's d' thàinig fios gu robh iad air tighinn air tìr air tràigh ann an Uige ann a Leòdhas. Bha. Seall sibh a neise mar a bha fios aig a' bhloireannach sen air a sen. Bha. 'S bha i làn chinnteach as.

O, they didn't believe her, or anything like it, and she stayed until the evening, and she said that she was going now, that she had given her message, but that she didn't know where the boat's crew were, but she knew they were still alive. And she went home. They didn't believe her for all that.

I think they were adrift for four days before word came that they had come ashore on a strand in Uig, Lewis. Yes. See now how that woman knew that. Yes. And she was completely sure of it . . . (MacLeod 1972: 196-7)

As we have seen before from the earlier literature, there are a variety of omens traditionally associated with death in Scotland. The School of Scottish Studies has recorded many similar accounts such as seeing a *dveag* or light, hearing sweet singing, bells, three knocks at a door or saws preparing a coffin before the death of a person.

The School has also recorded accounts of visions in which people who are *fey* i.e. about to die, are seen. There have been other accounts in which visions of people at the moment or shortly after death have been seen. Other cases have included people who have had visions of a living person, for instance seeing a *doppelgänger* or experiencing *manadh a' bheò* – having a vision of a person whom you have never met before but later you meet.

As we have seen from the classical cases, people tried to rid themselves from the second sight through prayers. However Alan Bruford recorded an account from Peter Fotheringhame, in Orkney, in which his grand-uncle used another method. His uncle had met a woman who somehow *knew* from his appearance that he had the second sight and was bothered by seeing the visions. She told him about a way to rid himself of the second sight:

'Well,' she says, 'if you want to get rid of that . . . give me a small bit of copper, any copper as long as it's copper. I don't want much,' she says. 'Give me a small bit of copper, and,' she says, 'prove it.' So it wasn't very much bother to him to find copper, you know, them days. He gave her a bit o copper, and she took it in her hand, she said a few words: 'Now,' she said, 'you'll be an old man before ever this bothers you again.' . . . And it was the case. He was well over eighty year old and he came in one day and he says: 'Well,' he says, 'I haven't got long to go now,' he says. 'The old lady's story's comin true.' He says: 'I've seen so-and-so,' mentioned him by name; he says: 'That man's passin out very soon,' he says, 'I saw him today, and it won't be long till my time comes now.' He says: 'She's been quite correct. I've never seen nothing till today, and,' he says, 'I know I haven't long to go myself.' And as he said it so it happened. He told my father that. (Bruford 1972: 199-200)

The School of Scottish Studies have done extensive fieldwork about the Scottish travellers who have an unique way of life, being itinerant. They have a rich history of songs and folktales, including stories of the supernatural and of second sight, which have been orally passed down from generation to generation. Stanley Robertson is a well-known storyteller from a travelling family from Aberdeen. He has published some of the folk-rites in Scots which have been handed down orally in his family (1989). Barbara McDermitt, a past postgraduate from the School of Scottish Studies and now

a storyteller, interviewed Stanley Robertson over a period of three years. She wrote a moving profile of his life, his family and his beliefs about the supernatural (1986). Psychic ability seemed to run in the Robertson family: his grandmother, his mother, his sister and himself all having had psychic experiences. His mother would use her second sight to tell people about their lives, though never for money: 'My mither was aafe psychic. She was also a spiritual woman. An my Granny Beck was the same, because she had lots of experiences that A heard passed doon through the years . . . [My mother] if she never met you in her life before, she could tell ye your name and age an everything about ye. She really had this gift.' (McDermitt 1986: 179-180)

Stanley Robertson felt that other travellers also had psychic ability. The late Betsy (Bessie) Whyte, was a well-known storyteller and singer who came from Perthshire. She wrote two books (1979, 1990) which beautifully describe her life as a traveller. Peter Cooke and his postgraduate student, Linda Headlee, from the School of Scottish Studies first met Bessie Whyte at her home in Montrose in 1973. During the years until her death in 1988, she made many recordings with the School of Scottish Studies about her folk-rites, songs, and life as a traveller. She was known to use her second sight by telling people about their lives. Sometimes she used her second sight through the aid of reading tea leaves or reading palms as a way to focus the mind for concentration. She also spoke about how second sight ran in her family:

. . . Mother was gifted with the second sight to a very high degree, but she rarely gave it full rein. I think she was a bit awed by it and a bit frightened. I myself am very much like my mother was but possessing the gift in a much lesser degree, as does my youngest sister. I too am a bit wary of it – a sort of 'Is it from Heaven, or is it from Hell?' feeling. My father helped me to learn to live with it. He also taught me tolerance and restraint.⁴

THEORIES OF SECOND SIGHT

For some of the investigators, the proof of the validity of the second sight experiences was contained in the telling of the experience and the integrity of the teller. For others, the proof lay in the documentation of the experience, the writing down of the experience beforehand, and noting when the actual event took place. Most of the collectors were clergymen and they wanted to show through the accounts the reality of a spiritual dimension to the mind and proof of the reality of God.

For men like Kirk, Theophilus Insulanus and Fraser, belief in the spiritual agency of the second sight, be it through fairies, angels or through God, led people to hold the view that second sight is communicated by an immaterial mind which is immortal. Theophilus Insulanus argues that second sight is not innate in the material sense but comes from the spirit of God, citing the following passage in the Bible: 'And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.' (Joel 2.28)⁴⁶ Theophilus Insulanus contends that second sight is not communicated through the physical organs

but communicated through the spiritual agency of the imagination of one person to another. As evidence for this, he noted that although most visions occur at night, remarkably the seer was still able to discern the colours and details of an event. Furthermore he states that there have been seers who kept their ability to have visions even after becoming blind. These facts, he concluded, meant that second sight was not mediated through the physical eye but through the imagination.

Theophilus Insulanus was a proponent of what modern day theorists would call a radical dualistic model of mind where mind and matter, though having separate natures, interact.¹⁷ He hypothesised that the spirit or soul of a person was different from that of the body but that they did form a union:

. . . that soul and body are different substances, and diverse in their operations, yet because of their confessed intimate union, they will not have the same faculty to assign to each their proper sphere of action. Some . . . suppose that the soul is clothed with a fine material vehicle, seated in the brain, where it receives sensations by the economy of the nerves, &c. yet whatever intercourse berwixt soul and body, may be thus managed . . . it will I presume, be impossible to finite minds, to account for prediction from natural causes, without we admit of revelation . . . (1763: 32)

Another proponent of radical dualism was Fraser, who espoused physical and spiritual agencies to account for second sight. He proposed that the seer's imagination is the agency of second sight and that there is a mental process in the brain to form the images:

. . . Seeing, is nothing else but the Transition of the intentional Species thro' the chrySTALLIN Humour to the retiform Coat of the Eye, and judged by the common Sense, and conveyed by the optick Nerve to the Fancy . . . Now if these Species formerly received, and laid up in the Brain, will be reversed back from the same to the retiform Coat and ChrySTALLIN Humour . . . there is in Effect a living Seeing and Perception of the Object represented by these Species, as if *de novo* the Object had been placed before the Eye . . . (Fraser 1707: 13-14)

But he maintained that the *source* of second sight was spiritual, from good and bad angels, and was external to the seer's personality. MacEchern also supports the view that the personality of the seer is in touch with an external source of information. Though in his view, this source was either another person's mind or the mind of God:

. . . If the vision should show a knowledge of the distant or of the future beyond what the seer's own consciousness or sub-consciousness could account for, it is evident that the vision, even if subjective, must have its source in something foreign to the seer's personality. If, for example, I see my far-distant brother in the article of death, or I have to-day a vision of what takes place to-morrow, of such a nature that no sub-conscious 'balancing of probabilities' could lead my mind to forecast, then the vision of sight, although subjective, without a present material object being present to be seen, must have an origin outside of the seer's mind, and be explained by some foreign cause, such as telepathy from a human being or telepathy from a higher spirit, or telepathy from the highest spirit . . . (MacEchern 1922: 298)

Another debate evident in the literature concerned the question of whether second sight runs in families as a possible hereditary ability.

Robert Kirk observed that second sight ran in the family and that there was a father-son transmission. 'For some have this second sight transmitted from Father to Son, thorow the whole family, without their own consent or others teaching, proceeding only from a Bounty of providence . . .' (Kirk 1691: 67) However, Kirk's near contemporary John Fraser stated that there was no evidence to support such a transmission pattern.

John Gregorson Campbell's personal views were those of a sceptic even though he accurately described the tradition of second sight. He did not believe that the seer's visions were external and independent of the seer, and thus in touch with a spiritual realm. Campbell argued that the visions of seers were due to hallucinations and delusions ('spectral illusions') caused by a hereditary mental illness:

In some instances it ran in the family; in others, but rarer cases, the seer was the only one of his kindred who 'saw sight' (*chi sealladh*). Some had it early in life, upon others it did not come till they were advanced in life. These characteristics alone show it to be in its origin the same as spectral illusions. It arose from hereditary disease, malformations, or weakness of the visual organs, and the derangements of mind or bodily health.¹⁸

Campbell's assertion that second sight can be attributed purely to a hereditary disease can be challenged on several grounds. Though people with certain forms of mental illness such as schizophrenia have auditory hallucinations, it does not necessarily mean that people with second sight are mentally ill. It can be argued that people with second sight do not have hallucinations since there is a real *veridical* event which corresponds to their auditory or visual vision. A further distinction between hallucination and second sight is the fact that a number of people can share the same *collective* vision; as MacGregor put it (1899: 55), ' . . . would several people at the same time and place be out of health in such identically the same manner as to have identically the same optical illusions?' Aubrey and Martin observed that people who had second sight experiences were in good health and did not suffer unduly from any mental illnesses. They noted that second sight ran in families. Aubrey was informed about several families in Skye having second sight where it descended from parents to their children. He noted that when a woman has the second sight and is married to a man with second sight, the only way to free their child of it, is to have the child baptized at birth. Martin also observed that second sight ran in the family, but noted that it did not descend directly from parent to child.

This faculty of the Second Sight does not Lineally descend in a Family, as some imagine, for I know several Parents who are endowed with it, but their Children not, & vice versa . . . I could never learn from any among them, that this faculty was communicable any way whatsoever (Martin 1703:30).

Other writers, such as MacEchern, mentioned that some families had second sight in several generations. He gave the example of his own mother (from the Cameron

family of Rannoch). Her second sight was conveyed to her through dreams. Alex MacDonald, in discussing his collection of experiences in which a person had seen a ghost, noted that some were from the same family and were related by blood. He argued that 'persons of a certain type of character are more subject to ghost-seeing than others; such as have the longing for immortality, whether from hereditary or surrounding circumstances – we suspect from both – very prominent in them, and are of a dreamy, idealistic disposition, are clearly more disposed to the belief in ghosts, and more apt to see them, than others who are more practical and realistic. . . .' (A. MacDonald 1889: 49)

Although second sight is thought of as being hereditary, historically there have been incidences of transferring a vision to another person through physical contact.¹⁹ A. J. MacDonald recorded a more recent case of a man who had a vision of a funeral procession and transferred it to a young boy by having the boy place his hand on the man's left shoulder.

'Trobbad, ma tha, 'ars' esan, 'agus cuir do làmh air mo ghualainn, 'ars' esan, 'chearr, agus coimhead a mach air mo ghualainn dheas, 'ars' esan. Agus, 'Ach tha mi 'ràitinn seo, 'ars' esan, 'ma chì thu 'n dràsda' e, 'ars' esan, 'chì thu ritist iad.'

'Come here then,' said he, 'and put your hand on my left shoulder' said he, 'and look out over my right shoulder.' Then – 'But I tell you this', said he, 'if you see it now,' said he, 'you will see them again.' (A. J. MacDonald 1972: 192-193)

Though Kirk observed that this form of transference was temporary, in this more current case, the boy is reported to have kept the faculty of second sight. Other variations of this experience involve not only touching the left shoulder but also placing one foot, usually the left foot, on the person's foot. George Macpherson relates the tradition that when the gift is transferred to a person, that person has it for their lifetime though they can not transmit it to the next generation.²⁰ However, when the person has been born with it, it stays with them during their lifetime and they will also pass it down to further generations. So it appears that people with second sight are believed in some cases to be born with the gift and have it transmitted to their offspring whereas people who have acquired it through transference from another person or being taught it, do not pass the second sight to the next generation. Is the ritual of transference a psychological method to encourage the seeing of visions, or does having physical contact help facilitate mental processes in the brain to see visions? Although the latter seems unlikely, it is difficult to answer this question since there are very few recent accounts.²¹

Study of second sight has not been confined only to Scotland, since the phenomenon has been reported in other cultural traditions as well. Martin Martin gave accounts not just from Scotland but also from Wales, the Isle of Man and Holland. Karl Schmeißing interviewed people with second sight in northern Germany. Hans Bender (1964) discussed a survey done in 1958 on beliefs in second sight in the western part of Germany and Gerda Grober-Glück (1973) summarised information gathered in the early 1930s from questionnaires about second sight in Germany. From collections of legends and

reports, Grober-Glück also noted that second sight experiences are reported in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Accounts of psychic experiences have been collected in Finland, some of which are examples of second sight (Virtanen 1990: 157-158). In addition to the places mentioned by Grober-Glück, Virtanen states that people from the Faroes, parts of Ireland, Brittany and New Zealand also report having second-sight experiences.

Some have argued that the aesthetic scenery and atmosphere of the Highlands and Islands, even their isolation from the hustle and bustle of cities, inspire visionary experiences.²² There is indeed something very special about the atmosphere of the Highlands and Islands. For people with second sight experiences, being in touch with nature through the outside world is something which they say is conducive to having such experiences. The shaded tints of light across the hills, lochs, and machair, with the gales and rain, can fill one with a feeling of awe for the beauty and power of nature. The aesthetic atmosphere where one has the solitude to be in tune with one's thoughts and feelings may indeed inspire visionary experiences. But people have had second sight experiences in urban settings as well (Cohn 1994), so this explanation is evidently not the full story.

In a recent study I applied a multidisciplinary approach to the study of second sight, from the fields of ethnology, parapsychology and human genetics (Cohn 1996). Using interview, questionnaire, survey and family history methods, I examined the prevalence of second sight, the nature of contemporary experiences and whether there is any evidence that second sight could possibly be hereditary.

A 65-item questionnaire was designed to cover the different types of second sight experiences found in the historical literature and modern-day accounts from the School of Scottish Studies' Archive, as well as biographical and family history information. A total of 208 questionnaires were received, primarily from Scotland and also from other countries. The responses indicated that second sight is experienced by people of diverse ages, occupations, religious and cultural traditions. Women tended to report more experiences than men and an important factor related to having second sight was having had a religious experience (Cohn 1999a).

Drawing from interviews with seventy people from different parts of Scotland and material collected from letters and questionnaires from people throughout Britain and from other countries, an archive has been built up of over one thousand contemporary accounts of second sight and other types of psychic, transpersonal and religious experiences (Cohn 1996).²³ The interview material was analysed with both a profile approach and a pattern approach. Profiles of five informants gave an insight into the range and circumstances of the experiences, the context of family attitudes toward discussing second sight and their religious and personal views. The families regarded second sight as being both a spiritual and physical phenomenon. From the person's own experiences and religious beliefs, there was a deep belief in fate, that what was seen would happen and that one could generally not intervene unless one was called to do

so. Also there was a belief, sometimes based upon personal experience of seeing a loved one after death, that when a person dies, some part of them, a soul, continues. In some families with second sight, it was openly discussed and believed to be a hereditary 'gift'. In other families, the subject was taboo. Yet despite this, it still ran in these families (Cohn 1996).²⁴

To complement the profile approach, a phenomenological approach was applied to looking at patterns in the complete set of accounts. Contemporary accounts bear similarities with classical accounts, but are expressed in a modern context. For instance in a recent case in the Highlands, a man had a vision of a funeral procession whilst driving his bus; by recognising the mourners, he named the person who would die, in front of the passengers. In many of the visions of funeral processions and death shrouds, people report seeing the scene not 'in their mind's eye' but in front of them. The theme of external imagery is often found in accounts of awake visions of a person before, at the moment of, or after death. In most cases, the apparition appears solid and the percipient is unaware that the person is ill or near death. Only when the image fades does the percipient realise that something is amiss. For instance, a person from Skye had a vision of her neighbour who she thought had returned from holiday in England. In her own words '...It was absolutely natural. There was nothing unnatural, nothing frightening about it. In fact, I wasn't aware that he was dead. I took it that he was still alive ...' She was informed later by the neighbour's employer that he had died quite unexpectedly. Her vision of the neighbour coincided with the time of his death. In cases of seeing an apparition of a person after death, the percipients reported in most cases that it appeared as a solid person. They did not feel that they mentally projected the image of the apparition but that it had an existence of its own. The percipients felt that the apparition came to them for a purpose, to bring comfort, impart information about a loved one or to give information about an unresolved matter (Cohn 1996).

These experiences often have a psychological impact on a person's life, as illustrated by one informant from Lewis, who said they made him 'more aware of people, more aware of the fragile nature of life, the fragile nature of the mind even...' Most people regard it as a natural part of themselves, as one informant from Harris illustrates: 'second sight in my culture is like fresh air and water, it is just there'. Even so, some people felt it was an unwanted 'gift' and were burdened by what they saw as it posed an ethical dilemma over whether to tell the person concerned. For many, there was also the fear of ridicule or ostracism (Cohn 1996).

To find the frequency of second sight in the general population, a large-scale mail survey was undertaken in different areas of Scotland (Cohn 1994). Second Sight is generally regarded as being more prominent in the Western Isles and Highlands of Scotland than elsewhere. However, the survey data shows this not to be the case – the phenomenon occurs throughout rural and urban parts of Scotland. The survey also gives empirical support to the traditional belief that second sight does run in families, especially among blood relations. Though several investigators also observed that second

sight ran in families, there was however, no consensus as to a consistent transmission pattern. As the number of family histories examined by each investigator was rarely stated, it is impossible to draw a sound conclusion from the earlier literature whether second sight is hereditary or not.

To examine whether second sight runs in families due to cultural and/or genetic factors, I constructed and analysed a total of 130 pedigrees from people with a family history of second sight for known inheritance patterns and the results of the genetic analyses demonstrate that second sight seems consistent with an autosomal dominant mode of inheritance, especially for small family sizes. Certain aspects of the data favoured social and cultural factors as also contributing to second sight running in families (Cohn 1999b).

A potentially fruitful way to examine whether second sight is transmitted as a cultural and/or a genetic phenomenon would be to look at the incidence of second sight among the Scottish emigrants and their descendants now living in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA. During the Highland clearances, in the 19th century, a large number of Scottish people were evicted off their land, forcing many of them to emigrate to these countries. Would second sight still be experienced in another country after several generations? The answer appears to be yes. For instance in Cape Breton, Canada, second sight is still being reported.³⁵ It should also be pointed out, however, that there were some people who felt that once they went to another country, they lost the second sight.³⁶ Further family history studies of second sight need to be done in different cultural traditions to clarify whether the mode of inheritance for second sight observed by Cohn (1999b) is universal. If so, this would raise the question whether the hereditary aspect of the ability lies in the sensitivity of the normal sensory systems which convey the experiences.

Could second sight be hereditary as a talent of mind and not be due to an abnormal state of the mind? Even if it is hypothesised that the mind could possibly catch a glimpse of the future, one is still left with the question of how this information is conveyed to the person. Is it through an immaterial mind, is it processed through the sensory faculties in the brain or through some combination of these two pathways? It is well established from both medical and neurological evidence that there is a direct relationship between brain states and mental processes. Therefore there may be particular brain states that affect mental abilities which are conducive to second sight and other psychic experiences. It has been observed that some people who have temporal lobe epilepsy have experienced psychic experiences such as out-of-body experiences and *déjà vu* (Cytowic 1994: 134-135) and that there may be a genetic predisposition for such a relationship in certain families (Neppe 1980). However, people who have had these experiences can be free from these illnesses and may have an unusual mental ability.³⁷ The phenomenology of second sight experiences suggests that information about an emotionally charged event is conveyed through a whole range of senses and the experiences are described by the percipient as being *real*. Many visions appeared as

projected three-dimensional images which became the central focus of perception. This *external* imagery is characteristic of eidetic imagery (Cohn 1996). A similar relationship was observed by Schmeïng in Northern Germany (Schmeïng 1937, 1950, 1954).

There is some evidence that creative people may be more likely to have psychic ability (Moss 1969 and Schlitz & Honorton 1992). Thus, second sight could also be related to other talents. Current research is underway to examine a possible relationship with other mental and artistic abilities. If such a relationship were found, this would imply that second sight might actually be related to a creative mental process and what may be hereditary is the way a person processes sensory information when having a second sight experience.

The early investigators have provided contemporary scholars with a wealth of accounts, customs and lore of second sight. Their ideas have stimulated a debate about the source, process and meaning of second sight which continues to this day. The answers to these questions will illuminate what the nature of mind is and its relationship to time. Furthermore, there has been a recurrent theme of a spiritual quality to many of the experiences. Thus, any theory of second sight must reconcile both the hereditary and spiritual aspects of mind.

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NOTES

- 1 Ramsay 1888: 464; see also Wood c. 1930: File 12.
- 2 Morrison, p.18. This point was also made by earlier writers, for example see Fraser 1707 p. 4 in the Preface.
- 3 The review will not be exhaustive as it does not completely cover the Gaelic literature on second sight.
- 4 Kirk 1691. The passages quoted in this article are on pages 5-6, 26-27 and 30-31 of the transcription by C. Campbell (Kirk 1692).
- 5 Aubrey 1696: 163-164. In Pepys (1699) there is a letter from a Lord Tarbat to Mr. Robert Boyle which corroborates this experience. One Sir Norman M'Leod told Lord Tarbat that he had heard of this vision and had witnessed its fulfilment. Sir Norman was present at the man's burial in St. Clemen's Church in the Isle of Harris. There was also another man to be buried and a dispute took place between the two sets of mourners as to which body should be taken into the church first. One person took out his bow and shot an arrow, hitting one of the dead men in the thigh, from which no blood came out. This was exactly what the seer had predicted. Other accounts of second sight were mentioned in Pepys' correspondences, see p. 387.
- 6 There have been other cases in which the future spouse was standing on the right side, or standing in front of them, or busy with a task, for instance, weaving, or spinning, see MacBain, 1887: 325-326, and J. G. Campbell, 1902: 147.
- 7 MacEchern 1922: 302-303. Polson (1926: 100) referred to him as one Reverend Macpherson.
- 8 Other accounts of collective visions can be found in MacGregor 1899: 45; K. N. MacDonald, 1901: 145-146 and Polson 1926: 101-102.
- 9 L. G. Johnson, 1971: 140; for accounts see Bruford 1985: 172-3, and Dempster 1888: 240.
- 10 Henderson 1866: 296-298; J. G. Campbell 1900: 268-276; Polson 1926: 107-108; C. MacDonald 1947: 80-83; O. F. Swire 1973: 143; D. A. MacDonald 1974: 319-321; Bruford 1977: 81; G. W. Macpherson, personal communication, 1994.
- 11 Bennett 1992: 282. She cites the work of the Reverend John Lane Buchanan (1793) as a more accurate depiction of life in the Hebrides, as he lived there and had knowledge of both the people and their language.
- 12 Father McDonald in his notebook notes that although Marion MacRury says that after she felt the wind of the Bible on her face she no longer experienced any more visions, in fact she had other visions since that experience. See also MacCulloch (1936: 253) who mentions this method, and MacInnes (1989: 21), who notes that this practice is still known today.
- 13 MacBain (1887: 331) notes that hearing the mourners' lament and seeing the corpse candle ran in some families.
- 14 Bennett 1992. For another good review of Highland beliefs of the supernatural, see MacBain 1889: 232-272 and for a recent review of women's beliefs of the supernatural, see also Bennett 1987.

- 15 See Whyte 1976: 249-276. In that article there are additional contributions from Linda Headlee and Alan Bruford. Alan Bruford, on p. 257, described Bessie Whyte, writing of her as 'a remarkable person, a grandmother who still looks and acts like a young woman, whose immediate sympathy and readiness to understand others can almost be felt as you enter the room. Whatever the nature of her gift, it is easy to believe that she has some telepathic ability: easier still to feel as soon as you meet her that here is a friend.'
- 16 In the Hebrew text this passage is found in Joel 3.1 in *The Book of Prophets*.
- 17 See Beloff 1988 and 1994 and Smythies and Beloff 1989.
- 18 Carr, p. 271, supported Campbell's view. Campbell, *Witchcraft and Second Sight*, p. 126.
- 19 Kirk, Aubrey and Martin wrote of this phenomenon as did Lord Reay in correspondence with Pepys 1699.
- 20 G. W. Macpherson, personal communication, 1994.
- 21 In my own fieldwork, though people have heard about transference, I have not come across any first-hand account of it, though I have recorded a second-hand one.
- 22 The editor who wrote the Preface to Theophilus Insulanus' *A Treatise on Second Sight*, pp. 5-8 and Carr, p.270, supported this view.
- 23 In the PhD thesis, I included interviews with seventy people and over 500 accounts were analysed. This is only a fraction of the collected accounts analysed. I have since broadened that analysis to include additional material from interviews, questionnaires and letters, bringing the total to 1018 accounts.
- 24 Parts of this and the following two paragraphs are excerpted with permission from my previous article, Cohn 1998.
- 25 Shaw 1987. Several school children from St. Joseph Elementary School, Sydney, published second sight accounts from their own family, see Students 1991: 9-16. Other accounts from Cape Breton have been discussed by Catherine Maclean (1980).
- 26 One such example comes from my own fieldwork. A crofter from Port-of-Ness, in the Isle of Lewis said that both his father and his wife's uncle had the second sight but when they went to New Zealand, they lost it.
- 27 It would be interesting to compare the phenomenology of psychic experiences between people who have unusual mental talents and people who have mental illnesses to see if the type and nature of the experiences are similar or different. It would also be important to see the impact these experiences have had on the lives of the people and whether some are more able to integrate the experiences in their lives than others.

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