

IAN GIBBINS

Dr Korsakoff and Colleagues Report

... a patient conceives of an event that he has not really experienced but that only comes to his mind, as if it had really happened to him ... the patient tells ... of his extraordinary voyages, confuses old recollections with recent events, is unaware of where he is and who are the people around him ...

– Sergei Korsakoff (1889 / 1891)

Case 1

He said:

“Of course, I am pleased to see you, pleased to welcome you. But, surely, you are mistaken. Why here? Why now? Surely, you must recall that tonight – you should have had an invitation – we will banquet at my family's riverside chateau. You will meet my beautiful children, my kings, my queens, my handsome swashbuckling princes.”

He said:

“As you know, I am owed a substantial sum of money. As you know, highly placed politicians are deeply within my debt. Tomorrow, as you know, I will collect my dues and my daughter will collect her reward. Tomorrow, she will sail to America, to her dreams, her distant desires, to her beloved crew-cut sailor boy with his glorious Detroit special, his fish-tailed Cadillac car.”

He said:

“I once treated a girl for snakebite.
Perhaps, she might have lived.
Perhaps, she might have died, just as
we felt the needle-sharp fangs of shrapnel,
honed with mustard fire and phosphorus,
just as some of us might have lived,
just as some of us must have died.”

Case 2

Today, it is raining in Moscow.
Today, the Don made a century at Lord's.
Today, a neighbour's house sold for a song.

Today, it is hot beyond relief.
Today, hooligans exploded a parkside bomb.
Today, Halley's Comet raced across the sky.

Today, it is a hush that calls me home.
Today, there was talk of a trial or tribulation.
Today, my front door jammed, immovable on its hinges.

Case 3

We all went hunting. I went hunting too.
I shot Elephant and Gazelle and Centaur.

We were in the Mountains of the Moon.

We climbed as high as Heaven's Gate.

I saw a Rainbow encircle the Earth.

We swam like Green-haired Mermaids

through a hidden Crater Lake, as clear
as the Sapphires adorning my sunburnt neck.

We wrote a Wondrous Travelogue.

We gave it to Marco Polo.

He autographed the Frontispiece.

He shook my trembling hand.

I know there was a Concert. I know there
was a Funeral. I know I sang until I cried.

I recall a Montaine Centaur. I recall
a Mermaid, with Emeralds in her Hair.

I recall Marco Polo's Pen,
scratching across my Page.

Source: Armin Schneider (2008) "The Confabulating Mind: How the brain creates reality" (Oxford University Press).