



Förstl, H. and Dickson, S. (2021) Paramnesic reduplication of Charles Bonnet and Theophile Bonet. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 160(3), pp. 416-418.

(doi: [10.1192/bjp.160.3.416](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.160.3.416))

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Deposited on: 27 April 2021

Article: Charles Bonnet's Description of Cotard's Delusion and Reduplicative Paramnesia in an Elderly Patient (1788)

Article author(s): Hans Förstl, Barbara Beats

Journal: British Journal of Psychiatry, Volume 160, Issue 3

Response title: Paramnestic Reduplication of Charles Bonnet and Theophile Bonet

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Response: Dear Sir, We have been able to obtain further information [1; 2] concerning the above-mentioned claim that Charles Bonnet (1720-1793), famous philosopher and naturalist from Geneva, had described not only the eponymous Charles Bonnet Syndrome of scenic visual hallucinations often observed in patients with visual impairment, but also the nihilistic delusion of being dead (Cotard delusion; named after Jules Cotard, 1840-1889) and the false belief of being in another place quite similar to the real one (paramnestic reduplication according to Arnold Pick, 1851-1924).

This is quite wrong. There was another scientist by the name of Theophile Bonet, born exactly 100 years earlier (1620-1689), who also came from Geneva, and it was he who collected and published the case of this elderly lady from Copenhagen who believed she was in Norway and also could not be disabused of the impression that she was dead [3]. Bonet quotes "Ol. Borrichii", Ole Borch (1626-1690), physician to the King of Denmark, as the original source. Borch's report had not only been printed in Bonet's large compilation, but also and a little earlier in the works of Thomas Bartholin [4]. In 1756 it was translated into German [5] before it found its way into GNOTHI SAUTON, the Journal of Empirical Psychology in 1788 [1]. The sloppy misspelling of Bonet as Bonnet by the young journal interim editor Karl Friedrich Pockels (1757-1814) misled the authors of the brief report from 1992 to a misidentification and wrongful attribution, which needs to be corrected, particularly as it has already been cited several times in the international literature on this seminal publication by Karl Philipp Moritz. The new digital edition of the journal and a spin-off publication of individual cases has picked up on the error [1; 2] and we hope - but we are not quite certain - that this letter will help to avoid further confusion of Bonnet and Bonet - and Borch.

Hans Förstl, Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Technische Universität München; Sheila Dickson, Senior Lecturer, Department of German, University of Glasgow.

[1] "P."(ockels KF) (1788/2021) GNOTHI SAUTON Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde Vol. VI/3 Dickson S, Wingertzahn C Eds. Digital Edition. University of Glasgow; British Academy; Berlin Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. www.mze.gla.ac.uk.

[2] Goldmann S (2015) Nachwort. In: Berühmte Fälle aus dem Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde. Goldmann S Ed.. Psychosozial Verlag, 222.

[3] Borch O (1686) Femina quae mortuam se credit, & miratur se quandoque reviviscere. In: Bonet T ed. Medicina Septentrionalis Collatitia (Geneve) Lib I De Capitis Affectib Sect XIX, Cap IX, 188.

[4] Borch O (1677-1679) Femina, qvae mortuam se credit, & miratur se qvando'q reviviscere.

In: Bartholin T ed. Acta Medica et Philosophica Hafniensia (Copenhagen) Vol V, 151-153.
[5] Krüger JG (1756) Versuch einer Experimentalseelenlehre. Hemmerde, Halle. Anhang,
174-177

Conflict of interest: None declared

Date submitted: 20 January 2021