

Reciprocal Apparitions

Reciprocal apparitions are apparitions for which there are corresponding accounts from both percipients and agents. Reciprocal apparitions are often connected to out-of-body and near-death experiences and have been reported from agents and percipients in different states of mind. Theoreticians are divided on whether to consider them as evidence for the exteriorization of consciousness beyond the body or as due to the telepathic transmission of information and images.

Nature of Reciprocal Apparitions

The term *apparition* is used in psi research for what are popularly called ghosts. [Apparitions](#) differ from hallucinations in that they represent real persons; many are veridical in some fashion. They typically are visual presentations seen in good light and are mistaken for the person they represent, although they may be partial images of him or her, and they may be strictly auditory, tactile, olfactory or (at least in principle) gustatory, instead of or in addition to visual. Apparitions may appear in dreams as well as waking visions.

Reciprocal apparition is the term used for an apparition for which there is (usually) a corresponding report from the person perceived, the presumed agent. Reciprocal apparitions are commonly connected to [out-of-body experiences](#) and [near-death experiences](#): The agent feels that their consciousness has left their body and travelled to a distant location where their apparition is seen or heard. Some reciprocal apparitions result from intentional efforts to project one's consciousness to the distant place. Reciprocal apparitions may have deceased agents and have been reported in [intermission memories](#), where a reincarnation case subject recalls having been where his apparition is perceived.

Several reciprocal apparitions were described in the classic *Phantasms of the Living*, published in 1886.¹ Others were collected in a follow-up study by [Eleanor Sidgwick](#) in 1922.² Hornell and E.B. Hart analyzed a series of reciprocal apparitions a decade later.³ More recent examples are presented by [Titus Rivas](#) and colleagues and by Tricia Robertson.⁴ The Wilmot Apparition, treated in a separate entry in the *Psi Encyclopedia*, is a well-known reciprocal apparition. The case of Maung Yin Maung (see below) reported by [Ian Stevenson](#) includes a reciprocal apparition related to an intermission memory.

Examples of Reciprocal Apparitions

Connie and Margaret

This reciprocal case from *Phantasms of the Living* features a collective auditory apparition. Connie and Margaret, good friends aged thirteen and fourteen, were running along a path by a hedge when they both distinctly heard their names called, twice in succession, thus: 'Connie, Margaret – Connie, Margaret'. They could see no one in the adjoining orchard so went to the house, assuming that one of

Margaret's brothers had called them from there. However, Margaret's mother assured them that no one had called them and they then assumed that they must have hallucinated their names.

Meanwhile, Connie's brother Ted was in bed at his home, feverish and delirious. When Margaret's mother went the next day to enquire after him, she was told that in his delirium, he had suddenly sat up, pointed excitedly, and declared that he saw Connie and Margaret running by the hedge at Margaret's home. He called out their names, but they paid him no heed. Margaret's mother asked at what time this had happened. It turned out that it was just past noon, at the same time that Connie and Margaret had come to the house, saying they had heard their names called.⁵

Mrs Smith

This case also was included in *Phantasms of the Living*. The agent was a student in a large boarding school who withdrew to marry the school's former headmaster, a Mr Smith. They moved away and at her husband's insistence she broke off all contact with her schoolmates. Six months into the marriage, she awoke from a dream in which she seemed to be back in the school dormitory with four girls, two of whom were unknown to her. One of the girls turned off the gas and they retired for the night. She followed two into their room and watched them prepare for bed. Then she went to one, took her by the hand and said, 'Bessie, let us be friends.' Awakening from the dream, Mrs Smith immediately confided in her husband, who had been reading beside her in bed.

Three months later Mrs Smith visited her mother and discovered that she had received a letter from Bessie, who was writing to ask whether Mrs Smith were alive or dead. Her mother had not forwarded the letter, unopened, because she had been advised that there was to be no communication between Mrs Smith and her school friends. Mr Smith subsequently sought out and interviewed Bessie, without letting on about the dream, and learned that, apparently on the same night, Bessie had gone to bed when she suddenly cried out that she had just seen Mrs Smith, who had touched her and said 'Let us be friends.' Mr Smith learned also that the other two girls in the dormitory suite were newcomers and would not have been known to Mrs Smith when she was in attendance at the school.⁶

Mr L

This is another reciprocal case from *Phantasms of the Living*, with the agent in the waking state at the time his apparition was perceived. Augusta Parker's invalid husband was being treated with magnetic passes on his back and legs by Mr L, a visiting American mesmerist. One afternoon Augusta's husband asked to be left longer than usual in the garden, in his wheelchair. After her luncheon, just after 2.00 pm, Augusta was watching him from a window of their house when she saw a strangely attired man walk up and seem to speak to him. When her husband came in a short while later, she asked him who the man was, but he did not know what she was talking about. No one had approached him or spoken to him, he averred.

On the next visit from Mr L, two days later, he volunteered that he had twice experienced a strange sensation, while in another place entirely, of standing near

Augusta's husband, once in their drawing room and on another occasion in the garden. Augusta realized that he was dressed in the same fashion as the figure she had perceived with her husband. She asked when this had occurred last and Mr L said two days before. He had just eaten and was sitting before the fire reading a newspaper, when suddenly it was as if he was standing in front of her husband in his wheelchair in the garden. He recalled the time perfectly: It was just after 2.00 pm. Augusta later asked her husband whether he had told Mr L about her vision, but he assured her that he had not.⁷

Olga Gearhardt

In a more recent reciprocal case, Olga Gearhardt nearly died when a transplanted heart failed to work properly. During several hours of resuscitation, she had what she believed was a 'strange dream' in which she felt her consciousness leave her body. For a few minutes, she watched doctors operating on her, then she went to the waiting room where she saw members of her large extended family. Frustrated by her inability to communicate with them, she left the hospital and travelled to the home of the one family member who was not there – a son-in-law who had an extreme fear of hospitals.

The son-in-law awoke about 2.15 am to see Olga standing at the foot of his bed. Thinking that for some reason her surgery had been delayed and she had come to his home, he sat up and asked her how she was. 'I am fine,' she replied. 'I am going to be all right. There is nothing for any of you to worry about.' With that, Olga vanished, and he realized that she had not been there in person. He got out of bed and wrote down the time and exactly what she had said to him. When Olga's daughter later called him to tell him the operation was a success, he replied, 'I know she's okay. She already told me herself.'⁸

Jenny

Tricia Robertson described another recent case, involving a Scottish woman she calls Jenny whose son had moved to South Africa when he married. He had a child, whom Jenny had seen once as a new-born, but not for two and half years. She missed her grandson and was anxious to see what he looked like then, so decided to try to project herself out-of-body and visit him. The first time she did this she found herself in a black space, gazing at a vague light in the distance; frightened, she 'wooshed' back to her body. A few nights later she tried again, with more success. She visualized the sitting room in her son's house and concentrated on it. She imagined herself there, but saw it empty of all furnishings. The following day she rang her son and learned that he had moved and that the house she had viewed was now vacant.

Without telling her son what she was endeavouring to do, Jenny decided to go to the house of his in-laws, to which she had been to on her earlier trip to South Africa. From the perspective of the ceiling, she saw her son's father-in-law sitting in a chair, reading a newspaper. The man looked up slowly and, apparently seeing her, yelled, 'You can't touch me, I'm Christian!' More amused than alarmed, Jenny 'wooshed' back to her body. After more enquiries, she determined the location of her son's new home and made another attempt to travel there out-of-body. This

time she found herself in a house that was unknown to her. She noted the style and colours of the lounge suite, the curtains and other furnishing before 'wooshing' back to her body. The following day she wrote to her son, asking him to describe his lounge suite, amongst other things. The description she received matched the room she had viewed.

Still not telling her son about her undertaking, Jenny made another try, this time to see her grandson, wherever he might be. She found herself on the edge of a park looking down at children playing. She picked out a little boy she felt was him. The boy looked up, tugged at his mother's skirt, pointed at Jenny with a smile and said, 'Look at lady.' His mother peered in the direction he was pointing, but saw nothing; she told him that no, dear, there was no one there.⁹

Mr and Mrs EJ

This case included by Eleanor Sidgwick in her 1922 review has a collective percipience of a person long dead; although we do not have an account from the deceased agent, it is natural to classify it as a reciprocal case. A Mr and Mrs EJ independently dreamed of Mr EJ's mother, who had died seventeen years prior. Mr EJ dreamed that she came into their bedroom, passed by his bed, looked at him, and proceeded to the foot of his wife's bed. His wife dreamed that the woman entered the room, leaned over the foot of her bed with her arms crossed in the manner which had been her habit in life, and told her that she had heard from Mr EJ's deceased brother Fred that she did not realize how sick her own mother was; she would not live another three months. In the event, Mrs EJ's mother lived another six months before expiring.¹⁰

Maung Yin Maung

Ian Stevenson reported this Burmese case of a man who was apparently reborn to his brother and sister-in-law after dying when his light plane crashed not far from their home. One night shortly after his death his sister-in-law had need to use the privy; when she exited, she heard the gate to their compound creaking, turned, and saw him enter and walk towards her, then halt. At first she believed him to be physically present, then remembered that he was dead. She spoke to him, saying that as it seemed he was fixated on them, he was welcome to reincarnate in their family, so long as he was not disfigured by the accident.

Her husband, from within the house, heard her speaking, and asked with whom she was conversing. She explained, to which he replied, 'You must be mad', but when he joined her and they looked again, the apparition was gone. That night, however, he appeared in the woman's dream. In the dream, he was sleeping in the bed she and her husband normally occupied, while they sat nearby. Then she saw his mother and one of his sisters enter the room. They implored him to go home with them, but he declined, saying that he would be staying with his brother and her instead.

When Maung Yin Maung was old enough to talk, he gave his complementary version of the story. After he died, he had at first stayed at that location, then somehow found himself at the gate to his brother's house. He recalled seeing his sister-in-law (now his mother) emerge from the privy and 'showed himself' to her

as an apparition. He walked towards her until he felt he could advance no further. He recalled her saying, 'If you have such a fixation on us, why don't you become my child.' He also recalled communicating with his past-life mother and sister, who asked him to return with them, but he said he would stay with his brother and sister-in-law. As it turned out, in the previous life Maung Yin Maung had had a falling out with his sister when she married a man of whom he did not approve.[11](#)

Explaining Reciprocal Apparitions

Reciprocal apparitions may be explained most straightforwardly as the projection of consciousness, either unconsciously or deliberately, to a distant place. This is the way they were understood by [FWH Myers](#), one of the authors of *Phantasms of the Living*. In his classic *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, Myers supplied striking examples of 'experimental apparitions', as those connected with the intentional projection of consciousness are called, then said:

In these self-projections we have before us, I do not say the most useful, but the most extraordinary achievement of the human will. What can lie further outside any known capacity than the power to cause a semblance of oneself to appear at a distance? ... Of all vital phenomena, I say, this is the most significant; this self-projection is the one definite act which it seems as though a man might perform equally well both before and after bodily death.[12](#)

Myers's point of view has not been a unanimous one in psychical research, however. The first author of *Phantasms*, [Edmund Gurney](#), believed that such cases might be best described as telepathic transmissions. Of the case of Connie and Margaret, he concluded:

We seem to have, on the part of the two girls, a telepathic hallucination, reproducing the exact words that were in the mouth and ear of the sick boy; and, on his part, a vision reflected from their minds, and once more illustrating how what might be described as clairvoyance may be a true variety of thought-transference.[13](#)

Gurney thought that the telepathic agent was most likely the person in the most 'abnormal' state of consciousness, regardless of whether this was the apparent agent or percipient. Thus, in the case of Mrs Smith, he thought that she was more likely to be the agent than Bessie, who was awake when she saw the apparition.[14](#) He struggled a bit with Mr L, but concluded the telepathic transmission most likely originated with him since by his admission he was in a slightly altered state at the time.[15](#)

Eleanor Sidgwick was inclined to agree with Gurney regarding the telepathic basis of collective and reciprocal apparitions,[16](#) but [CD Broad](#) was less confident. Broad considered that with reciprocal apparitions, the telepathic theory 'is much less plausible as an account of the experiences of the *person whose apparition is ostensibly seen* than as an account of the experiences of *those who ostensibly see it*. The telepathic theory has to play down, or to interpret in a very strained way, the accounts of *excursive* experiences given by quite a number of persons who have had them and reported them'.[17](#)

The Harts also favoured Myers's position,¹⁸ as did Stevenson, who like Myers observed that in reciprocal cases, 'The agent often has a strong desire or intention to "go to" the percipient at the time of the apparition; if we accept the living agent's claim to activity (and often initiative) in the combined experience, we cannot easily deny the possibility of a similar role in at least some cases in which the agent has died'.¹⁹

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 153–67; cases 303–308.
- [2](#). Sidgwick (1922), 354–423.
- [3](#). Hart & Hart (1932–33).
- [4](#). Rivas, Dirven, & Smit (2016), 157–70; Robertson (2015), 91–92.

- [5.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 164-65; case 308
- [6.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 159-62; case 306.
- [7.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 162-64; case 307.
- [8.](#) Morse with Perry (1994), 22-24.
- [9.](#) Robertson (2015), 91-92.
- [10.](#) Sidgwick (1922), 358-59.
- [11.](#) Stevenson (1983), 280-81. 288-89.
- [12.](#) Myers (1903), vol. 1, 296-97. His accounts of experimental apparitions appear at 292-96.
- [13.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 165.
- [14.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 161.
- [15.](#) Gurney, Myers, & Podmore (1886), vol. 2, 164.
- [16.](#) Sidgwick (1922), 354-423.
- [17.](#) Broad (1962), 238; italics in original.
- [18.](#) Hart & Hart (1932-33).
- [19.](#) Stevenson (1982), 352-53.