

Phénomènes Psychiques au Moment de la Mort by Ernest Bozzano. Éditions de la B.P.S. (Paris), 1923. 261 pp. J. M. G. Editions (Agnières), 2001. 326 pp. €18.30. ISBN 2912507529.

Deathbed Visions: The Psychological Experiences of the Dying by Sir William F. Barrett. Methuen (London), 1926. 116 pp. Free at <http://www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk/books/barrett/dbv/contents.htm>. Aquarian Press (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire), 1986. 173 pp. £5.99 (paperback). ISBN 0850305209.

There is a long tradition of the association of “between death” and a variety of psychic phenomena, among them apparitions, physical phenomena, and what we refer to today as ESP. The writings of such authors as Gurney, Myers, and Podmore (1886), and Flammarion (1920–1922/1922–1923) are examples of this. The books reviewed here are important and influential representatives of this idea.

The first one was authored by Italian student of psychic phenomena Ernest Bozzano (1862–1943), who was well-known for his studies presenting numerous cases of psychic phenomena and for his strong defense of the idea of the survival of bodily death. In *Phénomènes Psychiques au Moment de la Mort*, Bozzano brought together three of his previously published studies about death-related phenomena, namely deathbed visions, music, and physical phenomena.

In the study of deathbed visions, Bozzano presented a classification consisting of visions of persons: (1) known to be dead and seen only by the dying individual; (2) not known to be dead and seen only by the dying individual; (3) seen both by the dying persons and by deathbed bystanders; (4) showing correspondences with information obtained through mediumistic communicators; (5) perceived only by relatives of the dying person located around or close to the deathbed; and (6) seen somewhat after death and in the same house where the dead body was located.

Bozzano presented examples and discussed those veridical visions in which the dying person perceived someone he or she did not know had died. He examined critically the idea that persons knowing about the death affected the dying individual via a subconscious telepathic message that produced a hallucination in the dying person. Bozzano objected to this explanation because he considered it unlikely that such communication would take place between individuals lacking affective rapport between them, a necessary precondition for telepathy, in his view. Furthermore, he believed telepathic transmission was unlikely because “in nearly all spontaneous telepathic phenomena the *agent* transmits to the *percipient* the hallucinatory vision of their own person, and not that of another person . . .” (p. 51) (this, and other translations, are mine).

Referring to subjective hallucinations, Bozzano wrote that “if the phenomena in question have as a cause the thoughts of the moribund . . . the dying person . . . should perceive more frequently hallucinatory forms representing living persons” (p. 109), something he said did not take place. However, Bozzano could have been dealing with a biased sample of cases. We must remember that many of his sources were spiritualistic and psychical research books and journals. It is unlikely that the authors and editors of such publications would have been interested in accounts of visions of the living, unless they were veridical visions.



Bozzano also mentioned a case in which a man saw apparitions at his wife’s deathbed around her dying body and her “astral body” floating above her physical body. He considered the latter an objective “fluidic doubling.” Interestingly, and because one of the apparitions seen was of a woman in a Greek costume and with a crown on her head, Bozzano speculated on the possibility of a “telepathic–symbolic projection” (p. 103) from a spiritual entity.

The section about physical phenomena involved various events corresponding to deaths. As I have mentioned elsewhere (Alvarado, 2006:135), out of 13 accounts presented by Bozzano, the effects consisted of: falling objects (54%), clocks stopping or starting (23%), objects rocking or shaking (8%), objects breaking or exploding (8%), and lights turning on or off (8%). Bozzano argued that cases in which the dying person and the physical event were distant from each other showed that the effect was not physical, but had to be psychical. This suggested to him the presence of the spirit of a dead person at the location in which the event took place. Furthermore, he noticed that some cases involved intention.

In the third part of the book, Bozzano discussed what he called “transcendental music.” He presented cases that took place at deathbeds and after deaths. But Bozzano also discussed mediums who performed with musical instruments, telepathically perceived music, and music heard in hauntings.

The following is an example of a case of music cited by Bozzano (pp. 230–231) related to an apparition, which I take from the original:

In October, 1879, I was staying at Bishopthorpe, near York, with the Archbishop of York. I was sleeping with Miss Z. T., when I suddenly saw a white figure fly through the room from the door to the window. It was only a shadowy form and passed in a moment. I felt utterly terrified, and called out at once, “Did you see that?” and at the same time Miss Z. T. exclaimed, “Did you *hear* that?” Then, I said, instantly, “I saw an angel fly through the room,” and she said, “I heard an angel singing” (Sidgwick et al., 1894:317–318).

Bozzano argued that the case represented “two simultaneous supernormal manifestations that, due to the special idiosyncracies of the percipients, were perceived separately” (p. 231).

Collective percipience of music, Bozzano argued, eliminated suggestion and hallucination as an explanation. In many of the cases the dying person “did not participate in the collective hearing of transcendental music, which excludes all possibility of explaining the facts by assuming a hallucination having its origin in the mentality of the dying person” (pp. 258–259). This referred to the idea that the dying person affected bystanders via a process of telepathic transmission.

The analyses of these cases, and of other psychic phenomena, led Bozzano to argue that he had found proof for survival of death. This proof, he argued, came from different lines of evidence and types of cases that, when considered together, supported each other.

Some years after Bozzano’s book appeared, William Fletcher Barrett’s (1844–1925) *Deathbed Visions* was published, a book that has long been recognized as a classic on the subject. Unfortunately, this is an incomplete study because its author died before he could finish it. The chapters presented here were put together by the author’s wife, physician Florence E. Barrett, who decided not to add anything to the book so as to keep the author’s thought intact.

Barrett was a physicist with a lifelong interest in psychic phenomena. He was a founding member and one of the first vice-presidents of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, and served in later years as a council member and as President of the Society. Barrett published on such varied topics as telepathy, mediumship, mesmerism, and dowsing. A believer in the nonphysical nature of the mind, Barrett wrote in an autobiographical essay, “psychical research will demonstrate to the educated world, not only the existence of a *soul in man*, but also the existence of a *soul in Nature . . .*” (Barrett, 1924:296).

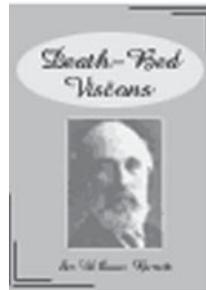
Barrett summarized his outlook in the first chapter as follows:

It is well known that there are many remarkable instances where a dying person, shortly before his or her transition from the earth, appears to see and recognize some deceased relatives or friends. We must, however, remember the fact that hallucinations of the dying are not very infrequent. Nevertheless, there are instances where the dying person was *unaware* of the previous death of the spirit form he sees, and is therefore astonished to find in the vision of his or her deceased relative one whom the percipient believes to be still on earth. These cases form, perhaps, one of the most cogent arguments for survival after death, as the evidential value and veridical (truth telling) character of these Visions of the Dying is greatly enhanced when the fact is undeniably established that the dying person was wholly ignorant of the decease of the person he or she so vividly sees. (p. 1)

Barrett included in the second chapter several cases about visions corresponding to people not known to be dead at the time of the vision. He took the following case from James H. Hyslop, who in turn took the account from Minot Savage. The case reads as follows:

In a neighbouring city were two little girls, Jennie and Edith, one about eight years of age and the other but a little older. They were schoolmates and intimate friends. In June, 1889, both were taken ill of diphtheria. At noon on Wednesday Jennie died. Then the parents of Edith, and her physician as well, took particular pains to keep from her the fact that her little playmate was gone. They feared the effect of the knowledge on her own condition. To prove that they succeeded and that she did not know, it may be mentioned that on Saturday, June 8th, at noon, just before she became unconscious of all that was passing about her, she selected two of her photographs to be sent to Jennie, and also told her attendants to bid her good-bye.

She died at half-past six o'clock on the evening of Saturday, June 8th. She had roused and bidden her friends good-bye, and was talking of dying, and seemed to have no fear. She appeared to see one and another of the friends she knew were dead. So far it was like other similar cases. But now suddenly, and with every appearance of surprise, she turned to her father and exclaimed, "Why, papa, I am going to take Jennie with me!" Then she added, "Why, papa! you did not tell me that Jennie was here!" And immediately she reached out her arms as if in welcome, and said, "Oh, Jennie, I'm so glad you are here!" (Barrett, pp. 18–19)



Later chapters included such fascinating phenomena as apparitions seen by persons around the deathbed, visions of distant events, music heard by the dying person or by bystanders, and visions of what some described as the separation of the spirit from the physical body at death. Clearly the content of the book was not limited to cases of visions of the dying.

While the book consists mainly of case reports, on occasion Barrett discussed explanations for them. For example, in a case in which two sisters saw the faces of their two dead brothers looking at their dying sister, he mentioned Frank Podmore's speculation that the image was created by telepathy from the dying sister. Barrett wrote that "this explanation is less tenable and quite as unlikely as is the percipience of spirit forms by the dying person and sometimes by those present" (p. 75).

It is obvious that both Bozzano and Barrett were influenced by the work of previous persons, as seen in their citations of works, many of which come from the spiritualistic and psychical research literatures. Regarding deathbed visions, some of their predecessors were Frances Power Cobbe (1877) and James H. Hyslop (1907). Barrett's death prevented him from using in more detail the

work of Bozzano. According to Barrett's wife, her husband had marked parts of Bozzano's book reviewed here. She wrote:

He was specially interested in Bozzano's observation that if the phenomena were caused by the thoughts of the dying person being directed to those he loved, the appearances might be expected to represent living persons at least as frequently as deceased persons who had long passed from this world, whereas no records had come to hand of dying persons seeing at their bedside visions of friends still living. (Barrett, pp. vii–viii)

While Barrett understandably did not provide much analysis, Bozzano did. However, his conclusions sometimes were too definitive. Certainly they depended on theoretical assumptions that could be questioned, such as the way telepathy manifests. In later years Bozzano continued to make similar arguments in favor of survivalistic interpretations. His last statements were made posthumously in his books *Musica Transcendentale* (1943/1982), *Le Visioni dei Morenti* (1947), and *La Psiche Domina la Materia* (1948), which included new cases.

There is no question that research on these topics has been neglected (Alvarado, 2006; for an exception see Brayne, Lovelace, & Fenwick, 2008). Leaving aside the general topic of apparitions of the dead, we should mention the deathbed visions work of Karlis Osis (1961) and of Osis and Haraldsson (1997), the most sophisticated work on the subject conducted to date. Some work has been conducted with death-related physical phenomena (Piccinini & Rinaldi, 1990, Rhine, 1963) and music (Rogo, 1970, 1972). Other topics, such as collectively perceived deathbed cases and the cases of emanations from the dying body, have received much less attention (e.g., Crookall, 1967). Unfortunately, and with the exception of the above-mentioned research, the study of the phenomena outlined by Bozzano and Barrett has not received systematic attention.

Both Bozzano and Barrett performed a service for later researchers by presenting an organized catalog of observations. To this day individuals interested in the phenomena they discuss find useful illustrative cases in their books. But their contribution was not limited to this. They also documented the variety of death-related phenomena, something that has also been done by other authors, such as Flammarion (1920–1922/1922–1923). Furthermore, reading through the books reviewed here modern readers can get a good idea of the features of these experiences. Another contribution is that these studies also remind us of the important conceptual issues underlying these phenomena, particularly the issue of survival of bodily death.

It is to be hoped that new interest in these phenomena goes beyond popular discussions (e.g., Wills–Brandon, 2000), and beyond purely descriptive

studies that are limited to case presentations, as seen in some of the literature available today about “after-death” manifestations (e.g., Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995/1997). As I have argued elsewhere in terms of selected near-death phenomena, much remains to be done in this area, considering such aspects as prevalence, the features of the experiences, the characteristics of the experiencers, the relationship of the phenomena to other variables, and hypothesis testing (Alvarado, 2006). But future attempts to develop new research in this area will benefit from attention to Bozzano, Barrett, and other pioneers.

CARLOS S. ALVARADO

Atlantic University

215 67th Street, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451

carlos.alvarado@atlanticuniv.edu

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Allan Kardec und der Spiritismus in Lyon um 1900. Geisterkommunikation als Soziales Phänomen by Katrin Heuser. VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008. 120 pp. €59 (paperback). ISBN 9783639072587.

Judging from the content, structure, and layout of Heuser's micro-study of French spiritism in Lyon c. 1900, which is distributed by VDM (a German publisher specialising in academic theses), the book appears to be the published but self-edited version of the author's *Magisterarbeit*, or M.A. thesis, in cultural studies, though background information regarding the genesis of the book is entirely lacking. While the back cover blurb announces that the book is intended for readers interested in the science, sociology, and historical roots of spiritism, it is only the second (though dependent on the third) aspect that Heuser's study addresses adequately.

The study is based on the activities of the spiritist societies *Les Indépendants Lyonnais* (founded in 1890) and the *Société spirite pour l'Oeuvre de la Crèche* (founded in 1904) in Lyon, the historical capital of French spiritism or Kardecism. Using primary sources such as membership lists, police records, and the groups' periodicals and pamphlets, the author investigates the personal backgrounds of the founders, propagandists, and general members of the two groups, their social structures and aims, and the strictness of adherence to Kardec's original doctrines in relation to the groups' specific social interests. In a brief excursion, Heuser compares the spiritist scene of Lyon to that of the German capital of spiritism (or spiritualism), *fin-de-siècle* Leipzig. The theoretical framework for Heuser's historical study is Berger and Luckmann's social constructivist model of knowledge and reality. Contrary to previous authors' writing on the social and cultural history of French spiritism, such as Laplantine and Aubrée, Bergé, and Sharp, Heuser finds that social class did not determine involvement in spiritist societies, and that gender and biographical factors were more reliable determinants—at least for her small Lyon sample.

Owing to the nature of the study as a work in cultural or social history rather than as history of science—but contradicting the misleading announcement in



ALLAN KARDEC