



HAL
open science

‘The varieties of effects resulting from such morbid causes as are capable of rendering more vivid the feelings of the mind’ by S. Hibbert (1825)

G.E. Berrios

► **To cite this version:**

G.E. Berrios. ‘The varieties of effects resulting from such morbid causes as are capable of rendering more vivid the feelings of the mind’ by S. Hibbert (1825). *History of Psychiatry*, 2007, 18 (1), pp.103-105. 10.1177/0957154X07075331 . hal-00570886

HAL Id: hal-00570886

<https://hal.science/hal-00570886>

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Classic Text No. 69

**‘The varieties of effects resulting from such morbid causes as are capable of rendering more vivid the feelings of the mind’
by S. Hibbert (1825)**

Introduction by

G. E. BERRIOS*

The transformation of the old notion of apparition into the new concept of hallucination started in earnest at the beginning of the 19th century. Apparitions were naturalized on the argument that in no case were they a response to an external stimulus; and were secularized by challenging the very existence of external spirits or forces. Both arguments are clearly stated in the work on ‘Apparitions’ by Samuel Hibbert (a chapter of which has been included below as Classic Text No. 69). Although the debate on the ontology and meaning of the ‘phantasms of the living’ has continued to this day, it has had no influence on the medical concept of hallucination. It is likely that the latter has suffered as a result.

Keywords: *apparition; Ferriar; ghost; hallucination; Hibbert; history; psychiatry; psychopathology; spectral illusion*

The construction of the concept of hallucination in the cultures of the West cannot be understood without considering the concept of ‘apparition’ from the historical, theological and literary perspectives (Green & McCreery, 1975; Gurney, Myers and Podmore, 1886; Parish, 1897; Sidgwick, Johnson, Myers, *et al.*, 1894; Tyrell, 1943). The rich literature on apparitions provided the medical notion of hallucination not only with a structural matrix but with a

* Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, Addenbrooke’s Hospital (Box 189), Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ, UK. Email: geb11@cam.ac.uk

language of description. This is the reason why current talk on hallucinations remains biased in the direction of visual perception and incorporates doxastic, some will say, fiduciary elements in its definition.

The history of the concept of apparition is rich and complex and is inextricably linked to the history of religion in general and of demonology in particular. Most known cultures seem to contain the view that, whether dead or alive, persons may, in certain critical situations, 'appear' to other humans, either as individuals or as groups. Very early in Christianity, Augustine (1991) classified 'visions' into corporeal, imaginative and intellectual. Corporeal visions were supernatural manifestation of an object to the eyes of the body. It either stimulated the eye in the usual way that other stimuli do, or an agent superior to man modified the visual organ so that a sensation was achieved. Imaginative visions represented an object by means of imagination alone, without the aid of the visual organ. Intellectual visions 'perceive' without a sensible image, that is as an act of pure understanding. It has been claimed that this was Augustine's 'most serious attempt to account for errors of sense perception' (Matthews, 2001).

Augustine's views reverberated through the ages and can still be found, for example, in Calmet's *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits* (1751). The standard belief that at least some apparitions were supernatural (resulting from something external stimulating the perceptual system) began to be challenged at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the event, the naturalization and secularization of apparitions gave rise to the modern concept of hallucination which was redefined as a disorder of perception occurring in the absence of any external stimuli. This did away with the millennial belief that hallucinations may have a communicational function either between human beings or between a human being and an external power (e.g., deities) (Berrios, 2005). The Classic Text below is a good representative of the challenge mentioned above and includes the two types of arguments referred to.

The author

Samuel Hibbert (1782–1848) was born in Manchester and educated at the Manchester Academy. He refused to work at his father's business (a linen merchant) and started an early literary career turning his pen to whatever was available at the time (Sutton, 2004). After a spell in the Lancashire militia, Hibbert took an MD degree at Edinburgh University but never practised.

His studies and the friendships he made in Edinburgh (e.g., with David Brewster) left him with a taste for natural history and chemistry. In 1817 Hibbert undertook a geological survey of the Shetland Islands, reporting the presence of chromate of iron and of a native form of hydrate of magnesia. He also became involved with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, helping with the running of their museum and with some editorial work.

In 1823 Hibbert read a paper on ‘Spectral illusions’ before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and his book on the subject, *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions*, was published in 1824 (see Hibbert, 1825). Probably influenced by Ferriar’s *Essay* (1813), Hibbert proposed a physiological account of apparitions. Some of his contemporaries understood his work as a defence of materialism (Anon., 1828). Although the debate on the extra-natural aspect of some apparitions was to be revived at the end of the nineteenth century by the powerful psychical research movement (Oppenheim, 1985), the medical concept of hallucination did not benefit from these studies and remained locked within its narrow mechanistic framework (Berrios, 1996).

References

- Anonymous (1828) *Past Feelings Renovated; or, Ideas Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr Hibbert’s Philosophy of Apparitions. Written with the View of Counteracting any Sentiments Approaching Materialism* (London: n.p.).
- Augustine (1991) *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, translated by Roland J. Teske (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Berrios, G. E. (1996) *The History of Mental Symptoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Berrios, G. E. (2005) On the fantastic apparitions of vision (by Johannes Müller). *History of Psychiatry*, 16, 229–46.
- Calmet, A. (1751) *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits, et sur les vampires*, 2 vols (Paris: Debure L’Aîné).
- Ferriar, J. (1813) *An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions* (London: Cadell and Davies).
- Green, C. and McCreery, C. (1975) *Apparitions* (London: Hamish Hamilton).
- Gurney, E., Myers, F. W. H. and Podmore, F. (1886) *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols (London: Trübner).
- Hibbert, S. (1825) *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd); first published in 1824.
- Matthews, G. B. (2001) Knowledge and illumination. In E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 171–85.
- Oppenheim, J. (1985) *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Parish, E. (1897) *Hallucinations and Illusions. A Study of the Fallacies of Perception* (London: Walter Scott).
- Sidgwick, H., Johnson, A., Myers, F. W. H., Podmore, F. and Sidgwick, E. M. (1894) Report on the census of hallucinations. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 10, 25–394.
- Sutton, C. W. (2004) ‘Ware, Samuel Hibbert (1782–1848)’, revised by Elizabeth Baigent. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Tyrrell, G. N. M. (1943) *Apparitions* (London: Gerald Duckworth).