

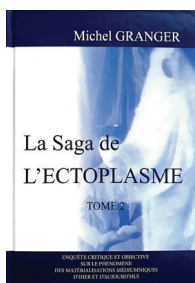


BOOK REVIEW

A Critical and Objective Investigation Into the Phenomenon of Mediumistic Materializations of Past and Present

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Granger, M. (2022). *La Saga de l'ectoplasme, tome 2. Enquête critique et objective sur le phénomène des matérialisations médiumniques d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* [The Saga of Ectoplasm, Volume 2. A critical and objective investigation into the phenomenon of mediumistic materializations of past and present]. Pologne : Le Mouvement Spirite Francophone

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After the first volume of this Saga, published in 2021 (see my review: Evrard, 2022), here comes the second of three volumes in this epic. Michel Granger has a Ph.D in physical chemistry and is a retired chemist engineer from private industry. He is already known from the anomalistics scene as the writer of 13 essays, some about extraterrestrials, cattle mutilation, coincidence experiences, futurology, and more than 1,600 articles and chronicles in various French more or less scientific magazines and journals.

BOOK DESCRIPTION

The 918 pages of this new opus cover just four parts and an index of proper names that alone spans 27 pages. That's an indication of how long the parts are. They take the form of mini-files arranged in chronological order. There is a great deal of redundancy (without repetition), not only with the first volume, which already presents some of the leading mediums but between the parts where we regularly find the same actors (mediums and researchers) and the same controversies. For example, the Polish medium Franek Kluski will be mentioned in two subsections of the first part and in at least one subsection in each of the other parts. Anyone wishing to form an opinion on this medium alone would have to put the puzzle together again. The same goes for Margery, Guzik, Palladino, Béraud, and so on.

The choice made for the first two parts is based on a not always obvious categorization between "private experiments" (Part 1, pp. 15-224) and "official tests" (Part 2, pp. 225-450). How can we systematically decide on borderline cases? The same research conducted by Geley with Kluski in the early days of the Institut métapsychique international falls into both categories.

But that's not the point. Once again, what stands out is that Granger knows these files through and through, and has a great eye for detail. This is sometimes pushed to the point of writing footnotes that themselves take up an entire page. This researcher has documented his work throughout his life, contacting all those who have shown an interest in ectoplasms from near or far, looking out for works that are impossible to find on specialized websites, and translating them himself using tedious computer resources when he doesn't know the language. We must acknowledge the courage and quality of this endeavor.

The other two parts of this volume deal with "Controls' and evidence by photos, films, prints and 'molds'" (Part 3, pp. 451-553) and "Doubts and frauds" (Part 4, pp. 555-888). This last part is by far the most important and original, while the others are mainly extensions of the files and methodology already present in the first opus, consisting of describing and analyzing cases, adding photos of varying qualities, and giving a score out of 10 to indicate the credibility of each demonstration.



SUMMARY OF PARTS

The first part follows on from the first volume in that, after studying private spiritualist circles, from which nothing credible emerges, Granger examines the private circles of psychical researchers, when they visit the medium's home or invite him or her into their homes. Covering a period from 1870 to 1955, 33 sub-sections examine, among others, D.D. Home and Sir William Crookes, Kate Fox and Alfred Russel Wallace, Eusapia Palladino in Europe and America, the work of Dr. William Jackson Crawford, Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, Charles Richet, Gustave Geley and Glen Hamilton. What can we say, except that the results are frequently convincing, but the conditions are always inadequate to convince anyone beyond the privileged psychist circle.

The second part deals with official tests on materializations and ectoplasm. The difference here is that researchers are mandated by a collective, an institution, a committee, or a commission to establish research that they will report on regardless of what happens. These commissions are often made up of researchers with varied backgrounds and intentions. Their succession suggests that they have only a passing impact on public opinion and do not result in the constitution of a cumulative body of knowledge.

From 1869 to 1994, 31 files are studied. An ellipse is nevertheless made on the whole post-World War II part, with the exception of an English case in 1994, but it's built this way because the third volume of the Saga will be entirely devoted to the question of contemporary cases.

The first dossier is on the committee studying spiritualism at the London Dialectical Society. Some rather amateurish aspects are rightly criticized. The second deals with the investigations of the Sidgwick group (between 1873 and 1875, then between 1875 and 1880), a prelude to the creation of the Society for Psychical Research. Then there are the tests of Palladino at the Institut général psychologique; of several mediums in the various psychical research societies around the world; the Scientific American commission around a proposed prize of \$2,500 in 1923; the studies of mediums at the Sorbonne (Béraud in 1922 and Guzik in 1923); the opposition between Margery and Houdini; the work with Rudi Schneider in various countries, and so on. Each time, the pros and cons are weighed up, delimiting the share of valid criticism and the share of phenomena that continue to challenge.

The third part is more methodological and epistemological, with 21 sections. What evidence has been provided, and what is expected? The cases listed are then analyzed cross-sectionally. Does light really have an annihilating effect on ectoplasm? This does not seem to be the

case everywhere, nor can it be fully justified. To respect this condition imposed by certain circles, Granger proposes to strike a balance by advocating the widespread use of infrared (p. 484) and thermal (p. 888) cameras. This would optimize production and control, as Louis Favre would have wished in his day (Evrard, 2017).

Asked whether too many controls could kill the phenomenon, Granger takes issue (p. 462). He rejects any hypothesis of a possible intrinsic elusiveness to phenomena (p. 188), which would thus react negatively to attempts to objectify them.

Several sections are devoted to attempts to cast ectoplasmic limbs in heated parafin. Here again, the author's precision is unsurpassed. However, he sometimes proposes alternatives that deserve further verification. Thus, to cast doubt on the extremely thin parafin gloves described by Geley in his experiments with Kluski (pp. 548-549), into which plaster was poured to obtain certain famous molds, he recalculates the weight (25 grams) of the gloves obtained in controlled sessions, in relation to the surface area of a hand (60 cm² of an adult and 40 cm² of a child) and the density of parafin (around 1g/cm³). The result is gloves so heavy that, *in theory*, they should be six times thicker than Geley claims. However, the superimposition of parafin layers is precisely a way of making them stronger, so that a hand slipped inside can be removed without breaking them. The argument could become decisive if counter-experiments were conducted *in practice* to verify these calculations more systematically.

Finally, the last part is made up of 50 subsections discussing doubts and frauds. All ectoplasm-producing subjects are said to have cheated at least once (p. 564 ff.). Without giving up, Granger analyzes in detail the value of these accusations and the consequences that should be drawn from them. Particular attention is paid to the study of Crookes' experiences with Florence Cook, too often summed up elsewhere in distressing shortcuts. Palladino, Margery, Harry Price, and other famous cases rub shoulders with little-known examples. Granger makes a clear distinction between proven and presumed frauds, which the usual commentators on these controversies don't always do. He also identifies the fact that most of the frauds brought to light were exposed by the psychists themselves, some of whom attested to the reality of the phenomena in other sessions. The aim is to show that deception has been clearly identified in some cases but that it would be absurd to systematize this explanation by asserting that everyone has been deceived all the time.

One regret on my part: the treatment of the Villa Carmen dossier (pp. 701-729), where Charles Richet (along with other researchers) conducted experiments in the summer of 1905 with the medium Marthe Béraud. In it,

Granger blithely mixes sessions organized by Richet with sessions where he was not present, ignores certain contradictions to criticisms that have already been made (see, e.g., Evrard, 2016, chap. 5), and concludes the whole thing with an extremely low credibility score of 3/10. According to our exchanges prior to writing this review, this “unfavorable” treatment is linked to the disappointment engendered by Richet, who was initially one of his models for investigating ectoplasm. Although Granger claims to apply a neutral methodology, giving equal credit to testimony “for” and denunciation “against” (p. 653), it is not easy to extract oneself from any bias.

This shows that even if, like a perfect collector, he gathers together the largest quantity of material available on ectoplasmy, this work will remain that of a researcher, with his own vision of things, and may be discussed and interpreted differently by researchers with at least as much material. In this way, anyone seeking an informed

opinion on the (im-)possibility of ectoplasm can no longer bypass Granger’s work. The third volume, which will bring the Saga to a close, is due to be published in the following year.

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