

Biography of Gustave Geley (1868-1924)

A French physician and Laureate of the French Medical Faculty at the University of Lyons, Dr. Gustave Geley gave up his medical practice in 1918 to become the first director of the Institut Metapsychique International in Paris. He is most remembered for his research in the area of physical mediumship, especially with the mediums Marthe Béraud ("Eva C."), Stephan Ossowiecki, Jean Guzik, and Franek Kluski, the latter producing paraffin casts of "entity" hands.

"The most remarkable materializations which I have myself observed are those produced by Eva in my laboratory during three consecutive months of the winter of 1917-1918," Geley wrote. "In the bi-weekly séances in collaboration with Madame Bisson, the Medical Inspector General – M. Calmette, M Jules Courtier, and M. LeCour, we obtained a series of records of the greatest interest. We saw, touched, and photographed representations of heads and faces formed from the original substance (ectoplasm). These were formed under our eyes, the curtains being half-drawn. Sometimes they proceeded from a cord of solid substance issuing from the medium, sometimes they were progressively developed in a fog of vaporous substance condensed in front of her, or at her side."¹

Geley stressed that the experiments were carried out under strict controls. They were held in his laboratory, to which no one was permitted beforehand. Eva C. was completely undressed in his presence and then dressed in a tight garment, which was sewn up the back and at the wrists. Her hair and the cavity of her mouth were examined by both himself and his collaborators before and after the séances. Eva was walked backwards to the wicker chair in the cabinet and her hands were always held in full sight outside the cur-

tains, the room always quite well lit the whole time. "I do not say merely, 'There was no trickery,' I say 'There was no possibility of trickery,'" Geley stressed. "Nearly all the materializations took place under my own eyes, and I have observed the whole of their genesis and development."²

Dr. Charles Richet, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1913, attended many of the séances in Geley's laboratory. "I can say exactly the same," Richet seconded Geley's comment about there being no possibility of fraud.³

Geley described the process necessary to obtain materializations beginning with Eva being put into a light hypnotic state, not enough to involve forgetfulness of her normal personality. The cabinet was to protect the entranced medium from disturbing influences and from the action of light, the rest of the room having sufficient light for observation purposes. The phenomena would sometimes appear after a few minutes, but at times it would take more than an hour. "They always begin by painful sensations in the medium," Geley explained. "She sighs and moans from time to time much like a woman in childbirth. These moans reach their height just when the manifestation begins, they lessen or cease when the forms are complete."⁴

Although Richet and England's Sir William Crookes had witnessed full materializations, Geley witnessed only partial materializations with Eva C. "I have not, alas, observed phenomena so complete, but, on the other hand, I have very frequently seen complete representations of an organ, such as a face, a hand, or a finger," he recorded. "In the more complete cases the materialized organ has all the appearance and biological functions of a living organ. I have seen admi-

rably modeled fingers, with their nails; I have seen complete hands with bones and joints; I have seen a living head, whose bones I could feel under a thick mass of hair. I have seen well-formed living and human faces.”⁵

Geley added that the better materialized the forms were, the more power of self-direction they seemed to have. “They evolved round Eva, sometimes at some distance from her,” he continued. “One of these faces appeared first at the opening of the curtain, of natural size, very beautiful and with a remarkably life-like appearance. At another séance, through the curtain of the cabinet, I could feel with my hands the contact of human body which caused the curtain to undulate. (Eva was stretched out in the armchair, in full sight, and her hands were held.)”⁶

As Geley came to understand it, these incomplete materializations were the result of insufficient power on the part of the medium. “To build up in a few seconds an organ or an organism biologically complete – to create life – is a metapsychic feat which can but rarely produce a perfect result,” he explained. “That is why the great majority of materializations are incomplete, fragmentary, defective, and show lacunae in their structure...but in these attempts we find almost always the marks of creative power, the sign-manual of life. In these rough forms the enigma of universal life – the relations of the Idea to Matter – is revealed in the splendor of its beauty.”⁷

Eva C. also produced some mental phenomena. “She has ‘read’ automatically on an imaginary screen, like that of a cinema, pages of philosophy,” he further explained. “These automatic productions had no relation to her normal powers and knowledge, and greatly exceeded these latter. This was very interesting, but during this period of her mediumship the ectoplasmic faculty disappeared.”⁸

Similar materializations were obtained with Franek Kluski, a 50-year-old Polish writer and poet. With Kluski, however, Geley decided to see if paraffin molds of the materialized hands

could be obtained. Geley and his collaborators set a bowl of paraffin wax in the laboratory in which they conducted the experiments. The materialized “entity” was then asked to plunge a hand, foot, or even part of a face into the paraffin several times. A closely fitting envelope was thus formed, which was dipped into another bowl of cold water. They obtained nine molds on their first effort – seven of different hands, one of a foot, and one of a mouth and chin. These were produced in various sizes, including the hand and foot of a child, and so it was clear that these were not Kluski’s and that there was no trickery, although other controls completely ruled out this possibility. Photographs of these molds were taken and are shown in Geley’s 1927 book.



Geley wrote that there were some manifestations showing mental intelligence, including communicating raps. “One of these asked us to sing,” Geley reported. “We sang the ‘Marseillaise’ softly, and this was applauded by hand-clapping in the dark cabinet, behind the medium.”⁹ However, Geley concluded that the “entities” at this particular séance and at subsequent ones “did not seem to me to be of a high order of intelligence.”¹⁰

Writing about mediumship in general, Geley rejected the secondary personality hypothesis offered by some psychologists. “In ordinary dis-

junctions, the secondary personalities which appear as a consequence of mental decentralization behave as usurpers of the place of the Self," he explained. "They seem to aim at replacing the legitimate government; they declare themselves to be the true Self. In mediumship, their behavior is different – they declare themselves foreign to the Self; they claim to be distinct entities. Usually, at least in our day and in the west, they claim to be the 'spirits' of the dead, and say that they only borrow from the medium the vital dynamism and organic elements which they need in order to act upon the material plane."¹¹

Geley concluded that the Self both pre-exists and survives the grouping which it directs during one's earth life, "that it more particularly survives its lower objectification during this life. This may at least be admitted, if not as a mathematical certainty, at least as a high probability."¹²

Many materialistic scientists criticized Geley, claiming that he was duped, but he had many

esteemed scientists, including Richet, renowned astronomer Camille Flammarion, and renowned physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, who observed some of his experiments and fully validated his research. Lodge referred to the paraffin casts as "a standing demonstration of some thing inexplicable by normal science...a permanent material record, which can be examined at leisure, and which ... are, as it were, a standing miracle."¹³

Geley was killed in a plane crash on his way back to Paris from Warsaw, where he was conducting additional experiments with Kluski. His 1927 book was published posthumously.



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¹ Geley, Gustave, *From the Unconscious to the Conscious*, Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 59.

² Richet, Charles, *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, W. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1923, p. 525.

³ _____, p. 525.

⁴ Geley, p. 54.

⁵ _____, pp. 56-57.

⁶ _____, p. 60.

⁷ Geley, Gustave, *Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments*, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1927, p. 240.

⁸ _____, p. 7.

⁹ _____, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰ _____, p. 259.

¹¹ Geley, *Unconscious*, p. 265.

¹² _____, p. 267.

¹³ Berger, Arthur & Joyce, *The Encyclopedia of Parapsychology and Psychical Research*, Paragon House, 1991, p. 154.