

Critical Approaches to Exceptional Experiences

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The field of critical studies began to galvanize in the middle to late twentieth century relying heavily on work from literary criticism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and feminism. Yet, the field also has bearing on the study of the paranormal, what we might call *critical parapsychology* (Glazier, 2021). Such an approach examines exceptional experiences in their full embodiment as naturalistically and locally situated phenomena that are concurrently shaped by culture, institutions, and language. As Williams (1996) reminds us, the metaphors we use in paranormal studies matter in terms of the way they literally co-construct our maps of reality. Critical parapsychology is not only interested in those metaphors that win out, so to speak, but also in exposing the power effects contained therein, by those sanctioned and sacred metaphors held by legendary science. I am in the early stages of collecting submissions for an edited volume on critical approaches and the paranormal. The CFP may be found [here](#). Possible analyses include:

- Explore the physicalist metaphors in scientific and pedagogical books.
- Read the tropes of parapsychology (apparitions, for example) against the grain of typical scientific texts.
- Analyze the disjunct between public beliefs in the paranormal and those of scientists - the figure of the expert or technician in relation to hierarchy.
- Develop an antiracist or critical race theory investigation of the importance of preserving paranormal folklore and legends.
- Examine how certain entity encounters (non-human beings such as elves or fairies) pose a challenge to human exceptionalism.
- Use feminist or other critical theories to deconstruct misogyny and experimentalism in parapsychology.
- Detail the connection between non-normative sexuality and the paranormal.
- Employ a Marxist analysis of how extraterrestrials or invisible entities challenge or uphold current capitalist hegemony.
- Understand how the transpersonal or spiritual experience of possession is a threat to secularism.
- Consider animism, ancestors, and indigenous peoples as non-normative or subjugated forms of knowledge.

