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Winning Paper: Specters, Séance, Sex, and Spirit Cabinets: A Glance at the Smoke and Mirrors of Victorian Era England's Obsession with Contacting the Dead

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Specters, Séance, Sex, and Spirit Cabinets: A Glance at the Smoke and Mirrors of Victorian Era England's Obsession with Contacting the Dead

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The Victorian era, which lasted from 1837 to 1901, gave birth to a rapidly evolving new world; England entered a time of prosperous trade and wealth through imperialism and colonialism. However, the fruits of rapid industrialization came at a high cost to working and poor class individuals.[1] Death rates rapidly increased among individuals working in industrious jobs due to a lack of labor laws and safety regulations. Sickness spread quickly, as many families lived in tiny, terribly ventilated flats that often went uncleaned. Many children died from injury from the back-breaking labor forced upon them, malnourishment, and fast-spreading illness. While high levels of death constantly loomed over the working class, it remained present in the minds of upper-class individuals as well, typically in the form of infant and child death.[2]

Rigid social structures of the time separated men and women. Men had many occupational avenues to distract themselves from the ever-present thought of death. Men attended schools, engaged in mentally stimulating activities such as sporting events, hunts, and freely chose careers for themselves. Women during this time did not hold the same luck. While some women had the option of working, few found fulfillment in their day-to-day lives. Work for women during this time is stratified by class. Upper and middle-class women held the possibility of working, while lower-class women worked to survive. The lives of lower-class women lacked much difference or separate space from men in the same class. Women's occupational opportunities were few and far between, with options outside of the home ranging from prostitution to harsh, back-breaking manual labor. While upper-class women often lacked external careers, they did not experience a break from the constant demands within the home; these women were held responsible for maintaining a clean, well-functioning home, obedient

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[1] Lindsay Patrice Greer, "Summoning the Spirit of Obsolescence in Media and Performance: A Posthuman Séance" (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 2017), 4.

[2] Kenneth Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain 1750-1850*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis) 2013: 12-15.

staff, and serving as the sole guardians of their children. With women quickly losing their husbands to death from illness or injury, and more often, children to aspects of their life that they could not control, they began to explore new coping mechanisms that strayed from the traditional religious norms present for centuries. While many of the puritanical views from the 17th century had lessened, immense pressure on women to remain chaste and subservient to men remained strong. This grief and sexual repression concoction led to boredom, anger, and frustration. When these aspects pair with an influx of new ideas and products, and a drastic culture shift, women seized the opportunity to explore more nontraditional occupation paths, leading to a life-altering cultural growth. The profound culture change caused by the introduction of séance and morbid obsession in Victorian Era England let women embrace unique methods of handling grief, death, and sexual repression while offering alternative avenues to explore spirituality, religion, occupation, and gender roles in new, macabre ways.[3]

For centuries, women and men occupied different spaces. Through this vast difference and separation, conditions forced women to take on the role of empathetic, caregiving individuals. This stereotyped assumption portrays women as better conduits for spirits because of their perceived vulnerability.[4] Intellectuals gave multiple titles to women who held such abilities; the two most used were *psychic medium* and *clairvoyant.* While the terms seem similar enough, there are slight differences between them. Psychic mediums experience the supernatural phenomenon in ways that are not describable or detectable through the five basic human senses, meaning that the experiences of these mediums are only tangible to those who hold the sixth sense. Conversely, the unique aspect of clairvoyance hails from their ability to visualize a

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[3] Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (1976), 23.

[4] Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, The Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 16-18.

paranormal phenomenon rather than focusing solely on the indescribable feelings utilized by psychic mediums.[5] The word choice of medium calls from its definition: it serves as the middle ground between two extremes. Mediums helped delve into the mystical, ever-escaping middle between the boundaries of life and death to extract impartial visions of loved ones and communicate through channeling. Channeling is the process that mediums use to communicate with the dead. This process involves surrendering one's body as a conduit for the spirit to speak or write through.[6]

Mediums utilized their gifts at seances; seances are events in which spiritual mediums channeled and transmitted messages from the dead to the living.[7] During such encounters, mediums channeled spirits into their bodies and allowed the spirits to act out their unfinished business in multiple ways. One common form practiced during this time came in the form of a trance or hallucination. When such trances were underway, mediums would allow a spirit to overtake their body and perform actions as the specter saw fit. Trances often included the medium speaking in foreign languages, deepened voices, and with a glaze over their eyes as if in a catatonic shock. Spirit writing served as another popular means of communication from the dead. Mediums conjuring a spirit allowed themselves to serve as conduits and freely write information given to them by the ghost.[8] Other signs of a legitimate medium came in telepathy. This paranormal aspect gave mediums the ability to move items and communicate with others solely with their minds. Floating audience members, shaking tables, slamming doors, and extinguishing candles served as signs of telepathic engagement. The audience members who

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[5] H.H. Price, "Some Philosophical Questions about Telepathy and Clairvoyance," *Philosophy* 15, no. 60 (1940): 377-380. For clarification, the word medium replaces clairvoyant unless otherwise specified.

[6] *Spiritualism*, directed by Dennis Wholey (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, and Infobase: 2008).

[7] Elizabeth Lowry, "Gendered Haunts: The Rhetorical and Material Culture of the Late Nineteenth-Century Spirit Cabinet," *Aries* 12, no. 2 (2012): 221.

[8] Wholey, *Spiritualism*, 2008.

attended séance became known as sitters, as the majority of their roles involved sitting at a table with a medium. Images of this phenomenon became common at the time due to the public's desire to see evidence of such feats.[9]

While psychic ability was the most necessary attribute of mediumship, mediums would not have produced such profound findings without using spirit cabinets. These cabinets are large boudoir-type cabinets in which mediums would stash makeup, costumes, mystified objects, and props that they would use for their seances. Using spirit cabinets, mediums transformed themselves into the spirits they were attempting to contact. By using women's shawls to create makeshift, tent-like cabinets, mediums created the first iteration of the spirit cabinet. The cabinets quickly evolved into large, mechanism-filled contraptions that shocked and awe séance sitters. Most of these intricate pieces of furniture belonged to male mediums, as female mediums lacked the connections and funds to have such cabinets constructed for themselves. Often, when the sitters present at seances had lost children, mediums recruited or kidnapped orphaned children to make the experience more realistic to the grieving parents. [10]

As with spirit cabinets, other aspects of séance grew and adapted to the needs of the time. American culture clashed with English society during the early nineteenth century as new, exciting ideas and tools came to light. As spiritualism continued to seep into English culture, talking boards, also known as spirit boards, began to gain popularity. Later, this spiritual tool took a more commercial turn with the release of the American Park Brother's Ouija board.[11] All said boards had similar designs. All had the English alphabet and numbers ranging from 0 to 9.

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[9] Jules Courtier, *Séance with the Medium Eusapia Palladino*, 1908, photograph, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. See Appendix A.1 for the image.

[10] Lowry, "Gendered Haunts," 224.

[11] Christian Lundberg and Loshua Gunn. "'Ouija Board, Are There Any Communications?' Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject, or, Continuing the ARS Conversation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4, (2005): 84.

Most had the phrases "yes," "no," and "goodbye" placed in various places on the board, but before mass production, no two spirit boards looked the same in this regard. Planchettes, which are heart-shaped apparatuses with a hole, or seeing-eye, serve as the spirit's communication method. Planchettes glide across the spirit board through sitters who have placed index and middle fingers on the edge of the apparatus. In the first advertisement published in the United States for the Ouija Board, the product promises "its operations are always interesting and frequently invaluable, answering as it does questions concerning the past, present, and future with marvelous accuracy."[12] The spirit then uses the combined energy of the sitters and guidance of the medium to move the planchette to the desired letters, numbers, and phrases. Such items moved séance away from the trivial methods used previously.

Unlike trance mediumship and spirit writings, mediums often attempted to communicate with spirits in ways that the audience could confirm for themselves.[13] Mediums utilized a simple method of asking yes or no questions to the spirits they had contacted and then demanded the spirits answer using knocks, with one knock meaning yes and two knocks meaning no. The debunking of this aspect came swiftly, as skeptics quickly realized the medium knocked their feet underneath tables or used an unseen helper that knocked outside of the séance parlor. By introducing spirit boards and including sitters in the rituals, mediums held some defense against accusations of performative fraud.[14]

With the fundamental focus of mediumship revolving around death, the targeted audience of seances included those who experienced a great deal of grief. Since women's lives at this time

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[12] "Ouija, The Wonderful Talking Board." *Pittsburg Dispatch*, (1891): 12.

[13] Emile Grillot De Givry, *Picture Museum of Sorcery, Magic, and Alchemy*, translated by J. Courtenay Locke. New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, Inc, (1963): 170. An image depicts a doctor and his friend conferring with a spirit in a cemetery. See the appendix to view the image.

[14] Lundberg and Gunn, "Ouija Board," 86.

revolved around their status as wives and mothers, women found themselves at the mercy of hopelessness and depression following the deaths of their husbands and children. While strides in medicine attempted to create a safer environment for everyone, few succeeded. Victorian medicine lacked a deep understanding of germs, transmission, hygiene, and healthy child delivery techniques. Working conditions during the Industrial Revolution lacked significant safety measures. Both adults and children logged long hours with no breaks, lacked protection from harsh chemicals, and held no job security if they fell injured from workplace injuries. This brutal concoction of illness and physical duress leads to high mortality rates. With death constantly present in Victorian minds, séance culture came to fruition in England following a cultural shift in the United States known as the Second Great Awakening.[15]

During this period, a great revival took place within Protestant churches, as focus began to shift away from the ideas of predetermination to beliefs that individuals were individually responsible for their destinies. Cultural shifts allowed preachers to make grand claims of speaking to holy spirits to gain knowledge. As the idea of religious figures speaking to spirits became more common, individuals began to believe that they could talk to the spirits of deceased loved ones without fear of godly retribution. Cultural shifts allowed preachers to make grand claims of speaking to holy spirits to gain knowledge. As the idea of religious figures speaking to spirits became more common, individuals began to believe that they could talk to the spirits of deceased loved ones without fear of godly retribution. As these ideologies became paramount with the U.S., the culture began to seep into practice in other Western cultures, as seen in

[15] Aaron Kruczek- Hadley. *Everyday Religion: An Archaeology of Protestant Belief and Practice in the Nineteenth Century*. (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015), 16.

England. While death is always common everywhere, the presence of Britain's industrial revolution led to needless bloodshed within the poorer classes. [16]

With women left to deal with the emotional fallout of such horrendous losses, they turned to the new options of séance and mediumship to mend pieces within themselves. Historically, women's occupational options were scarcely limited. Housewifery reigned supreme over most aspects of life. The expectation placed on women from young ages was to marry quickly and procreate even more rapidly. As financial need and social constructs allowed it, women were permitted by their husbands or fathers to take up jobs with the contingency that said jobs would not affect their ability to perform as wives or mothers. Educational options were limited to upper-class women. Even with such options available, young women only learned skills that prepared them for domestic life, such as sewing and embroidery, playing musical instruments, reading, writing, and carrying themselves in graceful, eye-catching ways.[17]

With such a strict emphasis on women remaining chaste until marriage, young men and women led separate lives that only intersected at grand social events with parents constantly watching and chaperoning. Lower-class women did not have such strict expectations, but societal expectations still placed them within the home. Women that faced extreme, unfortunate circumstances often turned to prostitution to survive. As mediumship and seances began to gain more and more popularity, many lower-class women turned to mediumship and spirit parlors in hopes of earning income and supporting themselves without selling their bodies. Spiritualism served as one of the few areas within women's life where they maintained complete control; these female mediums chose which spirits to convey, how channeled energies presented

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[16] Kruczek, *Everyday Religion*, 24.

[17] Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualis*m, (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 2006), 22-27.

themselves, and what special effects to show the audience. Mediumship gave women some semblance of autonomy years before achieving it in other legal capacities.[18]

Men's rights towered over women's during this time. Men's freedoms include options to choose their educational path and career path and engage in social events with much less stress about their reputation. Men hold the ability to social climb through merit instead of marital ties. The roles of men within the home were minimal at best. Their responsibilities lie in the world of financial stability and managing the actions and reputations of their wives.[19]

Relationships within marriages often became strained due to a lack of overlapping ideals; men focused little on child-rearing and homemaking while women lacked a voice in financial matters present during the time. These issues often transferred to the bedroom as formal sexual education did not exist for women. Men, especially in upper-class households, had the option of patronizing brothels to explore their sexual desires. Adversely, mothers of young women forbade them from asking about such things due to the taboo nature of the question. By refusing to educate women about sex, women did not know what to expect regarding sexual intercourse, which led to disappointment and discontent within their marriage. Men's shortcomings, such as their lack of empathy and selfish nature, led them away from the redeeming light of mediumship in many cases. Women, however, embraced this change and utilized mediumship to awaken the more sexual aspects of their personalities. Channeling served as a very sensual, immersive experience that focused on the body and prowess of the woman rather than the man. This inversion of power in gendered environments helped empower women.[20]

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[18] Tromp, *Altered States*, 26.
[19] LeGates, "Cult of Womanhood," 32.
[20] Jill Galvan, *Sympathetic Medium*, 161.

While women eventually felt empowered by channeling, spiritualism began in a religious revival. This religious revolution led to the influx of individuals wishing to contact the dead, and a relative acceptance existed for seances within the Protestant community. One reverend, William Stainton Moses, wrote extensively on mediums, channeling, and spiritual guidance. Born to a father who served as a headmaster at a nearby school, Moses received an exemplary education from a young age. Through his family, he gained an intense love and interest in church and the stories of Christianity. While attending school at Bedford College, Moses encountered his first paranormal experience. One morning, Moses awoke to find an essay in his handwriting that he had no recollection of writing, as he fell ill with a fever the night before; Moses accredited his successful essay as his first experience with spirit writing. Following his time at Bedford College, Moses received a scholarship to Oxford, where he earned his master's degree and became an ordained minister of the Church of England.[21]

Although Moses was a man of faith, he despised fellow religious leaders for their lack of belief in supernatural occurrences that did not exist at the hands of religious icons, such as Jesus. Moses also disliked scientific skeptics, remarking, "there is another reason that imports much uncertainty into this special investigation. We are not dealing, as the astronomer, for instance, is, without which is in itself fixed, which acts according to law more or less known to us, and respecting which we have a body of fact from which we can proceed on our way of further observation and experiment."[22] Often, Moses argued that blind following of the Holy Spirit paired with denial of the spirit energies of parted loved ones served as hypocritical nonsense.

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[21] L. Anne Delgado and Dame Gillian Beer, "Psychical Research and the Fantastic Science of Spirits." *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 250.

[22] William Stainton Moses, *Spirit Identity and Higher Aspects of Spiritualism*, (London: Spirit Writings, 1902), 7.

Moses disagreed with the idea of repeatable experiments that showed the same results as proving or disproving the existence of the paranormal. Throughout both his writings and from historical accounts, Moses denied skeptics the opportunity to disprove his theories of spiritualism. [23]

Moses often wrote of the importance of women within spiritual circles; he used the word "operator" to describe mediums, as he felt that the word fit better. Operators held more control over the spirits possessed, in the opinion of Moses. By referring to themselves as an operator, psychic-sensitive individuals enabled themselves to control spirits rather than allowing said spirits to overtake their bodies. Through operating, Moses created his most prolific spirit writings.[24]

Moses took a great interest in the plight of photographing specters. He created a popular, iconic form of art known as spirit photography through his works. During the Victorian Era, photography was still in its infancy. Cameras used negative exposure plates to create images. If the exposure plate was not properly stored or developed, or if the plate was used multiple times without development in between, photographs developed with images superimposed on each other. Moses used this to his advantage. After a picture took place, Moses altered the exposure plate through double-exposure and drawing. While the images in question remained fraudulent, the impact of such photographs is solid and present. Furthermore, Moses helped found the London Spiritualist Alliance and the publishing agency known as Spirit Writings. These contributions allowed for a complex, interwoven society of spiritualists, skeptics, mediums, and seances sitters to interact and thrive through meetings, performances, writings, and fundraising events. His infatuation and respect for morbid, supernatural practices and well-respected religious background allowed spiritualist followers to thrive within London. Moses also served

[23] Moses, *Spirit Identity*, 14.
[24] Ibid, 27.

as one of the first members of the British Society of Psychical Research. While William Stainton Moses found fame and attention through his beliefs and writings, other individuals with such claims and similarities found themselves outcast by their society.[25]

Spiritual women in religious roles endured needless abuse at the hands of the church. Catholic nuns with a strong sense of empathy typically found roles as healers; these women traveled to the homes of ill members of their church to perform rituals that would help banish their ailments. In some cases, these women consumed the body fluids of their parishioners to draw out their illnesses. Some nuns also experienced stigmata, the temporary experience of having Christ's wounds. In rare cases, religious women spoke of their trances involving holy figures. One woman named Joanna Southcott experienced horrible treatment because of her religious visions. Southcott, known locally as a prophetess, worked closely with the Church of England for most of her adult life. She often spoke of how the Spirit of God communicated with her through visions and trances; Southcott wrote of her visions in pamphlets that she sold to her followers. Southcott amassed a large following and a decent sum of money through this means of business. This aspect of her mediumship served as a happily celebrated gift by most religious officials until 1814, when the 65-year-old, unmarried, perceived-virgin claimed that she carried the Messiah due to a vision she received from God. Outraged erupted as critics argued that she mocked the sanctity of both God and the church through her claims. Hundreds flocked to get a glimpse of her body, hoping to see evidence, or lack thereof, of her biblical pregnancy. Unfortunately, many morbidly curious individuals served as voyeurs to her death. Southcott's

[25] Delgado, "Fantastic Science," 250.

biblical "pregnancy" was, in fact, a growing abdominal tumor; many spectators arrived in time to witness the poor woman succumb to the rupture of the tumor.[26]

As spiritualism and mediumship continued to grow in popularity during the mid-19th century, mediums shifted focus away from practical or morally acceptable aspects of séance to capitalize on the performative elements. With religious rules becoming more lax in the new, post-industrial age, women attempted to break from the traditional mold of womanhood. As participation in séance grew to more significant, wealthier audiences, mediums forced themselves to up the ante, typically through alcohol. Many mediums found it much easier to channel, slip into a trance, and engage with sitters after the proverbial veil lifted due to intoxication. While at first, the intoxicated aspect of new séance acted as a temporary solution to a permanent problem, it soon met with fierce criticism from the temperance movement in the 1830s. Opinions split between the spiritualist community. The use of alcohol and drugs to enhance the performance of mediums and sitters meant an increase in income, better reviews, and relieving pressure from the ever-demanding spiritualist community. Yet, the formation of such reliance and addiction directly opposed the large, religious-minded portion of the community. As support for temperance grew, attendance to mediums engaged in recreational drug and alcohol use sharply decreased.[27]

An example of one such occurrence took place in October of 1878. A young medium, known as Annie Fairlamb Mellon, fell from grace from the Newcastle Psychological Society because of her alcohol use and disorderly conduct. A letter written to the editor of the spiritualist newspaper *The Medium and The Daybreak* read:

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[26] Susan Juster, "Mystical Pregnancy and Holy Bleeding: Visionary Experience in Early Modern Britain and America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 2, (2000): 249-253.

[27] Tromp, *Altered States*, 150-160.

> It is generally supposed that Miss Fairlamb was the paid servant or medium of the Newcastle Society and subject to the committee's authority. This is a mistake, which I have been frequently called upon to correct. The fact is, Miss Fairlamb, after a great deal of insult and annoyance during the winter months of 1876-7 from the alcoholic element introduced into the promiscuous sciences of the society, over which she at the time had no control, tendered her resignation in March, 1877. [28]

Fairlamb's excessive alcohol use led to her forced resignation from a well-respected spiritual institution.

While her expulsion from the Newcastle Society temporarily set back her career ambitions, it failed to stop her from continuing her work as a medium. After striking a business deal with a fellow medium, Catherine Wood, Fairlamb's escapades continued. Fairlamb and Wood gained fame internationally for their abilities as mediums and their unique niche of channeled spirits. For instance, Fairlamb and Wood often dressed as dead children from imperialized colonies of Britain. Fairlamb often acted as a deceased five-year-old Indian child while Wood assumed the role of a four-year-old African child. While dressed as dead, colonized children, this pair of mediums often groped, kissed, pickpocketed, and otherwise harassed the audience before them.[29] Fortunately, this disrespectful trope came to an end through the debunking work of the skeptic Thomas Henry in 1894. Henry describes the moment in which he witnessed Fairlamb's fraud occurring. The famous spirit channeled by Fairlamb, Cissie wore a black shawl and a muslin headwrap. After grabbing Fairlamb, who exited from her spirit cabinet wearing a false beard, Thomas recalls noticing evidence of further fraud within her cabinet: "I then entered the cabinet and found on the floor a small black shawl, some old muslin, Mrs.

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[28] William Armstrong, "Mrs. Mellon and the Newcastle Society," *The Medium and Daybreak* (October 25, 1878): 6. The complete name of the medium mentioned is Annie Fairlamb Mellon. The account listed does not refer to this medium by her married name. For this reason, Annie Fairlamb Mellon will be referred to as Fairlamb to aid in continuity.

[29] Tromp, *Altered States*, 95-105.

Mellon's shoes, and stockings, and a small black cotton bag about 9 inches square, with black tapes attached to it."[30]

The example seen with Fairlamb offers imperialism deeply penetrated English consciousness on every level. As séance culture and the morbid obsession grew popular, popular literature reflected the same patterns. The people of Britain maintained a certain level of curiosity about the nations from which they received goods. This allowed authors to capitalize on both ideas of imperial curiosity and morbid obsession.[31]

One white, British author took it upon himself to share his imagined ideas of spiritualism in Indian culture. Grant Allen, the author of *Kalee's Shrine*, offers invaluable insight into the minds of British imperialists of the time through his writings. Allen begins his book by describing a scene in which a young Indian child bears witness to a priest experiencing the vision of a spirit. The priest sees an evil goddess walking towards him, uttering curses; her name is Kalee, and she is thirsty for blood. The child is immediately frightened by the priest's deranged utterings and attempts to flee the area; however, Kalee envisions the scenario differently. The goddess possesses the priest and cuts the throat and the tongue of the unlucky child before regressing into her spiritual form. Through his writings, Allen helped British individuals conceive an opinion, albeit a false, vicious, and stereotyped Indian culture and spiritualism. [32]

Other 19th century authors at the time capitalized off spiritualism in more pragmatic ways. Author and spiritualist Andrew Lang compiled a book of firsthand experiences with ghosts and specters. Throughout his work, he discusses the importance of both spiritualism and science. Before discussing the existence of ghosts and the arguments of science, Lang offers, "science

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[30] Thomas Shekleton Henry and Harry Price, *Spookland*, (Chicago: Clyde Publishing Co, 1902), 51.
[31] Tromp, *Altered States*, 104.
[32] Grant Allen, *Kalee's Shrine*, (New York: New Amsterdam Book Company, 1879), 5-17.

admits, if asked, that it does not know everything. It is not inconceivable that living minds may communicate by some other channel than that of recognized senses."[33] By compiling the individual stories of many unknown individuals, Lang helps to create a narrative of connection and a sense of community for individuals that felt isolated in their experiences. Writing stood as one of the few forms of escape for women. Through his intuitive writings, Lang inspired women to tune into the less logical parts of themselves in favor of discovering new experiences through phantasmagoria.[34]

Other forms of writing, such as spiritualist newsletters, pamphlets, and editorials, thrived in Victorian Era England due to printing presses' quick, streamlined nature. Less powerful, poorer individuals consumed and created literature at great rates. One newsletter, titled *The British Spiritual Telegraph,* focused on the opinions of the paranormal through the lens of college-aged individuals. These newsletters varied in the topic on a weekly. An article from August 1857 demands that its readers take a critical review of religion, arguing, "arouse yourselves, a great work has to be accomplished; the Christian churches have to be shaken; the materialistic tendencies of the age have to be arrested."[35] As the newsletter continues publication, its early emphasis on challenging the ideas of Christianity is subdued. Later works focus solely on accounts of spiritual experiences that involve the presence of the Holy Spirit or religious revelations through visions or trances. A statement hailing from one of the last issues of the newsletter reads, "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are enfolded in the word of God, so that it is as impossible to add to it, as it is to add anything to the material universe; every new truth in religion or science is merely an unfolding of the wisdom of God of which the

[33] Andrew Lang, *Book of Dreams and Ghosts*, (New York: Causeway Books, 1897), 106.
[34] Lang, *Dreams and Ghosts*, 110.
[35] "Stir Up the Gift of God that is Within Thee," *The British Spiritual Telegraph*, August 23, 1857.

scriptures are the written expression and the invisible universe the material expression."[36] The progression of these writings shows how views on religions fluctuate over time. Initially, the newsletter wished to rebel against the sanctions of the church. By the end of the publication, the letter turned back towards religious sanctions for guidance. This example is just one of many that show how culture changed again following the close of the 19th century.

As the 20th century quickly approached, changes began to occur again within British society. Although women who partook in mediumship enjoyed the relative freedom it supplied, women expected more from their day-to-day lives. The ideals of women's suffrage went from an uncanny, intangible dream to a demanding, necessary plan. As this cultural shift occurred, women found themselves abandoning the ideas of spiritualism in hopes of gaining the ability to be intelligent, respected, voting, and employed women rather than just existing as wives and mothers. Spiritualism allowed women to explore their sexual identities and cope with the archaic structures present in their lives. While interest in séance lessened, it did not expire. Instead, séance and mediumship adapted to meet the requirements of the new age and the new woman.

[36] "A Vision of Midsummer Morning Dream" *The British Spiritual Telegraph*, November 1, 1869.