This thesis analyses the position of working-class women in Victorian Spiritualism, and how they transcended class positions using their role as mediums. Spiritualism was a religious movement that was popular in both North America and Europe during the Victorian era, and women were especially important to the movement because of their “innate” connection to the natural and supernatural realms. As the movement primarily focused on communication to and from the spirit world, women acted as intermediaries by using their bodies as “vessels” and through this attained positions of power and respect. Recent scholarship has mostly focused on the contributions of middle-class women towards this movement; however, working-class women were also greatly involved in Spiritualist circles. Working-class women were held to a different societal standard however, due to sexual and moral qualities that had been prescribed upon them by the middle class. There were many working-class women Spiritualists but how they were introduced to the movement and how they operated within it differed to their middle-class peers.

This thesis examines why Spiritualism was appealing to working-class women, because they would not have used the movement to gain access to the public sphere (as was the case with middle-class women). Working-class women were already present in the public sphere and thus there must have been another reason why they were drawn to the movement. As is shown in the thesis, many Spiritualists also identified as Socialists; the two movements shared many similarities, including a vision of a utopic future where classes and genders were equal as well as a distrust for the middle-class Christians of their society. Another question examined is how working-class women viewed their own position in Spiritualism, which brings forth issues of agency and consciousness. Through examining sources from the mediums themselves as well as newspapers I am able to construct an understanding that working-class mediums knew that in order to be respected in the Spiritualist community they had to downplay their own involvement as well as emphasize their lack of interest in worldly goods. A portion of this thesis focuses on the differing treatment of public and private mediums – those women who were private mediums were commonly regarded as less likely to be fraudulent and more respected than those who were public – public, in this instance, meaning those mediums who took payment for séances and extended their circle beyond that of their family and friends. Working-class women in Spiritualism remain emblematic of contradictions that were so prevalent in Victorian society – the body of the working-class woman was thought to be her strength and her connection to the spirit realm, but it was only through giving up her agency and acting as a mouthpiece for these spirits was she respected and taken seriously.

Research methods I have used include an examination of historical sources, mainly being newspapers, accounts from people present at séances and an autobiography from one of the most prominent mediums of the time. I have also included a brief overview of intersectionality and why it is important for this thesis, as well as an analysis of power. From my thesis I hope to show the Spiritualist movement from the perspective of working-class women as well as how they used it to attain their own agency.
In Public, In Power: Working-Class Women and Victorian Spiritualism

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1. Introduction

There is no era that is perhaps more historically emblematic of stringent sexual and class norms than Victorian Britain. Classes and genders were compartmentalised on every level, from the spaces they inhabited to the language they used, and women were especially policed. The mechanization of the Industrial Revolution, as well as indirect influence from moral and societal codices, resulted in already existing class norms becoming interspersed with gendered language and properties, and no group was more diligently policed than working-class women. Working-class women defied, and offended, the societal norms defined by the middle class through their appearance in the public sphere, their participation in the paid-labour force, and their apparent immoral attitude towards feminine sexuality. Spaces where both middle-class and working class interacted together, especially for womenfolk, were scarce – the public and private dichotomies that they inhabited were not designed for intermingling. One area in which working-class women found themselves not only participating, but leading, was that of religion – more specifically, that of the Spiritualism craze which was rampant in western Victorian society in the second-half of the nineteenth century.

Spiritualism, which flourished in both England and North America between the 1840s and 1920s, was a religious movement that was predominantly based upon the communication with and relaying of messages to and from the spirit world. As the movement developed, more emphasis was placed on the full materialization of spirits who were thought to possess knowledge about the worldly plane and the afterlife. It was through this mode of communication where women would be placed at the forefront of the movement – not only were women encouraged to partake in leadership roles, their innate moral superiority was thought to give them a predilection to engaging with the spirits. For working-class women, whose every move was judged in contrast to their middle-class counterparts, Spiritualism offered an outlet not only in which they could prove their own moral worthiness, but where they could actually transcend their own class and the constraints that accompanied it. I hypothesize that the Spiritualist movement, which has often been viewed as a primarily middle-class movement, was just as beneficial to working-class women, who used it to circumvent their class and gender restraints and created a new space for themselves; not in spite of their femininity, but because of it. Through acting as mediums, leading seances and disseminating Spiritual ideas both verbally and in print, women came to the forefront of a movement in which
they were able to indirectly challenge their sexuality and use it to their advantage. I would like to clarify that when I mention the term *mediums*, I am referring to those men and women who were employed to act as intermediaries between the spirit world and the corporeal one, both through transmitting messages and, later on, using their bodies as sites of spirit possession. A *Spiritualist* in this context refers to one who believed and dabbled in the art of spirit communication whether as a séance attendee or as a medium. This subject will be analysed through the examination of primary documents from the mediums themselves and newspapers and journals from their counterparts both male and female, as well as research materials surrounding working-class women, female mediums and Socialism. Through analysing these, I will demonstrate why working-class women flocked to Spiritualism, as well as how they used the movement to transcend the stigma that surrounded not only their gender, but their class position. Additionally, the sources will display how working-class women saw themselves and how they displayed themselves to the public.

1.1 Research Questions

Why was Spiritualism appealing to working-class women? I wish firstly to examine why Spiritualism became appealing to the working-class in the first place. For middle-class women, it is commonly thought that Spiritualism and their performance as mediums gave a new sense of freedom and liberality that would not have been possible otherwise. However, the majority of working-class women were already in the public sphere – they were not bound by the same sense of propriety as their middle-class counterparts. Why get into Spiritualism at all? I believe that working-class were introduced to Spiritualism through a variety of channels, one of the main ones being Socialism. As I will demonstrate, Socialism and Spiritualism very similarly aligned on several topics, and members of one often dabbled in the other. The idea of respectability is also quite prevalent, which shall be elaborated upon in the next question.

How did working class women view their own position in Spiritualism? This is perhaps the trickiest question, as I am fully aware of the bias present in sources like autobiographies and newspapers that makes it difficult to get a point of view other than that of the authors. However, my goal is not to examine the credibility of these sources, but instead to examine how they contributed to the discourse surrounding working-class women and Spiritualism. The working-class as a whole was prescribed a largely unflattering set of characteristics by their middle-class counterparts, and as I will show, Spiritualism offered working-class women a chance to
grasp respectability on their own terms, instead of having to conform to those of the middle-
class.

How did they navigate their own class and gender constructs to attain positions of power in the
Spiritualist community? This is a multi-layered question, but I emphasize some key facets here;
namely, to separate themselves from accusations of fraud, to use channels such as
autobiographies and newspapers to promote themselves as vacant vessels for spirits to inhabit,
and to separate themselves from middle-class Spiritualism through religious, economic and
political ideologies. The working-class medium faced similar challenges when presenting
herself as a Spiritualist as a middle-class medium in terms of gender dynamics and the
relinquishing of autonomy, but working-class women needed to navigate different channels in
order to tip the precarious power structure in their favour.

1.2 Methodology and Sources

I will conduct an analysis of my historical sources as well as include an intersectional overview
of class and gender. I am examining my primary materials to display how these working-class
women, were represented and discussed, both by others and by themselves. My source
materials are varied and are based on works by the mediums and their inner circle themselves
as well as Spiritualist newspapers, primarily Two Worlds and Medium and Daybreak. My
autobiography of focus is that of Emma Hardinge Britten, who was born in the UK and was
part of the upper echelon of the working class. She was pivotal in popularizing Spiritualism
and became the editor of the Two Worlds newspaper, which had a primarily working-class
readership. Britten’s other publications have also been of use here when looking at how
Spiritualism represented gender equality, such as in her publication The Place and Mission of
Women; the Faith, Facts and Frauds of Religious History; and Spiritualism Vindicated, and
Clerical Slanders Refuted. I chose the publications of Hardinge Britten as the primary self-
published works to base my analysis upon because Hardinge Britten represented the trifecta of
what I am examining – she is from England, had a modest start in life, and was outspoken on
both gender and class constructs of her time. Publications from champions of the public
mediums are also of interest here, as they display the defences of public mediums and strategies
used to implement them. Several newspapers proved to be the most telling as to the mentality
both of Spiritualists and Socialists and how they viewed the rest of society, the chief ones being
Medium and Daybreak, the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, and the Two Worlds. I examined
the autobiographical sources, looking for instances of what I found to be a common theme in Spiritualist mediums – emphasizing their passivity, their reluctance to become a spirit channel, but their eventual acquiescence upon their realization it was for the greater good. Emma’s autobiography was published over a hundred years ago, and there are several things I tried to keep in mind when examining her published works – firstly, that it is impossible to know whether Emma herself was convinced of what she wrote, or if she merely knew the tricks to establish herself as a reputable medium and so kept with them. Secondly, Emma’s audience would have mainly been fellow Spiritualists, so Emma’s writing her support for public mediums is not an action that would have fallen on deaf ears. Lastly, that Emma still manages to perform the typical trope of her peers, which is to emphasize her passivity and her fear at being “chosen” to become a Spiritualist vessel. Another theme particularly seen in Emma Hardinge Britten’s publications is her championing of the public medium, and her support for both Spiritualist and Socialist institutions and cooperation. Spiritualism co-existed at the same time as Evangelical Christianity, but I am not focusing on how mediums managed to live in two worlds at once. I am instead interested in the various fields in which working-class women were introduced to and practiced Spiritualism, as well as also how working-class problems and struggles were presented in Spiritualist newspapers. One of the most important things I would like to impress upon the reader is the way that working-class women used the tools that were available to them to subsume the traditional power hierarchy and thus establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with. Working-class women relinquished control over their bodies to allow spirits to speak through them, allowing them to propel into the spirit world, although they were far more aware of the challenges of their position and the class strata they occupied and were not afraid to criticised this. I have also taken the reports of the mediums as well as the accounts the mediums themselves wrote at face value – I am not analysing these materials with the purpose of deciding if the mediums were genuinely convinced of their spirituality, but instead how they used it to indirectly challenge the patriarchal hegemonic discourse they operated within.

The intersectionality between gender and class has been prevalent for decades, and gender relations can effectively both constitute, as well as symbolize, the differences in power.¹ Historian Joan Scott, author of *Gender: A useful Category of Historical Analysis* wrote that

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“gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. 2 Even in relationships of employment, people entered them as gendered beings until the salience of this is halted directly. 3 Rosemary Crompton, author of *Class theory and gender*, writes that R.W. Connell identifies three inter-related structures of gender relations – that of the labour division overall, power (in which authority is synonymous with masculinity), and the construction of people with emotionally charged social relations. 4 We can assume some of the obvious similarities that gender and class share in regards to power – their inequality in social resources, a lack of cultural and political influence, an inequality in making use of existing resources, an imbalance in the division of duties and rights, differential treatment due to standards of judgement, a cultural representation inequality such as the stereotyping of the working-class by the middle-class, and psychological acceptance of inferiority – that is, insecurity of one’s position. 5

I wanted to employ an intersectional approach when conducting my research and writing, because I realise that (white) working-class women would have faced prejudice twice over whilst trying to conduct their daily lives, and this was important for me to acknowledge. The women that I have researched would have faced challenges and preconceptions as a result of both their class and sexed body, and I wished to address this by emphasizing that these two traits are not mutually exclusive. This thesis dwells heavily on the idea of duality – that of the private and the public, the moral and the illicit, the body and the being. Much of Victorian ideology was based upon the premise that there is a Cartesian dualism – as feminist theorist and philosopher Elizabeth Grosz explained, “the assumption that there are two distinct mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances, mind and body, each of which inhabits its own self-contained sphere”. 6 The body and mind trope resulted in the idea that woman were inherently “more biological, more corporeal, more natural than men” 7 Cartesian theory was seen as scientific fact – women’s passivity and sensitivity meant that they could absorb the consciousness of surrounding spirits, and even in the mediums’ own autobiographies, they emphasized their weakness to enforce their femininity and create a way for them to be in the public sphere that was accepted and acknowledged. The body was not discussed in the

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3 Rose, *Limited*, 16.
5 Leijenaar et. al., *The Gender of Power*, 52.
7 Ibid., 45.
autobiographies, because this could jeopardize their credibility. Additionally, Ann Braude, Director of Women’s Studies at Harvard Divinity School, writes that Spiritualism was the first “women’s religion”. That Spiritualism held an extremely prevalent position when it came to the empowerment of women I am fully in accord, but I am going to go beyond that to examine how the religion functioned for and was navigated by working-class women. Examining the experience of working-class women here was inspired in part by a quotation from Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, authors of *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, who were motivated to show that “gender and class always operate together, that consciousness of class always takes a gendered form”.

The autobiographies that I reference are also an important facet when looking at the self-perception of these female mediums – they are a critical recognition of how women comprehended their own roles within the processes that shaped them. When looking at the process women underwent in a historical framework, it could best be described as one “subsuming the history of gender relations within an overarching meta-theory of modernity articulated from the vantage point of the present”. In the autobiographies of mediums, their relationship to others is depicted as one of authority, not of dependence, and they show both a non-traditional and a non-patriarchal viewpoint. In addition, the autobiographies of mediums occupied a middle ground between private and public spheres, and according to historian Elizabeth Lowry, were crucial in constructing “their bodies strategically within and against competing discourses”. The occult experiences and narratives are combined in order to present the experiences as truth. I focus specifically on one autobiography, that of Emma Hardinge Britten, but I feel that given Emma’s fame at the time and her respected position as a medium and a champion of working-class women, examining her self-representation was a vital component in constructing the viewpoint of the working-class Spiritualist woman.

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8 Ibid., 51.
13 Lowry, Otherworldly, 4.
1.3 Concepts and Previous Studies

I am hoping to present a new angle on the field of female Spiritualists, by focusing my attention on those working-class women who were Spiritualists. Previous excellent works have been written on female mediums, including social and cultural historian Alex Owen in her 1989 book *The Darkened Room*, which proposed that a psychoanalysis of the female mediums operating in Victorian Britain would determine that these spirit representations that were manifested were tools to bring the repressed psyche to the forefront of societal discourse.\(^{15}\) Owen’s work mainly discussed middle-class female Spiritualists but she also briefly touched upon the position of working-class women, which in part inspired me to conduct further research on the topic. I also read the works of Tatiana Kontou, who wrote *Women and the Victorian Occult*. Of particular use here in the connection between Socialism and Spiritualism has been Logie Barrow, in his work *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910*. All of these books have contributed to an understanding of Spiritualism for women and for the working-class; however, I am interested in the intersectionality of these two points and how they fit into the realm of Spiritualism. In summation, my thesis will elaborate upon the topic touched upon by Alex Owen, in her book *The Darkened Room*, in which she briefly mentioned that for women, Spiritualism could “…in certain circumstances…provide a means of circumventing rigid nineteenth-century class and gender norms. More importantly, it did so without mounting a direct attack on the status quo”.\(^{16}\) A primary area of interest that intersects with virtually every facet of the lives of the mediums is that of power – power they acquired, power they acknowledged, and power that, for however short a time, was not granted to them by the favour of anyone else. As I examine my sources and analyse the position of the mediums as well as how they viewed themselves, I hope to prove the tenacity of the quote by Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, authors of *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, that “Gender is critical to social relationships, and the historicity of gender usually changes as do the cultural markers which it measures itself by”.\(^{17}\)


\(^{16}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 4.

1.3.1 Power and the Body

If I am to construct an analysis on how working-class women operated within Spiritualism, especially how they operated as mediums, it is vital that I write about their mode of entertaining any such notion: their body. It is necessary to touch upon the topic of power and discourse, and if there was any true form of it in the strategies that women, especially working-class women, employed to renegotiate their status. Foucault criticised the idea that power is possessed by one specific group and that it is inherently damaging, stating instead that “Power is everywhere, and comes from everywhere”\(^\text{18}\), and also that “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms…power produces, it produces reality…the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of his belong to this production.”\(^\text{19}\) Thus, whilst women were oppressed, they were able to subvert this by operating outside the framework which they were typically confined. Women used their own power to negotiate their own separate identities. The *History Of Sexuality* introduces sexuality as a gendered phenomenon that was coined in the 18\(^\text{th}\) century – the first step was to thoroughly sexualise the feminine body, and then determine its worthiness through fertility, maintenance of a family atmosphere, and the upbringing of children.\(^\text{20}\) Feminist theory has long shown how images of female sexuality that circulated through the cultural sphere, thus turning sexuality into a culturally saturated phenomenon of power relations. Foucault’s own research on this concept as the body of the site of oppression is not without its own problems – it reduces individuals to passive bodies and does not give an accurate account of why gender is the root cause of so many disciplinary actions.\(^\text{21}\) Additionally, he falls short when explaining how with the rampant feminization of women, several women still felt short of neatly into these circumscribed roles.\(^\text{22}\) Nevertheless, for the purpose of the intersection of looking at the power relations in this thesis and how they can be malleable, Foucault is the most succinct.\(^\text{23}\)

However, it is imperative that when studying the oppression of women, whether as a cultural or natural concept, that an analysis of the body is made, primarily due to bodily difference being the key example when used to explain women’s inferiority. This oppression has usually been enacted twofold – firstly, by using the standard of male bodies when comparing women’s


\(^{22}\) Ibid. 41.

\(^{23}\) Ibid. 12.
and men’s bodies, and secondly, by conflating social characteristics with biological traits. For Foucault, knowing the body outside of its cultural signifiers is impossible; “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”. The sexed body is also the site of where power relations are resisted; “there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised”. Foucault’s power theory has been the bulwark of research after, but he fails to acknowledge the gendered dynamic that governs all power relations. Writer and feminist Karlene Faith extrapolated upon Foucault’s ideas by applying them to the feminist resistance, showing that feminists are responsible in the promotion of “subjugated knowledges”. Faith elaborated on her suggestion by showing that resistance, especially feminist resistance, “begins with the body’s refusal to be subordinated, an instinctual withdrawal from the patriarchal forces to which it is often violently subjected”. Additionally, the feminine view of power need an analysis to be included, with an emphasis on domination and subjugation, for a gendered perspective on feminist power. As I examined the working-class medium, I was able to view her tactical use of femininity and the accompanying traits – she uses events and turns them into opportunities, which are subsequently determined by the absence of power. Additionally, the changing identity of the medium corresponds with Foucault’s theory that personal identity can change, in what he deems “coalition politics”; that is, that subordinate groups can examine dominant groups and notice how they will share some, but not all, of the same interests. Foucault eliminates the assumption that a humanistic viewpoint was at all present, instead focusing that authentic consciousness is the legitimate basis of consent. Mediums, and their ability to ascend to positions of leadership and respect in the Spiritualist circle proved Foucault’s hypothesis – “we’re never trapped by power: it’s

24 Ibid., 17.
25 Ibid., 27.
26 Ibid., 39.
28 Radtke and Henderikus, Power, 39.
32 Ibid., 21.
always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy”.

In her book *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman elaborates on how the civil society created through the sexual contract has patriarchal and political rights as interchangeable, and this same contract places patriarchy at the top. Pateman also discusses how in the dichotomy between public and private, women are part of the private sphere but also part of the civil sphere – the contract is sexual because it establishes bodily control, and political because it controls freedoms. Although this thesis touches upon the actual bodies of the mediums, I am more interested in the *traits* that were prescribed to them due to their status, and how they used Spiritualism to subvert these. Foucault emphasized, “…that the power relations traversing the body are neither necessarily consciously perceived and then internalized by the individual nor can they be traced to specific forms of institutional power. Power focuses directly upon the body as material, chemical, and mechanical substance.” As Foucault stated, normal power relations are changeable, and are the pre-existing condition for establishing the social relationship for those individuals who are free. For power to exist, a set of objectives and goals must be in place, such as those of the working-class mediums to distance themselves from the traditional confines of their position. These traditional confines were the result of several decades of physical and mental policing from the upper classes, which is where the role of Spiritualism as a method of subverting these norms became of great importance.

33 Ibid., 23.
2. Examining the Female Medium

What exactly was the Spiritualist movement? It can be perhaps stated that in any other religious movement, women would not have been able to reach such prominence because they were women. Spiritualism emerged first in the United States, and had reached England in 1852 with the arrival of one Mrs Hayden, who began advertising as a medium that October. Spiritualism was able to coexist harmoniously with other religions at the time because it did not besmirch Divine Intervention yet still allowed people direct communication with their beloved deceased. Although Britain was the epicentre of a number of worldwide scientific and educational advancements which challenged their understanding about natural order, family life still centred around the doctrines of Christianity – evangelicalism at the time was considered to be “the strongest binding force in a nation which without it might have broken up…” Even if one didn’t circumscribe to organized religion, spirits were a rational outcome of the world; they were able to be seen, touched, and communicated with, and thus accompanied atheistic and agnostic viewpoints. Spiritualism had inherited the idea of the moral superiority of women from the Evangelical revivalism that swept the country, but it was specific Christian sects that gave women a leadership platform. Diana Basham, author of The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society, wrote that it was the similarities of existence that women shared with spirits that allowed them to compose such a vital part of the Spiritualist movement. Tatiana Kontou concurred with this thought when she published that Victorian female spiritualists “…existed within an uncertain medium whose dimensions were simultaneously literal and metaphoric”. The Spiritualist woman was praised for being “a very womanly woman…possessed of that delicacy and fineness of feeling which forms the true beauty of womanhood”. This was quite in opposition to the mainstream societal view of Victorian working-class women, which contained no inkling of femininity but was primarily always of a sexual nature. None of the distinctions between working-class and middle-class women were made evident here – there was no formal sexual hierarchy, working-class women were not associated with lower-bodily functions, and all

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38 Owen, Darkened Room. 19.
39 Ibid., 23
40 G. M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age (London, Oxford University, 1960), 5.
41 Owen, Darkened Room, 23.
42 Ibid., 12.
45 Skeggs, Formations, 100.
women, regardless of their occupation and the sphere they inhabited were endowed with womanly qualities which rendered them morally superior to the opposite sex. Spiritualism and the movement to liberate Victorian women emerged at roughly the same time, and can be connected through worldly works of literature and art. Author Marlene Tromp commented that “from Kensington Palace to the penny press, debates about Spiritualism appeared everywhere”.

In 1849, Elizabeth Blackwell became the first female medical doctor; an advocate of Spiritualism, she had consistently stated that it was through mesmerism that she discovered her vocation. The ghost’s club at Cambridge University was founded in 1851, and was both a predecessor to the Society for Psychical Research as well as a platform for discussing the reform of women’s education. One of the earliest members of the Society for Psychical Research was Eleanor Sidgwick, who also became the Principal of Newham College in London and partook in the fostering of higher education for women.

When examining the unique position of working-class women and their double subjugation, I found it necessary to introduce ideas of class and the role it played within the context of nineteenth-century England. In Distinction, Pierre Bourdieu claims that marks of class are inscribed upon the bodies as intrinsically as those of gender. I found this concept important to include because the medium’s main weapon in navigating class and gender boundaries was her corporeal body. Power is the medium through which collective interests are realised, including those of class. Class is a specific construct that is viewed within the realm of historicity – it places itself onto material inequalities, and thus influences access to resources both cultural and economic. Class is difficult to define for feminist theorists, partially because of the difficulty in examining how class relates to the sexual division of labour. Additionally, analysing both class and gender together becomes problematic as the forces of society that divide the masculine and feminine, as well as the lower and upper classes, also separate them.

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46 Georgina O’Brien Hill. "‘Above the Breath of Suspicion’: Florence Marryat and the Shadow of the Fraudulent Trance Medium.” Women’s Writing 15, no. 3 (2008), 334.
48 Ibid., 123.
50 McNay, Foucault and Feminism, 37.
51 Leijenaar, et. al. Gender, 8.
52 Skeggs, Formations, 6.
physically. In the nineteenth century, class was reliant upon gender to express itself, and class in nineteenth-century scholarship was intrinsically bound to the ideas of sexual difference. Upon conducting my research, I needed to incorporate at least a brief overview of the history of the working class in England, and how working-class women were viewed. I chose to include Marx because his focus is in the working class and their struggle, yet at the same time the lack of acknowledgment of the separate struggle of working-class women clearly shows the gaps in the historical tableau. Marxism is unique in that it sees the economic climate as the determinant for the social stratification of its participants. However, Marxists have been criticized for their failure to understand that the models they developed out of the examination of men do not fit the relationship to the means of production when looking at the women-specific structure. Marx viewed women as part of the proletariat, but the only class model they were offered the chance to assimilate into was that influenced by the men which had been studied. Similarly, the ideal standard held in regard by the working-class had a moral imperative that could have been a possible reaction not only to social factors but also colonial immigration. Women, both middle and working-class, were excluded from market and politics due to the emphasis of these spheres, and working-class men used the fact that they held property in their labour to exclude working-class women yet again. However, women did not cease their participation in the labour force – rather, their participation aided the expansion of the means of production, and their employment as domestic servants and laundresses was a vital part of building the service-sector economy. Exponential growth of towns and cities and subsequent urbanization meant that men and women experienced a “promiscuous mingling of the sexes”. Working-class women were stuck in an endless cycle in which the middle-class associated them with the polluting images that the middle-class themselves had prescribed to them. This effect resulted in a greater policing of the working-class, for the middle-class adhered to the idea that “in the working-class world, aesthetic criteria

54 Joan Wallach Scott. Gender and the Politics of History (1999), 60.
56 Nancy C. M. Hartsock, Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 148.
58 Frader and Rose, Gender and Class, 26.
59 Ibid., 15.
60 Ibid., 17.
61 Ibid. 199.
and rules of conduct are inverted”. The most alarming concern that stemmed from industrialization was the subsequent effect on the lower classes, which was viewed as “…a spirit of precocious independence which weakens family ties and is highly unfavourable to the growth of domestic virtues”. What I will examine is how working-class women used Spiritualism to cast off these unfavourable qualities which were bestowed upon them by the middle class.

2.1 The Construction of the Working-Class Woman

I have noted that the discord between women in middle and working classes was inherently based in their sexuality, and the respective qualities which accompanied it. Whereas middle-class women emphasized their lack of sexual instinct and passivity, they looked down on working-class women as depraved creatures with rampant sexual urges. Class was “steeped in and spoken through the language of sexual differentiation”. When studying the working-class, Engels wrote that they were “a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality” – thus, they were engrainged with the sexual norms that accompanied someone of their standards. Social purity movements during the 1870s and 1880s held both men and women to high moral standards, and also worked to diminish the supposed immorality of the working-class women, through abolition of prostitution and protection from the sexual appetites of men. The dichotomy of public and private corresponding to both the working-class and middle-class, respectively, was considered a bound fact rather than a theory, and was henceforth the building block for the formation of the working-class. Additionally, working-class women were dichotomized into two main classifications – that of the exploited, degraded victim, or a vile degenerate with no decorum. Women who deviated from their biological functions of wife and mother were “…denounced as ‘unsexed’…whereas women as sexual beings were perceived as threatening and represented disorder, women as mothers, defined by their domesticated bodies, conveyed safety and moral order”. Marx and Engels were proponents of the split of both public and private, and

64 Owen, Darkened Room, 8.
66 Owen, Darkened Room, 34.
67 Frader and Rose, Gender and Class, 11.
68 Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria, 30.
69 Frader and Rose, Gender and Class, 205.
maintained that politics took place in the public sphere. The separate spheres theory was adopted by the working-class in the nineteenth century, and Marx and Engels hypothesized that the private feminine domain was a counter to the evils of industrial capitalism. It was in the 1820s-30s that working class terminology came into usage, a language that was based on nature founded terminology as well as a focus on the sexual differentiation. The formation of the working-class as a category was determined by its capitalist nemesis as well as those who were excluded from the narrative, mainly women and children. This subsequent divide of the sexes was a step backward from the previous public intermingling of men and women – “the gains of the Chartist period, in awareness and in self-confidence, the moves towards a more equal and cooperative kind of political activity by both men and women, were lost in the years just before the middle of the century”. The induction of women to enjoy and relish their participation in the domestic sphere was seen by Foucault as a form of productive power to be achieved by the participants. Additionally, women’s work is commonly used to justify the inequality of social power that already exists, to purport the idea that “…female factors aren’t valued in money terms…” I find this statement to be indicative of the environment that the mediums themselves faced, as work for monetary purposes was to become one of the key issues for a working-class (i.e. public) medium.

The working-class came into fruition only through the middle-class anxiety of their status in power relations; indeed, for the middle-classes, “the degenerate classes…were as necessary to the self-definition of the middle-class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress”. Sexuality as a social categorization also spread to the working-class from the bourgeoisie in three separate tracts – the introduction of birth control methods, the organization of the conventional family which led to campaigns for increasing the moral substance of the lower classes, and the cultivation of a moralistic categorization of sexual perversions. The middle-class sexuality was prescribed to marriage – sex for the sake of pleasure was vulgar, and the best and most natural way for a woman to express her sexuality was in her roles as wife and

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70 Ibid., 12.  
71 Ibid., 12.  
72 Scott, Gender and the politics of history, 66.  
73 Ibid., 60.  
75 Skeggs, Formations, 40.  
77 Skeggs, Formations, 4.  
78 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 121.
mother—British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley wrote that “the woman who disdains motherhood out of self-regarding interests…frustrate their natural function and full being”.

The characteristics of the power relations of gender and class share several similarities: an inequality of social resources, a lower social position, and a limited influence in culture and politics. This idea is critical to the formation of one’s position in society and is a determining factor in who is included in positions of power. Although this is a blatant aphorism, I believe that it should not be disregarded that the working-class constructed their own worldview based on their own internal hierarchy; this can be evidenced in this example from George Potter - “the working classes are divided into upper, middle and lower…the working man belonging to the upper class of his order is a member of the aristocracy of the working classes. He…is well read in political and social history…his self-respect is also well developed”. For example, the middle-class held the assumption that the working-class they would automatically defer to their superiors, and that they would willingly emulate their way of living. For the working-class, however, respectability was focused on self-sufficiency. Class and class-consciousness were inextricably bound together, and this is turn fostered a sense of reliance and resilience. Richard Hoggart, in his seminal work The Uses of Literacy, elaborated upon the idea of community in working-class neighbourhoods, stating that “one is inescapably part of a group…and from the frequent need to turn to a neighbour since services cannot often be bought”.

Married working-class women had adhered to another standard, which was that their husband should earn enough that it was not necessary for them to work. The creation of the family wage ideology was mainly responsible for creating this idea, but it was largely unattainable – in Yorkshire, 63.3% of women said that they worked because their husband’s wages were otherwise insufficient. A survey taken by William Beveridge in 1911 of married women who were still in the labour force ranged considerably, from 13.2% in London to 17.5% in

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80 Leijenaar, et.al. *Gender*, 52.
81 Frader and Rose, *Gender and Class*, 22.
85 Frader and Rose, *Gender and Class*, 206.
Lancashire, and in the countryside from 19.5% in Bradford to 44.5% in Blackburn. The idea of respectability was extremely prominent in Victorian society and its pervading classes-working-class interpretations of it were trifold; there was that of middle-class habits and values being adopted by the labour aristocracy; a shared value system which evolved to transcend lines of class; and finally, that of opposition and class pride to being controlled by the middle-class whilst also accepting the middle-class socio-cultural society. Respectability was tied into who was worthy of being bestowed with moral authority – this, of course, was reserved only for the middle-class, who had the privilege of individualization and validation. The traditional view of the respectability code of the working-class has been that it was created through the ensuring that the bourgeoisie maintained their control. New research however has been developed on the idea that the working-class created their own respectability code to advance their political and social ideals. Engels called respectability “a false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers” – one can assume he was referring to the dominant discourse of the middle-class respectability. The idea of class-bargaining was a reality - there was a surplus of “conflict, consensus, deference and defiance”. In The Making of the English Working Class, E.P. Thompson wrote that “classes are based on the differences in legitimate power associated with certain positions, i.e. on the structure of social roles with respect to their authority expectations”. Thompson also looks at class as a relationship instead of a structure, and class consciousness as a cultural creation. Where perhaps Thompson falls short is his lack of inspection of working-class women and their separate realm; instead, he appears to place them within the discourse of the working-class man as an afterthought. In The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory, Joan Kelly writes that both systems of economy and gender combine onto social and historical experiences, that both “operate simultaneously to reproduce the socioeconomic and male-dominant structures of…[a] particular social order”.

For a working-class Spiritualist woman, they were already operating within a system that defined the middle-class woman as the norm and themselves as a threat. Working-class women were viewed as inherently unclean and immoral due to the intrusive middle-class surveillance of their lives and relationships. The compartmentalising of the working-class was also made

88 Meacham, A life apart, 95.
90 Skeggs, Formations, 3.
93 Scott, Gender and the politics of history, 68.
94 Ibid., 35.
possible through new techniques introduced in the Enlightenment – there were social surveys, photographs, and ethnographic studies. In her work *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, Beverley Skeggs notes that this monitoring and documenting of the lower classes has been defined as the “classing gaze”. Most of this documentation was situated in the home, which meant that women were in the middle of the discursive construction. Everything from the living-room to their children’s behaviour was measured to the standard of those who were in charge of the discourse – the middle class. The reformatory education in the domestic ideal for working-class women was sprinkled with precepts such as “cleanliness is next to godliness”. The morality zealots of London rarely touch upon the actual workplaces that Victorian women participated in, preferring instead to use the activity they viewed on the street and public areas as typecast of all working-class women. The moral character of the working-class was measured by observable characteristics, such as sobriety, the institutionalization of sexuality, religious observance, and prudence and decorum. Even the language in which the middle-class spoke to the working-class was saturated with self-awareness and superiority –

…the middle and upper classes, self-confident to arrogance, kept two modes of address for use among the poor; the first was...clearly enunciated, the second had a loud, self-assured, hectoring note. Both seem devised to ensure that though the hearer might be stupid he would know enough in general to defer at once to breeding and supremacy.

From the 1860s onwards, the working-class also experienced the advent of the Charity Organisation Society, the Salvation Army, and of course churches, all with the overarching purpose to conform the working-class to middle-class values. The subsequent view of the working-class was that their morality was not only in dire need of reparation, it also operated as a malleable force that corrupted and degraded the working-class, most commonly due to their living situations – “the progress of vice in such circumstances is almost as certain and

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96 Ibid., 46.
98 Ibid., 8.
often nearly as rapid as that of physical contagion”.101 Until 1884, women could be jailed for refusing their husband’s sexual demands.102 In Britain in 1851, 25% of married women were engaged in paid employment.103 A survey of 200 working-class couples found that seventeen women were illiterate,104 and it is also acknowledged that drinking was on the increase in working-class women – up to 36% of women in Manchester and 38% of London working-class women had been arrested for drunkenness, as documented by temperance reformer Joseph Rowntree.105 I believe that the position of working-class women was not one of middle-class decorum and hidden emotion, so it is no surprise that they would be attracted to movements such as Spiritualism which offered them relative freedom to operate without adhering to the middle-class norms. Indeed, a certain “branch” of working-class Spiritualism actually emphasized their difference from their middle-class Spiritualist peers. Thomas Malthus was a proponent of restraining oneself morally – he believed that by avoiding marriage, the working-class would improve their position. Minister Thomas Chalmers agreed with this – he believed that the working-class were poor because they showed a lack of sexual restraint.106 The rate of premarital pregnancy was high – as much as 30-50% in rural England – and has been connected with the advent of proletarianization, as men who needed to move to cities to work could often use this excuse as well as lack of wages to support a child to get out of marrying.107

Jeffery Weeks, a historian of sexuality, has suggested that the code of Victorian sexuality served as a framework for a debate over the working class situated as morality over class struggle. Commission reports published by Parliament about the working conditions in mines and factories were “…saturated with an obsessive concern with sexuality of the working-class…into the framework of a more amenable and discussible area of ‘morality’”.108 These discursive tropes of Victorian sexual mores appeared in a large part through the rising interest of a scientific study of bodies by the dominant classes.109 Eleanor Rathbone studied the disparity between the working and the middle-class, and has commented that those who were

102 Pateman, Sexual Contract, 123.
103 Pateman, Sexual Contract 130.
104 Meacham, A Life Apart, 91.
106 Clark, The struggle for the breeches, 180.
107 Simonton, Routledge History, 64.
108 Skeggs, Formations, 43.
109 Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria, 2.
well-off were endowed with a “listening-in apparatus” which provided them the time and means necessary to ingratiate themselves into society, whereas working-class women had no option other than to think of “what is immediately present to her in time and place”.\textsuperscript{110} I have strong confidence that this is where Spiritualism was able to bridge the gap between what was appealing to a working-class women and what was considered acceptable to the rest of society, as Spiritualism empowered working-class women and made it capable for them to fashion their own identity. This empowerment usually took place within the context of mediumship, where women would utilize something that had long been regarded as their downfall: their female body.

2.2 Female Agency in Spiritualism

For women, their roles as mediums were critical to feminine empowerment – a large majority of mediums were women, and those who attended seances did so knowing that they would submit to a female spiritual authority.\textsuperscript{111} The séance room was a main battleground for the subversion of feminine traits, but this could only be achieved when women accepted their role as a vessel for spirits upon which they had no agency. The idea of bodies as empty vessels was quite typical of the assumptions about the corporeal and the mental in nineteenth century scientific study.\textsuperscript{112} The body was still seen as a biologically passive instrument which had no agency except that of which was granted to her by a man, thus reinforcing the idea of Cartesian dualism and that of feminine vulnerability.\textsuperscript{113} That the Victorians operated under the framework of anatomic essentialism is no secret, but Spiritualism offered an escape route for women who found themselves constrained by these bodily restrictions. The main trait which was emphasized in female mediums was passivity – a common conception for Victorian society, whose church highlighted the differences between the sexes and emphasized the subordination of women.\textsuperscript{114} Where the Spiritualists differed, however, was in their treatment of the female – by using their bodies as vessels for the spirits and messengers of divine communication, this passivity actually afforded women their greatest weapon.

Prior to the 1870s, spiritual contact was done through the modes of automatic writing or communication with a spirit voice. Women picked up mediumistic techniques faster than men,

\textsuperscript{110} Meacham, \textit{A Life Apart}, 195.
\textsuperscript{111} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 6.
\textsuperscript{112} Lowry, “Embodying Essence”, 47.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{114} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 9.
mainly due to being in the domestic sphere and their supposed innate moral superiority.\textsuperscript{115} The term \textit{sensitive} was preferred by the Spiritualist community rather than medium, as it was thought to more readily show their feminine attributes as well as to display as an inherent personality trait.\textsuperscript{116} Women thus were controlling the messages that came through, as well as how those messages were interpreted, a point that I consider to be of great importance when examining the role of a medium. Between the years 1889 and 1892, the Society for Psychical Research carried out a Census of Hallucinations, and reported that women were almost twice as likely to experience these hallucinations (which in this context firmly referred to psychic visions).\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, a team consisting of Gurney, Myers and Podmore in 1886 examined the cases of 882 Spiritualists, they found quite a gender discrepancy. 58\% of the percipients were women, compared to 42\% men; however, 63\% of the spirit agents were male, compared to only 37\% female.\textsuperscript{118} Spirit rapping was how most mediums were introduced to mediumship, and sentences would be developed by use of a printed alphabet sheet.\textsuperscript{119} By 1853, table-turning had become a national pastime in all classes, in which one would tilt or rap on the table to communicate with the spirits.\textsuperscript{120} After the 1870s, a younger generation of mediums began to showcase their talents, resulting in a form of Spiritualism based on spectacle and theatricality. The main goal was a full materialization of a spirit, something that would become the standard for mediums.\textsuperscript{121} the materialization of spirits also spurned an interest in the integrity of mediums, and test conditions at séances began to become increasingly common.\textsuperscript{122}

Alex Kardec from the Society for Psychical Research distinguished between physical and mental mediumship, stating that the former was focused on material spirits through acts such as table rapping and furniture moving whilst the latter would require spirits to speak through mediums and relay messages from the spirit world.\textsuperscript{123} The Society for Psychical Research was viewed by many working-class Spiritualists to be elitists, and that the middle-class members were too quick to give in to the notions of moral and intellectual respectability.\textsuperscript{124} In 1869, the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Owen115} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}. 7.
\bibitem{Kontou116} Kontou, “Women and the Victorian Occult”, 277.
\bibitem{Gurney117} Edmund Gurney, Frederic William Henry Myers, and Frank Podmore, \textit{Phantasms of the Living}, (London: Rooms of the Society for psychical research; Trübner and co. London. 1886), 723.
\bibitem{Gurney118} Ibid., 723.
\bibitem{Owen119} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 45.
\bibitem{Owen121} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 42.
\bibitem{Hill122} O’Brien Hill. “Above the Breath of Suspicion”. 334.
\bibitem{Lowry123} Lowry, “Embodying Essence”, 46.
\bibitem{Barrow124} Logie Barrow. \textit{Independent spirits: Spiritualism and English plebeians, 1850-1910} (Routledge, 2016), 140.
\end{thebibliography}
London Dialectical Society set up a committee to investigate spiritual phenomena, which fell under three categories of fact –

1) first, that under certain bodily or mental conditions...a force is exhibited sufficient to set in motion heavy substances, without the employment of muscular force, without contact or material connection of any kind between such substances and the body of any person present.

2) That this force can cause sounds to proceed...from solid substances not in contact with...the body of any person present, and which sounds are proved to proceed from such substances by the vibrations which are distinctly felt when they are touched.

3) That this force is frequently directed by intelligence.\(^ {125} \)

These guidelines would have been what much of the investigators working to expose fraud abided by. Based on the above, mediums would have been required to prove that their spirit guides were able to move objects without interference by the medium; that they could speak and make noise not from the mouth of the medium, and that the guiding force behind it was a cognitive spirit. Both the working-class and the middle-class Spiritualists viewed their religion to be based on facts, and the overarching superstructure of the beliefs were a secondary characteristic, especially for the lower-classes.\(^ {126} \) Those who were more commonly considered respectable in Victorian society were made to feel inferior by the plebeian Spiritualists, who were able to retain their secularity which still exploring the empirical evidence of spiritual communication.

I also would like to dedicate a few pages to examine the role of middle-class Spiritualists, and how the working-class navigated their positions in contrast to these. The majority of Spiritualists were from the middle classes – just as middle-class women were the benchmark of female sexuality, so was Spiritualism also firmly planted in middle-class households.\(^ {127} \) One of the main tenets of Spiritualism was women’s innate spiritual superiority - a double edged sword, because this superiority was supposed to dwell in their natural place – the domestic sphere.\(^ {128} \) The first role of women was to her family, to “…bring up her family in health and moral purity, fitting them by habits of industry, temperance, honesty, and independence, to take


\(^ {126} \) Barrow, *Independent spirits*, 141.

\(^ {127} \) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 8.

\(^ {128} \) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 28.
a useful position in the work of life”. 129 Sarah Lewis wrote in Women’s Mission in 1839 of the private nature of Spiritualism, thus connecting it to the female sphere inexplicably “the sphere which God and nature have appointed…can any of the warmest advocates of the political rights of women, claim…a nobler destiny!” 130 This was relevant regardless of class, and the goal was the same for all: the materialization of an apparition from the spirit world. Spiritualism supported the autonomy of women and condemned submissive behaviour and hierarchical structures. 131 Fanny Kemble, a working-class actress who had been present at several mesmerism performances, recalled Spiritualist author Catherine Crowe’s action upon being mesmerised. Mrs. Crowe experienced “…a fit of temporary insanity, during which she imagined that she received a visit from the Virgin Mary and Our Saviour, both of whom commanded her to go without any clothes on into the streets of Edinburgh, and walk a certain distance in that condition”. 132 Mrs. Crowe was an upstanding Victorian middle-class woman, and she was parading around naked in the streets, an act that would not be committed except by the most brazen of street walkers. The séance circle, mesmeric or otherwise, was a place for the complete disregard for gendered norms as well as the adoption of other identities. I briefly looked at the public spheres theory, and notice that Spiritualism is construed as a counter-public because for the mediums who practice, it is “in conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment”. 133 This performance in public allowed, through the embodiment of other identities, a deviation of the normalised gender and class practices. 134 Gender theorist and author Judith Butler also stated that it is in the public sphere that an alternative identity is constructed. 135 For women to live as “the Other”, Beauvoir determined that it is accomplished by experiencing their lives through those of other people. 136 Mediums who operated in the public sphere were therefore able to construct a separate identity based upon their passive body which served as a channel for the spirits, and this “counter-public” was not viewed as a threat by society because the women involved made sure to emphasize their lack of agency and their lack of control.

129 Medium and Daybreak, 11 Jan. 1878, 25.
130 Sarah Lewis, Woman’s Mission (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 12.
134 Ibid., 52.
135 Ibid., 52.
136 Parkin, Social Analysis, 182.
Spiritualists not only appeared during a period of social change, but also emerged around the same time as technological innovations. The original Spiritualist messages were called “Spiritualist telegraph”, called this because it was seen as a rival of the newly minted Morse Code in 1837. Critics in 1889 called mesmerism “only the old witchcraft, restored, renovated and adapted”138. Even when Spiritualism was criticised, it was the movement as a whole rather than the mediums who are attached to it. An anonymous complaint of Spiritualism focused on a medium who led an erotic séance – when the aforementioned medium threw her arms around a married gentleman, as well as to swear and smash things, the femininity of the woman was not brought into questions. Instead, the critic referred to it as a spiritual carnival139, criticising the movement itself. The Lancet, a popular medical journal, published an article saying that mesmerism flourished “wherever there are clever girls, philosophic Bohemians, weak women – and weaker men”.140 Women were an essential part of Spiritualism and crucial to tackling social ills, but they were still expected to do this work at home, alongside being a dutiful wife and mother. Feminine qualities “both elevated and confined women within the context of spirit communication”.141 However, Victorian society as a whole was undergoing a restructuring of the position and power of women, dedicated to “…a life of energy and activity, lived up to the highest physical, moral, and intellectual standard attainable in this world”142, and Spiritualist dogma was no less affected by this. 1882 saw the passing of the Married Women’s Property Act – women were now able to be the owners of their own property, and a husband was no longer required to be the legal representative of his wife.143 This resulted in a torrent of activity of Spiritualist men and women subverting the norms imposed upon them, which started at home – in the séance room.

137 Basham, Trial of Woman, 111.
138 Basham, Trial of Woman, 121.
140 The Lancet Volume 2, 15 Sep. 1838, 873.
141 Owen, Darkened Room, 1.
143 Owen, Darkened Room, 6.
2.3 Power and Subversion in the Séance Room

Darkened séance rooms were often admitted by sitters as being “admirable for a flirtation”\(^{144}\). Mediumship as a whole carried an aura of sexual frisson – there were acts of surrender to an unseen force, possession of the body by it, as well as the physical touching from other séance participants, often to determine the corporeality of a spirit. Bodies both corporeal and preternatural were necessary for a successful séance, and the medium contained both stringent restrictions and a level of disregard; “thus the renunciation of the medium’s body or directives to formalize the conduct and procedures of the séance can be seen as the attempted inscription of bodies and embodiment”.\(^{145}\) Séances of this fashion welcomed participants from all walks of life; the bodies of working-class and middle-class women, upon their usage as vessels for spirit communication, abandoned their composure and sexual rigidity in order to engage with fellow sitters through physical theatrics. Thus, we are introduced to “…the peculiarly Victorian development of sexual pleasure in the sensation of class difference”.\(^{146}\)

For women, both mediums and sitters, the séance circle became a theatre in which the thwarting of gender norms and assumption of the opposite sex was commonplace. Where this theatricality fell short, however, was that outside of the confines of the séance, middle-class women were still largely considered unable to function in positions of power and leadership.\(^{147}\) Additionally, the power women experienced as leaders of the séance circle only took place when they renounced their own autonomy and became passive participants in the social movements which centred around their abilities. I believe that Max Weber’s concept of social closure is worth mentioning here - this explains how the powerful exclude those weaker from receiving the full benefits of joint enterprises, which in turn helps in rallying the weaker to organize in order to receive those benefits – “a social relationship may provide the parties to it with opportunities for the satisfaction of spiritual or material interests. If the participants expect that the admission of other will lead to an improvement of their situation…their interest will be in keeping the relationship open”.\(^{148}\) Thus, the advancement of autonomy for these female

\(^{144}\) Charles Maurice Davies. *Mystic London; or, Phases of Occult Life in the Metropolis.* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1875), 246.


\(^{146}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 231.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{148}\) Charles Tilly. *Identities, boundaries and social ties* (Routledge, 2015), 71.
mediums was dependent upon the mediums maintaining the status quo outside of the séance circle.

Many women travelled circuits using their mediumistic talents – they visited temperance rallies, Spiritualist societies and Mechanics Institutes, and they held a precarious position. There was no knowing, in fact, what the spirits would say through the mouthpiece of these women, and the mediums held no responsibility at all for what transpired. Miss Annie Fairlamb, leading a séance in Newcastle, was reported by James Burns (Spiritualist and editor of *Human Nature* magazine), “the gentleman to my right asked her (Minnie) to favour him with a kiss. She did so, seemingly desirous of adding to the pleasure and spiritual convictions of all. She then stood opposite me…stooped down slightly, our lips met firmly…” Another of Annie’s spirit forms, George, was fond of kissing and touching female sitters, even writing a few billets-doux. Katie King, the spirit apparition of Florence King, often initiated the procedure of being searched, and would invite male sitters to also squeeze if they touched her. Florence Marryat, at another one of King’s seances wrote an article in *The Spiritualist* stating that she had “…stood upright by the side of Katie, who desired me to place my hands inside the loose single garment which she wore and feel her nude body. I did so thoroughly.”

It was not just the corporeal which appreciated women’s unique ability to communicate with the spirits – the spirits themselves also encouraged such behaviour. *Life and Labor in the Spirit World*, a book “written” in 1885 by members of Miss M.T. Shelhamer’s spirit band, makes several musings on the position of women and the inequalities faced by Victorian society. On sexual liberation, they wrote “in the realm of spirit, our societies are not confined to one sex: there is no exclusiveness; woman is not considered incompetent to discuss the questions of life with her brother”. The spirits even offer an insight into the political atmosphere of the time; “…the question of universal liberty has been aroused in the minds of the thinkers of every nation…as an outgrowth of the idea comes the question of Woman Suffrage; for this matter – so vital to all classes of society – is under the supervision of a co-operative society in the heavens…” Women were clearly considered to be patronized in the spirit realm - their quest for equality had supernatural support, regardless of the class from which they hailed.

149 *Medium and Daybreak*, 7 June 1878, 362.
150 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 221.
151 Ibid., 228.
Commenting on the class inequality which their Spiritual supporters on Earth were confronted with, the spirits said:

_The humblest of God’s children have spirit friends and attendants, as well as the highest and grandest: spirits who watch over, guide, and direct those under their charge are with the poor and lowly as well as with the wealthy and great; none are forsaken, none forgotten, all are cared for and blessed with angel ministrations._155

In saying this, the Spiritualists are emphasizing that they are getting _direct approval_ from their spirit friends that their religion is for all classes and social standings – a Spiritualist blacksmith has much a chance of attaining Spiritual greatness as a member of the gentry. Spiritualism was subtly shifting the traditional gender roles and doing so whilst still acknowledging women’s and men’s fundamental differences. Carol Bacchi in 1990 wrote that “…in Western conceptual systems, the feminine is always defined as a _difference from_ a masculine norm; therefore, ‘nothing has to be done’”.156

The working-class has long been overlooked as a dynamic social group in their own right; instead, the focus has been on their status as a by-product of the discourse produced by the dominant classes. Spiritualism was useful for working-class mediums to test the boundaries of their moral integrity, and the séance room proved the perfect atmosphere to relinquish their autonomy and channel the spirits. However, mediums themselves were subject to a schism in their own society when it came to the differences between public and private mediums, as I will survey in the next chapter.

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155 Longley, _Life and labor in the spirit world_, 141.
3. Public and Private Mediums

I would like to include an extract from the *Two Worlds* - a page of mediums advertising their services, which is able to give us a breakdown of the demographic; in a total listing of eighty-seven speakers, thirty-eight were men working alone, fifteen were single women working alone, twenty-two were married women working alone, eight were married couples, two were men working together, and two were a mother and daughter team.\(^{157}\) As can be evidenced, public mediums came from a variety of marital states and sexes, and the married status of a woman was not complete cause for her to retreat into the private sphere. However, as I will discuss in later chapters, some Spiritualists were of the belief that once a woman married she would disappear from the public circuit. The edition of the newspaper published on March 2nd, 1888, discusses a woman who appeared in public in Manchester, one Miss Walker, a “…promising young medium in a manner that surprised several…and her clairvoyance was more than satisfactory to a large and intelligent audience”.\(^{158}\) Another public medium, Miss Patefield, was similarly praised and the author wrote “we have not enjoyed such an intellectual treat for some time, and hope to soon have the pleasure of again listening to the guides of this gifted young lady”.\(^{159}\) Both mediums here are advertised as displaying intelligence and composure, and thus the *Two Worlds* displays public mediums in a favourable light.

Private séances were characterised by a small group of family or close friends, who accepted no direct payment for their services. I believe that it is evident that the Spiritualists also circumscribed to the separation of the two spheres discussed previously. The women who needed to earn a living became public, and they were subjected to the stereotypes that accompanied their decision. Many public Spiritualist speakers travelled circuits, visiting Spiritualist societies, temperance halls and Mechanic’s Institutes. Public was once again associated with the moral compass of the working-class (that is, the compass the middle-class had prescribed to them). There was an undercurrent of fear that if public mediums were not able to call upon their gifts when they were most needed, they would resort to trickery and fraud to ensure they still made a wage.\(^ {160}\)

\(^ {157}\) *Two Worlds*, 18 Nov. 1887, 14.
\(^ {158}\) *Two Worlds*, 2 March 1888, 239.
\(^ {159}\) *Two Worlds*, 2 March 1888, 238.
\(^ {160}\) *Owen, Darkened Room*, 51.
Public mediums also ran far more of a risk of both their reputation and their livelihood by venturing into this territory – there was no guarantee of money or protection, they relied heavily on advertisements in papers to promote their craft, and they were subject to abuse from the general populace. Even James Burns, champion of the working-class Spiritualists, was ambiguous in his commentary on public mediumship; at the Second Jubilee Convention of Spiritualists in 1879, he spoke that “the aims, objects, and energies of Spiritualists have been far too intimately identified with the business interests and abnormal practices of professional mediums…I am not here to cast odium on that class, far from it, my words are in favour of their protection”. Spiritualist author Henry M. Dunphy was far more blatant, declaring that, “I am persuaded that in the case of unprofessional (i.e., unpaid) mediums, I have never been able to trace anything approaching to deceit or collusion”. One of the most well-known Spiritualists, Sherlock Holmes author Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote in his *History of Spiritualism* a defence of a Mrs Elizabeth Blake, a professional medium, being “…one of the most wonderful mediums of whom we have any record, and perhaps the most evidential…a poor, illiterate woman.” I find one of the greatest ironies of the women who practiced in the private sphere was that they were sometimes patronized by a wealthy man who claimed to be a scientific researcher, or was interested in supporting the medium in her practice – although they would receive gifts and benefits for this transaction, these mediums were still considered private because there was no *direct* payment. This act of having a male intermediary to finance a medium so that she would not be seen requesting money from sitters is, in my opinion, one of the channels many working-class women understood to be necessary if they were to attain a position of respect and influence. One of the most famous mediums of her day and the first to produce a full materialization, Miss Florence Cook was offered patronage by a researcher named Charles Blackburn – he offered to pay her a stipend so that she would be “freed from all the troubles and anxieties of professional mediumship”.

Emma Hardinge Britten was also outspoken about her acceptance of payment for displaying her mediumistic gifts, an attitude that was quite emblematic of public mediums – “if my mediumistic gift is the one most in requisition, it is no less worthy of being exchanged for bread

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161 Owen, Darkened Room, 62.
162 Medium and Daybreak, 12 Dec. 1879, 773.
164 Arthur Conan Doyle. The History of Spiritualism (London, 1926), 158.
165 Owen, Darkened Room, 50.
166 The Spiritualist, 12 Dec. 1873, 451.
than any other”.  

If women were thought of as being immoral for accepting payment each time they performed at a séance, then many made a sort of compromise with spiritual societies – a fixed number of séances were decided upon monthly for a fixed weekly payment, which made the performing of public mediums more dignified, as they were not accepting money for each performance. In *Unseen Universe*, Emma published an article reflecting upon the position of public Spiritualists, musing:

...I cannot but regret that a wider spirit of liberality from the wealthier class of believers does not extend to the brave workers aforesaid, and enable them to engage, as a rule, speakers and mediums whose medial qualifications are not marred by the lack of this essential requisite in public oratory.

Several Spiritualists also thought that it was necessary for mediums to have some preoccupation other than their mediumship – private mediums already had their domestic duties to attend to, but a medium whose livelihood depended on this ran the risk of being “ruined mediumistically and morally by having nothing to do but be mediums. The ruin of our Cause is the morbidities of these trafficking mediums and the irregular action of their unoccupied minds”. Steps taken before séances, whether for public or very renowned private mediums, included strip searching and being held by restraints, including padlocks around ankles and leather straps around wrists. It was around the time that Spiritualist activity began to be commercialized that the position of the mediums changed from one of power to one of humiliation. At séances, Florence Cook’s clothes were removed in a bedroom, and her wrists were tied to a chair outside of the apparition cabinet. I do not think it is an exaggeration to assume that this apparent disregard for the sensitivity of mediums can best be posited as an overzealousness to confirm that there was no fraudulent activity occurring, or perhaps assault in an attempt to besmirch the women who were in these positions of power. An account of a séance led by Florence in *The Daily Telegraph* confirmed the veracity of the extent mediums were policed to guard against fraud:

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168 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 56.
169 *The Unseen Universe*, Vol. 1 No. 1, April 1892, 38.
170 Medium and Daybreak, 15 Oct. 1880, 664.
171 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 232.
172 Peiss, *Going Public*, 825.
173 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 68.
...though we had left Miss B. tied and sealed to her chair, and clad in an ordinary black
dress somewhat voluminous to the skirts, a tall female figure draped classically in white,
with bare arms and feet, did enter at the open door, or before us, spoke a few words, and
returned after which we entered the Bedouin tent and found pretty Miss B. with her dress
as before, knots and seals secure, and her boots on!\textsuperscript{174}

The description of “Miss B.” wearing voluminous skirts is perhaps to cast doubt on the readers’
opticn that no fraud could have taken place – could there be a figure hiding under the skirts?
However, the article describes that the figure that entered was wearing a different coloured
dress and had bare arms and feet, whereas “Miss. B” had her boots on when they checked upon
her. Cabinets became commonplace, for a medium to hide inside whilst spirit apparitions were
being produced – only the most fervent believers were invited inside the cabin to view the
apparitions, and these were usually the same people who wrote the widely read reports on the
séances.\textsuperscript{175} Critics of private mediums were less common but did exist, as can be evidenced in
this letter about the troubles with private mediums from one J. Jones to the \textit{Yorkshire Spiritual
Telegraph} in 1857:

\begin{quote}
the greatest difficulty we have to contend with is, the extreme timidity of the mediums,
they dislike to meet strangers – they lose sight of the value of the gift given them and the
blessing they might be to thousands by convincing the leaders of society, of the
truthfulness of the phenomena and the source from whence they spring.\textsuperscript{176}
\end{quote}

Although private mediums were sometimes criticised for such timidity, public mediums still
faced the brunt of accusations and pressures to remain wholly credible yet at the same time
earn enough to make a living.

The schism between public and private mediumship was equivocal to the professional and
domestic worlds that women occupied, as well as the respective moral templates that both
contained. To be “public” was not just to be in the labour force or to be outside of the domestic
realm – it could be anything that went against normative feminine behaviour.\textsuperscript{177} Public séances
were general entry séances, a fee was required for entry, and the medium who performed the
séance usually relied upon it for their livelihood. Spiritualists wrote of the rarity of public

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{175} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 52.
\item\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph}, No. 9 Vol. 8. 21 Jan. 1857, 126.
\item\textsuperscript{177} Peiss, \textit{Going Public}, 818.
\end{itemize}
mediums, estimating the numbers at one in a thousand.\textsuperscript{178} Private mediums, on the other hand, were “in every rank of life, from royalty down to the humblest household”.\textsuperscript{179} This religion was propagated and made a women’s domain in part by Emma Hardinge Britten, a British medium whose works allowed for working-class women to make their way into Spiritualism’s public realm. The autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten will now be examined and analysed – there has been a historical precedent for autobiographies to focus both on the intellect and conscience of the author\textsuperscript{180}, and Hardinge Britten’s proves no different in how she represents herself and her relationship with Spiritualism. I examined many of Hardinge’s works and found that almost all of them referred in some way to the position of women and the importance of professional mediumship, but her autobiography is unique in that it is telling in how she perceived herself at the time.

3.1 Emma Hardinge Britten

The auto-biography of Emma Hardinge Britten was published posthumously in 1900, and contains several insights into the social position of a medium of her class and how she navigated through her world. Emma also embodies the traditional passive Spiritualist viewpoint that she was a reluctant participant in their grand crusade but continued nonetheless; “I realised that I should be unfaithful to my noble employers if I continued to resist their counsels”.\textsuperscript{181} There is shock and apprehension upon appearing in public – “What, ‘I! a young English lady, to go out like a bold, strong-minded woman to preach! Oh, shocking!’”\textsuperscript{182} In the preface, written by a fellow Spiritualist, is a commentary on the characteristics of one who has been drawn to Spiritualism “youth, age, or sex, matters not;…the Worker appears, and though the path may be strewn with thorns…the task is accomplished, and the world is helped beyond all staying”.\textsuperscript{183} The preface ends with “we hail thee then still, Emma Hardinge Britten, noble woman, faithful worker, and nobler title than all, faithful friend of mankind and true fellow worker with the unseen Angel hosts, to whom, for our emancipation she gave her all”.\textsuperscript{184} Emma makes sure, from the first few pages, that she has differentiated herself from her peer group,

\textsuperscript{178} Owen, Darkened Room, 49.
\textsuperscript{179} Medium and Daybreak, 15 Dec. 1876, 785.
\textsuperscript{180} Wallraven, “Mere Instrument”, 395.
\textsuperscript{181} Emma Hardinge Britten, Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten (Stansted Mountfitchet: Spiritualists’ National Union, 1900), 62.
\textsuperscript{182} Emma Hardinge Britten. The Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten (Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1900), 38.
\textsuperscript{183} Britten, Autobiography vii.
\textsuperscript{184} Britten, Autobiography, ix.
and makes sure it is known that she did not relish this difference – “I fancy that I was never young, joyous or happy, like other children; my delight was to steal away alone and seek the solitude of the woods and fields”.\textsuperscript{185} Emma reasons with her isolated childhood as being necessary for her Spiritualistic development, and that she was not complicit in her discovery of her talents –

\begin{quote}
it was only in after years and when I became called and associated with a secret society of Occultists and attended their sessions in London as one of their clairvoyant and magnetic subjects, that I myself began to comprehend why a young girl fairly educated, and blessed with many advantages, should be branded with such peculiarities of disposition as must inevitably shut her off from all companionship with children of her own age and standing.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

I would like to point out that Emma is thus ensuring that her readership audience knows the reason for her isolation as a young child – it was a force that was out of her control, and she credits the “secret society of Occultists” she joins as being the reason she was able to discover her true purpose. The fact that Emma also describes herself as being “fairly educated, and blessed with many advantages”, is also of interest here – she clearly does not fall into the typical trope of many Spiritualist writers, which is that an unhappy childhood led to their association with the spirits. An alternative reading could also be that Emma is using this language to appeal to the middle-class as well – her “many advantages” could allude to material and social comforts, and her describing her education level separates her from a typical working-class peer. Emma then continues some while later, and quotes an article written by a contemporary about her, which states:

\begin{quote}
There were many circumstances in Emma’s early life which, as a thoughtful woman, she now considers to have been instrumental in preparing her for her present mission. Being deprived of her good father’s care at a very tender age, the young girl, like the rest of her family, was compelled to depend upon her own talents for subsistence...the exercise of her musical powers, and other circumstances, threw her into the society of persons far above her in rank and educational culture...which she now finds have been on incalculable value in preparing her as an instrument for the Spiritual rostrom.\textsuperscript{187}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{185} Britten, Autobiography, 3. 
\textsuperscript{186} Britten, Autobiography, 4. 
\textsuperscript{187} Britten, Autobiography, 4.
Although Emma was not shy about her humble beginnings, she also acknowledges that she was out of her league in the company she kept, but that this company and the experiences they provided strengthened her mettle to become a leading figure in the cause for Spiritualism. Emma then discusses her career as an actress, which began after she began to show signs of being a magnetic subject, in her ability to detect magnetic impulses in people and channel her own. Her mother was concerned that this would “…either end in permanent lunacy or death”. Emma portrays her mother as emblematic of the dominant discourse of the time when it came to women mixing with electromagnetism and other unseen phenomena. Being able to control the spirits was of the utmost necessity, otherwise a medium would be viewed as deranged. Emma then decided to become an actress; her writing about this time is rather vague, but she does state that “…in justice to others, what more than one living witness could, if they would, confirm, and that is that perhaps few young girls in narrow circumstances, leading a busy struggling life, were ever subject to more sore temptations from a vicious aristocracy than myself”. I stress here that Emma is indirectly confronting the prejudices faced by the working-class because she is now in a position to do so – an internationally renowned medium that has interacted with believers of all classes, her commentary on the treatment of working girls from the “vicious” aristocracy is typical of the views of working-class Spiritualists towards those in the upper-classes. Emma also makes sure that the reputation of her mother was not besmirched and Emma’s participation in the spirit world was not the result of a pushy parental figure –

my intense susceptibility to occult powers brought me prominently under the notice of the magnetisers, amongst whom were not a few of the highest personages in the land. Tempting offers of engagements as a magnetic subject were made, but these were determinately rejected by my good mother, whose aversion to my participation in such experiments was equally steadfast and unconquerable.

Emma is solidifying not only the fact that spiritual activity enabled her to cross over into social circles higher than her own, but that she was in fact desired by these people to be a magnetic subject. It is only from Emma’s mother refusing to do so that Emma is spared becoming a public medium right away, a fact which is interesting – Emma did indeed become a public medium later on, but her emphasizing her mother’s refusal to let her do so shows that she was

188 Britten, Autobiography, 6.
189 Owen, Darkened Room, 44.
190 Britten, Autobiography, 6.
191 Britten, Autobiography, 9.
not ignorant as to the treatment of public/professional mediums. Emma’s formal introduction into Spiritualism was made through her acquaintance with a married couple at a boarding house in New York, where she and her mother were staying as Emma pursued a theatre career. Emma here highlights her piety and Christian background, saying that she had never assumed the voices she heard during her childhood to be the spirits of the departed. Her membership in the Occult society, before she departed for America, she was taught that seeing and hearing such spirits was also in a condition of somnambulism, and that apparitions were nothing more than emanations from the deceased, which were the result of being buried rather than cremated. Emma at first thought that “…it was desecration to remain under the same room with people who indulged in such talk”\(^\text{192}\) but became curious once talking to others and learning of the couple’s upstanding reputation. Emma’s first interaction with the spirits was a terrifying one – she emphasizes to the reader that she originally went to séances with the intention of exposing them as fraudulent, but upon becoming overwhelmed by the affirming presence of spirits, who recounted the last words her deceased brother had spoken to her, had no choice but to become a vessel for their whims:

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\text{the power which had formerly resided in the locomotive table seeming to have been suddenly transformed to both my hands and arms, and obliging me to point to the letters which, taken down, spelled out intelligence in exactly the same way...a few knocks were heard sounding directly under my feet, but these affected me with such an indescribable sense of terror that I would rush from the room.}\(^\text{193}\)
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Emma, although aware that she is susceptible to supernatural happenings, does not welcome them, but instead runs in fear. I again stress that Emma is utilizing a strategy commonplace in mediums of the time of all classes – she notes that her first interaction with the spirits terrified her, thus ensuring to the reader that there is no way she was excited or intrigued by these happenings. Emma eventually comes around to the idea of becoming a medium, however. She recounts her time spent as a medium and member of both public and private circles, pursuing her investigations

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\ldots\text{in garrets, cellars, saloons, and public halls...I became early and dearly intimate with the three celebrated Fox sisters, Mrs. Kellogg, Ada Foye, J.B. Conklin, and many other professional mediums of a far stronger and more reliable type of power than many of the}\]

\(^{192}\) Britten, Autobiography, 16.
\(^{193}\) Britten, Autobiography, 27.
present day. In addition, I formed one of a band of over twenty New York non-professional mediums, who gave their services free to all comers “without money and without price.”

It is interesting to note Emma’s choice of wording here; the emphasis on her circle of professional mediums being of a “far more reliable type of power” is a possible allusion to the vast array of accusations of fraud that had plagued mediums in the second half of the nineteenth century; so this is possibly an attempt to convince readers that non-fraudulent mediums did exist and that she herself is personally acquainted with them. The non-professional praise is limited to their giving their services freely, as Emma made clear in several publications and speeches that she did not see any reason why women should not be paid for the services they provided. This lack of praise for the non-professional mediums is telling of Emma’s gradual involvement into public mediumship, and where she has placed herself in the schism. Emma also shows her support for the public mediums and names them as a cornerstone of the Spiritualist movement, although she does seem to denounce the power of the working-class (if it is to be read literally) in the following excerpt:

one of the striking features of the Spiritual outpouring, that the entire cause was chiefly upheld by the learned and professional classes of the community, and although they were often shamefully persecuted, their houses stoned, windows broken, and themselves mobbed and threatened for their peculiar faith, the opposition was always from the least respectable classes.

Reading this, it becomes evident to myself that for Emma, and no doubt several other Spiritualist mediums, the professional class and the “least respectable class” are not synonymous. Whilst the professional classes were primarily composed of working-class and middle-class men and women, non-Spiritualists were placed within a different class structure based upon the notion of respectability – belief in Spiritualism was already a pre-requisite for being a respectable member of the community, so mediums would not need to be organized in such a similar manner. Emma’s idea of going to lecture, a “thoroughly un-English idea of becoming a female preacher” was aided by her meeting a Mr Day, who rented out an entire building for mediums to diffuse the idea of Spiritualism into society. Emma comments on the arrangements that mediums had in these various rooms, as well as proof that a professional

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194 Britten, Autobiography, 34.
195 Britten, Autobiography, 37.
196 Britten, Autobiography, 37.
medium could receive a yearly salary provided she sat free for the public in order to foster a greater sense of trust and respectability.

...in the large back drawing-room of the building the generous lessee had placed Miss Kate Fox, who, at a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year, was engaged to sit free for the public every morning. When Mr Day heard of my intention to give my services to the public without pay, he kindly placed two handsome rooms...at my disposal for my séances. Being still too proud to accept of this generous arrangement rent free, I offered to edit his paper.197

Interestingly, Emma puts herself in the category of one who was not willing, or did not need to, charge a fee for her services. Although she says that she was too proud to accept her rooms for free, she still did not engage in a monetary transaction with Mr. Day, instead offering her editing services to him. Emma was making money from her stage career, so it is perhaps plausible that she genuinely did not need the extra money from public séances, but her being both an outspoken champion of professional mediums and also one that was unwilling to pay rent for her rooms does cause some consternation. Emma stated that she sat “as a medium for all classes who chose to visit me, winding up during at least three evenings every week by set circles, held for friends or by special appointment”.198 She also states that, contrary to the opinions of friends and spirits, she did not consider herself to be “one of the strong-minded women”199 Emma uses the colloquialisms of one labouring in the fields when she describes her calling, and does not cling to pretence or ostentation when describing her struggle. When discussing the letters that she was receiving from all over the United States appealing to her services, she noticed that “the demand for workers in this tremendous harvest field was wide-spread and urgent”.200 Emma travelled extensively across the United States giving lectures, and in New Hampshire she met Frank Chase, the only Spiritualist representative in three villages. Musing about Frank, Emma pondered the difference of the classes in their dedication to Spiritualism:

...this brave young man against bigotry, cowardice, and village politics, that should stimulate the despairing the hope under the most adverse circumstances, and put to shame the murmurs of the “well to do” Spiritualist, who, after enduring a few cold looks,
and paying out a few dollars, to sustain ‘the cause’, with the self-satisfied assurance ‘that he has made sacrifices enough for Spiritualism, and means to do no more’. 201

From this excerpt, there is an overwhelming sense for the reader that it is the lower classes that Emma believes to understand the true nature of Spiritualism. The “well to do” Spiritualist, as Emma refers to them, do not do more than offer monetary support, whereas the Spiritualist plebeians throw themselves into their cause regardless of the consequences. Emma also criticises those who would pursue mediums with the intent of exposing them as self-serving frauds, and places herself in the category of those who have been victimised, a target for

the attention of experiment of that class of reformers who follow in the track of success, some of whom would fain prey upon those more fortunate than themselves, or, still oftener, of that class of persons who deem the new and widespread revelation of Modern Spiritualism sanctions all the wild and fanatical ideas which can be cloaked under the cover of a mystical new religion. 202

Emma’s political campaigns published pamphlets in which she emphasized her support for those of the lower-classes, “her name has for years been identified with a widely-spread and philanthropic effort to ameliorate the condition of poor fallen women, amongst whom her missionary labours have obtained for her the designation of ‘The Outcast’s Friend’”. 203 Emma moved to England to pursue her mediumistic career and, when listing her many acquaintances she made during her career there, seems to make a distinction based on class. She has her close friends “Mr and Mrs Howitt, Mr Robert Cooper, Mrs de Morgan” and then groups her upper-class friends under the banner of a “…perfect host of titled, aristocratic, and in many cases illustrious personages, all devoted to, or interested in, the cause of Spiritualism”. 204 Another distinction Emma makes between the classes is in their usage of mediums. Emma wrote that it was impossible for her to cease being a public medium, and compares herself to the private medium Mrs Everitt, who was “…one of the best and most wonderful mediums of this or any other age, was in high request, especially amongst the aristocratic classes, who would not condescend to consult professional mediums”. 205 I note here that Emma also shows herself to be of the mind that professional occupancy does not dilute the femininity of women, whether

202 Britten, Autobiography, 72.
203 Britten, Autobiography, 200.
204 Britten, Autobiography, 212.
205 Britten, Autobiography, 213.
they are in the public sphere or not. Speaking at a Mechanic’s Hall in Glasgow, she wrote that she felt “…privileged to show the several thousands of the Glasgow population that women can still be patriots, public speakers, and women at the same time”. 206

Although never directly commenting on the idea that Spiritualism, particularly that of lower-class women, was thought to carry immoral connotations, she references a debate she attended in Australia between Mr. Walker, a trance speaker, and Mr. Green, a clergyman. Mr. Green produced a letter from a doctor in New York that declared that a great majority of the mediums and teachers of Spiritualism practiced adultery, sat in nude circles, and were not accepted into polite society. Mr. Walker appeared shocked at this proclamation, and stated that although he had never been to the United States, “he had just come from England, where Spiritualism was as popular amongst the nobility and best classes of society as Christianity”207. In saying this, I believe that Emma is relying upon the presuppositions engrained into Victorian society about the qualities possessed by each class, and that those best classes of society would not demean themselves to act in such a way. Neither, of course, would the majority of the working-class, but using the upper-classes as an example of all that is proper with Spiritualism is an admirable way to ensure that all those who practice Spiritualism will be able to be bestowed with the same traits. Attached to the ending of the book is a pamphlet published after her death by Will Phillips, describing those who mourn for her – “Rough miner and burly ranch-man join in the throng with the cultured of the world. The countess knows no title now save that she earned by toil and love…”208 Even posthumously, the ability of Emma’s techniques to transcend all classes is made evident, and her “Countess” title adopted during her life, perhaps in an ironic sense to chide those titled personages who practiced a different, private sort of Spiritualism, is declared void as she joins the spirits to whom she dedicated her life.

Emma’s autobiography showcases the agenda in which herself, and several mediums, operated upon; the idea of downplaying their role in Spiritualism, but at the same time using their position to offer critiques of society and class roles that their engendered position would not normally offer. Autobiographies are an important outlet when looking at the discursive role played by mediums, as often, as scholar Alison Piepmeier wrote “nineteenth-century women’s engagement with the public world can become invisible to scholars when that engagement is

206 Britten, Autobiography, 220.
207 Britten, Autobiography, 228.
208 Britten, Autobiography, 266.
embedded in the context of a society that values women’s situatedness in the home and of a scholarship that views women as victims”.\textsuperscript{209} Mediums used their autobiographies to “build identity and to construct herself in relationship to both Spiritualism and institutional discourses”.\textsuperscript{210} Foucault also commented on how discourse is the site of conflict, and women can adopt language to suit their own means.\textsuperscript{211} The language Emma uses in her autobiography, in which she constantly chooses a passive tone and references the struggles of working class women, is indicative of this discourse. The autobiographies also highlighted the idea of “Real Womanhood”, a term created by Frances Cogan, which highlighted the concepts of confidence, practicality and strength.\textsuperscript{212} This is in contrast to the “True Womanhood” narrative, which focused on submission, domesticity and purity. The Real Womanhood narrative was more approachable for those who accepted and conformed to unconventional gender roles. Trev Lynn Broughton has commented on the power of the autobiography, saying that it “…in its modern, introspective form at least, situates itself at the very juncture of the public world of announcement and the private world of self-analysis and meditation”.\textsuperscript{213} Emma’s autobiography has achieved this succinctly; she presents herself as a participant into the public world, but constantly reminds the reader that she is at odds with herself and her position. I believe that it was this constant juxtaposition that allowed Emma to climb the ranks of Spiritualist society as a respectable and highly-regarded medium, speaker and author.

### 3.2 Annie Fairlamb and Catherine Wood

Outside of London, two of the best public mediums at materializing spirits were Miss C.E. Wood and Miss Annie Fairlamb. They both were employed at the Newcastle Society for the Investigation of Spiritualism.\textsuperscript{214} I have chosen to include them in my analysis because they were both from an upper working-class background and they were both professional mediums, but interestingly they diverged in how they were viewed by society. Both mediums show “the role that a destabilized identity played in both the potential political efficacy of mediumship

\textsuperscript{209} Lowry, “Otherworldly figures”, 4.
\textsuperscript{210} Lowry, “Otherworldly figures”, 54.
\textsuperscript{211} Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault, 1.
\textsuperscript{212} Elizabeth Schleber Lowry. Invisible Hosts: Performing the Nineteenth-century Spirit Medium's Autobiography (SUNY Press, 2017), X.
\textsuperscript{213} Wallraven, Mere Instruments, 395.
\textsuperscript{214} Owen, Darkened Room, 56.
and in making a continuing life of mediumship possible for an individual medium”. Miss Wood was a domestic servant until 1873, when she became a regular medium. Both Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb hailed from a lower-class background, but from homes that favoured self-improvement and education. Spiritualism changed the class status of both of these women, both economically and socially, and they became members of genteel circles across England and Australia. The two women reached the height of fame for their materializations of a number of spirits, ranging from men and children to the legendary Native American Pocahontas. Miss Wood’s reputation for her materializations resulted in her being invited to wealthy Spiritualist homes, at which point she moved from playful spirits to conjuring the sitters deceased relatives. Miss Fairlamb was primarily in the public arena, and her monetary returns show her success – over the duration of sixteen months, she received £69.13.9d for performing at 141 séances. Both women usually worked together, and during public circles would emphasize their connectedness by being literally tied together to prove both their authenticity and their reluctance to cover for one another. This connectedness also appeared even across a temporal space – at a séance of Miss Wood’s, one of her spirit controls, Pocky, took a pocketknife from a sitter and said that it would be delivered across space and time to Miss Fairlamb, who was in Berwick-upon-Tweed at the time. Although Miss Fairlamb did not immediately find the object, she wrote two days later to say that she had found a knife in one of her dress pockets. The two women were not only skilled at full materializations, they also produced spirits that played upon the emotions of the sitters in a sexually-charged atmosphere. Miss Fairlamb would often produce an African child spirit named Cissy, and Wood the spirit of a five-year old Indian child named Pocky. The innocence and purity of the child spirits could be viewed as an extension of the mediums who had produced them, and could also capitalize upon the emotions of bereaved parents attending séances with the hope of contacting a departed child. The child spirits were wary of sitters, because of the inappropriate behaviour that they had been told the sitters liked to partake in. When the women were tied together, it was often surrounded by male sitters, or one medium would lie on the floor inside the cabinet whilst the sitters and other medium sat in a circle outside. Annie Fairlamb would often lie inside

215 Tromp, Altered States, 99.
216 Owen, Darkened Room, 57.
217 Tromp, Altered States, 100.
218 Owen, Darkened Room, 57.
219 Owen, Darkened Room, 58
221 Tromp, Altered States, 102.
222 Tromp, Altered States, 102
the cabinet, reclining back for the consumption of the sitters and to create a sexually suggestive atmosphere. An investigator at the scene described the way in which an attendee’s payment for the séance was taken –

...his necktie was unloosed and removed, his watch was taken out of his pocket and placed in my left hand; money was removed from his pocket and rattled apparently in a human hand; his legs, arms, body, face, and head were patted and stroked by both large and small hands...a cigar was placed in his mouth, and an infantile form placed its arm round his neck and audibly kissed him.223

I would like to posit here that by replacing the traditional monetary exchange with a theatrical aspect, which itself was overlaid with erotic imagery and action and contained a mixture of both human and spirit interaction, the mediums successfully freed themselves of the stigma associated with paid mediumship and created a new form of payment in which clothes and money were removed interchangeably and distractions of a sexual nature removed the sitter’s mind from the economic interaction he partook in. When James Burns attended these séances, he wrote that he had experienced several kisses from the spirit controls and with Cissy “an altogether rich kiss”.224 Both women distinguished themselves with their coloured child spirit controls and working-class identity, yet still capitalized on the interactions in the séance room and the freedoms offered in the same way as their primarily middle-class counterparts down south.225 Their demand for payment went against the anti-materialistic message of Spiritualism, yet in this way they “consistently critiqued the role of materialism in class oppression, even as the two mediums operate within the culture’s capitalistic frame”.226

Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb ended their professional relationship between 1876-77; the reasons for this are speculated, but most likely came from money issues, different attitudes to the test conditions of séances, and the alcohol use by sitters. From here, both mediums embarked on dramatically different expressions of their mediumship which resulted in a remarkable dichotomy in their perception by society. Miss Wood and Miss Fairlamb both kept their spirit controls, but whilst those of Miss Woods were strictly adhering to the gender codes of the Victorian Society, Fairlamb’s spirit controls were ambivalent in their representation of

224 James Burns, “Interview with Physicalized Spirits at Newcastle” The Medium and Daybreak, Vol. 9, 7 June 1878, 363.
225 Tromp, Altered States, 106.
their gender. Miss Wood also grew more explicit in her acknowledgement of her economic states, where Miss Fairlamb kept her focus on spiritual purity. Miss Wood also grew more explicit in her acknowledgement of her economic states, where Miss Fairlamb kept her focus on spiritual purity.\textsuperscript{227} The two women were the subject of much controversy when, in 1877 at a Blackburn séance, her spirit form was seized and it was found to be the scantily clad Miss Wood herself. Miss Wood claimed that an evil spirit had removed her clothes and sent her into the circle, and \textit{Medium and Daybreak} jumped to her defence, saying that Miss Wood had been affected by her bad surroundings which led to her “disgraceful position”.\textsuperscript{229} The man who exposed her “went to far as to say that unless every penny that had been paid for the séances this week and last was returned to the sitters, he would put the case in the hands of the police”.\textsuperscript{230} In this way, it is clear that Miss Wood’s séances were of a primarily economic nature, and that her sitters expected the money they paid to be for the service she provided. It is unclear whether she sold her story or just spoke to the Blackburn Times, but, her story was published, along with her admittance of fraudulent behaviour.\textsuperscript{231} Undoubtedly, this provoked anger from the Spiritualist papers, who retaliated a month later in their discussion of the demoralizing of mediums; Miss Wood’s case was used as an example of the “corruption of good manners”.\textsuperscript{232} Again, money was the primary factor in her criticism, this time by James Burns; who wrote in \textit{The Medium and Daybreak} that “if Miss Wood will sell herself to the degrading manipulations of newspaper reporters, that they may, through her disgrace, earn a small pittance by writing special reports of their ignoble triumphs, she must be content with the wages of such conduct”.\textsuperscript{233} In 1882, Catherine was exposed again, and the rationale was that these attacks were deliberately trying to defame her character or that her spirits were trying to merge their materialization with that of the medium’s appearance. Miss Wood had made her séances primarily economic, thus, economic means were her downfall and the reason for her degradation. Good manners were typecast of a respectable Victorian group, but there is no denying that in the séance room, the lines between decorum and erotic theatricality were often blurred. The Victorian code of conduct which emphasized a restriction on the realization of sexual desire for the sake of pleasure in turn caused a greater proliferation of spaces for the practice of sensuous activities as well as a disregard for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{227} Tromp, \textit{Altered States}, 109.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 70.
\item \textsuperscript{230} Tromp, \textit{Altered States}, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Owen \textit{Darkened Room}, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{232} \textit{Medium and Daybreak}, 17 Aug. 1877, 523.
\item \textsuperscript{233} James Burns, “Miss Wood Caught Personating a Spirit” \textit{The Medium and Daybreak}, Vol. 8. 17 Aug. 1877, 523.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Owen, \textit{Darkened Room}, 69.
\end{itemize}
identities that had been mapped onto its subjects. Miss Fairlamb, until an exposure in 1894, was intent on keeping her reputation of being the “one person in the United Kingdom of undoubted materialising faculty, and undoubted character, who could almost always secure the presence of phenomena, and who had never been detected in a trick of any kind”. Catherine was reliant upon her traditional ideas of gender and class, and her open need to use her mediumistic skills professionally resulted in different standards being applied to her. Her tendency to interact with more “promiscuous” spirits and her stricter controls (things such as handcuffs, being locked in a cage, wearing a velvet collar) were because, Tromp argues, that her dependency upon the traditional views of spirits and class identity drew suspicion and made her more susceptible to exposure from her fellow Spiritualists.

From 1877–78, Alex Owen remarks upon the atmosphere Miss Wood was part of; “judging from the comment of observers and non-believers, [her séances were plagued with] violent, abusive, or sexual behaviour as well as the presence of ‘unacceptable’ language”.

I would describe this treatment by referring to Cixous, who described the linkage of binaries, using the concept that where one binary is validated, others invariably linked to it are also reinforced. Therefore, according to Marlene Tromp in her work Altered States, Catherine Wood’s fervent adherence to traditional gender and class roles, both in her spirits and in her own position, resulted in the undoubtable entrenchment of her own position as a working-class woman. Wood was unwillingly, or unable, to breach her own discourse of gender and class codes, therefore, she was forced to remain in her own position as a working-class woman and had to face the moral and social implications that came with such a status. The linkage between Miss Wood and dubious morality never left her – as a Mr. John Hartley quoted, “All of my spiritualistic friends…are convinced that Miss Wood has been very indiscreet in lending her services promiscuously to any committee who may have the means to make worth her while to visit them”.

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235 Holloway, Enchanted Spaces, 183.
236 Henry T. Shekleton. Further Light Upon the Mysteries of Spookland (Sydney: W.M.Maclardy, 1894), 4.
238 Tromp, Altered States, 110.
239 Tromp, Altered States, 111.
240 Tromp, Altered States, 111.
Catherine had several spirit controls, two of the primary ones being Maggie and Benny. Maggie performed all the outward façades of a traditional lady: she would leave if she was touched inappropriately and was described as being “…a beautiful and gentle spirit…her magnetism was a baptism of sweet influences, her event movement betokened the gentleness and refinement of her nature, and every act she was able to perform her deep sympathy and love.”

In this way, it is evident that Maggie was emblematic of a chaste Victorian woman with a great capacity for nurturing and passiveness. Benny was an archetype of masculinity, he was flirtatious and would kiss female sitters, often resorted to violence, “…a man of as fine proportions as any in the room,” and was physically very strong. There was obviously doubt that this could be Miss Wood, as has been recorded by one sitter “I think it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for so small and slender a young lady…”

Initially, it may seem as though this impossibility of having an imposter would only add to Miss Wood’s credibility. However, Tromp argues that the medium’s strength often lay in her ability to blur her identity with that of her spirit controls.

Spirits were thought to be so intimately connected with their mediums that a blurring of identity was commonplace – the fact that Wood’s spirits were so different from her own persona and the fact that they stuck to such rigid gender roles resulted in suspicion of their identity and Miss Wood’s credibility. Although Catherine Wood had several champions, one of them being Emma Hardinge Britten, who stated in 1882 that

_I am informed, by some of my Newcastle friends, whose evidence is simply unquestionable, that spirit-forms have been seen to issue from a cabinet previously searched and known to be empty, when the medium (Miss Wood) was sitting outside the cabinet, in full view of the whole circle, and in a room sufficiently light to see all that transpired_,

she was unable to avoid separating herself from the dubious credibility associated with women of her rank. An exposure of Catherine Wood was recorded by James Burns, who said that the...

*medium appears in this case to have been in a mesmeric trance-state; suddenly her ‘control’ left, and another low spirit, whom a clairvoyant calls a ‘wag’, took control in*

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245 Tromp, _Altered States_, 113.

246 Emma Hardinge Britten, _Dark circles and cabinets_ (The Psychological Review, 1882), 439.
opposition to her usual guides, made the medium come out in an unconscious state and personate a spirit form in a very clumsy and suspicious manner, as all the fastenings were broken, and her clothes scattered about, which is unusual under other circumstances.247

Such a distinction between the medium and her spirit resulted in the doubting of her entire identity. Catherine wasn’t materializing the spirits as she had claimed, therefore everything about her must be wholly false. On another occasion, she was also caught with muslin on her person that people claimed she used to conjure “spirit draperies”.248 An article by a psychical investigator in the Blackburn Standard, in which he had been investigating Catherine Wood and her spirit Benny, said that Benny “…took control of the medium, and in the broad masculine Scotch accent, announced…if they would secure the medium firmly in the cabinet they would have ‘somethin’ gude the nicht’”.249 In a postscript added, the investigator also commented

since I wrote the above…I am informed that the medium has been caught in the act of personating a materialized spirit form. I am not much surprised at such a result…if spirits are in contiguity with the human family, they will have the mesmeric power…on the minds of certain sensitive individuals…another low spirit…made the medium come out in a very clumsy and suspicious manner, as all the fastings were broken, and her clothes scattered about…this fact should teach people to be mindful of these invisible low spirits who are everywhere ready to set upon the minds of those who walk disorderly, live impure lives, and keep bad company. If spiritualism does nothing else than teach us that “like associates with like” it will have done some good to society.250

As can be evidenced above, once evidence of Miss Wood’s fraud came to light, she was again adorned with the morals of the working-class – someone who leads an impure life and keeps herself in the company of morally dubious persons. Catherine being a “certain sensitive individual” who lived an “impure life” meant that she was susceptible to the tricks of a low spirit, and although the writer appears to relieve some of the blame from Catherine, it is clear that if she were a private, middle-class medium, the description of her would not be so damning.

248 Tromp, Altered States, 114.
Annie Fairlamb and her manager went a different route, one in which they fashioned themselves as being wholly uninterested in monetary concerns, which in turn made way for a critique of “naturalized class hierarchies, the ideologies of separate spheres, and imperialism". Tromp suggests that this disrupting of the class boundaries showed that spirits used Fairlamb to materialized much in the same way the middle and upper-class used the working-class to materialize, as well as the poor in other countries to materialize their own nationality. Fairlamb was navigating the world of public mediumship, which was seen by some as a necessity – an author wrote to The Spiritualist newspaper in 1873 that there should be some séances open to the public - “How, otherwise, can those who have no personal friends to introduce them, and who are anxious to form an opinion founded on conviction and experience, have the opportunity of seeing and hearing for themselves?” Miss Fairlamb left the Newcastle Society due to the excessive consumption of alcohol there; at least, that was the reason given by her new manager, William Armstrong. Annie sat for no one without Armstrong’s approval – a small fee was paid to Armstrong of which Fairlamb received a stipend. Fairlamb’s manager claimed that the amount they were making was only £69, 13s and 9p over a sixteen-month period- this was much less than the £2 a week she was making with her employment at the Newcastle Society. This emphasis on poverty worked well in the eyes of the public, especially when every medium ran the risk of being accused of fraud; “where is the motive for fraud in this case? Mrs Mellon [Fairlamb’s married name] does not make a profession of her mediumship…” I summate that because Fairlamb did not have any direct contact with payment, and because when the money was mentioned it was done so by her manager and in a format that emphasized her modest means, Fairlamb was not placed in the same category as those mediums who sat at séances for primarily economic reasons.

Another reason for Fairlamb’s success was her blurring of her spirit identities; usually between male and female and the medium herself. One such spirit was Minnie, who took the hand of a sitter, Mr Rhodes. Mr Rhodes later said that he “was not certain whether the dark hair falling below the drapery of the head and face was a beard or otherwise.” Minnie also presented herself as traditionally feminine and ethereal, “…with all that grace and saint-like appearance

251 Tromp, Altered States, 114.
252 Tromp, Altered States, 114.
253 A.A.A. “The Protection of the Media” The Spiritualist Vol. 3. 15 March 1873, 135.
254 Tromp, Altered States, 115.
255 Tromp, Altered States, 116.
256 (Smith, Jane Stewart Smith “Testimony of One of the Photographers” The Medium and Daybreak Vol. 21, 3 Oct. 1890, 627). Quoted in: Tromp, Altered States, 116
which is characteristic of her…” At another séance, a spirit “at first sight presented a somewhat curious masculine appearance”, but when the hostess was asked to search the medium, it was for spirit draperies, not fake beards. Another spirit, George, hit a sitter who didn’t follow instructions, but he hit with an open hand as a woman would, and it was noted that he had “rather small features, a delicate olive complexion”. The identities between the spirits were blurred, both between themselves and that of the medium who facilitated their appearance, resulting in an opportunity to “re-situate normative femininity which was based on an assumption of immutable sex difference”. Although Fairlamb married in July 1877, she was still travelling with Armstrong a year later, possibly because of the success she achieved with his handling of their finances. Annie had a few close calls, but managed to maintain an aura of innocence and vulnerability due to her blurring of the identities. One of her spirit identities, the African child Cissy, was reported to have carried the medium into the light whilst she was “…convulsed with shivers, distressing symptoms racking her frame” – additionally, the spirit had no head because whilst the medium was in the light, she declared was not able to materialise it. The combination of Cissy’s body combined with Annie’s head gave a fervent onlooker the impression that their bodies were one and the same. When Cissy appeared in photographs, she was not as dark as one would assume a person of African origin would typically appear, but Annie explained this by saying that the lights which were used to take the photographs were of a brighter type than those that Cissy was used to. One with a basic knowledge of shadows and colours would quickly realize that the drapery surrounding Cissy, combined with the flash, would’ve made her appear even darker, but this was the power of the medium – the fluidity of identity meant that her reputation was considered above reproach.

It can be seen here that Mrs. Mellon had successfully removed herself from the circle of professional mediumship and the moral implications that came with it, for through her reluctance to associate herself with any material aspects of her profession she had managed to keep her reputation clean. That is, until 1894, when Mrs. Mellon was exposed at a séance in Sydney. An attendee at the séance, Mrs. Caroline Amelia, discussed the event, saying that she “…distinctly saw a mask, or what looked like one – at any rate, some black covering- on the

257 Medium and Daybreak, 17 Aug. 1877, 522.
259 James Burns, Interview with Physicalized Spirits at Newcastle.” The Medium and Daybreak Vol. 9, 7 June 1878, 362.
lower part of Mrs Mellon’s face…I was so horrified at the time at the prospect of exposure, and the fear that she might be searched, that on the spur of the moment I said, “Give me anything you have to hide,” in reply to which she said, “No, no, I have nothing…Mrs Mellon at the time seemed perfectly cool and collected”. The man who exposed Mrs. Mellon, Thomas Shekleton Henry, wrote an account of his actions and what led up to them. His colleague, referred to as Dr M., was reluctant to restrict Annie’s movement in the cabinet, but Henry was of the mind that:

there was no necessity for this far-fetched delicacy in treating of the matter; we were dealing with a professional medium, who, although not directly paid a certain sum for undergoing these “Tests,” yet indirectly was most substantially paid by valuable presents of jewellery, &c, besides receiving such an invaluable advertisement (in support of her professed abnormal powers) from the presence at these “Test” séances of several well-known and respected citizens.

Even though Annie was not directly receiving payment, in the eyes of a sceptic such as Henry, presents she may have received from admirers were cause enough for a monetary gain, and thus suspicious activity. The “Test” séances, which were not Mrs Mellon’s idea, apparently were attended by prominent, upstanding citizens, who also gave Annie further publicity. Mrs Mellon called the tests she had undergone in England barbarous and cruel, and declined all attempts at being a test subject for Mr. Henry. The fact that Mrs Mellon had no records of her test results, as well as the fact that sitters who showed scepticism towards the spirits were not allowed to approach her spirit guide Cissie. The blurring of Cissie’s identity, usually a boom when sitting for fellow Spiritualists, was actually a problem for sitting for sceptics. Henry noted that Cissie had various heights, she appeared with no hands and then with no feet, and that it would be possible for a medium to move behind curtain with her hands on the floor. Annie also had never been touched whilst in the cabinet and also never spoke whilst the spirit forms were speaking, and she never gave séances in a public room or in any other private residences other than her own.

Henry attended a séance on October 12th, 189, and watched as Annie sang for approximately ten minutes, until he noticed “…a very tall form appeared between the curtains, draped in loose

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263 Ibid., 42
264 Ibid., 46.
white material, with what appeared to be a black face, although no features could be seen… I felt certain… from the shape and movements of this figure, that it was an imposture and a trick.”  

Henry knocked over some pencils on a desk, and “…went over on the pretext of picking up the pencils, seized the form of the so-called ‘Cissie,’ and found that I had hold of Mrs. Mellon, and that she was on her knees, and had a white material like muslin round her head and shoulders”. He then stated that Mrs. Mellon hid this material, as well as a black on her face, under her petticoat, and upon questioning, declared that she was entranced and did not remember a thing. After this reveal, Annie was never quite elevated back to her old status, and primarily faded from public view, but retains a position as a working-class medium who took payment for her séances but did not come under suspicion in the public eye. Her counterpart Catherine Wood, who focused on separating herself from her spirit controls and also making sure she earned a living wage, was not quite so lucky. These two mediums were emblematic of the attitude that was still prevailing even in the Spiritualist circles, which was that the accepting of money and the acknowledgment that mediumship was a career, not a calling, resulted in far greater mistrust and scorn. I also wish to repeat the idea that if a medium’s identity was blurred with that of the spirits, it made her less under suspicion of being fraudulent. This demonstrates the extent to which the somatic presence of the medium was tied to her spiritual one. I believe that the cases of these two women and the different paths they chose emphasizes the pervading dichotomy of the public and private and the suspicion that still surrounded women who required payment for their séances.

3.3 Florence Cook

I will now also examine that case of Florence Cook, who successfully managed to keep her reputation as a public medium intact for her entire life. One of the most prominent mediums in England, Miss Florence Cook, was born to a family that dwelled somewhere between the upper-working and lower-middle class. Florence began to go into trance-like states when she reached fourteen, and then turned to experimenting with spirit circles. Florence stated that she had received a message for her to find the secretary of her local society in Hackney, the

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265 Ibid., 49.
266 Ibid., 50.
267 Ibid., 57.
268 Owen, Darkened Room, 42.
Dalston Spiritualists’ Association, for her mediumship needed to be supervised if it was to become controlled. Circles themselves were saturated with ritual and order – circles usually consisted of friends or members of the spiritualist society, seated in a semi-darkened room. A prayer would be said to set the tone of the séance, the sitters would join hands and think pleasant thoughts. A successful séance required the attendance of both corporeal and intracorporal bodies. Hand holding was customary, and the séance would usually have no less than three but no more than twelve people – eight was considered ideal. The usual pattern of sitting was for men and women to alternate, as this was though to present a balance of positive and negative forces, in either darkness or a dim light, singing or talking until breeze was felt over the hands of the sitters. I am certain that the separate spheres ideology greatly helped those who were unsure about submitting to the control of a female medium – in the domestic area, women were not seen to be a threat to male superiority, and therefore men could cede to women without feeling embarrassed or emasculated.

Florence learned the art of spirit control, and was soon acting and speaking for a spirit which went by the name of Katie King. When Florence made her first full materialization of Katie in 1873, it was the first of its kind in Britain. This propelled new competition from mediums, and Florence experienced an unparalleled kind of celebrity; she entertained Lord Arthur Russell, was offered yacht cruises and trips to Paris, and led séance circles at the houses of many eminent people.

An account from the *Daily Telegraph* details how a séance participant would have seen Florence;

...pretty Miss Blank tied round the neck, arms, and legs to the chair, in a very uncomfortable and apparently secure manner...after some delay a face rose gently to the aperture, rather far back, but presently came well to the front...the head was swathed in white drapery...it remained for some time, disappeared and reappeared...the doors were opened, and little Miss Blank was found ties, with seals unbroken, and to all appearance in a deep sleep...

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269 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 44.
270 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 44.
Florence Cook was epitomic of the paradox of the Spiritualist world – she was lower-class, she was a public medium, but she was being offered a payment to prevent her from having to resort to showcasing her gifts for money. Emma Hardinge Britten condemned this practice of receiving monetary support in exchange for performance, because she felt that it limited the professionalism of the mediums. Florence also became the object of psychical research by the onetime President of the Psychical Research Society, William Crookes – it should be noted here that psychical researchers were usually from a different social class than that of their subjects. Mediums were not hoping to get rich from their profession, unless they managed to secure a wealthy patron. For example in America, the average medium, regardless of sex, could make up to $5 for an evenings work, and would charge $1 an hour for private sittings. Personal calling was the main factor – women were willing to risk social ostracism for their craft, and mediums accepted that suffering and self-sacrifice were part and parcel of being a woman. In an editorial, Spiritualist James Burns wrote that “Spiritualism is essentially a domestic institution…mediums have the greatest degree of power, the phenomena are of the most unmistakable description, and communications are purest, when presented in select and harmonious gatherings of which a well ordered family is a type”.

Florence herself found a champion in Florence Marryat, a society lady and editor of the London Society magazine. Florence Marryat was one of the few mediums invited into a medium’s cabinet – during her first experience with Florence Cook managed to materialise the deceased infant daughter of Florence Marryat, even recreating the cleft palate her daughter had been born with. Marryat published the two-part series written by Henry Dunphy, entitled Modern Mysteries, in her February 1874 edition of London Society. Marryat added her own opinion to Dunphy’s works about Florence Cook, stating that “she [Katie King] was good enough to give me what I consider a still more infallible proof (if one could be needed) of the distinction of her identity from that of her medium…I again saw and touched the warm breathing body of

278 Owen, Darkened Room, 51.
280 Owen, Darkened Room, 231.
283 Medium and Daybreak, 12 Oct. 1877, 649.
Florence Cook lying on the floor, and then stood upright by the side of ‘Katie’, who desired me to place my hands inside the loose single garment which she wore, and feel her body…”

In her book *There is no Death*, in which she documented her experiences with mediums, Florence Marryat recalled her visit to a medium who was rumoured to be untrustworthy but did not steal from her, saying “I do not think I know a single medium of whom I have not (at some time or other) heard the same thing, and I do not think I know a single woman whom I have not also, at some time or other, heard scandalized by her own sex, however pure and chaste she may imagine the world holds her”. In this book, Marryat again defends Florence Cook, saying that “I have seen florrie’s [sp] dark curls nailed down to the floor, outside the curtain, in view of the audience, whilst “Katie” walked about and talked with us…moreover, I have seen both Florrie and “Katie” together on several occasions, so I can have no doubt on the subject that they were two separate creatures”.

Some years after she married and became a mother, Florence Cook Corner disappeared from the public view, and a few decades later she gave an interview with *Light* newspaper in 1894. She was asked if she had given up all sittings to which she replied “Oh, dear no. I sometimes sit to oblige my friends. But quite privately. There are reasons, indeed, for more reticence in the matter than it is in my nature to observe”. Although she was no longer in the public light, Florence still connected her mediumistic skill to a genetic predisposition “the mediumistic faculty has run in our family as far back as we can trace…it was about the age of fourteen that I began to fall into trances”. Florence again fell into the characteristic trope of making sure her mediumistic skill is not through any choice of her own – rather, it was destined through her family history. Even when she started to experiment with séances, she stated that her mother also experimented as well but did not wish to continue. However, “…after this we hardly had a minute’s peace at home for some time. Tables and chairs were smashed, books were dang about, chairs took walks on their own accounts, the table jumped about at meal-times, and great noises resounded through the house at night. All this was because mamma and I had made up our minds not to sit again. At last we were driven to do so”. Again, Florence emphasized that she was compelled to become a medium, she had no choice in the matter, and furthermore,

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287 Ibid., 141.
that it was the spirit who had made her decision for her. I stress here that Florence emphasizing
her powerlessness even at a time when she was no longer in the public eye is telling because it
shows just how entrenched the idea of downplaying agency was. If Florence was to admit that
she was willing to become a medium, then her credibility, plus that of her fellow mediums,
would be thrown into jeopardy. Florence was also asked about the resemblance between herself
and her primary spirit control, Katie King. Florence again, in the fashion of Annie Fairlamb,
cast doubt on the appearance of her spirit by stating:

_It was very annoying to me at first that not only Katie’s but several other materialised
faces were so similar to my own, this resemblance wore away after a time...Katie, always,
however, bore some likeness...she had a funny habit, sometimes, of appearing with
chocolate-coloured complexion, and on several occasions, showed herself with a face as
black as ink...even the eyeballs being black...this question of resemblance was soon
satisfactorily settled; and, in fact, did me a service in the long run, because it moved
people to notice more particularly the differences, which increased as time went on, until
nobody could suggest that we were one and the same._291

Florence’s commentary shows how there was similarities between her own face and that of her
spirit, but Katie sometimes presented herself with a black face, and how in the end, no one was
able to doubt the authenticity of Katie because her appearance was so dissimilar to that of
Florence’s. Florence also cleverly states that the similarities between herself and her spirit
guides did her a favour, because the differences (when they eventually appeared) were so
different from before that there could be no doubt that Florence was no fraud. When asked how
and why Mr. Crookes selected her she said “this is not generally known. I went to Mr. Crookes
myself, and offered myself a willing sacrifice on the altar of his unbelief”.292 Florence
presented herself as a passive subject in his study – he was to keep her under close observation
under any test conditions he wished, but if he found the phenomena genuine, “and that I am
but an instrument in the hands of the Unseen, say so honestly and publicly, and clear me before
the world”.293 The fact that in 1880, a new spirit of Florence’s, a twelve-year old girl named
Marie, was seized in London and found to be Florence herself294, was not touched upon. I
believe that Florence Cook’s untouchable status as a medium, even after she was found to be
impersonating a spirit, is dependent upon three primary factors – her support from Mrs.

292 _Light Newspaper_, 29 Dec. 1894, 629.
293 _Light Newspaper_, 29 Dec. 1894, 629.
294 Owen, _Darkened Room_, 72.
Florence Marryat, a respected (middle-class) member of the Spiritualist community; her emphasized patronage from a researcher, thus adding validity to her practice and separating herself from monetary needs; and finally, her reliance upon never separating her identity, physical or spiritual, from that of Katie King.

There was no restrictions to the type of woman or girl who could possess spiritual powers – the main commonality was a low status (whether self-perceived or not), and thus a corresponding lack of power and a deprived personal life; in short, “deprivation, frustration, and discontent”. It was through the transgression of sociocultural discourse that the séance was made liminal. I believe that public mediums were adept at negotiating their passivity on their own terms and using their bodies as the site of their protestations. Emma Hardinge Britten, in her autobiography, said that she had protested against the idea of becoming a motivational lecturer in Spiritualism, because she was not “one of the strong-minded women”. Emma continued to be able to affirm this viewpoint her entire life; indeed, the preface for her autobiography states, “Unexpectedly – nay, almost unwillingly, called to her high office, as Embassadress to the Unseen World, Emma Hardinge Britten played her part in the world drama, and filled it nobly and well”.

Marriage in both the public and private spheres bolstered respectability, and whilst many mediums wed whilst they were in the midst of their career, affirming the adage that “A good wife is the greatest earthly blessing”, it was more common that professional women were married at the beginning of their practicing. Florence Cook, who became Florence Corner once she married, was referred to by her main patron Charles Blackburn who remarked, “of course now that she is married and is no more amongst us, we will find others cropping up having similar power”. Florence was forbidden to continue practicing mediumship by her husband until she began to develop bouts of hysteria and lethargy – she then picked up her old mediumistic habits, but this time in the private sphere. Mediums were often viewed with scepticism outside their Spiritualist circle – hysterical trance was seen as a form of hysteria, and it was in agreement that female reproductive physiology rendered them exceptionally liable

to such illnesses. If spirit manifestations presented themselves, there was “sure to be found a
girl with hysterical symptoms”. Carole Pateman has suggested that the
feminist movement is about is the dichotomy between the public and private spheres which
both regulated and reacted to the sexual and economical differences in men and women.

If we look at the public sphere as the realm where women aspired to operate in, we would do
well to remember that “‘interrelationships’ exist between spheres, persuasion is used to ‘redraw
the boundaries of discourse’ such that separate ‘spheres of discourse remain viable’”. I
would agree with Cindy Griffin, in her book The Essentialist Roots of the Public Sphere: A
Feminist Critique, that the public sphere is an ideology, and that “to enter the realm of the
public any individual must experience a socially sanctioned symbolic rebirth”. The symbolic
rebirth for the mediums, working-class or otherwise, was to renounce their body as a corporeal
entity and instead entreat it to become a vessel for otherworldly inhabitants, thus rendering
them both messenger and muse. Griffin then continues that to be taken seriously, those entering
the public sphere must “seem to remove themselves from the realm of anatomy”. Here, I
also find myself in agreement – Spiritualist mediums, however knowingly, knew that in order
to operate in the public sphere they needed to rely upon a force that was so intrinsic to their
person it could not be disputed, yet at the same time did not bring their femininity to the
foreground of their performance. Their bodies, although necessary to elevate them to positions
of power, were not the focus of their practice – instead, it was the emphasis of the passive trait
and the transformation of their body into a vessel that enabled them to depart from the somatic
realm and into the spiritual one. I emphasize that public mediums, although unaware of it at
the time, enabled their participation in the labour market due to the fact that “classes and class
phenomena are conditioned by the peculiar pattern of women’s participation (however
intermittent) in the market for paid labour…class structures, and the market processes behind
them are “gendered”.

303 Judith R Walkowitz. “Science and the Seance: Transgressions of Gender and Genre in Late Victorian
304 Ibid., 8.
305 Hall et. al., Defining the Victorian nation, 30.
306 Griffin, The Essentialist Roots of the Public Sphere, 29.
307 Ibid., 33.
308 Ibid., 33.
where I will discuss the nature of plebeian spirituality as well as how the working-class became involved in such a movement.
4. Spiritualism in Plebeian Society

It was not uncommon for Spiritualists to band together on social issues, not just those of the supernatural. The state of Victorian society as a whole was often the subject of disapproval; “the fearful chaos of crime, immorality, poverty…or positive bankruptcy amongst the trading classes…the fear of poverty pervading nearly all classes of society; the incessant war of interests and classes…can the higher life exist in this state of things? Impossible”. Spiritualist newspaper The Medium and Daybreak advertised a conference in its May 6th, 1870 edition, the subject of which was “has spiritualism at the present time power to effect social distinctions”. One such mode through which Spiritualism affected social spheres was through that of psychical healing. Similar to hypnotism, healing was seen to be one of the highest manifestations of psychic power. Healing was present in both public and private spheres, and was thought to be able to develop in any person regardless of status. Healing involved energy transference through a positive interaction between sitter and patient. The sacred sciences, such as phrenology and mesmerism, were seen as intrinsic to developing the status of women. In British mesmerism, three classes of phenomena were created; physical effects to prove the transmission of a force or fluid to a person under mesmerism from the operator, phrenology, and a community based upon the study of sensations invisible to the eye, of which clairvoyance was a part. A large number of healers were women – no doubt that a feminine influence in the sick room was comforting for many, but Spiritualists viewed the healers first and foremost as the prescriber of the appropriate treatment. From the 1860s to the 1880s, approximately half of the female mediums had skills in healing and diagnosing. The public healing circle was composed of mostly upper-working and lower-middle class – a client requesting a personal consultation in 1876 could expect to pay about one guinea. The gentle characteristics of mesmerisms meant that they were at the forefront of providing relief to others of all classes, as displayed in an article in The Zoist; “are you aware of the power you possess…that in this power you can disperse a mine of wealth to others…to the poor, often

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310 Medium and Daybreak, 20 May 1870, 54.
311 Medium and Daybreak, 6 May 1870, 36.
312 Owen, Darkened Room, 107.
313 Owen, Darkened Room, 28.
315 Owen, Darkened Room, 111.
316 Owen, Darkened Room, 111.
317 Owen, Darkened Room, 115.
more acceptable than pecuniary relief?” Mesmerists were able to look at a patient’s body, and diagnose ailments as well as transfer energy through the help of spirits. During the 1870s, a female mesmerist commented on the nature of mesmerism and compared it to a trait that was the middle-class would not consider to be inherent – “…like virtue, the power to Magnetise is in all, and can be developed by all”.320

Spiritualists were fairly outspoken in what they believed was the true position of women. Emma Hardinge Britten, herself from a lower-class background, in her work The Place and Mission of Women, wrote that “wherever, in knowledge, in arts, in science…her brother can shine, there is woman calculated to walk with him side by side…woman, in her place, is surely a companion meet for man, in all respects his equal”.321 Britten mused on the differences between men and women in the same book, stating the attitude shared by most Spiritualists when she said:

women, by their peculiar organism, by the fineness of their nerves, the susceptibility of their sensations…women have always been peculiarly susceptible of impressions through the imaginative and sensational parts of their natures, also, the affectional and emotional. Men, with their larger and firmer knit minds, judgmatical, more apt to reason…weigh and measure that which is presented to them, while women perceive and appropriate truth by what is termed induction.322

Britten’s attitude toward the place of women could best be described as between radical American and British conservatism – she objected to marriage and domesticity being the only option for middle-class women, and was an advocate of giving women the proper training and education so they could find suitable employment.323 Emma also scorned those who looked down upon the lower classes as ill-educated; “to-day this uneducated woman, the doll of the street, the boarding house, and the saloon, is expected to comprehend the fine strings of human character”.324 She wrote, “we can see no limit to the power of woman to enter into the chambers

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320 Miss Chandos Leigh Hunt, Medium and Daybreak, 28 Feb. 1879, 135.
322 Britten, The Place and Mission of Woman, 5.
323 Owen, Darkened Room, 32.
324 Britten, The Place and Mission of Woman, 9.
of knowledge; we can see no bound which should hedge in the genius of woman”. Emma criticised the way that lower-class women had no agency and were subsequently made invisible by society – “we take the lowest condition of woman – that of the domestic servant, - that of the spinster, who is expected to earn her own bread by her own hands…here, in her very condition as a nonentity, as a mere household broom…” Emma was not speaking of a handful of women when she wrote this – in 1831, there were 670,491 domestic servants in Great Britain. The Unseen Universe, the newspaper Emma founded after she left the Two Worlds, published and herself wrote commentaries criticising the position of working-class women in England, particularly in her very first issue from April 1892, in which she discusses who is affected by Spirit communication – “Still mediumship is a special result of a special organism, and is not to be considered as a ‘gift’ bestowed on the subject by the favour of the Creator, neither is it the result of high or low moral qualities”.

4.1 The Plebeian Spiritualist

Spiritualists acknowledged the fact that they were not only pervading the traditional gender roles of Victorian society, but they were gradually becoming engrained in all classes. In his autobiography Why I Am a Spiritualist, A.E. Newton wrote that Spiritualism gave him the chance to “…hold to doctrines of an elevating, refining, spiritualizing tendency, and aspire to exemplify these in thought and life”. Even Prime Minister Gladstone and Queen Victoria were said to have dabbled in séance circles. In a letter to her husband, Spiritualist Mary Howitt wrote “the universality of the phenomena renders it a curious study. A feeling seems pervading all classes, all sects, that the world stands upon the eve of some great spiritual revelation”. I emphasize that if the Spiritualist movement was pervading all classes, the mode in which is happened was vastly different. The working-class were more likely to conduct investigations into the supernatural themselves, and there was far more of a common interest in a working religion, which was considered a lot more important that the exact theology. The middle-class professionals and well-educated produced a great number of Spiritualist

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325 Britten, The Place and Mission of Women, 8.
326 Britten, The Place and Mission of Women 10.
328 The Unseen Universe, Vol. 1. No. 11, April 1892, 15.
330 Owen Darkened Room, 19.
332 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 13.
works, with covert references to the 18th century seer Emanuel Swedenborg\(^333\) (not surprisingly, these works did not infiltrate into the working-class). Spiritualism, for the working-class, took root strongest in the North and the Midlands – the West Yorkshire town of Keighley was considered to be just as good of a Spiritualist stronghold as London.\(^334\) Keighley experienced a mass conversion to Spiritualism in 1853, the majority of whom were former Owenites, followers of the utopian Socialist Robert Owen.\(^335\) Spiritualism took hold in several cities – most notably, Bingley and Bradford, and then on to Manchester, Nottingham, Belfast, and Glasgow.\(^336\) Throughout Spiritualism’s entire journey in England, these remained vital areas, and the “miners, pit men, weavers and factory hands” some of their most fervent supporters.\(^337\) By 1887, there were over 100 meeting places for working-class Spiritualists, mostly in the North, and this remained so until the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^338\) The counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire, as well as the city of Durham, were bases of a form of primitive Methodism which spoke in tongues; Yorkshire also housed a faction of the Swedenborgian church, which promulgated the idea of spirit realms.\(^339\) Of the extent of working-class Spiritualism in Yorkshire, the article in the *Two Worlds* displayed “Yorkshire leads the van…the county of broad acres has done nobly to teach the truth to the weary world that man is immortal, that “the two worlds” are peopled by one humanity, united by love, by birth and nature. Over two dozen societies exist in the Yorkshire domain…”\(^340\) by 1870, Yorkshire Spiritualism had “attained a position in Yorkshire which is not dreamed of by people of the south”.\(^341\) This is not surprising given that between 85-95% of the population in England and Wales at this time identified as working-class.\(^342\) The *Taunton Courier* in 1811 had commented on the working-class mindset in regards to religion, and had written “the belief in supernatural agency, is universally prevalent throughout the Western Countries, and very few villages there are who cannot reckon upon at least one who is versed in ‘Hell’s Black Grammar’”.\(^343\) Only a few working-class movements were as popular in London as they were

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\(^{333}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 21.

\(^{334}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 21.


\(^{336}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 21.

\(^{337}\) Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles; or, Spirits, and Their Work in Every Country of the Earth* (New York: William Britten, 1884), 165.

\(^{338}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 43.

\(^{339}\) Owen, *Darkened Room*, 22.

\(^{340}\) *Two Worlds*, 18 Nov. 1887, 10.

\(^{341}\) *Human Nature*, 1 April 1870, 191.


in the north of England, and those were secularism, Owenism, and the Federation of Social Democrats. For many, Spiritualism was an addition to Owenist secularism, and still preserved the best aspects of both individualism and a collective mentality. Morse commented that Spiritualism had become “publicly a question of the masses”, although it still retained “its hold upon the classes”. He also differentiated between London Spiritualists, whom he said were prone to “ever-increasing apathy”, and the northern Spiritualists, noting that “our brethren in the provinces were not slumbering”. Two Worlds in 1887 reported that “…Lancashire is fairly alive…no less than twenty-four societies of ardent spiritualists exist within the county”. Printed in London in the 1870s, the Spiritual Notes newspaper attempted to bridge the gap between gap and foster relations between the northern as well as other plebeian Spiritualists. The paper expressed regret that the only truly “national” Spiritualist organisation, British National Association of Spiritualists was by and large metropolitan and “very ‘respectable’”. 

Emma Hardinge Britten, reflecting on her tours of northern England, referenced working-class Spiritualists multiple times, saying that she found several mediums there; “all these are working people, toiling during the week in their several vocations, but giving cheerfully…often at the cost of labour and fatigue to themselves, their best service every Sunday to platform utterances, and that most commonly with little or no remuneration”. An attendee at a speech by Mrs Britten wrote that he went to see her speak on spirit mediums at the Cambridge Hall, and “there were persons of almost every class, and the reserved seats were occupied by well dressed and evidently well-to-do-people”. During her speech, Emma said that Spiritualists were at a disadvantage – “for although Spiritualism was very widely known, she believed that in this country it was chiefly confined to a class that might not be numerously represented there”. In the Unseen Universe, the disproportionate effort of the working-class was also commented on:

344 Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 50.
345 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 97.
346 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 132.
347 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 132.
348 Two Worlds, 18 Nov. 1887, 10.
349 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 138.
351 “Extemporaneous Speaking: Mrs Hardinge Britten on Spirit Mediums, Electric Printing Works” Brighton Observer. 10 April 1868, 4.
352 Ibid., 4.
In England alone there are 160 public meetings held-two each Sunday—besides the circles and social gatherings, to which the public are admitted on payment of a small fee. It is a striking and significant fact that these meetings are almost entirely organized, sustained, and conducted by the working classes.\(^{353}\)

“Spiritualism…was a man and woman’s movement…a movement that has helped in making women free. It had emancipated her and given her rightful place by the side of man on the public platform”.\(^ {354}\) This quote, published in a Spiritualist newspaper shortly after the end of the Victorian era, shows the viewpoint that Spiritualists had when it came to their movement, and their participation in putting women in their “rightful place”.

4.2 Socialism and Spiritualism

Post-1880, the association between Spiritualism and Socialism was a common one in London. Both reform Socialists as well as Theosophists viewed history as a natural process of evolution, and themselves as proof of an unstoppable alternative future.\(^ {355}\) Frank Podmore, author of *Modern Spiritualism*, wrote that “there appears to be some natural affinity between Socialism of a certain type and Spiritualism”.\(^ {356}\) The theme of imminent apocalypticism was common, “thus, mysticism and revolutionary dreams could be married most happily”.\(^ {357}\) There were also benefits for Spiritualism to ally itself with Socialism – Spiritualism suffered from a lack of centralized organisation, so it could practice extreme flexibility when discussing and tackling plebeian concerns. In addition, Spiritualism was primarily based on phenomena, so there was a relatively large area for intellectual growth and a search for “cover in intellectual specialism”.\(^ {358}\) David Weatherhead, of the Keighley circle and the founder of the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, was also the leader of the secular Owenites of Keighley. It is of note here that the Owenites were one of the first political groups to adopt Spiritual principles – there was great overlap between the schools of thought, and many plebeians were drawn to Spiritualism due to its combination of prophecies and social critique.\(^ {359}\) Owenites also thought that an appreciation of Spiritualism would create “a plain peaceful path to an entirely new existence

\(^{353}\) Unseen Universe, Vol. 1 No. 1, April 1892, 37.
\(^{355}\) Tatiana Kontou, and Sarah A. Willburn. The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the Occult (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 179.
\(^{356}\) Frank Podmore, Modern Spiritualism, a History and a Criticism, 2 volumes, (London, 1902), 209.
\(^{357}\) Kontou and Willburn, Ashgate Research Companion, 169.
\(^{358}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 53.
\(^{359}\) Owen, Darkened Room, 22.
of man upon earth, in which no inferior character will be formed”.

In addition, they had no problem accepting the idea of female mediums in positions of power, as many Owenites believed that the Messiah was female.

Furthermore, the Owenites believed that sexuality was natural and important in both men and women, and that married men held a “tyrannical power” over their wives. The Woman Question, published by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, viewed women as an active force in the creation of socialism, but acknowledged that they had several areas of struggle, including the sexual double standard and being given equal access to the public sphere.

Marx and Aveling also made comparisons between the oppression of women and the oppression of the working class, stating that “women are the creatures of an organised tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organised tyranny of the idlers”.

Robert Owen, founder of the Owenite group, commented on the symbiosis of Socialism and Spiritualism, saying that they would bring about a “spiritual social state”. Socialism adopted Spiritualistic sentiment in its dogma as well, stating that “socialism…cannot be regarded as a political party, but rather as a channel through which the ideals of a reformatory nature are finding expression…politics is of the flesh. Reform is of the spirit”. A meeting at the Working Men’s Hall produced The Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph (1885-1857) and its successor British Spiritual Telegraph (1857-59) were more Keighley based than London, and David Wilkinson Weatherhead was their main financial backer. Feelings about the class system could be published in the issues, and the first item of the first publication an attack upon the middle-class and the aristocracy as exploiters of the “working community”.

“Spiritualism, with its quest to form communities between the living and the dead, was an interest often shared by those who were committed to other radical reforms that aimed to stretch the boundaries, and assert the rights of other under-represented communities”. Socialism also emphasized the lower orders as superior in morality (thus also superior in respectability)


360 Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, 1855. 96.
361 Owen, Darkened Room, 12.
362 Clark, The Struggle for the Breeches, 187.
363 Rowbotham, Women in movement, 142.
367 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 11.
368 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 11.
369 Kontou and Willburn, Ashgate Research Companion, 166.
to the upper classes. The Fabian Annie Besant, leader of the Match Girls Strike of 1888, became a renowned Theosophist. The Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, which ran from 1855-1857, published some Owenite propaganda but first accused the middle-class and aristocracy of exploiting the lower-classes. It’s eleventh issue, published in February of 1856, contained an address from the spirits of “Stanley and Peel” on people’s suffrage:

*has the aristocracy of this country, in any case, done justice to the labouring classes?...take a glance at the present low rate of wages in comparison with the high price of provisions!...can they call this justice?...mark it, working people of our beloved country, that the time is not far distant when the tyrants will be hurled from their seat of tyranny. Their reign of oppression [sic] is almost at an end...such, working people of England, is the doom of your oppressors...Great indeed are the suffrages of the working classes of England!-but remember these suffrages are false-they are only shadows-they are pretended and not real.*

This passionate article offers a working-class reader, who would presumably already be interested in spiritual and/or Socialist activity, a hope of a world where most ills against the working-classes have been abolished. The author is clearly disenfranchised with the “suffrages” that the working-class has already achieved, called them shadows and therefore a false hope.

Instead of private séances, Spiritualism speakers intermingled with secular lecturers at Mechanic’s Institutes and Working Men’s Halls, where they spoke on topics such as mesmerism and radicalism. The Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph continued to be a beacon of correspondence between Spiritualists and Socialists, as can be evidenced from the description of Owen’s own conference that was advertised in the May 16th, 1857 edition:

*On this day the various so-called Socialists, Spiritualists and Secularists, are more especially invited; when only true Socialism, in spirit, principle, and practice, will be explained, - the only true universal practical religion for the popular of the world stated, - and also the cause of the new Spiritual Manifestations being made at this period, when*  

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373 “AN Address From the spirits of Stanley and Peel!! On the sufferages of the people”, *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*, No. 11, February 1856, 149.  
374 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 22.
it is proposed to change the entire system of society over the world, in its spirit, principle and practice, and in the surroundings in which to place the entire of the human race through futurity.\textsuperscript{375}

That Socialists saw in Spiritualists a kindred spirit cannot be denied; however, most female mediums left the conscious speaking to men, and instead opted to perform trance speaking in front of audiences\textsuperscript{376} – the viewpoint here being that they would be taken more seriously as a vessel for a spirit than as a corporeal woman. The \textit{Medium and Daybreak} published a report of Spiritualist activity in Birmingham which stated, “Spiritualism is, I am glad to say, progressing here very unostentatiously, but surely…meetings are held for physical phenomena to convince sceptics…on Sunday evenings for trance-speaking and development of mediums…both meetings are well-attended”.\textsuperscript{377} In the same issue, a lecture by one Mr. Harper discussed the relationship between Spiritualism to social life, and paid particular attention to the elevation of women, “who hold such an important position in relation to the progress of society, especially in the matter of morals”.\textsuperscript{378} Working-class Spiritualists harboured the same hostility towards Christianity as the Owenites – many of them were secularists, and in this way differed greatly from the middle-class.\textsuperscript{379} The secularists were scorned by the southern middle-class for their new interest in Spiritualism, who retorted “…in Bradford, Bingley and other Yorkshire towns…there are [secularists], once notorious for believing nothing, now equally notorious for believing everything”.\textsuperscript{380} Many of the Spiritualist messages published were from the background of middle-class Christianity, and those that adhered to secular Spiritualism were not commonly respected by their middle-class counterparts.\textsuperscript{381} For the working-class Spiritualists, however, the doctrine of the Christian churches was distasteful, especially the emphasis placed on the poor always being prevalent in society.\textsuperscript{382} When religious quotes were used for emphasis by Burns and his fellows, they were of a hopeful nature and emphasized the idea of the working-class gaining their own freedom; “we do not approve of the cramped up class, thus Saith the Lord, and it came to pass”.\textsuperscript{383}

\textsuperscript{375} \textit{Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph}, No. 12, Vol. 4, 16 May, 1857.
\textsuperscript{376} Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium”, 204.
\textsuperscript{377} \textit{Medium and Daybreak}, 29 April 1870, 27.
\textsuperscript{378} \textit{Medium and Daybreak}, 29 April 1870, 31.
\textsuperscript{379} Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 38.
\textsuperscript{380} \textit{Westminster Review}, No. 151, January 1862, 48.
\textsuperscript{381} Oppenheim, \textit{The other world}, 86.
\textsuperscript{382} Oppenheim, \textit{The other world}, 89.
\textsuperscript{383} (\textit{Lyceum Banner}, 1908, vol. 18, 97f). Quoted in: Barrow, \textit{Independent spirits}, 197
Even the same Mr. Green who was featured in Mrs Britten’s autobiography, in a hand-bill he published slandering Spiritualists, made the connection between Spiritualism and working-class movements. He wrote that the outcome of Spiritualism would be to “…sweep away every king from his throne; substitute for monarchy a reign of defunct materialised Nihilists, Socialists, and Communists”.

Even the principles of Spiritualism reflected some of the communal ideas of socialism – in *The Creed Of The Spirits, And The Influence Of The Religion Of Spiritualism*, published in 1871 by Emma Hardinge Britten, the fifth commandment states “thou shalt remember that a wrong done to the least of thy fellow creatures is a wrong done to all”, and the eighth states “…in cases where thy welfare, or that of thy friend, is to be balanced against that of society, thou shalt sacrifice thyself or friend to the welfare of the many”.

For the working-class, Spiritualism was a tool in order to help explain beliefs about the fluidity of spiritual and psychical forces, not a mechanism to promote greater religious ties. Alfred Russell Wallace, one of the founders of the theory of natural selection and evolution, announced that he was a Spiritualist, and emphasized the scientificity of plebeian Spiritualism. John R. Durant stated that Wallace converted to Spiritualism because of his “enduring contradiction between his philosophy of nature [i.e., natural selection] and his philosophy of man and society [spiritualism and socialism].” Wallace came from a plebeian background, and learned much about science and literature from courses taken at the Mechanic’s Institutes. In 1839, he heard Robert Owen speak at the Owenite Hall of Science, and became especially concerned with Owen’s idea that self-improvement was the remedy for social emancipation. It is ironic that Owen emphasized the idea of self-improvement, because this was one of the tenants pushed forth by the middle-class to control the working-class. Phrenological studies done by the middle-class, “provided a simple key to understanding the need to obey the Laws of Nature; radical social and political schemes were shown to be unnecessary – unnatural – for with phrenology the individual could improve himself”.

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384 Emma Hardinge Britten. *Spiritualism Vindicated And Clerical Slanders Refuted: In Answer To Mr. M. W. Green* (Dunedin, NZ: George T. Clark, 1879), 9.
387 Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 44.
389 Ibid., 130.
Before his death in 1858, Robert Owen converted to Spiritualism, and in 1870 Wallace published “On the Limits of Natural Selection as Applied to Man”, arguing that Spiritualism deserved scientific study of an unbiased nature.\textsuperscript{391} Spiritualism was a welcoming viewpoint for Wallace because even after the theory of social Darwinism was put forth, it allowed Wallace to keep his utopic ideals.\textsuperscript{392} Even the Spiritualist version of heaven, named “Summerland” was told of as a place “where Socialism is already an accomplished fact”.\textsuperscript{393} For those who disbelieved in the idea of a Christian afterlife, Summerland was a spiritual haven “there is no eternal torment, no heaven of ecstatic bliss. What spiritualism does bring to light is the prospect of a progressive future for human beings…-death but the birth into another sphere of existence, a sphere in which every human being is exactly that which himself and society have made him”.\textsuperscript{394} Summerland was a place of equality, and reform had taken place in every structure and bureaucracy, from homes to lyceums to reformatory institutions.

Lyceums were educational institutions favoured by the Spiritualists as they were able to provide a curriculum based around mental and physical health and the fostering of spiritual awareness. Owenites also viewed education as responsibility of the whole society, thus Lyceums were attractive to both Spiritualists and Socialists.\textsuperscript{395} Robert Burns had encouraged the lower classes to set up institutions for their own education, as it would be key for managing their own freedoms. There was still an emphasis through the lyceums to encourage the domestic nature of women; the Lyceum Banner magazines produced separate issues for men and women, and whilst the issues for men were based in scientific thought and progress, the issues for women were mainly concerned with their life at home. A male author of one of the issues wrote of the desired qualities of a young lady as “1) Well Domesticated…2) One who knows how to Cook a good plain meal…3) Economical…3) Orderly and a Lover of Home”.\textsuperscript{396} Whilst there was a definite undercurrent of thought that placed women in their natural habitat in the home, there were still lessons at the Lyceum which focused on the sphere of women being extended to a place where “good can be done to any…in a profession, in business, in the world at large”.\textsuperscript{397} The Lyceum Banner and the Two Worlds often interchanged their writers\textsuperscript{398}, so this

\textsuperscript{391} McCalman, “Alfred Wallace’s Conversion”, 136.
\textsuperscript{392} McCalman, “Alfred Wallace’s Conversion”, 137.
\textsuperscript{393} Barrow, “Socialism in eternity”, 47.
\textsuperscript{394} (St. George Stock, Attempts at Truth (London: Trübner, 1882). 134). Quoted in Oppenheim: The Other World, 94.
\textsuperscript{395} Rowbotham, Women in Movement, 141.
\textsuperscript{397} (Lyceum Banner, 1908, vol. 18, 90). Quoted in: Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 61.
\textsuperscript{398} Barrow, “Socialism in eternity”; 56.
yo-yoing between domestic duties and inspirational soliloquies may not be as incompatible as one may originally think. Reformatory institutions were still said to contain resemblances to a class system, but not in a similar manner as on Earth.  

Socialists also attended séances, of which the phenomena produced by the mediums was seemingly the same regardless of the social class of the participants. An anonymous letter from a doctor was published in the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, which stated:

> to those of the great working classes, for the real movement towards the amelioration of our race. Spiritualism and its consequences are in your hands. Christ originally placed there...Its destiny has been established by high mysterious power, and the advent of a millennium or universal brotherhood, may be, in some measure, forwarded by the labours of Robert Owen; but the events which will ensure it, depend upon the progress made in the minds of the operative classes, under the direction of powers higher than any of ours...  

Spiritualism outlasted both Owenism and its accompanying secularism, perhaps because it was more focused on controlling aspects of everyday lives. Spiritualism’s focus on self-education meant that great emphasis was placed on continuous personal and intellectual growth – Burns wrote that “no class of men required to know more of human nature than Spiritualists”. Upon examining the above sources I am certain that many working-class women would have found in Spiritualism a religion that did not see their class degradation as a natural process nor meant that they had to mingle with the middle-class. Socialism would have appealed to many Spiritualists because of the hope it gave of a future utopian society as well as a shared scorn of the Christian middle-class which had judged them for decades. A large part of how they would have been made aware of the connection between the two movements would have been through the media of the day - newspapers.

4.3 Plebeian Newspapers

Upon examination of my primary sources, I discovered that the sources that proved the most telling were that of newspapers, where men and women wrote to offer praise of public

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399 Ibid., 47.
400 Barrow, Independent Spirits, 124.
401 Supplement to the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, July 1855, 53.
402 Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 53.
403 Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 55.
mediums, or of women in the working-class in general. The Two Worlds newspaper, edited by Emma Hardinge Britten, was published in Manchester in the 1880s and became the chief rival to those in London.\(^{404}\) James Burns, editor of Human Nature in London, also released the working-class targeted newspaper Medium and Daybreak in 1870, which had the widest readership for many years.\(^{405}\) Burns also had his headquarters in Holborn, which he called “The Progressive Library and Spiritual Institution”, that catered to popular Spiritualism and offered an inexpensive admission price of a shilling per person.\(^{406}\) According to a census in 1888, Spiritualism had spread in the North and the Midlands; numbers of Spiritualists are often difficult to determine, due to anonymity, financial restrictions (membership to Spiritualist societies could be as expensive as a guinea), and lack of registration of séance attendees. Numbers are estimated at anywhere between 10,000 and 100,000 people.\(^{407}\) Because much of Spiritualism was private, and only emerged to defend itself from criticism, the number of séances which took place is difficult to determine.\(^{408}\) The two groups most heavily controlled by the working-class, spiritualism and secularism, are each estimated to have had approximately 10,000 activists each.\(^{409}\) Spiritualist societies started to emerge in London, such as the British National Association of Spiritualists, which was created in 1874. The BNAS maintained that their original goal was to unite all classes (and correct the “excessive irregularity in the distribution of wealth”)\(^{410}\) and to become an umbrella organization for all classes; instead, it found itself representing only the wealthy believers.\(^{411}\) Newspapers such as The Light were also primarily directed at the middle-class, something that was evidenced from their rational science-based studies instead of sensationalist headlines; it was a “credible and level-headed paper, something all middle-class men and women pride themselves on”.\(^{412}\)

The Spiritualists National Federation was endorsed by both Two Worlds and Emma Hardinge Britten herself; a combination of forty-two locally affiliated societies with a primarily working- and lower-middle class membership, their core was the Midlands and northern England, and

\(^{404}\) Owen, Darkened Room, 23.
\(^{405}\) Owen, Darkened Room, 23.
\(^{406}\) Oppenheim, The Other World, 43.
\(^{407}\) Owen, Darkened Room, 26.
\(^{408}\) Barrow, Independent Spirits, 125.
\(^{409}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 97.
\(^{410}\) Owen Darkened Room, 25.
\(^{411}\) Owen, Darkened Room, 25.
for many years their headquarters was in Manchester. Working-class Spiritualism was inclined to be more secular – Spiritualism was used to explain their beliefs in the fluidity of the spirit and the psychical forces which surrounded them in their daily lives. Nevertheless, secularism was not a barrier to the acceptance of the working-class; rather, “spiritual beliefs tended to have a homogenizing effect which was invariably strong enough to overcome the uneasiness with which, for example, middle-class sitters sometimes regarded working-class sitters”. The secularists shared their interest of campaigning for freedom from authorities and found it resonated with the Spiritualist ideals of dispensing with theology. The lower-class Spiritualist movement adopted the most radical of opinions, such as the reforming of divorce laws, expressed by James Burns in 1867 “…seeing that it is a crime for man and woman to live in marriage who are not fittingly man and wife, it would separate them if under the direction of wise and superior motives.” Henry Wright commented “the right of woman to decide for herself, when, how often and under what circumstances she shall assume the responsibilities and be subjected to the sufferings of maternity is to be a settled principle of the coming republic. That it is a crime of blackest hue for husbands to impose maternity on their wives when they know their nature does not call for it”.

Although séance rooms were places for sexual theatrics to transpire, Spiritualism as a whole in England was linked to sexual conservatism – sacred maternity and sexual respectability were key concepts, and these pillars were supported by radicals and feminists alike. Britten was editor of the Spiritualist newspaper Two Worlds, the “people’s popular penny spiritual paper” that did not shirk away from commenting on the social inequalities of the time. The paper also encouraged independence from class for the individual – “titled and wealthy class…we, men, cannot own any material thing or possession. The only possessions we can own are our character and our knowledge” A lecture by a Miss Hallow in Miles Platting entitled “Cause and Cure of Crime, Poverty and Disease”, she declared that “uncleanliness,
intemperance, and the inequality of men being the cause of a great deal of suffering”.\textsuperscript{422} In a letter to the editor on January 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1888, the author wrote “a stupendous spirit of inequity is abroad amongst all classes…the most effectual way to do this is for all who are blessed with spiritual gifts, especially our public workers, to surround themselves with such conditions that the highest possibilities spiritually may be reached”.\textsuperscript{423} Accepting money for séances was also viewed as a natural outcome of society; “these people seem to think, that mediums are more than mortals, and that they can live on sublimated ether and spirit plums…if the service time or labour of the medium is of utility it is also of value, and that value…will be regulated by the law of supply and demand…mediums who work for nothing are of no more value, in my estimation, than those who receive pay…”.\textsuperscript{424} In the March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1888 issue of \textit{Two Worlds}, details were published of an address by a Mr. Clark in Salford, the title of one being “Is it wise to open Free Libraries on Sunday?” Mr. Clark declared the spirit guides had proved that any way to elevate humanity was wise, and “…any means taken to entice men and women from the public-house and its attending influence, were well deserving the immediate attention of all who desired to raise the fellow men”.\textsuperscript{425} \textit{Two Worlds} also discussed their primary working-class Spirituallist base and it’s lack of cohesion in the north, from a Mr. J. Armitage –

\begin{quote}
...in glancing over the Yorkshire district plan, I find Bradford with no less than nine different meeting rooms…Keighley, again, has three meetings rooms…Leeds has two, and Huddersfield…is it not time that spiritualists should learn to have more charity and tolerance towards each other…cannot something be done to induce all the units on the broad principle of brotherhood and mutual confidence in each other…?
\end{quote}

\textit{Two Worlds} was considered to be the closest in ideology to the modest form of Socialism, as they both encouraged independence for class and individual.\textsuperscript{427} The magazine even reflected their support for socialism, declaring that is was “true naturalism – justice, law, order and degree”.\textsuperscript{428} An editorial in \textit{Two Worlds} ran in 1897 entitled “Do the spirits teach Socialism?” – both were seen as doctrines devoted to the “development of human brotherhood”, and both shared the common enemies of wealth and traditional religious fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{429} Socialism

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\textsuperscript{422} \textit{Two Worlds}, No. 10, 20 Jan. 1888, 155.
\textsuperscript{423} \textit{Two Worlds}, 20 Jan. 1888, 150.
\textsuperscript{424} \textit{Two Worlds}, 27 Jan. 1888. No.11.
\textsuperscript{425} \textit{Two World}, 2 March 1888, 240.
\textsuperscript{426} \textit{Two Worlds}, 9 March 1888, 250.
\textsuperscript{427} \textit{Barrow, Independent spirits}, 114.
\textsuperscript{428} \textit{(Two Worlds, 1888, vol. 1, 405f). Quoted in Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”}, 49.
\textsuperscript{429} \textit{Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”} 50.
\end{flushright}
was promulgated by *Two Worlds* as being the “true naturalism – justice, law, order and degree…it should level up rather than pull down, and range all [the varieties of the race] into such harmony as will give to each his due share of human rights”\(^{430}\). Socialism that contained Spiritualist leanings either encouraged preaching in the current world or had a specific goal in mind whilst humbling acknowledging its own status. Independent Labour Party member Peter Lee of Rochdale edited *Two Worlds* for six months – a former Conservative Anglican, he had converted to socialism during the coal strike of 1893-94, and now lectured on mediumship and mesmerism.\(^{431}\) Fellow ILP member Keir Hardie commented on Spiritualism thus: “the unseen forces that make for progress…acting with or without our cooperation, but…become…the media through which they communicate themselves to our fellows”.\(^{432}\) These “unseen forces” refer to the spirit forces that spoke through mediums, and were seen by both Socialists and Spiritualists as campaigning for change. Will Phillips, editor of *Two Worlds* from 1899-1906, claimed to have spoken at no less than forty-eight Socialist meetings in one year.\(^{433}\) The magazine Emma Hardinge Britten started after she left the *Two Worlds, The Unseen Universe*, also included commentary that supported Socialism and criticised the materialistic Spiritualists;

> *We cannot attach any blame for this decadence to the worthy people who have in charge the public services devoted to Spiritualism. They are for the most part working men and women; persons who give to the cause time and means at much personal sacrifice, and are obliged to content themselves too often with such obscure places of meeting, as repeal rather than attract ‘the world at large’.*

By 1900, the Independent Labour Party had this to say about the status of working-women “True freedom for a woman is not freedom to earn *any* wage under *any* conditions. It is freedom to live a life worth living, and to develop her power to the full…”\(^{435}\) Logie Barrow, in his work *Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebeian Spiritualists, 1853-1913*, also suggested that there is a connection between the Spiritualist Lyceums and the increasing appearance of women in the local Independent Labour Party groups.\(^{436}\) Looking at the geographic pattern, many

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\(^{431}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 52.

\(^{432}\) Barrow, *Independent spirits*, 113.

\(^{433}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 50.

\(^{434}\) Emma Hardinge Britten, *The Unseen Universe*, vol. 1, 6 Sep.1892, 269.


\(^{436}\) Barrow, “Socialism in Eternity”, 62.
meeting places for Spiritualists corresponded with the ILP and Labour churches, which were founded in 1890. Speaking on socialism, it was said that it “cannot be regarded as a political party, but rather as a channel through which the ideals of a reformatory nature are finding expression. Politics is reform degenerated…politics is of the flesh. Reform is of the spirit”.

The branch of London Spiritualism was viewed by some as the early “respectable” Spiritualism, quite separate from its northern Spiritualist counterpart.

A published article in *Medium and Daybreak* wrote that a Mr. Bertram, at a lecture on social distinctions, had declared that the aim of Spiritualism is to elevate mankind to a higher standard in which the majority of abuses would be removed. He chastised the artificiality of class distinctions “…and that disregard of natural instincts which disapproves of a marriage between a rich man and a poor woman, though they may be spiritually fitted for each other”.

A paper in 1870 recorded the opening of a conference by A.C. Swinton, entitled “our rights and their sanctions; our wrongs and their remedies”. The conference touched upon the possibility of altering class divisions and the limitations of the rights of labourers, “so long as class distinctions were maintained among us, the workman must remain the victim of the law referred to”. Seats at the lecture were free and the working classes especially were made welcome. At the Bradford Mechanics Hall, in which a Mr. Peebles was lecturing, he stated that “our good friends the Spiritualists are mostly of the hard-working class, and have neither time nor money for anything of an extra nature”. The Spiritualists were also keen to present themselves as enlightened, particularly Spiritualist women. Mr. Peebles complained about a non-Spiritualist, Mrs. Law, saying that he did not care for her movements or her manner, and instead of asking a question on the spot, “as becomes a lady in all enlightened countries”, she went and boldly joined him on the stage.

On the subject of reform, *Two Worlds* appeased both its Spiritualist and Socialists supporters; “Spiritualism has made extensive inroads amongst the miners of the north, and proved a blessing in hundreds of homes. But what can we say of the rapacity of the Christian capitalists? It is quite time that the brute force of capital was curbed, and the greed of Christian masters

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440 *Medium and Daybreak*, 6 May 1870, 39.
441 *Two World*, Vol 1 no. 11, 17 June 1870, 55.
442 *Medium and Daybreak*, 6 May 1870, 40.
443 *Medium and Daybreak*, 6 May 1870, 40.
stopped. Humanity demands justice and equal opportunity”. The magazine was also outspoken in the inequality women faced – an author of a book review from February 1888 wrote “…the marriage laws have been, and still are, very one-sided and unjust towards woman every thoughtful and right-feeling person knows”. The Two Worlds issue from April 13, 1888, mused upon the earnings of citizens of the UK, and wrote that “the average earnings of the collier is about £12 a year: compare that with the sum of £143,000 got in 1883 by the Duke of Hamilton from mining royalties, and then say if the workman is not defrauded”.

Working-class Spiritualists prided themselves on their differences from the middle-class, and several were outspoken on the position of women. Many Spiritualists were introduced to Socialism, and vice-versa, as both ideologies shared numerous similarities, most notably a scorn of Christian doctrine and class inequalities. I have shown that newspapers such as the Two Worlds and Medium and Daybreak often introduced issues regarding class and inequality to their readers, and reminded them that they were partners in the creation of a brighter future.

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444 Two Worlds, 18 Nov. 1887, 10.
445 Two Worlds, No. 13, 10 Feb. 1888.
446 Two Worlds, 13 April 1888, ii.
5. The Legacy of the Female Medium

By the 1870s in Victorian Britain, an expansion of the rights and occupations of women was occurring; simultaneously, Spiritualists were also experiencing a decline in the number of female mediums. The nineteenth century framework of what Phillippe Arie called “The Age of the Beautiful Death”, due to the theatricality of the afterlife and the emphasis on experiencing spirit visions, is attributed to the “rising belief in the autonomy of the spirit”. The same authors that had written about working-class women and their contemptuous morality had by 1850s begun to realise that paid labour was not denigrating them. The Married Women’s Property Act passed in 1870, meaning that women no longer needed their husbands or fathers permission to enter into contracts and own property in their own name. The working-class also made some victories – the Manhood Suffrage Association was formed by working-class men in the 1860s to demand the vote. By 1871, 33% of the working-class had gained the right to vote. After 1869, both single and widowed female ratepayers in England and Wales could vote in local elections, and with the passing of the Education Act in 1870, women who were both parish and municipal voters were eligible to vote in school board elections.

Additionally, feminist movements to repeal the contagious diseases acts and appeals for suffrage had started to appear. 1887 saw the founding of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, 1889 the founding of the Women’s Franchise League, and 1891 the creation of the Women’s Emancipation Union. Mediumship had provided an unconscious resistance for women to their roles of class and gender – through their very weakness, their bodies, they had garnered the tools necessary to hold power over their peers. The most succinct remark upon the power of the medium would perhaps be the following: “the Victorian medium is a figure who subverts femininity and instigates questions of class, sexuality, and the position of women in the private and the public sphere both in this world and the next”. One of the enduring

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447 Owen, Darkened Room, 234.
448 King, “Shadow of a Mesmeriser”, 190.
450 Frader and Rose, Gender and Class, 206.
451 Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England, 162.
452 Hall et al., Defining the Victorian nation, 36.
453 Hall et al., Defining the Victorian nation, 158.
454 Hall et al., Defining the Victorian nation, 157.
Legacies of the Victorians has been their “biological and pseudo-naturalist appropriations” which are now being challenged thanks to post-modern feminist theory about how much agency women utilized. The emancipation of women from the confines of their gender and class norms could perhaps be summated thus; “the real strength of the women’s liberation movement is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality.” The decades of the middle and late 19th century have been called “the most plebeian of the 19th century” – working-class people allied themselves with lower middle class, for reasons both political and social. Individuals were repressed through their sexuality, and sexuality itself was the arena of struggle. There was no need for a restriction of the sexual mores which had dictated their position; “the performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice. Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all.”

Social theorists have bolstered the argument that the peoples actions were influenced primarily by the meanings they prescribed to the situations in which they participated. This “self-conscious reconstruction of the self”, allowed working-class women to present themselves as not online passive participants in the wider scheme of spirit communication, but also as women who inhabited the public sphere as being just as worthy of respect as their middle-class counterparts. In particular, the act of possession became synonymous with power – the more powerless a woman was to stop spirits from possessing her, the more power she held in the séance room. Before this time, if a woman was in a prominent societal position, she held influence rather than power. I can determine that women exercised their power when they were able to – that is, in the séance room. The power was productive in that they were able to transcend the role they played, and the power came from the bottom up – that is, it came from those working-class women who were oppressed.

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457 McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, 194.
459 Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault*, 43.
463 Owen, *Darkened Room*, 9.
6. Conclusion

Upon examining the source material, I summate that several facts came to light about the position of working-class Spiritualist women and their self-representation. In the nineteenth century, England was a society that was attempting to define the freedom of the individual and the natural hierarchical state\(^{464}\), and spirit communication only added to these debates. Working-class Spiritualist mediums were forced to work against pre-conceived notions against their class, most notably the accusations of fraud, but they retaliated through emphasizing their lack of interest in worldly materials, and their lack of agency, such as is the case with Florence Cook, Annie Fairlamb and Emma Hardinge Britten. The self-representation of mediums, as seen through interviews and autobiographies, was calculated and served a purpose; the mediums were aware of how to present themselves in the best possible light. The similarities shared between Socialism and Spiritualism meant that many members of the working-class found themselves interested in both movements, something that is evidenced through newspapers such as the *Two Worlds, Unseen Universe* and the *Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph*. Additionally, the status symbol that Spiritualism brought would have made becoming a medium an attractive choice for a working-class woman.

Although working-class mediums did face their own unique problems, Spiritualism as a whole emphasized the moral equality of all its members. Spiritualism, for however brief a time, allowed women to propel to the forefront of the decision-making process due to the fact that their innate feminine qualities were the very tools that enabled spirit communication. I understand that working-class women have been neglected for a great deal of the historical tableau, and finding research about their contributions to this field has proved both difficult and piquing – it can be said, however, that many working-class mediums were introduced to Spiritualism through the outlet of Socialism, both of which inspired hope for a new world order and an abolishment of the hierarchical structure both groups found themselves dissatisfied by. Female mediums, whether working-class or not, were able to formulate agency in the traditional power system and thus provided us a glimpse of a stage in which the main performance was the séance and the chief actors were those who sought, however consciously, to upend the gender norms which constrained their very beings. Mediumship offered women a chance to escape their circumscribed gender and class roles, however unconsciously, as well as a break from the monotonous lives they lived centred around home and hearth.

\(^{464}\) King, “Shadow of a Mesmeriser”, 198.
I have also shown how mediums presented their bodies as passive vessels yet simultaneously used them to subvert positions of power. Female mediums were already in a position where they were viewed as inherently more connected to the *natural*, and therefore emphasizing their relation to a realm that could neither be seen or heard except through a somatic intermediary put them in a precarious position. Emma Hardinge Britten rejected the notion that she willingly became a vessel for the spirits, but still used her respected position to declare her support for professional mediums and the working class. Florence Cook made sure to blur the identities between herself and her spirit Katie King cleared her of fraudulent accusations even when she was uncovered impersonating a spirit years later. Her insistence, even years later, that she was pressed upon by spirits to become a medium and she only offered herself to a patron to prove her innocence affirmed her status in the public eye as a medium who was not interested in the materialism of the mortal plane. The séance room was an ideal theatre to blur identities, but how the identities were blurred, as well as the own intentions of the mediums, dramatically affected their reception in society, as was evidenced from the cases of Annie Fairlamb and Catherine Wood. Spiritualism and it’s offer (however insufficient) of a religion for all classes and genders would have no doubt been appealing to the working-class, and those working-class women who were already Socialists would have found several commonalities with Spiritualists as well as a plethora of supporters on both sides. Much of this support was displayed in newspapers, which viewed Socialism and Spiritualism as two sides of the same coin.

I know that part of Spiritualism’s fascination was that women used their sexuality in order to subvert the gender norms which had been imposed upon them; they were not trying to prescribe new qualities onto their sex in order to gain some agency in their lives. Instead, women’s bodies were empowered as they relished the feminine qualities attached to their bodies and used them to subvert their societal and political position. Once a working-class woman became a Spiritualist, she navigated a precarious position that involved downplaying her own agency yet at the same time openly supporting her peers. For a class which had long been viewed with disdain and disgust, Spiritualism offered working-class women a chance to grasp for positions in which she was respected, trusted and admired. A working-class Spiritualist woman still had to suffer the implications that came within working as a professional medium, but they had support and some of them successfully managed to distance themselves from being seen as money-hungry frauds. The most successful mediums knew that passivity and lack of interest in materialistic goods would bolster her reputation as a Spiritualist leader. I will stress,
additionally, the power structures that the working-class mediums operated within were not wholly repressive because they were so important to them – they were agents who facilitated their own position of power through the shaping of their identity. I think that it is therefore not a stretch for the reader to imagine that the actions of working-class women, confined twice over by both their class and their gender, saw the use of Spiritualism and the spirit forms which accompanied such a belief as a gateway into a world where they were respected, acknowledged and, most importantly, empowered.
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