

A beautifully formed small hand rose up from an opening in a dining-table and gave me a flower; it appeared and then disappeared three times at intervals, affording me ample opportunity of satisfying myself that it was as real in appearance as my own. This occurred in the light of my own room, whilst I was holding the medium's hands and feet. You cannot perceive this *Something* violently; go past the grasp of the mind that measures all things except this *Something*. You cannot perceive it with concentration. Keeping the purer eye of your soul turned inward, you should extend an empty mind toward this *Something* in order to comprehend it, since it exists outside of the mind. Everything in the universe exists in a state of vibration. It's all about the frequency at which it vibrates. All things in the universe are made up of energy. Quantum science shows us that at the subatomic level, everything is pure energy that is in a constant state of motion, or vibration. The speed at which it vibrates is its frequency, and different things vibrate at different frequencies. We are vibrating at a different frequency than the air we breathe or the paper you hold as you read this. Even things that appear to be solid and unmoving are vibrating. Their subatomic particles are bouncing around all over the place, at a level at which we can't see, so for us, the object appears solid. The frequency at which matter vibrates governs the form that the energy that makes up matter will take. Everything has its own frequency. It's true, some things have similar frequencies. For example, each of the tables at the coffee shop vibrates at about the same frequency. They're all similar tables. After all. But each person – in physical form or not – vibrates at their own frequency. Table turning was derived from an ancient method of divination through spiritual agencies (*mensa divinatoriae*) and in nineteenth-century usage the idea was that the vibratory movements (transferred to the table at the behest of spirits) indicated certain letters of the alphabet, sometimes written down, at other times shouted aloud by the medium. In this way the table turner spelled out messages supposed to come from the spirit world. Woman's Day was celebrated at Lily Dale on Aug 22nd 1894. Over 2,000 people arrived on the regular trains, and presumably another 1,000 upon the excursion trains. Flags and yellow ribbons and buntings were floating from porches, balconies, and windows—an every place where there was room to put them. Chairman Barrett opened the session by a well-worded address of welcome to the suffragists who had come to Cassadaga for their annual celebration. He said the suffrage movement was born the same year and simultaneously with the Rochester knockings, the beginning of Modern Spiritualism, and that Spiritualism embraced every movement that for liberty and equal rights. Spiritualism began to take shape in 1848, the very year and in the same area of New York State that gave birth to the organized women's rights movement with the Seneca Falls Convention. In July 1848, seventy-two years after the American colonies declared their independence from England, a handful of American women called a meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, to declare independence from the “absolute tyranny” of men. Some 300 participants in the first Women's Rights Convention debated the merits of a document they called a Declaration of Sentiments. Consciously modeled after the Declaration of Independence, the text called on the U.S. Government to grant its female citizens, “all the rights and privileges” already enjoyed by white American men. The passage from earth may be symbolized by a river. From the earth side the waters look dark and angry, running swiftly between high banks. But from our side the river looks like a small crystal stream, with inclined banks, lined with beautiful angels waiting to greet the comer. None are afraid to cross from the spirit side, but you are afraid to launch out from the earth shore. January, 1864, a seance with Miss Colburn was held in the Blue Room of the White House. Several socially prominent guests also attended. Miss Colburn went into a deep trance, as was the usual procedure. When the young medium regained consciousness at the end of the sitting, she was surprised to find that the other guests had left the room, and that the President and Mrs. Lincoln had been there alone with her during the last half hour of the seance, conversing with spirits. The meeting now being over and the medium normal and awake, the President thankfully shook her hand and expressed his gratitude for the service she had been to him that evening. “My child”, he said, “you possess a singular gift. That it is of God I have no doubt. Thank you for coming here tonight. It is more important than perhaps anyone here can realize.” Lincoln had made up his mind. The next day he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Spiritualism is threefold; it is scientific, philosophical, and religious. It must be built on the rock of truth, not on the sliding sands of superstition. It's not the believe in a historical God or a geographical God. It's the believe in an eternal and infinite one—A God that is too large to be put within the covers of a book. The revelation altogether too grand to be compassed by any human idea. Mrs. Colby had no new arguments, she said, to bring forward, but would as a few words to strengthen the faith of her hearers. She was assured of woman's progress every time she heard of a woman's day, a woman's union or a woman's club. Men spend far more time in telling women what they can't do than helping them to do it. They say, “see what you have accomplished without the ballot. We have done this for you.” They forget how opposed they were to the innovations they now praise. The condition of women in Germany, who performed manual labor while yoked with oxen or harnessed with dogs, or those in the far East, who dared not walk the streets unveiled was scarcely more deplorable than patriotic working women of America, who were governed without consent and taxed without representation. Buckley at Chautauqua recently laughed at the idea that women were slaves, “Jesus said nothing to Martha about being a slave.” But on the other hand, neither did he say anything to Lazarus about being a slave. Yet if the learned doctor were occupying the same position as Lazarus did, he would be apt for rebel against it.

It was in 1872 that the first Presidential nomination went to a woman. Victoria Woodhull, beautiful, eloquent and 34, was already a national figure. She and her sister had come out of a childhood of squalor in Homer, Ohio, to score sensational successes in Wall Street as “the world’s first women brokers” and “queens of finance.” Victoria used her own newspaper and lectures, which drew thousands, to keep herself in the limelight, and to shock Victorian America. She boldly proclaimed, “Yes, I am a free lover.” She preached Spiritualism. She sharply criticized capitalism. In the early 19th century, a married woman could not sign contracts, was not entitled to her wages, did not have legal custody of her children, could not own property, could not attend college with men, and she could not vote. In the public sphere, when a woman married, she was without rights. He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. **The public, however, was growing eager to paint a sexualized picture of the pair as they became more public. Their background as spiritualists was also shady to Wall Streeters, as the practice was sometimes associated with prostitution. They would use money, earned from the brokerage firm to fund the suffrage movement, and Victoria Woodhull would come to be known as the first woman to petition for women’s suffrage in front of Congress. Victoria later said, “We went into Wall Street, not particularly because I wanted to be a broker ... but because I wanted to plant the Flag of women’s rebellion in the center of the continent.” Victoria Woodhull was nominated as the US presidential candidate for the Equal Rights Party. Her vice-presidential candidate was Frederick Douglass, though he never acknowledged it. Victoria tried again in 1884 and 1892 for the US presidential nomination.** The gendered modes in which Spiritualists claimed religious authority provided was the means by which the practice was demonized and marginalized by nonbelievers. It was precisely the negative, feminine coding of medium-ship that shaped a cultural understanding of Spiritualism as irrational and connected it with excessive, uncontrolled sexuality that later allowed doctors recategorize the medium as the hysteric. While most religious groups viewed the existing order of gender, race, and class relations as commanded by God, Spiritualism was associated not only with the women’s rights movement, but also with the abolition of slavery and other radical movements. At a time when no church ordained women and many forbade them to speak in the house of worship, and women were considered merely the property of their husbands or fathers, women in Spiritualism had equal authority, equal opportunity, and held high religious office in equal numbers. Many mediums gave lectures in trance under the direct influence of spirits. These trance speakers were the first group of American women to speak publicly before large mixed-sex audiences. The sexes were thought to have opposite electric poles. The negative charge of women made them attractive to the positively charged (male) spirits. This gave the female mediums an advantage because only they could receive the messages of the significant male spirits. Thus, they made political speeches under the influence of spirits of such famous personalities as Napoleon, Socrates, and Benjamin Franklin. Since it was not they—but the spirits speaking through them who were responsible for the content—the women could not be held liable for it. Not very surprisingly, the rights of women were now suddenly very dear to these spirits after their deaths. Spiritualism flourished at a time when the dominant culture, informed by science and medicine, was working overtime to fix the boundaries of maleness and femaleness—and later, homosexuality and heterosexuality—and solidifying those binaries as natural, essential, and immutable. Victorian women, cast as both pious and passive, could claim mediumship as a natural calling. Quite different questions and connections are raised by the fact that a significant number of men would find a parallel power in receptivity, crafting an unconventional model of masculinity through spiritual mediumship and trance speaking. That both Spiritualist men and women could reimagine their gender through practices ranging from cross-dressing to defying the vocal ranges equated with sexual difference suggests yet another world of transformations. Spiritualism’s loose structure makes it problematic to say all spiritualists believed one thing or another, but the movement adhered to two critical tenets; an emphasis on the value of individuality; or the equal value of each soul or person, and the idea that after death people entered spheres of spirituality based on the degree to which they had respected the individuality of others while they had been alive. “The only religious sect in the world that has recognized the equality of women is spiritualism,” wrote women’s rights leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Spiritualism peered women opportunities to expand their roles as leaders without overtly confronting 19th-century expectations. **I was holding the medium’s two hands in one of mine, whilst her feet were resting on my feet. Paper was on the table before us, and my disengaged hand was holding a pencil. A luminous hand came down from the upper part of the room, and after hovering near me for a few seconds, took the pencil from my hand, rapidly wrote on a sheet of paper, threw the pencil down, and then rose up over our heads, gradually fading into darkness.**