



secular
spirituality

REINCARNATION AND
SPIRITISM IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

LYNN L. SHARP

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Birth, death, rebirth, and progress without end, this is the law.

Allan Kardec

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Introduction

Secularism and Spirituality

American rock and roll legend Jim Morrison's grave is the most visited site in the most visited cemetery in Paris. What many seekers of famous grave sites may not know is that French spiritist leader Allan Kardec's ranks close behind. In the Père Lachaise cemetery are not only the markers of great writers Oscar Wilde and Honoré de Balzac, but also, and perhaps most popular among them, the miniature standing stones housing the bust of Hippolyte-Léon-Denis Rivail, better known as Allan Kardec (1804-1869). Kardec was the founder of the French spiritist movement, a many-headed, many-voiced effort to derive knowledge and meaning from communication with the spirits of the dead.* The movement was popular, democratic, energetic, and spectacular. It offered followers everything from a hope for social justice (and a reason to practice it) to "proof" that death did not mean the end of life but only a new beginning. Followers of Kardec talked frequently and at great length to the spirits of the dead, they explored what they called life "beyond the veil" that separated this life and death, and they believed firmly in reincarnation.

This belief in reincarnation was widespread in the nineteenth century. Although theories of reincarnation were not unknown earlier, they remained rare and secreted among esoteric searchers. Only in the 1830s, with the rise of romantic socialism and the influx of ideas taken from "newly discovered" (by the West) Hindu and Buddhist thinkers, did reincarnation begin to be integrated into more popular writings and spread generally among the literate.¹ It was with the spiritist movement from the 1850s on that reincarnation became truly popular, as

*"*Spiritisme*" is the French term for what English-speakers call "spiritualism." In French the term *spiritualisme* is a philosophical term referring to the belief that the human spirit or soul exists, as opposed to materialism, which denies the existence of the spirit. I have chosen to use the English equivalent, "spiritism" to distinguish the movement from the more general use of "spiritualism," and from related, but distinctly different, Anglo-American variants.

people spoke daily with the spirits and saw themselves as on a continuum with beings that had already gone beyond the grave.

The spirits have always been with us. Historians of the pre-modern era study belief in them as folklore or popular culture. In non-European societies, anthropologists look for cultural meaning in “different” cosmologies. In European peoples, continuing belief in spirits and magical thinking is often labeled “backward” or “superstitious,” and implied as foolish. While it may occasionally be any of those things, it is also a continuing facet of modern life. As such, it needs to be explored for the meanings that it gives both to popular culture and as an embedded factor of modernity. Here I attempt to do just that, by studying one facet of belief in the world “beyond the veil”—the continuing school of thought that proposes reincarnation as the progressive means to a better world and spirit communications as proof of that theory.

In other words, I take spiritism seriously as an alternative spirituality, as popular religion, and as expressing (and attempting to resolve) one of the key tensions in the nineteenth century: that between religion and science. I have set out here to tell the story of the spiritist movement, including its antecedents among the romantic socialists and freethinkers who imagined a variety of new, secular approaches to essentially religious questions. The story also shows how spiritists and other thinkers used reincarnation to argue for social reform, for political change, and for a changed vision of gender. Lastly, I argue that rather than Enlightenment thought replacing Catholic religious tradition in nineteenth-century French culture, the relationship of reason to religion is more complicated. Lines of spiritualist thought in the nineteenth century, especially spiritism, created new combinations of spirituality, reason, and romantic outlooks that refused to give absolute primacy to either Enlightenment materiality or to the narrow religiosity of the Catholic church. Reincarnation and spiritism offered a secular version of spirituality popular with those who may have wanted to reject Catholicism in favor of science but definitely wanted to retain a deep-seated religious outlook on the world. This development was quintessentially modern, part of creating a modern political and religious outlook that peaked at the turn of the twentieth century, but is with us still and helped form religious outlooks that continue today.² Reincarnation, for the romantic socialists, for freethinkers, and especially for the spiritists, was attractive because it promoted an ideal of Enlightenment progress without sacrificing religiosity.

Secular Spirituality rejects a traditional dichotomy between religion and the Enlightenment. The book adds a new dimension by illustrating another path of belief, neither fully secular nor fully Catholic, but strongly attached to both traditions. I argue that a large segment of French people retained their religiosity but restructured it in ways that the Catholic church (and many historians) did not recognize. In this I am working in a vein similar to that of Edward Berenson, who has shown how traditional religious beliefs could be harnessed to encourage peasants to shift their political and social beliefs to those of the democratic

socialists of 1848-1850.³ I use the semi-ironic term “secular spirituality” to apply to the variety of beliefs that sprang up from the 1830s on and used the idea of reincarnation as a basis for belief in a continuing spiritual development. The book concentrates then, on the romantic socialists in the 1830s and 1840s, and on the spiritist movement, which began in 1853 and continues (albeit somewhat transformed) even today. These movements created new visions of how humans and the supernatural interacted. They criticized the Catholic church, but they retained many traditionally Christian beliefs, most importantly the importance of what they called Christian charity. Christian charity became linked with class and political solidarity, as these groups used reincarnation to argue that progress meant not only science and new technical knowledge, but new moral knowledge. At heart influenced by the nineteenth-century predilection for progress, they insisted that both society and the individual would improve through a series of lives. The breaching of the Catholic church by the French Revolution allowed for a new burgeoning of alternative spiritualities which give the lie to any theory of overall secularization in the sense of a retreat from belief in the transcendental and supernatural. They give the lie also to the idea that to be “French,” “republican,” or “modern” is to be materialist.

It is the victors who tell the historical tales. One such triumphal tale has been of a long struggle in nineteenth-century France that pitted anti-clerical Republicans against Catholic conservatives. This fight began with the French Revolutionaries’ Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790, which forced priests to choose between the Revolution and the Pope. The Church came out of the Revolution chastened, shrunken, and lacking both priests and parishioners. But Napoleon, in his Concordat of 1801, re-established the Catholic church as the official church of France and it struggled to hold its place throughout the century. The final victory of the Republicans was celebrated by the Law on the Separation of Church and State in 1905. Many historians, looking back, equated anti-clericalism with anti-religiosity; based especially on these great political events, they told the metanarrative of the nineteenth-century as one of increasing secularization. Historians argued that the modern world moved individuals away from religion and toward rational interpretations of the world.⁴ This was, after all, the story that the nineteenth-century’s own historians told.⁵

This traditional narrative remains dominant in French popular culture: every French school child learns the cry of Léon Gambetta in 1877, “Clericalism, *there* is the enemy!” It is supported by the increasingly virulent political rhetoric of the Republicans in the 1870s, as well as by evidence showing decreased church attendance.⁶ Yet this was not the whole story; anti-clericalism and secularization of society are not necessarily linked, nor does a move away from clerical Catholicism necessarily connote a move away from the irrational, the supernatural, and the spiritual.⁷

A growing consensus among historians of France rejects the traditional narrative, arguing that religion remained much more important—and much more

popular—than this traditional narrative allows; despite this shift the narrative retains force among those outside a specialized field of knowledge. One of the reasons for this is that anti-clericalism certainly *was* important in nineteenth-century France. Another is that history textbooks remain wedded to simplifying narratives rather than delving into the multiplicity of experiences that make up the richness of the history of any place and period. Secularism works well in textbooks and makes heroes of the Republicans of the Third Republic, seen as the ancestors of today's political system. It is hardly, however, the whole story.

As early as 1963 D.G. Charlton published his *Secular Religions in France*, which drew attention to a series of thinkers whose philosophies, Charlton argued, acted to replace traditional Catholic religion.⁸ Charlton pointed to the significance of a series of non-catholic thinkers who promoted alternative systems of thought, some of which were strongly religious. Intellectuals such as Comte Henri de Saint Simon and August Comte even formulated their own religions as solutions to moral and social problems. Yet Charlton tended to downplay their religiosity and placed much more emphasis on the political and utopian teachings of these thinkers than on the religious, creating too great a dichotomy between the two.

By the 1980s a series of historians began to question the secularization thesis more directly, insisting that religion remained deeply popular and important in society, culture, and politics. Thomas Kselman's *Miracles and Prophecies* reminded historians of the great importance, and popularity, of the vision of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes. Lourdes constituted only the last and greatest in a series of Marian apparitions in France.⁹ These, and the Church in general, appealed especially to women. Claude Langlois described the great growth of female religious orders in what he called the "feminization of Catholicism." Ruth Harris showed how struggles over meaning at Lourdes in the early Third Republic expressed the tensions between religion and science in creating and directing meaning. Ray Jonas has illustrated the depth of religious belief by looking at the importance of belief in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its increasing popularity, even among men.¹⁰ The French legislature of the early 1870s went so far as to accept the implication that the country as a whole needed to "atone" and approved the building of the Catholic Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the crown of the highest hill in Paris, Montmartre. Modernization, then, did not necessarily go hand in hand with secularization. As Kselman suggested, "our understanding of modernization must be revised."¹¹

Although greatly influenced by the historians cited above, this work takes a different path. These historians showed the continuing importance of Catholicism, especially in its most popular variants. Yet the actors I discuss would seem to fit more into the old secularization narrative: certainly they were among those who no longer went to church, among those who saw Catholicism as "backward" and limiting. Like Jonas, Kselman, and others, I hope to correct previous interpretations of the importance of religion. But my work also challenges

the idea that this non-catholic, "secular" spirituality was in any way a rejection of *religiosity*. It complicates the dichotomies between religion and science and between secular and spiritual that, following the rhetoric of anti-clerical Enlightenment thought, many in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have taken for granted.

What did secular spirituality mean and how was it experienced? Spiritists varied from the elite to the worker. The bulk of the movement was made up of middle and working class people. In Paris, rentiers, accountants, and butchers met together to talk to kin who had passed on. In Lyon and the Nord, silk workers and miners created their own democratic spiritist circles. In Bordeaux and Carcassonne, bourgeois leaders stressed worker education side by side with spirit communication. In the Southwest countryside, rural farm workers conversed with the spirits of dead murderers, and healers cured those forsaken by medical men.

The movement offered something for everyone. Spirits provided information about life after death; they also offered miraculous services, from healing to emergency child care by the departed. Unlike social groups for men or lay religious groups which separated the sexes, spiritism promoted equality in theory and mingled men and women as equal participants in séances. Because it met most frequently in private spaces, the movement allowed women to take leadership roles, and they played a significant part as mediums. Spiritists created a philosophy that retained a traditional faith in the supernatural and the miraculous but integrated them into modern developments in the field of science. Rather than looking to what they saw as "backward" Catholic traditions, spiritists described themselves as looking forward to an egalitarian world of shared solidarity.

Believers in reincarnation imagined an evolutionary, perfectible soul, improving as it moved through a series of lives. Rousseau had argued in his *Origins of Inequality* that human perfectibility and the search for knowledge led away from the equality of "natural man." The spiritists, without ever pointing to Rousseau, nonetheless argued with that Enlightenment vision of social inequality, substituting a different vision of perfectibility, one that led to increasing equality and social justice. As humans progressed toward perfection, they would also become less selfish, more able to create a society that recognized the needs, rights, and interests of all, including the working class and especially women. This vision of a better society offered one of the strongest attractions of spiritism.

Another key attraction, as all of the works that have touched on spiritism in the nineteenth century have concluded, was that the doctrine was "consoling," something believers said at the time. That important facet cannot be ignored, and what consoles different peoples in different times is one of the major objects of religious studies. What is even more intriguing is why a doctrine that might seem alien to a culture could become, fairly suddenly, consoling. If consolation was

one thing that made spiritism and reincarnation attractive, why could this particular belief offer consolation at this particular historical juncture? By answering this question, we understand not only the popularity of spiritism but also the ways religiosity adapted to nineteenth-century values.

The spiritists occupy a paradoxical position in nineteenth-century France and its history. As a popular movement they integrated many of the key currents of the day: romanticism, progress, an interest in science and reason, in education and socialism. Important people from all walks of life took an interest in spiritist phenomena; many, such as the poet Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and the Nobel-prizing winning physiologist Charles Richet (1850-1935), continued to believe in these phenomena throughout their lives. Allan Kardec and his followers were well-known throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and books and pamphlets on spiritism proliferated. Yet also as a movement, spiritism occupied the margins of society. It bordered too close to the "magical" or the irrational to be accepted. After all, educated, bourgeois, nineteenth-century society did not consider it "normal" to converse with the dead, despite the fact that it was not uncommon among peasants in some regions and that tens of thousands of people (among them the bourgeoisie) did it at one time or another, and many quite frequently. To be an avowed spiritist was to open oneself to ridicule and to accusations of being "superstitious." The secular press mocked followers as credulous, somewhat silly, and very likely the dupes of fraudulent mediums. Scientists rejected the movement, despite its claims to empiricism, as unscientific, and the religious press rejected it as dangerous to the faith. It is perhaps this mockery that has led historians to assume the movement was minor and to ignore or dismiss it. Only with the rise of cultural history have the spiritists gained any attention from scholars, and that has been largely from anthropologists or ethnologists interested in the re-appearance of the movement in the 1980s.¹² That spiritism was both central and marginal is key to understanding the way it functioned in general and how it functioned in particular to create a secular spirituality that could attract such a widespread following. Spiritist ideas used contemporary values of progress and science to promote values not yet accepted by many contemporaries, such as socialism and the equality of women. Spiritism offered followers, most of whom were not among the privileged makers of cultural and social change, a means to comment on and try to effect that change.

The possession and interpretation of words held particular value for those many, many spiritists who were as a rule excluded from higher education and other more usual avenues to manipulation of knowledge: bourgeois women, workers of both sexes, even petit bourgeois males. Throughout the book the themes of interpretation and of creation of knowledge through experiment resurface. These themes are key to the popularity of the spiritist movement and of followers' willingness to repeat what might seem now rather banal adventures. Only near the end of the century did the words of the spirits become decoupled from the "truth" most spiritists thought they offered. With the occultist movement,

which claimed to find secret knowledge by interpreting opaque symbols, and with the psychical research movement, which placed paramount importance not on the teachings of spirits, but on “spirit phenomena,” on the “fact” of these events (which was all that could be admitted by “true science,”) the power of spiritism began to decline.

The question of “enchantment” has to be explored in thinking through spiritists’ beliefs and visions of the world. Alongside the secularization and the “disenchantment” of the world that Max Weber claimed was the unavoidable companion to modernity, a strong current continued which acted to re-enchant that world. When Weber discussed an increasingly “disenchanted” world, he did not choose the term secularization but did include the decline of religion and a decreasing sense that the supernatural was active in the world, or that inexplicable things could happen. Scholars of religion and anthropology have, assuming “the West” to be disenchanted, looked at other cultures as somehow still-enchanted. Many of these have equated “enchanted” to “magical” and then explored the magical world view as one in which the participants believe they can access a world other than this one in order to change this one. (An example would be the magic of spells and shamans.) Wouter Hanegraaff, following Jan van Baal, agrees that “magic” can be not just the accessing of another world but the re-enchanting of this one. (His study takes the case of neo-pagans in twentieth-century Britain and the U.S.) The important point here is that re-enchanting or magical belief “permits people to live not in a cold world of cause and effect but in a world which, for all its faults, is one of which one may expect anything.”¹³

One of the things spiritists implicitly tried to do, through the excitement of their meetings and their hope in reincarnation, was to “re-enchant” the world. Unlike later new-age enthusiasts, who consciously rejected scientific rationality in order to seek “re-enchantment,” the spiritists were able to do it by re-forming spirituality into a nominally scientific form and yet keeping it active in their everyday life. In this sense they created what I call “everyday miracles”: the repetition of contact with spirits which, while it did not always bring new specific knowledge, constantly reaffirmed that a “magical,” or supernatural world co-existed and not only could be accessed by those in “this” world but also was constantly intertwined with “this” world. The spiritists, by interacting with the spirits, acted in what S. J. Tambiah calls a “participatory” manner. Although they could not completely rearrange the world (shamans cannot either, of course) they did have a means to find out how and why it worked as it did and the ability to change it, if not immediately (as was true in some cases) then via their behavior and future incarnations.¹⁴ Spiritism and many believers in reincarnation, in their critique of materialism, refused to see science as disenchanting their world. Rather they used the rational tool of science to investigate what some others claimed was the irrational world of the spirits. The spiritist outlook incorporated science and empiricism within an enchanted world view, thus

retaining the supernatural side of the world through a “natural” religion while entering fully into the scientific side of modernity. Romantic socialists, free-thinkers, and spiritists all rejected the simplification of the world to its material factors and instead highlighted the existence of immaterial realms of the world that transformed and thus challenged contemporary cultural values.

* * * *

To understand how secular spirituality thrived in the face of a disenchanted world, we will follow belief in reincarnation from romantic socialism in the 1830s through spiritism and occultism at the end of the century. The majority of the text focuses on the spiritist movement itself, since this group, more than any other, adopted ideas of reincarnation as their hope for both social reform and a new, secular, spirituality.

Chapter one offers an intellectual history of the ideas surrounding reincarnation prior to the spiritist movement. It introduces two key characters, romantic socialists Jean Reynaud and Pierre Leroux. Eager young idealists, Reynaud and Leroux worked together to try to spread social-democratic ideas as a means to social and political reform. Building on Catholic thinker Pierre-Simon Ballanche, Reynaud and Leroux argued that the soul evolved through a series of lives, either on this earth or other planets. They were members of the radical utopians, the Saint-Simonians, in the 1820s. Saint-Simonian ideas of progress, romantic preoccupations with death, new explorations in “oriental” literature, all contributed to Reynaud’s and Leroux’s ideas. Reynaud also popularized his ideas and made them more “French” by arguing, in a fascinating use of history as nationalist propaganda, that the early Gallic druids had believed in reincarnation and bequeathed it to their descendants in the nineteenth century. The first part of the chapter explores the major political discussion around the relationship between the individual and the collective. Should government be made in the name of the former or the latter? Reynaud tended toward the former, Leroux toward the latter. Their ideas spread through the ferment of socialist and democratic politics and romantic literature, read by the major figures of intellectual society during the 1830s and 1840s, up until the 1848 Revolution. Both Leroux and Reynaud participated in the revolution, giddy with hope that they could now achieve their dreams. They did not. Instead they bequeathed their ideas to groups whose existence challenges the interpretation of the failure of 1848 as the end of romanticism and the rise of a more pragmatic, materialist, positivist intellectual outlook. The second part of the chapter illustrates this via a brief survey of a series of groups who incorporated reincarnation into their thinking. Many of these probably borrowed their thought from Jean Reynaud. Freethinker (and later spiritist) Charles Fauvety was central to this dispersion; he and the abbé Constant provide major links between the theorization of reincarnation in the 1840s and

its continuing acceptance in the period 1870-1900. Groups from mesmerists to freethinkers to liberal Protestants appropriated ideas of reincarnation. This segment explores these movements briefly to illustrate the continuity of reincarnation and ideas of social reform across the century.

Chapter two explores the early spiritist movement. Spiritism first took Paris by storm in the 1850s, taking the form of “table-turning” where groups gathered around a table and asked a spirit to move that table as proof of its existence. The chapter then looks at how Allan Kardec transformed a fad into a movement, popularizing the messages of the spirits that taught that each soul could be reincarnated many times as it moved progressively along a path toward divinity and decreasing materiality. Life on earth was only a stage, and an early one, on that path. The 1860s saw rapid expansion of the movement, then retreat in the face of the difficult years of the 1870s. Spiritism spread easily because it offered consolation in the face of death and also the excitement of daily “miracles” and the chance to peek behind the veil of death. Periodicals and intimate private groups ensured followers the chance to express themselves and personally experience the “scientific proof” of the immortality of the soul. Yet spiritism hardly went without challenge; this chapter also explores how mockery by the mainstream press led to a sense of solidarity on the margins that followers adopted in defense, which helped to strengthen the belief of those who continued in the movement.

Chapter three is the most anthropological of the book, closely exploring the meanings of *séances* and doctrine for the followers of spiritism. Democratic by doctrine and form, the spiritist movement also offered a chance to argue for political and social reforms. Spiritists of the 1860s and 1870s used their movement to challenge the government and many mainstream ideas and to promote equality across gender and class lines. Chapter three follows the democratic politics of these groups and looks closely at how spiritism functioned as a site for democratic activity and self-expression, which both acted as a political apprenticeship and allowed people to imagine the world to suit their own needs and values. Women and workers found their voices in spiritist circles as mediums and translators of the spirits. They frequently interpreted spirit messages in ways that challenged contemporary society. These visions not only endorsed socialist politics but also included challenges to gender roles and sometimes promoted an androgynous gender ideal. Many who frequented spiritist *séances* used them as a space of experiment and freedom to transgress and reshape social and political norms and values.

Spiritism’s challenges to both religion and Enlightenment science did not go unheard. Chapter four explores the interactions of spiritism with the gatekeepers of both these groups. After 1880, with the rise of psychiatry and psychical research, spiritist phenomena attained higher recognition in the wider world. Scientists increasingly explored spiritist phenomena, such as trance writing and the movement of objects. These phenomena served as a source for investigation

into hysteria, well known in the case of noted alienist Jean-Martin Charcot, and also into the realm of the subconscious mind and its artistic and scientific possibilities. Chapter four analyzes the tensions these changes brought as spiritist phenomena became important in the formation of psychiatry while spiritists hoped both for scientific acceptance and to remain the definers of the meaning of spiritist “facts.” Yet scientists refused to accommodate spiritist explanations of medium-created phenomena. Catholic authorities also rejected spiritists’ explanations, instead insisting that any voice from the beyond was linked to evil and thus threatened the faith of followers. Spiritists could easily create their own science, but they did assert their right to believe as they wished. As they increasingly lost their hope to convince science of their facticity, many spiritists (re)focused on the religious side of their rhetoric, stressing the moral progress of reincarnation. Spiritists offered a new religiosity, a popular urban religion that integrated both science and religion and yet retained many traditions of folk culture as well, refusing the divisions that many priests and scientists agreed should be made.

Relations between religion and the Third Republic and religion and science were among the most hotly debated and politically important at the end of the century. Tensions in these relations echoed arguments over materialism vs. transcendence. Spiritists participated in this cultural discussion, providing a counter and a foil for science’s claims to objectivity. Spiritism, along with the rising occultist movement that shared some of their values, made claims to being scientific while challenging science’s banishment of the beyond to the realm of disbelief. Chapter five takes up the narrative of the spiritist movement’s fortunes by following spiritist leaders Gabriel Delanne and especially Léon Denis, who led the movement into the twentieth century. Delanne tried valiantly to convince scientists that spiritism should be accepted as a new science and spirit manifestations as proof of reincarnation; Denis continued the earlier emphasis on the spiritual and explored new avenues of occultism and its links to spiritism. Occultism offered a series of challenges to the movement, but did not ultimately diminish its following. In the latter part of the century, feminist spiritists used the teachings of the spirits to argue for new rights. This chapter chronicles the revived popularity of the movement in the 1880s, and the challenge it faced with the new popularity of French occultism, its partial recognition by scientists, and the rise of a rightist strain of the movement, returning to the question of religion and nationalism. As the attempt to claim scientific legitimacy failed, spiritism also lost its bid to become truly a central explanation of the relationship between the material and the supernatural. That failure shifted the movement further toward the margins of society, as reincarnation and spiritism took on new meanings, supporting more mystic and more strongly religious tendencies.

The conclusion explores the status of belief in reincarnation by the early twentieth century. Spiritists and occultists clashed over a democratic or an elitist view of the supernatural, but both groups helped spread a new vision of the soul,

the afterlife, and the materiality of both. Ideas of spiritism and reincarnation offered a way to explain the seemingly inexplicable inequalities of a supposedly rational world. The currents of reincarnation and spiritism acted to integrate followers into the modern world but at the same time insisted on re-enchanting that world and defining it in broader and more spiritual terms than scholars have accepted. Spiritism continued romantic socialist ideas across the century, refusing the cold, hard coda of disenchantment. This study refutes any attempt to define the nineteenth century in terms of a dichotomy between religion and science or religion and secularism. Linking ideals of science, religion, and enlightenment in an evolutionary vision, reincarnation and spiritism promoted equality in this life and hope for the individual soul both in this world and the next. Despite the nineteenth century insistence on “reason” and “science” as overarching categories that could contain all things, spiritists and others struggled over how to define and redefine reason, knowledge, science, and spirituality. Only by exploring the myriad attempts to find a satisfactory version of this combination can we recognize the central importance of these questions to understanding the nineteenth century and its legacy for the twentieth.

Despite the consensus among historians that the old metanarrative is dead, and the agreement among many that no metanarrative can fully celebrate the complexities of history, questions of religion and secularism remain central to French conceptions of national identity, and the culture resolutely defines itself as secular. Witness the recent *Perben Law* (which went into effect in September 2004) prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols in public schools, which has caused great tensions. By exploring the varieties of religious identities in French history, and suggesting that “secular” has many more meanings than previously considered, this book adds insight not only to the French past but also to the French present.

NOTES

1. This is hardly to claim that the majority of literate people believed in reincarnation, but that the belief entered frequently into literary, philosophical, and political musings and many people did accept it.

2. New works dealing with Britain and Germany present similar arguments that occultism and parapsychology or psychical research are closely linked to both modernity and a modern subjectivity. On Germany, see Corrina Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); on Great Britain see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

3. Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830–1852* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

4. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

5. Michelet, for example, argued that there was not room for both the Church and reason in the new state of France. Christianity was arbitrary and irrational; the Revolution was reason itself. *History of the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 17–26.

6. A number of studies have argued that decreased church attendance means decreased religiosity. See Jacques Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1973) and Christiane Marcilhacy, *Le Diocèse d'Orléans au milieu du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Sirey, 1964).

7. René Remond, in his study of anti-clericalism, argues that clericalism and anti-clericalism are linked geographically and often depend one upon the other. “L’anticléricalisme est plus une contre-religion qu’un irreligion,” quoted in Louis Perouas, *Les Limousins: leurs saints, leur prêtres, du XV^e au XX^e siècles* (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 178.

8. D. G. Charlton, *Secular Religions in France, 1815–1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

9. Thomas A. Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Modern France* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1983). A number of authors have explored the attraction of Marian apparitions. Michael Carroll looks at their psychological side, while Barbara Corrado Pope explores the politics and feminism of Marian visions. See Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary, Psychological Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Barbara Corrado Pope, “Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 173–196.

10. Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000 [1999]); Raymond A. Jonas, *France and the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984).

11. Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies*, 147.

12. Régis Ladous has written a brief history of the movement as have anthropologists Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine. The latter survey rather than mine French spiritism; their main interest is in the relation of the French movement to spiritism in Brazil. Ethnologist Christine Bergé explores the medium as “tool” and the use of the “machine” in working-class communication with the spirits, especially in the twentieth century. Nicole Edelman offers an excellent analysis of the importance of spiritism for women mediums. There is also an old volume by Yvonne Castellan in the *Que sais-je?* series which is less scholarly but provides a good flavor of the movement. In English, Michel Pierssens has included spiritism in his argument on the importance of heterodox sciences. John Warne Monroe looks at the political position of spiritists among other heterodox movements such as mesmerism and occultists. Régis Ladous, *Le Spiritisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1989); Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine, *La Table, les livres, et les esprits* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1990); Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France 1875-1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Christine Bergé, *La Voix des esprits: ethnologie du spiritisme* (Paris: Métailié, 1990) Yvonne Castellan, *Le Spiritisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987) [originally titled *La métapsychique* (1954)]; Michel Pierssens, “The Turmoil of the Unknown: Unknown Forces, Paranormal Phenomena, and the Response of the Scientific Establishment in the 19th Century,” *Diogenes*, 169 (1995): 109-119; see also “Le Syndrome des tables tournantes,” *Les Temps modernes* 45/258 (July 1990): 87-111. John Warne Monroe “Evidence of Things Not Seen: Spiritism, Occultism and the Search for a Modern Faith in France, 1853-1925” (Yale University 2002) and “Cartes de Visite from the Other World: Spiritism and the Discourse of Laïcisme in the Early Third Republic” *French Historical Studies* 26/1 (2003): 119-153. Monroe also has a book, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* forthcoming from Cornell University Press in 2007.

13. J. Van Baal, quoted in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 83.

14. See S. J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 105-110, for his summary of these categories.

Chapter One

Romantic Reincarnation and Social Reform

In the spring of 1842, Mme Dumesnil, the beloved friend of Jules Michelet, lay dying. In an agony of spiritual suffering, Michelet cast about for resolution to the meaninglessness of death. He read the work of Pierre Leroux, *De l'humanité*, which assured him that collective humanity lived on, but gave him no promises for the individual soul. Michelet, convinced of the immortality of the soul, refuted Leroux's ideas with a vision of metempsychosis of the individual soul progressing toward perfection.* Pining for his lost love, he refused to accept Leroux's idea that the individual personality would disappear, subsumed and reborn into humanity in general. He later pointed to Jean Reynaud as the source of his ideas on the immortality of the soul.¹ Michelet's struggle, and the answers he came up with, are just one example of the importance of metempsychosis in answering questions that fascinated French Romantics: What kind of life after death exists for those who reject traditional Christianity? Even more important to many was the question of the proper importance of the individual in relation to society. Many romantic writers tackled these questions. Gérard de Nerval, Charles Nodier, Alphonse de Lamartine, Eugène Sue, George Sand, Honoré Balzac, Jules Michelet, and Victor Hugo (among others) all wrote on the subject of

* A note on the terms. Metempsychosis and palingenesis were common terms in early nineteenth century discussions of evolution and reincarnation. Palingenesis referred at the time to the (re)generation of an animal; a different animal emerged, but one that existed already in genesis in the germ cells of its predecessor. In palingenesis, evolution occurred, but it was not random or left to nature; instead all stages of existence were preordained. Metempsychosis generally refers to the theory of the transmigration of souls and includes in most definitions the progress from animal (or "lower" forms) into human (presumed a "higher" form.) Although the theories discussed here do not assume movement from animal to human, the term metempsychosis is used since the authors at the time used it. In today's usage, the term would be reincarnation which, as generally accepted, refers only to a series of rebirths in human form. Throughout the book, reincarnation is used most frequently to refer to what these theories called metempsychosis.

metempsychosis and what it offered to the world; most of them borrowed at least part of their ideas from three important theorists of plural lives and societies: neo-Catholic romantic writer Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776-1847), and the republican romantic socialists Pierre Leroux (1797-1871) and Jean Reynaud (1806-1863).²

The political climate of the 1820s and 1830s called for a rebuilding of the world shattered by revolution, empire, and war. Ideas of rebirth and regeneration were prominent ways to conceptualize this rebuilding, as was the ideal of progress. Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud, all widely known in their time, took the idea of palingenesis, or metempsychosis, previously subscribed to primarily in occult circles, and applied it to society and the individual in their attempts to theorize society after the Revolution. These thinkers created a new idea of social change and social justice, rejecting traditional Catholicism but relying on religious ideas of moral justice through metempsychosis to buttress ideas of social reform.

This chapter introduces a cast of central characters promoting ideas that historians have often seen as marginal and argues for the centrality and popularity of their ideas.³ Pierre Simon Ballanche, if known at all, is now read mainly for his views on prisons; Pierre Leroux is celebrated as the “founder” of socialism but rarely read; Jean Reynaud is almost unknown except as an early partner of Leroux; Charles Fauvety and Henri Carle, who enter later in the chapter, are known as marginal leftist figures in the Second Empire. Yet the first three, and those like Fauvety and Carle who promoted their ideas, contributed a strain of French thought that saw reincarnation as an explanation for and a way to solve many of the social tensions that so shaped French history and politics in the nineteenth century. By doing so, they established a type of secular spirituality which would flourish throughout the nineteenth century.

Certainly French society as a whole never embraced reincarnation as a religious tenet. Yet the idea was common throughout the nineteenth century and offered a central way to reconceptualize relationships between the individual and society, as well as a way to challenge injustice. The first section of this chapter explores the early seeds of reincarnation as a popular doctrine in the thought of Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud, spending most time with Reynaud, whose version of reincarnation would become the most popular later in the century. A close reading of the intellectual and political projects of these thinkers illustrates the depth and significance attached to these seemingly “utopian” ideas prior to 1848. Fascinated by discoveries in science and “orientalism,” Romantics and republican socialists readily adopted this vision of progress that encompassed both this world and the next and shifted Catholicism far from center stage. Reynaud and Leroux attempted, in very different ways, to institute their ideas during the Revolution of 1848. Both were unsuccessful. The chapter then turns to popular incorporation of reincarnation as inherently “French” due largely to Reynaud’s success at arguing that its ultimate source could be found among the

druid priests and priestesses of the early Gauls, the ancestors of the French nation.

After 1848, ideas of metempsychosis and reincarnation as a means to social progress became increasingly popular, although no longer always clearly linked to Leroux and Reynaud. The chapter ends with a brief glance at a series of thinkers and movements, from Freemasons to Protestants, who built on earlier ideas of reincarnation. Here we meet Charles Fauvety and Henri Carle, whose continuing search for equality via a new and hopefully universal religion popularized reincarnation among alternative thinkers. Mesmerism, or magnetism, too ensured that these ideas were discussed, debated, and spread throughout the century.

Ideas of metempsychosis and reform flourished in the romantic atmosphere of Paris in the 1820s and 1830s, where eager social thinkers Jean Reynaud and Pierre Leroux met as both joined the reformist Saint-Simonians. These two reformers worked together, building on the newly popular ideas of Pierre-Simon Ballanche. By imagining reform as part of the progress of either collective humanity or the individual soul through metempsychosis, Leroux and Reynaud gave ideas of reform a clear moral basis and added a spiritual dimension to the social question that would last throughout the nineteenth century.

The movement for social reform grew out of the class tensions that remained unresolved after the July Revolution, tensions that would resurface in 1848 and help destroy the fledgling Republic. Although historians have explored these in terms of questions of culture and of (self) definition, most historians have focused on workers and their culture, or on economic issues.⁴ The focus of republican socialists Leroux and Reynaud on the tension between individual and society, between the one and the collective, illustrates an intellectual dimension to the questions of self and class being asked in the 1830s and 1840s that has been little explored. In fact, these theories show that rather than emphasize either the individual or the collective, a significant strain of thought attempted spiritual regeneration for both the individual and society together, struggling against the divisions inherent in liberal individualism.⁵

Historians have moved away from the old narrative of secularization and now recognize the importance of religion as a fertile source for reform and especially for socialist ideas.⁶ The argument that the nineteenth century was the century of secularization needs to be fully replaced by the recognition that religiosity and spirituality both remained alive and innovative. The question is to understand how religiosity continued within and around a rhetoric (and a reality) of increasing hostility to the Church. Several studies have pointed to the importance of Christ as the first communist, or of ideas of early egalitarian Christian societies as models for socialism. Yet Christocentric socialist ideas that claimed to remain "Christian" were only one version of religious inspiration for reform.⁷ Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud combined their experiences and their ideals to formulate arguments on how to remake society. Together they imagined and

popularized a combination of spirituality, progress, and humanism. Through the concept of metempsychosis, the idea of expiation of sin as a basis for the relationship to God gave way to the idea of justice, illustrating the rejection of traditional Christianity in the face of ideals of progress for the individual and/or for society as a whole.

Sources of Reform

The first attraction of these ideas came directly out of the felt chaos of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. Jean Reynaud inherited the revolution in a number of ways. He was born under the Napoleonic Empire, experienced its demise, and felt the changes as the restored Bourbon monarchy moved away from the compromise of the Charter of 1814, giving increasing authority to the Church after 1824. He inherited the revolution in a number of ways. He was the nephew and student of Merlin of Thionville, a member of the Convention whose voice was among those raising vehement calls for the death of Louis XVI in 1792.⁸ During his childhood he experienced the siege of Thionville in 1814. (A formative moment, as was Ballanche's suffering in Lyon under the Terror.) According to a friend, Merlin's great love of France, and the influence of a childhood teacher, an "old soldier of the Republic," who filled Reynaud's head with tales of fighting valiantly for the glory of one's country, made him fiercely patriotic.⁹ He was among those elite youth educated at the Ecole Polytechnique, Napoleon's truly "modern" school aimed at teaching talented students practical knowledge useful to the nation. And he came of age in the mid-1820s, amidst fierce political and social debate over how to restore the nation that had been so maimed by the violent years of revolution and war.

It is almost impossible to imagine the strength of emotions that accompanied the destruction of a centuries-old monarchy and the society that went with it. Although the Bourbon monarchy could be restored, it was not so easy to restore the sense that society had an order determined by God or nature. It was clear that people could remake society, and the highest concern of intellectuals was to decide how best to do that. Reynaud, like so many of his cohort and his friends, wanted to change the world. At the Ecole Polytechnique he studied geology, but he learned also the ideas of the Comte de Saint-Simon, as they were being propagated by Prosper Enfantin. The core idea, to reorder the world so that it ensured the amelioration of the poorest classes, appealed immediately to Reynaud.¹⁰ Saint-Simon argued that it was the industrialists, energetic men of ideas, invention, commerce and practical industry like those found at the Polytechnique, who would improve the world for those less fortunate. They would also supervise it and ensure it ran in a just and orderly fashion.

Reynaud left Paris before the full flare of *Enfantin's* power, receiving in 1829 a post as Engineer of Mines in Corsica.¹¹ He found on arrival that a small detail had been overlooked: Corsica had little mining. Unwilling to do nothing, he decided to apply his knowledge of geology and geography to map Corsica. He took off into the hills of what many considered a foreign (even unfriendly) country, with nothing but a pony for companionship, his camping gear, and his instruments. Reynaud's love of nature and his own independent will are best revealed here, two traits that would direct much of the rest of his life, especially his insistence on individual independence.

Reynaud had finished his mapping in Corsica when he heard about the Revolution of 1830 in Paris. Excited at the hope for change, and realizing he could do little of use in Corsica, he rushed back to Paris. He resigned from his position as engineer, and threw himself into the work of the Saint-Simonians. It was here that he met the man who would be his companion, collaborator, and close friend for the next ten years, Pierre Leroux. Leroux, nine years older than Reynaud, came from a working class background. As a typographer, Leroux typified the self-educated artisan elite so prominent in republican thought and revolt in the early nineteenth century. He also embodied for Reynaud the educated worker who strove for progress and improvement and was part of the answer to a better world. The two of them seemed to want the same thing: progress for society by improving the state of the working class intellectually, economically, and morally. Both worried as well about the increasing power and megalomania of Prosper *Enfantin* among the Saint-Simonians. To escape the torrid atmosphere of Paris they went to Lyon "on mission" for the Saint-Simonians in 1831.

Historians, when they consider Reynaud at all, imagine Leroux as the guiding influence on Reynaud. This assumption comes most likely from the fact that Leroux has been rehabilitated as the "founder" of French socialism and has thus been seen as more important.¹² The documents of the time give us little reason to accept this opinion. Both were active thinkers and both were strong personalities. At the beginning of their collaboration they shared similar ideas and outlooks, although their emphases would later diverge as they developed their theories of social and individual change. Leroux himself wrote that the two were one in mind and spirit in Lyon, and praised the skill of Reynaud's original oratory.¹³ Together they leaned toward finding not only a practical solution but also a religious and/or moral solution to the "social problem." Religion and morality were not supplemental but pivotal to the creation of a new man and therefore a new society. Reynaud preached their ideas before audiences including both working class and bourgeois, exhorting the former to morality and the latter to aid the working class with a tone that almost threatened them with democracy: "Is it necessary for the people agonizing in the lower ranks of society to get to sharing your political rights, in order to induce the government to tend to their well-being?"¹⁴ Together Reynaud and Leroux put forward the Saint-Simonian idea that the producing classes were responsible for the laboring classes. Despite

large audiences and great appreciation, especially from working-class audiences, they did not win many permanent converts for Saint-Simonism.

When they returned to Paris they found the Saint-Simonian school in a moment of crisis. Disputes had broken out over the future of the movement. Enfantin and his disciples looked to form a Saint-Simonian “church” with Enfantin as “Pope,” and the hope of finding a female “messiah” to share his rule. Saint-Amand Bazard, previously a strong force in the movement and one who remained staunchly on the social-reform side of the movement, rejected this mystical side. Leroux and Reynaud quickly sided with Bazard, as did Hippolyte Carnot, Edouard Charton, and others. Both spoke out strongly against Enfantin on a raucous night in November 1831, at a meeting at the Salle Taitbout in Paris.¹⁵ Although this ended their official participation in the Saint-Simonian movement, it hardly ended their commitment to Saint-Simonian ideas. After a brief period of hardship, Leroux and Reynaud began publishing in the *Revue encyclopédique*, which Hippolyte Carnot purchased as an outlet for the dissident Saint-Simonians. Here they developed the ideas that would make one the “founder” of socialism and the other the (unacknowledged) “founder” of druidism and belief in reincarnation in France. Leroux and Reynaud argued that their ideas were key to reforming society, but they both also saw their doctrines as centered on morality and religion.

Religion was a topic of central importance during the 1820s, and not only in terms of the attempt by conservative Catholics to regain influence and control in government. Chateaubriand’s romantic paean to religion, *On Christianity*, (1801) drew great attention and helped to redeem the value of religion as an emotional experience. All of Paris bubbled with ideas of what the world should be like: Ernst Legouvé remembered “the great movement of ideas which exploded in France in these years from 1825 to 1830. Pure politics, philosophy, poetry, history, political economy, all the great objects of human thought were the order of the day for all minds.”¹⁶ Those who wanted change also offered religious reasons, particularly as the Catholic church increasingly became a symbol of the lack of change. Saint-Simon himself had called for a “new religion” to express his new philosophy. He published his *Nouveau Christianisme* in 1825, shortly before his death.

Under the Restoration, the Catholic church’s close association with the conservative monarchy caused many to view it as reactionary. The majority of social reformers set themselves against what they saw as the dual problems of throne and altar.¹⁷ Within debates among reformers, the major trauma of the Revolution repeated itself. Should reform be modeled along the lines of the “liberal revolution” of 1789 or along those of the “radical revolution” of 1792? Although some reformers tended to echo the Enlightenment rejection of religion, many partook of a vague deism that existed outside the Church and, more importantly, many non-liberal thinkers shared Saint-Simon’s impulse to imagine a new religion, one that would further the project of social equality articulated by the radical revolu-

tionaries, rather than the individual equality before the law enacted by the Napoleonic Code and valued by liberals.

When the liberalism of the July Monarchy turned out to be more conservative than many supporters of the Revolution of 1830 had hoped, republican and socialist opposition began to grow. It was socialists, after all, who first dubbed the July Days a “bourgeois revolution” as they were convinced that some of the old elite had continued in power.¹⁸ Leroux and Reynaud took part in this opposition, helping to pen the “Exposé des principes républicains de la société des droits de l’homme et du citoyen” (A Presentation of the Republican principles of the Society of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 1833) which combined republican politics with socialist ideas they had gained during their tenure with the Saint-Simonians. As defenders of the working class, many of these republicans came to detest the economic side of liberalism, even while many of them wanted to extend individual rights, such as the vote, to the working class. Economic individualism, they argued, set the interests of the individual against those of the society as a whole, and thus created division rather than harmony. The challenge to intellectuals wanting to create social equality was to find a way toward progress that did not favor the needs of the individual (usually assumed to be bourgeois) over social reform (assumed to aid the working classes.)

Although two major socialists offered systems to address these problems, neither system attracted many followers. Charles Fourier argued for a complete revision of social life into a system of phalansteries. His social organization would completely change both individual and society, he argued, freeing the individual to experience his or her passions. Fourier, like Reynaud, also argued for metempsychosis on a series of planets.¹⁹ In fact, this vision drew to him many of his first and most enduring followers, including Victor Considerant.²⁰ Yet the radical ideas of Fourier were little known and up until 1847 Considerant, leader of the *Ecole sociétaire* which promoted Fourierism, remained loyal to the July Monarchy.²¹ Neither Leroux nor Reynaud seem to have been interested in Fourier’s ideas, if they were even aware of them.

Saint-Simon’s vision seemed to promise a more achievable balance between society and the individual. While Saint-Simonian socialism favored industry, and saw it as the way of the future, it also looked for cooperation rather than individual competition. Ultimately, at the end of his life, Saint-Simon turned away from the industrialists that he had hoped would organize society for its own good and toward the workers, who should work collectively to create a better society, and he argued the necessity of a “New Christianity” to ensure the moral health of that society. For many, his system seemed to offer the right balance between encouraging individual industry and improving society. As already noted, however, the Saint-Simonians disintegrated in the face of Enfantin’s emphasis on sexuality.²²

For many, including Leroux and Reynaud, an overemphasis on socialist collectivity was as dangerous as the extreme individualism preached by the eco-

nomics liberals. Metempsychosis, on the other hand, offered an egalitarian justification for social reform and a way to explore and attempt to resolve the tension between the individual and society so prevalent in the politics of the period 1825-1848. Yet none of these thinkers was able to fully resolve the problem of whether the individual or the collective social body should be uppermost in either religious thought or political strategy. Tensions between the individual soul's survival and the collective reincarnation of humanity became apparent in these thinkers' writings and suggest that there may have been religio-philosophical as well as political and economic reasons for the failure of early socialism to successfully challenge liberalism.

Theories of metempsychosis did not spring unbidden but evolved out of the social and political currents of the 1820s and 1830s. New forms of knowledge, both scientific and cultural, changed the intellectual climate of the period. Of particular importance in terms of metempsychosis were contact with "the Orient," and new conceptions of time and progress. As Raymond Schwab pointed out, "the earth's map cannot change without changing the map of the heavens."²³ Metempsychosis figured prominently on the new map of the heavens.

Two streams, East and West, brought metempsychosis to our social reformers and they drew freely from both, although Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud would all claim they looked to Western philosophy for the truth of metempsychosis. The first, the Western sources, were as recent as the Enlightenment and as ancient as the early Greeks. Pythagoras was the earliest source to argue for metempsychosis; Plato repeatedly promoted it among his dialogues; the Romans, too, offered visions of metempsychosis, although perhaps with less enthusiasm. Cicero repeated Plato's ideas while the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (c.e. 216, by Philostratus) described Apollonius' journey to the East, to the land of the Brahmins, where he learned of metempsychosis; Plotinus too promoted the idea of multiple lives before achieving a higher state. Several Enlightenment writers helped spread ideas of multiple incarnations, including John Toland, who connected it to the ancient Celts. Leibniz was the best known of Enlightenment thinkers who toyed with visions of reincarnation. Leibniz rejected Pythagoras' version but nonetheless argued for an updated, gradualist, version: "Leibniz imagines that monad and matter, soul and body, form a lasting unit whose component parts ever so gradually change and develop in the process of their continuing existence."²⁴ Leibniz was well known to both Ballanche and Leroux, although neither claimed him as a source.²⁵

August Viatte illustrated in fine detail the significance of eighteenth-century occult thought for spurring Romantic creativity. Among the Romantics, occult ideas such as metempsychosis moved from secret Freemasonic societies into popular novels and became a basis for philosophical reflection. In addition, mesmerists popularized misconceptions of the mystic Swedenborg during the 1820s. Mesmerized somnambulists and Swedenborg's visions of spirits and angels not

only helped to focus interest on the afterlife but also offered hope that individual and social interests could be easily reconciled.²⁶ Although Swedenborg had presented a very different version of the afterlife, in which the soul moved on to other planes rather than being reincarnated, his view that the soul continued on, inhabiting the interstices of the universe and perhaps existing on other planets fit well with ideas of metempsychosis.

Yet it was not only the western tradition of metempsychosis that led so many romantic thinkers to imagine metempsychosis as the answer to their questions on the afterlife. Europe rediscovered the ideas of India and the East in an "Oriental Renaissance" during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A vogue for Eastern ideas followed the translation and publication of texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana*, which privilege metempsychosis. "[T]he French Soul of 1820-40 became Romantic and that opened it to everything that Indianism meant and conveyed."²⁷ The Romantics, in their fascination with nature, thrilled to the idea of each rock, each tree, having a soul, that all nature was alive with spirit. Eastern ideas of metempsychosis appealed as well to an Enlightenment hope for progress, interpreted by Romantics as "a continual progression that advances the vital principle degree by degree until the fullest perfection is achieved."²⁸

Leroux and Reynaud, following Ballanche, participated in this turn to the East and saw India and Persia as sources of ancient truths. Ballanche labeled India "the eternal well spring of dogma," pointing to the East as the origin for religious ideas that would later be improved by Western, Christian thinkers.²⁹ Leroux's 1832 article "De l'influence philosophique des études orientales" examined the combined effects of religious questioning and the "new knowledge of the Orient," which promised a second Renaissance as significant as the first. Like the first, it would inspire minds thirsting for religion and, as the first had wounded Christian belief, the second would "achieve the complete destruction of Christianity."³⁰ Leroux imagined that out of this destruction would rise his "religion" which argued for the progressive resurrection of collective humanity. Similarly, Reynaud used his article on "Zarathustra" to explore how humans should live in this world.³¹

Rather than the East offering something completely new, it offered old ideas in new clothing, and clearly much sexier clothing at that. The Englishman Sir William Jones had linked Indic metempsychosis, Pythagorean metempsychosis, and Platonic myth in his translation of the *Gita Govinda* (1792).³² According to Raymond Schwab, many of these poets and scholars saw India as "a new land to be hailed in the cheers of shipwrecked men." He argued that it is was like "the dual theme of easier breathing and slaked thirst, which at the time was inseparable from the discovery of Asia. Michelet's orchestration of the theme is the most masterful: 'Greece is small, I suffocate; Judea is dry, I pant.'³³ Although German thinkers explored reincarnation, and Weimar poets such as Herder, Goethe, and Schiller were fascinated by it, it is more likely that the

French fascination with metempsychosis came from the Indian East than from their neighbors directly to the East. The “Oriental Renaissance” happened chiefly in France, despite the interests of the British and the Germans in these topics. “There was no single intellectual capital elsewhere where people filled with enthusiasm and grounded in the critical spirit, interested in information and in imagination that was always brought back to a discriminating tradition, could meet several times a week in a small number of pleasant houses. Between 1820 and 1830, from the Jardin des Plantes to Abbaye-aux-Bois and to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, interchanges on oriental matters seemed to be a neighborhood business.”³⁴

Yet French thinkers did not lose their loyalty to the West. Ballanche and others looked back to Plato and Pythagoras as responsible for “initiating” the West into the knowledge of Eastern thought. Ballanche argued that the East and West had shared the same insights into the progress toward perfection. In fact, it was the East, via Egypt, which had initiated the West into the process of rehabilitation. However only the West had continued to act, via Christianity, while the East had remained stagnant.³⁵ Leroux argued that concepts of metempsychosis developed in Eastern thought had already existed in “seed form” in the great writings of the ancient West.³⁶ Reynaud argued that even before the Christians, the Druids had subscribed to ideas of reincarnation, which they had taught to Pythagoras himself.³⁷

Despite these claims, the importance of the discovery of the great Eastern religious thought in promoting these ideas cannot be overlooked. The wholehearted pursuit of Oriental studies not only familiarized Romantics with metempsychosis but offered them alternative models of conceiving spirituality. Western interest in the East has been seen as condescending since Edward Said’s critique of “Orientalism.” Yet not all agree that the Occident’s engagement with the Orient was always a form of “orientalism.” Given the dissatisfaction with society during the 1820s and 1830s, casting to other cultures for ideas, and particularly to the “Orient” offered rather a way to criticize their own society.³⁸ Thinkers were quick to appropriate Eastern thought, but they did not embrace it wholeheartedly, and ultimately supported “western” sources for their ideas. Their vision was a combination, and a truly nineteenth-century one. The romantic continuation of Enlightenment progress and perfectibility, by placing that progress and perfectibility in the social *and* the soul, was not simply a carrying-forward of Western thought but also a blending of Eastern and Western thought. This further problematizes the image of a thoroughly rational and scientific nineteenth century, inheriting its virtues and its values from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Equally important, romantic reincarnationists built on a series of scientific thinkers who had recently begun to explore the possibilities of endless time and the philosophic consequences of evolutionary thought. The naturalist Charles Bonnet published in 1769 his *La Palingénésie philosophique ou idées sur l'état*

passé et sur l'état future des êtres vivans. Bonnet argued for the "periodic rebirth of the entire natural world."³⁹ For Bonnet, progress happened through catastrophic change that brought about the transformation of preformed "germs" of future beings carried within each individual animal. Bonnet's version of the chain of being went beyond the physical world to reach the spiritual world and ultimately extend to God himself.⁴⁰ Each being, as a link in the chain and keeping proportional distance, progressed toward perfection and thus toward God. This change happened not at the will of the individual but in great, collective changes, ordained by God and affecting the entire natural world.⁴¹ Bonnet was well known and well-read both in the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century. The *Palingénésie philosophique* "decorate[d] eighteenth century libraries in beautiful editions" and Joseph de Maistre for example, discussed the writings of "the illustrious Bonnet" whose ideas he noted, "belonged to the history of *l'esprit humain*."⁴² After the French Revolution, Bonnet's theory of catastrophic change resonated with a generation raised on catastrophe.⁴³

Bonnet was only one thinker in a chain leading to a new understanding of time, geology, and change in nature. The major geological discovery of the eighteenth century, the "discovery of time" recognized fossil evidence as pointing to change over time not only in the geological world but also in the world of flora and fauna. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck published his theory of evolution in *Philosophie Zoologique* in 1809; although Lamarck was not well-received, his ideas influenced Geoffrey de Saint-Hilaire among others, and contemporaries quickly realized the connotations of the great lengths of time required to produce the level of change he proposed.⁴⁴ The emerging evolutionary concept of time challenged the Christian concept of time, which focussed on a definable beginning and end. In *La Terre et Ciel* Reynaud criticized the unchanging belief of the Church: "The scale of time is . . . absolutely changed by geology and, as that changes, so must the medieval beliefs" of the Church.⁴⁵

Popular discussion of these ideas ran rampant. The year 1830 saw the great debates in the French Academy of Sciences on evolution or "*transformisme*" vs. fixity of species' characteristics. The competing arguments by Georges Cuvier and Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire were presented, celebrated, and mocked in the popular presses, and people avidly took sides. If Cuvier won in the Academy, Geoffroy won in popular opinion. Geoffroy appeared "as the hero of an intuitive, organic, progressive vision of the cosmos and the place of humanity within it."⁴⁶ This organic, progressive vision found a ready audience in the salons of Paris, which encouraged the spread and exchange of ideas. Nodier's salon at the Arsenal, Cuvier's salon at the Museum of Natural History, Juliette Recamier's private salon, and Hugo's grand cenacle all provided places where poets spoke with orientalist who spoke with scientists who spoke with social theorists. Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud were all active in the social world of the romantic intellectual. Ballanche practically lived at the salon of fabulously beautiful and popular Recamier; he was a favored friend and actually moved his residence to

remain near to her.⁴⁷ Leroux as a journalist and editor of the *Globe*, mingled with and wrote about these people and their ideas. Reynaud shared a close friendship with Geoffroy St.-Hilaire family and with Edouard Charton; Leroux and Reynaud frequented the same salons, including Nodier's, and Geoffroy contributed to their *Nouvelle encyclopédie* conceived during the 1830s.

Not unrelated is the place the intellectual held as spokesperson for the masses. The romantic writer saw him or herself as able to speak directly to and for the masses in a new and exciting way. Writers purposefully positioned themselves as representatives of humanity, rather than as members of one or another political or religious tradition, and they spoke not in the name of authority but in the name of spirituality.⁴⁸ This is clear not only for writers of literature but also philosophers. Certainly Jean Reynaud saw himself as an educator of the people, speaking to and for the people in all his works. Pierre Leroux aimed his works at "humanity," and Ballanche saw himself as expressing the "grande pensée" of the era.⁴⁹ Within this milieu of debate and ferment over social reform, ideas of metempsychosis stood out as logical and hopeful avenues for progress.

Progress as a Means of Social Perfection

Pierre-Simon Ballanche formed his ideas before the full flowering of romanticism in France, although he did not begin publication of his *Palingénésie sociale* until the late 1820s. His early writings, in the 1810s and early 1820s expressed strong loyalty to both crown and altar. Yet Ballanche saw the need for social change, even intimating that Louis XVI's death had been a necessary evil, and it was liberal romantic rather than conservative Paris that embraced Ballanche. Ballanche flourished as an intimate of Recamier and her circle in Paris in the 1820s, becoming increasingly liberal politically as time passed. He remained, however, profoundly religious, appealing to what he called the "thirst for a religious direction" that followed the Revolution.⁵⁰

Ballanche's highly original theories of regeneration and social reform nonetheless show the imprint of two major non-Catholic influences. The first is Charles Bonnet, the second illuminism. Ballanche explained that what Bonnet did for the individual, he would do for "l'homme collectif."⁵¹ In Ballanche's version of palingenesis, it was society that underwent catastrophic but progressive change. Ballanche's "homme collectif" lived as part of a society and could be perfected only within society. (When Ballanche spoke of society, he intended not universal society, but the nation-state, or most particularly, France.) Not the individual but society possessed a lasting identity, as Ballanche described in explaining his choice of "palingénésie sociale": "I needed a name which, applied to collective humanity, contained at the same time the idea of death, and the idea of resurrection, or of restitution of being, because unless abolished by some great catastrophe, human societies, despite changes of form, conserve their individu-

ality, the knowledge of their moral identity."⁵² Ballanche revised Bonnet's ideas to add a social dimension to what had originally been a natural, if God-directed, process.

Religion played a key role for Ballanche because Christianity already expressed the equality among individuals, equal before God, which he called solidarity, that would *gradually* become the social norm, through social palingenesis. "It is precisely the task of the new social order to extend the principal of solidarity into the civil realm."⁵³ Solidarity here meant the fraternal brotherhood of the human race taught by Christ. Rather than look to change the world politically, Ballanche imagined it evolving socially and morally.

Ballanche's social evolution came at a cost. Life on earth, he admitted, offered mainly suffering and expiation. Suffering was both consequence of the Fall and the means by which the Fall could be overcome. By suffering, humanity evolved. The doctrine of an *épreuve*, or test, lay at the center of Ballanche's ideas. The test ensured the "progressive redemption of humanity by its own sorrows (*douleurs*)."⁵⁴ For Ballanche, suffering acted as the key to affirming holiness and this earth remained always a place of suffering. In Ballanchean theology, humans suffered not as individuals, as recompense for their actions, but in their capacity as humans progressing toward God. "Humanity cannot accuse God of permitting needless suffering because humanity brought suffering on itself [through the Fall] and because it is by means of the expiatory value of suffering that humanity is rehabilitated."⁵⁵

The vision of social perfection offered by Ballanche retained an essentially pessimistic character. If optimism arose in the sense of progress and the initiation into God's will, pessimism remained in the primacy of suffering to that progress. Ballanche accepted the eighteenth-century value of progress, but he took the motor of progress away from humanity and gave it back to God, since it was God who directed the changes that would ultimately advance society. Individuality and free will thus played a small role. Although humankind collectively worked toward reconciliation with God, Ballanche believed that the process remained long and beyond the scope of the individual. Too good a Christian to state outright that the individual directly reincarnated, Ballanche did intimate that death opened the door to a new life: "We dream for an instant on the Earth; our dream is sometimes peaceful, but most often worried and troubled; a beneficial crisis called death comes and causes our awakening."⁵⁶ Rather than the individual experiencing a personal metempsychosis, society would undergo serial rebirths, thus his use of palingenesis. Ballanche's motor for social reform lay in a return to and renewal of the Church and especially morality.

Ballanche's ideas reached others as much through discussion in various circles as by publication. Leroux and Reynaud learned of his ideas from discussions with other Saint-Simonians; they continued to study him after their break with the movement.⁵⁷ Largely ignored in the 1820s, Ballanche's greatest popularity came in the period 1830-34, when his ideas seemed to resonate with the events

of the time. The Revolution of 1830 embodied for many Ballanche's ideas of a struggle between "oriental" principles of static decadence and "Western" principles of progress and social evolution.⁵⁸ Ballanche's ideas were influential, but not adopted directly by many thinkers. He emphasized the Church too strenuously for most Romantic socialists, who saw the Church as bankrupt, yet his ideas of progress and regeneration resonated with many thinkers. Rather than reclaim Catholicism, early socialists wanted to transcend it, to create a new and better religion. This is the direction Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud took in their quest for social reform.

Leroux and Reynaud embodied the great hopes of early romantic socialism. Throughout the 1830s, Reynaud and Leroux worked closely together, sharing their ideas about society, democracy, republicanism, and the future life of humankind. The two collaborated on a number of publishing projects, all of which combined ideas for social and religious change. They used the *Revue encyclopédique*, the mouthpiece of dissident Saint-Simonians, to critique cultural values; they began an *Encyclopédie nouvelle* to educate people to what they would need to know in a new society. They were "socialist" in the sense that has come to be associated with early romantic socialists; although they called for representation of the working class and took note of the need to remedy class and economic problems, they sought *social* change for the good of all, in order to regenerate society and move it toward perfection.⁵⁹ In an argument against both extremes, individualism and ideas of organization of labor, Leroux insisted he was socialist only if socialism meant "the Doctrine which sacrifices none of the terms of the formula: Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Unity, but reconciles them all." In 1834, Leroux wrote strongly against socialism as a tyrannical threat to "individuality and spontaneity." Over twenty years later he noted the irony that he was now known as a socialist; who would have suspected, he wondered, that "twenty years later, this term would be used to express, in a general manner, *la Démocratie religieuse*" which he had always supported.⁶⁰ Reynaud certainly agreed with Leroux. Both believed in reforming society and collective humanity, but both believed they aided the individual as they did so. Socialism, if it would be called that, must be socialism that continued the values of the French Revolution, but with the emphasis on individualism replaced by a religious impulse.

In their 1833 "Exposé des principes républicains de la Société des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen," a manifesto for republicans, Reynaud and Leroux added Saint-Simonian and socialist ideas to those already held by republicans. They argued not only for universal (male) suffrage, but also for very specific changes in society, including: public instruction for both girls and boys, guided not by the clergy but by secular instructors; the creation of "social capital" for the development of industry; the right of association for workers; all of which would be accomplished under the banner of "the principle of progress; the conquest of modern civilization which imposes on the future no other rules than those of eternal justice and brings hope in this world to humanity."⁶¹ For both

men, that hope lay not only or even predominantly in politics but in formulating a new religious outlook, one that privileged justice, cooperation, and the promise of a future life.

Metempsychosis was the key to this new religion; it would overcome the shortcomings of Christianity and yet provide moral and social guidance for a new society. For both these thinkers, the teachings of the Church could not be reconciled with ideas of equality and solidarity. The greatest shortcoming of the Church was to teach acceptance of inequality on earth rather than the hope of equality through solidarity. Also, the idea of eternal punishment denied any hope of progress. What just God would punish people forever, with no hope of improvement? Leroux and Reynaud did not reject God, but rejected a wrathful and punishing God who did not recognize the conditions of humanity on earth.⁶² They imagined a God in their own image, a just God who wanted to eliminate the suffering of people on earth, just as they did. Conscious of the unequal chances that each individual had to do good in life, they questioned a Church which would condemn a man forever to suffering after already suffering in this life.

Although they continued to respect each other's work, by 1840 their very different personalities (Reynaud was overly serious, while Leroux tended toward drinking) and their increasingly divergent views on the afterlife led to a philosophic split. Leroux insisted that metempsychosis involved successive lives on earth, as humans, rejecting Reynaud's ideas of an evolving form. Leroux also insisted that the individual memory disappeared and did not determine the future self, while Reynaud argued for a self that built increasingly on lessons learned in past lives.⁶³

Leroux's version of the new religion that would support social reform emphasized collective humanity over the individual and saw metempsychosis as involving the species, rather than individual souls. Ballanche's influence is easily visible in Leroux's emphasis on humanity as a whole.⁶⁴ Leroux also accepted that religion had worth, but unlike Ballanche he rejected Christianity as outdated. For Leroux, society has progressed through a series of stages, each "previous life of Humanity" bringing society forward toward possible perfection. Christianity offered the first major step, but it alone was not enough. The Reformation had been key in spreading the doctrine to all the people, and philosophy (or Enlightenment thought) had argued for the perfectibility of society on this earth, which, if achieved, would equal the reign of God on earth for Leroux. He criticized the Enlightenment for being overly anti-Christian and denying the need for love among one's fellows, but Leroux insisted that modern thought allowed one to move beyond the Christian mistake that the reign of God could only be in heaven.⁶⁵

For Leroux, the new religion of "humanité" offered the answer to the question of how to solve the social and political ills of the time.⁶⁶ Like Ballanche, Leroux highlighted solidarity. But for Leroux, that solidarity existed as an essen-

tial fact of humanity, rather than springing from Christianity. In fact, Christian ideas of charity, supposedly bringing humans together, deceived people by turning them away from humanity and toward God. As Nietzsche and Freud would later also argue, Leroux pointed out that one could never really experience a selfless love for one's neighbor. What was necessary was to exploit self-love, a natural inclination of humans. He called this self-love "egoism" and judged it just as necessary as charity. In fact, charity sprang from egoism. Leroux explained his "law of life" which provided the foundation for charity. Charity and egoism together (and they were actually one) created "la liberté humaine": "liberty springs from charity, or from communion with humanity [nos semblables] and the universe, just as charity results from the individual right that we have in this communion, in other words, our interests and our egoism."⁶⁷ Leroux argued that this solidarity was truly the union, the identity even of the *moi* and the *non-moi*. The identity of the *moi* and the *non-moi* was, for Leroux, collective humanity itself. Thus only by recognizing the connectedness, the one-ness of humanity, could one create true liberty.

Justice took the place for Leroux that expiation and reconciliation held for Ballanche. In his preface, Leroux had the soul asking itself numerous questions. Among the most significant was: "Will I be on the earth when justice and equality reign among men?"⁶⁸ This hope for justice drove both Leroux and Reynaud to posit a world moving toward perfection and equality. For Leroux, Christianity's main weakness was that it promised justice only in some future world. Those who looked to the past and a golden age were equally ridiculous in his eyes. Rather he agreed with Leibniz that humans are perfectible by definition; their nature is to be perfectible. But perfectibility happened only within society. "Man lives in society and only in society; society is perfectible and man perfects himself in a perfected society. This is the great modern discovery, this is the supreme truth of philosophy."⁶⁹ The perfected society would also be a just society, and thus poverty and inequality would cease to exist. This had to happen, because for Leroux, God is a just God and a benevolent God, one who could not condemn humanity to endless suffering without purpose.⁷⁰

If Leroux refused to dwell on suffering, he still did not see the world as a place of happiness. Humans were not made to be happy but to develop toward perfection.⁷¹ (Presumably, happiness might come from perfection, but Leroux seemed to hold a Kantian view that seeking individual happiness distracted one from the true works of humanity.) Suffering, however, expiated nothing. The way to rid the world of suffering was to reach solidarity among all humans, to recognize humanity as one. This would happen by the will of humans, rather than the will of God. Thus Leroux rejected Ballanche's emphasis on God's will as directing the future of humanity.

Leroux's path to perfection offered more hope than Ballanche's. Rather than accept suffering, humanity must strive to avoid suffering. This would be achieved through solidarity and through charity toward others. Leroux saw

human nature as tripartite, consisting of sensation-emotion-knowledge (*sensation-sentiment-connaissance*.) To deny any part of that human trinity, either of oneself or of others, damaged the self and caused suffering. (Leroux proves himself a romantic here by arguing that the error of the eighteenth century was to privilege knowledge over feeling.) For Leroux, the greatest right and fulfillment of the individual occurred through their communication with the whole of humanity. He argued that family, nation, and property each acted as means of communication among people. Society must be arranged to ensure that these acted as sources of freedom rather than as limitations. Without family, nation, or property, a person (man?) had no social existence. Leroux criticized those who wanted to do away with any of these institutions.⁷² (These criticisms would presumably be aimed at socialists such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. Owen rejected both private property and marriage, as well as religion. Fourier rejected traditional marriage and morality, although he allowed for property. Even the Saint-Simonians challenged the family in their critique of inheritance.) Leroux did admit that these institutions could bring both good and evil—family could enslave women and children; nation could enslave those without power; property could enslave those who have none.⁷³ But evils sprang not from the institutions themselves but from misuse or poor organization of these institutions. When family, nation, or property became a “cast,” then they were evil, because they separated people rather than bringing them together.⁷⁴ Again, Leroux returned to human solidarity as the key to perfection of both the individual and society.

Metempsychosis for Leroux happened in this world. As he saw it, there was “neither paradise, nor purgatory, nor hell apart; paradise, purgatory, hell are in this world.” By existing, the individual participated in Being, in the eternal and infinite being (a character; not an entity.) “To be, is to be infinite; either in an absolute way, like God, or in a purely virtual way, like all creatures made by God.”⁷⁵ Although the mortal part of a person might die, the immortal essence, their humanity, never did. Only the exterior form died. “To live is to die in one form in order to be reborn in another form.”⁷⁶ Thus “life” for Leroux encompassed the cycle of living and dying, which represented simply a change of form for each person who was reborn as a part of the collective being that is humanity. Leroux had little interest, however, in the continuance of the individual soul; to die was to be reborn but to lose one’s individuality, which for Leroux was a gain rather a loss. Leroux went beyond Ballanche in seeing the individual as reincarnated; but he remained, like Ballanche, centered on the importance of the collective or society. He presented metempsychosis as the continuance and eventual triumph of solidarity for all; the promised positive answer to his prefatory question: “Will I be on the earth when justice and equality reign among men?” The importance of metempsychosis lay in its proof that humanity was one collective being and in giving humanity as a soul the time to advance and perfect itself; multiple lives, however did not advance the individual toward solidarity or

perfection. Here Leroux was borrowing (admittedly) from Vico by having God leave it up to humanity to transform itself, although Leroux did see this as ordained by God.⁷⁷

Jean Reynaud departed from his friend Leroux in emphasizing the importance of the individual. Reynaud, like Leroux, insisted that “eternal justice”—the sort necessary to a perfect society—could not be found in Christian theology. Original sin and eternal punishment were inherently unjust; the former punished the innocent, the latter punished without opportunity for progress. Reynaud replaced Christian punishment with a very different vision of metempsychosis. The soul inhabited a series of bodies on a series of planets as it progressed toward perfection. Reynaud posited “an infinity of corporeal existences . . . in the infinite diversity of habitats [the planets] that God has disseminated throughout space.”⁷⁸ Death led not to judgment but to transformation. As the soul progressed, humans abandoned one body and advanced to another, better one, like casting off used clothing. Reynaud criticized Christian thinkers for limiting immortality to the current body—there would be many others. “Thus the soul which passes from one journey to another, leaving its first body for a new body, constantly changing its residence and its exterior, pursues under the rays of the Creator, from transmigration to transmigration and metamorphosis to metamorphosis, the paligenetic course of its eternal destiny. . . . Birth is not a beginning, it is merely a change of body.”⁷⁹ Because the soul was not chained to the body, the soul could freely disengage from the body when it disintegrated; the soul then moved into another body, another physical form, on another planet.

Reynaud’s emphasis on justice led him to stress progress, even an implied redemption, which could be attained in the increasing immateriality and “perfection” of successive lives. Reynaud’s views on suffering also differed greatly from both Ballanche and Leroux. Although he rejected Ballanche’s formulation that suffering expiated humanity’s general sin in the Fall, he implied instead that suffering sprang from the acts of the individual. Reynaud came closer to traditional Christian ideas of compensation and punishment, but also echoed Hindu ideas of karma. For Reynaud, although he did not stress this aspect, suffering in this life resulted from actions in past lives. These results were expressed most clearly in class and social status. According to Reynaud, children and parents had an affinity before birth (he noted that causes for this affinity vary and cannot be known.) “Thus we are the cause of our own birth” he said. Each person chose, in fact, their very lives, based on what they did in a previous life. “We are thus not passive in this capital fact of birth, which represents in some sort all there is in our life of the fatal or the preordained [including] . . . the essential qualities of our bodies and our minds, of our education, of our status, of our country and our most common relations in society; which includes . . . all the elements of our earthly existence.”⁸⁰ Individuals not only chose their situation (and class?), but they earned that situation in former lives: their birth and their characters represented “precisely those circumstances that constitute the particular positions

that, by [their] preceding efforts, [they] merited from heaven."⁸¹ Thus Reynaud argued that present life resulted from past life, and implied that one was what and where one deserved to be.

Stated thus, Reynaud's system would seem to be a karmic justification of the status quo and a privileging of individualism over social change. Yet that exact tension is what Reynaud struggled to resolve in the entirety of his work. If birth was foreordained by individual acts in a previous life, that was "all there is in our life of the fatal or preordained." Thus changes in life were possible, and individuals were not destined by their birth to continue to suffer throughout life. They could, through charity and solidarity, change their life. If the article "Ciel" argued that individual progress depended on the individual, the article "Terre," and much of Reynaud's other writing, insisted that only by collective improvement of society could the individual progress.

In this world, humans should work to transform the earth into an equal, cooperative society. Reynaud echoed Leroux's insistence on solidarity among humans and founded that solidarity squarely on the category of work (*travail*): "Man works for himself when he works for others and there is no other way to work for himself than to work for others."⁸² Reynaud wanted "to convert this terrestrial residence, where so many creatures still suffer, into a residence peopled exclusively by happy creatures."⁸³ Human labor for Reynaud remained precariously poised between the onerous punishment it had been described as in Christian theology (and might seem to the worker) and the means of salvation. He argued that the political and social goal should be to raise all workers not only to "that ease become common in the world" but to the level of "artists or intelligent directors of the forces of nature." By applying human ingenuity to matter, it would be possible to achieve a "universal reform of terrestrial existence."⁸⁴ On this earth, however, labor will always exist. The more progress humans make, the less onerous it will be, but it will continue to exist because it is necessary to the way humans are organized in this life. In order to have universal well-being it is necessary to perfect humans, not nature.⁸⁵ Reynaud's position here differed greatly from many of his companions of empirical bent, both earlier and later. He did not see material improvements as enough to solve social ills. No matter what wonders humans might make with the material world, they could not create perfection. It seems he offered here a mild critique of industrialization, and even of his Saint-Simonian roots, which so privileged activity over leisure, in his implication that all labor is suffering. I do not want to overstate this point—Reynaud was all for applying ingenuity to the material world to ameliorate suffering. And any reduction of suffering on this earth must be done by and for society. But human will alone could not create perfection; individuals must transform themselves, ultimately into something supra-human, before they could solve the ultimate problems of injustice.

For Reynaud, improvement remained fairly well assured. He insisted that heaven and earth were essentially the same, just different phases of the same pro-

cess, and that all people would ultimately reach perfection. Humans, created by God, have an inherent spark of the divine which allows them to “lend God a hand” on earth by working toward a divine society. However, the most important task for Reynaud remained on the individual level, perfecting oneself, nurturing that divine spark, which eventually would bring one closer to the infinite and to God himself. On earth and in the heavens, all beings, angels or humans, engaged in this journey toward perfection. As Reynaud put it, “heaven is a journey,” a journey toward perfection.⁸⁶

Reynaud thus emphasized the individual more than Leroux did. Despite his visions of the individual perfecting itself, we must remember that, as with Leroux, this could only happen in a collective environment. Thus both Leroux and Reynaud challenged the idea that society is made up of atomized individuals. They offered an antidote to the idealized liberal individual that, as many historians have noted, was consistently assumed to be gendered male.⁸⁷ The collectivity did not have gender but consisted of both (all) genders and in fact offered the ability for male and female to unite into that perfect combination of masculine and feminine characteristics, which both thinkers connected with marriage, “the androgynous couple.” Reynaud insisted that full perfection could only come in union with the opposite sex; only by the “duality” of the “mystery of androgyny” could humans reach the fullness of life.⁸⁸ Leroux argued that Adam, the first human, was him/herself androgynous. As Naomi Andrews points out, the importance of gender and the androgyne in Leroux (and, I would add, Reynaud) is another way in which they attack the too-stark division between men and women that prevailed in the contemporary conversation about relations between the individual and society.⁸⁹ The connection between the religious imaginings of collective humanity and practical actions on behalf of women was direct, although it is difficult to know which direction is causal. Both Leroux and Reynaud argued for women’s rights and supported women’s causes. They were connected with feminist socialists such as Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland, the latter of whom collaborated with them on the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*. Leroux, of course, was close friends with and under the patronage of George Sand, who helped to popularize his ideas. As undersecretary at the Ministry of Public Instruction during the early Second Republic, Reynaud not only pushed for boys’ education but also responded to calls by Eugénie Niboyet, Deroin, and Roland by encouraging Hippolyte Carnot to convert private asylums into nursery schools. He was good friends with the feminist Ernest Legouvé, and likely instrumental in Carnot’s choice of him to a chair at the Collège de France, where he taught a course on the history of women.⁹⁰

Leroux and Reynaud, as theorists of metempsychosis, imagined a new world, one in which people would live as equals, in which individuals or society as a whole would become increasingly better through multiple lives, ultimately perfect, and for Reynaud at least people would become more like God as they neared perfection. How they would achieve this world was never fully spelled

out, at least in part because the "Doctrine of perfectibility" was not only a belief but also a method: as humanity perfected itself, people would naturally live in greater solidarity, and equality and a better life would follow. As we have seen, they did, however, suggest specific goals. Both argued for republican socialism, for the rights of women, and for the right of workers to democratic representation.⁹¹ They supported the Society of the Rights of Man, whose manifesto they wrote, which was important in popularizing socialist ideas.⁹² These ideas included not only class struggle but also a religious vision of solidarity. Although from hindsight we can see the goal of political equality as a practical one and the goals of religious fraternity and social equality as more "utopian," who was to say before 1848 that the one was more likely than the others?

Leroux and Reynaud both attempted practically to bring their ideas to fruition. Leroux founded a printing house in Boussac (with the generous help of George Sand) and attempted to put into action some of his socialist ideas. Until 1848, Reynaud held back, worrying that the people were not yet ready for a republic. Although he admitted that he differed from Leroux on "the solution to the social problem," his writings constantly expressed the need to improve the lot of the working class.⁹³ Yet in 1848 he moved quickly; he was at the Hotel de Ville on 24 February, the day the Second Republic was declared, and immediately offered his services. His actions, when he became Hippolyte Carnot's right-hand man as undersecretary at the Ministry of Public Instruction, reflected his hopes for gradual, evolutionary change through education. He published a circular (that conservatives would call "dangerous") which called on schoolteachers to explain the rights and duties of a citizen to the new electorate and insisted that "the greatest error which we must warn the people of the countryside against is that in order to be a representative, it is necessary to have either education or wealth."⁹⁴ While Leroux issued a call to the Assembly to send the unemployed to Algeria and institute socialism there, Reynaud set up an Ecole d'Administration open to all (by examination) and forced the resignation of Michel Chevalier and other liberal economists.⁹⁵ He insisted that "the old science [of economics] was concerned only with making individuals rich; the new will strive to make the people as a whole rich."⁹⁶ He rejected vehemently the "cruel English economy that has already done more damage to France than all the invasions ever organized by England."⁹⁷ Yet for Reynaud, it was the moral change, not the political, that remained most important, and he retreated quickly from the politics of parties that followed June 1848, resigning along with Carnot in July 1848.

Popularizing Romantic Reincarnation

Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud held no monopoly on popularizing versions of metempsychosis. Gerard de Nerval integrated the idea into a mystical syncretic

religion. Charles Nodier rejected the perfectibility of humanity but imagined palingenesis would eventually create a new species, the “comprehensive being,” which would be able to comprehend the existence of God.⁹⁸ Joseph de Maistre not only wrote about Charles Bonnet’s popularity but he himself accepted Bonnet’s ideas of “evolution” although he rejected any social implications.⁹⁹ More than any others, however, Leroux and Reynaud linked metempsychosis to social reform in a direct manner. Their ideas were quite popular among romantic circles and known in one form or another by the elite working class as well.

Throughout the 1830s, their collaboration helped set the tone for republican socialism. Articles in the *Globe* and the *Revue encyclopédique* set out their ideas for a democratic, egalitarian society. Leroux and Reynaud continued to publish together until 1840, and although they diverged after that, their ideas still shared a commitment to social and religious change.¹⁰⁰

The *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, which was published jointly by Leroux and Reynaud from 1836-1840, acted as the mouthpiece for their beliefs in metempsychosis. The *Encyclopédie* announced lofty goals: to update Diderot’s first attempt at an Encyclopedia, and “to summarize, in a clear and precise manner, the portion of human knowledge now advanced enough to be popularized and placed in the common domain.”¹⁰¹ The prospectus announced its central doctrine of progress and of perfectibility: “doctrine of life and salvation, not only for the collective [espèces] but for the individual. To demonstrate *a priori* the truth of this doctrine by metaphysics and, *a posteriori* by history, this is the general idea guiding the publication of these articles.”¹⁰² Another Diderot imitator, the *Encyclopédie du XIXe siècle*, described the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* as offering “more or less acceptable theories of social regeneration, bold and systematic, supported by an incontestable talent [and] seeming to have as a goal rather to promote these systems than to summarize the whole of knowledge.”¹⁰³ The first installment of the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* was also called the *Encyclopédie pittoresque à deux sous* and it seems clear that its authors hoped the corpus would reach working-class readers and transform their ideas, thereby transforming the world.

The conversation in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* touched an impressive array of the French intellectual scene: Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Edgar Quinet, Pauline Roland, Charles-Augustin de Sainte-Beuve all wrote for it; Félicité de Lamennais, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, Eugène Burnouf, Sand, Armand Barbès, and countless others read it. Leroux was “perhaps the most widely revered social thinker of his day.”¹⁰⁴ Individual articles by Leroux and Reynaud were also published as stand-alone works. Leroux’s *De l’Humanité*, written as an entry for the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, instead appeared as a book in 1840. Reynaud’s article “Terre,” was also published as *Discours sur la condition physique de la terre* in 1840. Its arguments for charity and solidarity greatly impressed Michelet and Lamennais; almost thirty years later Michelet would still refer to Reynaud’s philosophy as “a ray of light.”¹⁰⁵ Although Leroux’s *De l’humanité* did not enjoy

the popularity of Reynaud's work, his ideas were widely known, highly respected by leading romantic socialists, and offered the most systematic exploration of the idea of multiple lives on this earth. They were further popularized in George Sand's novels.¹⁰⁶ Alphonse Esquiros, Eugène Sue, and Victor Hugo were all influenced by theories of metempsychosis, particularly Reynaud's.¹⁰⁷ We have little definite evidence that workers too valued the *Encyclopédie*, although Agricol Perdiguier, one of those few workers who wrote an autobiography, kept it on his bookshelf among other classics such as Homer.¹⁰⁸ Workers more likely gained any knowledge they may have had of Leroux's and Reynaud's ideas from articles and summaries in the "advanced journals" favored by autodidacts, but we cannot be certain what they did or did not read.¹⁰⁹

More likely to reach a popular audience was the *Magasin pittoresque*, with a circulation of over fourty thousand. From its formation in 1833 through the 1840s, Reynaud, a close friend of editor Edouard Charton, was a frequent contributor. Many of his anonymous contributions center around science yet continue to forward his ideas of progress. An appealing 1841 article by the popular artist J.J. Grandville, with an insert from Reynaud, used tales of bugs and caterpillars to help popularize Reynaud's ideas of making a better world now to prepare for future lives. Grandville's anthropomorphized bugs promote socialism and human solidarity in an extremely accessible way, even as they wait for their future metamorphosis. Thus throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Leroux and Reynaud both spread ideas of progress and social reform linked to solidarity and metempsychosis. Their ideas gained great popularity and contributed to the hope that society could evolve peacefully into a more perfect place.

These works continued to be published and read after 1848. Reynaud's *Terre et Ciel*, published in 1854, which reprinted those two articles from the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, enjoyed great popularity; going through six editions. In that form, it gained enough attention to lead to condemnation by the Council of Perigeux in 1856. Interestingly enough, Reynaud protested that condemnation, claiming that his ideas could be reconciled with Catholicism, even while his own explanations argued against traditional Catholic teachings, especially hell and eternal punishment.¹¹⁰ Reynaud also insisted there that all religions teach the same truth, a theme that would be taken up by those arguing for a universal religion, treated later in this chapter.

The importance of individual morality in Reynaud's thought—that humans must individually perfect themselves morally—made his theories the most accessible in the post-1848 period. Reynaud himself never gave up the idea that the individual perfects him or herself in relation to the rest of society. Yet after 1848, socialism made for dangerous conversations; religion remained an acceptable topic, and a popular one. Leroux, in exile in Jersey, lost much of his following and his influence. Reynaud, who fled first to Nice, ultimately chose "inner exile" and retreated from politics into his religious theories. Reynaud's ideas on

metempsychosis and the continual perfection of the individual, and thus also society, were picked up and further popularized from the 1850s on by the free-thinkers and by the new spiritist movement. Not only the importance of the individual, but also a strong nationalism made Reynaud's ideas very popular. Reynaud directly linked reincarnation to a certain version of "Frenchness" that let reincarnation be nationalist, an excellent counterpoint to the tendency of Catholicism to look to Italy and the Pope.

Naturalizing Reincarnation: Druidism

Reynaud's ideas on reincarnation and his fierce patriotism eventually came together in a claim that France itself, not Greece or the Orient or early Christian fathers such as Origen, were the "true" source of ideas of reincarnation. Reynaud admitted that progress had been made since the druids, specifically in the addition that Christianity brought: an emphasis on charity to others as a way to improve this world. Yet he insisted that the core truths of his philosophical ideas, and of all religions, could be found in the first Frenchmen, the Gauls, as expressed by their intelligentsia, the druids. Most important, the druids had already known about reincarnation. Reynaud's arguments were set forth in his article "Druidisme" in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* (1847).

Reynaud began his discussion of druids with a nationalistic call for France to know itself as a country by knowing its past. Now more than ever, he claimed, this goal must be reached, because the country was shaking itself free of the rule of a conquering force. Reynaud referred to the religion of Rome as that of a conqueror, just as Rome itself had originally conquered Gaul. French historians who had seen only savagery and barbarism in the druids were mistaken. Seduced by the prestige of ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome, historians of the druids missed their "sublime" character.¹¹¹ Reynaud made this question political as well as religious. Historians needed to base the religion of the future on the religion of the past of the nation, rather than on the "accident of history" that was the Roman occupation of Gaul. Whether this would happen, Reynaud said, was the true "question between the ultramontanes and the nationalists."¹¹² This directly political question, whether France should be influenced by Catholics who followed Rome, had strong resonance in the heady and rebellious years at the end of the July Monarchy. Although King Louis Philippe had broken the old "alliance of throne and altar" of the Restoration, the July Monarchy remained conservative and allowed the Church to oversee much of education, all the way up to the university level, a decision that greatly irked republicans and socialists. Socialists of all types called for a truly French republic and the exclusion of the Catholic church from the affairs of the French state.

For Reynaud, the druids offered a solid base for a new/old religion. Following Origen, Reynaud claimed that the druids' religion was akin to that of the

Hebrews; he concluded from this that they actually believed in only one God, rather than a pantheon. Greek and Roman observers who had described numerous Gods had assumed that the druids were pantheistic because of their own beliefs. The Celts had come “from the same mountains” as the people who settled India and Asia and brought to Europe the same original idea of a single god that the Brahmins had.¹¹³

Their belief in metempsychosis, which he intimated they had perhaps even taught to Pythagoras (rather than learning from him as some of the ancients sources had thought,) did away with the fear of death and the “monotonous duality of light and shadows” offered by Catholicism.¹¹⁴ In one of the most animated passages in his writing, Reynaud described the adventures of the soul, which one might liken to those of a *flaneur* of the universe. He wrote of the universe “as a vast archipelago bathed by an ocean of ether under the rays of a pure sky, peopled by a nation of immortals. . . . What new and unexpected friendships will form in these [future] residences! What unimaginable marvels of nature and art. . . . What revelations, what progress of the heart, what joy of the soul!” All this waited to be encountered by the “citizen of the universe” as he “strolled successively through the infinite.”¹¹⁵ In Reynaud’s interpretation of Celtic circles of reincarnation the *flaneuse* not only encountered glories but also progress as she eventually moved from the circle of voyages to the circle of happiness, a paradisiacal level of lives which Reynaud envisioned as possibly unending, but unending joy rather than pain.¹¹⁶

The social order promoted by the druids had also been more just than that of contemporary France. In keeping with his own position on the importance of women, Reynaud found that the ancient Gauls had not only recognized women, but that women had been major and equal actors. Among the Gauls women had strength, wisdom, and enough physical force to participate in all of society. Women had been part of the council of judges of the druids, and “the return to Gaul” would be a step toward the “rehabilitation of this sex too-long humiliated.” Although Reynaud did not find a sort of Saint-Simonian androgyny in the druid couple, he did argue that women chose their husbands in some liberty and that they were equal material partners in marriage.¹¹⁷

Reynaud, like many others in the nineteenth century, romanticized the Celts, rejecting earlier views that had seen them as barbaric.¹¹⁸ Much of his book-length article was spent reviewing the sources on the druids and arguing with those who presented a less than sympathetic picture. Reynaud’s druids were wise and fearless and practically perfect, except for not preaching charity. The Romans had misunderstood and overemphasized the idea of human sacrifice; Reynaud implied human sacrifice rarely happened and then only for the glory of willing martyrs.¹¹⁹ These druids were, most important of all, worthy predecessors for the France of Reynaud’s day, a France shaking off Roman (Catholic) and monarchical limits and forming itself into a society of wisdom, glory, and progress.

Reynaud continued rather than invented a tradition of looking toward the Celts for all things French. As early as the first half of the sixteenth century, writers claimed the druids as evidence of a glorious past for the nation.¹²⁰ Nobles in the eighteenth century saw themselves as the more advanced Franks, who had conquered the dirty and heathen Gauls and thus had the right to govern. Prior to the nineteenth century, the Celts and Gauls were rarely romanticized. Instead they were seen as the uncivilized clay out of which civilized France had been molded. Much of the work on druids and Celts before the Revolution seems to have been historical rather than nationalist.¹²¹ Dom Martin, for example, in his study on *La Religion des Gaulois* (1727) presented druids in a matter of fact manner, not excusing habits such as human sacrifice.¹²²

With the Revolution, and the rejection of the royalist past, a new yet still glorious past had to be recovered or created. One fecund source of that past was easily available from Enlightenment writings: the glories of Greek and Roman culture, as adopted and adapted into French Republic and Empire. While Greece and Rome continued to offer glory, the Gallic past of the land and the early peoples that would become France and the French offered a source for new interpretation. Formed under Napoleon, an Académie Celtique promised to discover that past and “to rediscover the titles of glory bequeathed to their descendants by the Celts, the Gauls, and the Franks.” They were moved by “an emotion at once noble and nationalist which had necessarily arisen in an age in which the French showed themselves so worthy of their ancestors.”¹²³

The exact source of Reynaud’s own fascination with the druids is unclear. His important article on it followed his works on “Ciel,” and “Terre,” where he had already set out his key ideas. The druids acted as a later addition, rather than an originary point for Reynaud. Thus his “discovery” of the druids validated rather than fueled his visions of metempsychosis. The only hint given by his biographer lies in Reynaud’s 1843 voyage, which included travel in Germany, where Reynaud renewed his childhood distaste for the Germans, whom he accused of “aping” the French.¹²⁴ When he returned he began working on his article on the druids. This suggests a conjecture that he hoped to reject any common heritage with the Germans. Yet druids were on Reynaud’s mind long before 1843. He allegedly “converted” historian Henri Martin to druidism as early as 1833.¹²⁵ Reynaud might well have been familiar with the question of the Gauls and the Franks from his days as a Saint-Simonian. The Comte de Montlosier’s *De la monarchie française* commissioned (but rejected) by Napoleon, revived the idea that the Gauls were the Third Estate. These ideas were taken up by various liberals and Saint-Simonian “industrialists” who argued that the Franks were warlike, while the Gauls promoted commerce. “The *industriels* were thus the inheritors of the hard-working Gauls, the Third Estate who had made the Revolution in order to bring political history into synchrony with progress in social organization.”¹²⁶ Augustin Thierry promoted this idea in his *Lettres sur l’histoire de France* (1820), new editions of which continued to appear throughout the

century. He also wrote of the Gauls in the Saint-Simonian periodical, *L'Industriel*, before he left the movement in 1817. Not only the Saint-Simonians but also the liberals adopted this idea, including Jean-Baptiste Say, Charles Comte, and Benjamin Constant.¹²⁷ The importance of the Gauls as a touchstone offered a major justification and organizing principle in the early nineteenth century.

Historians made the Celts a valid subject of study. Amédée Thierry, brother to Augustin, continued the interest in the history of Gaul, publishing a three-volume *Histoire des Gaulois* in 1828 (reprinted in 1835, 1844, 1857), followed by *Histoire de la Gaule sous l'administration romaine* published from 1840-47. Given its proximity to Reynaud's publishing, this may have been a key stimulant to his interest. Certainly it acted as a source; Reynaud read Thierry's work, referring frequently to it in the footnotes to his article, but disagreed with its position on religion, women, and many other issues. Most of his religious ideas appear to have been taken from Dom J. Martin, *Religion des Gaules*, which we know that Reynaud borrowed from the library in 1845.¹²⁸ But Dom Martin, followed by Thierry and others, argued that despite what Caesar and other sources alleged, the Druids did not believe in metempsychosis. Martin did not go beyond saying that they believed in the immortal soul. He did however, argue that they attracted Pythagoras to come to them rather than having adopted his ideas. This is what Reynaud argued as well, so we may assume that he took it from Dom Martin and embellished it. Reynaud's stress on the positive facets of druidic beliefs in metempsychosis and his connection of these to their high moral principles, however, seem to be completely his own. Nevertheless they did not remain his alone for long.

Reynaud was part of a trend when he decided to find his own ideas in the Celtic past and to use that past to support the present. Reynaud went beyond others by looking to the Celts not only as a source of French greatness but also as one source of a new moral and religious belief. Reynaud's biographer credits him with setting off a wave of druid studies and with initiating the connection between patriotism and an interest in the early history of France. Reynaud was hardly the first. But certainly many thinkers read and were fascinated by his approach and found it an enticing image. "'For some time now,' wrote Henri Martin to Edgar Quinet in the summer of 1847, 'the article *Druidisme* has been in great demand chez M. Furne.'"¹²⁹ Multiple studies on the Celts followed Reynaud's: Emile Souvestre used Reynaud's work as a base for novels, Eugène Sue popularized the Celtic origins of France in his *Mystères du peuple*. Henri Martin, encouraged by Reynaud, wrote at about the same time his *De la France, de son génie et de ses destinées* (Oct. 1847). His use of the druids as the basis of Gallic liberty and freedom and reincarnation as the basis of individual and political progress clearly echo Reynaud and made a greater splash even than Reynaud's own works. Although not widely remembered today, Henri Martin was the central popular historian of France throughout the Second Empire; his

work both as politician and as vice-president of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* in the Third Republic ensured that when primary schooling was set up throughout France most of the history all French children learned came from Martin's writings.¹³⁰

Many people interested in alternative visions of history, science, and society leapt to incorporate Reynaud's findings on the druids as supporting their own. Ange Guépin, in his *Philosophie du socialisme* (1850) called Reynaud's work "as beautiful as it is patriotic"; the Fourierist Désiré Laverdant also wrote of the religion of the druids in his *Socialisme catholique* and referenced Reynaud. The *Journal du Magnétisme* promoted it in 1852. The great priest Lacordaire highlighted Reynaud's importance by preaching against his ideas from the pulpit of Notre Dame.¹³¹ Writers such as Ed. Panchaud in *Le Druidisme ou Religion des anciens Gaulois: Exposé de la doctrine de la morale et du culte des druides* (1865) helped spread these ideas by arguing against them. The druids and the question of how their values shaped France remained a subject for discussion throughout the century and Reynaud's ideas about druid belief in reincarnation remained a strong part of the discussion. Thus the connection between druids and new versions of the afterlife which Reynaud created would help make reincarnation truly French. As late as the 1920s, spiritist writings promoted the connection between druids and metempsychosis, encouraging young mediums to emulate their ancestors of old, the druids, by preparing themselves to reach the beyond through meditation and ritual.¹³² The connection of metempsychosis to the druids, rather than to the Brahmins or even Pythagoras, fit a nationalist as well as a socialist outlook, and made it easier to popularize the belief under changing regimes and circumstances.

Eclectic Religiosity

In considering the movement of ideas of reincarnation across the century, it is important to acknowledge that no continuous chain from one movement to the next exists; instead there is a glorious maze of interweaving lines of thought. Reincarnation spread from the romantic socialists to numerous other groups. Its very ubiquity and untraceability attest to its importance. It is beyond the scope of this book to fully elucidate its many manifestations. The most important of these was, of course, the spiritist movement, which we will explore in depth beginning with chapter two. What I do in this section is simply point to the variety of forms and uses reincarnation took, including hopes to create a universal religion that would overcome the divisiveness of Catholic Christianity. A glance at some of these interweaving threads will help illuminate the ways that the ideas of Reynaud and Leroux maintained their popularity and were used to shape a French vision of secular spirituality.

Charles Fauvety (1813-1894) offers a fascinating example of the intersections of these various themes and the continued connection between religion and socialist or reformist thought. Fauvety, from a Protestant family, grandson of a revolutionary who was guillotined as a follower of Robespierre, rejected established religions but seems to have inherited his grandfather's robespierriste tendencies in his search both for a rational religion and for social reform.¹³³ His attempts to integrate religion and reform traverse the century and its socialist movements, and as a Free Thinker he supported movements from the Fourierists and Saint-Simonians to Proudhon to the spiritists to occultism at the end of the century. A quick glance at his biography helps us see how easily these strands of thought could be combined.

Fauvety, born in 1813, was a student in Paris at the time of the 1830 Revolution and was arrested, perhaps for zealous participation, during the Revolution. From that time until 1845, he followed the wishes of his family, working with an uncle in commercial concerns until he came into an inheritance and dashed for philosophical freedom, leaving commerce to his brother-in-law.¹³⁴ By 1846 he, along with the abbé Alphonse-Louis Constant, was busy publishing *La Vérité sur toutes choses*, which featured anti-government propaganda and argued for a renovation of religion. Trying, like Leroux and Reynaud, to combine new religiosity with socialism, Fauvety presented an eclectic synthesis of Swedenborg's ideas of love with magnetism and fouriérist "attraction" arguing that a "universal agent of life" existed and needed to be expressed through a new socialist society based on association.¹³⁵ He flirted with Proudhonian socialism both before and after 1848 and was reputed to be responsible for bringing Proudhon to Paris.¹³⁶ By 1849 he had broken with Proudhon as not socialist enough, while Proudhon rejected Fauvety's "tartines religieuses."¹³⁷ He supported the republican contingent during 1848, although his activity was in the press rather than in the Assembly, and his active advocacy of socialism in his weekly *Le Positif* was not enough to earn him exile when the coup d'état came along.

In fact, Fauvety and his wife Maxime, an actress and apparently an active political thinker herself, helped hold the religious socialist and republican world together by their salon, held bi-weekly from 1850 to 1869. There could be found an eclectic group of thinkers who wished to challenge the status quo. These included Eliphaz Levi (formerly known as the abbé Constant) who promoted the use of occult magic as a means of renewal; Jenny d'Héricourt, follower of Cabet's Christian socialist utopianism and ardent feminist, and the young Juliette Lambert, budding writer and feminist and protégé of Jean Reynaud, as well as ardent republicans such as Charles Renouvier, Emile Littré, and Elie Reclus.¹³⁸ Here again we see the connections between republican political thought, socialist tendencies, and religious renewal, as all these thinkers shared these values, although privileging them differently.

In the late 1850s Fauvety shifted into freemasonry, where he helped propagate a deistic program popular among some republican spiritualists.

Fauvety briefly rose high in the masonic world, becoming advisor to the Grand Master of the Grand Orient.¹³⁹ Fauvety argued vehemently that freemasonry was and should be a religion, based on the tenets of a belief in God and the immortality of the soul. In the “Programme maçonnique adopté par la Loge RENAISSANCE,” [aka *La Renaissance par les Emules d’Hiram*] of which Fauvety became head, he put forth principles of work, solidarity, reciprocity, and a “religious ideal” that stressed universal harmony.¹⁴⁰ Freemasonry held firm in its rejection of Catholicism; Catholicism had already rejected freemasonry, forcing Catholics to leave their lodges. The freemasons maintained a vague spiritualist outlook however, asserting in 1849 that the Order was based on belief in God and the immortality of the soul.¹⁴¹ Fauvety failed ultimately to establish freemasonry on his own religious basis and became somewhat isolated within the masonic establishment by the second half of the 1860s. He continued, however, to find support for rational religion among others who remained within the fold and the *Emules d’Hiram* continued to support a utopian, socialist, republican vision of society that Fauvety shared. Philip Nord argues that these masonic lodges acted as a source for continuing the utopian thinking of the 1830s and 1840s; the membership of *La Renaissance par les Emules d’Hiram* promoted feminism, socialism, and reformist projects throughout the Third Republic, from the *Ligue de l’Enseignement* to the *Ligue française pour les droits des femmes*.¹⁴²

One of Fauvety’s companions in this lodge was Henri Carle, another republican who had been involved in the 1849 project to create an *Association Fraternelle des instituteurs, institutrices et professeurs socialistes*. This union was promoted by feminists Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland; Roland had been a frequent contributor to Reynaud’s encyclopedia and remained a good friend. Carle’s adventures landed him in jail but did not change his mind. He would continue to popularize religious freethinking in his *Alliance religieuse universelle* which called for all religions to come together around general deistic principles for the progress of society.¹⁴³ Fauvety rejoined Carle in the political group “Alliance religieuse universelle” at least by 1870. Carle’s *Alliance* may seem to be a marginal group, promoting religion when it was already passé, but it gained the support of people like Henri Martin, Jules Michelet, Edgar Quinet, Jules Simon, Adolphe Crémieux (founder of the “Alliance Israélite Universelle”), and Victor Hugo, all in one way or another religious free-thinkers like Carle and Fauvety. Carle openly claimed Leroux as one of his religious predecessors.¹⁴⁴ Martin, of course, continued to popularize in his histories the ideas on druids and reincarnation that he and Reynaud had shared since at least the 1840s. The *Alliance* shared ideas and members with the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, both helping to promote republican thought and practice in the 1860s build-up to a republican government.¹⁴⁵

Already in his masonic ideas, Fauvety promoted beliefs that involved an evolutionary progression of reincarnations reminiscent of Reynaud and Leroux.

He argued that as humanity progressed, religion was moving away from the supernatural and toward the scientific and rational, but he also insisted on immortality of the soul, progressive plural lives, and universal harmony, which he defined as “cosmic communion of all beings.”¹⁴⁶ His continued emphasis on the immortality of the soul opened him to the new vogue of spiritist ideas and ultimately led him to accept Reynaud-style ideas of reincarnation, although whether he came by these directly or either through Henri Martin or spiritism is not clear.¹⁴⁷

Fauvety came to spiritism sometime during the late 1860s. In 1866, he launched the revue *La Solidarité, journal des principes* which promoted a socialistic deism and strove to continue his ideas presented within the masonic world. He himself called it scientific socialism and claimed inspiration from Pierre Leroux and Christian socialist Philippe Buchez. In *La Solidarité*, he published long studies of spiritism and the immortality of the soul. None of his biographers explore his support of spiritism, but he participated actively in groups, in publishing, and in Congresses. Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie, a leader of the spiritist movement in the 1870s, named Fauvety as among the strong, long-time supporters of spiritist ideas.¹⁴⁸ In 1878 Fauvety joined with Leymarie in the newly forming Société scientifique d'études psychologiques (Scientific Society for Psychological Studies), whose goal was to explore spiritist phenomena, but also to promote social reform, and in 1879 he published a defense of spiritism, in collaboration with the medium Mme George Cochet.¹⁴⁹ In the 1880s he continued to write for the *Revue Spirite* and as late as 1889 he gave a speech at the Congrès spirite et spiritualiste and acted as one of the honorary presidents.¹⁵⁰

Carle too, although he does not seem to have supported spiritism per se, furthered ideas of progressive reincarnation. His *Libre conscience* acted as the sponsor for the “Congrès philosophique de Paris du Théisme Progressif” (Philosophical Congress for Progressive Theism) to be held in 1868 whose goal was to promote the same natural religion that Carle and Fauvety had promoted within the masons. Fauvety supported the Congress, as did leftist writer Eugène Nus, Reynaud’s old friend Henri Martin, Fouriérist Hippolyte Destrem, spiritist and astronomer Camille Flammarion, the feminist republican Léon Richer, and a host of other republicans interested in things spiritual. The Congress claimed as its basis principles similar to those in the masonic program, but added that death was only a passage. “[O]ur development continues in new manifestations, we have for guarantee of that the perfectibility of our nature and the ineluctable need for justice, demanded by conscience [selon la conscience], which will not reach full realization in the current manifestation. [or life] . . . The consequences of our acts, in this life and in ulterior existences, suffice to establish this harmony.”¹⁵¹ Here we see a reincarnation very similar to Reynaud’s, with an emphasis on justice and perfectibility. Carle added to it his and Fauvety’s emphasis on harmony of beliefs coming from the natural religion, to overcome the disunion caused by previous religions.

Just as the ideas of the 1830s and 1840s were carried on by connecting with spiritism, so were they carried on via connection with occultism. As noted above, Charles Fauvety and Alphonse-Louis Constant worked together prior to the 1848 Revolution, and Constant continued to frequent Fauvety's salon, but the ideas he published as Eliphas Levi were popular with occultists rather than spiritists. In the 1840s and 1850s, Levi began to promote magic and occultism, but he also continued to popularize the secular spirituality born of the milieu connecting social progress with religious progress. Levi used Ballanche's idea of palingenesis, applied to progressive rehabilitation that was begun by Christ's sacrifice but had now to be continued by humanity.¹⁵² Humanity itself had to strive toward achieving a better world. Levi's emphasis took the form of an androgynous theology, in which the final redemption would only be achieved when the oppression of women became the glorification of women. Here his thought is again reminiscent of Reynaud and especially Leroux, partaking of that same hope that the future world will be an equal world.¹⁵³

Like Fauvety and others, Levi argued for a Universal Religion, which he saw as the path to social reform. He argued that, through knowledge of revelation gained by studying occult analogies, the mage would be able to create a synthesis of secret doctrines and modern science.¹⁵⁴ For Levi, the contemporary world was a sterile place but the future world would bring regeneration; the rights of the collective would triumph over the rights of the individual, and truth would be known. Levi's world lacked the equality of Leroux's and Reynaud's; mages would be the recognized leaders of the masses, because of their superior knowledge. All of these elements would be favorite arguments of the fin-de-siècle occultists and would be actively promoted until at least the turn of the century.

One particular figure embodied this carry-over from romanticism to spiritist ideas in the post-1848 period: Victor Hugo acted as carrier for many of the ideas of earlier socialists. Hugo's closest neighbor in exile was Pierre Leroux himself, one of the few people he saw fairly frequently. He also read Reynaud's *Terre et Ciel* when it came out, despite his general refusal to read much and certainly nothing he did not like. Along with Reynaud's thoughts on reincarnation, he also explored the spiritualist strain of mesmerism and the early table turning, reading Dupotet, *La Magie dévoilée ou la science occulte* (1852) and an anonymous piece, *Des esprits et de leurs manifestations fluidiques* (1853) He continued reading in the same vein with the socialist-spiritist Victor Hennequin's, *Religion* (1854) and Alexandre Weil's, *Les Mystères de la création*; (1855)¹⁵⁵ Hugo represented Ballanche and Reynaud's ideas to the public in his poem *La Légende des siècles*. The massive poem, written in exile (1859), echoed these ideas, showing "the blossoming [épanouissement] of humanity from century to century, man [l'homme] mounting from the shadows to the ideal, the transfiguration of earthly hell into paradise, and the slow and supreme birth [éclosion] of liberty" that accompanies this blossoming.¹⁵⁶ Through liberty, and the transformation of

humanity itself, humans would reach the perfection of which all were capable. Hugo thus presented Ballanche's and Reynaud's ideas in a popular and palatable form.

The last arena which connected the utopian and reincarnation-oriented thought of the 1830s and 1840s with that of the spiritist movement and the later century was that of mesmerism, or magnetism. The mesmeric movement was widespread and varied, and it is difficult to make generalizations about the values of its members. Two major strands had existed in the movement nearly from its inception; the first was the materialist strain, promoted by Mesmer himself. The latter was the spiritualist strain, which had been born when a magnetized subject of Mesmer's student, the Marquis de Puységur, revealed that he could talk to spirits. (Spiritualist here includes both those who argued that the soul was key to magnetism and those who, like the spiritists, would actually obtain messages from already departed spirits.) Both strains claimed to be scientific, and both focused on healing, but the connections with the subject at hand are clearly stronger in the latter. However, talking to spirits did not guarantee an interest in reincarnation, and that is very difficult to pin down in mesmerist circles. There were, nonetheless, clear connections between the mesmerists of the early century and the spiritists and mesmerists of the second half of the century.

Materialist mesmerism began to falter in the 1840s, as the Académie des Sciences refused, yet again, to recognize the practice as medically and scientifically valid. In contrast, spiritualist mesmerism became stronger, as proponents like Henri Delaage and Alphonse Cahagnet promoted the idea of receiving revelations from the beyond.¹⁵⁷ Cahagnet followed Swedenborg, seeing the spirits of the dead as teaching the spirits of the living, but did not emphasize any teaching of reincarnation. Cahagnet's *Les Arcanes de la vie future dévoilées* discussed his "celestial telegraph" for communicating with the dead.¹⁵⁸ This version of mesmerism led directly and easily into spiritism, and many magnetists participated in the first spiritist contacts with spirits via mediums and table turning in the early 1850s. It is important to recognize that the spiritualist strain of mesmerism had been strong since the Marquis de Puységur had modified Mesmer's teachings to argue that the soul's efforts were key to the somnambulist's abilities. One of the most well-known magnetizers was the Baron Jules Dupotet de Sennevoy. After the disappointing judgments by the French Academy, he took magnetism to London, where he was quite successful for a time. In 1845 he returned to Paris, where he promoted spiritualist magnetism through his *Journal du magnétisme*, which lasted until 1860 and helped continue ideas of contact between the worlds from the idealistic 1840s through the repressive 1850s and into the more relaxed tone of the 1860s.¹⁵⁹

The question of the relationship between reincarnation and individual magnetizers remains to be fully explored. As a movement magnetizers did not necessarily promote theories of reincarnation. However, many of the most important

magnetizers did explore reincarnation in their teachings. Colonel de Rochas, an important promoter at the end of the century, experimented with regression of memory in order to help patients experience former lives via subconscious memory. He doubtless contributed to the confirmation of reincarnation.¹⁶⁰ There was little unanimity, however, as Henri and Hector Durville, great promoters of popular magnetism and of courses on magnetism at the end of the century, argued that the spiritists were wrong about the reasons for the phenomena, that it was not the spirits but the *dédoublement des corps*—fluids from the body that separated and achieved things not normal for humans.¹⁶¹

In any case, magnetizers played an important role in continuing to keep these questions alive throughout the nineteenth century. Questions of survival of the soul and reincarnation would experience a resurgence in the late 1870s through the end of the century, as hypnotism began to be studied as a valid scientific and medical treatment.¹⁶² Spiritualist magnetists continued to keep discussions of the immortality of the soul and the possibilities of contacting it, as well as of rebirth, in the public and scientific eye.¹⁶³

Alternative thinkers had no monopoly on using religion as a means to reform society and reach some version of social perfection. The Catholic church had explored and rejected such ideas with attempts in the 1830s by liberal Catholics such as Lamennais and Lacordaire to rejuvenate religious faith, to lend it a romantic cast, and to reconcile science and faith. Lamennais proclaimed the coming of a religious democracy that would not have been unwelcome in many ways to someone like Pierre-Simon Ballanche or Jean Reynaud; Pierre Leroux would have rejected it for its liberal individualism. Although the papal encyclical *Mirari vos* in 1832 censured the ideas of the liberal Catholics, many hoped until 1848 to find a way to renew what they saw as the stultifying Catholicism of the official church. Yet after 1848 these voices were efficiently muffled, not to come into their own again until social Catholicism arose late in the century.

Protestants, too, had their religious and social reformers. Fauvety himself recognized the work of the *Union Protestante Liberale* (UPL, formed 1861) as progressive and linked to a broader view of religion. The UPL, a group of liberal Protestants, were influenced by the new “scientific” Biblical criticism that challenged the literal character of the Bible, and created a schism within the French Protestant church.¹⁶⁴ In a work in which he explored both Ernst Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* and the UPL’s new views of religion, Fauvety praised the UPL for trying, as he was, to reconcile science and religion and to remove the “supernatural”—which he saw as giving up control of ones’ religious ideas to something outside—and to make religion more useful for a modern society. The UPL, Fauvety claimed, recognized that humans are perfectible and are progressively moving in that direction. In fact, if they kept going in the direction they were arguing, they would move themselves right out of Christianity, a development Fauvety applauded.¹⁶⁵ Fauvety certainly overstated how far the UPL might go, but its activities do show that the urge to link religion and social reform was widespread.

What alternative thinkers offered, however, was a rejection of the establishment churches, a new emphasis on justice and on social reform, and on individual progress. Theories of progressive reincarnations, inherited from Leroux and Reynaud, were popular because they offered a way to change the world, promoted morality, and insisted on fraternal solidarity, that humans have a responsibility to each other, even while recognizing the importance of class in contemporary society.

The attempts by Reynaud, Leroux, and others to resolve the tensions between the individual and society via religious thought help illustrate the depth of these tensions, tensions that showed clearly in the inability of the revolutionaries in 1848 to overcome the conflicting claims of individual liberty against working-class attempts at collective social reform. Romantic socialists offered a new vision, one of an interaction between politics and metaphysics, based on a universalism that yet retained individualism. The importance of ideas of metempsychosis lies in the attempt to integrate spiritual regeneration both for society and for the individual, to bridge the gap between liberalism and republican socialism, and in the expression of the hopes romanticism had for both. Leroux and Reynaud imagined that society would change gradually, through education, increasing political rights, and through the progress of the soul, individual or collective, until it eventually gained the ability to create the perfect society.

When these ideas came to the test in 1848, romantic republican socialists who hoped for human solidarity were confronted by a combination of conservative ideas and class solidarity of the propertied, who based their politics on practical, economic, goals. In the face of determined opposition, their theories failed. These visions of human solidarity required the willing participation of all classes and presumed a shared goal for society that was hardly the reality of French society by 1848. Pierre Rosanvallon has characterized the universal suffrage of 1848 as "social" rather than political. Those without the vote were seen as socially excluded; the correlation became that once granted the vote, they would be included and society would share a will for reform. This conception left little room for political parties and divisive struggle over interests.¹⁶⁶ For republican socialists such as Leroux and Reynaud, the solidarity of humanity should have overcome divisive individualism. The inability to solve this tension was one reason for the eclipse of romantic socialism. The idea of a self based neither strictly on reason nor on individuality but on its relation to the collective was in fact no solution to the problems of France's increasingly industrial society. Instead, it opposed the very foundations of industrial capitalism in its attempt to resurrect the mystical self. Capitalism, based on the idea of exploitation of labor and individual industry, had no room for a mystical self connected to other humans and the community. If, however, as Rosanvallon argues, the 1830s and 1840s idea of a collective solidarity remained "constitutive of French political culture," and "French democracy endlessly aspired to an abstraction . . . to a society without

class, without personal conflict, without misunderstanding, freed of all attachment to the past, and eternally devoted to celebrating its unity” then we can see how Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud contributed to establishing that ideal.¹⁶⁷ French visions of government would remain profoundly religious, and even retain a hint of metempsychosis, in that they believed in a transformation of self and nation through republicanism.¹⁶⁸

Despite the eclipse of 1848, romantic socialist ideas of secular spirituality and progress through solidarity spread rather than diminished. Leroux, Reynaud, and post-1848 promoters of similar ideas were secular in rejecting the Church’s pre-eminence, yet religious in positing a spiritual path to social change. They claimed for humanity the right to judge itself in both this world and the next. Regarding “religiosity” and human responsibility, these thinkers offered a complete transformation: from responsibility to God in Ballanche, to responsibility to humanity in Leroux and, as furthered by Reynaud, responsibility to humanity in order to evolve as an individual. Reynaud, despite his emphasis on humanity and social reform, privileged the individual as the locus of progress. It was this last version of reincarnation that would be most suitable to spiritualist republicans such as Carle and Fauvety, who would mix politics with religion, reincarnation with reform, connecting them firmly and making of them a continuing tributary to the stream of French intellectual thought throughout the nineteenth century.

All these purveyors of the ideas of metempsychosis and social reform offered a variety of solutions to both social and religious problems of the day. Yet they all insisted on the importance of a religious thread to pull the nation together. They also helped uphold the ideal of evolutionary progress. Humanity, they believed, would get progressively better, even possibly progressively divine. They linked the progress of the soul through reincarnation to the progress of the nation spiritually, but not just spiritually. Politics and religion came together among these thinkers. Religious renovation then, was not only a religious idea but a transformative social and political one, one that would help make France into the ideal nation she was meant to be. This idea maintained strong ties to heterodox political and religious groups throughout the nineteenth century. The most prolific of these would be the spiritists, who added direct discussion with the dead to the notion of reincarnation as a means to argue for social reform.

NOTES

1. Arthur Mitzman, *Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and Romanticism in Nineteenth-century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 45. See also David Albert Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud, encyclopédiste de l'époque romantique d'après sa correspondance inédite* (Paris, 1965), 163.

2. Despite the prevalence of this belief among Romantic writers and philosophers, historians have done little to investigate. An exception is Arthur Mitzman's psychobiography of Michelet, where he treats reincarnation as important to Michelet's understanding of the past. D.G. Charlton briefly describes Leroux's beliefs in his *Secular Religions in France, 1815-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 83-87. French scholars of literature Paul Bénichou and August Viatte have identified metempsychosis as a major factor in Romanticism, springing from the theosophists of the eighteenth century. See Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes: doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) and *Les Mages Romantiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) and Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme*, 2 vols, (Paris, Champion, 1965 [1928]) Only Michel Nathan, also a literary scholar, has explored the concept in any depth, in his *Le Ciel des Fouriéristes* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1981). Nathan's thèse, "L'âme et les étoiles," (Paris VIII, 1980) gives more detail on the subject.

3. Ballanche, Leroux, and Reynaud were all influential in their time. Historically, their fortunes have differed. Ballanche, always recognized as an important influence on the Romantics, is known most recently for his visions of penal reform. His *Ville des Expiations* (1907, 1926, 1981) and his *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme* (1981) have been republished in the twentieth century. Recent work on Ballanche includes a new biography by Gisèle Hervé, *Pierre-Simon Ballanche* (Nîmes: C. Lacour, 1990), and Arthur McCalla's in-depth study of his ideas of progress, *A Romantic Historiosophy: The Philosophy of History of Pierre-Simon Ballanche* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). McCalla does look at Ballanche's philosophy of palingenesis, seeing it as part of Ballanche's overall attempt to reconcile past and present, the pre-revolutionary traditions of social hierarchy with the new liberal ideas. A.J. L. Busst explores Ballanche's influence on the Saint-Simonians and the importance of Vico in his thought. A.J.L. Busst, "The Message of Ballanche's *Orphée*" *Romance Studies*, 10 (1987): 21-33; Busst, "Ballanche, Lecteur de Vico," *Studi Francesi*, 39 (1995): 479-487. Leroux, almost forgotten until rescued by the Viards, père et fils, from the "conspiracy of silence" that surrounded him, is now well known, but mostly as one of the first and foremost socialist thinkers. See Jacques Viard, "Les origines du socialisme républicain," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 33 (1986): 133-147; Bruno Viard, ed. *A la source perdue du socialisme français* (Paris, 1997). The importance of the Viards in Leroux studies and their emphasis on political questions has meant that Leroux's religious and philosophical writings have had much less attention. Jack Bakunin, however, explores Leroux's religious thought in, "Pierre Leroux: A Democratic Religion for a New World," *Church History*, 44 (1975): 57-72. See also his "Pierre Leroux on Democratic Socialism and the Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 455-474. Reynaud, despite being well-known and popular at the time, remains largely forgotten except through his connection with Leroux. Their

Encyclopédie nouvelle was recently republished by Slatkine (Geneva, 1991). He is still cited by spiritists as the theorist of reincarnation, but has received little attention from academics. The exception is a semi-biographical exploration of his unpublished letters. See Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud* and “Jean Reynaud: an unfamiliar page from the history of socialist thought” *Science and Society* 46 (1982): 361-68.

4. See (among others) Lenard R. Berlanstein, ed. *Rethinking Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Ronald Aminzade, *Ballots and Barricades: Class Formation and Republican Politics in France, 1830-1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp, eds., *Work in France: Representations, Meanings, Organization, and Practices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Régime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). John M. Merriman, ed., *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979); Bernard Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) and “Republican Socialism and the Making of the Working Class in Britain, France, and the United States: A Critique of Thompsonian Culturalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993): 390-413; Jacques Rancière, *La nuit des prolétaires* (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

5. These debates do not originate with republican socialists but rather continue a fear of too much individualism that surfaced even before the French Revolution. They are linked both to questions of the new political economy and to society. See Sara Maza, “Luxury, Morality, and Social Change: Why There Was No Middle Class Consciousness in Prerevolutionary France,” *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997): 208, 216-221.

6. Excellent work is now being done on the topic. See Jonathan Beecher, *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and “Fourier and Christianity,” *Nineteenth-century French Studies*, 22 (1994): 391-403; Pamela Pilbeam, “Dream Worlds? Religion and the Early Socialists in France,” *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 499-516; Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) and “A New Religion of the Left: Christianity and Social Radicalism in France, 1814-1848,” in *The Transformation of Political Culture, 1789-1848*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989), 543-560; Christopher Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians, 1839-1851* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Miguel Abensour, “L’Utopie socialiste: une nouvelle alliance de la politique et de la religion,” *Le Temps de la réflexion* (1981): 61-112; Jacques Valette, “Utopie sociale et utopistes sociaux en France vers 1848,” in *1848, les utopismes sociaux: utopie et action à la veille des journées de Février* (Paris: Éditions C.D.U.-SEDES réunis, 1981), 12-110.

7. As historians, I wonder if by accepting these socialists’ claims to be “Christian,” although outside the Church, we anachronistically apply a twentieth-century vision of define-your-own religion (do your own thing), a vision that is more a result of these and later movements than a reality in the 1830s.

8. For Reynaud’s relation to Merlin of Thionville, *Dictionnaire Biographique du mouvement ouvrier français, 1789-1864* sous la direction de Jean Maitron (Paris, 1964),

307.

9. E. Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud* (Paris, 1864), 6.

10. Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud*, 22-25. Legouvé offers a biased but fascinating view of Reynaud's early life. His homage to his friend's life after his death seems to be the basis for all other accounts, making it difficult to corroborate details.

11. Before Corsica, Reynaud spent March through August traveling in Germany with Frederic LePlay, later renowned for his investigations into and hopes to reform the lives of poor workers. The two spent their time discussing how best to serve their country and how best to resolve "the social question." On the relationship, see E. Cheysson, "Jean Reynaud" [pamphlet] extrait du *Livre du Centenaire de l'Ecole Polytechnique*, t.III. (Paris: 1896), 2. In 1848 Reynaud would continue his conversations with Le Play, as they, among others, grouped to discuss means to solve the social question. (Catholic Encyclopedia, "Pierre-Guillaume-Frederic Le Play," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12162a.htm>; accessed 3/28/06). Le Play's great work on the lives of workers was *Les Ouvriers européens* (1855).

12. Jacques Viard, "Les Origines du socialisme républicain."

13. Letter from Leroux to Enfantin, describing Reynaud's "preaching" to the workers in Lyon s.d. [June 1831] cited in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 59.

14. Quoted from *L'Organisateur*, June 25, 1831, in David Albert Griffiths, "Jean Reynaud: An Unfamiliar Page from the History of Socialist Thought," *Science and Society* 46/3 (1982), 367.

15. There are conflicting accounts of this meeting. Viard speaks only of Leroux, while Legouvé speaks only of Reynaud. Apparently both were present, and both spoke out against Enfantin in front of a good number of his disciples. The resulting hubbub led to the breakup of the meeting and, in at least one account, seriously damaged the movement because of the defections of Leroux, Reynaud, Charton, and Carnot among others. Viard argues that this break had as much to do with Enfantin's refusal to recognize the struggle of the workers in Lyon as it did with the "Père's" attempts to proclaim himself the unquestioned religious leader of the group. However Carlisle insists that it was a question of morality and women's place. See Jacques Viard, "Les origines du socialisme républicain," 137; Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud*, 43; Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 50; Robert B. Carlisle, *The Proffered Crown: Saint-Simonianism and the Doctrine of Hope* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 171-77. Claire Goldberg Moses gives a nice account of the importance of women's equality and sexuality in causing this fissure. She places both Reynaud and Leroux among those protesting Enfantin at the meeting. (Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1984], 45-59).

16. Legouvé, *Reynaud*, 24.

17. Modern historians have questioned how closely intertwined the throne and altar really were. See Sheryl T. Kroen, "Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration," *French Historical Studies* (1998): 27-53 and *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)

18. Pamela Pilbeam cites Louis Blanc and Etienne Cabet as sources for this point. Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 132.

19. For an exploration of Fourier's ideas on metempsychosis and his influence on Romantic writers, see Michel Nathan, *Le Ciel des Fouriéristes: habitants des étoiles et réincarnations de l'âme* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1981).

20. Jonathan Beecher, *Fourier: The Visionary and his World*, (University of California Press, 1986), 329-321; *Victor Considerant*, 168.

21. Beecher, *Victor Considerant*, 175.

22. The literature on both Fourier and the Saint-Simonians is extensive. See, among many others, Jacques Droz, ed., *Histoire générale du socialisme*, t.1 *Des origines à 1875* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972); David Owen Evans, *Social Romanticism in France, 1830-1848* (New York: Octagon, 1969); Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes* (Paris: Gallimard 1977); Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Beecher, *Charles Fourier*; Sebastien Charléty, *L'Histoire du Saint-Simonisme (1825-1864)* (Paris:Gonthier, 1965, [1896]); Carlisle, *The Proffered Crown*; Susan K. Grogan, *French Socialism and Sexual Difference: Women and the New Society, 1803-44* (London: MacMillan, 1992).

23. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 283.

24. Liselotte Kurth-Voigt, *Continued Existence, Reincarnation, and the Power of Sympathy in Classical Weimar* (Rochester: Camden House, 1999), 9; 15-18; 39; quote on 46. Apollonius of Tyana would be the source occultist Papus would claim for reincarnation at the end of the nineteenth century.

25. McCalla points to Leibniz' ideas on the "divinely preestablished harmony among all substances of the universe" which are reflected first in Bonnet and later in Ballanche. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 153, 157. Leroux claimed that Leibniz's ideas on perfectibility were simply a middle ground on the way from Pythagoras to Saint Simon. Leroux, *De l'humanité* (Paris: Fayard, 1985 [1840]), 300. The implication was that they were being surpassed by Leroux himself.

26. Viatte, *Les Sources occultes*, ii.165, 248. See also Lynn Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg & French Literary Culture* (Albany: Suny Press, 1996), chapters 1 and 3. It is Wilkinson who points out that these are misconceptions rather than Swedenborg's teachings directly. For her claim regarding the individual and society, see 4. Her observations focus on the late eighteenth rather than the early nineteenth-century society but I think her evidence supports extending her claim.

27. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 226.

28. Germaine de Staël, cited in Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 230.

29. Viatte, *Les Source occultes*, ii.221.

30. Pierre Leroux, "De l'influence philosophique des études orientales," *Revue encyclopédique* 1832: 79.

31. Reynaud, "Zarathustra," *L'Encyclopédie nouvelle*" t.8, (Paris, 1841): 774-820

32. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 205.

33. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 361.

34. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 354 The Abbaye-aux-Bois, home of Julie Recamier's salon, was also home to Pierre-Simon Ballanche.

35. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 184-190.

36. Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, part IV, on "tradition." For his general outlook on the importance of the West, and for his claim that all these ideas existed in "seed form" in Western thought, see 665.

37. Reynaud, "Druidisme," *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, t.4 (Paris, 1843). See below for further discussion of this point.

38. J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997) Clarke argues that orientalism was a critique of Western society in a general sense, without referring particularly to ideas of reincarnation.

39. Charles Bonnet, *Palingénésie philosophique* (Geneva, 1769), 101.

40. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 154.

41. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 152. McCalla gives a brief summary of Bonnet's thought, see 151-158.

42. Oscar Haac, book review of Arthur McCalla, *A Romantic Historiosophy*, *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 27 (1999): 219. Maistre's discussion is found in *Du Pape*. See Jacques Marx, "L'Idée de palingénésie chez Joseph de Maistre" *Revue des études maistriennes* 5-6 (1980): 114. Marx notes that despite the ironic possibilities of tone, Maistre was sincere in his interest in Bonnet. Viatte sees Bonnet's influence lasting throughout at least the first quarter of the nineteenth century; *Les Sources occultes*, i. 41.

43. Katia Sainson, "René's Generation: Regeneration and Extinction after Revolution 1795-1805" (Ph.D. diss. New York University, 1999), 20, *passim*. Sainson argues that it is "René's generation," Chateaubriand and others of Ballanche's contemporaries, who struggled with this exact question of whether history flows via catastrophic events or slow continuity.

44. Sainson, 17, 30-45, *passim*, especially chapter 1. Sainson argues that this new relation to time led the generation immediately following the Revolution to discuss history in terms of regeneration, taken from discoveries in the natural world. We see with Ballanche especially that by the 1820s this idea of looking at history in terms of regeneration has taken on religious content and is expressed not only in terms of regeneration but in terms of reincarnation.

45. Jean Reynaud, *La Terre et Ciel*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1864 [1854]), 109.

46. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 160; see also Toby Appel, *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

47. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 65-73; *passim*.

48. Paul Bénichou, *The Consecration of the Writer, 1750-1830*, trans. Mark K. Jensen. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), xii.

49. See the preface in Reynaud *Terre et Ciel* and Leroux, *De l'humanité*; for Ballanche see McCalla, 138. Reynaud also published many anonymous articles popularizing scientific and geologic knowledge in the *Magasin pittoresque*.

50. Ballanche in a letter to Mme Recamier, cited in McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 345.

51. Pierre Simon Ballanche, *Essais de palingénésie sociale* (Paris, 1827), 9-10.

52. Ballanche, *Palingénésie sociale*, 12.

53. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 106. For more detail on Ballanche's view of

Louis XVI and the Revolution, see pages 98-103.

54. Bénichou attributes this at least in part to his experience growing up in Revolutionary Lyon during its destruction during the Convention. Bénichou, *Temps des prophètes*, 75-76. For quote, see 87. For details on Ballanche's suffering and his life during the Terror, see McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 9-22.

55. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 170.

56. Cited in Jacques Roos, *Les idées philosophiques de Victor Hugo: Ballanche et Victor Hugo* (Paris: Nizet, 1958), 95. According to Roos, Victor Hugo takes from this the idea of metempsychosis, describing all our earthly lives as but sleeps from which we awake to find ourselves.

57. McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 356; Bénichou, *Temps des prophètes*, 284-85.

58. Ballanche hailed the "Orient" as the birthplace of western society, and argued that East and West had shared the same insights into the progress toward perfection. In fact, it was the East, via Egypt, which had initiated the West into the process of rehabilitation. However only the West continued to act, via Christianity, while the East had remained stagnant. On this, see McCalla, *Romantic Historiosophy*, 184-190.

59. See Beecher, *Victor Considerant*, 1-8 for a discussion of "The Problem of Romantic Socialism."

60. Pierre Leroux, "De l'individualisme et du socialisme," (1834) *Oeuvres 1825-1850* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1978), 376. Notes added in 1847 and 1850 comment on the term socialism.

61. "Exposé des principes républicains de la Société des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen," first published in *Le Tribune*, 23 October 1833, later appeared in pamphlet form. See Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 131ff. for further discussion of Reynaud and Leroux's republican connections.

62. It is interesting in this context that Edward Berenson argues that a gentler version of religion had spread over much of France. Leroux and Reynaud do not seem to have experienced that version, and it is possible that those educated in the 1810s and early 1820s had a very different religious experience than those schooled in the later 1820s and 1830s. See Berenson, "A New Religion of the Left," esp. 550-554. Certainly the older, more fear-based version had not disappeared. Thomas Kselman points out that threats of hell remained popular among Catholic missionaries and in preaching manuals throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), 82-83.

63. Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, 215-218. For a discussion of the split, see Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 197-99. The two men remained estranged but friends; Reynaud tried to aid Leroux during 1848 and Leroux offered a heartfelt tribute to Reynaud shortly after his death in 1863.

64. Leroux neglects, however, to mention Ballanche in his long line of precursors: "Pascal, Charles Perrault, Fontenelle, Vico, Malebranche, Bacon, Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant, Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon, et même aussi Fichte, Schelling, Hegel qui tous ont entrevu, à des degrés divers, et sous des jours différents, la vie collective et progressive de l'humanité." Leroux, *De l'Humanité*, 126.

65. Leroux, *Individualisme et socialisme*, 369-371.

66. Leroux sets out his vision in his *De l'humanité* (1840). Originally intended as

the entry for “humanity” in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, Leroux refused to let Reynaud publish it after they argued over where and how metempsychosis or reincarnation took place. For more on Leroux’s new religion, see Jack Bakunin, “Pierre Leroux: A Democratic Religion for a New World,” *Church History* 44 (1975): 61.

67. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 159.

68. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 20.

69. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 118-120; quote 118.

70. This insight is implied throughout Leroux; it is stated much more clearly in Reynaud, see below.

71. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 50.

72. Leroux apparently borrowed this idea from Ballanche, who describes these three institutions as the patricians’ rights in his *Orphée*. See Busst, “Message,” 31. Obviously, this formulation is problematic in terms of gender, given the limits of women’s ability to own property or “possess” family under the Napoleonic Code. Leroux was aware of the inequalities suffered by women and argued for their political rights.

73. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 130-138.

74. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 144.

75. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 188.

76. Leroux, *De l’humanité*, 189.

77. Jérôme Peignot, *Pierre Leroux, inventeur du socialisme* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1988), 71-73.

78. Reynaud, “Ciel,” *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, t.3, 611.

79. Reynaud, “Ciel,” 613.

80. Reynaud, “Ciel,” 614.

81. Reynaud, “Ciel,” 614.

82. Reynaud, “Ciel,” 618.

83. Reynaud, “Ciel,” 618.

84. Jean Reynaud, *Terre et Ciel*, 94-95.

85. Reynaud, *Terre et ciel*, 92, 98-99.

86. Reynaud, “Ciel” 606.

87. See, among others, Christine Fauré, *Democracy without Women: Feminism and the Rise of Liberal Individualism in Paris*, trans. Claudia Gorbman and John Berks (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason’s Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

88. Reynaud, *Terre et ciel*, 366. Reynaud argued for the entrance into eternity of all types of women, thus implicitly rejecting the dichotomy between respectable and not respectable women; see 365.

89. Naomi Andrews, “Utopian Androgyny: Romantic Socialists Confront Individualism in July Monarchy France,” *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003): 437-58.

90. For Reynaud’s activities during the Revolution of 1848 and the Second Republic, see Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud*, 83-100 and Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 292-323.

91. Reynaud, “De la nécessité d’une représentation spéciale pour les prolétaires,” *Revue encyclopédique* IV (April 1832): 1-20.

92. Moss, "Republican Socialism and the Making of the Working Class," 405-407.

93. Quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 317-318.

94. Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud*, 92; quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 310. Originally published in *Le moniteur universel*, 6 March 1848.

95. Peignot, *Pierre Leroux*, 107-108. Although Reynaud succeeded in the first rounds of elections, Leroux was elected only in the complementary elections of 8 June. For Reynaud, see Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 317.

96. Quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 299.

97. Quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 319. This quote comes from a letter to Leroux in mid-May 1848, calling for Leroux to help ensure unity amongst all those who wanted a republican government in the face of the increasingly conservative tone of the Assembly.

98. Kari Lokke, *Gerard de Nerval: the Poet as Social Visionary* (Lexington, Ken.: French Forum, 1987), 124-18. Hilda Nelson, *Charles Nodier* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 128-29. See Nodier, *De la palingénésie humaine et de la resurrection* (1832). Despite the importance many literary works played in furthering these visions of the future, it is outside the scope of this history to explore in any depth the part reincarnation held in nineteenth-century French literature. That work remains to be done.

99. Marx, "L'Idée de palingénésie," 114.

100. See Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 439-63 for a detailed bibliography of Reynaud's works (and many of Leroux's).

101. Quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 132.

102. Quoted in Félix Thomas, *Pierre Leroux: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa doctrine: contribution à l'histoire des idées au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1904), 56.

103. Quoted in Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 123.

104. Charlton, *Secular Religions*, 83.

105. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, 348.

106. Beecher, Victor Considérant, 150.

107. Mitzman, *Michelet, Historian*, 45.

108. Edgar Newman, "The Historian as Apostle: Romanticism, Religion, and the First Socialist History of the World," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 2 (1995): 56

109. For headway in the difficult question of what workers read, see Martyn Lyons, "The Autodidacts and their Literary Culture: Working-Class Autobiographers in Nineteenth-Century France," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 28 (1991): 265-273. Lyons argues that "we might expect them [workers], perhaps, to have a good knowledge of contemporary socialist thought," but he did not necessarily find this to be the case, nor does this guarantee they knew Leroux and Reynaud (271).

110. Jean Reynaud, *Réponse au Concile du Perigeux*, (Paris, 1858), 14-16.

111. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 403-1. Please note: the pagination in this article is incorrect and repeats in a series, so although page numbers are given, the reader should be warned that more than one page may bear the same number. Pages 409-416 are especially frequent, repeating a number of times. I have dealt with this by noting the first appearance as 409-1; the second as 409-2, etc. The article was later printed as an independent book under the title *Considérations sur l'esprit de la Gaule* (Paris, 1847).

112. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 403-1.

113. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 408-1.

114. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 409-416-1.

115. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 409-1; (ellipses in original).

116. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 416-1.

117. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 410-412-3. Quote on 410-3.

118. On the two strains of sources regarding the druids, one sympathetic and one much less so, see Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 99, 103. On the importance of Celts for nineteenth-century patriots, see Krzysztof Pomian, "Franks and Gauls," in *Realms of Memory, Vol I: Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 29-76. Pomian's article discusses the early Gauls in general; no reference is made to druids in particular.

119. Reynaud, "Druidisme," 413-2.

120. Piggott, 133. Ironically for our case, both the Germans and the French claimed the ancient celts.

121. Pomian, 51-55 for Franks. Pomian describes the cyclical popularity of the Celts for nationalists, from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. Throughout most of the nineteenth century and especially during the period 1840-1890, they remained quite important in definitions of nationhood.

122. Dom Jacques Martin, *La Religion des Gaulois* t I. (Paris, 1727), preface n.p. For other similar works see Dom. Joseph Cajot, *Les Antiquités de Metz, ou Recherches sur l'origine des Médiomatriciens, leur premier établissement dans les Gaules, leurs moeurs, leur religion* (Metz, 1760) and M. de Chiniac de la Bastide du Claux, *Discours sur la nature et les dogmes de la Religion Gauloise* (Paris, 1769).

123. Nicole Belmont, ed., *Aux sources de l'ethnologie française* (Paris: Editions du C.T.H.S. [Comité des Travaux Historique et Scientifiques, 1995], 10. Belmont has re-edited the original *Mémoires* of the Académie Celtique; the quotes are from the dedication to the *Mémoires*, t. I (Paris, 1807).

124. Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud* 255.

125. Charles Rearick, "Henri Martin: From Druidic Traditions to Republican Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History* 7 (1972): 55. Griffiths has Reynaud and Martin discussing the druids together only in 1845 and does not explore any earlier interest but given their popularity, it is difficult to believe that Reynaud had not considered the question much earlier. Pomian argues that Martin was influenced by Michelet's references to the Gauls in his *Histoire de France* (1833 for the first volume) and especially Michelet's characterization of the French nation as progressive. That idea was pervasive among most all of these republican writers in the 1840s. Martin defended Reynaud's ideas on the druids and the relation of Gaul to Rome, which had been found rather controversial when first published. Martin, *Jean Reynaud*, 13; Legouvé, *Jean Reynaud*, 77-79.

126. James Mitchell Lee, "Benjamin Constant: The Moralization of Liberty" (Ph.d. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2003), 231.

127. Lee, "Benjamin Constant," 231.

128. Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 255.

129. Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 275.

130. Rearick, "Henri Martin," 60-61. Rearick's article recalls the importance of Martin both at the time and as formative in creating a particular image of France.

131. See Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud*, 276-277, for a more extensive list of those who cited and popularized Reynaud.

132. Henri Regnault, *Léon Denis et l'expérience spirite* (Paris: Leymarie, 1929), 39.
133. For Fauvety's life, see "Courte Biographie de Ch. Fauvety," *L'Initiation*, 1894: 94-96; André Combes, "Charles Fauvety et la Religion Laïque," *Politica Hermetica* 9 "Esotérisme et socialisme" (1995): 73-85.
134. Combes, "Fauvety," 73.
135. Combes, "Fauvety," 74.
136. "Court Biographie, *L'Initiation* 1894: 94.
137. Combes, "Fauvety, 75.
138. *Dictionnaire de biographie française* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1971-75): 811 and Combes, "Fauvety," 76.
139. Combes, "Fauvety," 79. The Grand Master concerned here was Maréchal Bernard Pierre Magnan, a compromise candidate, more acceptable to republicans than the old master Prince Murat. Magnan was appointed by the Emperor in 1862. See Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 17-21 for a discussion of the republican challenge to Murat. Fauvety was active in this challenge, although he then supported Magnan, who also became unpopular with republicans, in the hope of reconciling all masonry.
140. Charles Fauvety, *Religion Universelle: Qu'est-ce que la religion? Premier discours* (Paris, 1861).
141. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, 131.
142. Nord, *Republican Moment*, chapter 1, especially 22-30. Note also that, according to Joscelyn Godwin, French freemasonry, unlike that of Britain, was becoming less rather than more religious. Godwin, *The Beginnings of Theosophy in France* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1989).
143. Combes, "Fauvety," 77. Carle's journal ran from 1865-1873, becoming the *Libre conscience* in 1866 and subtitled "Organe de l'Alliance religieuse universelle."
144. Combes, "Fauvety," 80; n.18, 88.
145. Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 84-85.
146. Quoted in Combes, "Fauvety," 78.
147. Fauvety never discussed in depth ideas of reincarnation before his spiritist phase, although he clearly knew the ideas of Leroux and probably also Reynaud.
148. Jules Bois, *Le Monde invisible* (Paris, 1902), 312.
149. See the *Revue spirite* 1880, 1884, 1885 for articles by and about Fauvety. See Malgras, *Pionniers du spiritisme*, 106, for the Société scientifique.
150. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste de 1889* (Paris, 1900). Marie-France James, *Esoterisme, occultisme, franc-maçonnerie et christianisme aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Explorations bio-bibliographiques* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1981), 62.
151. *Congrès philosophique international de Paris (du Théisme Progressif)* (Paris, 1870), 13-14.
152. Jean-Marc Seijo-Lopez, "Révélation et révolution dans l'oeuvre d'Alphonse-Louis Constant," *Politica Hermetica*, 51. For more on Levi's occultism, see David Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 23-24. For more on his ideas when he was Constant, especially his ideas on gender, see Naomi J. Andrews, "La Mère Humanité":

Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L. Constant,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 697-716.

153. See Naomi J. Andrews, “Utopian Androgyny: Romantic Socialists Confront Individualism in July Monarchy France,” *French Historical Studies* 2003. Frank Paul Bowman points out that divine androgyny is an Illuminist concept. Frank Paul Bowman, “Religion, Politics, and Utopia in French Romanticism,” *Australian Journal of French Studies*, no. 3 (1974): 315.

154. Seijo-Lopez, “Révélation et révolution,” 54-55.

155. Claudius Grillet, *Victor Hugo spirite* (Paris: 1928), 14-15.

156. Hugo, 1859, quoted in Richard B. Grant, *The Perilous Quest: Image, Myth, and Prophecy in the Narratives of Victor Hugo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968), 123. Grant himself does not recognize the importance of transformation and reincarnation in this poem, although Jacques Roos insists upon it, and my colleagues in the French dept, Mary Anne O’Neil and Dale Cosper, both argue for reincarnation as the subject. My thanks to them for pointing this out. See Roos, *Les idées philosophiques de Victor Hugo*.

157. For an in-depth if eclectic survey of magnetism and mesmerism, see Bertrand Méheust, *Somnambulisme et médiumnité*. 2 vols. Vol 1. *Le défi du magnétisme* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo, 1999). See also Ernest Bersot, *Mesmer, le magnétisme animal, les tables tournantes et les esprits* 4th ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1879).

158. Frank Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism* (New York: Arno Press, 1975 [1910]); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 187.

159. Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 157.

160. “Unification de la pratique spirite” exposé pour le Congrès spirite de Sao Paolo (Octobre 1991). Thanks to Roger Perez of the Union spirite française et francophone in Tours for providing me with this information.

161. *Le Matin*, 7 aout 1913. (Police DB215).

162. Anne Harrington, “Hysteria, Hypnosis, and the Lure of the Invisible: The Rise of Neo-Mesmerism in Fin-de-Siècle French Psychiatry,” in *Anatomy of Madness*, vol.3, ed. Roy Porter, W.F. Bynum, Michael Shepherd (London: Routledge, 1988), 231-36

163. See Méheust, *Somnambulisme et médiumnité*, vol. 2: *Le choc des science psychiques* for an exploration of magnetism at the end of the century. Many of the same scientists investigating spiritism investigated magnetism as well.

164. Nord, *Republican Moment*, 95-100.

165. Charles Fauvety, *La Question religieuse*. (Paris: 1864), deuxième cahier, 4-5; 22-23.

166. Pierre Rosanvallon, “The Republic of Universal Suffrage” in *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 192-205.

167. Rosanvallon, 201, 204.

168. David Bell’s concluding thoughts in *The Cult of the Nation* on the decline of French nationalism in tandem with the decline of people to convert would seem to support this vision of republic as religion. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation: Inventing Nationalism 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 204-216.

Chapter Two

1850-1880: Building a Movement

Birth, death, rebirth and progress without end, this is the law.
Allan Kardec¹

In the spring of 1853, table turning took Paris by storm. Suddenly, everyone who was anyone could be found seated around a table, large or small, touching pinkies and concentrating all their energy on reaching out to the spirit world. The new craze came as an import from the United States, and the British were doing it too.² Alexander Erdan described the arrival of turning tables: “Everyone knows the huge stir this news made, the astonishing effect it produced. . . . It was a universal monomania . . . bookstores were inundated with publications on the subject. In short, the talking table was the characteristic event of society in the year 1853, the focus of all *esprits*.”³ *L’Illustration*, a popular illustrated weekly, showed engravings of respectable bourgeois men and women earnestly gathered together in search of either greater knowledge of at least a shiver and a thrill at their risky behavior.⁴ Table turning was just plain good fun. It was also completely new, or seemed so, and there was little else to distract Parisians (and other French people) during the first repressive phases of the Second Empire.

The phenomenon of “talking” tables found a ready audience and people adopted the table as the parlor game of the season. In 1853, every salon in Paris had a small round table and a group gathered around, eager to ensure it moved. The sheer physical phenomenon of a table that seemed to move of its own volition created a stir. The additional ability of the table to provide answers to questions ranging from personal to philosophical to scientific matters ensured a broad interest. People gathered in small groups—the upper classes in salons or clubs, the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois classes more often in their homes—to ask questions and write down the answers laboriously spelled out by the tables—one rap for A, two for B, etc.—and to discuss these answers. Searchers soon graduated from recording raps to using a “*planchette*,” a lightweight triangular device with an arrow which pointed to the letters of the alphabet painted on a cloth or

board. This early relative of the Ouija board allowed slow but precise communication. If a sensitive medium could be found, the spirits communicated in writing, using the hand of the medium to spread their word.

The craze also brought a rash of publicity and public discussion, much of which derided the practice for its irrational character. (This publicity is discussed below.) In the face of this reaction, and perhaps even more so due to the tediousness of obtaining any message of length given the cumbersome method of counting raps, the salon craze quickly faded. Yet well-respected people, such as Victor Hugo, took the phenomenon seriously and spent their time investigating the words of the spirits.⁵ Most importantly, the small groups that began out of fascination with a craze found there something lasting and worthwhile. The spiritist movement was born from these first private groups; its philosophy grew from the discussions about the spirits' teachings.

This chapter explores the popular spiritist movement from its beginnings in 1853, through its difficult years in the early 1870s, up to approximately 1880. The idea of an existence beyond the body had taken a variety of forms prior to the 1850s but the new movement pushed this idea from the realm of intellectuals into a wider popular realm from the 1850s on. These were the years of repression under the Second Empire and the government of Moral Order in the early Third Republic, the decades when France began to shift more fully into an industrialized and urbanized society; these were the events that helped frame the forms spiritism took. After the 1880s, as the Third Republic became more liberal and scientific research also flourished, spiritism began to mingle increasingly both with scientific psychical research and with occultism, and the tenor of the movement changed. But the spiritism of the decades from 1850-1880 sprang onto the French scene with great fanfare and a freshness that quickly led to its formation as a popular movement. Although interest among the elite faded rapidly, small private groups spread and developed a movement promoting a particularly modern spiritual vision that combined science, religiosity, and hope for the progress of the individual.

Spiritism as a movement was completely new, yet it continued many of the values from earlier romantic socialists. The novelty spiritism offered was the direct popular contact with the spirits of the dead. This contact could be had by anyone, male or female, and within the privacy of the domestic sphere. It also, despite its insistence on reason and science, offered a more explicitly spiritual experience than had magnetism or many romantic socialist schemes. The breath of the supernatural haloed every contact with a spirit that had transcended this world. Max Weber's disenchanted world remained enchanted for spiritists and the tools of modernity only provided a window into that enchanted realm.

Whether spiritism was a philosophy or a religious belief depended in large part on the individual follower. Both philosophies and religions play the role of ordering beliefs and providing answers to transcendent questions. If spiritism was a philosophy, it was a philosophy based on a belief in God and immortality.

As such, it continued the general spiritualist train of much mid-century French philosophy. The movement offered a more direct and individualized version of spiritualism. Firstly, the great majority of followers recognized the importance of Christ as either divine or nearly so. More importantly, not only did spiritism proclaim the importance of God, it claimed to materially prove the continuance of the immortal soul. The reincarnation that the romantic socialists had offered based on logic and/or faith, the spiritists based on reason and empirical events.

Most often believers side-stepped the issue of the Church. Although clerical condemnation came frequently and many followers, again sharing the outlook of the romantic socialists, saw institutional Christianity as outmoded and no longer applicable to the modern world, many also expressed their personal experiences with the spirits in highly emotional religious terms. Spiritist leaders claimed spiritism to be a philosophy rather than a religion, a belief system that could include (and improve on) all religions. This claim of a vague and overarching character allowed individual followers to critique the Church—as well as science—yet see themselves as remaining on a path to salvation. The built-in tension between religion and philosophy offered little problem to followers who eagerly embraced spiritism in large part because of its multi-faceted character.

This chapter explores the formation of spiritism as a movement and the variety and tensions of the first three decades. After looking at the genesis and early development of the movement, this chapter elucidates beliefs and doctrine, to understand the basis of the movement in equality and progress as well as why followers joined. Early spiritists fought against the mockery of a press that tried to undermine any seriousness the movement claimed; these arguments in the press most often took gendered forms. To fight this mockery, spiritism stressed the private and domestic, building its strength through small groups, private *cercles*, and spiritist periodicals. The last section of the chapter shows the struggles of spiritism during the 1870s, as it tried to cope both with the death of its founder and with the changes France underwent during the turbulent 1870s. The movement's popularity came from three main pillars: it connected morality and progress along a clear path; it offered the support of a group combined with solace in the face of death in innovative ways, and it responded to age-old spiritual questions in a thoroughly modern and “scientific” way that did not deny the importance of the spiritual.

Finding the Spirits

Spiritism developed quite rapidly following the first table-turning craze. People who became faithful spiritists did so despite eventual mainstream rejection of (or boredom with) the phenomena, attending weekly (or more frequent) meetings, usually to contact the spirits but also to discuss the teachings of the spirits and to explore how spiritism affected their lives and how they hoped it might affect the

lives of those around them. Believers, sure they had found a new truth, wanted to spread their knowledge and to deepen it. These groups, finding themselves ridiculed and mocked, looked to communicate with other groups who shared their ideas, and eventually a loose network of spiritists came into being. No overseeing body was ever formed, nor were doctrinal or organizational decisions ever explicitly agreed upon.

However, the majority of spiritist organizations looked for leadership to Allan Kardec, known as the “codifier” of the teachings of the spirits. The most prominent spiritist leader during the movement’s early years, Kardec was born Hippolyte-Léon-Denizard Rivail on 3 October 1804 in Lyon. Rivail’s personal history touches most of the reforming currents of the early nineteenth-century. Raised Catholic in a city known for its free-thinking and occultist tendencies, Rivail attended school in Protestant Switzerland, studying under the reformist educator Jean-Henri Pestalozzi, whose pedagogic style came directly out of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile*.⁶ Finishing his schooling, and perhaps some study of medicine, Rivail moved to Paris to continue Pestalozzi’s work.⁷ As a teacher, Rivail concentrated on the sciences, but especially on mathematics, on which he wrote several treatises. He published works on pedagogical methods, borrowed money from a gambling uncle, and around 1830 opened a small school of his own in the rue de Sèvres. His wife, Amélie Boudet, also an educator, taught the liberal arts while Rivail taught sciences in their school.

Outside the classroom, Rivail experimented in various intellectual currents. He joined a freemason’s lodge, became a member of the Paris Society of Magnetizers and acted as secretary of the Phrenological Society.⁸ In a *Mémoire* on education that echoes both Platonic and Revolutionary rhetoric, Rivail argued for a meritocracy of intellectuals supervising universal and free education.⁹ Forced to close his school when the gambling uncle ran into a string of slow horses, Rivail found a position teaching astronomy, physics, and chemistry in a Parisian lycée.¹⁰ In the post-coup Second Empire, Rivail’s ideas on reform and free education for the poor met with a poor reception. The Catholic church controlled education and Napoleon III’s government continued close supervision of instruction. It was at this point in his life that Rivail discovered a new belief, and a new career.

Rivail initially experienced spirit manifestation by attending a séance at a fellow magnetizer’s house. Spirits gave detailed answers to Rivail’s specific queries on this life and life after death. Skeptical of the spirits at first, Rivail soon became convinced of the truth and worth of what the spirits told him. Again magnetism played an important role when Kardec turned to the somnambulist Mlle. Japhet and her magnetizer, Roustan, to obtain and organize the teachings of the spirits. In a later memoir, Rivail explained that Japhet allowed him to work in-depth with the spirits much more completely than had the daughters of his friend Boudin, who had been his previous mediums.¹¹ Women were thus significant in the formative stages of the movement. Although Kardec retained the

credit for his work with spirits, the importance of female mediums should not be overlooked.¹² According to Rivail, the spirits dubbed him their “codifier,” responsible for recording what they taught and teaching it to others in turn; they also instructed Rivail to call his work *Le Livre des esprits* (*The Spirits’ Book*).¹³ Rivail accepted with alacrity the assigned mission. He immediately began to question his “guides,” organizing and composing works that recorded the answers the spirits gave to his questions.

The answer that attracted Kardec most was that of reincarnation. As we have seen, the logic of reincarnation rested directly on French social and cultural values of equality. After 1851, the social experiments of the Second Republic had been crushed and social inequality seemed established in society. Political change remained beyond reach. “No one dared speak out, action was forbidden.”¹⁴ Kardec published his *Livre des esprits* and started his *Revue spirite* “at the moment when the regime became worried, tense, panicked and, with the law of the *Sûreté générale*, systematized and regularized repression.”¹⁵ Unable to act, people looked for answers to help them explain the status quo and for ways to continue the dream of or drive toward equality. Spiritism offered a path outside of politics that still led to social equality. Reincarnation of the immortal soul paved that path.

Kardec presented reincarnation and social reform in writings that would quickly become very popular, creating a new movement. Kardec published the *Livre des esprits* (*Spirits’ Book*) in 1857, founded the “Société des études spirites” (Society for Spiritist Studies, later Parisian Society for Spiritist Studies) and began the *Revue spirite* in 1858, and spent the remainder of his life editing the journal, publishing spiritist works, and traveling around France to promote the doctrine of spiritism. He followed the *Livre des esprits* with the companion volume *Livre des médiums* (*Book on Mediums*, 1861) on how to be a medium and continued with a series of works that popularized and explained spiritism.¹⁶

The number of spiritists is impossible to establish. Very rarely did spiritists even discuss numbers of followers. In 1869, the *Revue spirite*, the most prominent spiritist journal, estimated numbers and classes of followers.¹⁷ In Europe, it claimed, spiritists numbered around one million, six hundred thousand of those in France. These numbers seem clearly exaggerated. There is no satisfactory way even to estimate numbers of followers. Few lists of members have survived from spiritist groups; most groups were quite small, ranging from four to twenty-five members, and as there was no central organization, there was no registry of groups themselves. In 1889 the Congrès spirite et spiritualiste boasted thirty thousand adherents, although again, how they calculated these numbers remained unclear.¹⁸ As with any belief, believers were more numerous than those who joined established groups. Periodicals and public séances appealed to those who wanted to hear about the spirits but might not want to go so far as to join a spiritist circle. Both spiritists and detractors of the movement acknowledged its rapid growth and the existence of a spiritist circle in every town of any size by

the 1870s. An impressionistic survey of groups mentioned in the *Revue spirite* and in other spiritist journals confirms this, and also that membership grew rather than diminished as the century progressed; the 1880s and 1890s saw an increase in individual groups and in their public presence voiced through books, pamphlets, and periodicals.

Equally difficult to be certain about was the composition of the movement. The movement crossed classes and sometimes brought together in the same groups people of a variety of classes. Were the majority of followers workers, petit bourgeois, bourgeois? Certainly those that led the movement at the national level, such as Kardec, were educated members of the bourgeoisie. However, evidence from small periodicals and memoirs shows that many workers found their way to spiritism. Lyon harbored more worker spiritists than any other city, and saw various worker groups established.¹⁹ Given the anonymity of the majority of correspondence with spiritist journals, accurate estimates for the nation as a whole are impossible. But the overall character of this correspondence seems to agree with the *Revue spirite's* own 1869 estimate that there were no more than 30 percent of followers who were highly educated (meaning beyond a basic level of literacy and cultural literacy.) Most writers showed familiarity with major cultural symbols and themes but rarely demonstrated specific literary or scientific knowledge. This same estimate linked together “industrial, manual and commercial professions” including *concierges* side by side with petty merchants who were side by side with the *grands industriels*.²⁰ The majority of followers may well have been among the petite-bourgeoisie, a fact that the *Revue* seems to have seen as a positive benefit, in that spiritism offered them education into a new and modern philosophy.

The *Livre des esprits*, the handbook or “Bible” of the spiritist movement, sold extremely well. Ruth Harris claims it sold “literally in hundreds of thousands” of copies. It probably had done so by the end of the century. Translated into numerous European languages, the text went through fifteen editions in France alone between its first publication in 1857 and the author’s death in 1869. We do know that over forty-eight thousand copies had been printed by 1874.²¹ The book enjoyed early translation into English, Spanish, and German, and by the 1870s and 1880s was read throughout South America and in Russia. It has continued to be regularly reprinted up to the present day.²² Spiritism spread through the *Livre des esprits*, the *Revue spirite*, and the proselytizing of group members and leaders, either via periodicals or public conferences.

The *Revue spirite* enjoyed a steady level of subscriptions—approximately 1800 throughout the century. The number of subscribers was certainly lower than popular political presses such as the weekly *Le Charivari* at three thousand or the astonishing thirty to forty thousand enjoyed by the daily *Le Siècle*. However the *Revue spirite* reached as many people as the *Messenger de Paris*, and its circulation remained significantly higher than similarly specialized monthly journals such as the *Annuaire philosophique* and the *Alliance religieuse*, each of which drew 1,000 subscribers.²³

We know also that all the major presses of the time, as well as the official bodies such as the Académie des Sciences, responded to the new phenomena. From the 1850s through the turn of the century, the popular presses carried articles regarding the spiritist movement. Most of these were unfavorable, but they nonetheless acknowledged that spiritism was spreading throughout France and in fact helped to spread it by promoting curiosity about it. Spiritism featured in most of the major publications, including the *Revue des deux mondes*, *L'Illustration*, the *Journal des débats*, *Le Siècle*, and the abbé Moigno's *Cosmos*. It had the honor of being mocked by everyone from Honoré Daumier in *Le Charivari* to Charles Monselet in *Le Monde illustré*. *Le Charivari* mocked the idea of an old *concierge* being able to call, at will, the spirits of Voltaire or Henri IV, yet this might well have piqued the interest of some readers who considered themselves a step above a *concierge*.²⁴ Thus spiritism, although painted as marginal, was hardly ignored. The phenomena fascinated, as did the promise it offered of a glimpse beyond the veil of death.

Why did people become spiritists? As we shall see below, the doctrine promulgated by Kardec and others certainly provided one pull. The written and spoken word were key to spreading this message, through publications, periodicals, and public speakers who demonstrated the power of the spirits. Other draws included the sense of being part of a select group, the sense of awe and solace at reaching out to the dead, and the sheer excitement and entertainment of witnessing, even creating, miracles on an everyday basis. One spiritist group, for example, delighted in the miraculous reception of roses materialized by their spirit guides as proof of the spirits' existence. The (deceased) grandfather of one member of the group, having been especially fond of roses during life, was credited with these appearances. This happened not once, but frequently, over a six-year period.²⁵

The very use of small groups was key to the spread of the movement. Spiritism in some sense pioneered techniques now used by religious groups and others to ensure continued adherence in an atomized world. American megachurches ensure that members feel a sense of identity and community by setting up small cells or groups for prayer and discussion.²⁶ Like revolutionary cells, but without the secrecy, the intimacy of a spiritist group ensured a base cohort of others who guaranteed general support, aid in furthering a mission, and solidarity in time of either emotional or material need. In a society that increasingly promoted individualism, group members retained a sense of the corporatism of the old regime, but this unity came through their belief and ideals rather than through their occupation or through any newer sense of class consciousness.

Throughout the 1860s Kardec worked tirelessly on recruiting people to what he called the new philosophy, as well as on editing the *Revue* and on his many other publications. In 1860, 1861 and again in 1862 he made long journeys through France to visit budding spiritist groups. He spoke at banquets held in his honor, answered questions on how to be a spiritist or a medium, and encouraged

those just beginning on the spiritist path.²⁷ In 1862 the journey lasted seven weeks and included some twenty stops, including Lyon, Bordeaux, and many of the major towns in between, where Kardec attended over fifty meetings. Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie, who led the movement from the early 1870s, continued Kardec's habit of traveling to attend meetings and spread spiritism. As the movement grew, mediums too began to travel in order to share their talents and perhaps make a modest living.

When a traveling medium arrived, a public séance would be set up. Spiritist groups sometimes presented small concerts by local musicians before the medium performed. One Mlle de Devans, a student of Chopin, opened a séance by playing a piece written by Mozart, through a medium, after his death. She also played Chopin. After this, mediums invoked the spirits of both composers, who gave their fervent support to spiritism.²⁸ The promise of entertainment, if nothing else, drew many unfamiliar onlookers who otherwise would pay little attention to the serious, even pedantic character of spiritist writings. The excitement of speaking to the dead, the hope of hearing from a loved one, the mystery of words, sounds, even flowers from the supernatural provided the incentive to return.

Literary sources also raised popular curiosity. French novelists such as Théophile Gautier, Gilbert-Augustin Thierry, Eugène Sue, J.-K. Huysmans, Alexandre Dumas, Maxime du Camp, and Eugène Bonnemère, as well as lesser knowns such as Ange de Keranious, all wrote about spirit encounters or reincarnation. Villier de Lisle-Adam's *L'Eve future* (1886) featured a spirit created by none other than Thomas Alva Edison to replace an inconstant love; both Gautier's *Spirite* (1863) and Camille Chaigneau's supposedly factual *Les Chrysanthèmes de Marie* (1880) told the tale of a man who had fallen in love with a spirit.²⁹ Eugène Sue, in his *Gilbert et Gilberte* (1853) featured a spirit, Korrigan, who told the hero and heroine of the many lives and many worlds which awaited them.³⁰ "But how charming, said Gilberte ingenuously" thus expressing the intrigue many of Sue's readers felt toward the idea of plural lives and plural worlds.³¹ Dramatist Victorien Sardou, who also worked as an illustrator at *La Patrie*, wrote about and participated in spiritism. His spirit-inspired drawing of Mozart's contemporary dwelling, (or Beethoven's, depending on the teller), which he indicated existed on Jupiter, excited the popular imagination, as well as sarcasm from some less credulous corners. However, apart from Sardou and Chaigneau, few popular novelists were spiritists and even these did not directly discuss spiritism as a movement. Many mediums wrote spirit-inspired novels; these spread news of spiritism with front-cover proclamations of the supernatural source of their work.³²

There were more direct paths than fiction to reach spiritist knowledge. As early as 1864, spiritists claimed some 1200 works had already been published specifically regarding spiritism and its phenomena.³³ These were available to the casual reader through the stalls in railroad stations, through spirit societies as

they formed in various cities, by mail from the Librairie Spirite bookstore in Paris, and often at more general bookstores. Spiritism could be found in myriad forms. An *Almanach spirite*, for example, published in Paris in 1865, provided spirit quotes alongside daily moon and tide information and described the leaders of the movement.

Spiritist societies actively strove to make these publications available. They often designated to members of their group the task of spreading spiritist propaganda. The “Société anonyme pour la continuation des oeuvres d’Allan Kardec” formed immediately after Kardec’s death with his widow presiding. Throughout the most fruitful years of spiritism, groups continued to form with the express purpose of propagandizing, from the “Société anonyme” in 1869 to the “Comité de propagande” in 1895.³⁴ In 1874-75, the *Société spirite* of Paris took up a subscription aimed at providing spiritist works to the military libraries sponsored by the *Ligue de l’enseignement* to help educate soldiers.³⁵

The importance of reading in spreading spiritism can hardly be overestimated. J. Chapelot related how the deep green cover of the *Livre des esprits*, “the color of hope,” attracted attention and led to the speedy disbursal of the “several hundred copies” which first came to Bordeaux at the end of the 1850s.³⁶ The experience of Hillaire, a poor farm worker in the village of Sonnac, near Bordeaux, illustrates how books often functioned in the spread of spiritism. A copy of the *Livre des esprits* found its way to the local bar, given to the proprietor by his brother-in-law, an architect who belonged to a spiritist group in a nearby town. Hillaire recounted how five or six of his friends seized on the book, gleefully prepared to have a fine evening ridiculing it. Together they read and together they moved toward belief, until their reading sessions became attempts to contact spirits and they were holding nightly séances. The friends attempted to bring Hillaire into their group but he refused, until he found himself at a meeting in a nearby town, the hamlet of Métairie, and more surprisingly, found himself displaying the talents of a medium.³⁷

Hillaire’s account included two of the main routes people took to spiritism: his friends who came via the book, and he himself who came via the friends. Hillaire himself displayed many features typical of stories told by those who became spiritists. First, avowed prior skepticism, thus giving more weight to the conversion when it happened and denying accusations of credulity. Secondly, repeated exposure through friends brought the new follower to meetings, or at least gave those meetings some validity. Thirdly, there came the inexplicable “push” or “urge” to act. This often took the form of a compulsion to write, wherein a person (this often was the case with women) found herself “forced” to put pen to paper and discovered a spirit discoursing through her.³⁸ In Hillaire’s case, the “push” was to attend the meeting, rather than to act as a medium, although this followed immediately. Even those who did not show mediumistic abilities often spoke of urges to attend meetings, where they heard loved ones address them or learned of the uplifting new morality of spiritism. Such experiences led them to return, soon becoming convinced spiritists.

Spiritist books drew on traditional and popular forms familiar to the average Frenchperson, even those who read little. The almanac form, or the catechetical form of the *Spirits' Book*, did not intimidate even those unused to reading. Spiritists also often used pamphlets, cheaper to produce than books, and short enough to be read by those who might find a heavy book of doctrines somewhat taxing. Both forms provided an easy formula for ready reference and memorization. Sebron, a moralistic medium who had little contact with Kardec or the rest of the spiritist movement, wrote scores of small pamphlets discussing his own actions in the third person and showing his readers how to act morally by the trouble he got into when he strayed from a narrow path. He also appealed to a sense of fun, describing the insults heaped upon Sebron by the spirits when he must lose his mediumship due to lack of respect and to flirting with "light" or mischievous spirits. For example, Sebron was called a sot and told his divine mission was to inform the Pope that his sauce was only digestible after dinner.³⁹ Sebron's works took a somewhat vulgar form of anti-clericalism, that was hardly irreligious, echoing the customs and values of the lower classes. Such propaganda helped spiritism to seem both familiar and new, and to appeal across a variety of classes.

Word of mouth, either formally in public lectures or informally, through person to person discussion, remained at least as important as books. Often word of mouth first brought people to spiritist literature, which then converted them. Or friends brought others to actual meetings. Norbert Truquin, a radical worker, tells how a fellow worker tried constantly to get him to come to spiritist meetings and to accept spiritist ideas. Truquin, uninterested, mentioned this only in passing, but he gives an insight into how workers passed the word of the new belief.⁴⁰ With the continuous travel of journeymen, from town to town and job to job, spiritism circulated among the working class.

Public séances, public lectures, and word of mouth all provided avenues for the curious to find their way into the system of small private groups that lay at the heart of spiritism. The séances provided contact with loved ones as well as a doctrine that addressed contemporary spiritual and religious questions. This offered solace to those who mourned and the hope of progress to those for whom Catholicism seemed sterile and unscientific. However, it may have been the paradoxical possibility of daily contact with the miraculous that most often made true converts of people. The *frisson* of touching the beyond continued to enchant those who experienced it. The sense of being among an elite group of people who had found a new truth helped solidify that belief.

Individual Reincarnation and Social Regeneration

Spiritist leaders couched their doctrine in the terms of equality and fraternity that characterized social discussion in the aftermath of the French revolution.

Spiritists imagined a more equal, less cruel world, one based on the equality of the immortal soul and supported on this earth by fraternal charity. The doctrine reflected its cultural origins, mirroring concerns prominent in the mid-nineteenth century, and reacting to the changing political situation. Spiritists participated in liberal reforming trends, supporting workers' cooperatives and mutual aid societies, and stressing education of the poor for self-improvement. The leaders of the movement expressed progressive views on social questions, sharing a general concern with other bourgeois liberals. The doctrine offered a critique of positivism and materialism while attempting to integrate these trends, especially as exemplified in modern science, with a continued belief in God and a re-moralization of a society they feared was headed for decadence.

Spiritists were conscious of living in an age of reason and science. "We are in the epoch when man should use his intelligence and his moral force to unveil all the mysteries," they proclaimed.⁴¹ The Second Empire has been called the age of positivism. Napoleon III surrounded himself with engineers and thinkers who followed August Comte's practical philosophy. Positivism insisted on a separation of "factual" science from "superstitious" spirituality. Yet instead of accepting this dichotomy, spiritists moved to combine science with faith. "And now, how should one envisage spiritism? Is it a science? Is it a religion? We believe it is both the one and the other . . . a religious science."⁴² They claimed that manifestations of spirits—rappings, trance writings, spirit materializations—provided the empirical, scientific basis for proof of the survival of the soul. "We are no longer in those epochs when faith sufficed to assure the certitude of a future life. The modern spirit needs more . . . ; this is what Allan Kardec marvelously understood. All his teaching rested on the rigorous observation of facts."⁴³

Kardec combined a strong faith in science and a scientific proof of the survival of the soul, mirroring the changing forms of proof accepted as valid in the nineteenth century. The explanatory power of the Church diminished as scientific observation grew, yet science could not explain the supernatural, or still the stirring of the soul that called for something beyond material reality.⁴⁴ Spiritism strove to answer both these needs: the positivistic refusal to believe without proof and the religious impulse to know that the soul continues on after death.

Spiritism arose from and remained always linked to the physical phenomena of turning tables and trance writing. The first tenet of spiritist doctrine involved the existence of the immortal soul and the ability of the living to communicate with that soul after death. All physical phenomena were explained by and were evidence of this fact. Each acted as proof of communication from the beyond. "All effects have a cause; all intelligent effects have an intelligent cause," appeared (and still does) on the title page of each issue of the *Revue spirite*. Because the physical phenomena were neither random nor mute but communicated ideas through language, their cause must be intelligent. The spiritists claimed

the ultimate cause was God. To the question, "What is God?" the spirits responded, "God is the Supreme Intelligence—First Cause of all things." When questioned further, the spirits brought forth the second pillar of spiritism, the need for reason. "What proof have we of the existence of God?" Answer: "The axiom which you apply in all your scientific researches, 'There is no effect without a cause.' Search out the cause of whatever is not the work of man, and reason will furnish the answer to your question."⁴⁵ These two quotes epitomize the combination of reason and faith that Kardec strove to maintain throughout the spiritist doctrine.

In the early years, reason remained uppermost in the spiritist value system. By the end of the century reason would be somewhat supplanted by empirical observation, although the two were referred to indiscriminately by the term "science."⁴⁶ Reason remained the key to interpreting spirit messages. As in the earthly world, so in the spirit world, one found all kinds. Spirits' ways "no more resemble each other than those of men, from the savage to the most enlightened European."⁴⁷ Spirits belonged to a hierarchy, depending on their level of advancement, and lower spirits were not above a little mischief or even evil misguidance of humans. Spiritism required its followers to judge carefully the spirits' teachings before taking them as whole cloth. Without reason, an unsuspecting beginner might be led astray by false messages given by lower-level spirits.

Spirit teachings touched on every aspect of human life, from the metaphysical to the banal, from the nature of the soul to the need to be polite to in-laws. The doctrine presented in Kardec's *Livre des esprits* took the form of a catechism in which the spirits responded to questions. Kardec often further explicated their answers. This form echoed the Catholic catechisms almost all French would be familiar with. Almost any question of how to live could be answered by a quick foray into either the *Livre des esprits* or the *Livre des médiums*; the reader did not have to take the Church's word for it, nor try to sort through Biblical parables or the interpretations of various Church fathers but could find a direct and practical answer. This common sense approach equaled reason for the spiritists and the everyday-ness of spiritism surely acted as one of its great appeals. Thus whether or not the spirits presented themselves at any given moment or meeting, their continuously available guidance offered an anchor in confusing times.

Reincarnation provided the means to moral, intellectual and social progress and ultimately perfection. The afterlife revealed by the spirits' teachings matched nicely that posited by Jean Reynaud. Each individual would grow increasingly more perfect. Through numerous incarnations, each soul learned to rise above immoral temptations and moved toward a greater understanding of God and the universe. Normally, each incarnation moved you closer to intellectual and spiritual perfection and the worst a person might fear would be not to progress. The truth of this was supported by the fact that spirits themselves showed differ-

ent levels of "advancement." Some were silly or played pranks; some told jokes or gossiped; but the ones worth listening to were the ones who offered clear, reasoned explanations of the way to a better life and a better world.

Spiritists argued that their belief in progress through reincarnation rested on logic. The fact of social and material inequality, coupled with a belief in a just God, created a logical quandary and a paradox. What just God would create such manifest injustice? Influenced by liberal tendencies to deny that poverty is the fault of the poor, spiritists agreed that society was at fault. They became reformers. But they also looked for a larger, more metaphysical explanation. Reincarnation provided the answer. The spiritist version of reincarnation argued that each soul began a long cycle of incarnations from an equal low state and progressed toward an equal enlightened end to the journey. They imagined enlightenment as coming either into the sphere of God, or close to it. Thus humans, although they could never equal God, could become increasingly divine. The spiritists never abandoned a truly religious outlook on progress.

If material goods or achievements varied along the way, this only expressed the progress of individual souls, reflecting no permanent inequality. Each life experience provided a test to the soul, a learning experience that moved it forward on the inevitable path of progress. The test of poverty held as much validity as that of wealth, and vice versa; no one earthly situation correlated to a particular level of progress. Kardec insisted he had supported and proven spiritism logically, "without reference to statements made by spirits; such statements being, for many minds, without authority. If we, and so many others, have adopted the hypothesis of the plurality of existences, we have done so not merely because it has been proclaimed by spirits, but because it has appeared to us to be eminently rational. . . ."⁴⁸ Kardec prized the philosophy of reincarnation over the trappings of spirit communication. His followers similarly accepted the doctrine of reincarnation as a centerpiece of spiritism, although most preferred the spirits to logic as the main proof of reincarnation.

Reincarnation offered a philosophy based on the perfectibility of humankind, on the continuing progress of both society and the soul. This appealed to contemporary values, especially to the nineteenth-century obsession with progress. Kardec claimed that his ideas on reincarnation came from "Pythagoras, who borrowed it from the philosophers of Hindoostan and of Egypt, by whom it had been held from time immemorial."⁴⁹ Kardec never cited a recent source but he had certainly read Fourier, and his ideas seem to follow most closely those of Reynaud, whose *Terre et ciel* had just been published (1854). Victorien Sardou, a dramatist and journalist who had long followed Reynaud's philosophy helped introduce Kardec to table turning.⁵⁰ In the words of the Reynaud's friend, historian Henri Martin, "This principle of perfectibility . . . is the essential revelation of the modern ages and the generative dogma of the future."⁵¹ Kardec too saw the principle of progress as key to his new philosophy. To ensure it would be seen as new (and not as socialist, which was hardly a safe

position at the time) Kardec probably preferred to ignore more recent versions of reincarnation than Pythagoras. However, Kardec showed the influence of Reynaud not only in his explication of reincarnation but also in his use of druidic sources. The very pseudonym "Allan Kardec" reputedly had been Rivail's when he lived as a druid in an earlier life.⁵² Reynaud had, of course, already linked the druids and reincarnation. Kardec used this patriotic theme to gain support for his new doctrine.

The prevalence of works that dealt with the topic reflects the popular interest shown in a belief in plural lives. As noted above, numerous popular and literary writers featured among their works one or more showcasing a disembodied spirit or a lost love reincarnated, from Balzac to Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant and beyond.⁵³ Many of these works sprang from the fascination with the idea of being able to continue relations beyond the grave; few mocked this possibility and their interest in the very human rejection of loss helps illuminate not only their own popularity but spiritism's as well.

Spiritism in many ways took over the role of the romantic socialists in promoting reincarnation. Fascinated by this idea of communication with the dead and with the possibility of plural lives, the French devoured not only the *Livre des esprits* but also works such as Alexandre Erdan's *La France Mystique* [sic] (1855), Louis Figuier's *Histoire du merveilleux aux temps modernes* (1860) and his *Le Lendemain de la mort, ou la vie future selon la science* (1872). Both of these chroniclers, although they did not claim to be spiritist, nor mingle among spiritists, directly promoted spiritist ideas, especially Figuier, whose investigations into these phenomena came from his own grief over the loss of a son.⁵⁴ Camille Flammarion's *Pluralité des mondes habités* (1863) and André Pezzani's *Pluralité des existances de l'âme* (1865) were popular works by men involved in one way or another in spiritism. A Lyon lawyer, Pezzani involved himself in a variety of alternative religions including spiritism, although he wondered at sometimes Kardec's willingness to accept everything the spirits said. Flammarion, the great popularizer of astronomy, was in his early years a friend and disciple of Kardec and never rejected spiritism, although he ceased to promote it. All of these works went through multiple editions and helped spread the spiritist version of reincarnation even to those who were not spiritist. All taught the theory of progressive incarnations on the path to perfection. Eugène Nus in his *Choses de l'autre monde* (1880) confirmed spiritism's importance in popularizing Fourier's ideas, admitting that any attempt to reclaim them for Fourier would be "drowned in the spiritist current, and that Saint Louis [one of the spirits who often delivered wisdom on reincarnation] was necessary to give to that grand conception, old but rejuvenated, which is the supreme logic of justice, the impetus necessary for it to penetrate the popular mind."⁵⁵ Flammarion and Figuier were popular as well because they combined and simplified science and metaphysics for a curious public and prices were low enough for many a worker to afford.

An odd tension existed within the spiritist doctrine of reincarnation. Without a centralized and dogmatic interpretation of ideas, individual followers could see what they would in reincarnation. They seem to have done so freely. Charity, key to achieving progress along the path of reincarnations, could be Christian or it could embody class or political solidarity. Positions in life were earned, but could also be chosen by spirits as tests. Thus higher class or wealth were not always evidence of superiority. Yet as a whole, reincarnation, for spiritists, offered hope and an impetus toward aiding others, not despair and a reason to judge. Reincarnation certainly *could be seen* as justifying hierarchy but the way it was posited was as *freeing*. If we look closely at spiritist thought on reincarnation, we see that most followers found it an equalizer and a liberator, rather than confining one to fate or karma. I would suggest that this is due to the absolute inability of spiritists to take karma seriously. Their belief in progress and the importance of individual will to effect future lives was so deep that the idea that one might regress or be punished in future lives seemed difficult to fully integrate into their doctrine.

The spiritist strain of reincarnation began with socialist ideas of reincarnation but, again following Reynaud rather than Leroux, emphasized ideas of individuality and even merit. As they became more popular, and underwent interpretation by a variety of mediums and spiritist thinkers, these ideas became more diluted and in some senses less politically powerful. Other authors who have compared Kardec's ideas of social reform to those of the earlier romantic socialists have argued that the emphasis on individualism basically negated the message of social reform. I too at first accepted this view.⁵⁶ Although this seems intuitively true, and certainly the socialist message was muted in the political climate of the 1850s, further study shows that Kardec largely continued Reynaud's message, which had fully supported a politics of democratic republicanism. As chapter three will show, large numbers of individual spiritists took this further and took up social causes. In addition, Kardec's teachings were loose enough to allow a variety of interpretations.

Reincarnation could be and was called on to support a number of positions, from social reform to support for the status quo. The *Livre des esprits* taught that spirits often chose the tests they lived in earthly lives. Each spirit must progress through many lives and many lessons. Although theoretically no earthly situation had more value than another, believers easily attached merit to the position in which a soul found itself in this world. Each successive incarnation, while remaining only a step in the progress toward perfection, also constituted a reward or punishment for the actions and attitudes of the previous incarnation. "That which one can not do in one existence [towards improvement] one does in another, it is thus that *no one escapes the law* of progress, that each is compensated according to his real merit."⁵⁷ Those enjoying wealth in this life had most likely been poor in a former one, or would experience poverty in a future life. "Christ" himself supported the connection between reincarnation and merit

in a spirit communication to the Lyon medium Guillaume. The spirit of Christ reproached those who complained, saying: "To whom should they address these reproaches? To themselves, and not to others, because each has that which he has earned by his work and his devotion in former incarnations."⁵⁸

At the low point of 1870, when spiritists like all other French wondered how to rebuild a world seemingly destroyed, discussions of reincarnation as a model for change seemed to wane. The *Revue spirite* went so far as to justify the conservative government of moral order as reflective of the "national will." It also insisted that the only inequalities left were those of "intellectual level and material well-being," and that "there still exist lines of social demarcation which derive not from a particular situation inherent in the political and civil state of society, but result from the actions and the initiative of the individual. Shocked by these inequalities, perhaps more apparent than real, fiery and impatient hearts [*esprits*] want to eliminate them." Such an outcome was impossible however, because "inequality is the condition of inferior worlds. . . . The earth is a place of expiation and suffering, the expiation and suffering must necessarily vary according to the circumstances which have motivated them. [i.e., former lives]"⁵⁹ These complacent words were a far cry from Leroux's and Reynaud's ideas of a perfectible society, or even from Kardec's calls for a just society. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, it is clear that the leading spiritist magazine took a conservative, rather than a radical view, but only for a short period. Before long, calls for equality would again grace its pages.⁶⁰

Reincarnation meant many things for many followers; spiritism's lack of doctrinal unity allowed the utopian message of fraternity to continue even in the face of a harsher message. André Pezzani, for example, saw himself on the side of the workers but left no illusions as to their place. The majority of men in this society, he said, are dispossessed, disinherited of property, and obliged to suffer. They raise their voices against such a social order, demanding a sharing of the wealth. "What can society say to this? Spiritism [in its dogma of reincarnation] on the contrary, gives the solution to the problem, it assigns, for the origin of property, a providential law. We are all in the position that we have merited."⁶¹ Yet Pezzani and others continued to insist on Kardec's doctrine that charity and improving the lives of others was central to being a spiritist. "The essential goal of Spiritism is the amelioration of others [*des hommes*]."⁶² Although Kardec stressed especially moral and intellectual aid, many followers also looked to aid their co-believers in material ways as well. Even as one medium published the comment above on the necessity of inequality, the *Revue spirite* acknowledged (after Kardec's death) that Jean Reynaud, Charles Fourier, and Eugène Sue had all already taught the doctrine of reincarnation, pointing followers back toward ideas of romantic socialism.⁶³

For most followers, spiritist doctrine continued to act as a personal solace, rather than a source of judgment of either society or other individuals. Ideas of reincarnation offered answers to many questions and contradictions confronting

people in late nineteenth-century France. Science and materialism seemed cold and could not answer questions of philosophy and faith. The *Revue spirite bordelaise* provides us with an example of one type of person who found solace in a belief in reincarnation. A self-described “simple artisan” told of his sampling of beliefs from the Catholic to the fatalist, from the materialist to the “resigned philosopher.” He never lost faith in God, he insisted, although he felt constantly unhappy about the future. Reincarnation allowed him to accept his difficult world: “I could support with joy the tribulations of this short existence, knowing that my current misery is only a just consequence of a guilty past or a period of tests to reach a better future. No more doubt!”⁶⁴

Spiritism attracted followers in part because, as an unfriendly observer noted, Kardecist morality “fit” a “bourgeois liberal public, readers of George Sand and Victor Hugo.”⁶⁵ Progress and equality, the two vaunted outcomes spiritists sought in reincarnation, grounded a theory favorable to social reform. The doctrines of the *Livre des esprits* meshed smoothly with many values of the socially conscious bourgeoisie. Spiritism’s connections to dominant currents of thought in the nineteenth century include its emphasis on progress, the importance of work, education, equality, and fraternity, and individual responsibility.

Charity too connected spiritists to other dominant currents, including the Catholic church but also, if couched as solidarity, to earlier socialist ideas. The way to solve inequality lay in charity. The spiritist motto was “without charity, no salvation,” (*hors la charité, point de salut*) echoing the Catholic church’s “without the Church, no salvation” (*hors l’église, point de salut*). Yet the Church too preached charity toward others, and, if it refused to reach for equality via charity, it often saw its role as helping to solve the “social question” of poverty and hardship. Charity was emphasized again and again both as a solution to social ills and as a learning experience for the soul. As in the catechistic form of doctrinal teachings, here again spiritism borrowed something that many French would know and appreciate and separated it from the Catholic church.⁶⁶ These teachings helped make spiritism seem familiar and proper. The importance of charity and the consequent effort spiritists made to create mutual assurance societies and to help their poor, especially during the 1860s and 1870s, tended to lessen the impact of the emphasis on the individual and return to the idea of solidarity. Spiritism offered the way to regeneration of the world; progress toward that regeneration would be made via each individual embracing work, equality, fraternity and especially charity.

Spiritists valued work as highly as they did charity. Charity could be classified, in fact, as the form of useful labor most suited to those with means. Work would not lead to material equality, but it held the key to leading a worthwhile life. “The law of labour is a law of nature. . . . Every sort of useful occupation is a labour.”⁶⁷ Even the rich must labor and those with material fortunes lived under a type of noblesse oblige of charity to others. Kardec’s doctrine connected the law of labor directly to the law of property, (under the heading “law of jus-

“right”) making each equally inviolable. The “first of all natural rights” is a person’s right to live, and with that comes the right to “amass the means of living, in order that he may repose when no longer able to work.” This, progressing logically, led, in a very Lockean manner, to the right to defend that which had been earned. Kardec glossed the spirits’ quotes of commandments against stealing with his own explicit support of property: “What a man has amassed by honest labour is a legitimate property that he has a right to defend; for possession of the property which is the fruit of labour is a natural right as sacred as the right to labour to live.”⁶⁸ Spiritist writings failed to discuss the distinction between “property which is the fruit of labor” and property which came from the fruits of inheritance or other peoples’ labor, although the above formulation clearly allows room for that distinction. The doctrine of labor appealed to the working class by ennobling its daily efforts and to the property owner by ensuring that what he or she held, he or she was entitled to keep.

Spiritism offered a strong critique of materialism, a force it equated with moral decadence and societal decay. Here again, the spiritists shared ideas with the Catholic church. The difference was that spiritism allowed followers to come to these ideas on their own, rather than face “strident pronouncements” from the pulpit.⁶⁹ Materialism, by limiting explanation of physical phenomena to physical laws, shunned God, shunned the promise and the responsibility carried by the immortal soul, and, the spiritists said, shunned the morality and the justice that only these things could impart. In 1863 André Pezzani described a society on the verge of disintegration. He saw the modern world as a “society corrupted [*gangrenée*] by atheistic materialism and the cult of gold.”⁷⁰ In 1864, Kardec, in his advice to a newly forming spiritist journal, condensed spiritism’s purpose: “Destruction of materialism, of egoism and of pride, moralization of the masses by faith in the future and the goodness of God, union of men by the bonds of charity, such is [spiritism’s] mission.”⁷¹ The decline of religion implied in materialism called for a renewal of moral and spiritual impulses. The Church’s rigid insistence on outdated doctrines of heaven and hell shared the blame with scientific empiricism run amok for undermining humans’ better nature. Spiritism would replace these twin trends with a renewed faith in people, supported by charitable giving and the universal acceptance of belief in God, all supported by “scientific” evidence.

Spiritist doctrine was versatile, encompassing all religions and supporting a variety of stances. The doctrine integrated science and spirituality, liberal ideas and social progress, traditional ideas of religion with the modern, changing world. Its doctrine drew from many of the main currents of nineteenth-century thought—progress, equality, the growing emphasis on the individual, republican or socialist politics—and promoted science (broadly speaking) and Enlightenment reason as the way to understand the world.

In fact, spiritist doctrine maintained the middle ground of democratic thought that would become central to the Third Republic after 1877. Its stress on

equality, justice, merit, and solidarity would be the same as that taken by the early Third Republic in establishing its identity. In a speech on education, Paul Bert, Minister of Education under Gambetta in 1881-1882, sounded as if he could have been speaking the values of spiritism. The role of education, he said, was to teach the child “that it is through labor that he becomes the master of his fate, for the democratic state is based on equality and justice, and must accord to everyone the share and place attained by his own merit.” He continued that the old monarchy had offered only charity but, “in the democratic state, along with charity—not supplanting it but cooperating with it—is solidarity . . . the duty imposed on society itself by its policy to come to the aid of those who suffer.”⁷² During the repressive Second Empire, spiritism expressed the same values as those liberal (and anti-clerical) republicans who would direct the Third Republic.

Yet spiritism frankly refused to abandon God and the belief in forces yet unknown. This tenacious hold on the unknown, and the attempt to claim science as proof thereof, more than anything else set the stage for a conflict between spiritists and a culture in the process of creating itself in an image of Enlightened science. The Second Empire and the early Third Republic struggled to maintain order in the face of political and social changes and challenges. Spiritism exemplified a flux and an implicit (and sometimes explicit) challenge to these institutions, not only in its doctrine but also by embracing and valuing the unknown. The story of spiritism is a tale of continuous struggle to integrate the marvelous and the irrational as rational components in the institutions of daily life in nineteenth-century France.

Spiritism on the Editorial Pages

The spiritist movement certainly had its “adversaries,” as Kardec often named them. Although observers were usually willing to admit the sincerity of most spiritists, many in traditional centers of power and opinion, be they ecclesiastical, scientific, or journalistic, disapproved of the movement. Many people in the scientific and philosophical world did take seriously the material phenomena of turning tables. All manner of press, from the scientifically-oriented *l’Abeille medicale* to the Catholic *La Croix*, participated in debates on the cause behind the turning and talking tables. The debate continued unsolved throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. But the spiritist explanation was roundly discounted by dominant philosophy and science, and the philosophical and political impulse that powered the movement was ignored. Catholic thinkers found it at best misguided and at worst heretical, often arguing that the so-called “spirits” were really demons.⁷³ Scientists dismissed it at first as unscientific, although they would become more interested later in the century.

Some of the most vocal opponents were the mainstream presses, who found spiritism a mockery of sense and reason (and an easy target.) Although spiritism

built on contemporary beliefs, and spiritists fervently proclaimed this fact, they remained a distinct minority and most of the notice they got from the mainstream was critical and/or mocking. As noted earlier in this chapter, spiritists felt a strong solidarity with their co-believers. Group solidarity only grew as the press attempted to marginalize the movement. Spiritists not only clung to their beliefs but did so with pride.

Despite its claims to be scientific, spiritism's tenacious hold on the unknown, the spiritual, and the "irrational" more than anything else set the stage for rejection by a society creating itself in an image of Enlightened science. Contemporaries saw spiritism's attempts to combine Enlightenment reason with spirituality as antithetical to social values and societal structures. These values were described in gendered terms.

Descriptions portraying spiritism as marginal rested on a definition of the movement as feminine that separated it from the masculine public sphere of action. The nineteenth century saw a growing distinction between what could be considered male and female spheres. The Napoleonic Code of 1804 made women unable to act legally for themselves; husbands or fathers acted for them. Women's ability to participate politically had been hotly contested in the French Revolution and judgment had fallen against them when the Jacobins prohibited the women's political clubs in 1793. A growing body of literature, springing from Enlightenment discussions of the different natures of men and women, insisted that women belonged only in the domestic sphere. Accompanying this physical separation of responsibilities came a separation of values. Certain values and characteristics became defined as feminine, others as masculine. Men, dealing in commerce and law, were considered rational and pragmatic. Women, whose position after the Revolution was increasingly limited to the home (at least women of the upper classes) found their association with nurturing of children extended to define their essence. Not called upon to interact in the public sphere, women had not the strength of mind and reason possessed by men. Instead women had the caring and sensitivity necessary for comforting the young and the frail. Common wisdom argued that women were naturally more moral and more spiritual than men. "Sensitive" and emotional, women tended toward religiosity and superstition, and sometimes toward madness. By characterizing spiritism as feminine, critics linked it to irrationality, madness, and superstition, weakening its claims to logic, to reason, to scientific observation, and to a place in the male realm of politics and philosophy.

The most obvious way spiritism was associated with feminine qualities was by tying it to actual women. Certainly women were spiritists; they often acted as mediums and they participated fully in spiritist associations. However, male mediums played as much of a role, and a more public one in France, and men made up a strong majority of spiritists. Spiritism was also connected to women by its concern with women's issues, and by the claim that men and women were equal in soul and should be so in this world. Both men and women spiritists

argued for equality of education and a recognition of women's worth. This, together with the "foolishness" and "irrationality" of the movement, and the attribution of these qualities to women, allowed the two to be equated and dismissed. One critic of spiritism insisted that "Women, young girls especially, along with a good number of workers more or less ignorant and lazy, form the immense majority of the faithful." He implied that these groups lacked the intelligence and education to see that spiritism was nothing more than "a huge deception practiced on a grand scale."⁷⁴ The dominant press, science, and other members of the conventional majority dismissed spiritism time and again as female idiocy. In the early years this dismissal worked through constructions of fanatical, religious women. As the century passed, science characterized spiritists as clinically hysterical women in order to discredit them.

Suzanne Desan and Claude Langlois both argue in different ways that the nineteenth century saw the "feminization" of religion.⁷⁵ The Catholic church had lost political centrality in the Revolution; in the nineteenth century it became increasingly associated with women. Despite (or in many ways because of) its continuing power through the state, Catholicism was associated with the counter-revolution and thus with values contrary to Enlightened reason. Anti-clericals defined religion as irrational superstition. Women too were seen as irrational and the two became connected in public opinion. Desan locates this change in the Revolutionary destruction of the counter-revolution. Revolution drove religion into hiding, into the home, and thus into the realm of women. During the nineteenth century, men increasingly ceased to practice Catholicism while women remained steadfast in the faith and even grew in numbers, joining lay orders of nursing and teaching sisters. First in the 1820s with the restoration government and again with Napoleon III in the 1850s, religion was associated with conservative, ultramontane politics. Although many Catholic men (and women) remained strong in both faith and liberal beliefs, the discourse of the nineteenth century equated Catholic with feminine and regressive while anti-clerical republicans were seen as masculine and progressive. This sentiment was strong by the 1860s as Napoleon III moved from supporting religion to supporting nationalism in Italy, and would only grow as the century continued.

Thus the simplest way for left-leaning presses to debase spiritism as an arguable proposition was to dress it in the feminine garb of religion and gently send it home, where it belonged. The republican journal *Fraternité littéraire* of 20 January 1865 commented that spiritism, being a religion, could offer fraternity only under the "flag of fanaticism, error and superstition." On 10 March the same journal denied spiritism even fanatical fraternity, classifying it as "an amusement, a diversion for our young boys, our women, our daughters, our female cooks or our nursemaids. . . . Spiritism is a false thing recognized only by superstitious people."⁷⁶ Spiritism belonged in the kitchen and the nursery, in the domain of women and children.

A constant stream of articles solidified this image while gratifying the curiosity of the public. Spiritist mediums, although more than half men, appeared in most presses almost exclusively as women. The *Annuaire philosophique* passed the cause of mediumship off to the “cerebral exaltation,” or over-excitability normally found in young women. The Catholic *Musée des Familles* portrayed spiritist meetings as a place where living women sought the cosmetic secrets of history’s legendary beauties.⁷⁷

Like the realm of religion, banishment to the realm of women meant impotence in male circles for spiritists of either gender. The *Figaro* explicitly contrasted spiritism and politics, the realm of women and that of men in a discussion of the Empress Eugénie and the women of her court who took an interest in the American medium Daniel Dunglas Home until Napoleon III put a stop to it.⁷⁸ The *Figaro* failed to mention that Napoleon himself had expressed interest in spiritism and did not dismiss the idea itself as nonsense but only became annoyed with Home personally.

Spiritists recognized the perception others held of spiritism as an enclave of (usually crazy) women and moved to refute it. In an article on “Spiritist statistics” in 1869, the *Revue spirite* insisted that only 30 percent of spiritists were women. They went beyond just listing numbers, carefully pointing out:

It is thus wrong that the critique has claimed that the doctrine recruits principally among women because of their penchant for the marvelous. It is precisely, on the contrary, this penchant for miracle and for mysticism which makes them, in general, more rebellious than men. . . . Spiritism demands reflection and philosophical deduction in order to be understood; the narrow education given to women makes them less apt at this than men.⁷⁹

Despite their belief in female equality, spiritists accepted the same bond between irrationality and women as did the rest of their society; they only worked to undo the equation joining them to women. Spiritists perceived themselves as in the mainstream of nineteenth-century thought and values; they argued for the importance of liberty and fraternity, struggling to avoid dismissal by association with feminine qualities of irrational belief.

Hysteria, irrationality, and superstitious religious beliefs all ran counter to masculine reason and were associated with the feminine. It was only a short leap from these behaviors indicative of failure of reason to outright madness. Medical control of madness made rapid gains in the nineteenth century and people became greatly concerned with the insane.⁸⁰ The rise of science and the experimental method meant the devaluation of events supported only by anecdotal evidence. The spiritists were often tarred with the broad brush of madness. Science judged the evidence upholding the existence of spirits suspect, encouraging

people to dismiss the phenomena and those who believed in it. Spiritists believed even against the rational decision of science; this, and their connection with religion and the unknown, made them easy targets for accusations of insanity. The popular press discussed statistics on and causes of madness, turning popular opinion against intense emotional experiences such as “religious sentiments pushed to excess.”⁸¹ A review in the popular *Journal des débats* provided a mocking summary of spiritist beliefs and summed up: “And so enough, too much perhaps, on the follies of spiritism. If, as M. Allan Kardec teaches us, there exist for the Spirits ‘types of bivouacs, of camps where they can rest’ . . . these should be at the Petites-Maisons [asylums]. But no, all these Spirits lodge only in the brains of mediums and their adepts. And it is, after all, just about the same thing.”⁸² The *Journal des débats* foreshadowed later connections psychologists would make between hysteria and figments of feminine imagination. Here the minds of the mediums, always women for the press, became asylums for the spirits, and all together were mad.

Some doctors claimed that spiritism led directly to insanity and that fast-filling asylums owed some of their prosperity to the new taste for spirit chasing. According to one source, out of two hundred mental patients in Zurich more than fifty were “victims of turning and talking tables.” In the Gard, fifty-four out of two hundred fifty-five mental patients were listed “victims of spirit rappers” and a doctor writing in the *Messager de la semaine* stated that table turning ranked among the first causes of rising insanity and must be regarded as “the most serious of dangers.”⁸³

The spiritists specifically linked their marginalization to their doctrine, arguing that it was what they said, rather than the fact that it was said by spirits, that disturbed science, medicine, and the consensus press. They fought back with their own numbers, claiming that enemies exaggerated and that if perhaps one or two people expressed their previous madness in spiritist terms, they were prone to unbalance before their experiences. Spiritists further noted that tobacco and novel reading caused more insanity than did spiritism.⁸⁴ *La Ruche spirite bordelaise* accused society of silencing it for the “madness” of wanting the “moralization of the masses; the era of true fraternity.” The spirits stated the same theme more explicitly when they told Kardec that his movement would have “rancorous contradictors, especially among those whose interest it is to keep up existing abuses.”⁸⁵ Politics rather than hallucinations stood trial according to the spiritists. Their protests went unheard by the majority of French readers, since they were published almost exclusively in spiritist journals.

Few treatments in the popular press took spiritism seriously. William Howitt, a fervent follower, complained in 1866 that: “the whole Press as by one consent . . . has adopted the system of opening its columns and pages to any false or foolish story about [spiritism], and hermetically closing them to any explanation, refutation, or defence.”⁸⁶ Descriptions in popular works portrayed spiritists as outside the normal boundaries of humanity. In one report the reader was led

through a séance in which the president and his two secretaries were hideously ugly and weirdly formed. The three mediums were described as androgynous and as “extra-corporeal beings whose sightless eyes fix on nothing. They are skinny, stretched, with a head too small.”⁸⁷

Spiritists were painted as different, incomprehensible, or other than what they should be and what “normal” people were. Descriptions of spiritists placed them beyond the pale of respectability. They crossed the boundary between accepted and “abnormal” behavior, arousing a sense of danger. Seen as springing from the dangerous elements of society, spiritists were the leftovers and the misfits. “Old women with greedy eyes, thin and jaded young people, promiscuity of station and of age, *concièrges* of the neighborhood and *grandes dames* of the quarter, some in calico, some in lace, poetesses of luck and prophetesses of chance, tailors and laureates of the *Institut*; one fraternizes in Spiritism.”⁸⁸ *La France* painted a vivid tableau of the depths to which the great *fraternité* fell when it was taken up by the likes of spiritism. Lines of class and gender were crossed, women reigned, and the revolutionary worker (the tailor of 1848) took refuge here. In this chaotic disorder festered the opposite of true fraternity and the social order it promoted.

The crossing of gender boundaries appeared repeatedly in criticisms of spiritists. The activity of women in the movement, both real and vaunted, and the association of male spiritists with feminine qualities, led to characterizations of spiritists as outside gender norms. They were described as wandering vaguely, “distinguished by an air of the other world, lost in an oceanic haze.” Men in long hair, women with theirs cut short, emaciated and malcontent, men and women exchanged attributes and lost their sexuality by their emaciation.⁸⁹ Obviously, these descriptions do not reflect real spiritists. Women would not be cutting their hair short for another forty years, and the bohemian or experimental avant garde was rarely found at the relatively staid spiritist meeting. Yet men and women “fraternizing” in spiritist meetings challenged gender role definitions; the threat these challenges posed to social values can be read in the press portraits of spiritist sexual promiscuity and androgyny.

Painted as mad, fanatic, dangerous, and other, an other that partook essentially of supposed feminine irrationality and weakness, the spiritist movement found itself continually classified on the margins of a society it hoped to improve and in whose best values it claimed to participate fully. Despite their announced base in reason, the movement stood condemned for irrationality and separated from the public sphere of politics and social change. Their ideas and critiques were dismissed as the ravings of lunatics and public admission of spiritist beliefs almost guaranteed scorn from the social sources of power.

Spiritists shared their contemporaries’ values, privileging reason and science over faith, the supernatural, and the irrational. But the public portrayal of the spiritist movement, based on its association with feminine qualities, undermined its ability to be heard as speaking the language of reason and science which

defined the second half of the nineteenth century. Further, it compromised the hopes the spiritists had of acting as a reform movement in the public, political, and masculine realm. It did not, however, stop spiritists from arguing for reform, or from teaching new ways to their members, and the movement continued to offer new knowledge, hope, and even self-confidence to many of its followers.

Leadership and Survival

The first expansion of spiritism continued until Allan Kardec's death in 1869. Kardec's death preceded that of the Second Empire by less than a year. The political and social hardships of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune of Paris plunged most of France into a period of profound questioning. Despite the declaration of the Third Republic in 1870, most of the 1870s remained relatively repressive and pro-church under the conservative "government of moral order" led first by Adolphe Thiers and then by the Duc de Broglie. The development of groups, periodicals, and the changes of leadership and emphasis in the movement responded closely to these political changes. Once the Third Republic was firmly established after 1877, and with the social and cultural changes of the 1880s and 1890s, spiritism would change rapidly, changes which will be explored in chapter four.

Allan Kardec never hesitated to see himself as the leader of the movement, and of a movement that should and would be great. He worked to assure that other versions of spiritism did not arise alongside that promoted by the *Revue spirite*, and argued that too much dissent in group discussions could be harmful, frightening away the spirits.⁹⁰ He insisted that founding institutions too early would be dangerous and only allow mockery by those forces all too ready to do so if later events were to prove them wrong.⁹¹

The strongest challenge to Kardec's position as doctrinal authority came from J. B. Roustaing, a Bordeaux lawyer whose *Spiritisme chrétien ou révélation de la révélation* threatened to undermine some of Kardec's main tenets. Roustaing argued that Christ had never been truly incarnated as human, but had only had a fluidic body, what spiritists called the "périsprit," the semi-material envelope surrounding the body. He also argued, against Kardec's instructions in the *Livre des médiums*, that physical manifestations of the spirit were as important as "intellectual" ones, or teachings from the spirits. Kardec gave a lukewarm reception to Roustaing's work, saying it should only be considered a "personal opinion" of Roustaing's spirit guides and noting that several spirit communications to Kardec had questioned the veracity of Roustaing's spirit sources.⁹² During his lifetime Kardec managed to keep a relatively tight rein on accepted doctrine. Roustaing's work fell into semi-obscurity, even among spiritists, although it would resurface as controversial in the early 1880s.

Michel Bonnamy also challenged Kardec's leadership, even while appealing to it. Like Roustaing, and Kardec, Bonnamy, as *juge d'instruction* at Villeneuve-sur-Lot in the Tarn-et-Garonne, held a respectable position and thus could command some authority. He published both *La Raison du spiritisme* (1868) and *Mémoires d'un spirite* (1871). Bonnamy, like Roustaing, started by contacting Kardec as he found his spiritist "faith." Like many others, he found the doctrine through the written word, this time the *Livre des esprits*, rather than through spirit manifestations. However, it was the latter that ensured his adherence to the movement. Liking the logic of Kardec's teachings but unsure about their reality, Bonnamy wrote to Kardec to ask for a spirit communication from his parents. This was quickly obtained at the next meeting of the "Société parisienne des études spirites" and Bonnamy became convinced.⁹³

His conviction cost him his job. Bonnamy described in his memoirs being called before his superior, Procureur Générale M. Sigaudy, who agreed that his spiritist explorations fell into the realm of freedom of religion. However, the publication of his *Raison du spiritisme* in 1868 changed the stakes and brought down the reaction of a higher civil servant, the Garde des Sceaux. Bonnamy's position was revoked in March 1868.⁹⁴ After this reversal, Bonnamy, like many newly converted spiritists, devoted extensive time to spiritism. In this case he found himself the recipient of spirit communications directly from God himself. This trumped Kardec, who had only heard from the "Spirit of the Truth" who, he intimated, was in fact the Holy Spirit. Kardec wrote firmly that although Bonnamy was a brave man to proclaim his spiritist faith, the communications were probably not from God.⁹⁵ Unlike Roustaing, whose discussion of Christ set about reconciling science and religion, Bonnamy was too far out to gain much acceptance among spiritists. Even Bonnamy's medium, a young male worker, seemed to be made nervous by this exalted company.⁹⁶ Bonnamy's teachings faded somewhat from view, although he remained an honorary president of the *Cercle de la morale spirite* in Toulouse.

Kardec's goal was to create a serious-minded "philosophy" but one that he clearly saw as replacing religious beliefs. He insisted that spiritism encompassed all religions and his discussion of spiritist teaching frequently employed terms such as messiah or doctrine. His own works continued the connection with titles such as *L'Evangile selon le spiritisme* (*The Gospel According to Spiritism*, 1864) and *Le ciel et l'enfer ou la justice divine selon le spiritisme* (*Heaven and Hell or Divine Justice according to Spiritism*, 1865). The examples of Roustaing and Bonnamy show the importance for Kardec of maintaining control of doctrine and the dangers and fascinations that such religious reinterpretations offered followers. During the 1860s, most of the focus of the movement, due to Kardec's influence, was on setting out a clear doctrine and on gaining followers through the formation of small groups.

Spiritist groups multiplied quickly. Following Allan Kardec's publication of the *Spirits' Book* (1857) and even more, the *Book on Mediums* (1861), people

could easily obtain information on what spiritism meant and on how to talk to the spirits. The latter offered specific advice on the make up of spiritist circles.⁹⁷ On travels through the country in 1860 and again in 1862, Kardec visited spiritist groups in some twenty towns and cities. The prefect of Paris (who was no friend to spiritism) claimed in 1874 that there were "3,000 groups in France, each having its own president." By 1889, there were over fifty cities and towns represented at the first Congrès spirite et spiritualiste.⁹⁸

In some areas, such as Lyon, spiritism started almost simultaneously with the movement in Paris and it remained independent and grew on its own. Lyon had a strong base on which to build; in the 1830s Jean-Baptiste Willermoz led a group of magnetists who talked to spirits and some strains of this had remained. In addition, Saint-Simonians, including Reynaud, had proselytized there to large crowds in 1830 and 1831.⁹⁹ There was also a ready core of followers in the workers who rejected traditional Catholicism, accepted the socialist ideas that spiritism also preached, and were excited by both the activity of physically manifesting spirits and the promise of progressive future lives. In Lyon workers proselytized each other. The worker-medium Guillaume Renaud led a group of other workers from at least 1858-1862, and members went to other groups and recruited from among their co-workers.¹⁰⁰ Bourgeois interest in Bordeaux helped the movement to grow rapidly there, while large numbers of workers in Rouen and Nantes led to cross-class pollination in these areas, especially as the century wore on.

Groups spread the movement locally, but periodicals held it together nationwide, even if these ties remained somewhat tenuous. First and foremost, periodicals carried communications from the spirits. Even a small and none-too-well educated group, then, could benefit from the more theoretical philosophical musings of spirits contacted by other groups. Groups found new members, members found new information and ideas; everyone, from the man who professed a new doctrine of the afterlife to the woman who healed a fellow villager, found an audience and recognition in these periodicals. Spiritist periodicals on the whole lived short but exciting lives. They were born from hope and trailed away from lack of funds; yet their directors often returned a year or two later at the head of a new, similarly short-lived venture.

The most important periodical was of course the *Revue spirite*, begun in Spring 1858. Although the *Livre des esprits* was published a few months earlier, the *Revue spirite* set up a forum in which those interested in the new philosophy could interact. This interaction, more than anything else, ensured the growth of the movement, keeping people's interest alive and allowing continuous publication of a stream of communications from spirits to mediums, interpretations by leading spiritist thinkers, and reassurance to individual spiritists that they were part of a larger and grander adventure.

Early periodicals sprang up in the path Kardec took in his proselytizing wanderings. Throughout the 1860s seventeen periodicals were born. Nine of

these served the Lyon, Bordeaux, Toulouse or Marseilles regions; none of the nine lasted more than two to three years between 1864 and 1869. Yet these periodicals served to introduce people to the movement and to spread the word about local levels of spiritism. Apart from the *Revue spirite* and its announced rival the *Revue spiritualiste* all remained small, achieving a circulation of less than five hundred, some significantly less. (The *Revue spiritualiste* [Paris, 1858-1869], directed by Henri Piérart, had direct connections to English spiritualism, catered to an elite class and scorned the *Revue spirite*, particularly its reincarnationist ideas. Piérart, hoping to build a more elite movement than Kardec aimed for, was unable to sustain a following and his subscriptions dwindled until he was forced to close.) However, small did not mean unimportant to readers. *Le Spiritisme à Lyon*, for example, was a tiny but vibrant paper which served a very active spiritist community of numerous worker groups and a few bourgeois.

By 1868-69, the spiritist movement had made enough strides that Kardec, at least, felt it was ready to constitute itself as a formal society. The movement boasted not only circles and groups throughout France but a well-established bookstore, the *Librairie spirite* in Paris. Spiritism, in its infancy, could only give "individual results," but as doctrine and knowledge became elaborated, it could provide the fruits of "collective and general results," working to truly change society as well as individual followers.¹⁰¹ Assessing the doctrine as "approaching completion," the *Revue spirite* offered, in December 1868, a "*Constitution Transitoire*" (Transitional Constitution) setting out Kardec's vision for how the movement should be run once he was no longer at the helm. He envisioned this constitution as adaptable to future developments, giving a continuous base for the movement.¹⁰² Yet Kardec had no chance to establish his succession. On 31 March 1869 Allan Kardec was found dead in his study, where he had been hard at work on the latest issue of the *Revue spirite*.

Kardec's plan was to replace himself with a committee of twelve (an apostolic number, fitting in with the religious theme) who would follow him as leaders of the new movement.¹⁰³ Kardec's article on the new constitution refers to and even partially reprints earlier discussions from the *Revue spirite* and helps chart the changes in his own thinking about this question. In 1865 Kardec seems to have imagined a single successor, insisting that "he who succeeds me" must be assured of an independent existence and have the time necessary to devote to the doctrine.¹⁰⁴ By later in the decade, after his brushes with Roustaing and Bonnamy, Kardec argued against a single leader for the movement, citing the dangers of egotism and false thinking. Only a group, Kardec came to believe, could ensure that spiritism would continue on its proper course. Doctrine, because of its progressive character, would continue to build on the solid bases that Kardec himself had cemented. Unity of opinion, he argued, would come from comparison of all the partial results obtained through the spirits. This was what Kardec himself had done, as he saw it, and what those who came after him should do as well. He compared the body to an academy of science in its

arbitrating functions. In addition, the twelve members of the committee, or Superior Council, would, according to their expertise, oversee a library, a museum, a “dispensary” for free medical consultations, a *caisse de secours* or mutual aid society, and a retirement home. Needless to say, there would also be regular séances. Together they would also ensure the publication of the *Revue spirite*.

Kardec envisioned a vibrant and active institution, set up mainly around propagation of the doctrine but also involving working charities and ensuring some material benefits for followers. He was keen to ensure that the doctrine remained pure. Kardec presumably imagined that he and others would begin to create this new Council, setting up for the “transfer of power” as it were. But death surprised him and the movement, headless, developed in new directions during the 1870s.

It is worth considering the question of Kardec’s charisma. Certainly he was highly respected and closely followed by the Parisian spiritists. Letters to him often refer to him as “master” and he seems to have been beloved for his serious approach but also for an ability to laugh, according to his biographer. Kardec’s moral authority clearly remained unquestionable. Yet many spiritists knew him only through his writings, especially through the *Revue spirite*. He received hundreds of letters weekly, asking advice and clarification of doctrine but answers were not personally given; they could be found in his books as easily as in his presence or personal teaching. Even while his own leadership was key, his distribution of that leadership came through institutions, especially the *Revue* which could be taken over by others. Thus, although the movement experienced some decline and definite turmoil such as Max Weber describes befalling a community after the death of a charismatic leader, the primacy of the written word in the role of spreading spiritism ensured some level of institutionalization took place.¹⁰⁵

Kardec’s death did indeed throw Parisian spiritists into some confusion. Those who had been leaders in various Parisian spiritist groups came forward to shoulder the continued publishing of the *Revue spirite* and to run the *Société des études spirites*. One M. Malet became president of the Society, with the bureau made up of MM. Levent, Canaguier, Ravan, Desliens, Delanne, and Tailleur. Of these, Desliens and Tailleur were known for their local participation—Desliens had started several Parisian spiritist groups. The Delannes were family friends of the Kardecs; Alexandre Delanne had been spiritist since the 1850s and raised his son, Gabriel, to be so as well. Mme Amélie Kardec set up a *Caisse générale du Spiritisme* (spiritist general fund) as a means to use profits from Kardec’s work to continue the propagation of spiritism. By July 1869 several spiritists had formed a corporation or *Société anonyme pour la continuation des Oeuvres spirites d’Allan Kardec*, (Society for the Continuation of the Spiritist Works of Allan Kardec) to manage that fund and to continue spiritism. The front man for this group was A. Bittard, who ran the spiritist bookstore, the *Librairie spirite*. This group claimed to be following the spirit, if not exactly the letter, of Kardec’s *constitution transitoire*.¹⁰⁶ Desliens continued as a member of the *société*

anonyme formed to promote spiritism and as general editor for the *Revue*. He managed to hold things together through the hardships of 1870 and 1871 but in June 1871 he resigned his position due to ill health. He was succeeded in both positions by Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie, who may in fact have already been part of the *société anonyme* and had certainly been active as a medium in the Parisian *Société des études spirites*.¹⁰⁷ Leymarie would remain in charge of the *Revue* throughout the century.

Spiritism was a philosophy or religion of hope. Although it drew interest in the early to mid 1850s, its real growth spurt had come in the period from 1858-1869, when the Second Empire was becoming increasingly liberal; when the left began to hope that it would see change happening in the government soon. Although Napoleon III remained in power, republicans were being elected to the Chamber of Deputies and Victor Duruy, who supported education for girls became Minister of Instruction in 1867. The world seemed on the upswing for both the French and the spiritists in the late 1860s. Paris was being rebuilt; capital was booming; education was beginning to expand in the countryside; and workers were striking mightily in hopes of making a better world. Spiritist groups were expanding rapidly; the *Revue spirite* was strong; spiritists were gaining converts among respectable men of the community. All seemed to be looking up. Then came *l'année terrible* of 1870-71, in which France, and the spiritists, seemed to take a body blow.

The worst times for spiritism lasted from 1869 to approximately 1880-1882. Not only had Kardec just died, but these were the dark days of the Franco-Prussian War, the heroic siege of Paris and the brief but truly divisive Paris Commune of 1871, pitting Frenchman against Frenchman and Paris against the provinces. France saw the declaration of a Republic that many leaders weren't sure they wanted, and the attempt by those same leaders to undermine that Republic and replace it with a monarchy. The Third Republic was not fully established until the early 1880s; the conservative and grudgingly republican government of moral order remained quite repressive through 1877, supporting the Church against the left; the traditional against the modern.

Despite the attempts by Parisians to keep the movement going well, spiritist membership and periodicals suffered during the early 1870s. The 1870s saw only seven new periodicals, five of these in Paris, one in Tours and, in Guise, *Le Devoir*, which treated spiritism as only one among many subjects.¹⁰⁸ However, the movement began to get its feet again by 1878, and those periodicals that began in the late 1870s enjoyed strong success. Recognized throughout the spiritist world, four of the seven lasted until the turn of the century.¹⁰⁹

The lack of new periodicals in the 1870s matches the complaints of spiritists themselves, who lamented slow growth after 1870. Later spiritists argued that the temper of the times turned against spiritist doctrine as "the spirit of revenge for the defeat of France was officially cultivated even down to the primary school level, [and thus] the Spiritist doctrine of fraternity and peace must have suffered

severely in its diffusion from the reaction.”¹¹⁰ However, it was likely less the “doctrine of peace” that kept people away from spiritism but the emergence of two main trends. Certainly the new government of Moral Order was no friend to spiritism, seeing it as anti-Catholic and irreligious. More important probably was the resurgence of Catholic faith. Many a bishop and his parish priests argued that the “scourge” upon France was the fault of its turning away from morality. The country seems to have agreed, at least to the point that it was not only the government of Moral Order that supported the building of church of Sacre Coeur as a penitence, but vast numbers of subscribers.¹¹¹ Economic hard times weighed perhaps heaviest in the movement’s lack of growth. The majority of spiritists came not from the affluent classes but from those who struggled to maintain their families and many of them were simply too hard hit during the depressed economic times of the 1870s to do more than continue meeting in small groups.¹¹² Certainly one of the major worries of the *Caisse générale du spiritisme* was the need to publish Kardec’s work at more affordable prices.¹¹³

The difficulties of 1870-71 and the need to make restitution effected spiritists as well, or at least P-G. Leymarie, who increasingly emphasized progressive social change in his editorial post at the *Revue spirite*. Leymarie’s interests were broader and more political than Kardec’s. His flirtations with followers of Fourier and utopian religions brought tension into the spiritist movement and many suspected both his spiritist “faith” and his motives. Yet Leymarie maintained the *Revue spirite* from the mid-1870s through the turn of the century, and his son Paul Leymarie continued it after Pierre-Gaëtan’s death. The *Librairie Leymarie* still exists in Paris, at the same location on the rue Saint-Jacques that it had at the end of the century, and it still sells spiritist (and occultist) works. Under Leymarie the *Revue*, and Parisian spiritism in general, became increasingly eclectic and moved easily into the mix of spiritism and occult science that reigned in alternative circles by the end of the century. Most of this took place in the 1880s and 1890s. Yet as early as 1871, when taking over as secretary-general, Leymarie noted that the *Revue* needed to move beyond philosophy to also tackle scientific (spiritist) research.¹¹⁴ Leymarie’s remark presaged a significant shift the thinking of many spiritist leaders. Throughout the 1860s, individuals had been as interested in the excitement of spiritist phenomena as in the consolatory philosophy that Kardec offered. If Kardec insisted that the philosophy was the thing, many lesser followers were excited at the chance to hear from a lost loved one or to peek behind the veil of the beyond. The hope that these glimpses into the beyond would offer true proof that would be acceptable to science only grew as the century progressed, until it became a major goal of the movement as a whole. By 1880 this shift would come fully to the fore as spiritist leaders tried to convince the scientific world that they too could be a part of it.

In the 1870s, however, the spiritists continued to fight for their survival. Leymarie, in partnership with his wife Marina, ran the business end of things. He

edited the *Revue spirite*; acted as a medium and participated wholeheartedly in Parisian spiritist groups. Like Kardec, Leymarie made of the movement both a vocation and a living. Leymarie came from a respectable family but one unable to afford to educate him beyond the basics.¹¹⁵ He came to Paris in the 1840s to seek his fortune and had a hard time finding it. Active politically in the 1848 Revolution, he was an “ardent republican” and chose exile over Napoleon III. He went first to Belgium and then to Brazil.¹¹⁶ Returning to Paris after the amnesty of 1859, he tried his hand, unsuccessfully, at business.¹¹⁷ Like Kardec when he turned to spiritism, Leymarie needed a new line of work. An auto-didact and voracious reader, he soon found his way to Kardec’s séances and, with astronomer Camille Flammarion and dramatist Victorien Sardou, experimented extensively. Leymarie worked with Kardec during the late 1860s; he published the *Revue spirite* until his own death in 1901; his wife Marina collaborated with him on both the *Revue* and the publishing house, the *Librairie Spirite*, directing both after his death and passing the leadership on to their son Paul when she died in 1904. Leymarie also continued to act as principle administrator of the *Société anonyme pour la continuation des Oeuvres spirites d’Allan Kardec*. The police saw him as an unscrupulous opportunist, accusing him of hoodwinking old widows into leaving him their fortunes when the *Société anonyme* benefited from their largess, but the police refused to believe anyone could honestly believe in spiritism.¹¹⁸ Most spiritists saw him as a tireless fighter for their cause, especially in the hardest years of constant ridicule.¹¹⁹

Yet Leymarie did not necessarily do the cause of spiritism great good. He was interested in a variety of new trends, including Theosophy, and he seems to have been somewhat credulous. He became entangled with what became the greatest public embarrassment for spiritism in its nineteenth-century career, the revelation of fraud in a case of “spirit photography.”

Since the emergence of spirit phenomena, observers had claimed that the phenomena were either subconsciously caused or, on a more sinister note, a fraud. Public demonstrations by magnetists and somnambulists had long been a popular entertainment; spiritist mediums followed an already established protocol when they began to give public demonstrations. Public demonstrations usually involved the medium going into a trance (sometimes still accompanied by a magnetist) and then the spirits acting through him or her. Events included “invisible hands” playing musical instruments, or moving objects through the air, or the spirits manifesting their own personality through the body and voice of the medium. Most demonstrations were small scale and focused on physical phenomena, although occasionally an important medium would come through Paris and cause a sensation. The most famous of these was Daniel Dunglas Home, the Scottish-American medium who made headlines throughout Europe in the late 1850s and 1860s, as he gave séance after séance for the royal and the wealthy of Europe.¹²⁰ The spiritist movement in France, especially in the 1860s and 1870s, tended to report briefly on, proclaim the quality of, but mainly to

spend little time, on these public mediums. One dissenting spiritualist argued that this was due to Kardec's promotion of reincarnation. Alexandre Aksakof insisted that Kardec had refused to speak about mediums who demonstrated physical manifestations, rather than communicating with the spirits through writing, because these were not so easily controlled and they rarely spoke of reincarnation.¹²¹ Kardec certainly rejected the public side of spirit demonstrations, which remained in a peripheral connection with the movement; they might bring people to spiritism, but serious spiritists usually worked in their own groups and with their own mediums.

Thus when a new phenomenon arrived in Paris, a spiritist photographer who could take pictures of vaguely materialized spirits, it was somewhat surprising that Leymarie took him up. But Leymarie had been intrigued by news of a spirit photographer in England, and had called for France to produce its own. It was not long before one appeared. The "spirit photographer," Edouard-Isidore Buguet, became a sensation among spiritists, especially Parisian spiritists, during the years 1874-75. Once convinced of Buguet's authenticity, Leymarie loaned him money to set up a studio, advertised his photos in the *Revue spirite*, and promoted him as a great boon to spiritism.¹²² Even Mme Kardec seems to have been taken in by Buguet and his medium, Alfred Firman. (Interestingly enough, it was Buguet, rather than the medium himself, who garnered the attention.) Spiritists throughout France wrote with great excitement over the new, physical, proof of the continued existence of the spirits. British observers came to study Buguet and declared him legitimate. But the government of France had a different opinion and suspected fraud. A police sting operation in May 1875 found Buguet's photographic plates had pre-exposed ghostly images on them, and Buguet, caught red-handed, admitted that his images were not spirit-caused. Not only were Buguet and Firman arrested, but Leymarie as well, as promoting and profiting from the fraud.¹²³

Eventually, Leymarie was acquitted, partially on the testimony of a doctor who swore to the validity of Leymarie's beliefs in spiritism, and Buguet fled to Belgium. But the trial itself offered both great evidence of the devotion of spiritists to their cause (and to Leymarie), and fodder for those who opposed the movement. Clients of Buguet testified again and again that although they could see many of the photos were fakes, their personal photo was real, and they recognized their loved one. In addition, Leymarie, leader of the spiritists, could be read either as a fraud or as a dupe; neither label bred confidence in the cause.

Spiritism stagnated during the 1870s. Those who believed continued to believe, and spiritist groups happily continued their experiments with the other world, profiting from the everyday miracle of spirit contact to gain consolation, joy, and entertainment. Yet new members did not arrive in great numbers and the movement seemed to be at a standstill. It would not be until the 1880s and the introduction of new experiments, both by occultists and by psychical researchers, that spiritism experienced a resurgence of interest.

Probably due to decreasing adherence in the provinces, particularly in the southwest, we see in the 1870s a new trend in spiritism. Paris, always the center, exercised more influence, and spiritism began to spread rapidly toward the north as well. Groups that had previously attempted to publish their own journals, especially those in Bordeaux, now looked to publications from Paris. Parisian journals published many of the communications from Bordeaux circles, and interaction between Parisian groups and more southern circles remained high. Leymarie traveled often, maintaining contacts with provincial spiritists. However, relations with Belgian spiritists, not as evident before Kardec's death in 1869, began to play a larger part. (Leymarie had good friends in Belgium.) Exchanges with Belgian spiritist groups, especially by the end of the century, occurred as frequently as those with other French groups although the one did not eclipse the other.

Leymarie himself blamed "the breath of individualism and of personal ambition [which] has dispersed our former *phalange*," for the troubles of the spiritists.¹²⁴ His use of the Fouriérist term "phalange" however, is indicative of what might have been at least part of the problem. Under Leymarie, the *Revue* (and the Parisian spiritist scene) became more overtly political. The relaxation following Second Empire censorship and the opportunity to address social questions provided a freer atmosphere in the new Republican government. Also, Leymarie's circle included Charles Fauvety and radical Fouriéristes such as Eugène Nus, both of who became members of the group he founded in 1878. Their radical ideas, in some spiritists' eyes, diluted and/or polluted the movement and some more conservative spiritists may have drifted away.

The major reason for the lull in spiritism in Paris, however, was simply a lack of leadership. Leymarie had been partially discredited and the funds of the society hurt by the Buguet scandal. Gabrielle Delanne, who would become a major force in the movement was still very young and would not publish his first spiritist work until 1885. Although Delanne grew up in the movement, as his mother and father were both active spiritists in Kardec's group in the 1860s and seem to have continued their private spiritism in the 1870s, Gabriel hesitated, considering a career in engineering before becoming a full-time spiritist leader.¹²⁵ The other spiritist who would step forward to lead in the 1880s and 1890s was Léon Denis. Although already an active spiritist in the 1870s, he seems to have remained in Tours and had not yet been "discovered" by the Parisian spiritist scene.¹²⁶

In fact, the first generation of spiritists was beginning to fade. Although some would continue through the 1880s, and Leymarie, of course, even longer, Kardec's vision of spiritism, as a movement that not only provided information about the next world but would change this one, flourished mainly through the 1870s. By the late 1870s and early 1880s, new voices began to be most heard in spiritism: those who saw the physical phenomena of spiritism as at least as important as the doctrine and hoped to make truly scientific breakthroughs.

These thinkers helped shift much of the emphasis from the philosophic and the political to the material and the empirical, but spiritism never lost its spiritual side. The first blush of spiritism though, combined those hopes of change both in this life and in the next, and that was perhaps its biggest draw. The doctrine combined a series of hopes and consolations and wrapped them in a package that seemed modern and rational. Spiritism in its first incarnation offered hope for a better world, a hope embraced by socialists, republicans, workers, and women who hoped to find their values accepted in a new society. Looking at spiritist groups more closely will illustrate how much this meant to followers.

NOTES

1. This phrase is repeated frequently in Kardec's work, and by his followers. It appeared on the title pages of most of his published works. It can also be found on the title pages of spiritist journals up until the turn of the twentieth century, including, for example, the *Phare de l'espérance* (Nancy, early 1900s).

2. The story of the Fox sisters, two young women in upstate New York who heard rappings and began to communicate with a spirit, is usually cited as the germination of "modern spiritualism." On American spiritualism see, among others, Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles* (Manchester: William Britten, 1883); Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). The best chronicler of the British movement is Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); see also Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1860–1910* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul) and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

3. Alexander Erdan, *La France mystique* [sic] (Paris, 1855), 71.

4. *L'Illustration*, 7, 14, and 21 May 1853 all offer images to inform the reader about the new craze.

5. Hugo's interest in metempsychosis, explored in the previous chapter, was continued and furthered by his table turning. For more on Hugo and table turning, see Jean de Mutigny, *Victor Hugo et le spiritisme* (Paris: Nathan, 1981). See also Claude Grillet, *Victor Hugo, spirite* (Paris, 1928); Gustav Simon, *Les Tables tournantes de Jersey* (Paris, 1923). Procès verbaux of some of Hugo's séances are available at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 14066, as well as in Grillet and Simon. Although Hugo never became an active spiritist, he continued to affirm throughout his long life that spirits existed and could be contacted.

6. Régis Ladous, *Le Spiritisme*, (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 36. On Kardec's younger years, see Henri Sausse, *Biographie d'Allan Kardec: Discours prononcé à Lyon le 31 mars 1896* (Lyon, 1896).

7. Biographers Henri Sausse and André Moreil give differing accounts of Rivail's time before coming to Paris. In the *Revue Spirite* and elsewhere, Rivail's study of medicine is often mentioned but never confirmed. Although Moreil accepts this as fact, it seems doubtful given Rivail's work as a teacher. For in-depth bibliography of Kardec, see Sausse, *Biographie d'Allan Kardec* or André Moreil, *La Vie et l'oeuvre d'Allan Kardec* (Paris: Spered, 1961).

8. Moreil, *Allan Kardec*, 98.

9. Moreil, *Allan Kardec*, 87.

10. Henri Sausse, *Biografia de Allan Kardec* (Mensaje Fraternal: Caracas, Venezuela, n.d.), 18. See also Jacques Lantier, *Le Spiritisme* (Paris: Culture, Arts, Loisirs), 84.

11. *Revue spirite* 1858: 36. John Monroe gives a detailed summary of Kardec's first experiments. See John Warne Monroe, "Evidence of Things Not Seen: Spiritism, Occultism and the Search for a Modern Faith in France, 1853–1925," Ph.D. thesis (Yale University, 2002), 143.

12. For more on the importance of women mediums, see chapter 3. See also Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, Guérisseuses et Visionnaires en France, 1785–1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).

13. Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 84–85. Britten, *Nineteenth-Century Miracles*, 47. Allan Kardec, *The Spirits' Book* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Brotherhood of Life, Inc., 1989), 12. These spirits also reputedly gave Kardec his pseudonym. See note 52 for the druidic character of this name.

14. William M. Reddy, "The *Batteurs* and the Informer's Eye: A Labour Dispute under the French Second Empire," *History Workshop* 7 (1979): 30.

15. Régis Ladous, *Le spiritisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 35.

16. Kardec's works are numerous, including: *Instruction pratique sur les manifestations spirites* (1858); *Qu'est-ce que le spiritisme* (1860); *Voyage spirite en 1862* (1862); *L'évangile selon le spiritisme* (1864) and many smaller pamphlets on the subject.

17. *Revue spirite* 1869: 4–10.

18. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1889* (Paris, 1900).

19. See Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine, *La Table, le livre et les esprits* (Paris: Lattès, 1990), 79–81, 91.

20. *Revue spirite* 1869: 5–7.

21. Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law and Society in the Fin de siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 195. Monroe, "Evidence of Things Unseen," 136.

22. A new English-language edition was published in 1995 with updated language to appeal to a contemporary audience. Allan Kardec, *The Spirits' Book* (Philadelphia: The Allan Kardec Educational Society, 1995).

23. Archives Nationales, F/18/294. These numbers are taken from the years 1866, 1868, and 1869.

24. *Le Charivari* 16 September 1865.

25. *La Paix universelle* 1895: 84. This group, reporting its delight in 1895, had been in existence since at least 1884. For more on the joys and adventures of spiritist group meeting, see chapter three.

26. For a twentieth-century version of this, see Malcolm Gladwell's description of small groups at a "megachurch" in Orange County, California, which has tens of thousands of members. Gladwell, "The Cellular Church," *The New Yorker* September 12, 2005: 60–68.

27. Kardec's second voyage is described in *Voyage spirite en 1862* (Paris, 1862). The book in its own turn served to proselytize.

28. Victor Commetant, *Les Civilisations inconnus* (Paris, 1863), 259.

29. Gautier's *Spirite* borrowed directly and in detail from Kardec's *Livre des médiums*. See *Spirite*, présentation de P. Laubriet (Paris: Ressources, 1979), x. Villier de Lisle-Adam's *L'Ève future* appeared in serial form in 1880, then in book form in 1886.

The theme of spirits replacing (and bettering) real world lovers occurs throughout the literature and appears as well in Michelet's *La Sorcière* (1861). For Gautier, it was a theme begun in 1834 with *Omphale* and appeared throughout his work.

30. Sue's *Gilbert et Gilberte* was published in feuilleton in *Le Siècle* 21 December. 1852 through 3 April 1853. It thus corresponded almost exactly with the beginnings of the spirit craze.

31. Sue's novel (vol. I, 138, edition not given) is quoted in *Spiritisme à Lyon*, 31 January 1872 #65, no page numbers.

32. Antoinette Bourdin, busy medium and prolific writer, wrote a series of novels during the 1870s which grasped the imagination of many spiritists, and probably of other audiences as well, with their grandiose images and sweeping descriptions of unknown lands and famous personages. Her style was allegorical and mildly didactic. At least one of these, *Consoled*, was translated into English in 1884. Julia Becours, of Rouen, wrote novels of her own as well as spirit-inspired works which found popularity during the 1880s and 1890s, at least in the north of France.

33. *Echo d'outre tombe*, 1(11) 1865 4. The periodical claims between 1200-1500. No source for this number is given. While it certainly can be questioned, the vast number of spiritist books, tracts, testimonials, etc., make it not difficult to believe.

34. Formation of two separate groups and then merging of the two is announced in A. Laurent de Faget's *Progrès spirite*, 1895: 74, 123. The propaganda committee's full title showed its hoped of unifying spiritism: Comité de propagande et fédération universelle.

35. *Revue spirite* 1874-1875; passim. Each month the list of donors was printed. In a four-month period, the *Revue* had collected over 1,000 francs.

36. Jean Chapelot, *Spiritisme, réflexions sur le spiritisme, les spirites et leurs contradicteurs* (Bordeaux, 1863), 14-15.

37. Auguste Bez, *Les Miracles de nos jours, ou les manifestations extraordinaires obtenues par l'intermédiaire de Jean Hillaire cultivateur à Sonnac* (Bordeaux and Paris: 1864), 11-13.

38. This sequence of avowed disbelief and ridicule, hesitation, and finally incontrovertible proof accompanying belief was typical of spirit conversions. Daniel Cottom points out that this follows a cultural formula. Daniel Cottom, *The Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movements, Revelations, and Betrayals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 122-23.

39. Laurent Laperlier, under pseudonym Sebron, *Conseils de Saint Eloi aux spirites* (Paris, 1858), 72, 74.

40. Norbert Truquin, *Mémoires et aventures d'un prolétaire à travers la révolution* (Paris, 1888), 228-230.

41. *Echo d'outre tombe* I (10), 1865: 2.

42. *Almanach spirite* (Paris: 1865), 33.

43. Gabriel Delanne, in his "preface" to Henri Sausse, *Biographie d'Allan Kardec*, no page number.

44. The need for "scientific" proof of immortality is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

45. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 63-64.

46. The French word *science* is broader than the English term and connotes

knowledge in general as well as empirical observation and experiment.

47. Kardec, *The Book on Mediums*, (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1989), 179

48. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 147.

49. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 183.

50. Pierre Boudou, *Le Spiritisme et ses dangers, quatre conférences* (Bordeaux: 1921), 170-171.

51. Henri Martin in a letter to A. Corbon. Quoted in Corbon, *Le Secret du peuple de Paris*, 2nd ed. (Paris: 1865), 400-402.

52. Kardec's pseudonym was somewhat controversial. On this, see Emily Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth-Century Miracles*, 47 and Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 12. The first edition of *Livre des esprits* claims the name as druidic; later versions water this down to an old Breton name; one version argues that he gained his pseudonym from two early spiritist mediums. (See *La Lumière* 1899: 398-400) Most spiritists seem to have accepted the vision of Kardec as druid and Kardec's memorial at Père Lachaise cemetery, erected in 1870, took the form of a druidic dolmen.

53. For a brief summary of spiritism in nineteenth-century literature see Aubrée and Laplantine, 92-94. To my knowledge, this topic has not been treated by literary critics, apart from Michel Nathan, who has summarized the various roles reincarnation takes among philosophical thinkers as much as literary thinkers. See his *Le Ciel des Fourieristes: habitants des étoiles et réincarnations de l'âme* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1981).

54. Louis Figuier, *Le Lendemain de la mort, ou la vie future selon la science* (Paris, 1872), 3. Figuier's first work on this subject, *Histoire des merveilleux*, was much more questioning, even occasionally hostile; the latter work, after his loss and the country's pain of the Franco-Prussian war, was much more accepting of the spiritist interpretation of mediumistic phenomena.

55. Eugène Nus, *Choses de l'autre monde* (Paris 1880), 165.

56. Lynn L. Sharp, "Life's Just Desserts: Merit and Reincarnation in Nineteenth-Century France" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Society for French History, Orcas Island, Wash, Oct. 1992.) For a less positive view of Kardec's version of reincarnation, see Nathan, *Le Ciel des Fourieristes* and Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 156-57.

57. Kardec quoted in J. Bouvéry, *Le Spiritisme et l'anarchie devant la science et la philosophie* (Paris: 1897), 158. Original italics.

58. Bibliothèque National, NAF 14551, 64-65.

59. *Revue spirite*, 1871: 304-306; 369-372.

60. See Chapter three.

61. *La Verité* (27) 23 August 1863 (no page numbers.) Here Pezzani wrote under his pseudonym Philalèthes.

62. Kardec, *Spiritisme à sa plus simple expression* (Paris, n.d.), 25.

63. *Revue spirite* 1871: 133.

64. *Revue spirite bordelaise* I (2) 1863: 18-20.

65. Boudou, *Spiritisme et ses dangers*, 170. The point that Sand promoted Leroux's ideas and Hugo himself dabbled beyond the veil seems to have been lost on Boudou.

66. Charity and social justice both remained important to a variety of Catholics, especially charity. The 1840s saw the burgeoning of both religious and lay brotherhoods and convents, as well as the formation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society by the leading liberal Catholic Frédéric Ozanam. On Ozanam, see Carol Harrison's forthcoming work on the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Raymond Grew notes that utopian socialism called on Christian ideas of justice; this could be expanded to include the spiritists as well. See Grew, "Liberty and the Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Europe" *Freedom and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Richard Helmstadter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 211.

67. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 290.

68. Kardec, *Spirits' Book*, 351.

69. Grew, "Liberty and the Catholic Church," 203, 211.

70. *La Vérité* 21 (12/07/1863), no page numbers. Pezzani writes here under the pseudonym of Philalèthes.

71. *La Ruche spirite bordelaise*, I 1864: 2.

72. Paul Bert, Speech of 21 March 1880, in *Nineteenth-Century Europe: Liberalism and its Critics*, ed. Jan Goldstein and John W. Boyer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 360-61

73. This attitude continued throughout the century, although the stress on demons was strongest early in the century. The most fervent representative of this strain was Jules Eudes de Mirville, *Des esprits et de leurs manifestations diverses* 2 tomes (Paris, 1863)

74. Philip Burlet, "Du spiritisme considéré comme cause d'aliénation mentale," extrait de *La Gazette médicale de Lyon* (Paris: 1863), 8.

75. Suzanne Desan, "The Family as Cultural Battleground: Religion vs. Republic under the Terror," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith M. Baker, (Oxford: Pergamon, 1994). Claude Langlois, "Politique et religion," in *Histoire de la France religieuse* vol.3, 108-143; *Le Catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984). Langlois argues a growing feminization of Catholicism throughout the nineteenth century, "La femme et la religion au dix-neuvième siècle," paper presented at University of California, Irvine, California, Dec. 1992.

76. *Fraternité littéraire*, 20 January 1865 and 10 March 1865. No page numbers.

77. *L'Annuaire philosophique* Nov. 1868, quoted in *La Solidarité* 1869:12; *Revue spirite* 1867: 201-208; "Les Tables auteurs" in *Musée des familles*, Dec. 1853. With the exception of the piece in the *Revue spirite*, these sources are collected in the Bibliothèque de l'Histoire de la ville de Paris (BHVP) CP4260.

78. *Figaro* supplément, 17 Sep. 1890. In BHVP CP4260.

79. *Revue spirite* 1869: 5, 7.

80. For a thorough examination of changing views of madness, see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

81. The phrase was reported as a major cause of mental alienation by *Le Moniteur* of 16 April 1866. For the period 1856-61, one-third of cases of insanity were attributed to moral rather than physical causes, about 10% of these to "religious sentiments pushed to excess." This was lower only than "domestic problems" and "other causes." Cited in *Revue Spirite* 1866: 205-212.

82. Emile Deschanel, "Revue de quinzaine" *Journal des débats*, 29 Nov. 1860.
83. Jules Eudes, Comte de Mirville, *Des esprits et de leurs manifestations divers* t.2, 30-31.
84. *Revue spirite* 1865: 147-48.
85. "La Folie du spiritisme," *Ruche spirite bordelaise* 1863: 50-51. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 61.
86. Quoted in Arthur Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism* vol. 1, (New York: Arno, 1975, [1924]), 171.
87. P.L. Imbert, *A travers Paris inconnu* (Paris, 1877), 232, original italics. Oscar Commettant, *Les civilisations inconnus* (Paris, 1863).
88. *La France*, 14 September 1866, quoted in *Revue Spirite*, 1867: 24.
89. *La France* 14 September 1866, quoted in *Revue Spirite*, 1867, p.23.
90. Kardec, *Book on Mediums*, 440.
91. *Revue spirite* 1869: 369.
92. *Revue spirite* 1866: 190-191.
93. Michel Bonnamy, *Mémoires d'un spirite* (Villeneuve-sur-Lot, 1871), 7, 17-21. This text, originally written in 1869, was not published until 1871.
94. Bonnamy, *Mémoires*, 470-75.
95. Bonnamy, *Mémoires*, 638.
96. Bonnamy, *Mémoires*, 562.
97. Kardec, *Book on Mediums*, 434-456.
98. Kardec, *Voyages spirites*, 4. A.P., BA/880; *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite* (Paris, 1890). The number of groups in 1874 may easily have been exaggerated, however, as the prefect was trying to convince a judge that spiritism was a problem needing to be addressed, in order to try M. Buguet, photographer of the spirits. See below for more on this.
99. The Lyonnais, as a group, had long held an interest in alternatives, from theosophy to mesmerism. It was hardly surprising that the Saint-Simonian message would attract them as well. On Lyon, see Christine Bergé, *L'au delà et les Lyonnais: mages, médiums et francs-maçons de XVIIIe à XXe siècle* (Lyon: LUGD, 1995).
100. "Manifestations spirites" B.N. NAF 14551; 14552. These manuscripts describe various attempts by workers to expand their circle to include others.
101. *Revue spirite* 1869: 370.
102. *Revue spirite* 1869: 369-394.
103. *Revue spirite* 1869: 383.
104. *Revue spirite* 1869: 375.
105. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 242-247.
106. *Revue spirite* 1869: 240.
107. *Revue spirite* 1871: 287-88.
108. *Le Devoir* was the informational organ of the *Familistère*, a socialist residential factory experiment started by Jean-Baptiste Godin in the 1870s and continued by his widow through the 1890s. Godin himself was a spiritist and his paper encouraged his workers to believe in reincarnation and to attend services based on this idea.
109. *Philosophie de l'avenir* (1875-1900) was published in both Paris and Brussels and the *Moniteur spirite* (1877-1900) began in Brussels but soon moved to Paris. *La religion laïque*, directed by Charles Fauvety, was not strictly spiritist, but supported the

movement and published much on it. It survived from 1876-79 and began again in 1886, lasting this time until 1914. However, it was taken over by a follower of Fauvety, Verdad, and knew some very difficult times. Fauvety had earlier, 1866-68, edited a journal titled *La Solidarité*, which also strongly supported the movement. *Le Devoir*, mentioned above, was the fourth long-running journal.

110. "Un peu d'histoire," xerox excerpt from talk given at Symposium de Tours, 7-8 April 1990. (Anonymous but possibly by Roger Perez. Xerox distributed by the Union Spirite de Tours, 1991).

111. Raymond A. Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Raymond Grew argues that Catholics gained political weight from the 1860s and especially in the 1880s. See his "Liberty and the Catholic Church," 226.

112. Berthe Frope, *Beaucoup de Lumière* (Paris, 1884), 12-13.

113. *Revue spirite* 1869: 155-57.

114. *Revue spirite* 1871: 287.

115. Biographical material on Leymarie comes from several sources, including articles in the *Revue spirite*, but the most important are the Archives de la Préfecture de la Police (Paris) (A.P. BA/880) and J. Malgras, ed., *Les Pionniers du Spiritisme en France*, (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Psychologiques, 1906), 102-110. The quote is from BA/880.

116. Leymarie provided a conduit by which spiritism took its first footsteps in Brazil. It is now extremely popular there and holds great influence, especially among the middle and working classes. For more detail, see Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine *La Table, le livre et les esprits* (Paris: Lattès, 1990).

117. The prefect describes Leymarie as a failing shopkeeper ("marchand tailleur") in 1868 (A.P. BA/880); Malgras says he ran a maison du commerce which did not prosper (*Pionniers*, 102). Either way, he needed a new line of work.

118. A.P. BA/880.

119. Malgras, *Pionniers*, 102.

120. For great praise of Home see Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, passim.; for a more skeptical view of Home, see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10-16. For a lively description of the Davenport Brothers' more controversial tour of Paris, see Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, 153-54.

121. Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, 178-179. Note that Conan Doyle, although reporting Aksakof's complaints, accepts reincarnation as a fact, although he rejects its universality. Many British spiritualists, however, rejected reincarnation as un-Christian.

122. A.P., AB/19.

123. A.P., BA/880. For an in-depth discussion of this event and trial, see John Warne Monroe, "Cartes de Visite from the Other World: Spiritism and the Discourse of Laïcisme in the Early Third Republic," *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003): 119-53.

124. Bois, *Monde*, 312.

125. *L'Echo de l'au delà*, 15 Jan. 1900, 20.

126. Lantier, *Le spiritisme*, 111.

Chapter Three

Politics of the Séance: Progress, Gender, Equality

A much more grandiose and admirable
world than all possible material worlds.

Victor Tournier

The spiritist doctrine of progress through reincarnation promised perfection in future lives. Yet that was not enough for many spiritists. With its emphasis on progress, spiritist doctrine and practice also invited a revisioning of current society. In their particulars, spiritists and their goals varied: they were working-class like Guillaume Renaud, Lyon silk worker, imagining a world of equality and spiritual fulfillment; women like Emilie Collignon, a modern wise woman dispensing recipes for cures or knowledge on child-rearing and working effectively for girls' education; bourgeois politicians like Victor Tournier and Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie, promoters of leftist reforms and socialist ideals. Yet despite their differences, all found in spiritist séances and periodicals a means of expressing their own values and creating a vision that challenged contemporary society.

Born during the repressive years of the Second Empire, spiritism generally avoided directly political statements; yet it rejected the hierarchy, positivism and materialism of the day to argue for a new and more egalitarian world. Spiritist dissent was at its highest in the early years of the movement, during the period 1860-1880, before the Republic was fully instituted and when ideas and assumptions that would later be promoted by the Third Republic remained an expression of true dissent. By the 1880s, many of the republican values that spiritists supported would begin to be instituted by the Third Republic. Spiritists, although supportive of the government, nonetheless would continue to challenge growing materialism and to offer a loyal opposition that insisted on the continuing importance of spirituality and gender equality.¹

This chapter explores the politics of spiritist groups, in the broadest sense of that word. I argue that spiritism functioned as a site for democratic play and self-expression which both acted as an apprenticeship for democratic behavior and allowed people to imagine the world to fit their own needs and hopes.² Most of this democratic play took place in the meetings of the spiritists and created a space in daily life that allowed spiritists to reinterpret the world.³ There was also a strand of spiritism that functioned in a more directly political way, as spiritist writers and speakers argued for social reforms and a society that reflected the egalitarian world that visions of reincarnation supported. It was the collection of practices generated by spiritist doctrine which allowed both forms of politics to take place. Informed by doctrine supporting a republican and sometimes socialist vision of the world, spiritist séances and periodicals themselves created egalitarian spaces (real and virtual) for self-expression and envisioning a better world. Such spaces also challenged the gender norms and ideologies of the Second Empire as women benefited both from doctrinal claims for their equality and from the ability to express themselves. The politics of gender can be seen not only in alternative values of masculine and feminine traits, but also in the androgynous tone that spiritists used in reimagining the world.

The group meeting offered a space for myriad forms of self-expression. Groups themselves offered camaraderie and solace in an often isolating urban environment. They also ensured solidarity in the face of both outside ridicule and the hardships of the world; spiritists defended each other and created mutual societies for funerals or sickness. Not least of all, spiritist meetings were great fun, providing knowledge, artistic expression, the puzzles of the words of the spirits to decipher and the excitement of the hope of a future life.

For the historian, the spiritist meeting offers a window into how spiritism functioned. James Clifford argues that “identity, considered ethnographically, must always be mixed, relational, and inventive.”⁴ This chapter reads spiritist meetings both historically and ethnographically, to understand how spiritists invented new identities in relation both to contemporary cultural values and to the spirits themselves. Spiritists built their doctrines and interpretations from the knowledge they gained from contact with the spirits. Most often this contact was by one individual, but involved the group in the often difficult interpretation of the words and meanings of spirits. Anthropologists, in studying trance states, argue that the process of interpreting the verbal and non-verbal symbols of trance promotes an interaction between the psychological domain and the socio-cultural one, an exchange that involves an interpretive and dialectical process. This means that spirit possession, “as a creative symbolic process, is a form of mediation between an individual and culture.”⁵ I would argue that for French spiritists that mediation lay not only between the individual and culture but between the group and culture. This mediation took the form of spiritist formulation of critiques of and alternatives to the culture they confronted.

Spiritist groups also offered two not completely separate varieties of what I call “alternative worlds.” The first was the most important. This was the world of the séance itself, of the spiritist meeting and the space it offered for interaction with other members or with spirits themselves. Within the spiritist group, gender and rank hierarchy were muted (although they may not have disappeared completely) and democracy was the order of the day. Within this world as well, spiritists had the right to interpret the meanings of the spirits. For women in particular this democratic world meant new freedoms of expression and spaces of opportunity to push the boundaries normally established for “respectable” behavior.⁶ Doctrine and expressions of belief often recreated androgynous ideas that Jean Reynaud and Pierre Leroux had espoused earlier in the century.

The second version of alternative world came from the spiritist critique of society. Spirits and/or spiritists used spirit messages to offer a vision of a more egalitarian world. They used reincarnation as their justification for that world, and they used the encouragement of the spirits as an excuse to try to create a better world in this life, as well as imagining one in the next life. Spiritism promoted both socialist and bourgeois republican reforms through this practice, and acted to continue earlier links between religion and the left.⁷

Sociability and Democracy

Spiritist groups appealed to varying needs of followers. The message of the doctrine emphasized two strands of hope, one of consolation and one of reform and the prospect of a better future. Usually a group emphasized one of these, while still promoting the other. A. Desliens, who headed at least two groups in Paris during the 1870s, described the purpose of one newly founded group as “to bring to germination and fruition, for minds until now closed to it, the seed of the consoling truths of Spiritism, and . . . to fight for the regeneration and emancipation of the human spirit.”⁸ Desliens aimed his group “less to those who fight hand to hand for truth, and who cannot help but discover it one day than to those more unhappy ones who walk only hesitantly through life, ceaselessly seeking an oasis where they can rest their weary limbs, an abundant and clear spring to refresh their soul, corrupted and battered in the struggles of life.”⁹

Almost all spiritist groups claimed adherence to and taught, generally, the doctrines promoted by the *Revue spirite* and Allan Kardec as long as he lived. Some have argued that this meant that Kardec and the *Société parisienne des études spirites* had close ideological control over other groups.¹⁰ While Kardec may well have hoped to control others, the ability of mediums and members to leave one group and quickly start up or find another, plus the absolute lack of institutional structure, allowed for each group to do as it chose. For example, Kardec refused to endorse the spirit teachings obtained by medium Emilie Collignon and her questioner Jean-Baptiste Roustaing. Yet Collignon, as we will see

below, remained a popular spiritist medium and launched her own career out of spiritism.

Desliens' group shows how groups often diverged from the main rhetoric of Allan Kardec and the *Revue spirite*. Despite participating fully in Kardecian spiritism, spreading Kardec's general doctrines and reading and writing contributions for the *Revue spirite*, the group tended to have its own focus. In their activities, Desliens' group saw science and reason (and those who had acquired expertise in them) as "precious auxiliaries" to the group but stressed that "charity, fraternity, solidarity" led them to help those deprived of understanding and of "the bread of the soul."¹¹ In order to learn more of the "infinite knowledge" (*la science infinie*) given by spiritism, the group would begin each meeting with prayer (rather than Kardec's prescribed quote from the *Livre des esprits*) and then concentrate on "*causeries familières*" or "informal talks." These often continuing chats with the spirits on particular topics helped individuals to gain a better understanding of spiritism. They would also, said Desliens, through discussion, "throw a new light on controversial questions."¹² What these controversial questions might be, unfortunately, Desliens did not say.

Most groups stated their purpose as the study and spread of spiritism. The Paris group located in the *rue de la Glacière* met every Thursday evening to demonstrate and dedicate "our perseverance and our love for the study of spiritism." In addition, the group announced meetings on the first and third Tuesday of each month that would be dedicated to the development of diverse mediumistic skills.¹³ This pattern was typical to many groups. Some groups held general meetings twice a week, as well as offering subcommittees on general and/or spiritist education on Sundays or evenings.

As a source of both knowledge and sociability, the spiritist circle attracted many followers. People could be consoled not only by the philosophy but by a new-found group of friends who shared their own point of view. Once within a group, believers felt part of a special project, privy to knowledge that others did not possess. Alex Owen has described the spiritist séance as a transformative space created by shared conventions. Consensus allowed the suspension of "everyday concepts of reality" and "made the events of the séance immediately accessible to all believers, . . . [but] baffled, frightened, or enraged those who were not a party to it."¹⁴ While Owen emphasizes this transformative space as a place to act out female sexual desire, it can also be seen on a more prosaic level as a way for individuals to place themselves within the center of a select group, rather than on the margins of accepted social belief, or even rationality, where observers might have placed them. Rather than someone outcast or "hesitant in the walk of life," the spiritist became a member of a close-knit group with an important purpose. Longtime spiritist Léopold Dauvil remembered his group as a space imbued with friendship, where common ideas led to fraternal affection and each member could feel him or herself among "friends living and dead," forgetting the chagrins of the outside world.¹⁵ This sense of a haven and a frater-

nal group of friends or substitute kin is referred to again and again by spiritists. "Nothing draws people together into such soul-to-soul relationships as psychic quest. . . . This close vital comradeship is one of the outstanding features of such communion."¹⁶ They found in groups and meetings not only consolation and spiritual fulfillment, but also a camaraderie and a sense of support which aided them in daily life.

The formation of a spiritist group required a collective, democratic philosophy; the very structure of the group must be as fluid as the force it studied. Allan Kardec described how to establish a group in his practical guide to spiritism, the *Book on Mediums*. The first requirement was a small group, serious, intimate and with a membership in tune with one another.¹⁷ The spirits themselves taught that invoking the spirits simply for fun, with a sincere desire to improve, courted danger by offering a target to evil spirits. The very act at the base of spiritism, the reception of spirit teachings, thus required people to reach beyond the level of the individual. "A meeting is a collective being, whose qualities and properties are the result of those of its members." These groups should be homogeneous, Kardec argued, because divergence of thought resulted in "a clashing of ideas disagreeable for the spirit."¹⁸ This need for homogeneity of opinion dictated a fluid form of organization. "[I]t is best to avoid all indissoluble engagements . . . small groups need only a very simple disciplinary rule for the order of the séances; regularly constituted societies require a more complete organization: the best will be where the wheels are the least complicated."¹⁹ Spiritist groups generally followed Kardec's rule. Although large societies existed in Paris, even these broke up into small groups with changing membership which constituted the working core of the movement. Situated in neighborhoods and meeting in private homes, these groups rose, fell, and mutated as the levels of participation by various individuals changed.

In general, spiritist groups subscribed to principles of democracy, unity, and self-help. *The Société spirite et magnétique* (Spiritist and Magnetist Society), established in 1895 in Bordeaux, aimed to teach "true fraternity, justice, and the love of Duty," to study the magnetic "force" existing in all nature and especially in humans and "to demonstrate it in a scientific manner and by active propaganda . . . to place it at everyone's disposal."²⁰ The by-laws and even the names of the *Amis de l'union fraternelle* (Friends of Fraternal Union), and the *Amis de la fraternité* (Friends of Brotherhood), express their goals of promoting a "spirit of union and of fraternity while continuing to propagate the philosophy of Allan Kardec." The *Groupe Spirite Girondin*, formed in 1884, declared that "the greatest charity, the most absolute solidarity, and a true fraternity should exist among all the members of the group."²¹ Almost all groups had democratically elected officers who served from one to five years but who could be removed at the wish of the majority of the group. The officers went unpaid and their powers did not often extend beyond organizing meetings, although some also helped to publish the group's periodical if one existed. At least one group

even refused the control involved in electing a president. The *Groupe Spirite Saint-Vincent-de-Paul et Brunat* announced that “it was decided that, in order to conserve the group’s cordial and fraternal character, its egalitarian physiognomy . . . the title of president was abolished.” A group of active members, chosen by the whole, would take responsibility for directing the spiritist gatherings.²² This Marseilles group had already been in existence seven years when this decision was made in 1871; various members continued to practice another eighteen years, until at least 1889. Apparently, the formula was a success.

The democratic forms of spiritist groups went beyond organization. The actual practice of spiritism, although it varied from place to place and group to group, generally followed broad democratic principles. Meetings commonly began with a prayer; even non-religious groups felt the need to recite a ritual invocation, often aimed at creating a welcoming atmosphere for whatever spirits might be induced to visit the group. After the opening invocation, usually recited by the host of the meeting, authority shifted from a single person to the whole group. Previous communications would be read by anyone wanting to share one. Each person seems to have had the right to voice their experiences and no particular order or hierarchy prevailed.²³

Next came the call to the spirits. The whole spiritist community participated in calling the spirits and creating or receiving knowledge. Even in the most formal of groups, anyone could submit a question to a medium. The whole group then cooperated to get an answer. In the case of table rapping, the whole group necessarily had to work together to make the table move. Each established physical contact with two others as they formed a circle of power. This form destroyed barriers of individuality and acted as a symbolic move from hierarchical to communal power. One or more members called out the alphabet while another noted down the letters at which the spirit rapped. Together the group then finished composing the message of the spirit by rewriting the letters into words and sentences.²⁴

Composing the spirits’ messages often included much discussion and some guesswork, since communications rarely arrived as clear and legible messages from the beyond. Mediums or spirits sometimes misspelled or ran messages together, obscuring meanings. Spiritists often commented on the rapidity of spirit-inspired writing, its illegibility, and the confusion of words and phrases that sometimes occurred. The condition of the spirits’ communications made it necessary for followers to work together to decipher words and create meanings from them. Spirits provided the words and phrases, but often the construction of sense from these remained the collaborative chore of the group.²⁵

The focus of the meeting and the authority of giving the spirits’ words shifted with each new person who questioned the spirits. No one person held authority or power in the name of the spirits. Authority moved rapidly and sometimes randomly from the spirits to the group as a whole or to various individuals if a vision or trance writing occurred, creating shifting and unstable patterns of

authority. By refusing to acknowledge one authority, spiritist meetings formed a diverse, almost anarchic power. It was usually the whole group, rather than one individual, who focused this power and used it to define meanings, morality, and metaphysics depending on how they translated the words of the spirits.

Larger meetings or those focused on trance writing often took a two-tiered form, with mediums seated at a table while non-mediums sat around them and concentrated, sometimes touching hands, to call spirits to the group. Questions asked by the audience were immediately taken up by a group of mediums who all wrote simultaneously. Each of these mediums in turn reported their communication from the spirit. Although the mediums spoke the words, it was the whole group which achieved the call to the spirits and helped to interpret the words, letters or visions that mediums described. Thus again rather than a hierarchical form of interaction, knowledge and participation remained horizontal and democratic, in the root sense of being created by the participation of all the people. The *Revue spirite* reminded its readers that, because spirits give knowledge and spiritists then further shape it, "all work is common and collective, in order to confirm the great principle of solidarity and of association which is the base of societies and the law of the whole of creation."²⁶

Spiritist groups were not satisfied with intangible expressions of fraternity and democracy. They followed words with action. Spiritist groups created various forms of self-help; usually this took the form of a *caisse de secours*, or mutual aid society. Some aid societies dealt specifically with the growing expense of the funeral, clearly an important moment for spiritists as they passed into a new life. In 1874, in Béthune near Lille, twenty-eight members formed the *Group Spirite de Saint Eloi* specifically to ensure that all members would enjoy an equal burial and to promote charity at the same time. "We recruit our members from all ranks of Bethunoise society. . . . Our mission is to inter the poor for free; as for the rich, they pay us, but *no offering* remains with us, all is exchanged for bread [for charity] at the end of the year."²⁷ The *Société spirite de Carmaux*, a group made up of miners, took advantage of their spiritist society as a way to set up interest-free loans for those in need. This remained an important function of groups, whether in 1872 with the miners or in 1895 when the profits from the first biography of Kardec, by Henri Sausse of Lyon, went to help older spiritists via the *Caisse de secours aux vieillards* of the *Société fraternelle* of Lyon.²⁸ These mutual insurance funds, created by taking a portion of dues, of all proceeds from group activities, and of entrance fees to public meetings, ensured members of income in case of injury or loss of employment.

The participatory character of séances taught individuals that the discovery of knowledge follows a process. Any spiritist could, and most did, participate in the experiments with mediums, trance writings, and materialization of physical objects from the non-physical realm of the beyond. It is important to remember that spiritists saw these experiments as scientific, since they offered empirical proof of the existence of the spirits. Referring to English spiritualists, Logie Bar-

row characterizes as a “democratic epistemology” this process that opened the definition of knowledge to all comers.²⁹ This inherently democratic form of knowledge encouraged, almost required, spiritists to become amateur scientists, in the form of participating in empirical spiritist experiments. Spiritists surpassed institutionalized science, however, by the fact that everyone could participate. By the process of actively creating new knowledge, either from or about the spirits, spiritists learned to think of themselves as part of the process of science. Despite the fact that scientists did not accept their “experiments” as valid, spiritists could thus feel integrated into a world which they had made their own and familiar rather than separated and excluded.

Spiritist challenges to science will be discussed below, but it is worth noting here that spiritists used their democratic knowledge to create histories for themselves and the world that differed from those argued by the natural scientists. They created utopian worlds based on either past or future social evolutions, on this planet or others. These worlds often incorporated scientific findings but explained them in spiritual or social terms. A typical example of the poignancy and simplicity of these visions is that published by Pierre Bellue. Bellue, working through the spirits of such greats as Herodotus, Voltaire, Arago, and Michelangelo created a popular cosmology where God had truly provided for all peoples’ needs. According to Bellue, the world was created when the “Supreme-Will” made two planets, one of earth and volcanoes, the other of rocks and water, collide. Bellue’s world presented a bountiful, closed system. Only three species of animals had originally existed and they had gladly worked to humans’ advantage. One had a jagged tail that, dragged through the earth, acted as a plow. Another had pockets in its ears in which it secreted a delicious substance akin to butter. Bellue told readers that the first humans arrived on earth from other planets, brought by spirits. They multiplied and tended the earth, but there were no problems, because there was no commerce or ambition.³⁰ Here was a truly appealing past for the worker or petit-bourgeois who rarely knew the leisure such a world would entail. Bellue himself was a military man, a sergeant whose hero was Napoleon. Perhaps, like Julien Sorel, he looked back to an army where a man could advance by merit. In a world without commerce or ambition, without workers and bosses, equality would be easy.³¹ These visions of a perfect world were not the mainstay of spiritism, but they illustrate the lengths to which democratic knowledge might take a hopeful spiritist philosopher.

Medium Guillaume Renaud along with his fellow silk workers also created an original history of the universe. Like Bellue, he starts with pseudo-scientific premises of raw, unformed materials in the universe. The earth, said Guillaume, was created from the Milky Way, the “grand laboratory where God forms, creates the worlds and the suns.” There “nebulous bodies” received the “prolific seed” from the Milky Way and the resulting “fluid matter” was taken by spirits to surround the earth’s core. Luminous spirits, gifted by the Father with “the force, the light and the knowledge necessary” set to work creating the new

earth.³² After several epochs, this earth was peopled by the Solariens (the advanced spirits) bringing twelve couples of each of the twelve races of humans to earth. Jesus told these races to cross breed and multiply. From these there would descend a world unified in color and language.

Unfortunately, something went wrong, a murder occurred, sprung from one man's jealousy over another's success with women. The Solariens left the world, leaving only a message of eternal love for others which that first murder already contradicted. From there, things only got worse. Guillaume's prescription is interesting: the solution to earth's problems is to return to the law of love by giving women freedom and equal rights. This would counteract the acts of men whose jealousy and temper caused murder and started wars. The world would then see unbelievable harvests and "the Globe will shudder with joy."³³ Guillaume's world offered a fascinating mix of progressive social ideas, even to the ideas of cross-racial marriage and women's rights, with an emphasis on love of neighbor that could spring either from traditional religious teachings or from utopian socialists, from Fourier to Cabet, all presented in a popular version of scientific terms.

In an alternate utopia, feminist and medium Olympe Audouard also saw a vision of women's equality. Audouard gave much less detail, but more hope for achievement, since she placed her dream world in the future rather than the past. Audouard, a bourgeois writer, described a society of gender equality where women could work at the same jobs as men did and would not be tied by culture to the home.³⁴

Spiritist discussion of popular cosmologies and plural worlds transformed scientific subjects into almost unrecognizable imaginaries and added a religiously fraternal, utopian socialist ideal of brotherly love. The constructed cosmologies featured socialist and reformist values in a very utopian setting. A workless, equal world, or one where women could do the same work as men, was a far cry from the reality most spiritists lived. Most spiritists did not go so far, yet, at their weekly meetings, they acted out and created a democratic and egalitarian world of their own that allowed individual creativity at the same time that it offered an implicit critique of the unequal organization of society.

Republican Spirits

Spiritism clearly offered an arena in which to use the doctrine of reincarnation to argue for a better, more equal world. Some spiritists, most of whom had been previously involved with the republican and/or socialist movements, continued from within spiritism to argue for social and political reforms that would regenerate society. Just as for Reynaud and Leroux social reform was closely connected to reincarnation and religious thought, for these spiritists of the 1860s and 1870s, anti-clerical struggles and the spread of leftist thought were

uppermost. Political spiritists thus continued themes and values expressed by the romantic socialists. However, few of these thinkers called themselves socialists. Socialism in the 1860s referred less to the romantics and more to Karl Marx or Joseph Proudhon, whose ideas of equality spiritists shared, but whose methods they would have rejected. As with Reynaud, the term republican seems to fit them best.³⁵ They valued social equality and democratic politics as the way to reach that equality. The political context, especially after 1871, led them to support the values that would be those of the republicans, even if the Third Republic would not go far enough toward equality of either wealth or gender to meet many spiritists' goals.

Many spiritists did not actively attack the Second Empire or campaign for reforms. Yet spiritism brought to them not only consolation and the wonder of everyday miracles in the séance, but also a doctrine that explicitly insisted on broadly political values and goals. Spiritism's calls for equality and solidarity meant calls for social change. The leaders of the spiritist movement in the 1860s and 1870s waged a strong republican, anti-clerical campaign, calling for equality and social reform. Whether most spiritists saw themselves as political or not, they followed their leaders, and the teachings of the spirits, in strongly supporting these ideas.

Two centers of explicit political expression were strongest: Paris and, more surprisingly, Carcassonne. In Carcassonne a long-lasting spiritist circle led by bourgeois notables recruited local peasant landowners and helped spread spiritism throughout the area.³⁶ This group was led first by Timoleon Jaubert, who traded on his notable status to spread his spiritist beliefs, most publicly through his well-known work *Spiritisme, un magistrat convaincu*,³⁷ and whose popular, spirit-dictated poetry not only was reprinted from one spiritist journal to another but also was popular among non-spiritists.³⁸ Jaubert wrote of his spiritist beliefs as early as 1854 and as late as 1892 his works were still being reprinted by the *Librairie du magnétisme*, a bookstore specializing in works on magnetism and spiritism.

Led by Jaubert and later by Valentin Tournier, the spiritist circle at Carcassonne supported and popularized leftist and utopian thought, including Fourier, Proudhon, and, on a slightly different note, Auguste Comte. Most of the leftists in the region passed through this spiritist circle, although many did not stay. Spiritism showed itself more progressive than Catholicism and served as a refuge for occitan idealism of the left. The anti-clerical, republican milieu of these spiritists was reflected in the leftist uprising at the Commune of Narbonne in 1871.³⁹

Jaubert helped popularize general leftist thought; Tournier specialized in republican anti-clericalism, rejecting both materialism and the Church, struggling to claim God and religion for the people. Tournier had been exiled after the Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's coup d'état of 1851 and he took up spiritism after his return in 1859. He published several works, including *Le spiritisme devant la*

raison, les faits, les doctrines (2 vols; 1868) and actively collaborated with the journal *Messenger des âmes* as well as corresponding frequently with the *Revue spirite*.⁴⁰ Yet his most significant work was his “Refutation” of an *Instruction pastorale* written against spiritism by Monseigneur Desprès, the Archbishop of Toulouse. This played popularly in the spiritist world, published not only in Carcassonne but also in Liège and in Paris and widely discussed and quoted.⁴¹ In this and in his many talks and letters to leading spiritist periodicals, Tournier presented arguments that strongly echoed those of Jean Reynaud. In a letter to the *Revue spirite* of 1876 he argued, as had Reynaud, that the “law of progress” on this earth required everyone to work but also offered “a much more impressive [*grandiose*] and admirable world than all possible material worlds.”⁴² Spiritists later argued that it was Tournier’s “Refutation” which led to the prosecution of the *Revue spirite* over the issue of false photographs of spirits.⁴³ The claim is difficult to verify, although the timing was close and certainly Tournier’s continued republicanism and anti-clericalism was a bane to the government of moral order. In fact, that anti-clericalism was so well known by 1884 that he was called upon to speak at the funeral of a woman he had not known simply because she had insisted on a civil funeral and refused confession. Despite the clergy’s warning that no one would attend, the cemetery was full and Tournier’s speech promoting spiritism made a strong impression.⁴⁴

As in Carcassonne, Parisian spiritists also promoted republican ideas, although they emphasized social reform. After Kardec’s death, when Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie took over the *Revue spirite*, he gradually turned it from a centrist if reformist position to a much more left-leaning publication. Although the journal continued to concentrate on the cause of the spiritist movement, readers could also find reporting about everything from the League for the Rights of Women to an association to aid released female prisoners. Leymarie promoted a series of reformist causes, all associated with, studied by, and supported through his *Société scientifique des études psychologiques*, formed in 1878.

A favorite cause of many spiritists was Jean Macé’s *Ligue de l’enseignement* (League for Education). This League, promoting the cause of public and progressive education, appealed strongly to spiritist ideals. Leymarie and his wife Marina Leymarie were close friends of Macé and offered their home for early meetings of the Parisian branch of the League. Drawn from Leymarie’s spiritist group, Emmanuel Vachez became the secretary of the new group and the *Revue spirite* helped publicize the League and its mission, including urging readers to contribute funds.⁴⁵ Throughout the provinces, smaller spiritist groups also publicized and praised the League’s progressive mission, even going so far as to form a *Ligue d’enseignement spirite* in Bordeaux, which seemed to combine a mission for secular teaching and for teaching spiritist doctrine.⁴⁶ Seeming paradoxes like these never bothered the spiritists. Thus, though the League, with its fight for an education free of even mention of the afterlife, might seem to support a growing positivism, it was firmly supported by those who greatly hated posi-

tivism, with not only spiritists like Leymarie on its board but also Henri Martin and Camille Flammarion, promoters of reincarnation and plural worlds, respectively.⁴⁷ The League was instrumental in supporting republican thought and instituting republican values in the new regime.⁴⁸ Spiritists continued to support the *Ligue de l'enseignement* up until the passage of the Ferry Laws promoting free, compulsory, secular primary education in the early 1880s. Spiritism, in its criticism of the current establishment, helped contribute to a critical republican project but rejected the full implications of the republican value of *laïcité*, or secularism, which implied a complete lack of religious training. Spiritists seem to have assumed that *laïcité* was much more about challenging the Catholic church, which was in fact the case, and continued their support for a broad, non-institutional spirituality.

That the republican and spiritist projects went together well is easily seen in the description of a public lecture given by Leymarie. The “Cercle républicain de Moreuil” sponsored Leymarie to discuss both the *Ligue de l'enseignement* and freemasonry. Leymarie used the opportunity to discuss not only these topics but also the equality of women and the need for social reform, all from a spiritist point of view.⁴⁹ A request from the provinces illustrates both the popularity of this type of talk and the ways in which seemingly contradictory beliefs easily came together. One M. Ouiste asked the Parisian spiritists to “send us a speaker who can discuss the doctrine with faith and make parallels between it and Catholic and spiritualist doctrines; who can speak of the national faith as well and unite it with that of spiritism, as humans will become demi-gods and reject forever fratricidal war.” After the conference, spiritist pamphlets would be distributed and a collection taken up for the *Ligue de l'enseignement*.⁵⁰ All of this mingled with a fine anti-clericalism, as M. Ouiste prefaced his request with evidence: a story of a local notable, a progressive Catholic whose civil funeral had been the occasion of political speeches to some 2,000 people. The result? Fewer men and, he emphasized, even fewer *women* at the clergy’s sermons. While anti-clerical republicans might read this as a triumph over religion as a whole, spiritists read it as a triumph for the spiritist belief over the Catholic one.

Perhaps the most fascinating project to which Leymarie and at least a segment of the Parisian spiritists lent themselves was the “familistère” of Jean Godin. Begun in 1860 by Jean-Baptiste-André Godin, this project created worker’s cooperative housing and shops linked to Godin’s factory for cast-iron stoves.⁵¹ Influenced by Fourier, Godin imagined a socialist utopia and tried to create it with the help of his own workers and outside philanthropists. Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie was friends with Godin and urged spiritists to support the endeavor, even while Godin, spiritist himself, promoted ideas of reincarnation in the Familistère’s journal, *Le Devoir*, for which Leymarie acted as the Parisian agent. The leadership’s interest in the Familistère did not seem to trickle down to the masses, however. Although spiritists continued to follow the Familistère’s progress,⁵² and the Familistère was represented at the *Congrès spirite* of 1889,

the connection did not necessarily run the other direction. One spiritist worker at the Familistère wrote to the *Revue spirite* in March 1884 to lament the fact that so few members of the cooperative were, in fact, spiritists, despite their shared socialist visions.⁵³ Godin, however, would join the list of important thinkers supporting ideas of reincarnation to which spiritists and others pointed at the end of the century.⁵⁴ Support of Godin and the Familistère illustrated the importance many spiritists placed on leftist and reformist projects.

For most of the spiritists discussed above, spiritism embodied republican values and vice versa. For some political spirits, spiritism offered a respite during the repressive years, one which they meant to leave to continue leftist politics as soon as it was safe. Yet they remained at some level involved in the movement. Eugène Nus tells how he first experienced spiritism when he and other members of the staff of the Fourierist *Démocratie pacifique* gathered out of habit in the editorial offices on the rue de Beaune in 1852, after Louis-Napoleon had seized power and ended the Second Republic:

The coup d'état gave us leisure time. Our journal had been suppressed, like all republican papers. This common isolation, this distaste for people and for things, [felt under the new government] explains how we could have, curiously, assiduously, for long months, pursued experiments which, in other times, would have amused us for at most a few days.⁵⁵

For Nus and his friends, who spent extensive time contacting spirits from 1852-54, table turning filled forced "leisure" time and provided entertainment. But it did more than that. Through spiritism, they vented their political views in a seemingly non-political manner. Their "definitions in twelve words" of the soul, the conscience, etc. carried strong Republican overtones. Politics had been suppressed; the supernatural took on the job of expressing political standpoints. Although he ultimately pursued literary life over spiritism, throughout his career Nus continued to join various spiritist groups, including Leymarie's *Société scientifique des études psychologiques*, formed in 1878, and he wrote until his death for the occult publication *l'Initiation*.⁵⁶ In all these venues, he continued to express his Fourierist and republican politics.

Less well-known than Nus, would-be *hommes de lettres* Maurice Lachâtre also mixed his radical leftist politics with his popular spiritist ideas. He published socialist journals as early as 1848, and the 1860s and 1870s found him frequently condemned for publishing everything from Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris* to his own anti-clerical satire *Histoire des papes*. He ran a bookstore on the rue Sebastopol but was unable to obtain official sanction for it.⁵⁷ He began a spiritist journal, *Monde invisible*, in 1867, but it was not successful, lasting only a year. Each of these publishing ventures combined spiritist ideas with republican values. Active in the Commune, Lachâtre was exiled after 1871. He fled to

Spain, where he occupied himself with spiritism and a new mistress. When he returned to Paris in 1878 he occupied himself less with spiritism and more with politics, but he continued his interest in things “beyond,” opening the “*Librairie du progrès*” on the rue Bertin, and publishing many socialist, spiritist, and occult offerings.⁵⁸ Lachâtre’s bookstore contributed to the spread of the movement and to its connection to republican and socialist ideas.

These connections were continued by the rank and file followers of spiritism. Throughout the country spiritists used their spiritist meetings as opportunities to discuss not only the progress of the soul but the progress of the nation. The bourgeois members of the Bordeaux circle represented by the journal *Sauveur du peuple*, for example, despite its alleged non-political character, discussed all manner of events during the Second Empire, from the Senate’s new laws on the press to the Easter Sermon the Bishop of La Rochelle preached in the Tuileries.⁵⁹ Not all circles looked to the Left; the *Echo d’Outre Tombe* of Marseilles encouraged resignation to the vicissitudes of the world for its readers.⁶⁰ Yet most spiritist journals frequently featured anti-clerical articles, as we saw above with Victor Tournier, and many others spoke damningly of the concentration on wealth over charity, of materialism, of the sufferings of the people, and of the need to redress these problems via social reform. In this way, like the *cercles* that Maurice Agulhon has chronicled, spiritist circles created a way for ordinary people to learn and express republican values.⁶¹

Spiritist circles were hardly the central voice of the left, nor did the spiritists originate most of the good works they supported. As others have noted, however, the importance of a variety of ways of spreading and integrating republican ideas was key to the success of the Third Republic after MacMahon’s failed coup of 1877.⁶² Spiritist thought and meetings offered several attractions to leftist thinkers. First, it gave a moral, even supernatural, rationale to socialist and liberal reformist ideas via its stress on charity and the law of progress. It also offered an arena to discuss “politics” without attending political meetings. These remained illegal throughout the Second Empire and dangerous in the early Third Republic. Spiritism urged individuals to act for change and to support others who did so. Most importantly, through spiritism many relatively apolitical French people learned ideas of social change, moral reform, and religious faith as part of an overall progressive outlook on the world which, for them, defined the modern world and the Third Republic. Unlike many other forms of republican association, spiritism included—even encouraged—women’s participation, thus helping to bring women into the republican fold without challenging their traditional affiliation with religious issues.⁶³

Gender and Equality

Spiritist discussions of gender both echoed and presaged various forms of nineteenth-century feminism. Visions of a gender-equal world that originated in the Saint-Simonians and others continued in the spiritist doctrine. The founding document of the movement, the *Livre des esprits*, pointed out that all souls were created equal.⁶⁴ Like Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, spiritist treatises blamed inequality on society and called for the education of women in order for them to attain their natural equality to men.⁶⁵ Yet spiritists, male and female, partook of contemporary cultural assumptions of women's nature as morally superior, sensitive, and gentle. Followers and the messages they took from the spirits invoked both equality and ideas of women's "nature" to discuss females and femininity.

A lively debate on the nature and role of women took place within the movement, especially from 1865 to 1880. Apart from the *Livre des esprits*, women's position was not a major topic of discussion until the 1860s. This is probably due to the early years' strong focus on spreading rather than elaborating the doctrine. Two things allowed an expansion of discussion: first, the movement's consolidation in the mid-1860s; and secondly, the increasing liberalization of the Second Empire and a rising discussion of women's role in general. In fact, spiritism and ideas of reincarnation appealed to and were forwarded by two of the most important voices in reviving the feminist movement in the 1860s. Léon Richer was involved with Charles Fauvety and others arguing the existence of reincarnation and the survival of the soul; Olympe Audouard, well-known feminist lecturer, announced her conversion to spiritism in her journal *Le Papillon*.⁶⁶

By the later 1860s, the Second Empire was not only more liberal politically but the increasing social and political power of the bourgeoisie meant that their values, including the importance of domestic space, had spread throughout society.⁶⁷ However, the *Livre des esprits* early on set out a relatively radical position on gender and by the late 1860s spiritists were discussing the issues frequently. Throughout the nineteenth century, spiritist writers fell on both sides of the argument about women's relational character. They argued that women's role as mothers gave them special rights and powers; yet they continued to adhere passionately to the claim that all spirits, and thus all humans, were equal and should be treated as such. Although most spiritists followed a more "moderate" line like that of Léon Richer and Maria Desraismes, arguing for changes in women's status without arguing for the vote, women spiritists increasingly argued for women's right to act in the public sphere, and lived that argument by taking more active roles in group meetings and in the movement in general.⁶⁸ Spiritist arguments for women then, bridged the gap between relational and individualist feminism, justifying women's equality in a variety of ways that would appeal to dominant bourgeois values.

Allan Kardec, or the spirits he "codified," explicitly argued for sexual equality. (And here it is important to remember that all of the messages that Kardec

codified were obtained through female mediums.) According to the *Livre des esprits*, spirits were sexless, neither male nor female but incarnated as either. Upon taking human form, the spirit would choose its sex “in view of the trials which it [the spirit] has to undergo in its new corporeal life.” A spirit’s sex often changed from one incarnation to another, being first female, then male, then female again.⁶⁹ Since only the body and not the spirit had a sex, it followed that women should have the same rights as men. Inequality had its base in society rather than in nature. “Thus the only difference between the sexes is material, accidental and temporary. . . . From the equality of nature and of origin, logic concludes *the equality of social rights*.”⁷⁰ Inequality was seen as a product of “the cruel and unjust supremacy which man has usurped over [woman]. It is a result of social institutions, and of the abusive exercise of strength over weakness.”⁷¹

The *Livre des esprits*’ most radical stance involved the doctrine of marriage. Marriage must become a voluntary union of equals. Marriage, best based strictly on affection, should last only as long as that affection did. When asked about marriage, the spirits reportedly answered that the “absolute indissolubility of marriage . . . is a human law, altogether contrary to the law of nature. But men may change their laws.”⁷² *La Femme et la philosophie spirite*, an anonymous work dedicated to the ways spiritism emancipated women, argued that spiritist belief would bring a time when “we will see, on other worlds if not on earth,” unions entered into only because of reciprocal affections.⁷³ Again we see the importance of the romantic socialist influence on spiritism. Like Proudhon, one of the most prominent socialists after 1848, spiritists saw the couple as the basic unit of society. However, in a distinct departure from both mainstream society and Proudhon, they rejected the assumption that women must be forced to remain in marriage and instead argued, with Fourier and Saint-Simon, that marriage must be companionate, full of mutual effort and sharing.

Kardec saw women as full participants in the movement as well. In his 1862 *Voyage spirite*, a publication that chronicled his peregrinations through France teaching spiritism, Kardec claimed that the triumph of spiritist ideas would bring the legal emancipation of women and that if the equality of women ought to be recognized anywhere, it should definitely be in the camp of the spiritists. To exclude women from meetings would be to insult their judgment. Moreover, including women in meetings assured the “urbanity” and “gravity” of the meeting. This gravity would keep from fueling any mocking voices because the presence of women required closer attention to manners and forbade the “letting-go of meetings exclusively made up of men.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, Kardec did not imagine having women would be a source of mockery.

Spiritism viewed women as individuals in terms of souls; yet as incarnated humans they were most often discussed in relation to their place within the family. The spiritists’ call for equality did not deny the differences between men and women. Like many contemporaries, spiritists defined women as morally supe-

rior. Women's moral superiority and greater emotional sensitivity suited them for safeguarding morality and for caring for others; men's more rational nature equipped them to act in the affairs of the world. Along with this common view, however, spiritists followed romantic socialists in privileging discussion of women and their roles. Kardec had read Fourier and integrated his ideas on female equality into spiritist doctrine, including implying that women should be sexually free, as we saw above.

Most spiritists, however, preferred a less challenging view of women, emphasizing the bourgeois view of women as mothers within the home. Women should have equality, but equality in difference, rather than becoming like men. A lively discussion in the *Revue spirite* in 1867 concerned the reading aloud, at the "Société spirite de Paris," of two articles from the French press on women's position in America and in England. One correspondent argued that the "true" place of women was assigned not by society but by nature itself. To cross these natural lines would create monsters. "If women have incontestable rights, nature has hers that she can never lose. . . . A woman who makes herself man abdicates her veritable royalty; she is viewed as a freak."⁷⁵ Yet published with this was the imprimatur of the spirits supporting women's emancipation and education. A "Somnambulisme spontané," offered by (male) medium Morin of the Parisian "Société des études spirites" on the subject, "What influence should Spiritism have on the condition of women?" echoed standard bourgeois republican arguments about the need for women to be educated in order to raise their children well. The same spirit communication also argued that "early childhood being necessarily entrusted to woman, when she is educated, social regeneration will have made an immense step forward."⁷⁶ But the spirit speaking also called for "emancipation," and argued that women had already proved themselves adept at certain of the sciences and tactful in business, and that female doctors would be a good thing, if only for other women. Morin, or the spirit, argued that men needed to change: "Let man destroy the barriers that his self-love opposes to the emancipation of women. . . . Woman, know this, has the divine spark just as you do, because woman is you, as you are woman."⁷⁷ This formulation echoed the androgyny that Reynaud and others had taken from the Saint-Simonians. Morin went beyond the idea that the soul was neutral to imply that the soul was androgynous, or at the least that humans were. Only once the androgynous character of society was recognized and achieved would social regeneration be complete.

Spiritism thus challenged the hegemony of gender roles. Marc Baptiste, a theorist for the *Revue spirite* in the 1870s, combined a typical view of women as mothers with a call for them to reject masculine domination. Women, he argued, must repulse the honeyed words which brought them to the "service of pride and domination [by men] in the name of obedience and humility." Only by reducing the over-masculine and warlike character of society could war and tyranny be avoided. Women, who had known too well the bitter fruit of servitude, must

teach their children to see that domination as anathema, tyranny as insupportable.⁷⁸ By teaching their children to avoid hatred and by instilling insurmountable barriers against tyranny, women would both become emancipated and emancipate the world through a humanitarian revolution. Women's moral authority, here seen as a necessary complement to and control on the political authority of men, held the key to ending the oppression of all people.

Baptiste held the most radical of spiritist positions on women, and did so relatively early in the movement. The defeat of 1871 may have led Baptiste, like others, to search for social flaws to explain German victory. Certainly his vehemence far exceeded calls he made in a similar teaching work published in 1870 and aimed at "the peasantry."⁷⁹ Yet his position probably reflected that of, at least, the elite of Parisian spiritism. His books were published by the *Librairie Spirite*, the bookstore of the "Société des études spirites." More importantly, he, along with P.-G. Leymarie, held primary responsibility for the long lead articles featuring doctrinal theory that began each month's issue of the *Revue spirite*. These articles made him an authority in the minds of many spiritist readers.

The spiritist view of gender roles included an implied criticism of contemporary views of masculinity as well as of femininity. When Baptiste critiqued war, he criticized the quest for honor and valor so much a part of masculine gender roles. Men found in spiritism an outlet for religious beliefs repudiated by nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois values. Just as women were "naturally" superstitious and irrational, men, as men, were constructed by much contemporary belief as too rational to need religion. Yet many men quick to scoff at the Catholic church found themselves no less in need of metaphysical explanations than their female compatriots. Spiritism offered such explanations in liberal terms, combining spirituality and republicanism into a package that offered both science and the supernatural.⁸⁰ As noted below, men who had "feminine" characteristics found power and authority as mediums; a likely reversal of their experience outside spiritism.

The worker medium Guillaume also argued that gender norms had created a skewed and repressive world. The very first crime had been male—Cain's slaying of Abel. Emancipating women would solve the problems that flowed from this first social crime. Guillaume's spirits shouted their opinion that women's role was to save society: "Permit her to speak and to act; she will do so WITH JUSTICE, AUTHORITY AND LOVE. RENDER TO WOMEN THAT WHICH BELONGS TO WOMEN, HER[sic] RIGHTS, HER LIBERTY, HER INDEPENDENCE, AND ALL WARS WILL CEASE."⁸¹ Guillaume's guiding spirit connected women's liberty with their spirituality, arguing that women would support the liberty of all, just as they had supported the Catholic religion, thus regenerating society. Guillaume's opinions, like those of Baptiste, show the spiritist tendency to argue, like the romantic socialists and Saint Simonians, that society could only be judged and bettered by how well women were treated. The most advanced societies, socialists believed, offered women not just protection but equality.⁸²

On the whole, spiritism supported emancipation, but it also sent ambiguous messages about how free women should be. This may well reflect the prominence of men in doctrinal formulation. The observant reader will have already noted that the thinkers cited in this section are exclusively male. As in other movements, even those men holding progressive views might often share the prejudices of their culture. Spiritist views on marriage echo those of male Saint-Simonians who concentrated on the importance of emotion. In contrast, female Saint-Simonians, like later socialist feminists, emphasized economic inequity, within marriage as well as outside it, as a cause for female inequality.⁸³ Spiritists generally did not discuss the question of female economic dependence or independence, instead assuming women as existing within a family economic unit.

Certainly spiritist definitions of women's nature varied; women's nature and place was a constant topic of cultural conversation for all of Europe in the nineteenth century. Yet doctrine did posit female equality and called for female participation in the movement. Women answered this call eagerly. An examination of women's participation shows that they made good use in practice of the rights that doctrine secured for them in theory.

Women made up a constant presence in spiritism. No organized spiritist group excluded women from its membership. Often groups expressly included women by mentioning female equality in their statutes.⁸⁴ Percentages of women spiritists can be gained impressionistically. The *Revue spirite*, in an article written to de-emphasize the importance of women in the movement, claimed they made up only 30 percent of spiritists.⁸⁵ Research for this study found approximately the same proportion, about 27 percent female.⁸⁶ However, this estimate is probably low, perhaps significantly so. As in many situations, women often remain unheard by the historic record. They were the most anonymous among the already anonymous spiritists; rarely named, their individuality is effaced in descriptions of group meetings which simply list "several women" present. The few detailed records extant do show women actively participating, increasingly so as the century progressed.

Spiritism provided women with a means to speak publicly for women's views and women's rights. As noted above, Olympe Audouard publicized spiritism and women's rights together. A few women published strictly spiritist periodicals, although the majority of these short lived journals continued to be run by men. Both Clémence Guérin in 1863 and Honorine Huet in 1867 published journals under the name *Progrès spiritualiste*; both women used their editorial position to promote what they saw as women's strengths and values. Guérin noted that she received constant questions about the paper, "the principal, the most formidable" of which concerned the sex of the editor. She claimed full credit, reminding her readers in a playful equation of sex and nouns gendered feminine in French, that many beautiful things are of the female gender: flowers, music, religion, and reason. Guérin also underlined the spiritist view of the arbitrary nature of sex by pointing out that, in another incarnation, she might well have been a man.⁸⁷

Writing became an important outlet for many spiritist women. They published pamphlets of collected spirit communications, giving advice to both men and women on how to live moral lives. They also took part in the public debate over spiritism, writing in local editorial columns and in the columns of the *Revue spirite* and elsewhere. Mlle. Elise Arnaud published, at her own expense, a "Réfutation" of the abbé Fresquet's *Spiritisme démasqué et jugé* which demonstrated not only Arnaud's sarcastic wit at the expense of the Jesuits but also that she closely followed current arguments in the Parisian presses.⁸⁸ As in the case of women at spiritist meetings, the numbers of women writers is probably greater than the evidence implies. In the nineteenth-century male world of literature, many women wrote under male pen names; spiritist women were no exception. Women's most prominent role, however, was to act as mediums, bringing the words of the spirits into the world of men.

Pushing Gender Boundaries

Many of the examples of women in spiritism involve female mediums. Gaining recognition in the spiritist press, one of the few sources available to the historian, meant acting in some extraordinary way, either through mediumship, leadership, writing and publishing tracts or spirit messages or through participation in a séance described in the press.⁸⁹ Although women who were not mediums participated in all these manners, those gifted as mediums were more likely to do so, because they had not only their own authority but that of the spirits behind them. Mediumship accentuated all of the ways in which women could participate in spiritism, giving them a vehicle to express and meet their own needs, as well as to serve those of the group.

Spiritist doctrine indirectly celebrated women as mediums. Although both men and women acted as mediums, and doctrine did not specifically argue that women made better mediums, the qualities deemed most conducive to mediumship were those that contemporary French culture most often associated with women and characterized as "feminine." Mediums should be volatile, emotional, sensitive: all "feminine" qualities perfect to attract the spirits. The spirit of Erastus (a disciple of St. Paul) described the best mediums: persons "endowed in the highest degree with the mediumistic faculties of expansion and penetrability Impressionable natures, persons whose natures vibrate to the least sentiment, to the smallest sensation, whom moral or physical influence, internal or external, easily affects, are subjects very apt to become excellent mediums."⁹⁰ Mediums should also be sincere, humble and trusting, because this showed a genuine desire for instruction which would please the spirits. The nineteenth century characterization of women as emotional, spiritual, and morally superior to men played directly into this definition. A spirit communication addressed to "mediums of all ages, sexes, and conditions" taught that the highest spirits came

to mediums of high moral quality.⁹¹ These qualities were by no means limited to women, and men often figured prominently in the movement as mediums.⁹² It is interesting that even Kardec, who prized rationality above all else, especially in communications from spirits, never argued that a rational, i.e., male, medium would more easily attract a rational spirit. This despite the argument that like attracts like and non-serious mediums will attract frivolous spirits. Thus French spiritism promoted qualities in mediums, both male and female, which could be seen as feminine. This may account for the fact that numbers of male mediums seem to have been higher in France than in American and British spiritualism.⁹³ There are several possible reasons for this difference, especially the emphasis on rational discussion and logic (i.e., “masculine characteristics”) as the deciding factors in matters of doctrine. Also, the spiritist movement in general in France seems to have involved a higher percentage of men than in other countries. However, the definition of traits considered feminine as the best means to obtain spirit communication meant that women, or men with “feminine” characteristics were valued as mediums; certainly women enjoyed power equal to men’s in this respect.

Female mediums often took charge at spiritist meetings. Women’s culturally expected silence could be easily broken by a woman speaking with an authority she claimed from the spirits. The spirits were invoked to support mediums’ power. The medium Brunel (sex not given) received a communication that named mediums the “apostles of the future”; they should be treated with respect and some awe as “divine messengers.”⁹⁴ Théodore Flournoy observed that, “Mediums are usually surrounded by a halo of veneration, which prevents anyone from touching them during their trances. . . . No one therefore would, under ordinary circumstances, dare to attempt any manipulation of the medium.”⁹⁵ Flournoy referred to physical manipulation but the observation may be extended to mental manipulation or the attempt to control mediums. Their connection to the spirits protected both their bodies and their opinions from invasion.

The fickleness of spirits gave the medium power over whether any questions at all were answered. The medium must attain the proper state of mind to receive a communication from a high spirit.⁹⁶ An unhappy medium meant a feeble communication at best and the president of any spiritist group knew this well and did his (occasionally her) best to assure that the mind of the medium be at rest for the séance. Any distress on the part of the medium could terminate a session with the spirits. Henri Sausse lamented the end of a very fruitful series of sessions when the female medium in his group weakened and became fretful.⁹⁷ This malady, like many suffered by mediums, appeared as much mentally based as physically. After a rest and much pampering, the medium again began sessions to bring spirit advice on healing and to provide manifestations of roses and other flowers. Thus the medium held considerable control over the group by the simple fact that without his or her goodwill and good health, no spirit communications could be obtained.

The nineteenth-century view of women as subordinate to men and generally occupying the private sphere did not make it easy for women to use their own voice in the public sphere. Women mediums used the strength of authority lent by the spirits to publish their expressions of women's needs. Mme Emilie Collignon's writings exemplify the way spiritism acted as a support from which individual writers could garner strength and confidence. She apparently began her medium work with Jean-Baptiste Roustaing in 1861, acting as his medium for a major spiritist work on doctrine, *Spiritisme chrétien*.⁹⁸ First publishing in 1864 in the spiritist journal *Sauveur des peuples*, where her major communications addressed "educating mothers," Collignon followed in 1865 with a book on *Entretiens familiers sur le spiritisme* (Friendly Conversations on Spiritism).⁹⁹ She stressed women's issues again, especially the need for female education, and discussed women's needs specifically. Her preface allowed the reader an insight into her trepidation over her own authority. She discussed her mediumship and how even that was achieved only with the promise given by the spirits through another woman, one Mme Trély, a magnetic medium who told Collignon that the spirits would come to her. According to Collignon, these spirits, not herself, were the authors of the "friendly conversations." Without the spirits, she told readers, she could never have written a word. Hers was the hand; the thoughts came from the spirits.¹⁰⁰ This work was accepted and praised by Allan Kardec and touted as an important work by spiritist magazines throughout France.

After five years writing as a spiritist and gaining confidence, when Mme Collignon again took up the pen, she no longer felt the need of the authority lent by the spirits. Her next works were as concerned with women as ever, but she wrote from her own authority. Her *Esquisses contemporaines* (1870) contained essays and poetry on women's issues and advocated the emancipation of women. In words that might have made Betty Friedan proud, Collignon told women to take up the pen. Writing offered, she said, the perfect counterpoint to the boredom of housework and the strain of having children around. Although women shouldn't neglect their primary occupation of raising a family, they shouldn't fear the ridicule they might experience as women writing.¹⁰¹ Collignon herself overcame that fear through the process of writing as a medium, where she didn't have to take full responsibility for the risk and the unseemliness of a woman expressing opinions in the public sphere.

Collignon later went further, from public words to public actions. In 1872-73, she attempted to set up a school for working class girls in Bordeaux and used her writing skills, learned through mediumship, as well as her spiritist connections to do so. August Vauchez, who dabbled in spiritism and worked hard in the *Ligue de l'enseignement* introduced Collignon's work to the League president Jean Macé. When Mme Collignon wrote to Macé asking for a supportive introduction to her last work, *L'éducation dans la famille et par l'état* (Education by the family and by the state, 1873), it was immediately forthcoming.¹⁰² This work shows Collignon moving completely into the political arena. It addressed men as

much as women and delineated the role each sex, and the state itself, should play in the education of both boys and girls. Spirit mediumship gave Emilie Collignon an arena in which to hone her writing skills and to gain the confidence and support from which to criticize social and political institutions. Although her ideas struck no original chord, as many others inside and outside spiritism said similar things, her career illuminates the role mediumship played in freeing people, and especially women, to express their political opinions.

The range of spiritist writing and thinking on gender not only challenged traditional gender roles and created spaces for women's expression but also argued for a re-gendering, or a non-gendering, of society. This argument remained implicit rather than explicit in spiritist thought in most cases. In terms of their doctrine, their imaginings of a more equal world, and in their playing out of the spiritist couple, the spiritist movement supported and kept alive romantic socialist visions of an androgynous world. This comes out most clearly in the spiritist couple, where "androgyny" is less that of a being that is neither sex but of a composite being that is both.

Spiritist ideals of marriage viewed the couple as one social unit. As mentioned above, the basis for this view could be found in Saint-Simon, Leroux, Reynaud, and others.¹⁰³ Spiritism promoted a companionate marriage, seeing each union as a partnership based on understanding between spouses. In many cases spiritist husbands and wives worked together in spirit circles and sometimes even in publishing ventures. Several leading spiritist couples provided a model of this ideal in action. Certainly Allan Kardec and his wife Amélie Boudet provided a strong example of a cooperative marriage. Kardec, as the humble educator Hippolyte Rivail, married Boudet in the early 1830s, when she had already accomplished much. Boudet was a teacher, a poet, and had published works on pedagogy as well as a book of stories. She was nine years older than Kardec, a fact commentators rarely failed to mention, perhaps as proof that the marriage was truly one of mutual affection. After their marriage, they taught together at their own school until forced to close it in 1835.¹⁰⁴ When Rivail became Kardec and started the new project of spiritism, Boudet continued her equal participation. She helped him with the organization of the *Revue spirite*, although if she wrote for the journal, her articles went unsigned. Fellow spiritist leader Gabriel Delanne praised Boudet's devotion to Kardec and the care she gave him.¹⁰⁵ Despite this image of the angel of the hearth, Boudet moved as much on the business side of spiritism as anyone. After Kardec's death in 1869, she continued to administer the *Revue* and created the "Société anonyme pour la continuation des Oeuvres spirites d'Allan Kardec."¹⁰⁶ Mme Veuve Kardec remained popular and active among spiritists until her death in 1883. The Kardec's offered other spiritist couples a model of a successful spiritist marriage; the Delannes and the Leymaries, who followed the Kardec's as couple-leaders of the movement, furthered this tradition, providing in their turn a model to rank and file spiritists. The Malets too, briefly filled this niche. M. Malet took over the

leadership of the “Société parisienne des études spirites” upon Kardec’s death; his wife acted as a medium and contributed writings to the *Revue spirite*.¹⁰⁷

These couples differed from the Kardecs in that the women were less active in organization and instead participated through mediumship. (MM. Delanne and Leymarie were both mediums as well.) Yet these marriages too exemplified the spiritist ideal. They did not strictly separate public and private worlds, but instead provided a space within which women and men worked on the common project of spiritism. While not all followers could tread this path, spiritist example and doctrine created a vision of a couple as working together as one unit.

This vision of the androgynous couple took its most extreme form among a small group of workers in the *Groupe Sainte* in Lyon who again connected androgyny with the regeneration of society. They proposed that they and other spiritists were working toward the creation of “the city of Jesus-Mary” whose flag bore the solid triangle of work, intelligence, and love. These workers saw “intelligence,” or understanding and knowledge, as the child of work. Intelligence, born of work, has put itself “at the service of the great and powerful” and, “without realizing it, they [the great and powerful] have forged chains for themselves.”¹⁰⁸ The workers, hoping to break the chains “forged by political, religious, and learned powers” offered instead the love of Jesus-Mary (a clearly androgynous divine being) and the power of labor as the means to build the perfect society. These views confirmed the general spiritist view that a new society would mean new gender roles.

Simple participation in spiritism also moved in small ways toward undermining gender divisions. The combination of the spiritual world with the scientific, as spiritism pressed its claim to be a scientific religion, meant a melding of two disciplines that had been assigned, by the social norms of the day at least, to separate realms and separate sexes. In spiritism, both men and women participated in both realms without recognizing a division between them. Spiritism focused on a “family” of believers, bringing men theoretically into the domestic sphere. Physically, spiritism was associated with the domestic sphere as well, since most meetings were held in private homes. Men found reason within the confines of “women’s” domestic space; they also learned sensitivity there. Women mastered the language of fraternity so prevalent in the “male” public sphere. If many spiritists continued to think in terms of separate duties for men and for women, spiritism nonetheless unsettled the certainty with which those spheres had previously been divided. These were subtle challenges and contributed perhaps less to overturning the existing society than to creating a realm of difference within it that could gradually be expanded as it taught men and women to think in and live in ways they had not previously employed.

Like new gender norms, democratic politics does not spring unbidden from the needs of the oppressed; it must be learned by steady practice. Philip Nord has shown how various private associations helped men become accustomed to speaking in terms of, and fighting for, democracy.¹⁰⁹ Although the discourse of

democracy had been current since at least the French Revolution, Nord's insight into how people came to truly incorporate these ideas into their lives as expectations illuminates the process of politicization. Nord argues that without constant exposure to the ideas of democracy, without discussing them as obtainable in certain spheres, and without seeing them obtained, even in minor ways, the (male) lawyers, Protestants, and Jews he studied would not have learned the language of democratic participation. Their experiences in organizational government made them eager advocates of a more liberal political system.

A similar phenomenon occurred in spiritism, especially but not only with regard to social solidarity for all and equality for women. Spiritism provided one, although not the only, means by which women's equality and participation could be discussed and even practiced on a limited scale. Not until women had experienced some equality within the home and private group could they graduate to demand it on the grand, public scale. Spiritism offered spaces of opportunity for women to act and did give very broad interpretations of those boundaries. Again like Philip Nord's subjects, women and working class men learned the experience of speaking and acting, socially and politically, and of being equal within their private group. The spiritist meeting, like freemasonry, like bourgeois circles, offered a new source of politicization. The group meeting put values into action, thus moving from theory to practice, and providing an important step in assimilating the political process.

Spiritism provided a variety of ways for spiritists to challenge and rewrite their world. All of these are political in the largest sense, although most had little direct effect on politics. Their effect must be seen instead in the ability of the average spiritist to imagine herself in some control of defining the world and accepting or working to change society. These are the basics of the politicized citizen. Spiritism thus helped integrate its followers into contemporary political discussions and to spread republican and socialist values. It did this by challenging a divide key to many republicans, that of spirituality and politics. Spiritism, by associating social regeneration with spiritual quest, helped integrate that spirituality into the political. By not naming it as directly spiritual, it also helped create a link for spiritists at least, and probably for others influenced by these same forces, between a particular vision of a continuing afterlife and a serious and sustained politics of equality.

NOTES

1. The insistence on spirituality, especially in the face of scientific materialism, is treated in chapter four.
2. Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment 1848-1852* (Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) both explore the ways in which associations and groups functioned as a means of politicization.
3. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1984). Certeau explores ways in which non-producers of culture assimilate and change that culture.
4. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 10.
5. Emily Groszows Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Omotokyo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1993), 13-16, quote on 14.
6. For more on this in the case of British spiritualism, see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room, Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).
7. Among others, Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) explores ways that popular religious beliefs and hopes for the future could be combined into political action. See chapter one for a discussion of this question.
8. A. Desliens, "Discours d'ouverture" pronounced on the inauguration of a spiritist circle at 44, rue des Batignolles, Paris, in 1870. Quoted in "Inauguration d'un Cercle spirite à Paris," *Revue spirite* 1870: 155-56.
9. Desliens, "Discours d'ouverture," *Revue spirite* 1870: 153.
10. John Warne Monroe, "Evidence of Things Not Seen," (Ph.D. diss, Yale University 2002), 165-67; 209-216.
11. Desliens, "Discourse d'ouverture," *Revue spirite* 1870: 154.
12. Desliens, "Discourse d'ouverture," 153.
13. *Revue spirite* 1884: 495-96.
14. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 221-22.
15. Léopold Dauvil, *Souvenirs d'un spirite* (Paris, 1908), 73, 80.
16. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Land of Mist," in *When the World Screamed and Other Stories*, vol. 2 Professor Challenger Adventures, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990), 149. Doyle was a convinced British spiritualist and this story promotes the experience of spiritualism.
17. Kardec, *Book on Mediums* (York Beach, MN: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1989), 434. Although Kardec discouraged "frivolity," or lighthearted exchange with spirits, this continued to hold great popularity with many spiritists.
18. Kardec, *Book on Mediums* 438-440, quotes 440.
19. Kardec, *Book on Mediums*, 446, 447.
20. Archives Départementales de la Gironde, 4M433. (Hereafter AD Gironde).
21. Statutes of all three groups can be found in AD Gironde, 4M433. I use these

examples here, despite the late date of formation of the groups, mostly out of necessity. Charters where groups actually set out their rules are extremely rare, especially during the Second Empire when to do so would have been more difficult and possibly have brought unpleasant official notice. These groups show the spirit described by earlier groups and, if anything, the movement was less rather than more radical in its democratic tenor as the century progressed (see chapter four) so it is fair to argue that earlier groups would have been, if anything, more democratic due to their lack of structure, as the next example illustrates.

22. "Correspondance," *Revue spirite* 1871: 282.

23. Archives de la préfecture de la Police BA/880. (Hereafter AP.) A police description of a presumably typical meeting in 1878, at the home of M. and Mme P.-G. Leymarie, painted a tableau of an open space for airing experiences, with no particular authority or order.

24. *Progrès spiritualiste* 1867, n.p., describes a meeting at Mlle. Huet's which follows this process.

25. I have seen some of this writing, in an interview with M. Roland in November 1991 in Paris. Written by Mme Roland, who acted as medium, on plain typing paper, the words were blurry, with individual letters wavy and indistinct. Sometimes great spaces separated one line from another, while at other times they appeared to have been written almost one atop the last. M. Roland kindly "translated" what looked like near hieroglyphics into French for me; unfamiliar with the process, I wasn't able to make much of it out. In places the group had copied out "translations" beside the original.

26. *Revue spirite* 1868: 41.

27. "Correspondance," *Revue spirite* 1874: 93. The group claimed it had been founded in 1188 by Saint Eloi, who they still called their "spiritual president." Other than charitable activities, group members received communications from spirits, notably, of course, from Saint Eloi himself.

28. The miners announced their *caisse* in a letter to *Revue spirite*, (1873): 44. All of the Bordeaux groups mentioned above created *caisse de secours*, see AD Gironde 4M433. In Lyon and Tours, where spiritists were largely workers, *caisses* acted as a main focus for the groups. For Sausse, see his *Biographie d'Allan Kardec: Discours prononcé à Lyon le 31 mars 1896* (Lyon, 1896), preface. In addition, many Parisian groups mention having *caisses*.

29. Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1860-1910* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 141-170, passim.

30. Pierre Bellue, *Révélation et nouvelles communications* (Toulon, 1868), no page numbers.

31. Also, politically, a world that had originally known no workers could stand as evidence against those that argued that work was natural and inevitable. Stendahl's *The Red and the Black* illustrates many of the social tensions of the 1830s that romantic socialists hoped to ease.

32. Guillaume Renaud, *Manifestation spirite par l'écriture inconsciente* (Lyon, 1860), part I, 16.

33. Renaud, *Manifestation spirite*, part I, 44, 22.

34. Olympe Audouard, *Le Monde invisible* 1867: 231-232.

35. This chapter uses republican in the broad and non-party way it was used prior to

the 1880s.

36. Daniel Fabre, "Du messager des âmes au spirite en Languedoc," *La Mort aujourd'hui* (Rivages: Marseilles, 1982), 100.

37. Timoléon Jaubert, *Spiritisme, un magistrat convaincu* (Bordeaux, 1863).

38. See *Revue spirite bordelaise* 1864: 31 and *Echo d'Outre Tombe* 1864, *passim* for Jaubert's poetry.

39. René Nelli, *Histoire secrète de Languedoc* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1978), 185.

40. *Revue spirite*, 1875: 13; J. Malgras, *Les Pionniers du spiritisme* (Paris: Librairie des sciences psychologiques, 1906), 94-95.

41. Victor Tournier, *Instruction pastorale sûr le spiritisme par Mgr. l'Archevêque de Toulouse (Carême 1875) suivie d'une refutation* (Liège, 1875). See chapter five for a more in-depth discussion of Tournier's anti-clericalism.

42. *Revue spirite* 1876: 271-73.

43. Malgras, *Les Pionniers*, 95.

44. *Revue spirite*, 1884: 329.

45. *Revue spirite*, 1872: 350.

46. *Spiritisme à Lyon* May 1870; *Vie posthume* 1886: 192.

47. Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 135 suggests this rise of positivism; for Martin and Flammarion, see *Spiritisme à Lyon* May 1870.

48. Katherine Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie: The Ligue de l'Enseignement and the Origins of the Third Republic, 1866-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See especially the introduction and chapter 1.

49. *Revue spirite* 1884: 20-21.

50. *Revue spirite* 1884: 452-53.

51. For more on Godin's *familistère*, see Thierry Paquot, *Le Familistère Godin à Guise: habiter l'utopie* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1998 [1982]); Robert Alan Mandel, "André Godin and the Familistère de Guise, 1817-1888: A Study of Industrial Paternalism and Social Reform" (PhD thesis, University of Toronto: 1978); *Godin et le Familistère de Guise à l'épreuve de l'histoire: actes du colloque de Guise du 21 mai 1988*, ed. Guy Delabre and Jean-Marie Gautier (Reims: Presses universitaires de Reims, 1989). The Familistère still exists and offers a museum and visits. For information, see "Familistère de Guise," <www.familistere.com> (15 March 2006). You can also virtually "visit" the site of the Familistère at "Le Familistère Godin à Guise" <<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/familistere.godin/>> (15 March 2006).

52. Lucie Grange, *Lumière* 1884, 85.

53. *Revue spirite*, 1884: 238.

54. Gustave Géley, *Reincarnation* (London: Ethel Archer, s.d. [written 1912, published post-WWI]), 49-50; Verdad, *Les Temps Meilleur* July 1901: 37. Both these authors include Godin among names key to thought on reincarnation.

55. Eugène Nus, *Choses de l'autre monde* (Paris: Dentu, 1880), 3.

56. See Nus, *Choses de l'autre monde*; *Les Dogmes nouveaux* (Paris, 1870); *Les Grands mystères, choses de l'autre monde, Les origines et les fins* (Paris, 1880). On Nus as propagator of spiritism, see Jules Bois, *Le Monde invisible* (Paris: Flammarion, 1902), 312; *l'Initiation* 1894: 190.

57. AP BA/1134.

58. AP BA/1134.

59. *Sauveur du peuple* 27 March 1864, n.p.

60. *Echo d'outre tombe* 1865: 3-4.

61. Maurice Agulhon, *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise: 1810-1848, étude d'une mutation de sociabilité* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1977).

62. Katherine Auspitz argues not only that many different ways of spreading republicanism were important, but also that radicals, when they re-entered the political fray in the 1860s, worked for a "personal wholeness" that could only be achieved in a republican society. Spiritists believed that the way to help create that wholeness was through integrating spirituality and politics into a shared system of egalitarian values. (See Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie*, 19).

63. Carol Harrison points out the importance of the gendering of the public sphere (and republican values) as male in her study of bourgeois emulation. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France: Gender, Sociability and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95 and *passim*.

64. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 101, 105.

65. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977 [1792]).

66. Olympe Audouard, *Papillon* 1861: 27; 231-239. Audouard discussed spiritist topics frequently in her journal.

67. Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot, eds. *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). See especially 96-165.

68. Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach" *Signs* 14/1 (1988), 119-157 and "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin de siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984), 648-670. James F. McMillan calls Richer and Deraismes "moderate" in comparison to Hubertine Auclert, but any call for women's equality at the time was only moderate in comparison; the idea itself remained radical. See McMillan, *France and Women: 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 136-37, 192-93.

69. Kardec, *Spirits Book*, 131.

70. *Revue spirite* 1867: 12 (original italics).

71. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 331.

72. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book*, 29.

73. *La Femme et la philosophie spirite* [anon.] (Paris: Librairie spirite, 1870), 186. This work was published anonymously, but the *Revue spirite* identified its author as one M. Hugonnet (*Revue Spirite* 1870, 166.) Hugonnet was also author of "Souvenirs d'un chef de bureau arabe" (Memoirs of an Arab Bureau Chief) which argued for the emancipation of Algerian women as a means of civilizing Muslim Algeria. According to the *Revue spirite* the leftist journal *Solidarité* found Hugonnet's work quite sensible. In their issue of 1 April 1870, *Solidarité* said that, "Whatever you think of the reality of communications from beyond the grave, you will find in this book the most reasonable and progressive ideas on the role of women in the family and society." (Quoted in *Revue spirite* 1870: 167).

74. Kardec, *Voyage spirite* (Paris, 1862), 93.

75. *Revue spirite* 1867: 165.

76. *Revue spirite* 1867: 167.

77. *Revue spirite* 1867: 167-168, quote on 168.

78. Marc Baptiste, *Lettres à Marie sur le spiritisme* (Paris, 1871), 29-30; quote on 29. As well as publishing, Baptiste traveled extensively, spreading spiritism.

79. Baptiste published two teaching manuals, one for women—his *Lettres à Marie*—the other aimed at rural believers: *Lettres aux paysans* (Paris, 1870).

80. This argument is fully explored in Frank Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Turner argues that British scientists who became spiritualists did so because of a need for an overarching explanation that fit their scientific way of organizing knowledge. Among these are Alfred Russell Wallace and F.W. Myers.

81. Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 14551. All capitals in original. Although he had a strong Catholic bent to his writings, Guillaume never mentioned the “original sin” of Adam and Eve, nor blamed that sin on Eve. Note that his early anti-war stance (1860) prefigures the worries about war that many thinkers voiced after the Franco-Prussian war.

82. Susan K. Grogan, *French Socialism and Sexual Difference: Women and the New Society, 1803-44* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan, 1992), 172.

83. Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 68-85.

84. The statutes of the “Amis de la Fraternité” in Bordeaux (1889) and those of the “Société des Etudes Spiritiques” in Paris exemplify these. AD Gironde 4m433; and *Règlement de la société parisienne des études spiritiques*, (Paris, s.d. [1870]) respectively. If exclusively male groups existed, I have heard no mention of them in any spiritist source. Certainly they would have been discouraged by both doctrine and contemporaries.

85. *Revue spirite* 1869: 5.

86. This is an unsystematic sample, including only those spiritists about whom their name and some further identifying material was available. The prevalence of anonymity in the movement made an extensive sample impossible. The sample was a very small percentage of actual spiritists, consisting of 892 spiritists, of whom 242 were women.

87. Guérin, *Progrès spiritualiste* 1863: 85.

88. Elise Arnaud, *Réfutation du livre de M. l'abbé Fresquet le spiritisme démasqué et jugé* (Fleury, 1876), 9, 30. A Mme Arnaud wrote for a later spiritist journal, Lucie Grange's journal *Lumière* in 1888; I do not know whether these two writers are the same person.

89. Like any historian, I am compelled to recognize that my sources may skew my results. That women mediums may not, in fact, have been completely representative of how women acted in the spiritist movement is certainly possible. However, enough examples of non-medium female participation exist to show that most female spiritists found some measure of freedom through the movement. As for mediums, their position of power in the movement, however representative they are, cannot be denied.

90. Kardec, *The Book on Mediums*, 115.

91. *Echo d'outre tombe* 1865: 4. The curious, skeptical, or proud (stereotypically fairly masculine character traits) were considered less likely to attract good spirits. An argument for good and moral mediums can be found in same journal, 1865: 1.

92. Here I am in some disagreement with other historians of spiritism, especially Nicole Edelman, who counts 8 out of 10 mediums as women. See her thèse de doctorat

“Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires: somnambules et médiums en France (1785-1914)” (Paris: Jussieu, 1991), published as *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France, 1789-1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995). My own figures, however, continue to find high incidence of male mediumship, and an admittedly unsystematic study suggests as many as 2/3 of mediums, at least in private spiritist groups, were men. Edelman and I could not adequately account for our different figures. She claims she counted mediums from the *Revue spirite*, but I have done that for the years 1869-1879 and found still 2/3 male. It is possible that Edelman utilized a “recommended mediums” column which began to appear on the inside cover page of the *Revue* during the early twentieth century. This list, recommending public, fee-charging mediums, does indeed show a high percentage of women.

93. In the American case, Laurence Moore cites figures showing 121 female mediums to 110 men in 1859. R. Laurence Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America,” *American Quarterly* 27/5 (May 1975): 202. For England, Alex Owen gives no definite numbers but states “although it appears that women outnumbered men, there were many outstanding male mediums.” See Owen, *The Darkened Room, Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, introduction [ii].

94. *Echo d'outre tombe* 1864: 3.

95. Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900 [1889]), 6-7.

96. Kardec, *The Book on Mediums*, 249. Doctrine calls for “calm and concentration.” Excited or upset mediums were seen as likely to attract inferior or mischievous spirits.

97. *La Paix universelle*, 1895. This group is described in a series of articles throughout the year.

98. Jean-Baptiste Roustaing, *Spiritisme chrétien ou révélation de la révélation*, 3 vols. (Bordeaux, 1866).

99. Emilie Collignon, *Entretiens familiers sur le spiritisme* (Paris & Bordeaux, 1865).

100. Collignon, *Entretiens familiers*, preface (no page numbers).

101. Emilie Collignon, *Esquisses contemporaines* (Bordeaux, 1870), preface (no page numbers).

102. Collignon’s request to Macé, along with his answer, are printed at the front of her *L’éducation dans la famille* (Paris, 1873).

103. Grogan, *French Socialism and Sexual Difference*, 192-94; Naomi Andrews, “Utopian Androgyny: Romantic Socialists Confront Individualism in July Monarchy France,” *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003): 437-58.

104. Henri Sausse, *Biografía de Allan Kardec* (Caracas, Venezuela: Mensaje Fraternal, n.d. [originally published in French, Paris, 1896]), 17.

105. Reprinted in *Revue spirite* 1991: 51. This obituary provides a good summary of the important part Boudet played in spiritism from its beginnings as an organized movement.

106. For more on this, see chapter two.

107. *Revue spirite* 1869, passim for Mme Malet’s medium contributions. Malet’s inaugural discourse can be found in the May issue (149); his presidency lasted only from

April through September 1869 but we see nonetheless that the couple were active together in spiritism.

108. Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 14551, 95-99.

109. Philip Nord *Republican Moment*. See also his "Republicanism and Utopian Vision: French Freemasonry in the 1860s and 1870s," *Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991): 213-229.

Chapter Four

Struggles for Legitimacy: Science and Religion

If science does not want these facts, ignorance will take them.
Victor Hugo¹

From its inception, spiritism was caught between two worlds that became increasingly separate as the century wore on: science and religion. As we have seen, the politics of reincarnation and spiritism in general put the movement directly in the main current of republican and socialist anti-clerical values. Allan Kardec described spiritism as both a philosophy and a new branch of science, arguing that it superseded religion by encompassing all religions. Yet spiritism was marginalized both by many in the mainstream left, especially the press, and by orthodox science, which rejected its interpretations as non-materialist. Spiritists sought the endorsement of science, and fought against the Church as a dead institution. In the end, however, spiritism functioned for its followers much more as a religion than as a science. It had the depth and emotional component of faith rather than philosophy, and the links to the transcendental. The factors that attracted followers to the movement, especially the idea of progressive reincarnations and the inclusion of a level of “enchantment” in the world, ensured that spiritism would create one of the first “new age” religions and remain on the margins of society.

Yet spiritism certainly did not aim for the margins. Instead, as we have seen, it used central values of the nineteenth century to define itself. Two key ways it did this were in the attempt to formulate itself in scientific terms and to reject the “backward” character of the Catholic church. This chapter explores spiritists’ efforts, especially at the end of the century, to court scientific orthodoxy, their struggle to critique and update religion, and the rejection of the movement by both. It looks first at the rise of psychical research and the struggle of spiritist leaders, especially Gabriel Delanne, to maintain control over spiritist facts.

Spiritist “facts” were the phenomena obtained at *séances*. By the end of the century, phenomena such as table turning, trance writing, the ability to make objects move or instruments play without any clear material cause, and the materialization of objects, including the mysterious “ectoplasm” which spiritists claimed was the materialization of spirits themselves, drew the attention of scientists studying the brain and its abilities. Led both by the popularity of spiritism and by new sciences such as psychiatry, orthodox scientists increasingly studied mediums and their abilities from the 1880s on.

By the early twentieth century orthodox science had contained and explained, to its satisfaction if not the spiritists’, the events obtained at *séances*. The result of orthodox investigations of spiritist phenomena was to separate the material phenomena from the spiritist explanation, and thus to undo the synthesis spiritists had struggled to forge between science and the metaphysical. Although at first they had courted scientific attention, spiritists strongly resisted orthodox science’s conclusions. They criticized the materialist values increasingly attached to the human mind which implied the secondary quality (or non-existence) of the soul. By the end of the century, spiritists were forced to choose between rejecting the transcendental or giving up the search for scientific legitimacy.

If spiritism lost its battle with science, it fared better in struggles with religion. Despite (or because of) a turbulent relationship with Catholicism, spiritism created a strong position in its religious claims. As in the case of science, spiritists tried to claim legitimacy through doing religion better than the Catholic church; the movement was vehemently rejected by the Catholic hierarchy. Catholicism itself had been weakened by the rise of science and the anti-clericalism of the Third Republic after 1877. By sharing that same anti-clericalism and building on the increasing individualism of belief, spiritism was able to carve out a function for itself as a modern, urban, popular religion.

Scientific Spiritists

From the 1850s to the 1870s, spiritism created a science of its own, one standing on very different foundations than the exact sciences. Spiritists taught moral strictures based on rational discussion of empirically observed events and named the process “science.” Although the terms of this science changed somewhat during the period, especially after Kardec’s death, spiritist science and orthodox science remained separate entities even into the 1880s.

During the 1860s, spiritism focused primarily on automatic writing and on the moral side of the doctrine. Until Kardec’s death in 1869, the movement, especially in Paris, remained sensitive to his priorities. Kardec described physical manifestations, those that resulted in the movement of furniture, or noises without specific meaning, as obtained by “mediums under physical influence” of

the spirits. While these phenomena were “subjects very worthy of observation,” they were generally caused by “spirits of an inferior order.”² Kardec judged spirit messages generated through automatic writing or trance speech more intellectually and morally valid. These messages, especially if couched in educated language, indicated the presence of advanced spirits. Mediums producing these phenomena he called “mediums under the moral influence” of the spirits.³

Kardec’s format mimicked scientific forms. In his textbook-like *Instruction pratique* on “*la science spirite*” and how to practice it, Kardec set out a hierarchy of spirit-induced phenomena, describing and classifying spirits, mediums, and communications. One difference between spiritism and the exact sciences was spiritism’s claim to breadth. The movement presumed jurisdiction over a broad field, “touching all points of metaphysics and morality and even, one could say, the majority of human knowledge.”⁴ Positioning itself as a source of general knowledge, rather than specific expertise, spiritism could not participate in the trend toward professionalization, a sure path to legitimacy.⁵

Kardec also differed from the scientists of his day, and from those who later analyzed what would be called “psychical phenomena,” in his assumptions about how to approach the phenomena. For simple manifestations, the scientific method of laboratory observation sufficed. However, if the phenomena showed “incontestable signs of intelligence,” as was the case in trance writing or table rapping that spelled messages, or in manifestations where the forms of spirits appeared, “the mode of experimentation should be completely different than that concerning essentially material phenomena.” For Kardec, the very nature of these phenomena, although all medium-produced, differed. Intelligent, or intellectual phenomena came from spirits, beings with wills and purposes of their own. The goal of spiritist science should be less to study them as phenomena than to communicate with and learn from them. “Our laboratory procedures are powerless to account for facts which belong to the intellectual order. . . . [T]his is precisely the error made by the majority of savants; they believe they are in the presence of one of these phenomena that science reproduces at will and on which one can operate as on a salt or a gas.”⁶

Spiritist science was thus inherently different than other sciences. Like them, it had phenomena that could and should be observed, recorded, and interpreted. But, unlike them, the emphasis was on moral rather than physical interpretation, and the spiritist observer had more to learn of spiritual planes than material causation. “The spirit phenomena are no more the province of the exact sciences than are questions of theology or metaphysics,” Kardec reminded his readers.⁷

Spiritism’s alternative vision of science claimed to transform both theological and reformist ideas into scientific fact. In an article titled “The Perpetuity of Spiritism,” the *Revue spirite* insisted that, “Spiritism will not deviate from the truth, and will not fear conflicting opinions, in so much as its scientific theory and its moral doctrine will be deduced from facts scrupulously and conscientiously observed.”⁸ Spiritists argued that although other reform movements

based only on systematic theories had failed, spiritism would grow as knowledge of the facts it was based on spread. Growth of spiritism and its scientific facts meant more than just a new religion. According to the author, probably Kardec, “the consequences [of the spread of spiritism] mean a complete revolution in ideas and in the manner of seeing the things of this world and of the other.”⁹ Despite all his scientific rhetoric, Kardec carved out for spiritism a separate area of study, one that used the discourse of science but claimed the privilege of philosophy and religion to not only describe but to prescribe in the areas of morals and of invisible but eternal truths.

When discussing scientific questions, spiritists linked their values with new scientific knowledge. René Caillé drew on current evolutionary arguments to support the spiritist belief in reincarnation. He asserted that evolution taught that all beings metamorphose and progress. Beginning with a discussion of the life-stages of creatures like tadpoles and coral, Caillé argued by analogy to show that “all beings have their metamorphoses and each appears to stop at death at a certain level that it surpasses in its next life, because nothing dies but only transforms itself and progresses.” Caillé hoped, “Later, aided by all the resources offered by spiritist-science, . . . to be able to prove that [all] beings continue still further their progressive march by entering a more subtle milieu, the ether, which presents itself only as the fourth state of matter.”¹⁰ Caillé mingled the scientific with the philosophical and even the political, if we keep in mind reincarnation as a justification for a “progressive march” in society as well. Caillé’s alternative science moved from scientific discourse to a critique of social beliefs and practices.

Many spiritist thinkers worked in this same manner, discussing a scientific theory or discovery and then integrating it with spiritist thought. They practiced a new science, one that merged spiritist beliefs with established knowledge. Spiritist science engaged in what Michel de Certeau called the “art of doing.” Rather than passively receiving new cultural knowledge (in this case scientific), spiritists appropriated it, merging it with their separate spiritist knowledge to create ideas that would challenge many of the assumptions of the dominant culture. De Certeau argues that “re-employment of an external power” (or knowledge) creates a new way of speaking that modifies function and meaning.

A way of speaking this received language transforms it into a song of resistance, but this internal metamorphosis does not in any way compromise the sincerity with which it may be believed nor the lucidity with which, from another point of view, the struggles and inequalities hidden under the established order may be perceived.¹¹

Spiritists continued to believe firmly in the power of science; what they refused to accept was the scientific establishment’s monopoly of it, their refusal to

address spiritism's own findings. The external factor re-employed by spiritists to integrate and reformulate scientific knowledge was the idea of fluid, or *fluidité*. This concept, born in orthodox science that had since been largely discarded, lay at the base of spiritism and magnetism as areas of heterodox thought throughout the nineteenth century.

Spiritists did not create the idea of invisible but powerful fluids. Post-Newtonian science followed two strands of Newton's thought. The one which gained most scientific acceptance emphasized force, the other posited a fluid or "imponderable" substance that acted upon matter. Newton himself called it the "æther." Although science placed less and less value upon the idea, it remained available to the popular mind to explain what seemed inexplicable—invisible agents such as electricity and magnetism.¹² Myriad popular theories rose and fell during the eighteenth century to explain new scientific knowledge of chemistry and electricity. Robert Darnton described the 1780s literate public and its indiscriminate fascination which, unable to "distinguish the real from the imaginary . . . seized on any invisible fluid, any scientific-sounding hypothesis, that promised to explain the wonders of nature."¹³ The situation Darnton studied had changed surprisingly little by the 1860s; enthusiasm for pseudo-science only spread more rapidly with higher literacy rates. I would argue that the "reality" of the pseudo-sciences had less to do with success than did their explanatory powers *combined with* an ability to adapt to and incorporate the culture of followers.¹⁴

Anton Mesmer's theories of magnetism lasted the longest and provided the direct source from which spiritists developed many of their ideas about fluid as an explanatory category. Mesmer described magnetic fluid (sometimes called force) as "universally diffused; it is the medium of a mutual influence between the heavenly bodies, the earth, and animated bodies."¹⁵ Magnetists used this knowledge to cure both body and mind. By "realigning" fluids that somehow had jumped the banks of their proper stream, magnetism cured ills resulting from fluid imbalances. With the advent of spiritism, magnetism found its identity mixed, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes less so, with the more spiritually-oriented group. Although jealousies and disagreements formed between certain proponents of magnetism and of spiritism, most recognized their shared beliefs; many magnetists believed their fluids had an extra-natural source, and spiritist mediums often contacted their spirits through trances brought about by magnetists. Each group praised and published the other.¹⁶

One of spiritists' most frequent criticisms of the scientific establishment was their emphasis on the material. Followers decried the scientific division between things of this world that could be explained and those of the next world, which could never be proven. The question of the interaction between matter and the immaterial was both solved and made paradoxical by spiritist doctrine. The spirit is not exactly immaterial, Kardec's guides taught him. "[I]ncorporeal would be nearer the truth. . . . Spirit is quintessentialised matter, but matter existing in a

state which has no analogue within the circle of your comprehension, and so ethereal that it could not be perceived by your senses.”¹⁷ Yet in order to act on matter, spirits must use matter. Spirits were englobed by a semi-material envelope called the *périsprit*, allowing them to influence matter to move planchettes, or tables, or mediums’ writing arms.¹⁸ Thus there existed not only an exchange of thought between spirits and their spiritist followers, but universal fluid itself moved from one being to another.

The fluidity of this exchange blurred the lines between the material and the immaterial, working to bring the other world firmly into this one. Spiritists replaced Descartes’ “I think therefore I am,” with “I am thought.” According to spirits’ teachings, “spirits are the individualisation of the intelligent principle.” and thought is no more than an attribute of soul.¹⁹ The most radical formulation of this idea made matter and thought two sides of soul. “The soul is a material substance which has as properties [only] thought.”²⁰

Spiritist alternative science exemplifies the quandary of many nineteenth-century thinkers who believed in science yet were unable to relinquish a religious explanation of the world. Spiritists used (what they described as) scientific method, often seen as the basis for materialism, to critique that same materialism. In spiritist doctrine, materiality was transformed from an either-or to a continuum. In Kardec’s categorizations of spirits, the most intellectually advanced, the most evolved, were also the least material. Spiritism overcame materialism by subsuming it into a greater process. Material existence became only one point, and a low one at that, on a progressive scale of spiritual improvement. By extension spiritists could argue that the values and politics of earthly materialism too remained a lowly, even “primitive” form of evolution and decision-making. Spiritists thus borrowed from ideas often linked with the general trend of Social Darwinism prevalent at the time. Their critique of contemporary materialist ideas, somewhat ironically, echoed contemporary racist thought which saw things closer to the earth and more material, usually “primitive” peoples, as less evolved, less civilized, less worthwhile.

The idea of fluidity merged the popularly scientific and the spiritual by insisting on the evolutionary quality of the soul. The spiritist doctrine of reincarnation could be seen as “scientific” in its repeatable quality: all souls progressed toward intellectual purity and all souls passed the same points in a series of reincarnations. Yet the import of such science remained spiritual and social. Theorists such as J.-B. Roustaing and René Caillé described the magnetic fluid as linking all beings one to another and to God as well. “Magnetic fluid binds everyone together, uniting all spirits, incarnate or not incarnate; it a universal bond that God gave us, to envelope us as a single being and to help us to climb to him by reuniting our forces.”²¹ Fluid acted as a universal bond; only solidarity among humans would allow them to reach God. Spiritists hoped their merger of science, spirit, and fraternity would convince others to follow their path. Although spiritists criticized science for limiting its vision to the material world,

as scientists seemed more interested in their phenomena, the tone of many spiritists changed. In the hopes of legitimacy and proof of their truths, they turned toward the scientific world.

Allan Kardec's vision would have created a separate science which criticized orthodox science and hoped to prove survival and other spiritist facts, using these to both justify and provide direction for social reforms. However, many spiritist-scientists found this path too rough and considered it unfruitful. Rather than remain on the margins, these thinkers hoped to convince orthodox scientists to join their research, to study spirit phenomena as natural events, rather than dismiss them as the fevered imaginings of simple folk.

This change reflected not only the passing of Kardec and coming of a new generation of leaders, but also a change in the way science was generally received by the masses. Prior to the 1880s, scientists themselves did not popularize new findings. They published mainly in specialized journals and wrote for other scientists. The popularization of science was done by non-scientists writing for non-scientists. In order to sell, these texts appealed to curiosity, to a sort of gossip, and to a love of the mysterious and the miraculous. Every newspaper carried a column detailing the new discoveries of science, often putting them in terms of battles and scandals amongst scientists. Popularizers themselves were interested in the marvelous. Camille Flammarion, one of the greatest popularizers, was friend and follower of Kardec. The abbé Moigno, publisher of the popular science weekly *Cosmos*, and Louis Figuier, publisher of *The Day After Death, or The Future Life according to Science*, concentrated on how science interacted with the marvelous or the religious.²² These popular texts shared spiritist concerns and echoed the words and views of spiritists. Spiritist journals thus followed a general cultural pattern of mixing the teaching of science with the taste for the marvelous. Science was a source for new marvels such as electricity and the telegraph; it could also help explain some of the old. This made those marvels and miracles no less magical, no less mysterious than they had ever been. Spiritist popularizers of science differed from other popularizers in their moral emphasis and by their critique of science, but used many of the same themes.

Scientific knowledge and popular awareness of it began to change after the 1870s. The 1880s saw the educational reforms which led to the introduction of science textbooks into public schools. Some scientists began to take an active part in popularizing their findings. Although this led to battles amongst scientists about the propagation of knowledge, among the masses it generally led to a more sophisticated understanding of at least the scientific method, and often the workings of science.²³

The spread of rudimentary scientific knowledge among the masses of spiritists, combined with the increasing importance of institutional specialization for acceptance as an orthodox science, led spiritist leaders to work toward cooperation with the scientific establishment.²⁴ Especially in Paris, leaders

Gabriel Delanne and Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie strove to convince scientists to accept their own work as scientific and to investigate medium phenomena. They read the works of psychologists and psychiatrists on hysteria and commented in articles in the spiritist press on strengths and weaknesses of these works. The 1880s found great hopes growing in spiritist circles that science would finally give the movement the attention followers believed it had long deserved. Spiritists and their supporters called on science to give credence to the new, more thoroughly methodical work achieved by spiritists who studied medium phenomena.

Michel Pierrssens, in studies of the beginnings of psychical research, argues that a “crisis of anticipation” was born from the gap that separated scientific knowledge from popular expectations that science could solve the problems of the social world.²⁵ Pierrssens sees this anticipation as increasing popular interest in table turning and psychical sciences, thus creating a fiction of “supernovation” or continuing innovation and change, aimed at perfecting knowledge and the world. This fiction, this hope, combined with and was fired by a strain of literature which featured the supernatural and the psychic as full of dangerous but intriguing possibilities for the future.²⁶

Popular novelist and historian Eugène Nus often offered his voice in public support of spiritists and occultists. In an effort to gain scientific attention for them, he addressed the dedication of his chronicles of *Choses de l'autre monde* (1880) to the savants. “Faculties, Academies, sacrosanct Corporation, I announce to you, and I prove to you, along with Crookes, Wallace, Zoellner and others, your equals or your masters, that you are on the edge of an immense discovery, the door of which is already ajar.”²⁷ Nus and others often cited what we might call the “Galileo phenomenon” to justify themselves to science. The *Revue spirite* listed Kardec among great men of ideas who were persecuted. The list included religious, philosophical, and scientific thinkers. “Brahma, Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Christ, Saint Paul, Gutenberg, Copernicus, Kepller, Galileo, Newton, LaPlace, Voltaire, Cuvier, Allan Kardec.” In the eyes of his adversaries, the *Revue* adds, Kardec “was a rebel (or heretic) who shook off the yoke of the authority of the Church and of science, in matters experimental and philosophical.”²⁸ Although the *Revue* of 1873 celebrated this rejection even as they rued it, later writers tended more to complaint than to acceptance of this treatment.

In early 1882, under the title “Martyrs of Science,” *La Lumière* conceded that new discoveries not understood by science would always be persecuted. Several months later, however, the editors seemed determined to change the situation.

The savants, in general, refuse their duty by not examining the phenomena [of spiritism]. Who then to appeal to, if not to the people of good sense spread throughout all the classes of society? If, less timid or less modest, they stand together, to

affirm with unanimous agreement, that which they have seen and understood, no academy could stand in the face of them.²⁹

This call to battle with science implied that orthodox science should remain responsible to the will of the public; yet it also implied that, in order for spiritist phenomena to be accepted as true, science must acknowledge them as such.

By 1885, it looked like those who wished for scientists to study spiritism would get their wish. A group of important psychologists and physiologists formed the new *Société de psychologie physiologique* (Society of Physiological Psychology) dedicated to the study of psychic phenomena by the scientific method of observation and experimentation. This society, with Jean-Martin Charcot as its president, included some of the biggest names of the day involved in the investigation of the subconscious mind. Pierre Janet, Théodore Ribot, Charles Richet, and Charles Féré all numbered among the officers. The optimistic editor of the spiritist journal *La Vie posthume*, M. Georges, declared that even though the group would study only physical psychic phenomena, rather than the moral and written teachings of mediums, they would surely be led “by the series and the logic of the facts, to take account of a factor too much neglected in the calculations of the savants: the invisible intelligent being.”³⁰ M. Georges, and many other spiritists, firmly believed science would finally admit the existence and survival of the soul, and spiritism as proof of those facts.

Scientists and the Spirits

The scientists who investigated turning tables at their first appearance in 1853 found little danger in them, except as a fraud against a credulous public. The most common explanation offered by the scientific community, apart from fraud, was that involuntary movement shifted tables and subtle cracking of bones or muscles accounted for rapping sounds.³¹ Involuntary movement involved an innocent sort of fraud, in which devotees of the table fooled themselves. William Faraday published in 1853 an account of a séance he observed in which the participants moved the table with their hands, although they were unaware of doing so.³² Similarly, in 1853 the *Journal des débats* republished an 1834 article from *Revue des deux mondes* detailing studies by Léon Chevreul which had proven that individuals merely thinking about making a movement could involuntarily cause that very movement, without intention or awareness of doing so. In 1854 respected scientist Jacques Babinet also argued, in the *Revue des deux mondes*, for involuntary movement as the cause of table turning.³³ Although table turners and spiritists claimed tables moved without being touched, scientists argued that this was simply self-delusion by eager practitioners. The scientific community was in agreement; the matter seemed closed.

The 1860s and 1870s saw little interest by the scientific community in spiritism. The movement continued to grow, however, and mediums went on to produce physical phenomena far beyond simply turning tables. Instruments played; flowers, candy, and even whole spirits materialized; and “ectoplasm,” a viscous, white or clear substance that purported to be either spirits themselves or some manifestation of the world beyond, was extruded from mediums’ mouths, noses, and breasts.³⁴ These phenomena were the stuff of both entertainment and spiritist “scientific” experiments.

In the 1860s popular medium Daniel Dunglas Home traveled Europe giving public performances, including one for Napoleon III. The Davenport brothers brought large audiences to halls in Paris and London. Observers, often magicians concerned with public fraud (or professional jealousy) strove to prove the most prominent of these mediums fakes. They succeeded with the Davenport brothers, whose ability to make instruments play and ghostly hands appear was replicated in 1865 by John Maskelyne, a British conjuror.³⁵ Although audiences rioted both in England and in France in 1865 and the Davenports had to flee the stage, they were still dazzling audiences in London in 1867 and were eagerly awaited in Paris.³⁶ Home was never proved a fraud; he retired in the early 1870s, “with no evidence of any weight that he was even privately detected in trickery.”³⁷ The same phenomena were also reported by spiritist societies and the scientific researches of highly respected observers such as physicist William Crookes in England. The 1870s saw increasing interest by scientists in England; the 1880s saw increasing membership in spiritist groups in France, along with an increase in the number of journals, which made the movement more visible.³⁸

Spiritism and its physical phenomena refused to go away. In addition, followers increasingly claimed the right to call themselves scientists and their movement scientific. The movement impinged on the territory of several scientific professions. Astronomers found spiritists busy describing the plural worlds of the cosmos. Spiritist healers, curing people through the advice of spirits, threatened the newly professionalizing autonomy of allopathic doctors.³⁹ Spiritists also claimed the spirit world was the source of phenomena that psychiatrists argued came from the subconscious. Both in Paris and in Marseille, scientifically inclined lay people created societies to study mediumistic phenomena. In 1878 P.-G. Leymarie and Gabriel Delanne founded the scientific-leaning *Société scientifique des études psychologiques* (Scientific Society of Psychical Studies) to act alongside the more morally inclined *Société des études spirites* (Society of Spiritist Studies). This group involved the most elite spiritists in Paris. Delanne invited scientists, from England as well as France, to participate in séances and to witness for themselves the supernatural skills of the best mediums; few of his invitations were answered.

Emile Boirac, rector at the *Académie de Dijon*, and one of the few scientists who showed interest in spiritist phenomena, explained to the scientific community the need to account for spiritism.

Suppose, in effect, that invisible, elusive beings, such as the so-called spirits, could intervene at any moment, pleasing their whims, in the phenomena of nature and of life . . . would it not render all science impossible, when it is supposed that it is always in the power of these beings to oppose and to suspend the action of natural laws? ⁴⁰

Boirac pinpointed the systemic problem that confronted spiritists. If science accepted their explanations, it destabilized its own foundation. If the spirits could change or override scientific laws, then science could be constantly changed and overridden. Yet science based itself on invariable laws. Although spiritists recognized this problem, they were unable to alleviate it; they never succeeded in establishing separate supernatural laws which governed spirit manifestations. Turning this weakness to their good, spiritists argued that the lack of predictable laws proved the “intelligence” of the phenomena; manifestations were created by thinking beings rather than by mere chance. Scientists disagreed. The lack of “laws” governing spirits remained one of the things that made scientists hostile to the spiritist hypothesis.

Thus the French scientific world was slow to study the phenomena produced by spiritist mediums. Eventually, however, as the events became increasingly popular, the scientific world needed to explain them. The *Société des phénomènes physiologiques* (Society [of the study] of Physiological Phenomena) took on the task in the 1890s and its members, especially Pierre Janet, became close observers not only of mediums but also of the spiritist movement. None of the members were spiritists; most were vehemently opposed to the hypothesis that mediumistic phenomena proved life after death. Charcot, Janet, and Féré all worked in the developing field of abnormal psychology. The very title of their society, with its emphasis on the physiological, indicated their materialist presumptions. All believed that mediumistic phenomena could be traced to the physical body in one way or another, usually to abnormalities of the nervous system. Charcot and Janet saw the phenomena almost wholly as negative, caused by hysteria.

Only Charles Richet viewed mediumistic phenomena positively. Richet and Charcot were old rivals. Although Richet had written on *Somnambulisme provoqué* in 1875, three years before Charcot, the latter never acknowledged his work.⁴¹ Richet continued to study somnabulists. In 1885 in Milan he met with Russian scientist Alexander Aksakov and Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso to observe Italian peasant medium Eusapio Palladino in her trances. Richet wanted to prove that the source of mediums’ abilities could be localized to a certain portion of the brain. He performed a second series of experiments in 1885 in Algeria, working with the medium Marthe Béreaud at Villa Carmen. This proved to his satisfaction that ectoplasm existed and that it was not a manifestation of hysteria. Further experiments with clairvoyance, published in

1890, proved to him that the brain as well as the body possessed untapped powers. Yet even Richet continued through his life to publicly deny the survival hypothesis. Richet's work, however, led others, such as William James' student Max Wundt, to avow that spirits must indeed exist. The spiritists were proud to claim Richet as supporting them. The same was by no means true of other members of the society.⁴²

It was Richet who provided the impetus for the new field of psychical research in France. In 1890 he founded, with one M. Dariex who edited it, the *Annales des sciences psychiques* (Annals of the Psychical Sciences). This journal later became the *Revue métapsychique*. When Richet's friend Jean Meyer founded a society for the propagation of spiritism in 1917, Richet persuaded him to also fund a laboratory for studying psychic phenomena. The *Institut Métapsychique Internationale* (International Institute of Metapsychology) was born in 1919.⁴³ The fact that Meyer founded two separate institutions indicates the degree of separation which had occurred between spiritism and the study of medium phenomena. Spiritists had since the 1850s claimed their observations of mediums were scientific; now, however, their explanations were neither the only nor the most scientific ones. Scientists who had been trained either in medicine, biology, or chemistry and who thus had the imprimatur of orthodox science offered explanations counter to the spiritist ones.

In the 1880s and 1890s, a period of time and works melded the two fields. Psychical research was clearly distinct from spiritual or metaphysical concerns after the formation of the *Institut Métapsychique*.⁴⁴ Before this, however, during a time of great curiosity and experiment, unorthodox scientists and amateur investigators offered materialist interpretations that continued to include ideas prominent among spiritists. Dr. Azam in Bordeaux studied hypnotism and helped introduce it to orthodoxy; Azam's subjects had been spiritist mediums and he remained friendly with and sympathetic to spiritists.⁴⁵ Dr. Baraduc's writing on invisible but material fluids sounded very similar to spiritist' and magnetists' beliefs about the fluidic body. These works echoed spiritist explanations, but stopped at the point of looking for a source of fluid beyond the natural body. Dr. Grasset explained mediumistic phenomena as a process of "exteriorization" of the physical being, which then acted as an invisible force to move objects or play instruments.⁴⁶ Grasset also published a survey of early psychical research in which he listed spiritism as a historical predecessor to "the occultism of today" which included mental suggestion, clairvoyance, and telepathy. This account, "Being a record of progress made in the reduction of occult phenomena to a scientific basis," categorized most mediumistic phenomena as false or very unlikely to be proven.⁴⁷ These works show that the shift from spiritist interpretations to interpretations based on the assumptions of psychical research was a gradual one, and one that incorporated many of the ideas of the lower science into the higher science. Yet though they were sympathetic, though they incorporated spiritist logic, amateur investigators such as Grasset and Dr. Paul

Gibier, who worked briefly for the *Institut Métapsychique*, ultimately refused the spiritist explanation. Such amateurs, like the spiritists, strove to be considered scientific and thus had to reject extra-natural explanations. The realm of scientific studies was the material laws of the world; cultural definitions firmly separated science from the domain of the soul. Although spiritists and scientists might examine the same phenomena, the philosophies behind their examinations determined differing and exclusive explanations.

Drawing on ethnological and sociological terms that separate science in past cultures into “deviant” or “legitimate,” Michel Pierrssens argues that there is no *a priori* way to term a science “deviant.” The legitimation is in the questions asked, rather than the scientific method of approach. In connection with spiritism then, he asserts that Richet and others who studied psychic phenomena studied them in a manner no different than they used in their other scientific exploits, and that psychical research could only be deemed “deviant” after the fact, and not at the time.⁴⁸ Richet’s biographer Stewart Wolf confirms Richet’s attitude matched this. However, as Wolf also shows, Richet’s approach to all his scientific ventures remained atypical. The majority of Richet’s colleagues, in respect for his position, did not publicly question his interest in the “psychic marvels.” However, privately and within established scientific institutions, they ignored his work and even chastised him for wasting his time and talents on such things.⁴⁹ Orthodox science immediately classified certain questions as deviant, unanswerable, or not worthy of scientists’ time. Among these were classed the survival of the soul, and any extranatural source of the powers of mediums.⁵⁰

By 1900, the scientific community in general had rejected spiritists’ explanations of mediumistic phenomena. At the fourth *Congrès de Psychologie* in Paris in 1900, spiritists and occultists had their last chance to participate in public dialogue with the scientists who had begun to study the same phenomena.⁵¹ In a section titled “Psychology and Hypnotism,” the spiritists were “allowed” to present their view. The leaders of the heterodox sciences turned out in force. Gabriel Delanne spoke on clairvoyance and telepathy; fellow spiritist leader Léon Denis on the capture by photo or other apparatus of human “radiations” that proved the workings of the spirits. A leading occult figure, Dr. Encausse (Papus), presented electric measurements of mediums to prove that they acquired more energy (implied to be extra-human) when they functioned as mediums. M. Dariex, editor of the *Annales des sciences psychiques*, presented evidence on telekinesis, and Paul Gibier on the materializations of phantoms. Dr. Grassset, in describing the conference, boasted of the open-minded character of the scientists, even in the face of such unconvincing evidence.

You see that, with the greatest and most legitimate liberality, the tribune was opened to the occultists and the most well-known, the most distinguished among them spoke, gave papers. And yet, the unanimous conclusion [excluding the

occultists, ones assumes] was that nothing scientific had been established in this whole domain of exteriorization outside [the body] of unknown agents.⁵²

Grasset declared himself not convinced; Oskar Vogt complained about the “invasion of the section by the spiritists,” and Hippolyte Bernheim, who had incorporated hypnotic trance into the school at Nancy, exclaimed that, “As for the question of psychic or paranormal phenomena, it seems prudent to reserve my opinion.”⁵³

After this failed attempt to convince the scientists, amateur investigators began to pull away from the scientific establishment; they tried to establish separate institutions. Two years afterwards, Gabriel Delanne published a critique of the scientific work done on mediums, attempting to reclaim mediumship for the spiritists. He insisted that mediumistic trances differed from hysteria and from hypnotic trance. Pierre Janet had argued that automatic writing was caused by suggestion; Delanne countered this with proofs that mediums produced phenomena they could not have known, even subconsciously.⁵⁴ Léon Denis found ways other than science to prove the importance of spiritism, linking it to national pride, publishing a medium-communicated history of Joan of Arc, and situating spiritism as the inheritor of Joan of Arc’s obligation to save France.⁵⁵ Together with their patron Jean Meyer, Delanne and Denis formed in 1917 the *Union Spirite Française* (French Union of Spiritists) whose purpose was to propagate spiritism to the people rather than to convince science of its validity.

Orthodox science had the power to admit or condemn newly-developing heterodox sciences such as psychology, psychiatry, hypnotism, and spiritism. Without institutional and economic support, as well as social legitimation, no science could hope to grow and become further known. No wonder then, that spiritists, like hypnotists and psychiatrists, struggled for recognition from the orthodox sciences. Yet only one of these three competitors achieved prominence in this struggle. This success was owed partially to the incorporation of the main facets of the other two. Henri Ellenberger, in his wonderful in-depth study of the sources of psychiatry, has shown how dynamic psychiatry grew originally out of Mesmer and appropriated the methods of hypnotism and the matter of spiritism along the way.⁵⁶ Hypnotic trances were first subject to study as hysterical phenomena but soon became a means of treatment instead. The phenomena produced by spiritist mediums provided objects of study for the great psychiatrists and psychologists of the end of the nineteenth century. Charcot and Janet both insisted on their ability to explain the popular phenomena; providing an explanation for phenomena long unexplained (unless one accepted spiritist explanations) was a significant proof of the uses of psychology. Hard science had not been able to explain these sufficiently; psychology could explain them; psychiatry treat them. Spiritism contributed much to the consolidation of these professions at the end of the nineteenth century. Their mediums provided the phenomena;

their ideas of a hidden source of previously unknown knowledge, available to be tapped by a medium in trance, provided an analogy for the subconscious.⁵⁷

As psychiatry and similar pseudo-medical disciplines gained prominence, spiritist healings themselves began to be discussed as a factor of hysteria and equated with faith healing. As the shrine to the Virgin Mary at Lourdes drew mass numbers of pilgrims from the late 1870s on, and announced increasing numbers of miraculous cures, science had to face the challenge. In 1880 seven trains took seven hundred patients and forty-five hundred pilgrims to Lourdes from Paris alone.⁵⁸ In 1893 Charcot responded to the “miracles” of Lourdes by discussing the question of faith healing. It depended, he argued, on a certain suggestibility and credibility in the patient and was limited to cases where the only intervention necessary is that of the brain on the body. New scientific knowledge had shown that bloody vomiting, ulcers, and muscular atrophy may all accompany hysteria as symptoms. These symptoms were among those claimed to be miraculously healed.⁵⁹ According to Charcot, the faith healing of phenomena caused by hysteria constituted no miracle but simply two manifestations of a similar mind-state of suggestibility and credibility, the original creating the symptoms, the second erasing them. Emile Zola popularized Charcot’s position in his bestseller of the same year, *Lourdes*, which portrayed those healed as hysterical and easily suggestible.⁶⁰ The characterization as hysterical of those healed, or effected, by miracles or spirits put a scientific face on a supposedly supernatural event and at the same marginalized those who would claim otherwise as mentally less than sound.

Pascal le Maléfan has discussed the positions taken by early psychiatrists toward spiritism. By some, such as Charcot and Janet, it was seen as a cause of nervous disorders and mental alienation. A second view did not blame spiritism but rather classified it as an expression which “colored” madness; a way in which madness could be discovered (and presumably treated in part by eradicating the symptom.) The third, rather than seeking causality, saw an analogy between spiritism and psychopathology, in order to better understand the latter.⁶¹ As happened when other scientists dabbled in spiritism, alienists’ and doctors’ classification of spiritism and its phenomena into the category of expressions of hysteria, or symptoms of mental alienation, denied and devalued spiritist explanations.⁶² The social and cultural importance of both Charcot and Janet, along with their ability to explain phenomena without resorting to the supernatural for their “unknown forces” meant that their explanations would certainly take precedence over those of the spiritists. Charcot and Janet’s forces were also mysterious, but the mystery was within human nature, rather than supernatural. They were, thus, more “scientific.”

Giordana Charuty has charted the change from religious explanations for spiritism to psychiatric explanations as it manifested in Languedoc, culminating in the 1890s. She finds another important social and cultural element: the cooperation of science with Church and state. The popularization of spiritism

and magnetism brought new healers to the countryside whose presence was denounced by Aubanel, the head physician at the asylum of Marseille, who called on judges to prosecute these “charlatans.” Aubanel gave two justifications for this prosecution: the classic one that the healers exploit public credulity; and the claim that they produce madness, especially since the people who consult them are “of simple mind.”⁶³

Charuty argues that “The measures recommended—enlightened religion for the first [those consulting healers], judiciary repression for the others [the healers]—confirms the double alliance that psychiatry made since the second half of the nineteenth century with the Church and justice.”⁶⁴ An alliance by psychiatry with “Church and justice” helped establish psychiatry as a true science; in return, psychiatry reaffirmed the place of the establishment in determining beliefs and actions of the people.

This alliance did much to invalidate the spiritist attempt to merge traditional popular belief with new scientific knowledge. Through the century, Charuty argues, norms changed and belief had to be constructed in new ways. In the 1880s all the leading psychiatrists held public demonstrations of the dangers of hypnotic and somnambulistic (usually spiritist) consultations. Trials against illegal practice of medicine taught the common people the language of the judges and the psychiatrists and which traditional behaviors had now become unacceptable. The punishment for, or solution to, the new combinations of belief was to intern in asylums those who continued to believe.

The usage of internment reveals, finally, a crisis of the models of the supernatural allowing ways to think suffering, unhappiness and illness. Confronted by practices, discourses, and experiences which simultaneously appealed to three cultural models—the logic of sorcery, spiritist metaphysics, Catholicism—or which witnessed a completely different relation to the divine than that authorized by the Church, the alienists who, in the Aveyron, the Tarn, or the Hérault undertook the passionate exploration of these beliefs found themselves, objectively, on the side of the Catholic hierarchy in order to redefine the legitimate sharing between rational and irrational which appeared as one of the essential stakes of the cultural mutations of Languedoc in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

Charuty’s “cultural mutations” took place not only in Languedoc but throughout France. They involved changes in belief, in relations to the supernatural, but also in the importance of science and in the belief in its explanatory power. Spiritism attempted to participate in these changes; it built a strong semi-scientific culture that translated scientific knowledge into a form palatable to the popular mind. It

merged old and new forms of knowledge and belief and created a form of popular science that investigated questions of the unknown.

The scientific establishment's rejection of the spiritist explanation did not signify the end of spiritist alternative science. Spiritists instead returned to their original position of criticizing science, even while claiming to utilize the tools and methods of the scientists. In 1918 Léon Denis argued that both the universities and the academy lacked the imagination and the true science (or knowledge) necessary to lead France into the future.⁶⁶ Spiritists continued to think of their work as a science, but admitted that it remained on the margins and aligned itself against establishment science. Spiritism would forge into investigations of the unknown, while "fossilized knowledge would be the subject of official science."⁶⁷ Spiritists recognized that official science would continue to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge the exciting possibilities and truths offered by spiritist study. Spiritists set up a parallel strain of "science," to continue study of mediumistic phenomena. These strains are still active today, as Parisian spiritist groups in 1995 utilized computers to receive messages from the spirits and "prove" that the soul survives and that science has not given the last word on the unknown.⁶⁸

Spiritism had come full circle, from a critique of science's limits, to an eager anticipation of acceptance by science, to a new critique of scientific limits. Scientific materialism would rather accept the explanation of the unconscious, or no explanation at all, than accept the spiritist insistence on invisible spirits as the cause of phenomena. Spiritists rejected the costs that science demanded to deal with spiritist everyday miracles, and instead insisted on the reality, and the importance, of those marvelous events.

What spiritists most resisted in relation to scientific appropriation of mediumistic phenomena was the scientific world's refusal to accept these as proof of the survival of the immortal soul and of its continuance through a series of lives—reincarnation. Without the doctrine of reincarnation, spiritism lost both its moral power and its rationale for changing society. Spiritism fought hard to defend this position.

Scientists were not alone in denying the spiritist doctrine of reincarnation. Equally firm rejection of this teaching came from the Catholic church. Spiritism, whether it called itself a philosophy or a religion, trespassed boldly on the spiritual territory of the Church and the Church reacted. The Church had a much trickier position than the scientists; the Church could not deny the supernatural, and often accepted the supernatural provenance of mediumistic phenomena, but it too denied the spiritist interpretation of these events. Mediums usurped the power of priests by interpreting moral messages from the dead; in spiritist teachings each individual became responsible for his or her own salvation. These doctrines offered a direct challenge to the Catholic church, de-emphasizing the power of God and the priesthood and privileging instead the power of individual humans to achieve progress. Spiritism thus opened a conversation with and about

religion, one that attracted followers even as it brought a strong reaction from the Catholic church. The Catholic church vilified the movement in pulpit and press, and spiritists, both leadership and rank and file, shot back answering volleys.

In the process, spiritism created a modern, urban, popular religion, appealing both to a thirst for science and to a continued attachment to traditional religious beliefs. The spiritist movement, with its attempt to combine religion and rationality, science and superstition, recalls us to Durkheim's teachings that the sacred and profane continue to influence and shape one another. Spiritism as a popular religion complicates the assumption by many folklorists regarding the disappearance of popular beliefs in the face of the modern. Spiritism refused a complete disenchantment of the world while still integrating modern discourses on science and rationality.

The Catholic Church and the Spirits

The Catholic church remained mute before the first turning of tables in France. However, as soon as those tables began to "speak," and to do so in the voices of the dead, the Church moved quickly to investigate and then condemn the practice. The Church had to convince both clergy and laity of the dangers of spiritism. It denied the teachings of spirit messages yet affirmed the spirit phenomena as continuing proof of the supernatural. Catholic arguments against spiritism covered both spiritual and social ills, emphasizing the dangers the spirits posed to the unwary in this world, and in the next.

As early as November 1853, only six months after the practice began in Paris, Mgr. Guibert, bishop of Viviers, sent a circular letter to his clergy warning them against the dangers of the talking tables. The bishop's communiqué illustrates the need the Church felt to convince even the priesthood of the dangers of discussions with the spirits. Guibert reminded the priests that Moses first gave the command not to speak to the dead. "Moses declares that *God holds in abomination those who ask the truth of the dead.*"⁶⁹ Apparently the priests needed this reminder. Guibert reprimanded them for creating a welcoming atmosphere for these sins. "And you, you would construct of this an amusement, a curiosity, I would almost say a benevolence! Have you forgotten then the words of Saint Paul: *There can exist no commerce between the light and the shadows, nor alliance between Jesus-Christ and Belial.*"⁷⁰

Guibert did not admit the reality of the spirits. Instead he argued that they were most likely the products of experimenters' imaginations. Imaginary or not, however, the phenomena were dangerous. "But, if we have little faith in the presence of these spirits that are evoked by means of tables, we are no less deeply convinced that these experiments are one of Satan's thousand ruses to ruin souls."⁷¹

Not everyone in the Church wanted to dismiss the turning, talking tables as springing from fevered imaginations. The Church had to tread a thin line between denial and celebration of a supernatural world that continually threatened to escape its control. In the nineteenth century, Catholicism struggled to find a working relationship with the supernatural. Enlightenment teachings had rejected the supernatural as co-equal with the superstitious. Post-Tridentine Christianity had striven to enforce an urban, elite religion on a rural, uneducated population.⁷² This meant rejecting all superstitions and conforming to the outward expressions of Catholicism, including and especially confession. In the nineteenth century the Church reversed this trend somewhat by trying to recuperate the supernatural in specific, controlled forms. The religious revival of the period 1830 to 1850 expressed a romantic Christianity that used emotional confirmation of the beyond to recruit believers. The Church tried to continue this movement, but after the Coup d'État of 1851 it became identified with the reins of repressive power, increasingly on the defensive. In the face of the mid-century emphasis on rationality and faith in positive science, the Church reasserted a faith in the supernatural. This was expressed most strongly, of course, in the Marian visions of mid-century, but it also appeared in pilgrimages to sacred places, especially springs that offered healing and rejuvenation. The Church remained sensitive to elite critiques of superstition; it accepted these new appearances of faith in the supernatural, but only when it could direct and control them.⁷³ This attitude structured its reaction to spiritism.

When the spirits started talking, some Catholics were ready to see in their arrival a new proof of the existence and continuing influence of the spiritual world on the mundane. The abbé Houpert was happy to announce that spiritist facts were sent to "bear witness to the truth of all that our holy books and the Church teach us about the spiritual world."⁷⁴ In his 1854 circular letter on spiritism, Mgr. Bouvier, the bishop of Le Mans, observed among Catholics a diminished faith in the "intervention of spirits in the things of this world." Bouvier represents the problems of the Church in the face of modern rationalism. An ultramontanist who helped define the doctrine of the immaculate conception, Bouvier nonetheless supported modern education and "celebrated the conquests of science."⁷⁵ In spiritism he saw the proof of the quotidian workings of the devil. He feared for his faithful who, "by levity or indifference seem to share in this practice of disbelief."⁷⁶ Levity in the face of spirits created exactly the atmosphere that allowed the multiplication of demons, according to Bouvier. Thus he insisted on the importance of spirit communications as evidence of the supernatural, a view at least some of the faithful apparently did not share.

The Church could not simply deny and ignore the spiritual side of spiritist phenomena, as did most scientific observers. Instead it insisted on the supernatural quality of manifestations, and their origin in the "beyond" and not simply in the imagination of the participants. Renewed proof of the supernatural world and of survival of the soul would, the Church believed, promote belief in God

and adherence to the Church. Renewed evidence of the devil at work showed how current the Church's own work was. However, the doctrines that accompanied spiritist belief, especially that of reincarnation and progressive lives, were anathema to the Church. In order to have one without the other, Catholic writers had to denounce the authors of these messages as either Satan himself or members of his host of demonic assistants. By doing so, they reduced the discussion to a polemic, and limited their means of responding to the critiques spiritism offered.

In the early years of great spiritist growth, the Church worked actively to get the word out against the movement. In the year 1863, for example, sermons were preached in Bordeaux, Lyon, the Aisne, and at Metz. In Bordeaux, a visiting priest spoke on four consecutive weekends at the church of Villenave-de-Rions, accusing spiritism of being the devil in disguise and of leading people into crime and irreligion.⁷⁷ In Lyon, the priest Marie Bernard spoke more than once against spiritism. He even invoked civil aid, calling for the magistrate to condemn spiritists as "profaners of the dead, slanderers and perverters [of truth]" of a new kind, just as guilty as common criminals.⁷⁸ In Chauny (Aisne), the visiting abbé took a gentler approach. He cautioned against raising too high the veil which covered the mysteries of the beyond; most important, he said, was to believe in God. This pleased the numerous spiritist-Catholics in the audience.⁷⁹ The Jesuit priest Letierce preached three sermons in the cathedral of Metz arguing that spiritism's greatest sin was denying eternal punishment, an act fatal for otherwise innocent souls.⁸⁰

Like Guibert before them, other bishops added their voices to clerical attacks during the early 1860s. In 1864, the bishops of Strasbourg, Algiers, Reims, Langres, and Barcelona all spoke out against spiritism. The Bishop of Algiers gave the first official ordinance to completely forbid the practice. He instructed his priests to refuse absolution to any who participated in or even witnessed a spiritist event. The letter was to be read publicly in all cities and in rural parishes where spiritism had been introduced.⁸¹

The Holy See said relatively little about spiritism, although it certainly did not approve. In 1856, Pius IX issued a "condemnation of the abuse of magnetism" which Church thinkers later applied to spiritism as well.⁸² In 1864 the Congregation of Rome condemned spiritist doctrine by adding spiritist works to the Index.⁸³ It was not until 1898 that Pope Leo XIII finally condemned the practice and threatened to excommunicate anyone who acted as a medium or participated in spiritism.⁸⁴ By that time, the condemnation seems to have made little stir, either in Catholic or spiritist circles. The majority of battles between the two groups had already been fought.

One reason for the hesitancy on the part of the papacy may have been a reluctance to alienate Catholics who had found spiritism exciting, consoling, or simply an extension of the Catholic faith. To combat this, many Catholic treatments of spiritism retained a teaching quality. Their purpose remained primarily

to retrieve the faithful who had fallen into spiritist hands. The best example is the work of Père Ambroise Matignon, who framed his *Les morts et les vivants; entretiens sur les communications d'outre tombe* (1862) in the manner of a catechism. Through a series of conversations between a gentle, trusted theologian and a good Christian who had, unfortunately, “lost hold of himself in his great enthusiasm for the evocations,” Matignon taught his readers what the Church wanted them to think about spiritism.⁸⁵

Matignon’s work was commissioned by several bishops, who looked for a “short, substantial, and easily understood” work to “popularize the solution” to an increasingly thorny problem. The *Etudes religieuses*, published by the Jesuits and promoting the work, explained: “The craze for conversing with the spirits becoming more and more general, a new *matter of conscience* often is posed for the directors and for the faithful that they direct.”⁸⁶ Matignon took the spiritists (or at least his task) seriously; he quoted directly from spiritist publications to create the arguments offered by his Christian spiritist.⁸⁷ Each point found a response in the teachings of the Church.

Matignon put his most forceful arguments into convincing Catholic spiritists that their practice was both superstitious and evil. Scripture expressly forbade contact with the dead. Anyone who called up spirits then, whether they meant to or not, called upon the devil and his dark forces for aid. Matignon quoted the prestigious archbishop of Reims as authority. “‘It is superstition,’ says Mgr. Gousset, ‘when one invokes the devil, explicitly or tacitly, in order to know hidden, occult, and secret things, knowledge we cannot acquire by natural means.’”⁸⁸ When the fictional spiritist continued to insist that he did not call upon the devil, Matignon replied, “you desire a supernatural effect, and . . . you have no intention of waiting for God.”⁸⁹ This left only the devil to fulfill that desire. Spiritists fell directly into Satanic hands by the innocent wish to speak to their a deceased beloved. Matignon did not condemn them harshly but gently urged them to come back to the Catholic fold.

By 1875, although Catholics still decried spirit contact as being from the devil himself, debate between spiritists and Catholics had shifted to include important contemporary social questions. In his Easter pastoral letter the archbishop of Toulouse, Mgr. Desprez, accused spiritism of breaking up the family, of holding life cheaply, thus encouraging suicide and abortion, and, implicitly, of denying French people their very “Frenchness,” all through the doctrine of reincarnation.

[B]y this fact alone all family intimacy is threatened. You who live under the same roof, and who savor the happiness of being together, abandon your illusion. Who knows if it is not the spirit of Cain that you embrace in your brother, that of Absalom in your son, that of Herodias in your daughter. . . . Boast no more of being of old French lineage, because under

Julius Caesar you warred against the Gauls; during the crusades you fought on the side of the Turks, and when your son believes you buried beneath the soil of your homeland, you will be resuscitated in the body of a German general.⁹⁰

Reincarnation threatened the basis of French society, the family. Rather than address the spiritist position on the family, including a call for women's equality and the right of divorce, the bishop sought to demonize the movement. Interestingly, his demons this time were the secular demons of rent family intimacy and the German threat, rather than the actual devil of ten years before. In 1875, after France's ignominious defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, there could be few worse horrors than to find yourself a German general, or to find yourself living with one.

The arguments in this *Instruction pastorale* and the counterarguments presented by Victor Tournier, a popular and widely-read spiritist political writer and poet, illustrate well the battles for peoples' loyalty that the Church fought with spiritism. Tournier, in his refutation, also touched on both social and religious levels. He denied the accusations that spiritism was pro-abortion. (This accusation by the Church seems to have grown from the spiritist call for women's equality; there are no spiritist teachings to support birth limitation of any sort.) Instead, he argued that spiritism was better for family than Catholicism. Spiritists welcomed any new-born spirit, seeing it their duty to help it become a better being. Then he mocked the Catholics, using anti-clerical stereotypes current at the time to attempt to discredit the Church. "Is it meet that the Catholic church who in its priests offers us a model of celibacy, . . . who exalts virginity at the expense of maternity, accuses Spiritism of threatening the bond of the family?"⁹¹

Tournier, a radical leftist formed during the Revolution of 1848, echoed the rhetoric of the 1848 democratic-socialists that Edward Berenson has identified as important in moving rural voters from non-political popular religiosity toward leftist-political awareness. The Aude, which includes Tournier's home Carcassonne, is one of the areas where Berenson has identified this process.⁹² Like the democratic-socialists, Tournier claimed to be more Christian than the Catholics. Christ and the apostles were spiritists. "Did not Christ declare at each moment, in the Gospels, that it was not he who spoke, but the [Holy] Spirit? Saint Paul, was he not always guided by the spirit of Jesus? In each Christian group, as today in each spiritist group, did they not occupy themselves with evocations?"⁹³

Both Tournier and Desprez brought popular political arguments, past and present, into their discussion of religion. The image of Christ as the first socialist was popular with romantic socialists before 1848, particularly with Etienne Cabet and the Icariens. But the more virulent images in this argument focused on the family. By the 1870s, the fears of the French government and populace were turning toward the problem of the declining birthrate, particularly in relation to the German foes who had just vanquished the French. Both Desprez and

Tournier used the standards of the primary secular issue of the nation to measure the respective value of Catholicism and spiritism as religious systems. The spiritists, rather than the Church, were able to identify themselves with the nineteenth-century evolution toward an increasingly secular state that continually diminished Church control over the family. This is a prime example of the manner in which spiritists created an identity which both incorporated the identity of the nation and continued to privilege their own culture. Like the peasants of Brittany or the Pyrenees studied by Caroline Ford or Peter Sahlins, the spiritists worked to construct an identity that incorporated the common values of the nation without losing their own.⁹⁴ Like Sahlins' peasants in particular, the urban spiritists were adept at utilizing arguments that came from outside to achieve their own ends, or at least argue for them in this case.

Catholic critiques of spiritism remained based on spiritual and social arguments throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Although new works against spiritism were published, old ones were also repeated. Lecanu's *Histoire de Satan* was popular enough, or necessary enough, to be republished in 1882. Père Matignon's catechism against spiritism reappeared as late as 1902; and Père Bonniot's *Le Miracle et ses contrefaçons* went through at least three editions: 1887, 1888, and 1895.

The Church needed to prohibit spiritism in order to affirm the reality of supernatural interference while denying the movement's specific message. In the pamphlet wars between spiritists and Catholics even as late as 1914, the Church could be found backing the satanist explanation, saying there were, in fact, no scientific explanations for spiritist phenomena.⁹⁵ This is especially interesting in light of increasing scientific studies in the 1880s and 1890s which explained spirit visions in terms of hallucination. Despite the popular power of scientific arguments, the Church rarely attributed spiritist events to mental illness or an overactive imagination. The Catholic church, since at least the Syllabus of Errors in 1864, had taken a stand on the side of the supernatural versus the material, which had been ceded to liberals. I hardly mean to say here that Catholics fell into the superstitious and irrational category, but rather that the Pope, in outlining the errors of modernity and in asserting his infallibility on matters of doctrine, had claimed there is knowledge, supernatural and religious, that cannot be known by material means. Catholicism chose to control and promote miracles, like the healings at Lourdes, rather than borrow from science to explain them in material, physiological, terms.⁹⁶ The Church, then, could not afford to deny completely the satanic thesis. The active role of the supernatural held too much importance to its doctrine, its believers, and its staked-out position of authority.

Spiritism as Popular Religion

Although Allan Kardec attempted to maintain neutrality toward the Church, much of the spiritist relationship to the Church was from the outset adversarial. The Church's critique of spiritism was matched (and sometimes preceded) by spiritist condemnation of Catholic practices and doctrines. Spiritists denied heaven, hell, and purgatory; they were anti-clerical and anti-sacramental, often calling for civil funerals and avoiding the parish church. Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine argue that spiritism became more anti-clerical during and after the 1880s and that Léon Denis, a popular spiritist leader at the end of the century, epitomizes spiritist anti-clericalism.⁹⁷ Yet anti-clerical writings surfaced among spiritists long before this time and in some areas were so widespread as to be the rule. In fact, I would argue that spiritism became more, rather than less, religious toward the end of the century. Certainly Léon Denis, one of the two most important leaders of the spiritist movement (along with Gabriel Delanne), maintained his critique of the Church, but his outlook so strongly emphasized the spiritual over the practical material world, that spiritism in some ways tended toward a new mysticism.⁹⁸

Anti-clericalism was only one of the approaches to religion offered by spiritism. Even though many followers rejected the trappings of the Church, others retained a loose connection; many more retained a viewpoint that could be broadly termed Christian, calling for prayer and asserting that moral authority came from Christ and his teachings. Others argued for generally Christian values without mentioning the Bible or Christ. The very looseness of doctrine, and the encouragement of individuals to interpret the spirits' messages, meant that spiritism could not confine its followers to one position vis-a-vis the Church.

Early spiritism often displayed adamant anti-clericalism but also a broad Christian socialist reverence for Christian teachings. This position was probably the contribution of the many leftists, disappointed in the Revolution of 1848, who turned to spiritism in the 1860s. The *Echo d'outre tombe*, a Marseille spiritist journal published in 1865, and *La Vérité*, a Lyon weekly published in 1863, show that religion remained a concern, and clerical abuses were perceived as a problem. Both papers are filled with articles about the Church, religion in general, or the clergy. *La Vérité* kept track of any clerical abuse or support while the *Echo d'outre tombe* devoted at least one article per issue to discussing how spiritism and religious dogmas meshed. Most of these teachings took a broadly pro-Christ, anti-Church tone. Although they published articles reciting various parables of Christ as guides to live by and claimed that spiritism was hostile to no religion, the editors showed a fair amount of hostility to the Catholic church. Priests were painted as "little Gods" who led their parishioners into "stupidity and degradation [abrutissement]."⁹⁹ In a critique of Church power, the Toulouse periodical *Médium Evangélique* ran a serial featuring a repentant Pope giving the wealth of the Church to the poor and thus freeing himself to become truly the

servant of the servants of Christ.¹⁰⁰ The story implied that spiritists, with their emphasis on charity, were better Christians, more “Christ-like” than the Pope himself.

Kardec was in some ways the least religious of all spiritists, although his insistence on moderation and reason led to his refusal to quarrel outright with the Church. He wanted people to come to the same conclusions he had by way of observation and logic rather than faith. Ever the moderate, Kardec urged caution in religious expression. Prayer to open a meeting was not only suitable but necessary to receive “co-operation of good Spirits,” and all should proceed, “religiously—meaning with gravity, respect, and contemplation [recueillement]”—but external signs of religion should be avoided. These signs, Kardec warned, would only substantiate the claims of those who accused spiritism of being a schismatic religion while simultaneously alienating anyone who followed a belief other than that expressed. “Spiritism,” he reminded, “calls to people of all beliefs to bring them together under the flag of charity and of fraternity, . . . whatever their manner of adoring God.”¹⁰¹

Spiritism’s open position on the Church gave followers free rein to create their own religious experiences. The “Groupe Sainte,” who embraced the chance to imagine a more equal world in their group, also embraced the chance to imagine a different type of religion. This group established, through a series of communications with Jesus Christ, a vision of “the city of Jesus-Mary,” a utopian society in which the Pope would throw off his evil counselors and come to France, and “Capital” would be brought under control. The group claimed membership in the “apostolic, catholic and spiritist Christian religion” and hoped to offer Napoleon III advice on everything from their city of Jesus-Mary, to the principal local monuments, to the uses of alchemy.¹⁰² The group did not explicitly claim to challenge either secular or Catholic authorities, but their free creation of dogma and politics (including a dream of pan-European union) implicitly did so. As we saw in chapter three, their spiritist group allowed them the freedom to create their own vision of the world. In the case of religion, it was one that incorporated spiritist values such as anti-clericalism (the challenge to the Pope) and androgyny (in their godlike figure of Jesus-Mary) that offered a less hierarchical and more hopeful vision of the future, expressing their practical (and not so practical) hopes.¹⁰³

A bourgeois version of this same phenomenon can be found in Mme Lucie Grange, publisher of a successful spiritist journal. Grange, a practical businesswoman, well-known for her qualities as a medium, also had visions of being the savior of the world. Her vision combined Christian revelations, millenarian tendencies, and Grange’s experience with both mesmerism and occultism. Grange claimed Jesus had come to her to confirm “the truth of one of the principal revelations that he caused me to have, that a New Era dates definitively from 17 June 1884. . . . It has been indicated by my guides how I myself must *exclusively* work for the preparation of the SIGN.”¹⁰⁴ Grange was not alone

in her visions. Many mediums experienced similar visions, and their spiritist circles supported and accepted the revelations.

Although from different decades and different classes, these personal versions of religion shared a number of characteristics. Both included intimate contact with Christ himself and a sense of being chosen by him to teach others. They thus reflected an increasing emphasis within Catholicism on the kindness of Christ.¹⁰⁵ Both also offered critical commentary on the contemporary social and cultural situation. Grange's discussion of the decadence of society and the need for regeneration echoed contemporary bourgeois fears. The *Groupe Sainte* expressed a more utopian, socialist version of renovation, seeing themselves as precursors of a world united under one language and one, peoples', government. And one religion, of course—spiritism. These visions allowed their creators to construct themselves as making glorious contributions to changing the world, it is true. More importantly, spiritists used their constructions of religion to criticize the hardships of modernity while accepting values of progress and politics that the Church discouraged its followers from supporting. Spiritists embraced many of the rationalistic, progressive values of the nineteenth century, but they wanted to achieve progress through religion and morality. Simultaneously, they integrated a mystic contact with the supernatural into a modern world.

Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang argue that a "modern" conception of heaven was born with Swedenborg in the late eighteenth century. This heaven, material and sensual, would be popularized by spiritists and Protestants throughout the nineteenth century. In contrast, the Catholic heaven remained that of sixteenth-century reformers, one of contemplation carried out in the sight of God, up until the late twentieth century.¹⁰⁶

Swedenborg's heaven shared with contemporaries like Jean-Jacques Rousseau the hope of meeting one's beloved in the beyond. Swedenborg believed every Saint-Preux has his Julie, and if he cannot have her on earth, he will meet her in heaven. Instead of divine love, Swedenborg emphasized love between man and woman. Spiritists would shift the emphasis to the family, although they included the couple. The modern heaven began immediately after death and continued an existence similar to the previous, earthly one. Heaven became an active place, where everyone experiences sensual fulfillment and spiritual progress.¹⁰⁷

Spiritism painted a vivid and unflattering picture of the Catholic heaven. The *Revue spirite* even credited the Catholic vision of heaven as one of the reasons people feared death. Heaven, it said, was "this eternal uselessness, doubtless preferable to nothingness, [but] which is nothing less than a fastidious monotony." The angels themselves (as shown in paintings of heaven), "breathe boredom rather than true happiness."¹⁰⁸

Kardec's alternative heaven offered a view of how Catholic traditions failed to mesh with current bourgeois ideals of work and merit, and with the spiritist ideal of equality. The true heaven was not one of "contemplative idleness," or more pejoratively, of "fastidious uselessness." "Spiritual life is, on the contrary,

one of constant activity, but an activity free from fatigue." Kardec described the worlds closest to true heaven:

Life in the superior worlds is already a recompense, because there one is exempt from the evils and vicissitudes of which one is the butt here below. The body, less material, almost fluid, is not subject to illnesses or infirmities, nor to the same needs. Bad Spirits being excluded, people live there in peace, without any other care than their advancement by labor of the mind. True fraternity reigns there, because there is no egoism, true equality, because there is no pride, true liberty, because there are no riots to suppress, nor ambitious people seeking to oppress the weak.¹⁰⁹

Note that there is no mention of God in this almost-heaven. It is a most material heaven, from which progress issues, rather than in which contemplation occurs. Kardec's heaven would be productive and based on the same values he wanted to see instituted in this world, republican values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Similar values provided a critique of eternal damnation, with an added emphasis on merit. Teachings emphasized the importance of equality. As in their justification of reincarnation, spiritists avoided complicated theological arguments, instead arguing from the basis of a just God. Not all people have an equal opportunity to grow morally, due to inequalities of wealth and station. "Does not reason itself tell you that it would be unjust to inflict an eternal privation of happiness on those who have not had the opportunity of improving themselves?"¹¹⁰ Justice does not deny earthly inequality; it must, however, deny the permanence of that inequality. The obvious logical fault here is the assumption that inequalities of status mean an inability to improve morally. Spiritists equated moral progress with social status. They vacillated between conservative and liberal views of the poor: accusing the poor of being less moral and refusing to blame them for it. Yet the overall position is broadly socialist: hell is rejected on the basis that the world must progress toward equality.

The spiritists paid much less attention to hell than to heaven however, taking time only to deny its existence. They were hardly the first to do so. Hell fell into disrepute in the nineteenth century. According to Philippe Ariès, "by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the debate in Catholic and puritan cultures was over; belief in hell had disappeared."¹¹¹ If this was indeed true in theological circles, it was hardly true in the pulpits of the people. Thomas Kselman describes the vivid preaching practices by the Catholic missionaries in the 1830s and 1840s, preaching that strongly emphasized the fears of hell to come. However, this style of preaching did decline in the 1860s and was rare in the cities even before that.¹¹²

Spiritists and Catholics publicly disputed the existence of hell. The Jesuit Letierce preached several sermons in Metz in 1863. He charged that the denial of eternal punishment was one of the most serious crimes committed by the spiritists. The anonymous spiritist who refuted these sermons repeated Kardec's teaching that hell is not just. He or she then added that "almost everyone" had rejected the idea of eternal hell before spiritism but no one knew what to replace it with.¹¹³ Spiritism argued that its version, a progressive, egalitarian, and, especially, a useful heaven was a much-needed replacement.

Equally pertinent to spiritism was the issue of purgatory. Michel Vovelle called the nineteenth century "the century of purgatory." Vovelle and Guillaume Cuchet have shown the extensive popularity purgatory enjoyed in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁴ Indulgences became easier to obtain, and Catholic journals such as *Libérateur des âmes* or *L'Echo du purgatoire* promised readers witness of the power of the souls in purgatory to heal even those that modern medicine could not, to offer comfort to the bereaved, and even, in one case, to ensure a sale "in lucrative conditions" for a woman who offered prayers.¹¹⁵ These visions of the closeness of purgatory to this world echo the view presented by Father Frederick William Faber, an English priest, whose *All for Jesus* was very popular in its French translation throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Faber aimed at what he himself called "the middle class of the Church." He described the *au-delà* as material or at least reachable. Although critics might "start sometimes at the minuteness, familiarity, and assurance with which men talk of the unseen world, as if it were the banks of the Rhine," this knowledge comes from faith, prayer, and study.¹¹⁶ "Nothing can separate us from our dead brothers. We speak to the angels as easily as if they were, what they really are, our brothers in Jesus Christ. For all this, we make use of *chapelets*, medals, crucifixes, holy water, indulgences, sacraments, [and] sacrifices, as naturally as we would use a pen, ink, paper" or any other tool of this world.¹¹⁷

Comparison of the Catholic cult of the dead to spiritism presents some interesting coincidences and divergences. The coincidence of language is amazingly strong. In the prospectus of the *Libérateur des âmes*, the abbé Cloquet offered an inviting vision: "Who would not like to hear each month a voice which recalled the goodness of a father who is no longer, a mother who is wept for, the friendship of a brother or a sister, of a spouse ravished by death, the devotion of a friend who remains dear?" This was the same vision offered by the spiritists. Yet Cloquet's vision placed those loved ones amidst the flames and waiting for redemption at God's will, rather than making their own chosen progress in future existences, as spiritist ideas on reincarnation imagined. Unlike spiritists at a séance, the reader of *Libérateur des âmes* heard not the actual words of loved ones, but only the journal itself, which would be that "voice which recalls these . . . forsaken ones of the other world . . . it will be an echo of their cries."¹¹⁸

Contrast this to spiritism, which claimed to offer the true voices of the deceased, or at least words written by their own semi-material soul, via the hand

of a medium. In cases of great luck, one might even *see* the deceased materialize. Rather than anguished cries, spiritism offered consoling greetings from loved ones continuing their ever-forward progression toward that perfection awaiting everyone. Further, rather than the dour and heavy sermons that priests often offered in the cemetery on the Day of the Dead, spiritism offered great entertainment. Here is Léon Denis' description of séances his group held in the 1890s:

In general, it is the spirit guides who manifest first, giving advice and instructions full of logic and grandeur on the problems of life and of destiny. Next come conversations with less elevated spirits, several of whom have lived with us and shared our work. Emotional scenes occur. A father, a mother, will come to exhort their children who are present at the meeting. Friends from beyond the grave recall to us childhood memories; favors given, errors committed. They explain their way of living in space, after death, inevitable consequences of the way they lived on the earth. *How profoundly these living lessons, full of movement and color, these outpourings, these confessions move us.* ¹¹⁹

Spiritism, rather than just reminding people of their deceased through reading, provided an intimate session with loved ones, and much hope for their children attending the séance that the future would hold better for them than it had for their parents. Such is the nature of progress.

Both popular Catholicism and popular spiritism continued to imagine the lives led by the dead, the worlds awaiting the living. This tendency to imagine the beyond helped lead to the birth of purgatory in the late middle ages, as described by Jacques Le Goff. "The inception, elaboration, and dissemination of this doctrine depended crucially on the imagination."¹²⁰ Both spiritism and popular Catholic journals such as the *Libérateur des âmes* described the afterlife the beloved dead were experiencing, and what awaited the living. Both answered the questions of the curious and calmed the fears of the anxious. Léon Denis' description (above) shows how important an imaginary picture of the afterworld was to spiritists. His example is not rare; believers created similar descriptions in séance after séance, group meeting after group meeting, and many of these shared imaginations (or experiences) took the form of ongoing stories from spirits that became well-known. Unfettered by the limits of purgatory in Catholic doctrine, spiritism was able to innovate more in their imagination of the afterlife.

Both spiritism and purgatory offered the hope that the faulty soul could be saved after death, yet spiritism differed by constructing a version which included the contemporary valuation of individual will and merit continuing after death. The soul in purgatory might be aided either by God's mercy or, God willing, by the prayers of those on earth, but it no longer had any control over its fate. Father

Faber spoke of “the helplessness of the holy souls,” in calling for the Church militant to aid them.¹²¹ In contrast, the spiritist soul could be an active participant in its own entry into the perfection of heaven. It chose what life to be reincarnated into, and which lessons it must learn in order to advance toward its intellectual and moral goals. David Hess has argued that purgatory was one of the Catholic doctrines retained by spiritist teachings, except that it becomes this-worldly with the expiation of sins taking place in future lives rather than in purgatory.¹²² While certainly suggestive, this view overlooks the importance of individual will in the spiritist system. The discarnate soul admitted guilt and submitted itself willingly to lessons to be learned in coming reincarnations. The system was reminiscent not so much of purgatorial fires as of Catholic confession and penance or, even more, of the nineteenth-century urge to rehabilitate prisoners through moral education.

Spiritists rejected purgatory for reasons similar to their rejection of hell. It offered harsh punishments and did not allow for intellectual and moral improvement by the subject of those punishments. Jan Goldstein and especially Michel Foucault have made historians aware of the increasing importance psychologists and other health experts placed on situating subjectivity, on localizing and improving individuals’ interiority during the nineteenth century. Goldstein and Foucault discuss how views of psychology and earthly punishment were changing and merging in the late nineteenth century. The idea that the afterlife could inflict “worse” punishment than the earthly one must have struck many progressive thinkers as unfair at best, impossible at worst. The God-inflicted tortures of hell and purgatory seemed too harsh in this intellectual and moral climate. In an age when bourgeois reformers were reducing and psychologizing the punishments of prison inmates and the insane, it is hardly surprising that people of like mind would turn a similar rhetoric to their own fate for supposed infractions on God’s law.

Spiritism reflected folk concerns as well as bourgeois ideas. Thomas Kselman described folk beliefs about the dead that share much with spiritist beliefs. The dead were seen as leading a life just like that of people on earth.¹²³ In folk tales, punishment after death fit crimes committed in life. “Peasants suspected of moving boundary markers in order to expand their property, for example, were said to be forced after death to carry these stones from place to place.” In spiritism, discarnate spirits also suffered punishments fitting material crimes or sins. The difference was that spirits *chose* to do a fitting punishment. The punishment (or moral lesson to be learned) usually took place in the next life, although some discussions with spirits involved humans explaining to not very advanced spirits why they were suffering in the afterlife. Folk tales also emphasized the dead as integrated into family and village; the dead could stop carrying stones when some living person told them to “put it back where you got it.”¹²⁴ This personal interaction and harmony between the living and the dead was similar to the one spiritists created in their conversations with the spirits.

Spiritism integrated peasant beliefs, contributing to translating these traditions in a modern context.

This is the case Daniel Fabre describes in Languedoc for the traditional “*messagers des âmes*,” or *armiers* (soul messengers). These rural wise-men and wise-women had been visited by the dead demanding masses since at least the thirteenth century. As spiritism infiltrated the region in the 1870s and 1880s, the *armiers* began to call themselves mediums and to initiate contact with spirits. The mediums’ purpose remained the same, to ease the changes that souls go through after death, but the trappings became spiritist rather than Catholic.¹²⁵

Spiritism grafted onto this traditional practice; Fabre does not see that it changed it significantly. Yet he also notes that the Church began to oppose the *armière* after she became spiritist and defended itself against the “anti-clericals” who spread spiritist beliefs. Valentin Tournier and Timoléon Jaubert were the spiritist leaders in this region; they were among the most fervently republican of spiritist leaders in all France. The change here was a subtle one. The supernatural moved further and further away from what little control the priest had gained over it, becoming more (or again) the province of the people and, in this case, the Republic.

Paul Louisy, an early spiritist writer who strove to popularize spiritism as a rational “modern sorcery,” described a similar case of the supernatural escaping Church power. Spirit communications, he said, originally inspired profound terror and fears of diabolic pacts in his audiences. But things have changed.

It still concerns marvels, but not those undertaken by the demon. There are still obligatory formulas, but of such simplicity that the marvels lose, in the eyes of amateurs of the marvelous, much of their former value. No mystery, no fantastic machines, no frightening conjurations. . . . No, modern sorcery has for altar the first object handy, for mystery the day, for formalities sympathy and will, for adepts all men. Its goal, in the centuries of ignorance, was the practice of evil; today it is the research of the good.¹²⁶

Louisy observed a shift toward reason, but his description belied his assertion. The marvels became more accessible but not necessarily less marvelous, and clearly, “modern sorcery” remained a thing of supernatural fascination. The change was away from the Church and toward both the home and democracy. A contemporary observer described the spiritists’ goal as “habitual miracles.”¹²⁷ Rather than disperse the realm of the miraculous with “reason,” spiritists brought the “magic” within the reach of all.

Spiritism incorporated in changed form beliefs typical of popular religion: ghosts and phantoms; healing saints; and the intervention of the next world on this one. These were explained, however, using the rhetoric of science, espe-

cially natural law. Spiritism also turned to popular belief in spirits to popularize a very modern view of the cosmos, one based on progress and transformation by individual will.

Spiritist journals commonly repeated tales they had gotten from other sheets, to which they then added a spiritist explanation. They insisted that “miraculous” events, as reported in these various papers, continued to happen in order to draw scientists and doctors to study the new sciences, spiritism among them, and thus to explain what had previously seemed mysterious.¹²⁸ Spiritism not only reported “miraculous” and marvelous events, it created them on a regular basis in its séances. The curious spectator who rushed to see any miraculous happening reported by the papers, to gawk, to wonder, to be amazed, could also be found in spiritist meetings and reading spiritist journals’ reports of the marvels experienced by other followers. Although spiritism brought these things into everyone’s life, made them more accessible and less rare, it did little to make them less wondrous or strange. People found in them proof of marvelous wonders beyond human knowledge, proof of survival of the soul, and an explanation for miracles. It was these characteristics that popularized the movement and led to its rapid spread as a religion.

Ethnologists and anthropologists have concentrated on popular religion as leftover pagan remnants that survived the Church’s attempt to stamp them out.¹²⁹ Conversely, cities and their bourgeois inhabitants have been cast as centers of Enlightenment, casting out the shadows of superstition. The popular and the bourgeois are presumed to be antithetical one to the other. “Modern (bourgeois) culture has always displayed a marked scorn with regard to popular culture and, worse yet, it tends today to spread to the whole of society, constantly further reducing the space occupied by popular culture.”¹³⁰ Spiritism contradicts these assumptions, because it appealed to both the lower classes and the bourgeoisie and created an innovative combination of “superstition” and science.

If popular religion is defined only as the diminishing remnants of pagan belief, then we have created an ahistorical, unchanging, ideal-type of popular religion which is useless for addressing changing relationships between popular and “savant” religion, between official and non-official religion.¹³¹ However, if we see popular religion as retaining the magical in a form that is not “backward, regional, and secondary,” but one that adapts to cultural change, then we can better understand the rise and fall of spiritism and the many other religious and pseudo-religious movements which appeared in the nineteenth century and continue to do so in the twentieth.

Spiritism adapted popular traditions to changing cultural values, creating a new set of definitions and explanations for the world, life, and death. These resonated especially with the urban population, which had been exposed to a more “rational” world. G. J. F. Bouritius has characterized the religious revival of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the rationalization of religion that took place during the Enlightenment.¹³² Spiritism appeared after the main thrust of

religious revival, and it offered a different approach to the world. This new mentality spoke in terms of reason and of progress but thought in what have been seen (both then and now) as superstitions. This mentality is contradictory only if one insists that superstitions be traditional. Superstitions, here used broadly and neutrally to include belief in supernatural intervention, easily change and adapt to fit current scientific knowledge. Spiritism itself has done this, discarding beliefs it held in the nineteenth century as twentieth century science has proved these ungrounded.

Spiritism pioneered the ability to maintain a “superstitious,” or supernaturally oriented mentality while accepting and even seeking out the latest scientific knowledge. Science is easily accepted when religion is differentiated from life, as it is for most people today and was beginning to be in the nineteenth century. The difference in spiritism was that it allowed believers to perform this integration of reputedly incompatible forms into their daily life. In this sense, spiritism exemplified a new mentality, a mentality that adapted traditional beliefs to a modern, secularizing age.

NOTES

1. "Si la science ne veut pas de ces faits, l'ignorance les prendra." Epigram for the website for the Institut métapsychique internationale [http://www.metapsychique.org/index_1024.html; accessed 8/20/04]. This site also bears the interesting motto: "The paranormal, we don't believe in it; we study it." A recheck on 20 March 2006 found the latter saying still on the site, but not Hugo's quote. The quote can be found in *Préfaces de mes oeuvres et post-scriptum de ma vie*. Hugo's stance on science and the supernatural is discussed in David Charles, "Le Poème de Savoie: l'épistémologie Hugolienne et ses catégories," in *Ecrire/Savoir. Littérature et connaissances à l'époque moderne*, ed. A. Vaillent (Université de Saint-Etienne, 1994). A PDF file for this article, from the Jussieu study group on Hugo was accessed 21 March 2006 online at: groupugo.div.jussieu.fr/groupugo/Textes_et_documents/Charles_le_poeme_du_savoir.pdf.

2. Allan Kardec, *Instruction pratique sur les manifestations spirites* (Paris, 1858), 93.

3. Kardec, *Instruction*, 26. See 71-72 for a discussion of language of spirit messages.

4. Kardec, *Instruction*, 4.

5. Seymour H. Mausekopf and Michael R. McVaugh, *The Elusive Science: Origins of Experimental Psychical Research* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 44-57. Mausekopf and McVaugh discuss this problem affecting early psychical research in general. It is only once a narrow field of study is chosen that these sciences have any chance of establishing institutional support and career paths, essential pillars to a new science.

6. Kardec, *Instruction*, 62-62.

7. Kardec, *Instruction*, 63.

8. *Revue spirite* 1865: 40-41. This article is unsigned but was most likely written by Kardec, as editor of the *Revue*. Kardec wrote the majority of articles during the 1860s.

9. *Revue spirite* 1865: 40.

10. René Caillé, *Dieu et la Création* (Paris: Librairie des sciences psychologiques, 1884), 16.

11. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17-18. Certeau refers here to religion, but his terms are easily transferred to the scientific world.

12. Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1860-1910* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 94ff gives a good discussion of the popular conception of ether.

13. Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968), vii, 23.

14. Darnton's own work supports this argument. His thesis is that revolutionaries used Mesmerism to express cultural conflicts between the established academy and those who were excluded from advancement.

15. Anton Mesmer, *Mémoire*, quoted in Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), 33.

16. For instance, MM. Robert et Durville, both popular professors of magnetism in Paris, speaking at the Congrès spirite of 1889, expressed faith in spiritism, arguing that it

sprang from the same source as magnetism. Earlier, spiritist theorist Jean Rouxel described Durville's Institut Magnétique in his *Théorie du spiritisme*, encouraging followers to take the course and learn to understand the use of fluids. Rouxel, pseudonym of Auguste Leroux, also published frequently in G. Delanne's *Revue scientifique et morale du spiritisme*; this further illustrates the link between the two movements. Henri Durville published spiritist theorists such as B. Thomson. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale 1889*, 209; Jean Rouxel, *Théorie et pratique du spiritisme* (Paris: Librairie du magnétisme, 1892), insert, n.p.

17. Kardec, *The Spirits' Book* (Albuquerque, New Mex: Brotherhood of Life, 1989 [1857]), 89.

18. Kardec, *Spirits' Book*, 92.

19. Kardec, *Spirits' Book*, 91.

20. *Vie Posthume* 1885: 56. "L'âme est une substance matérielle qui a pour propriété la pensée."

21. J-B. Roustaing, *Les quatre évangiles des J.-B. Roustaing* (Bordeaux, 1882). Quote from René Caillé, *Oeuvre de Roustaing* (Nantes, 1884), 183. This formulation almost returned to Pierre Leroux's earlier thinking of humanity as returning to one shared collectivity upon death; see chapter one for this.

22. Louis Figuier, *Le Lendemain de la mort; ou la vie future selon la science* (Paris: Hachette, 6e ed. 1875); *Histoire des merveilleux*, 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1860). L'abbé Moigno published *Cosmos* through the 1860s and 70s. See Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973-77), vol 2: 591-609 for a discussion of how science was passed on to the masses.

23. Valérie Tesnière, "Le Livre de science en France du XIXe siècle," *Romantisme* 80 (1993): 68.

24. The process of professionalization has been described by several historians. For universities see George Weisz, *The Emergence of the Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); for psychiatry see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987); for the hard sciences see Terry Shinn, "The French Science Faculty System 1808-1914: Institutional Change and Research Potential in Mathematics and the Physical Sciences," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 10 (1979): 271-332.

25. Michel Pierssens, "Novation Astray," *SubStance* 62/63 (1990): 159; Pierssens, "Le Syndrome des tables tournantes: crise du savoir et 'sciences psychiques' aux XIXe siècle" *Les Temps modernes* 528 (July 1990): 87-111 contains similar arguments.

26. For a summary of this literature, see Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine, *La Table, le livre et les esprits* (Paris: Lattès, 1990), 92-94.

27. Eugène Nus, *Choses de l'autre monde* (Paris, 1880), dedication, no page number. William Crookes and Alfred Russell Wallace were British scientists involved in psychical research; J.F.K. Zöllner was a researcher at University of Leipzig who investigated, among others, the American medium Daniel Slade. All three were favorably inclined to believe the extra-natural provenance of the phenomena they witnessed.

28. *Revue spirite* 1873: 3-4.

29. *La Lumière* 1882: 62.

30. *Vie posthume* 1885: 23

31. The Fox sisters, from whose home in upper New York State had sprung the American spiritualist movement, confessed to making the spirits' knocking sounds by purposefully cracking muscles and joints. They continued their earlier spiritualist celebrity by going on stage to demonstrate how the fraud had been done. Later, the sisters retracted their confession but little mind was paid them. For more detail, see Emma Haringe Britten, *Nineteenth-century Miracles* (Manchester: Wm. Britten, 1883).

32. Described in Arthur Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols (New York: Arno Press, 1975 [1924]), vol 1:164, 182.

33. J. Grasset, *Le Spiritisme devant la science* (Montpellier: Coulet et fils, 1904), 221-22.

34. Arthur Conan Doyle believed ectoplasm to be the spiritual material that is the basis of all manifestations and is shaped into whatever the spirits wish it to become. Emmanuel Swedenborg, too, produced ectoplasm, according to an account quoted by Doyle. (*The History of Spiritualism*, vol 1: 16).

35. Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 26.

36. Maurice LaChâtre, *Le Monde Invisible* (Paris, 1867), 147-48.

37. Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 16. Quote is from Frank Podmore, a highly skeptical psychical researcher. For a description of extensive experiments involving Home, see Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), 31-54.

38. On the spread and character of the movement at the turn of the century, see chapter five.

39. For more on spiritist healing, see Lynn L. Sharp, "Popular Healing in a Rational Age: Spiritism as Folklore and Medicine" *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, forthcoming 2006.

40. Emile Boirac, *L'Etude scientifique du spiritisme* (Paris: Durville, 1911), 14.

41. Stewart Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine: Charles Richet and the Origins of Physiological Psychology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 27.

42. Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine*, 57-60; 129-130.

43. Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine*, 57. The Institut still exists, if somewhat precariously, today. See <http://www.metapsychique.org>.

44. For a history of psychical research in France, see Bertrand Méheust, *Somnambulisme et médiumnité, vol 2: Le choc des sciences psychiques* (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo, 1999).

45. Eugène Azam, *Hypnotisme et double conscience* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1893); also Joseph Maxwell, *Les Phénomènes psychiques* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1903).

46. Dr. Baraduc, *L'âme humaine, ses mouvements, ses lumières et l'iconographie de l'invisible fluïdique* (Paris: 1896); and *Les vibrations de la vitalité humaine*, (Paris: 1904). Charles Richet: *La personnalité et la mémoire dans le somnambulisme* (Paris, 1883); and *Possession, l'homme et l'intelligence*, (Paris, 1897). Joseph Grasset, *L'hypnotisme et le suggestion* (Paris: Doin, 1903); and *Le Spiritisme devant la science* (Paris, 1904).

47. Joseph Grasset, *Marvels Beyond Science* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1910) [originally published as *L'Occultisme Hier et Aujourd'hui; le merveilleux présicientifique*] quote is from title page of English edition.

48. Michel Pierrssens, "Le Syndrome des tables tournantes," 99.

49. Richet refused to devote himself only to science the way others did, instead dabbling in many projects, including literature, peace movements, and fishing, as well as metapsychical experiments. Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine*, passim, especially 129-130.

50. This could be stated too broadly, however. Méheust gives a nice categorization of various scientists in France and England and their relationship to spiritist phenomena. (*Choc des sciences psychiques*, 39-41).

51. Descriptions of the *Congrès* are taken from Grasset, *Le Spiritisme devant la science*, 94-97.

52. Grasset, *Le Spiritisme devant la science*, 95.

53. Grasset, *Le Spiritisme devant la science*, 96.

54. Gabriel Delanne, *Recherches de la médiumnité* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Psychiques, 1902), 329ff. Critiques of scientists, especially Janet, can be found throughout the book.

55. Léon Denis, *Jeanne d'Arc, médium* (Paris, 1910). For more on this, see chapter five.

56. Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1969). Ellenberger's work is a tour de force, following all the ins and outs of dynamic psychiatry as it developed outside the medical establishment.

57. For an in-depth study of the influence of spiritism on the developing psychiatric profession, see Pascal le Maléfan, *Folie et spiritisme: histoire du discours psychopathologique sur la pratique du spiritisme, ses abords et ses avatars, 1850-1950* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

58. Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1999), 258.

59. J.-M. Charcot, *La foi qui guérit* (Paris, 1897), 4-5, 30. Originally published under the same title in *Archives de Neurologie XXV* (1893): 72-87.

60. Harris, *Lourdes*, 304.

61. Pascal le Maléfan, *Les Délires spirites, le spiritisme et la métapsychique dans la nosographie psychiatrique française* Thèse de 3ème Cycle (Anthropologie et écologie humaine) (Paris: Université de Paris, V, 1988), 25-30.

62. Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine go further, arguing that the advent of psychiatry sounded the death knell of spiritist popularity. I would disagree with the extent to which they take this claim. Numbers of spiritists did not necessarily diminish at the end of the century, but any hopes of becoming accepted by the scientific establishment did. Aubrée and Laplantine, *La Table, le livres et les esprits*, 98.

63. Giordana Charuty, *Le Couvent des fous: l'internement et ses usages en Languedoc aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), 257.

64. Charuty, *Couvent des fous*, 257.

65. Charuty, *Couvent des fous*, 257, quote 366.

66. *Revue spirite* 1918: 322. See chapter 5.

67. Michel Pierrssens, "The Turmoil of the Unknown," *Diogenes* 169 43/1 (Spring 1995): 114.

68. This meeting was described to me by Christine Bergé in a private conversation in Paris, June 1995.

69. Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert, 'Lettre circulaire sur les dangers des expériences des tables parlantes,' (November, 1853) *Oeuvres Pastorales* t.1 (Tours, 1868), 386 (original italics).

70. Guibert, 'Lettre pastorale,' 390. original italics.

71. Guibert, 'Lettre pastorale,' 391-392.

72. Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 13-25.

73. Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 172-79.

74. *Table parlante* I, 1854: 47.

75. Marc Auffret, "L'avènement du rail," in *La Sarthe: des origines à nos jours*, ed. André Lévy (Saint Jean d'Angély: Bordessoules, 1983), 319.

76. *Table parlante* vol I, 1854: 27.

77. J. Guerin, et. al., *Réponses aux sermons contre le Spiritisme prêchés par le R.P. Nicomède* (Bordeaux 1863).

78. *La Vérité* 7 (1863), no page numbers.

79. *La Vérité* 7 (1863), no page numbers.

80. *Sermons sur le spiritisme prêchés à la cathédrale de Metz le 27, 28, et 29 mai 1863 par le R.P. Letierce, réfutés par un spirite de Metz, précédés des considerations sur la folie spirite* (Paris, 1863).

81. 'Lettre circulaire et ordonnance de Mgr. l'évêque d'Algers,' *La Vérité* 20 (1863), no page numbers.

82. Victor Tournier, *Instruction pastorale sur le spiritisme par Mgr. l'Archévêque de Toulouse (Carême 1875) suivie d'une réfutation* (Liege, 1875), 6.

83. *Revue spirite* 1864:191.

84. Regis Ladous, *Le Spiritisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 49.

85. Ambroise Matignon, *Les Morts et les vivants, entretiens sur les communications d'outre-tombe* (Paris, 1862). This was reprinted in 1902 as *L'évocation des morts* (Paris, J. Bloud, 1902). The following discussion is taken from an abbreviated version published in the important journal, *Etudes religieuses*, published under the aegis of the Jesuits. See Ambroise Matignon, "Les Morts et les vivants," *Etudes Religieuses* 1862: 41.

86. H. Mertian, "Preface," *Etudes religieuses* 1862: 41, original italics.

87. Matignon, "Les Morts et les vivants," 54. Matignon quotes from Kardec's *Livre des esprits* but also from *Spiritism à Metz*, a collection of communications from the dead published by a local spiritist group in 1861.

88. Matignon, "Les Morts et les vivants," 56.

89. Matignon, "Les Morts et les vivants," 59-60.

90. Tournier, *Instruction pastorale*, 8. NB: Tournier's rebuttal was first published in *Le Bons sens* of Carcassonne where Tournier resided. The full text of the pastoral instruction and Tournier's rebuttal were simultaneously published in pamphlet form in Paris and Liège and widely distributed throughout spiritist circles. The references are Biblical. Cain was the son of Adam and Eve who murdered his brother Abel. Absalom was King David's son who revolted against his father and died for his trouble. Herodias was the mother of Salome, who had her daughter demand John the Baptist's head.

91. Tournier, *Instruction pastorale*, 20.

92. Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), see 207-08 for the Aude.

93. Tournier, *Instruction pastorale*, 14.
94. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Caroline C. Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
95. *Le Spiritisme et ses détracteurs, réponse d'un vieux spirite à un 'docteur ès lettres' de Lyon* (Paris and Lyon 1914). This brochure was written by a spiritist in answer to a Catholic brochure that purported to be authorized by the cardinal-archbishop of Lyon.
96. On Lourdes, see Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies*; Harris, *Lourdes*.
97. Aubrée and Laplantine, *La Table, le livre et les esprits*, 94-95.
98. For more on Denis' leadership, see chapter five.
99. *Echo d'outre tombe* 1865. See issues 11, 13, 14, 16, 21, among others.
100. *Médiu Evangelique* December 1864: no page numbers.
101. Allan Kardec, *Voyages spirites* (Paris, s.d. [1862]), 96-97.
102. Bibliothèque nationale, MS, NAF 14552, 15-16, 25. Spagyric medicine is medicine based on alchemical formulas and properties.
103. For more on this group, on the freedom the spiritist séance offered to re-imagine reality, and on androgyny as a spiritist value, see chapter three.
104. Grange, *Le Signe de renovation* (Paris 1885), 2, original italics and capitalization.
105. Ray Jonas has shown the importance of this in his work on the Sacred Heart. See Raymond A. Jonas, "Monument as Ex-voto, Monument as Historiosophy: The Basilica of Sacre-Coeur," *French Historical Studies* 18 (1993): 482-502; *France and the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
106. Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: a History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 183, 292-293.
107. McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 183, 213.
108. *Revue spirite* 1865: 35-36.
109. *Revue spirite* 1865: 65-70.
110. Kardec, *Spirits' Book*, 121.
111. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 610.
112. Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 82-83.
113. *Sermons sur le spiritisme*, 46-49; 51-52; 60.
114. Guillaume Cuchet, "La Crise Théologique du purgatoire," *Revue de l'histoire de l'église de France* 85/215 (1999): 333-353; Michel Vovelle, *Les âmes du purgatoire, ou le travail du deuil* (Paris, Gallimard: 1996). See also Jacques LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
115. *Echo du purgatoire* 1870: 21.
116. Frederick William Faber, *All for Jesus* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1956 [1853]), 241.
117. Quoted in Cuchet, "Crise théologique," 338.
118. *Libérateur des âmes*, prospectus, 1863, no page numbers.
119. Henri Regnault, *Léon Denis et l'expérience spirite* (Paris: les Edition Leymarie, 1929), original italics.

120. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 360.
121. Le Goff, *Purgatory*, 294. Faber, *All for Jesus*, 234.
122. David Hess, *Spirits and Scientists*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 68.
123. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, 58.
124. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, 63.
125. Daniel Fabre, "Du Messager des âmes au spirite en Languedoc," in *La Mort aujourd'hui* (Marseille: Rivages, 1982), 100-103.
126. Paul Louisy, *Lumière! Esprits et tables tournantes, révélations médiumniques* (Paris 1854), 23-24.
127. Alexandre Erdan, *La France Mystique* [sic] (Paris, 1855), 51.
128. *Revue spirite* 1873: 139-44.
129. Roger Lapointe, *Socio-anthropologie du religieux: la religion populaire au péril de la modernité*, (Geneva: Droz, 1988), 8, 28-48.
130. Lapointe, *La religion populaire*, 115.
131. Lapointe, *La religion populaire* describes popular religion as civil religion practiced by the "inferior classes." It is lived, emotive, amateur, communal, traditional, oral, and exoteric. It often exists side by side with "popularized" religion, religion accepted by the people but taught to them from outside. Savant religion is all things opposite. Instead of lived, it is ordered or planned; instead of integrated into a whole life, it is differentiated, with separate parts. Michel Meslin, a French specialist on the subject, also adds that popular religion is anti-intellectualist and pragmatic while savant religion is intellectualist and ideological. (Lapointe, 28-48, see 47 for summary).
132. G.J.F. Bouritius, "Popular and Official religion in Christianity: Three Cases in Nineteenth-century Europe," in *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*, eds. Pieter Hendrik Vrijhoff and Jacques Waardenberg (The Hague, Paris, New York: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 123.

Chapter Five

Spiritism, Occultism, Science: Meanings of Reincarnation in the Fin de Siècle

We too, are positivists. . . . [I]t is because we have been to the school of the masters of science . . . that we have the right, even the duty, to proclaim the results we have obtained.

Gabriel Delanne

In 1900, at the *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste international*, Gabriel Delanne, one of the two foremost spiritist leaders, spoke the above words. At that same conference, “Papus,” the leading occultist, congratulated Léon Denis, the other leading spiritist, on “the remarkable fashion in which he conducted battle [against dismissive psychologists] at the recent *Congrès de Psychologie*.”¹ The milieu of French alternative beliefs had changed greatly by 1900—the event above symbolizes the most important change, the rise of occultism and, as seen in the previous chapter, the increased interest by scientists in spiritist phenomena. Chapter two showed us the movement building and struggling together through the rough years of the 1870s. The fin de siècle brought a new ease to the movement under the more open society of the early Third Republic. Many issues spiritists supported had come into their own in society; presumably spiritism should flourish as well. And flourish it did—new periodicals and associations appeared and French spiritists made more contacts with those in other nations. Yet new challenges faced the movement. The two greatest of these were linked to two major trends in fin-de-siècle France—the contradictory rise of both science and “irrational” and occultist thought.

This chapter chronicles the movement in the period 1880-1925, as it expanded in new directions and faced new challenges, particularly the increasing

popularity among the bourgeoisie of the new occultism, which, like science, offered alternative explanations for spiritist phenomena. Occultists, like psychologists, claimed to be the new arbiters of the invisible, which they insisted was not necessarily as supernatural as the spirits had claimed. The most prominent spiritist leaders, Gabriel Delanne and Léon Denis, represent the two main responses of the movement. Delanne struggled to gain scientific recognition, while Denis promoted the spiritual, even mystical, side of the spiritist movement. The spiritists have never given up their claim to be scientific, but it changed in the fin de siècle to be a minority explanation (incorrect in the opinion of many) of commonly accepted scientific phenomena. In the end it was Denis' vision of spirituality, reincarnation, and a continuing critical role for spiritism that remained the lasting characteristics of the movement.

Like the 1830s, the fin de siècle saw the rise of a series of new movements and ideas. Many of these opened themselves (and society) to the secrets of the unconscious mind, such as Henri Bergson's stream of consciousness philosophy and the Symbolists' explorations of dreams. Decadent writers and occultists, like the symbolists, explored, or indulged in, mysticism and trance writing to reach the depths of the subconscious. These movements, unlike spiritism, did not advocate reason, science, and social reform. Instead they celebrated unreason and rejected the stolid, boring bourgeois who defined the world by empiricism. Yet like spiritism, they insisted that the world was not limited to things measurable by the five senses. Friends like these, however, spiritism did not need. Spiritism suddenly found itself only one among many groups who vaunted the ability to reach extra-natural states, and a somewhat stodgy group at that, with its more traditional rhetoric of science, religion, and progress. More than any other group, occultism threatened spiritism; it too accepted ideas of reincarnation and science, and seemed to have ways of reaching new, quasi-religious knowledge, but packaged all this in a new way. It also, unlike symbolism, Bergsonian philosophy, or the decadents, styled itself as a popular movement and grew through groups and periodicals, just as spiritism did. Nonetheless, spiritism continued strong throughout the period and ultimately, appealed to more lasting values than did the occultists.

Spiritism recovered its vitality during the 1880s. From the early 1880s until 1914, the spiritist movement experienced a burgeoning, both of membership and of directions those members' interests took. Numbers of periodicals and followers increased after the low point of the 1870s. Influenced by new scientific developments, and forced to either accept or challenge them, spiritism took new directions, becoming both more scientific and more religious. Some leading spiritists increasingly focused on physical phenomena rather than the written messages of the spirits, and mediumship became paradoxically both freer and more controlled. Major congresses of "international spiritism and spiritualism" were held in 1889 and in 1900, which (especially in 1900) were followed with respect by mainstream presses, helping spiritism to come in somewhat from the

cold margins of respectability. After looking at changes in spiritism, this chapter explores briefly the formation of occultism and how the two movements interacted. Occultism helped stimulate interest in spiritism but it also offered an alternative explanation that focused on the individual more than the collective and challenged spiritism's monopoly over the natural supernatural world of the spirits. A close examination of the two conferences in 1889 and 1900 illustrates how the movements interacted.

Both occultism and the changes in French society led to long-lasting changes in the French spiritist movement. Some of its most important writers, taking refuge from scientists, insisted on the religious character of the movement and rejected science after science itself rejected the supernatural. With the rise of organized socialist parties based on Marxism, the spiritists' message of social solidarity declined, especially after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. As the *fin de siècle* changed around the movement, although its message had not greatly altered, its position was in some ways more conservative than it had been. Although briefly eclipsed by occultism, spiritism maintained popularity by anchoring itself in the strongest of its traditions, a moral critique of society, and an insistence on God's justice as reflected in reincarnation.

Revival and New Directions

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, spiritist periodicals enjoyed a resurgence, climbing in numbers from their nadir in the 1870s. Some sixteen journals began publishing in the 1880s and another fourteen joined them in the 1890s. Six of the 1880s journals were linked to a specific spiritist group. Five had publishers outside Paris, and of these, the longest lived was the *Vie Posthume* which served Marseilles spiritists from 1885-89. Increased literacy, credited to the Ferry Laws of the 1880s mandating primary (and secular) education, and decreasing costs to publish meant that more individuals ventured into the world of the spiritist periodical. Five of the journals born in the 1890s looked to particular spiritist groups for their direct sponsorship. Two of these five were linked—both ill-fated attempts by the *Unions spirites* of Reims and Rouen to create a local voice for spiritism. These groups probably also collaborated on the more successful *Phare de Normandie* (1894-1900), sponsored by the *Union spiritualiste de Rouen*, which reached a broader audience with its inclusive focus on a variety of "psychological studies." As in the 1870s, a majority of 1880s and 1890s journals based themselves in Paris, with readership throughout France. Thus the importance of Paris continued to grow. Larger periodicals even attracted foreign readership. Gabriel Delanne's *Le Spiritisme* often exchanged articles with British spiritualists, while the continuing *Revue spirite* (still edited by P.-G. Leymarie) had correspondents as far away as Constantinople and Spain.

One of the most successful journals was that of Lucie Grange, a Parisian bourgeoisie who had written for and collaborated on popular presses for at least ten years, from 1872-1882, before starting her successful *La Lumière*, which ran for over twenty-six years, until 1909. She wrote for *Le Petit journal* and *La France*, as well as publishing the "Parisian Chronicles" in the *Revue des publications*. Grange used the subtitle "Sciences. Arts. Littérature" for her journal *La Lumière* and only later did she add "Révélations du nouveau spiritualisme." Her journal afforded her the time and opportunity to put forth her own beliefs, and the spiritist chronicler J. Malgras describes her work as a "progressive mission of spiritist education." In it, she argued for women's education and equality, among other social reforms.² Grange claimed in the journal that many of her subscribers were not spiritists, yet she constantly discussed spiritist research, politics, and events, interspersing them with topics such as an explanation of the workings of electricity, and many of those writing in to her journal were, in fact, spiritists.

The only periodical founded after 1880 and based outside Paris which lasted more than a decade was actually a series of eclectic journals published by René Caillé, an engineer turned writer and the son of the great explorer of the same name. From Paris, Caillé moved to Avignon in 1882 and began publishing *l'Anti-matérialiste*, subtitled "*organe du mouvement religieux libéral et du spiritualisme moderne*." This later became *l'Etoile*, subtitled "*revue mensuelle, religion, science, art, Kabbale messianique, socialisme chrétien, spiritualisme expérimentale*," and finally *l'Ame: religion, science, sociologie*. The involved subtitles illustrate a point: Caillé's journals exemplify a shift in Caillé's personal spiritual journey as well as in spiritist journals in the 1880s and 1890s from a fairly narrow focus on spiritism to an editorial policy including a broad range of spiritualist topics, especially that of occultism.

Although spiritism remained the first choice of topics, articles began to appear more and more often in all spiritist journals on alternative interpretations of religion or science. Magnetism and magnetic healing which might or might not be aided by the spirits began to be frequently discussed. Articles describing theosophy, eastern occult practices, hermeticism, or the Cabala often shared pages with communications mediums received from spirits.³ Advice from loved ones in the beyond sat next to explanations of hypnotism and scientific explanations of psychic phenomena. Trémeschini, an engineer, spiritist, and occultist, published the *Bulletin mensuel* of Leymarie's "Société scientifique des études psychologiques." This seemingly spiritist title trailed after it the subtitle "*organe de la mouvement libre penseur religieuse et du spiritualisme moderne*" (Organ of the movement of religious free-thinkers and of modern spiritualism.) Leymarie, who also published the *Revue spirite*, included spiritism in this publication but reached for a broader audience interested in non-materialist interpretations with the mention of spiritualism in his subtitle. Camille Chaigneau, convinced spiritist, took a similar tack by titling his periodical *Humanité intégrale, organe immortaliste* (Integral humanity; immortalist organ. [1896-1901]).

Certainly, spiritist publishers, having a history of difficulties in obtaining enough circulation to support their endeavors, could not have been averse to attracting more readers. But the change reflected larger trends. The 1880s and 1890s saw the French intensify their mission to civilize. As the French empire expanded, so did interest in Eastern cultures. Hinduism, occultism, "exotic" and mystery religions were among the imports of colonialism, renewing popular interest in reincarnation. Spiritist publishers shared an interest in most of these new alternative movements and did not always distinguish among them. The hodge-podge tables of contents of new journals reflected this popular interest.

The end of the century was the heyday of spiritist journals and they declined in number after the turn of the century. Although the *Revue spirite* continued with only a brief interruption during World War I, and continues strong today, few new periodicals arose. The major periodical *Le spiritisme* closed, and its replacement, *Progrès spirite*, did not hold a similar place of importance. Several of those with a broad focus did, however, continue to publish up until the war, indicating the ability to hold a more faithful readership. Such continuity, of course, is indicative of the rising importance of reading in the life of the people of France as well as of continuing interest in spiritism. In the 1880s, more liberal press laws making printing and book selling free professions and allowing publishers the right to print their own journals began to take effect; prices dropped and continued to do so until the end of the century.⁴ With increasing competition in the world of the press, publishers had to appeal to popular interests. Up until World War I, spiritist and broadly spiritualist ideas continued to draw enough audience to merit a variety of publications.⁵

Private groups continued to grow as well. Over fifty cities and towns sent representatives to the 1889 *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale* in Paris.⁶ Many of these locales hosted several groups. Paris, for example, listed five major associations, each of which was broken into numerous groups. Lyons, Bordeaux, Tours, Marseilles, and Toulouse were similarly divided. Only the smallest villages had only one group.

Bordeaux was one of the most active centers outside Paris, with three major spiritist associations in the 1880s and 1890s. A *Groupe spirite girondin* formed in 1884 and continued throughout the 1890s as two other new groups were formed. All three groups were large enough (over twenty) to require registration with the ministry of the interior, and thus give us a glimpse of membership. One was highly bourgeois in membership: formed in 1895 the *Groupe bordelais, société spirite et magnétique*, had over thirty members, some of whom were also in the *Groupe spirite girondin*. A more distinct group, mostly working class, the *Amis de la fraternité*, had twenty-eight members when it formed in 1889 with the purpose of creating a mutual aid society which would be seen as "of public utility," (a term which recognized associations as charitable and allowed them to receive legations. The Bordeaux police and the Interior Ministry allowed the mutual aid, but denied the public utility.)⁷

The *Groupe spirite girondin* offers a fine example of numbers and male/female participation as well. When formed in 1884, the group listed twenty-seven members, eighteen male and nine female, among the members were Mme Agullana and M. Brisse. In 1886 the numbers were twenty-one men, sixteen women, M. Brisse was the president, Mme Agullana a member. 1893 saw the same numbers, but Mme Agullana had become president and Brisse a regular member. In 1894, women had gained the upper hand numerically, with twenty-two women and twenty men, the president was male, and both Brisse and Agullana had returned to regular membership. Bordeaux spiritist groups, at least, had relative parity among women and men and saw no one leader but change among leadership, even with continuity in membership.

Bordeaux like Paris, acted, as a stronghold of spiritism, and the proliferation of journals in the North attests to its strength spreading there as well. Yet there remained areas to conquer. In parts of the Midi, spiritism seemed to have declined and needed to be revived. Although the 1860s and 1870s had seen strong spiritist presence in Carcassonne, and Marseilles and Toulouse continued to be active, not all of the South had spiritist groups. François Vallès gives us an example of the Paris-to-provinces, bourgeois-to-lesser-educated character of much spiritist propaganda, especially that of the 1880s and 1890s. Vallès, who had gone from advocate of *Démocratie pacifique* (peaceful democracy) in 1848 to an Inspector General of Roads and Bridges under the Second Empire and Third Republic, had been active in Paris as president of the *Société scientifiques des études psychologiques*.⁸ In 1880, he decided to retire from his civil service work, but not from his spiritist work. He moved to the southern department of the Gard in 1880. Determined to spread spiritism, Vallès found a people who had forgotten the wars of religion, but just barely. "One always wants to know if it is the Church or the Temple that you frequent." The few spiritists he found knew only the rudiments of the doctrine.⁹

Vallès taught followers who had "almost everything to learn" by appealing to a popular interest in astronomy, the wonders of the heavens, and by denouncing clericalism and materialism. A lecture full of descriptions of the sun and the planets (here Vallès, like other spiritists, engaged in a little creative speculative biology and evolutionism) taught also "the necessity of migrations destined to develop in the ever-perfectible soul knowledge of the works of God." The message of a progressive journey of the soul remained the same as we have seen earlier.¹⁰ The promise of a future among the wonders of the planets surely captivated many of his listeners.

Thus spiritism continued to appeal to many humble people, and its attraction remained in many ways both consolation and miraculous events. It also continued to play on traditional customs. In both Lyon and Marseilles groups handed out free flyers or information sheets on spiritism on 1 November, All Saints' Day, as visitors came to the cemeteries. In Marseilles the initiative came from local spiritists, a "group of friends" sponsored by the *Athénée spirite* who

personally passed out over one thousand papers. In Lyon the *Association typographique* (who had published other spiritist works) printed flyers to be distributed throughout the country, including in Reims, Troyes, Sedan, Lille, Lemans, Tours, Grenoble, St. Etienne, and even Algiers, as well as in a few towns in Belgium.¹¹ These papers spoke directly to peoples' concern for their dead and took advantage of a time when many felt concern for their own life after death, to pass on the word of spiritism.

A strong development in the 1880s was that women began to speak more directly for their own causes, rather than strictly as mediums. Spiritism provided women with a means to speak publicly for women's views and women's rights. Late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries, several strong feminists within the movement combined their claim for political and civil rights with their claims to spirituality. Olympe Audouard, the spiritist-feminist best known to the rest of French society, spoke as a feminist first and a spiritist second. Although she wrote in her journal *Papillon* of her spiritist conversion, her lecture topics continued to concern such things as "The role of women in love, arts, letters, civilization and politics," which she lectured on in April 1883.¹²

Mme Olga de Bézobrazow, active at the turn of the century, went much further in combining spiritism and feminism. She expounded her philosophy of "féminisme-spiritualiste" in a series of books titled *La femme et la vie*. Bézobrazow argued that current feminism's claims to political rights did not go far enough. The future of feminism lay in "feminine thought;" women must be led, by Bézobrazow presumably, to their "personal thought" in art, science and religion.¹³ Bézobrazow argued that women had "cerebral independence" but they remained weakest in the life of the mind. The feminism of the future would blend science and religion; material reforms would be completed by spiritual ones. Like other spiritists, Bézobrazow saw education as the key to achieving a better future. Women must be dually educated, however, first in science and the arts, then in "belief" to complete their spiritual side. The "education of belief" was perhaps the more important of the two since it taught spiritism, which was "the new religion. . . the religion of the future which is that of women."¹⁴ Bézobrazow spoke frequently on her ideas. She lectured on "women in education," at a congress given in 1900 at the *Oeuvres des Institutions féminines*. At the *Congrès spirite* of 1900 she spoke on "the two meanings of feminism"; in 1903 she gave a lecture at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* on "Feminism and spiritualism" and 1903 found her speaking on feminism at the *Hôtel des Sociétés Savantes*.¹⁵ Bézobrazow's lectures were officially welcomed by the well-known Parisian spiritists in the *Société des études psychologiques*.

The most successful female spiritist publisher, Lucie Grange, probably owed much of her success to her popularity as a medium. Grange fought as strongly for women's rights as she did for spiritism. Articles such as "*Recherche de la paternité*" argued that men should be forced to take financial responsibility for children, whether they were married to the mother or not. This would reduce the

rate of infanticide and abortion which women resorted to because of poverty and misery.¹⁶ Grange put her feminism into practice by employing and publishing other women writers. Of the eighteen contributors listed for 1888, six were women, seven were men and the sex of the remaining writers was not given.¹⁷

Grange gives us a clue to the position of female mediums at the turn of the century in her insistence on her role as an independent medium. A description of her, by one M. Maricot, a regular contributor to *La Lumière*, is telling:

We beseech our readers not to imagine Mme Grange as a somnambulist. In order never to submit to the influence of another human will, she has never let herself be magnetized. Mme Grange is of robust constitution and could never be confused with a cataleptic. When she *sees* it is spontaneously, and without sleeping [in trance], all the time speaking with the people around her. She expresses herself enthusiastically, with a natural simplicity and assurance which inspires confidence. For the many years that we have known Mme Grange, we have admired her good character and her even temper. Gracious in society, she is always benevolent to all.¹⁸

Grange clearly was concerned about her reputation. She used her magazine to attract not only readers but also people who would use her mediumistic services. In August 1884, she announced that she would take a voyage throughout all France and French-speaking countries in order to further spiritism and to explain the prophecies given to the medium HAB (which was Grange's inspirational name.) In the journal, she asked for "advice" about places and areas, but clearly she was also asking (and would most likely find) people to welcome her into their homes and spiritist circles, further supporting her work.¹⁹ Grange also made herself available for private sittings or to help start new spiritist groups. Spiritism provided a venue by which she could both address women's issues and make an independent living.

Another feminist spiritist, Julia Becours, combined spiritism, feminism and charity in both her life and her writing. She was a prominent bourgeoisie in Lille, the wife of a doctor and involved in many charities.²⁰ Becours started the Society for Abandoned Mothers after deciding that powerful republican men refused to concern themselves with moral questions and women's problems. "[T]hey limit [women's] influence to private life [*la vie intime*] and keep them in a notoriously inferior position in everything that touches social problems."²¹ She was also a popular novelist, a member of the *Société des gens de lettres*, and a member of the local spiritist society. In order to avoid the prejudice that she spoke out against, and perhaps to mask her spiritism from society, Becours published spiritist works under the pseudonym Paul Grendel. As Grendel, she propagated her spiritist ideas in the form of novels. Her last book, *Les Voix Lointaines*

(Distant Voices), argued in favor of reincarnation and indefinite moral and social progress.²² That progress explicitly included women's rights, which she fought for in journals and revues throughout the department of the Nord.

Becours, Grange, Bézobrazow and other female spiritists argued for women's rights and did so in a manner that did not negate the importance of religion and spirituality. This was especially significant in the Third Republic, in which anti-clericalism had become a mainstay of republican belief. republicans who argued against granting women political rights and participation often described women as sentimentally religious, ruled by their priests rather than by their own minds (or, perhaps more importantly, by their husbands.)²³ Many feminists accepted this implicit equation and strove to distance themselves from the Church. Yet these women's emphasis on the spiritual shows the importance it maintained in the movement. Mme Bézobrazow lamented the difficulties she had interesting feminists in things spiritual.²⁴ Catholic women's groups existed, but rarely spoke for women's political rights. In contrast, rather than deny the association between women and religion, feminist spiritists capitalized on the spiritist doctrine to emphasize women's superior moral qualities but also their right to equality with men. Thus they continued yet furthered the arguments feminist spiritists had made in the 1870s, stressing often the political equality that women deserved. Taking advantage of the doctrinal relationship spiritism posited between spirituality and equality, female feminist-spiritists created a discourse that combined written expression, religious expression, and the call for women's rights.

Spiritist women clearly felt the need to stand up for themselves, especially mediums who wanted to remain independent. As scientists and occultists became increasingly interested in spiritist phenomena, the position of the medium may have become more precarious. Occultism, although it involved many women (see below) promoted a strongly masculine discourse of individuality and male hierarchy.²⁵ Occultists celebrated the ability of the mage to intervene in the world but saw the spiritist medium as passive and acted upon, rather than actor. Scientists and psychical researchers, as we saw in the previous chapter, also used the medium as a tool to reach physical phenomena, rather than a source of knowledge herself, or an interpreter thereof. Mediums such as the Italian Eusapio Palladino, who were studied extensively, were forced to undergo various control measures and asked to perform to the specifications of the researchers, rather than at the whim of the spirits, which no one outside the medium could divine.²⁶ The numbers of mediums making a small living from their arts, either of contacting the dead or of divining the future, seems to have grown, and their advertisements can be found throughout spiritist journals, as well as other small presses. As women became more independent in urban areas, mediumship offered a viable profession. Yet the mediums involved in the spiritist and occultist movements were increasingly the producers of phenomena, rather than the voice of the spirits. "They lost their spiritual and prophetic dimension."²⁷ By

the turn of the century, the medium became increasingly important and yet, in some ways, increasingly less powerful. This would explain why many female mediums did not turn to the occult, as male leaders often did, and those who did, such as Lucie Grange and Lady Caithness, insisted fiercely on their independence as mediums.

The last change in the spiritist movement is related to the question of the new emphasis on science and the relation of the researcher to the medium. The character of events produced by mediums, or at least of those most publicly sought-after, shifted during this period. Increasingly, rather than demand moral teachings from the spirits, spiritist researchers like Gabriel Delanne began to look to verify the truth of their experiments in scientific ways. Whereas the empirical quality of spiritist trance writing had been seen as “scientific” in the 1850s and 1860s, by the 1880s, simple empiricism was no longer enough. In some cases, spiritists spent little time asking advice from the spirits and instead tended toward “testing” them. Delanne’s *Revue scientifique et morale du spiritisme* for example, concentrated on finding proofs of identity of deceased spirits. They worked to manifest spirits of the dead who could provide information about themselves, then contacted those who had known them in order to find out if these facts were true. The researchers were elated when they found “absolute proof” that various spirits could only be who they said they were, as this proved that the soul continued after death.²⁸ Apports, or materializations of physical objects from the beyond, seemed at first a likely candidate for proving the existence of the spirits. When Henri Sausse and his group from Lyon reported in 1895 on their long-term experiments with a medium who consistently apported roses, their experiments were seen as “proof” that apports could indeed happen. (A German medium who had materialized flowers in demonstrations throughout Europe, including in Paris, was tried and convicted of fraud, by hiding flowers inside her skirts, in 1902, but this did little to dissuade spiritists from seeking apports.) The Sausse group’s phenomena were happily repeated in several journals to proclaim the scientific character of spiritism.²⁹

From outside the movement, physical phenomena clearly came to the fore. Pierre Janet, a leading psychologist who took an interest in medium phenomena, described this as a rising tendency after 1882.³⁰ However, this tendency should not be overstated. It remained limited mainly to those at the head of the movement. The importance to the average spiritist of the words of the spirits remained high. Spiritists integrated physical phenomena, both old-fashioned movements of the table not aimed at spelling things out and newer physical features, with careful study of the teachings of the spirits. They also continued many of the same social and political roles they had had in the 1860s. The *Athénée spirite*, composing several groups associated with *La Vie Posthume* in Marseilles, offers a good example. Although they celebrated the turn of the Parisian *Société des études spirites* to proving spiritism as “a SCIENCE,” yet they focused on education and on charity. The *Groupe Jean*, a part of the *Athénée spirite* grouped

around the medium M. Georges (who had been active as a medium since at least 1871), took up collections for the poor; the *Athénée spirite* itself created a subgroup aimed at “mutual instruction” in a safe atmosphere for those who were not well-educated. The *Athénée spirite*, however, did show its character as a fin-de-siècle spiritist group in its insistence on being “atheistic” spiritists in a public polemic with *Le Spiritisme* of Paris.³¹ Janet too, although critical of the spiritists’ metaphysical ideas, recognized their charity. Many groups, he noted, have “more profane preoccupations such as politics and even, we don’t hesitate to recognize it, charity. In Paris, one could name, I believe, eight circles of this type.”³² Spiritists thus adapted to the new currents at the end of the century yet continued to insist on the values which had formed the movement in the 1860s.

Spiritists had never been fully willing to toe any doctrinal line. As new voices and ideas arose at the fin de siècle, and as journals proliferated, so the rank and file of spiritists seems to have become even more independent. The extent of this is difficult to gauge, as the majority of spiritist writings come not from the rank and file, but from those recognized as leaders in the field. Certainly everyday spiritists never rejected any of the major leaders of spiritism: P-G Leymarie, Gabriel Delanne, or Léon Denis. However, they also happily went their own ways in meetings and offered more criticism, particularly of Leymarie, than had been the case earlier.

The small brouhaha which arose in the spiritist world around the question of a conference showed the volatility and the independence of various spiritist groups and the periodicals they followed. The idea for an international conference came from Jean Guérin, a wealthy landowner from Bordeaux. Guérin had already given some 5,000ff to aid the *Revue spirite* and to help promote J.B. Roustaing’s spiritist ideas. (Roustaing’s writings, which claimed to speak with Christ’s very voice, had been rejected by Kardec in the 1860s.³³) Several spiritist groups disdained the idea simply because it had been proposed by Guérin and they feared it was a power grab by Leymarie to further present Roustaing’s ideas. More importantly, a variety of groups wrote in against the conference, both to the *Revue spirite* and to *La Lumière* because it was “too soon” and could endanger the movement by trying to set doctrine.³⁴ The ultimate condemnation of the conference idea came from “Jean Darcy,” a male Joan of Arc (Jeanne d’Arc) perhaps, who insisted that “Spiritists will be always and above all free-thinkers, and will never believe anything except that which seems to them just and reasonable, that which they have understood themselves, not what it pleases someone to [attempt to] impose on them.” Clearly the fear was of having their freedom of decision and thought taken away. *La Lumière* boasted numerous spiritist groups in Lyon, Bordeaux and a few in Paris which publicly aligned themselves against a conference.³⁵

At the same time, tensions in who should lead the movement buffeted Leymarie. The extent of these tensions is difficult to ascertain. Certainly Gabriel Delanne, young, energetic, with his strong interest in science, wanted the move-

ment to adopt a scientific bent while Leymarie, although interested in empirical proofs, continued his interest in political and social issues. Delanne and others formed, in 1885, a new group, the *Union spirite française* (French spiritist union) which published *Le Spiritisme*, drew spiritist attention away from the *Revue spirite*, and acted as an alternative organizing center. An independent medium, Berthe Fropo, wrote a scathing polemic against Leymarie, insisting that the new society had been suggested by a spirit communication from no less than Kardec himself.³⁶ The new review claimed at first to promote Kardec's ideas over others but within ten years, it too would close, as the editor, Laurent de Faget, left to found yet another journal, *Le progrès spirite* because he claimed *Le spiritisme* was not Kardecist enough.³⁷

Certainly these tensions could be overstated. Although differences existed among the various factions and movements, it was also clear that they shared more than kept them apart. Despite the supposed animosity that Gabriel Delanne held for Leymarie for supporting Roustaing, at the *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste* of 1889 Delanne's father, Alexandre Delanne, who had been part of the group founding the new "spiritist union" happily referred to Roustaing as "our old friend" while telling of various spiritist experiments.³⁸ At that same Congress could be found representatives from nearly all spiritist groups, including Lucie Grange herself and Henri Sausse, a Lyon spiritist leader who had been, with Grange, vehemently opposed to such a congress in 1884. Groups disagreed, came back together, and disagreed again. The fluidity of the doctrine allowed a number of strong positions. With the proliferation of groups and periodicals, and increasing ways to explain the phenomena produced by mediums, spiritism too became divided and diversified in its interests and interpretations. This tension was most strongly illustrated in the increasing difficulty followers had reconciling science and religion.

Delanne and Denis

The period 1880-1914 saw a shift away from the doctrines that Kardec had insisted upon as key to the movement. Although almost all spiritists accepted reincarnation and argued that they essentially supported Kardec's ideas, they seldom promoted only Kardec's ideas. P.-G. Leymarie shifted the *Revue spirite* in new directions, opening it to both the occult and new ideas of science, but Leymarie had lost his centrality as a spokesman for the movement. The two most vocal leaders at the fin de siècle were Léon Denis and Gabriel Delanne, and each represented a different strain of spiritist thought. Delanne represented the turn toward science. Denis maintained Kardec's emphasis on spirituality, but he reinterpreted and extended it in new directions. The two thinkers represented two sides of the movement, the two classes most involved, the bourgeois and the petty-bourgeois/worker, and how those class backgrounds led to views that dif-

ferred without being irreconcilable. A comparison of these two views shows the first tensions of a split between religion and science that would not be finalized until the late twentieth century.³⁹ Both leaders were, according to their biographers, personally mystical, yet their mysticism led them in very different directions. Denis saw himself as personally chosen to suffer among humans in order to bring them succor of mind and body. Delanne, although described as “the most profoundly mystical of all the pioneers of French spiritism,” and as devoting himself to hours of meditation and intimate communion with God, nonetheless denied the divinity of Jesus Christ and strove to keep spiritism separate from religion.⁴⁰ Spiritism in the 1880s played out internally the tensions between science and religion that we saw it play out externally in the previous chapter.

The *Revue spirite* in the 1880s and 1890s broadened Kardec’s idea of spiritism unifying all religions to include a more occult, less Christian interest in astral planes and Eastern mysticism. Early on Leymarie was at the center of bringing spiritism into contact with the new occult movements. He was friends with Mme Blavatsky in 1873, before she even founded the Theosophical Society (in 1875). He formed, in 1879, a *Société théosophique des spirites de France* (Theosophical society of French spiritists), which seemed to know very little of the actual teachings of Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, but included members presumably interested in “Egyptian” occult knowledge, as Blavatsky had been toying with occult freemasonry when last she came through Paris in 1873.⁴¹ (The teachings of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus were purported to contain secret knowledge about death.)

Around this time, Leymarie experienced a series of setbacks. First, in 1883, came the realization by his “Theosophical society of French spiritists,” with the translation of certain Theosophical Society teachings, that Blavatsky’s teachings denied the reality both of the spirits of the dead and of reincarnation.⁴² (Blavatsky later changed her ideas on the latter.) This horrified the entirely spiritist membership of the new society. Then came a series of polemics among spiritists over Leymarie’s willingness to promote the ideas of J.-B. Roustaing and his acceptance of the patronage of Jean Guérin and whether spiritism was truly ready for a Congress. Most spiritists wished to maintain the fluidity of the movement and some feared Leymarie was trying to take that away. The latter is unlikely. Leymarie’s character seems to have been that of a truly curious seeker, but also someone easily caught up in new ideas. His main strength was not as a creator of ideas but as a popularizer of them; he continued throughout his life to promote Kardec’s teachings on reincarnation, even if he didn’t see them as the exclusive means to knowledge.

For Leymarie and the *Société anonyme pour la continuation des oeuvres d’Allan Kardec*, most of the 1890s were taken up with various lawsuits, first by the heirs of Guérin (who died in 1885 and willed his money to the société) and then by the heirs of Kardec, who, as Malgras puts it, rode the coattails of Guérin’s heirs. Despite fighting hard, Leymarie lost these suits, and this meant

that, although the *Revue spirite* continued, the *Société anonyme* did not. Leymarie continued to write in the *Revue* but, again according to Malgras, in Leymarie's writing "the form was sacrificed to the thought" and Leymarie never became a theorist of spiritism in any sustained way.⁴³ Leymarie continued and expanded the social emphasis of the movement, but the new, hip, and exciting side was not social but psychological, and Leymarie's importance declined.

By 1897 Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie had turned eighty years of age and, although he remained editor-in-chief, his son Paul Leymarie had taken over the editing of the *Revue spirite* and running the bookstore. The journal had added to its title *Revue spirite* the subtitle *Journal d'études psychologiques et du spiritualisme expérimental*. By the Congrès spirite et spiritualiste of 1900 the map of spiritualists in France had greatly changed, and the spiritists were only one segment of a complex movement. Leymarie (who would die the following year) barely merited a mention, in connection with "the *Librairie spirite*, whose revue announced our Congress with sympathy."⁴⁴ That unnamed revue was, of course, the *Revue spirite*, clearly dethroned here from its earlier role as the centerpiece of the movement. As Leymarie saw his star wane, both Delanne and Denis saw theirs rise.

Born and raised in Paris, Gabriel Delanne was the most scientific of spiritist thinkers.⁴⁵ His parents were bourgeois merchants who converted to spiritism when he was just a child. Delanne was not raised a mystic, however, but took a course typical for a bourgeois son. After passing both his exams, he was employed as an engineer at the Popp electrical company, where he stayed until 1892. Delanne's mother was a medium. She channeled spirits who spoke of clerical abuses. Delanne's father had been active in spiritist and republican circles since the early 1860s. Gabriel Delanne continued his parents' heritage.⁴⁶ He struggled to bring spiritism into the realm of science, interacting with university scientists and inviting them to spiritist experiments. Delanne's writings remained on the plane of matter and experiment. His rare references to metaphysics were only to claim that scientific spiritism now placed them on firm ground.

Gabriel Delanne was the only major spiritist leader to say that religion was completely unnecessary to the modern world. "Religions now resemble leading strings which were indispensable for the child to learn to walk, but which become useless to him, and even harmful, when he has developed enough to make his way alone." Yet Delanne refused to put spiritism completely at loggerheads with the Church. "It is not necessary to believe, nonetheless, that spiritism is opposed to religions, it combats only their abuses, it addresses itself most particularly to materialists and to those who, without being complete atheists, are undecided on the subject of the future life."⁴⁷

Delanne also continued to emphasize the moral side of spiritism. At age twenty-six he began his challenge to Leymarie with *Le Spiritisme*, which lasted until 1895. At that point he collaborated with A. Laurent de Faget on the *Progrès spirite* before starting another journal, the *Revue scientifique et morale du*

spiritisme (1896-1926, Delanne died in 1926). As the title implies, this journal maintained a strong moral current, giving teachings from the spirits that continued to support reincarnation, even arguing it with quotes from the Bible. Concurrently with his *Revue*, Delanne collaborated on *Le Tribune psychique* (1897-1919) which was much more scientific than spiritist. Delanne never rejected the moral side of spiritism, but his emphasis was on the scientific side. In an 1899 list of writers for the *Echo de l'au delà*, which included both Delanne and Denis, Delanne was listed as correspondent for "scientific spiritism," while Denis was listed as collaborator simply for "spiritisme."⁴⁸ This distinction may even have been understated.

Léon Denis, child of hardship and poverty, charismatic speaker and devout interpreter of the spirits, encouraged followers to lead, if not a traditionally religious life, than a highly moral and spiritual one based on a love of Christ. Raised in Bordeaux, he had to leave the city when his father was transferred from the mint there to the position of head of a small village train station nearby. Denis' father could not afford to leave his son with the priests who had hoped to keep schooling him. Instead, Léon Denis started work at a young age to help support his family. His biographer tells of his subsequent early "mystical religious crisis," wherein he spent each night during the summer of his fifteenth or sixteenth year worshipping at a tiny rural chapel.⁴⁹ Only two years after this, at age eighteen, Léon Denis discovered Kardec's *Livre des Esprits*, and was immediately "charmed and convinced." This was during the heyday of spiritist expansion, in 1864. By this time, or shortly thereafter, Denis had moved again with his family, this time to Tours, where he became a clerk to a leather merchant. In Tours, Denis met Kardec, the latter on a propaganda trip. This secured his faith and he joined a spiritist circle.⁵⁰ Unable to fight due to bad eyesight, the twenty-four-year-old Denis, a staunch patriot, nonetheless enlisted and served his country as director of an officers mess during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, then returned to Tours. At this point Denis' biographers diverge. Lantier describes a "reversal" in which Denis became "an ardent republican" and also a freemason. He served as spokesman for his lodge, allowing him to perfect his skills at oratory. Baumard says only that during the mid-1870s he was pressured by a senator to become active in politics, which he refused because he had to provide for his aging parents.⁵¹

In the 1880s Léon Denis finally came into his own as a spiritist leader. At a séance in 1882 the being who would be his spiritual guide for the rest of his life revealed itself. This spirit claimed to be "Jerome of Prague," who had been a disciple of Jean Hus in the fourteenth century and was, like his master, burned at the stake. A second communication some six months later urged Denis to march forward, spreading the word. Finally, in October 1885, Jerome told Denis: "My son, the light and life must be scattered everywhere; go where you are called; go where there is good to be said; I will support your unsteady steps; I will accompany you in the paths of wisdom."⁵²

Denis took his guide's advice and as early as 1883 he began lecturing throughout the country. He was a powerful speaker, drawing audiences as large as eight hundred people, and moving these audiences to applause and excitement.⁵³ Denis' presence was much requested; he lectured for the *Ligue de l'enseignement* as well as on spiritist topics. Even in the relatively small town of Rochefort he was able to draw some three to four thousand people to hear a talk on "The Worlds of the Heavens; The Sun and his Family; Universal Life; the Destiny of beings and their progressive existence on the ladder of the worlds."⁵⁴ Denis traveled extensively in his quest to spread "life and light," including to Algeria; his venues ranged from small spiritist group meetings, to the City Hall of Algiers and the "vast hall" of the Athénée in Bordeaux, to the elite salon of Lady Caithness in Paris. Between the lecture circuit and the authoring of spiritist texts and novels, Denis made what appears to have been a fairly good living.

The main spiritist texts of the end of the century, authored by Delanne and Denis, illustrate the diverging emphases emerging in the movement. The two spiritist leaders shared beliefs in a just God, a succession of plural lives, and the importance of spirit communications. But their expression of these beliefs differed greatly. Delanne's writings, although well received and read among spiritists, were relatively tame. He spent much time replying to the criticisms of scientists and listing communications and manifestations of the dead. He emphasized the event in spiritism and was willing, even more than Kardec, to leave room for science to find the full explanation in the future. Delanne remained firmly anchored within the acceptable realm of science. He was also rarely able to travel until the late 1890s; his message went less often heard outside of Paris itself.⁵⁵

Denis, on the other hand, both by speaking and writing, took spiritism into the realms of magic and myth. His first book, *Après la mort*, (After Death, 1891) offered spiritism in the midst of an exciting mixture. Denis included history, secret doctrines and mystery religions, the scientific adventures of British spiritualists Crookes and Wallace, moral teachings, promises of reincarnation (Crookes, Wallace, and morality also featured in Delanne's work) and a smattering of social and political critiques, sometimes somewhat contradictory. By 1910, the work had seen at least twenty-five thousand copies printed. Denis offered a fervent patriotism as well. He returned to Reynaud's interpretation of Celtic roots, lauding the ancient "gallic republics" which were collective, elective, included women in council and sacred rites and even let them choose their spouses. Even the great Gaul himself, Vercingétorix, had communicated with the "souls of the dead heroes of the country [*patrie*]." The Gauls lacked only solidarity and fraternal feeling; it was this division among them which lost the *patrie* to the Romans; Christianity taught this solidarity and fraternity; this fraternity, combined with the traditional druidic sense of liberty and equality, would make France "one nation, indivisible." The Revolution redeemed France, and "old Gaul was rediscovered whole in the France of 1789."⁵⁶

Spiritism inherited the traditions of the Druids; it was also the inheritor of Christ. "Before the drama of Golgotha, Jesus had announced to the people [*les hommes*] another consoler, the Spirit of truth, who would reestablish and complete his [Jesus'] teachings. This Spirit of truth is come and has spoken on earth, everywhere his voice is heard."⁵⁷ Spiritism, and the messages of the spirits, were that voice. Kardec himself had said he spoke with the "spirit of truth" but he had not gone further than that. Here and elsewhere Denis claimed spiritism as the truth and the future, the chosen path to knowledge, in a way which set believers apart. Kardec would never have claimed so much. In fact, Denis even argued that everyone was not ready for this knowledge. Unlike Delanne, who said religions were no longer necessary, Denis found them useful. He saw "established creeds" as narrow and not progressing. But, he added, "Dogmas, creeds, priests, and clergymen are nevertheless necessary to the world now, and will be for some time to come. Many young and timid souls in their journey through earth are unable to find their way or understand their own needs without direction. . . . The new spirituality" on the other hand, "addresses itself particularly to evolved souls who wish to find for themselves the solution to the grand problems."⁵⁸

Denis' writings tended toward an almost mystical sense of nationalism and the importance of the French past. He often reminded readers of the glory of Joan of Arc and what he called Celtic genius.⁵⁹ Joan of Arc, who Denis noted had clearly been a medium, was "like a resurrection of the spirit of Gaul . . . a dazzling figure." Her coming had been foretold by the bard Merlin himself and "it was under the fairy oak, near the stone table, that she [Joan] often heard 'her voices.'"⁶⁰ Writing in 1910, Denis insisted on the importance of Joan of Arc for the glory of France. He wrote, he said, to combat the materialists of the twentieth century who were denying Joan's voices, saying she acted only on "the voice of her own conscience." The great historians of the nineteenth century, Michelet and Henri Martin, knew better; they "understood the genius of peoples [*racés*] and of times, and the breath of the Beyond stirred their pages."⁶¹ Denis railed against the liberals who would destroy the glory of their country only to contradict the Catholics—all for the sake of the Party. "It is wrong, almost a crime, to seek to weaken the moral patrimony, the historical tradition of a people. . . . The tradition of a people, its history, is the poetry of its life, its solace in affliction, its hope for the future. It is by the bonds it creates among us that we feel truly the children of one mother, the members of a common homeland [*patrie*]."⁶²

In his speeches Denis supported a republic and social change, yet his rhetoric and his passionate nationalism shared more with conservatives than with most republicans. In fact, in most of Denis' writings, he advocated an occult, interior individualism mediated only by charity to fellow humans. His writings were critical of the status quo and of the Church, it is true, but they also critiqued the university and science. This became more acutely the case in his writings after the turn of the century. Since the majority of his books were either written

or revised after 1900, this became the main thrust of his message. In these works, Denis maintained a republican, liberal stress on education and on progress, but both were completely redefined from the general republican stance. Fraternity remained, but it lost most of its connections with the romantic socialist fraternity seen in early spiritist works.

In *Le problème de l'être et de la destinée* (The Problem of Being and of Destiny, 1908), Denis accused both science and the Church of falling short. He called both institutions "superfluous" and irrelevant to the conduct of life here and beyond. The university had no real answers: "In the midst of the universities a complete incertitude reigns upon the solution of the most important problems ever presented" to humanity. Religion had been undermined, "shut by the churches in walls of dogmas, and compelled to stand in rigid forms."⁶³ Here and elsewhere, Denis called for a new type of education. "Education . . . is the most powerful factor in progress. . . . But to be complete, education should inspire the mind of man to study life in two alternating forms—the visible and the invisible."⁶⁴

In a series of articles from May through November 1918, Denis set out his program for "The Future of Spiritism," which he hoped would solve the ills of post-war France. By this time the equality that he had so touted in the Gallic republics had been tainted by socialism. Like many who had been even more fervently egalitarian, Denis found his enthusiasm further dampened by the Russian revolution.⁶⁵ Those "people of all levels" who needed to be re-educated had been misled, kept in ignorance of their true nature and instead led toward democratic socialism. "Egalitarian socialism would be the wrong road to follow. . . . Equality is not found in nature and it cannot exist in society."⁶⁶ Denis pointed to the Russian revolution as exemplary of the oppression, anarchy and brigandage which could result from even the best-intentioned political moves. "Materialist socialism forgot one cardinal thing: that the soul needs hope and faith. . . ." The men to provide this were hardly the men who had held power in France during the last twenty years, Denis noted. "Democracy should be directed by honest and pure hands, not by materialist sensualists, careless of the superior laws and of the greeting that the Beyond reserves for them."⁶⁷ That this was printed in the *Revue spirite*, which thirty years earlier had trumpeted the call for equality, shows the major shifts in emphasis spiritism had undergone in the fin de siècle.

Although in these articles Denis supported Delanne's scientific program, he saw it as only a base for the real task. The real work ahead would be spiritual and internal. First, spiritism should "provoke, study, [and] coordinate the experimental proofs of survival [of the soul]. . . . Basing itself on well-established proofs . . . Spiritism should prepare to renovate the scientific, rational and moral education of people [*l'homme*] of all classes [*milieux*]."⁶⁸ Only education could heal "the interior ills from which our unhappy country suffers" which the First World War had revealed. "It has become evident to any thinker that human societies will never reach a state of peace and harmony by political means, but

rather by interior and individual reform, that is by education, a moral training which ameliorates the collectivity by perfecting each individual."⁶⁹ Although this train of thought had been implicit in the concept of reincarnation, and thinkers from Reynaud to Kardec had taught that the individual perfected, meant the community perfected, it had rarely been given the stress Denis laid upon it, nor had it rejected social equality. Kardec himself had seen social change as equally important to individual change in the formula for perfecting the world; Leymarie busied himself with all manner of social reforms, and even Delanne emphasized the social alongside the scientific.

Not only individual training but the individual will became paramount in Denis' thought. This culminates a type of thinking seen in earlier spiritist writings but without the emphasis Denis gave it. Spiritist publisher Maurice Lachâtre wrote of "the will" in the 1870s, but he saw it as a force for overcoming and achieving success against the challenges of the world. For Denis, the will had become the world. He too argued that "the will, used for good and conforming to eternal laws, can realize great things. It also can make much evil." But he went further, arguing that in accordance with the laws of the universe, everything could be achieved by will. Thoughts, desires, and actions, good or bad, could change the "fluid" that surrounds everyone and thus effect others, leading them into good or evil.

Our evil thoughts, our impure desires, our guilty actions corrupt the fluids which surround us and contact with these will cast malaise and produce maleficent impressions on those who we approach, because all organisms sustain the influence of the ambient fluids. Similarly, generous sentiments, thoughts of love, warm exhortations, will penetrate the beings around us, support them, vivify them.

Denis also said, "The use that we make of our will, alone, rules our advancement, prepares our future, fortifies us or debilitates us. There is neither chance nor fate. There are laws. Use, govern the one, observe the other, that is the secret of all greatness."⁷⁰ Denis' tone accorded well with cultural currents at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth. His later writings especially reflected influences from the Paris and Lyon based occult movements, in which he participated, even if he was indeed never fully initiated.

The flirtation with the occult was shared by many spiritists at the end of century, yet did not last overlong. By the time World War I was over, many French turned to spiritism for consolation or even for word from their dead.⁷¹ The time for high flown and fantastical thought had passed; the future would focus on moral rebuilding. Denis' program retained echos of the interiority of the occult; however, it emphasized moral growth and the rebuilding of the country above all else. The *Revue spirite* became more the organ of Denis' thought than

of Delanne's. Although in 1908 both were honorary presidents of the *Société spirite de Paris* and as late as 1918 the works of both writers were being advertised and recommended by the *Revue*, in that same year only articles by Denis were published. In fact, the year 1918 saw the publication of very few articles on the psychical sciences and Delanne concentrated his energies in other journals. Spirit communications came that year from Allan Kardec and from Delanne père, but by far the greatest number came from Jean Hus, whose disciple, Jerome of Prague, Léon Denis claimed as his personal spirit guide. Although Gabriel Delanne and Denis never quarreled, they came to work in increasingly separate arenas. There is also rumor of a quarrel that took place between Denis and Charles Richet, one of the primary scientific researchers with whom Delanne hoped to make progress; Denis certainly complained of criticism from Richet. In 1919, when Jean Meyer, head of the *Revue spirite* since 1916, founded the *Institut métapsychique* to continue scientific experiment into psychical and spiritist phenomena, he also founded, with Delanne and Denis, a *Maison des spirites* which carried on separately the work of propaganda and the teaching of Kardec's moral philosophy. Thus by this time, although Delanne and Denis continued to work together, their separate interests and strengths had led to varying outcomes. Out of the former came what has become known as psychical research. The latter continued the aspects of spiritual search and individual moral progress; these are the areas in which the spiritist movement most concerns itself today.⁷²

Facing Occultism

By the later 1880s and early 1890s, the supernatural was no longer the uncontested territory of the spiritists (it had never been completely so, of course; certainly the churches never gave up their claims.) We have already seen how spiritism changed from the 1880s on. In the midst of the new Third Republic, with secularism an official government policy and fear of decadence and of decline nearly one, spiritists found themselves sharing the margins with myriad new groups who also challenged the monopoly of science over knowledge and offered new ways of explaining spiritist phenomena. "The occultist movement" at the end of the nineteenth century is a loose and ill-fitting leash for a multi-headed, many-legged creature.⁷³ Neo-occultism included Blavatsky's Theosophy, imported from Britain; it included a neo-Martinist movement led by Gérard Encausse, known by his initiatory name as Papus; also a Rosicrucian society started by the ascetic Stanislas de Guaita, and a Catholic Rosicrucian society founded by Joseph "Sar" Péladan, who broke away from Guaita. The members of these groups intermingled, and many times the same people belonged to a variety of groups. Less related, but sharing similar ideas were groups like the catharists or the neo-agnostics.⁷⁴

Occultism has, of course, always embodied the search for secret, hidden knowledge. The term theosopher applied to those in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who looked in the book of nature for divine knowledge, or who looked for the secrets to the workings of the divine hidden in the great books of the past, most often the Jewish Cabala but also the Christian Bible. Most of these theosophers believed that only a highly educated elite could reach this knowledge. Many believed it should not be placed in the hands of the people, so patently unready to understand it. By the end of the democratic nineteenth century, this attitude had been modified somewhat. Although elitism remained and still remains an issue in occultism, popular periodicals and publications allowed a vast number of men and women into the secrets of the occult. Initiatory orders which sprang up at the end of the century encouraged followers and helped vulgarize the occult.

“Modern” occultism or “neo-occultism” did not really follow a direct line from the esoteric strains of the late eighteenth century. Its genealogy is usually given as follows: The main line for the new occultism sprang from the work of Eliphas Lévi (the abbé Constant), whose *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1856) made popular the word occultism and suggested a new path to knowledge. Lévi had many readers, especially among writers, yet his real influence came after his death, with the publications of his intellectual disciple Saint-Yves d’Alveydre (1842-1909). Although Saint-Yves d’Alveydre’s works were read (and republished) by the occultists of the 1890s, his role lay more as an inspiration rather than as an active center of the movement.⁷⁵ This entry into occultism did not necessarily pass by the door of spiritism or spirit phenomena.

Exploration of spiritist phenomena did, however, offer a common route into occultism. Many occult thinkers began as spiritists, and many of them never fully rejected the joys of the séance or the importance of these phenomena as proof of powers beyond the material. René Callié found himself in Paris in the late 1870s, broken in health by rheumatism, and turned to spiritism as much for comfort as for intellectual truths. Yet spiritism opened him to ideas of the occult, and he became increasingly involved in occult circles, while his publications continued to mingle the two until his death. We have already seen how Leymarie, Fauvety, Eugène Nus and others moved from spiritism toward occultism, without ever relinquishing their interest in the former.

Although, as with spiritism, most of the occultist world communicated with each other via revues and published work, there seem to have been three main physical centers of occultism in Paris, and those who frequented each overlapped. The earliest “salon illuminé” was that of Lady Caithness (1832-1895, also known as the Duchesse de Pomar after her first husband’s title) a native of Spain who had practiced mediumship in Britain and the United States throughout the 1870s and became, in 1876, an early member of the Theosophical Society, founded by Mme Blavatsky in 1875.⁷⁶ Lady Caithness invited a variety of orators to enthrall her guests in soirées where marginal sciences of all sorts

mingled. Lady Caithness herself, who believed she channeled the spirit of Mary, Queen of Scots, often spoke in an “inspired” state, at which points she called herself “Marie.” In herself then, she mingled spirit and occult preoccupations and rejected controversy between the groups. Léon Denis spoke there at least twice, but most speakers were more strictly occultist.

The second major arena for occultism was the bookstore *Librairie du merveilleux*, founded by Lucien Chamuel, who also helped Gérard Encausse (known as Papus) found the occult journal *L'Initiation*. According to V. Michelet, the *Librairie du merveilleux* attracted numerous occult and symbolist personalities: “The boutique of the *Librairie du Merveilleux* received a stream of personalities belonging to different elites. It was a crowd.”⁷⁷ This “bookstore of the marvelous” acted as a gathering place for all manner of occultists. A similar bookstore, *L'Art indépendant*, was founded by the occultist Edmond Bailly, where he published earlier works by hermetic masters and brought together esoteric thinkers and symbolist poets.⁷⁸

Unlike spiritists, occultists did not have small domestic gatherings. Instead they met in various organized groups; these constitute the third category of occultist communication. Like spiritist groups, however, these fluctuated greatly through the fin de siècle and are too numerous for us to explore here. The most important group was Martinism, formed by Papus, who was to occultism what Kardec was to spiritism. Papus was a member of almost every occultist group of the period, from the Gnostic church to Stanislas de Guaita’s Rosicrucians.⁷⁹ After dabbling in, and both rejecting and being rejected by Theosophy, by 1889 Papus was promoting Martinism, based on the teachings of late eighteenth-century occultist leaders Martines de Pasqually and Louis-Claude de Saint Martin.⁸⁰ His *Groupe indépendante d'études ésotériques* (Independent Group for Esoteric Studies), which spread through initiation and the promotion of textual studies the teachings of Martinism and of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, expanded rapidly at the end of the century and quickly overshadowed the Theosophical Society. The latter was rejected as less “French,” mainly because it was less Christian than the occultism of Martinism. Note that throughout the fin de siècle, a tension reigned within occultism over “Egyptian” occultism vs. that, like Blavatsky’s, which looked to the Orient. Egyptian occult teaching, later adopted by Western hermeticists, was considered occidental and could be blended with Christianity, whereas Hinduism and Buddhism were labeled oriental and seen as a challenge to Christianity. Most French occultists supported a “Christian” occultism, whatever the various established churches might have thought of it.⁸¹

The two most important occultist leaders of the late nineteenth-century were Stanislas de Guaita and Gérard Encausse, or Papus. Guaita took a mystical, hierarchical position, arguing that occult secrets could only be understood by elite thinkers. In his occult novel *La-Bas*, J.-K. Huysman modeled the mystical aesthete Des Esseintes after Guaita, who was known for having mysterious objects appear in various cupboards and for his use of morphine and other drugs.

It was Guaita who was accused of killing, by black magic, the Lyon occultist abbé Boullan, an accusation in the presses which led to two duels and great publicity.⁸² Guaita gathered around him an elite group of young men who wanted to experiment with truly mystical avenues to truth. But it was Gérard Encausse who shifted occultism in the late nineteenth century from an unknown esoteric program to a popular occupation among the bourgeoisie (especially among men.)

Papus' main role, like that of Kardec in spiritism, was in popularizing occultism through his writings. In 1888 he, along with Lucien Chamuel, started the journal *L'Initiation*; shortly after that they launched a more accessible weekly, the *Voile d'Isis. L'Initiation*, subtitled the *Revue philosophique indépendante des Hautes Etudes* (Independent philosophical review of Higher Studies), to distinguish it from Theosophical groups, covered topics such as hypnotism, Theosophy, the Kabbala, Freemasonry, and the "Occult Sciences" with occasional coverage of spiritism and magnetism. Its authors were the inner circle of late nineteenth-century occult and spiritist movements, as well as literary writers such as Eugène Nus. Each month offered sections on philosophy, literature, and a "initiatory section" which dealt with doctrines and supposedly "secret" knowledge. The review also kept readers abreast of happenings in the occult world, offering "bulletins" noting various meetings and talks, and summarizing articles from various sister presses.

Also like Kardec, Papus, as Gérard Encausse, was truly a man of his times. His studies in medicine and his position as head of the hypnotherapy laboratory at the *Hôpital de la Charité* gave him a legitimacy and an air of "science" that allowed him to speak as an insider in the scientific world. He insisted, again like Kardec, that his movement did not reject science but was in fact more scientific than the scientists, bringing scientific observation to the most important questions of the soul, the spirit, and the world of the invisible. Papus, even more than Kardec, possessed a charisma that drew people to him. He was an indefatigable searcher after knowledge, a readable writer, and an adept popularizer of other people's more complicated thought. His energy and drive made him the key to the popularity of occultism at the end of the century.⁸³ Papus' bibliography runs to several pages. He published the important popularizing work *l'Occultisme contemporain* in 1887 and his *Traité élémentaire de science occulte* first appeared in 1888 (several revised editions followed.) A flood of works followed, on occultism, martinism, the tarot, the dangers of spells. Most were written under the name Papus, some, on medical topics, under the name Gérard Encausse. A book on *La Réincarnation* appeared in 1912. Gérard Encausse was called to the front in 1914 as an ambulance medic and sent back reports to the Public Health Service on that segment of his life. In 1916 his poor health forced him to give up his position as an army doctor. He died in October 1916; his last work, published after his death, was *Ce que deviennent nos morts* (What becomes of our dead) where he voiced one more time his firm belief in reincarnation.⁸⁴

It is beyond the scope of this book to thoroughly discuss the history of occultism at the end of the century.⁸⁵ What is pertinent here is to look at how spiritists and occultists interacted, and at the spread of ideas of reincarnation among occultists to determine whether these are the same as those seen earlier.

The Theosophist movement at first seemed to reject reincarnation (something which helped make it popular in England and the United States.) However, H.P. Blavatsky's position on reincarnation evolved from her first work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), where she took little note of the doctrine, to the later *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), which very strongly affirmed reincarnation as a tenet of theosophical belief.⁸⁶ Lady Caithness, who spoke most strongly for Theosophy in France, was herself a firm believer in both the ability to talk to spirits and in reincarnation, which she defended throughout her life. The most important question was whether the grand number of occultists who followed Stanislas de Guaita and Papus would adopt reincarnation. They did, especially via the teachings of Papus, but they taught a different version of reincarnation than the spiritists had and they shifted the emphasis on how to achieve progress away from studying the teachings of the spirits and towards using the will of the individual; this was especially true in the case of Guaita.

For the Martinist movement, the key theological fact was not reincarnation but the Fall of humankind from divinity. The key to overcoming this was the eventual reintegration of the human with the divine. Reincarnation was the way to achieve this. Here we must remember that this was key to Pierre-Simon Ballanche's ideas of palingenesis. Ballanche had been influenced by many of the same sources as the later occultists. However, unlike Ballanche, who argued for social palingenesis through the spread of Christianity, Martinism saw this reintegration as occurring for each individual, as they moved increasingly away from the physical and toward the mystical and spiritual. For Guaita and Papus, who insisted on a Christian basis for their doctrines, prayer, spiritual purity, and purification on the astral planes all helped ensure a more advanced incarnation in a future life.⁸⁷

Spiritists and occultists shared a belief in reincarnation, and they interacted frequently. The occultists admitted the reality of spiritist phenomena. Spiritist phenomena offered the physical proof of the invisible world that the occultists, like the spiritists, hoped to explain. Many self-defined occultists could be found at spiritist seances, not only the grand public ones of traveling mediums but also at the more mundane private seances. However, the route of transit usually went the other way—spiritists, already curious and searching for explanations, were likely to explore occultist thinking in their quest for answers. For the occultist, an entire invisible world existed that was “natural” rather than “supernatural” but yet could not be seen. This was generally discussed as the astral world or plane. Each person had an astral body, which existed between the physical world and the world of ideas. By long study and intense practice, the mage, or initiated expert, could use his will (almost invariably it was considered to be men who

would reach this stage) to influence the physical world via the astral world. Occultists often explained the physical phenomena produced by mediums, such as “apports,” the playing of musical instruments, or the semi-materialization of supposed spirits, as the action upon the astral plane, either by the astral body of the medium or by those surrounding him or her, or by “elementals,” lower beings who inhabited or even made up the physical world and could be controlled by higher, learned, beings.⁸⁸

The idea of an astral body could be easily assimilated by spiritist thinkers. Kardec had taught that the soul was wrapped in a material envelope, known as the “*périsprit*” which, although less material than the physical world which we know, nonetheless was material enough to allow disincarnated souls to act upon the physical realm. For Kardec’s followers, the being was made up of the soul, the *périsprit*, and the body. The soul and the *périsprit* continued, while the body decayed. As the soul became increasingly more divine, so the *périsprit* became increasingly lighter and less material. The occultists formulated a much more complicated description of humanity which shows influences from Hinduism but also was probably made more attractive to many French by the influence of the rise of psychology. Humanity was made up of a physical body, an astral body, which contained the ego or unconscious—the “inferior intelligence”—but also the animal passions and instincts, and of superior principles, which included the superior intelligence or soul.⁸⁹ While the body was, so to speak, recycled, or metamorphosed into various vegetable substances after death, only part of the soul continued. The inferior intelligence could be lost, while only the superior intelligence continued, and thus individuality could be lost. This last was the position of Blavatsky and the Theosophists, but Papus sometimes seemed to border on it as well.⁹⁰ It is difficult to know how much followers made of these relatively subtle differences, depending on their outlook and level of study of occult writings. Clearly, occultism did keep the idea of reincarnation strongly in the forefront of the discussion of the invisible, science, and the relationship between these.

A key difference between spiritists and occultists resided in their image of how the world could be changed. The mainstay of occultist thinking centered around the concept of analogy, or correspondences. For the occult mage, the world was made up of the individual, or microcosm, and the univers, or macrocosm. The macrocosm, could be affected, changed, by the adept usage of the astral fluid of the mage on the astral plane.⁹¹ Thus, via an act of individual will, the occultist believed he or she could have a direct effect on the physical reality around him or her. For occultists, especially de Guaita but also Papus, individual will allowed an individual to literally change the world. The individual, not the collective, was uppermost. For most spiritists, although they insisted that the individual worked through his or her successive lives toward personal perfection, the sphere of change was collective, that of individuals or groups within society helping others to make a more perfect society on earth as a means to perfecting all individuals.

Occultists' attitudes toward spiritism varied. Stanislas de Guaita accepted the reality of contact with other beings, but usually argued that these were elementals, rather than truly the spirits of the dead. He saw the spiritists as dupes of these lesser beings, who led them to believe that they were talking to advanced beings. Not unlike the press mockers of the spiritists in the 1850s and 1860s, Guaita pointed to people silly enough to believe they were talking to the spirit of Voltaire as evidence.⁹²

Spiritists sometimes complained that occultists belittled them. Occultists insisted on more structure and order than the spiritist movement had traditionally favored. In fact, one occultist diatribe against spiritism claimed that, "the ultimate consequence of the spiritist invasion of the Occident will be . . . the sure loss and total ruin of thousands of souls, unknowing victims of Allan Kardec and his subversive doctrine, work of chaos, of shadow and of light[sic] . . . with the fatal result of psychic promiscuity and spiritual anarchy." This could have been avoided, says the author, "by reserving power for the adepts in hierarchized teachings, guaranteed by initiation."⁹³

Papus was both more open to spiritism and more ambivalent about it. Although he recognized it as worthy of study, he also placed it on a lower rung on the ladder of knowledge than occultist thought. Yet the occultists argued against the spiritist interpretation of spirit communications. Papus gave a catalog of things extant in the invisible world as a summary of the differences between occultism and spiritism, in a speech at the *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste* in 1889. As with the soul, the invisible world was more complicated for the occultists than for the spiritists. It contained not simply spirits of the dead, but a host of forms: "élémentaires" which were the "inferior principles of deceased beings" (and what spiritists usually communicated with); astral bodies of living beings, mages or mediums; "elementals, inferior beings that were never incarnated" and even "ideas become beings; collective beings" which he attributed to Eugène Nus.⁹⁴ Papus insisted that "the quarrel between occultists and spiritists *a propos* the spirits and the "élémentaires is a pure quarrel of words."⁹⁵ Yet at the same time he offered a very backhanded reassurance of the importance of spiritism, saying "The reach of the teachings of spiritism is greater, because it can be understood by a large number of people. The teachings, especially the theories, of occultism are, due to their complexity, reserved for developed intellects, [*aux cerveaux pliées*] used to the most difficult abstract conceptions."⁹⁶ In the next sentence, retreating again, he reiterated that both schools taught "an identical doctrine."

Many spiritists opened their arms to occultism, as seen by the shared Congresses and journals. Yet some also squirmed under occultism's regard and warned that occultism would take the movement off course. The strongest statement against the French occultist movement came from outside the country, from G. Palazzi, an Italian follower of Kardec. He argued that the occultists were the false friends of spiritism. Even while Papus urged in *l'Initiation* the study of

spiritism, the *Librairie du merveilleux* described Kardec's works as at best elementary. Palazzi feared most strongly for the democratic spirit of spiritism, pointing out that *l'Initiation* insisted on hierarchical meetings, since this was "a general law revealed by esoterism."⁹⁷ Palazzi was perhaps correct to fear the occultists as usurping and changing spiritist ideas. As the fin de siècle continued and occultism grew rapidly in popularity, spiritism seemed to diminish in its position as arbiter of the invisible.

The easiest way to see this is to compare the two *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste*, the first in 1889, the second in 1900. Both were held in Paris, both proclaimed the unanimity and friendship of the various "spiritualist schools." Yet the eleven years between them saw strong differences. The France of 1889, as seen in the Universal Exposition of that Year, was the France of industrial progress and the optimism that went with it. The France of 1900 was a France shaken by nationalist battles on the right and the left, in the middle of the Dreyfus Affair, embattled within but also without by competition from Germany and the United States. The spirit of progress of the spiritists against the esoterism of the occultists seems to have followed a similar path to that of the industrial certainties of France. Already the occultists held a solid role in the earlier Congress, but by 1900 the spiritists seemed to be an adjunct, rather than the center. Their role was to provide phenomena, rather than to theorize or moralize on the meanings of those phenomena.

The 1889 *Congrès spirite et spiritualiste* was organized by P.-G. Leymarie who, whatever others thought of him, saw himself as a spiritist first and foremost. Papus, not Leymarie, acted as general secretary of this congress because Leymarie, according to Malgras, remained in the background out of humility, limiting himself to being Vice President of a section on spiritism.⁹⁸ The Congress itself was held at Leymarie's *Librairie spirite* and it was Leymarie as well who published the *Compte rendu* of the meeting. There were four sections to the Congress, and only one of these was occultist. One entire section was devoted to the "social work" of spiritism and how to address the "social question" of inequality and poverty. Although occultists attended, spiritists apparently far outnumbered them. Papus, always conciliatory, as secretary stressed the similarities of "these great schools" rather than their differences. Despite the fears of many spiritists, the Congress of 1889, although it included spiritualists of many types, remained largely spiritist. Its concluding recommendations revolved around finding ways to better teach Kardec's doctrine and to further charitable works.⁹⁹

In contrast to the Congress eleven years earlier, the Congress of 1900 was under the purview of the occultists. Much broader, and linked to the 1900 Paris Exposition, this Congress drew many more adherents. It hosted a booth of some sort at the Exposition itself, and printed up a summary of occultist ideas to be distributed there. Rather than the social solidarity offered by the 1889 Congress promoted by Leymarie, by 1900 the emphasis lay on two major strands; the con-

nections among all types of spiritualism, including specifically occultists, and spiritist phenomena as a source of scientific proof of the survival of the soul. Papus, again acting as Secretary General, congratulated the spiritists on having only four of eleven sections dealing with doctrine, (which he implied was rather a waste of time) and the rest devoted to the much more important question of scientific proof of survival. (He was particularly pleased with a paper that discussed attempted recordings of spirits.) The final recommendations of this Congress mentioned no propagation of Kardec's teaching, nor charity, but issued a call for a mixed commission of spiritists and occultists to work toward union among the different groups. This speech, given by Papus, called for a collection of *facts* establishing "the diverse conditions of Reincarnation."¹⁰⁰ Papus carefully ignored the differences among the groups, as he had done in 1889, but this time spiritists were not praised as a "grand école." Science above all was most important, and was especially the purview of spiritists—to establish scientific facts that occultists (and psychological researchers) could investigate in order to argue their more complicated and up-to-date ideas.

Another interesting difference between the two Congresses was the discussion of the press and of women. In the first conference, women were present and presented "mémoires" of their mediumistic experiences. But in the latter, although Papus frequently referred to the importance of women to occultism, listing the Congress' indebtedness to mediums and the importance of women in the new world that spiritualism would create, they had little voice. In the 1889 Congress, the press was seen as still a mocking enemy, although Leymarie noted with hope that it had begun to take spiritism more seriously. In the latter Congress, Papus praised the press, noting that all the major Parisian dailies had reported (approvingly) on the Congress, thanking particularly *Le Figaro* for its coverage and most especially the feminist newspaper *La Fronde* for following the conference in such detail. By 1900, investigations into the invisible had become good press.

These investigations had also changed from the spiritist investigations of the 1860s. Many groups began to meld the different strains of alternative thought, or to participate in more than one simultaneously. The *Société des études psychiques de Nancy* offers an excellent example. The society formed in 1900 when several future members met in Paris at the *Congrès International de Psychologie*. Encouraged by the fact that the Congress had a section devoted to psychic sciences, led by the respected Professor Bernheim, doctor and hypnotist, the group, at least some of whom had previously been spiritists, decided to continue its own studies when they returned to Nancy.¹⁰¹ In their 1911 report, the directors of the society explained the program they had followed from 1900-1910. They evinced pride "that it [the society] has remained eminently eclectic, that it has adopted no one theory or doctrine for its own, leaving to each of its members as well as to invited speakers, the complete liberty and responsibility of their opinions."¹⁰² This eclectic individualism is a far cry from Kardec's claims

that any responsible thinker would be led by inexorable logic to the same shared conclusions of survival and reincarnation when presented with spiritist facts.

The eclecticism continued in the society's list of honorary members which included Léon Denis, Gabriel Delanne, and "Dr. Papus." The membership was less eclectic and clearly bourgeois. The Governing Committee included a doctor, a colonel, two lawyers, one of whom had been a deputy, and a "publicist."¹⁰³ The list of subjects addressed by *Bulletins* published during the society's first ten years included magnetism, spiritism (which remained the largest category), occultism, and theosophy. Most of these articles were reprints taken from other publications although the group's president, Colonel Collet, offered his mediumistic thoughts on previous incarnations and a prominent member, one Dr. Jenny Liehrmann, wrote on the secrets of the occult.

The report claimed that spiritism won the special attentions of several group members. A. Drouville, a medium who had been a spiritist prior to joining the Nancy society, offered traditional spiritist moral and philosophical advice gained from his own conversations with the spirits. However, spiritist studies had become more broadly defined. For this group at least, they now included the topic of "animism," "that faculty which the human soul possesses in a state of incarnation, of separating and exteriorizing itself to produce effects at a distance (telepathy, telekinesis, telephany)."¹⁰⁴ Animism combined two strains originally outside the spiritist view. It integrated early psychical science's efforts to avoid spiritualist explanations for phenomena with a more occult interest and belief in the powers of the soul rather than its salvation.

Both Léon Denis and Gabriel Delanne were invited speakers at the Nancy Society. Denis gave "two masterful lectures in the salle Poirer, filling it to the rafters with an elite audience."¹⁰⁵ Denis first demonstrated that spiritist facts rested on a scientific base, refuting other sources of phenomena including both the subconscious and demons; he next taught the philosophy of reincarnation. On his return in 1908, Denis filled the grand hall of the *Bourse du Commerce*. His appearances evoked glowing adjectives and great applause. Gabriel Delanne received a less enthusiastic reception: "After the apostle, we heard the man of science." "Without sentimentality or subjective appreciation," Delanne "placed himself resolutely on the positive and unattackable terrain of facts."¹⁰⁶ Delanne attracted fewer listeners; his second talk was confined simply to the usual meeting room of the Society. Despite the reputed scientific basis of the group itself, it was the "apostolic" Denis who garnered the glory and raised their hopes and interests. Denis appealed to the "religious" side of these students of science; to their need for marvels as well as explanations, and to their hopes for a better future that first led many people to study spiritism and the occult.

The integration of occult studies with more traditional spiritist studies complicated the picture and modified the broadly Christian socialist position advocated by earlier spiritists. With the new views advocated by Delanne and Denis, the spiritist movement changed its emphasis. Although the rhetoric overlapped in

these periods, the general trend did shift. With Denis especially, the goal became the evolution of the individual, a change effected by education yes, but also by will and by increasingly esoteric studies. The groups that followed Denis spoke as easily of occult standards such as astral planes and argument by analogy as they did of the old spiritist favorites fraternity and trance writing. This trend occurred from the 1890s to the 1910s, at the same time that psychology gained increasing respect, first with Charcot, later and more definitively, with Freud and others. The rise of the subconscious in mainstream society corresponded to the rise of the secret in alternative groups.

Just as occultism challenged the spirituality of the movement, so socialism and studies of the crowd made it more difficult to directly support collective action. Léon Denis' opening address in the 1900 *Congrès spirite et spiritualist* still maintained that earlier spirit of Reynaud, insisting that spiritism's "conception of existence and destiny will facilitate the development of all works of collectivity and solidarity."¹⁰⁷ Yet as we have seen, Denis emphasized the *individual* will, rather than the collective will. Occultism's emphasis on the individual fit better with overall cultural trends than did spiritism's earlier democratic collectivity. Liberal individualism, based at first on merit and social mobility, had hardened into a fear of the masses. With increases in urban population, with mass politics, strikes and demonstrations, with crowd battles around the Dreyfus Affair, the collective had become "the crowd." The crowd was irrational, dangerous, did not think for itself, and was a danger to society and order. Gustave le Bon, theorist of the crowd, investigated spiritism and dismissed it just as vehemently as he did crowds, as springing from the irrational, feminine, side of the mind.¹⁰⁸ Spiritism was even cited as evidence for the very gullibility of the crowd and the masses in general. Critics pointed to followers who refused to doubt even when mediums were caught in acts of fraud; judges restricted spiritist healers from practicing in order to protect the "innocent" who foolishly believed they had been healed.¹⁰⁹ By the end of the century collectivity, linked to Marxism and socialism, earned a dangerous reputation; respectable spiritists (partly in order to remain respectable) concentrated instead on improving the individual through internal change as much as external aid.

Léon Denis' focus on the internal also reflected other contemporary cultural trends. Denis tied his thought to current philosophical strains, especially the popular academician and philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson himself had experimented with spiritism; he had been president of the London Society for Psychical Research in 1900 (his sister Mina was married to MacGregor Mathews, a prominent British occultist) and had attended scientifically controlled séances which studied the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (as had Gustave Le Bon). Denis credited spiritism as being the source of Bergson's thought, or at least part of the same current of knowledge which humans had currently achieved. "According to him [Bergson], the principle of evolution is not in visible matter but in the invisible. And he [Bergson] declares, 'all new scientific findings tend to

transpose evolution from the visible to the invisible.” Denis further quoted Bergson, *l'Evolution créatrice*, “Progress is continuous and goes on indefinitely; invisible progress, spanning [but going beyond] the time the visible Being spends on earth.” By this train of thought, says Denis, Bergson returned to the spiritist philosophy of successive lives.¹¹⁰

By the end of the century these strains had come together to modify spiritism and in many ways to bring it closer to the philosophical center of French society. Although spiritism had moved somewhat to meet current thought, current thought had also moved quite far in the direction of spiritism, especially in its shift away from materialism. Philosophy, science, and art had begun in various ways to explore the unconscious. Bergson, Charcot, and Freud had all investigated spiritist mediums. Symbolism, decadents, and later dadaism and surrealism echoed trance writing experiments the spiritists had originated.¹¹¹ As dominant culture adopted some of the ideas held by spiritists, spiritism retreated into the realm of morality, leaving the subconscious to the new explorers.

By 1900 the occultist movement, fitting as it did into the rise of psychiatry and psychical research, as well as into a literary search for alternatives and a fear/fascination with mysticism and decadence, had challenged the spiritist movement as the forefront of the alternative. Which of the two movements was more popular is difficult to determine. Occultism intrigued artistic and creative minds more deeply; spiritism maintained its ability to attract the masses. Yet occultism had even less claim to scientific proof than spiritism did and, as science increasingly moved to investigate these phenomena, occultism too lost out. As we have seen, the greater enemy of spiritism turned out to be psychical research and psychiatry, both of which appropriated spiritist phenomena and linked them with orthodox science in ways which spiritists had tried to do but failed. Any hopes spiritism held to establish a generally-accepted scientific claim to truth had died. Yet after the First World War, as a nation mourned and bent to rebuild, a message of progress, perfection, and morality remained attractive to many. Spiritism, with its combination of religious consolation and progress through reincarnation, easily outlasted the occultist movement, appealing to more deeply seated French values. Like Christianity, spiritism consoled and promised justice; unlike the latter, it offered immediate contact with lost loved ones, a critique of current social inequality, and the promise that the individual could, through their own individual or collective acts, build a better society.

NOTES

1. Gérard Encausse (Papus), opening remarks, *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale 1900* (Saint-Amand, 1902), 3. See chapter four for more on the relationship of science to spiritism.

2. J. Malgras, *Les Pionniers du spiritisme* (Paris: Librairie des sciences psychologiques, 1906), 225.

3. Theosophy (upper-case T) refers to the occult movement begun by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky based on revealed teachings and Eastern philosophies; theosophy (lower-case t) refers to the system of thinking that seeks for divine revelation in nature and in mystical systems of thought such as the Cabala. Most French theosophists in the later nineteenth century were connected with occult movements led by Gérard Encausse or Stanislas de Guaita; this broader tendency is usually referred to as occultism.

4. After 1866 proprietors of journals could do their own printing; 1870 made the professions of printer and bookseller subject only to a simple declaration of intent to the Minister of the Interior, rather than a monetary *caution*. *Journal des commissaires*, 16 (1870): 232. In addition, new printing techniques allowed easier and cheaper printing.

5. Not all spiritist and occultist publications were solvent. René Caillé barely scraped by with his series of journals, and the *Lotus*, published by Félix Gaboriau to promote Blavatsky's Theosophy, was entirely funded by Gaboriau and had to close after two years. (Joscelyn Godwin, *The Beginnings of Theosophy in France* [London: Theosophical History Centre, 1989], 12.) Yet Mme Lucie Grange's *La Lumière* attracted elite readers who not only subscribed but also became members of a "knighthood" that offered charity by sponsoring free subscriptions to the magazine for those who could not afford it. (*La Lumière* 1892: 109-112.)

6. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1889* (Paris, 1890).

7. Archives départementales de la Gironde, 4M433.

8. *Démocratie pacifique* was both the title of a journal published by Victor Considérant from 1843-51 and the title of a letter Vallès published, addressed to Considérant. For biographical information, see Malgras, *Pionniers*, 51-53.

9. François Vallès, *Les Conférences spirites de l'année 1882* (n.p., 1882), xviii.

10. Vallès, *Conférences*, 84.

11. "Les Communications entre les vivants et les morts" Lyon Bibliothèque municipale 5350, which includes papers from 1882, 1883, and 1888. 1888 was the ninth year this had been done. For Marseilles, see the *Vie Posthume* 1885: 120. The Marseilles paper was a compilation of various writers supporting spiritism with several communications from the spirits mixed in.

12. Audouard's lecture was reported and praised by another woman publisher, Mme Lucie Grange. *La Lumière* 1883: 173.

13. "La pensée féminine" hints at the much later and more distinct split between feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva who emphasize "l'écriture féminine" and more politically oriented French feminists like those of the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (Women's Liberation Movement, known as the MLF). It is intriguing to ponder the roots of this split preceding Sartre, Lacan, etc. and settling in French feminine spirituality. However, in Bezobrazow it is truly only a hint.

14. Olga de Bézobrazow, *Du féminisme-spiritualisme et de l'éducation de la croyance* (Paris: Librairie des sciences spiritualistes, 1903), 6. This published version of one of her speeches summarizes Bézobrazow's ideas and also gives a list of her speaking engagements. These previous public lectures are pointed to as measures of credibility.

15. The *Oeuvres des Institutions féminines* was apparently a session held in 1900, perhaps peripherally to the 1900 Exposition, although the location is unclear. The *Hôtel des Sociétés Savantes* and the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* often sponsored talks on topics of interest to the public and had no particular feminist or spiritist affiliation.

16. Grange, *Lumière* 1882: 54. For the importance of this topic to women's agency in late nineteenth-century France, see Rachel Fuchs, "Seduction, Paternity and the Law in Fin de siècle France," *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000): 944-989.

17. Grange, *Lumière* 1888, taken from the lists of contributors on the inside front page of each issue.

18. *La Lumière* 1883: 142 (original italics).

19. *La Lumière*, 1884, 241.

20. For more on Julia Becours' charitable activities and feminist attitudes, see Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 157-60; for her writings, see 187-89; 194-200; 210-212.

21. Quoted in Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, 159; original source not identified.

22. A eulogy in *La Vie nouvelle* (1921: 97) described *Les Voix lointaines* and praised Becours' work on behalf of both women and spiritism.

23. Steven C. Hause and Anne Kenney, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 252-56.

24. Bézobrazow, *Du féminisme-spiritualisme*, 6.

25. David Allan Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 102-04.

26. Palladino was carefully studied by numerous psychical researchers throughout Europe and made quite a sensation. She was, however, eventually found guilty of "cheating" to produce results, something she claimed she did only occasionally and due to pressure from the scientists. A variety of sources discuss the Palladino experiments. The most important for France were those by Charles Richet. See Georges Meunier, *Ce qu'ils pensent du "merveilleux"* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1911), 20-21; *Revue spirite* 1902, passim; Jules Bois, *L'au delà et les forces inconnues* (Paris, 1902), 246-248; on Richet in general, as well as his psychical research, see Stewart Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine: Charles Richet and the Origins of Physiological Psychology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993).

27. Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France, 1785-1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 221. Edelman offers a detailed discussion of the changing fortunes of women mediums across the century. Although she argues that spiritist mediums were under the control of their group meetings and the men who ran them, she also points to the importance they held in those groups as interpreters of the divine (99-108).

28. For example, the *Revue scientifique et morale du spiritisme* 1902: 651, describes a clearly bourgeois gathering of couples who spent their evening carefully questioning spirits. Although they also received advice from the spirits, these they did not deem

worth publishing.

29. See *Le Paix Universelle* 1895: 92-93; *Progrès spirite* 1895: 135. These were apparently published in a pamphlet form as well. Spiritists continue to accept the reality of apports; see André Dumas, *La Science de l'âme: initiation méthodique à l'étude des phénomènes supra-normaux et aux théories de la métapsychologie* (Paris: Dervy, 1980), 287.

30. Pierre Janet, "Spiritisme contemporain," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 33/1 (1892): 430-31. Janet also complained that spiritists no longer detailed phenomena in as great detail as they had earlier, exactly because they feared psychologists would explain the phenomena by other means (426-27). For more on this, see chapter four.

31. *La Vie posthume* 1885: 143; 1886: 214-15; 1885: 85-86. For M. Georges' activity in the 1870s, see *Revue spirite* 1871: 280-84.

32. Janet, "Spiritisme contemporain," 415.

33. See chapter two for more on this.

34. See *Revue spirite*, Jan-March issues, 1884; See also *La Lumière*, Feb. and March 1884 issues.

35. *La Lumière* 1884: 155-57, quote on 157.

36. John Monroe, using Fropro as his main source, accepts this break as acrimonious and sees the new group as defending spiritism against occultism. (Monroe, "Evidence of Things Unseen," [Yale University, 2002], 353-363). I remain skeptical on this point. Fropro was never important in the spiritist movement and, more importantly, Delanne and Denis both remained on good terms with Papus and other members of the occult world. Denis especially also remained on good terms with Leymarie. Although tensions certainly existed among the various factions and movements, it was also clear that they shared more than kept them apart.

37. *Progrès spirite* 1896: 40. A. Laurent de Faget had been active in founding the earlier journal with Gabriel Delanne, and Delanne also collaborated on the new one, although most of the articles were written by Laurent de Faget himself.

38. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale 1889*, 215.

39. A suit in 1970 between André Dumas and Roland Tavernier culminated a long dispute between more traditional religiously-oriented spiritists and those who wanted to de-emphasize God and emphasize unknown psychic forces and other more occult phenomena. Conversations in 1991 with the above named, as well as with Professor Marion Aubrée of the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, helped me to follow this development. My thanks to them all. For further discussion of this, see Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine, *La Table, le livre et les esprits* (Paris: Lattès, 1990), 289-295.

40. Jacques Lantier, *Le Spiritisme* (Paris: Culture, Arts, Loisir, 1971), 110-111 for Denis; 119 for Delanne. This is the only source I have found that describes Delanne in this way. It is, however, also the most detailed source for Delanne's private life in all ways and my research supports Delanne's insistence on morality. Whatever Delanne's private religious practice, his public face was always that of the scientist.

41. Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984), 279-282.

42. Godwin, *Beginnings*, 8.

43. Malgras, *Pionniers*, 107-109.

44. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1900* (Saint-Amand, 1902), 715.
45. Delanne's influence on the movement and his interaction with the scientific community are discussed in chapter four.
46. Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 116-119.
47. Delanne, *Le Phénomène spirite* (Paris, 1893), 276.
48. *Echo de l'au delà* 1899: 3.
49. Claire Baumard, *Léon Denis, Intime* (Paris: Jean Meyer, 1929), 25. Baumard was Denis' private secretary for the last ten years of his life (by which point he was completely blind). She was clearly devoted to him and her biography is not likely to be unbiased. However, her accounts of his religiosity are confirmed by his own writings.
50. Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 108.
51. Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 109; Baumard, *Léon Denis*, 30.
52. Baumard, *Léon Denis*, 38.
53. For descriptions of talks, see, in Baumard, an anonymous letter to Denis (22 November 1883); see also *Paix universelle* 1895: 26.
54. *Revue spirite* 1884: 20-21. The *Revue* reported that Denis was "listened to religiously and applauded warmly." The talk took place on 14 January 1884.
55. Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 119.
56. Léon Denis, *L'après la mort: exposé de la doctrine des esprits* (Paris: Jean Meyer 1947 [1891]), 59-61. Quote on page 60.
57. Denis, *Après la mort*, 266.
58. Denis, *Life and Destiny*, trans. Ella Wheeler Wilcox (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 34.
59. Denis, *Jeanne d'Arc, médium* (Paris: Leymarie, 1910) and *La Génie Celtique* (Paris: Jean Meyer, 1927 [1926]).
60. Denis, *Après la mort*, 61.
61. Denis, *Jeanne d'Arc, médium*, 9.
62. Denis, *Jeanne d'Arc, médium*, 13.
63. Denis, *Life and Destiny*, 15, 31.
64. Denis, *Life and Destiny*, 21.
65. Many among the middle classes throughout Europe and America who had supported the idea of communist revolution found themselves wholeheartedly disgusted by the reality of it.
66. Denis, "L'Avenir du Spiritisme," *Revue Spirite* 1918: 322.
67. Denis, "L'Avenir du Spiritisme," 322-23.
68. Denis, "L'Avenir du spiritisme," 130.
69. Denis, "L'Avenir du spiritisme," 131.
70. Denis, *Après la mort*, 222-223.
71. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 57-58. Winter asserts that spiritualism in Britain spent much energy contacting the spirits of dead soldiers. In France, this was likely true as well, but it is only very rarely that one comes across a communication after the war from a soldier killed during it. Given the importance of French grief after the war, this probably took place with private mediums, possibly those who worked professionally as *tireuses des cartes* and general voyants. Their voices are rarely heard in spiritist journals. For a consideration of how deep both national and individual

grief ran after the war see Jean-Yves Le Naour, *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*, trans. Penny Allen (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); and Annette Becker, *War and Faith: The Religious Imagination in France, 1914-130*, trans. Helen McPhail (New York: Berg, 1998).

72. This split is by no means complete—spiritist meetings still do experiments involving ways to prove or measure the spirits; however the movement never achieved the scientific recognition it had hoped to, and spiritist results are most often ignored outside their own groups. See Christine Bergé, *La Voix des esprits: ethnologie du spiritisme* (Paris: Métailié, 1990).

73. For modern works on the occultists, see Joscelyn Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, which deals especially with the English-speaking world but touches on France as well; and *Beginnings of Theosophy in France*; David A. Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*; John Monroe, "Evidence of Things Not Seen," 300-351. Antoine Faivre is the acknowledged master of studies of esoterica, but he firmly rejects the popular occultist movement at the end of the century as being neither truly esoteric nor serious. See his *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994). For an overview, also not terribly sympathetic to the fin de siècle occultists, see Jean-Paul Corsetti, *Histoire de l'ésotérisme et des sciences occultes* (Paris: Larousse, 1992).

74. See Jacques Berlioz et Jean-Claude Hélas, eds., *Catharisme: l'édifice imaginaire* (Carcassonne: Centre d'études Cathare—René Nelli); for the semi-masonic neo-gnostics, see, in above, Suzanne Nelli, "Les néo-gnostiques. Jules Doinel évêque gnostique de Montségur," 121-129.

75. V.E. Michelet, *Les Compagnons de la hiérophanie: Souvenirs du mouvement hermétiste à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Dorbon-ainé, 1977 [1937]) gives a wonderful account of his travels among the occultists. His memoir is one of the most important sources for the inner workings of this occult world.

76. Marie-France James, *Esotérisme, occultisme, Franc-maçonnerie et christianisme aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Explorations bio-bibliographiques* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1981), 60-62. For Caithness' role in Theosophy, see Godwin, *Beginnings*, 7, 9, 21-22.

77. V. Michelet, *Compagnons*, 40.

78. V. Michelet, *Compagnons*, 67-76.

79. For Papus' involvement with the Gnostics, see James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976), 220; 244-46.

80. For details on Martinism of both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, see Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, chapter 1.

81. See Monroe, "Evidence" 340-45 and Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 12, where he argues that the Martinist movement was distinctly French.

82. For more on Guaita, especially his fascinating duel with journalist Jules Bois, see V. Michelet, *Compagnons*, 25-30 and Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 112-116.

83. Everyone who came in contact with Papus seems to have been impressed with him. He was able to engage people's enthusiasm, even if he often ultimately alienated them by seeking to hold power to himself. For a not always sympathetic view, see Marie-Sophie André et Christophe Beaufilets, *Papus, biographie* (Paris: Berg International, 1995). For a fairly hagiographic view, see the biography by his son: Philippe

Encausse, *Sciences occultes: Papus, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: OCIA, 1949).

84. André et Beaufile, *Papus*, 334.

85. And, of course, David Harvey, John Monroe, and others have already begun this task. See note 73.

86. Wouter J. Hanegraff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 472. Blavatsky added appendices to her later versions of *Isis* to claim there was no discrepancy. See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 340-42 for a brief summary.

87. Papus, *La Réincarnation*, 28, 54. Papus also mentions that greed on an earthly plane will hurt one's power on the astral plane, but although he does not condone greediness, the emphasis is still on how it affects the individual, rather than on the society as a whole.

88. This explanation was especially favored by Guaita. See Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 22-23.

89. Papus, *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste de 1889*, 63.

90. Papus, *La Réincarnation*, 38-39; Godwin, *Beginnings*, 8-9.

91. Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 21-24. See Papus, *La Science des mages*, for his description of this process.

92. Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 98-100.

93. G. Palazzi, *Les Occultistes contemporains* (Paris: Librairie des sciences psychologiques, 1892). Palazzi quotes a letter in *L'Initiation* complementing the directors of the *Lotus* (a kindred occultist review) for their complaints against spiritism.

94. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1889*, 64-65.

95. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1900*, 64.

96. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1900*, 66 John Monroe points out that Papus is an expert at simplifying while making readers feel they are grasping elite concepts others could not grasp. Papus indulged in a bit of that in this case. (Monroe, "Evidence," 337).

97. G. Palazzi, *Les Occultistes contemporains* (Paris: Librairie des sciences psychologiques, 1892), 2-3.

98. Malgras, *Pionniers*, 107.

99. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1890*, 437.

100. *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1900*, 719.

101. Société d'études psychiques de Nancy, *Rapport sur les travaux effectués par la société depuis son origine (1900-1910)* (Nancy: Imprimerie Nancéenne, 1911), 4. Bernheim was professor of medicine at Nancy and one of the most respected practitioners of "suggestive hypnosis." He participated in psychical research but denied any extra-natural sources of phenomena and ridiculed those who claimed such sources. Bernheim and Charcot headed the Nancy and the Salpêtrière schools respectively; the two schools were bitter enemies and fought for influence and power in the new study of the mind. For more on Bernheim, see Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 85ff.

102. Société de Nancy, *Rapport*, 4.

103. Société de Nancy, *Rapport*, inside front cover, no page number.

104. Société de Nancy, *Rapport*, 10. NB: This is the only usage I have found of the word "téléphanie." I can find neither a French nor an English definition of this psychic phenomena. Word usage and meanings for psychic science were in constant shift and

redefinition during this early period. "Téléphanie" apparently did not survive for long.

105. Société de Nancy, *Rapport*, 16.

106. Société de Nancy, *Rapport*, 16.

107. Denis, *Compte rendu du Congrès spirite et spiritualiste internationale de 1900*, 37.

108. *Revue spirite* 1908: 281; *Le Matin* 14 March 1908: n.p. Robert Nye gives an excellent exploration of Le Bon's theories of the crowd as diseased and irrational, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage Publications, 1975).

109. Lynn L. Sharp, "Popular Healing in a Rational Age, Spiritism as Folklore and Medicine," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* (forthcoming, 2006 [Presented at Colorado Springs 2005]).

110. Denis, "L'Avenir du Spiritisme," 259.

111. For an exploration of the commonalities of spiritualism/spiritism and surrealism that emphasizes their challenge to both reason and society, see Daniel Cottom, *Abbyss of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Conclusion

Thoughts for “Modern” Spirits

In November 1848, during the short-lived Second Republic, Victor Hugo spoke in the *Assemblée Générale* about the “moral illness” of “material tendencies” facing France. Aid to the poor was necessary, but that alone would not create a just France. What was needed, he argued, was to “raise the spirit of man, turn it toward God, toward conscience, toward the good, the beautiful, the just and the true, toward disinterestedness and greatness [*le désintéressé et la grand.*]” Hugo’s battle is an unsung battle of the nineteenth century: the struggle to preserve the immaterial, even while rejecting the “superstitions” of the Catholic church. His words are hardly forgotten history. They were repeated by the book review of the major French daily, *Le Monde des livres*, as recently as May 2002, as part of the continuing conversation on culture that is central to French intellectual life.¹ Conversations on religion, morality, and spirituality intertwined in nineteenth-century France and they set the stage for continued values and conversations in contemporary France. Spiritism and ideas on reincarnation were key in those conversations.

Historians have tended to separate romanticism, spiritism, and occultism from the Enlightenment and its claims to reason, crediting only the latter with a lasting role in the development of contemporary society. Yet this study of reincarnation and spiritist belief has shown that this view limits the importance of a variety of beliefs in challenging Enlightenment thought, but also in propagating and modifying it. Spiritism and romantic reincarnation rejected the Enlightenment insistence on a divide between science and religion, even while adapting ideas of reason and progress for a spiritual purpose. Progressive reincarnation adapted the Enlightenment for the nineteenth century in the hopes to answer Hugo’s call.

Reincarnation offered justice for both the collective and the individual. Spiritism continued this, with the added joy of touching the supernatural. When it first appeared, spiritism conformed to many of the values and needs of the nineteenth century. Its everyday miracles appealed particularly to the popular

classes, be they petty bourgeois or worker, yet its values of progress, science, and social reform could be adopted by many among the bourgeoisie as well. Its rhetoric of social reform flourished in the 1860s and then again in the 1880s coinciding with optimistic moments in French history, when politics and values were in flux and leftist hopes to build a better future were high. Although the politics of the 1860s and the 1880s differed from those of the 1840s, the hopes for change were similar; spiritism continued the romantic vision of the world that the romantic socialists had created.

By the 1920s, spiritism had retreated to the margins, or rather, accepted in many ways its position as critical of, rather than central to, much of French society. With the birth of the subconscious in the second half of the century, its maturity in Freud and other thinkers in the early twentieth, and its acceptance by the scientific mainstream, official interest in spiritism declined. The attractions of spiritism had been taken over and parceled out. Psychology claimed its trances; Dada and Surrealism claimed its written messages; and the new movement of social Catholicism satisfied similar urges toward moral social reform. In the face of increasingly militant social democracy the old romantic socialist bent became less radical and less convincing for many. The success of earlier fights for women's rights meant less stressful and more respectable occupations than mediumship for women who wanted to work; those who had been domestic mediums could leave the home for the office. All of these material and intellectual changes contributed to the decline of popular interest in spiritism. Shifted from the center by both psychiatry and the rise of psychical research in the 1910s and 1920s, its claims to being scientific diminished. Both Gabriel Delanne and Leon Denis had died by 1926 and no new leaders arose to take their places. Kardecist spiritism survived, but quietly, until reviving in the 1980s and 1990s as it was reimported from Brazil, where it had flourished since the 1870s.²

In the twentieth century, spiritism no longer fit so easily the mental universe of the average French person. François Laplantine offers a penetrating analysis of the changing belief in clairvoyants or seers. Belief, he argues, follows an all or nothing pendulum and, since World War I that pendulum has swung decidedly toward nothing. In his analysis, the French resist belief.³ Laplantine argues that the reasons for this are particularly French and have to do with culture rather than with the objective reality or non-reality of a clairvoyant's visions. Although most spiritist mediums did not see the future, Laplantine's analysis can be extended to them. Most particularly, reasons for disbelief have to do with the way the French have been taught to think. Laplantine places the "blame" for the French outlook squarely on Descartes' shoulders.

Our culture values the fact that we have been raised in a categorical system of thought founded on the extremely precise distinction between the present and the past, the past and the future, cause and effect, the separation of the self and the other

[*du moi et du non-moi*], of the interior and the exterior, of the subject and the object. These dualistic categories, whose origin can only be cultural, since no other society has elaborated similar ones, have become our mental categories, to such a point that anything which transgresses them is spontaneously (that is to say culturally) considered a mental illness.⁴

By "seeing" the past and the future, voyants transgress and destabilize the categories of linear thought on which French society is based. Not only do voyants disturb conceptions of time, but also boundaries between self and other and between interiority and exteriority by their contact and fusion with spirits.⁵ Spiritist mediums too transgressed time (and the barriers of mortality) by bringing the dead to the living; they allowed their self to be possessed by an other, giving up the all-important factor of individual will.

Possession and control of the self gained importance with the triumph of psychology at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶ Thus, anyone who did not possess his or her self could be considered mentally ill. Psychiatrists devised "cures" to reestablish the possession of the self. Laplantine's arguments help illustrate why spiritism became increasingly unsettling as the century progressed. Explanations for medium phenomena that saw the soul as "doubling" and moving outside the body could be integrated with the new emphasis on the individual self; spirits who spoke through the body of another could not, and often led to spiritism being redefined as mental illness, if of a mild variety.⁷ Belief in spiritism, which attributed inexplicable events to the agency of supernatural beings, was diametrically opposed to the definitions of the subconscious self as the source of unexplained phenomena offered by psychiatry.

Psychiatry fit better with Western rational categories of thought, those categories particularly emphasized by the ever-expanding French school system. Psychiatrists explained that exterior events were caused by interior drives. Interiority to exteriority offered a linear approach, although a hiatus of time sometimes exists between cause and effect. Most importantly, psychiatry allowed the self to exist and act within its own borders, without loss of boundaries or the danger of fusing with an other. (This rejected completely the romantic socialist hope expressed by Leroux that all humanity was in some manner connected.) Psychiatry explained things in the terms of science, in this-worldly rather than otherworldly terms. By the 1920s, Kardec's terminology of God, invisible fluids, and semi-material beings seemed quaint at best; the scientific world had moved on to new terminology, a new paradigm. The spiritists were no longer able to speak in the current terms of science. They remained important in religious terms and their spiritual solace continues to attract thousands of followers throughout France.

By the early twentieth century, evolutionary reincarnation had shifted from its place as a justification for social reform to an alternative religious or philo-

sophical belief. It continued to maintain a critical stance toward many established cultural values, especially those of materialism, but it had lost its connection to a revolutionary or even a truly reformist movement. Although many individuals believed in reincarnation for a variety of reasons, the movement that the belief had become most firmly attached to was Kardecist spiritism. The evolution of that movement brought about the changes to beliefs that had been seen as potentially revolutionary in the 1840s.

Yet spiritism had spread the belief outside the movement, and helped to make belief in reincarnation a continuing factor in French society. Psychical researchers in the 1920s continued the argument, with Dr. Gustave Géley's writings presenting the strongest case for evolutionary reincarnation. Géley insisted, like Reynaud and Kardec before him, that justice demanded reincarnation. The idea of justice, he wrote, "imposes, above all, work and effort; not isolated effort, the struggle of self, but communal effort: for all which favours or retards altruistic and general evolution favours or retards that of some member of the community. Base and inferior sentiments such as hate, the spirit of vengeance, egoism, and jealousy are incompatible with the notions of communal evolution and immanent justice."⁸ Although Géley argued reincarnation as a communal effort, the issues he discussed—jealousy, etc.—are individual, rather than collective social issues. Reincarnation had, by the turn of the century, lost much of its social punch.

Early interpretations of British and American spiritualism by James Webb, Geoffrey Nelson, and Mary Farrell Bednarowski saw these movements as hold-overs, as an "irrational" reaction to the modernization process. More recent studies on British and American spiritualism, reject, as do I, these characterizations and study these movements as rational reactions to political and social change.⁹ The early explanation accepted the "irrational" definition tacked on to spiritism by outsiders, rather than exploring its own rhetoric. In these explanations, modernity was seen as monolithic. Yet modernity is hardly monolithic, neither is identity. Spiritism cobbled together a variant of modernity; if a reaction, it was a constructive reaction that offered an alternative to the limits of the nineteenth century. Belief in reincarnation and spiritism interacted with various cultural changes and values, allowing followers to adapt to and integrate new ideas and to create new identities that existed within those new definitions. Thus the movement helped many of its followers to integrate modern, democratic, scientific values into a traditional set of beliefs.

French historian Mona Ozouf has called the nineteenth century "the chaotic century," a term that fits particularly well as it refuses implicitly a metanarrative of decreasing religiosity in the face of increasing order, democracy, and progress.¹⁰ My thinking about the nineteenth century accepts Ozouf's fortuitous characterization and looks both at the chaos of the century and at the "sign of order" under which nineteenth-century thinkers tried to contain their own chaos. The nineteenth-century attempted to make "reason" and "science" overarching cate-

gories that could contain all things, in order to try to integrate spiritual and traditional ways of knowing into that undefinable but desirable thing, modernity. Only by exploring the myriad attempts to find a satisfactory version of this combination can we understand the central importance of these questions to understanding the nineteenth century. By looking at spiritism we see the challenges it and other alternatives offered to the supposed dominance of reason and science, and thus to a metanarrative of Enlightened, secular modernity.

Spiritism challenged not only the materialism of scientific modernity but also its disciplining of the body. Michel Foucault argued that modern society increasingly narrowed the ability to act outside the discipline of the norm. Yet his interpretation leaves out the very margins he later turned to for whatever small hope of salvation might exist. Spiritist groups moved in and out of those margins during the nineteenth century, especially as they placed the body explicitly outside the systems of discipline in two specific ways. First, spiritism not only rejected the idea that spirit possession meant insanity, it also retained an alternative cure for mental (and other) illness. Illness caused "obsession" by spirits was cured not by disciplining the body of the obsessed person but by disciplining the obsessing spirit. Spiritist healers cast out the spirit, leaving the body free. Female mediums also achieved, if only temporarily, the undisciplined body. Although they did so by validating current cultural definitions of gender, they also destabilized these definitions by showing that women could exist outside them. Alex Owen argues that female mediums' bodies acted out the repressions of society.¹¹ H el ene Cixous sees a similar process happening in the "possession" of a woman by the bite of the tarantula spider that leads to the dance of the tarantella.¹² Both Cixous and Owen would agree that the bodies of the actors, especially women, were once again reinscribed into the social order and hierarchy after they had expressed that freedom. However, it may be that the very acting out of repression, the stepping outside the bounds of normality, helped to destabilize the system of discipline and to fight against the over-rationalization of the body that Foucault has posited accompanied Weber's over-rationalization of the mind.

Study of spiritism and reincarnation insists on another challenge to interpretations of monolithic modernity crushing the supernatural and the marvelous. According to Max Weber, modernity was to have brought about a disenchantment of the world. People would abandon organized religion for the religion of the state; scientific knowledge would increasingly erase the belief in fairies, white ladies, and various saints and forest spirits that had played such important explanatory functions in popular culture. Spiritism seemed in many ways to participate in disenchantment, as leaders argued against the idea of inexplicable "mysteries" and for the clear explanations of spirits acting on this world. Yet as we have seen, the contact spiritists maintained with the other world and the supernatural maintained also a traditional porous quality of the border between the worlds, and continued the sense that aid, mystery, and enchantment still

stepped often and lightly across that boundary. While spiritists participated in the nineteenth-century move toward valuing the rational above all else and their rhetoric pretended to banish the supernatural and irrational, they paradoxically provided a place for continued belief in the beyond and in “miraculous” intervention in people’s lives. By creating a definition existing within the knowledge fields of reason and science that yet contained the marvelous, they continued the existence of the marvelous and helped arrest that disenchantment of the world that Weber sees so strongly. This arrest was not temporary. Spiritism, by its popularity, forced the scientific world to broaden its own boundaries and to admit some of the miraculous in its investigations of psychic phenomena.

Spiritism’s version of modernity included its insistence on a popular religious or spiritual alternative to Catholicism. Clearly, the challenge to Catholicism never threatened the centrality of that religion in French culture. The obvious reasons for this are traditional and cultural; the institutional dominance of Catholicism in France had been established for centuries, even in its supposedly weak times during the nineteenth century it could hardly be easily dislodged. Spiritism could not create a new and competing religion for several reasons. Its democratic character was established against some of the characteristics that most strengthened the Catholic church, such as hierarchy and an established leadership in the priesthood. Spiritism lacked rituals for the standard life transitions; birth, coming of age, and marriage could not be addressed by a philosophy centered around the transition of death. Its domestic character remained a weakness as well as a strength. Despite public demonstrations, spiritist séances most commonly took place in the home and the modern evolution of the home was as an increasingly private place, separated from public institutions.

In many ways, Catholicism had migrated by the end of the century toward central spiritist concerns, returning to the social Catholicism advocated by romantic reformers such as Lamennais. The *Ralliement* of the 1890s, Pope Leo XIII’s call for Catholics to rally to the Third Republic, helped erase some of the tensions felt by those who would be both religious and republican. It was followed by the blossoming of Catholic social work movements, such as Marc Sangnier’s *Le Sillon* which was sympathetic to social change and workers’ cooperatives, if not to socialism per se. Although the *Ralliement* never reconciled the Catholic church and the Republic, it did return the Church to reform.

The question of why spiritism did not replace Catholicism is a red herring, of course. The spiritists never wanted to. They wanted to create a new philosophical movement that would go beyond religion, incorporating the spiritual and the scientific into one clear consolatory vision of the evolution of the human being. In this sense, they looked always to the future and valued changer over tradition.

A number of recent books have looked at occultism in various countries as expressive of modernism and modernity.¹³ My research agrees with these scholars, but uses a broader definition of “modernity.” Romantic socialists and spiritists, long before the modernism of the end of the century, integrated

Enlightenment and evolutionary ideas of progress and the perfectibility of humans to create a modern religious philosophy that would, they hoped, change the world. Throughout the nineteenth century, scientific and religious thinkers were forced to take account of this strain of thought; their own works were influenced by it and they also helped popularize it. This secular spirituality, that promoted the everyday miracle and the natural supernatural, offered a “third way” between the secular and the Catholic and shows that this divide was far from as concrete as has been assumed. The third way that reincarnation and spiritism opened has been traveled by various new age beliefs in the twentieth century, thus ensuring that French “secular” society maintains a strong, if rarely acknowledged, connection to a romantic vision of a world outside the purview of materialism and pure reason. While romantic socialists and spiritists did not change the world quite as radically as some of them imagined, they did participate in creating a version of “secular” that nonetheless maintained both spirituality and enchantment and carried them firmly into the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. *Le Monde des Livres*, 3 May 2002: iv.
2. See David Hess, *Spirits and Scientists* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University, 1991). For the revival of spiritist activity in France, see Marion Aubrée and François Laplantine, *La Table, le livre et les esprits* (Paris: Lattès, 1990).
3. François Laplantine, *Un Voyant dans la ville*, (Paris: Payot, 1985), 33.
4. Laplantine, *Un Voyant*, 36-37.
5. Laplantine, *Un voyant*, 37.
6. Jan Goldstein gives a brief summary of the way this argument has continued in twentieth-century scholarship. *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 2-3.
7. The problem of mental alienation was discussed in chapter four.
8. Gustave Géley, *Les Deux psychismes* (Saint-Amand, 1903), 18-19. See also *De l'inconscient au conscient*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1919). Géley argued with another important psychical researcher, Dr. Grasset, who posited separate consciences within the same being.
9. James Webb, *The Flight from Reason*, (London: MacDonald, 1971); Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "Nineteenth-Century American Spiritualism: An attempt at a scientific religion," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973. For a more complicated view, see among others, Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) and Logic Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
10. Mona Ozouf, "L'histoire et la politique dans *Les Misérables*," talk given at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 16 May 2002.
11. Owen relies on Lacanian psychology to demonstrate the challenge to norms of female mediums. See *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in late Victorian England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 214-235.
12. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 19-22.
13. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); B.J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: From the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

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