

POETRY FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD

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Spontaneous poetry was part of the public demonstrations given by many trance mediums, predominantly young and female,¹ in the first decades of the huge movement that Spiritualism rapidly became in the latter half of the nineteenth century.² After Margaretta Fox and Ann Leah Fox Fish publicly demonstrated rapping mediumship in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, New York on the evening of November 14, 1849, a demonstration that continued through November 15 and 16, 1849, rapping mediums came forward all across the United States in the area above the Mason-Dixon Line. The rapping phenomena quickly expanded in many of these mediums and others to include clairvoyance, levitation, writing, and other phenomena.³

Within months of the Fox sisters' first public demonstration, trance mediums (again, mostly girls and young women),⁴ began to come forward, becoming part of the thousands of mediums of the period.⁵ Trance speakers became the "missionaries of Spiritualism," in the nineteenth century.⁶ Particularly in the 1850's and 1860's, the trance mediums were the ones who gave the public demonstrations in halls to audiences often numbering in the hundreds and even thousands. Other forms of mediumship were mostly demonstrated in the home and test circles.⁷ Trance mediums shared the platforms with others at the great reform meetings of the era, addressing audiences of thousands while entranced by Spirit.⁸

At a time when women were mostly denied the right to speak in public, the sight of uneducated, young, female trance mediums holding forth on public platforms, speaking with confidence and eloquence, was a startling sight.⁹ The audience would choose a

committee to select a topic for the medium to talk on.¹⁰ The medium may have come onto the platform in trance or would go into trance after being given the topic, and immediately speak eloquently and with knowledge of the given subject well beyond any knowledge the medium could possibly have and beyond that of anyone in the audience.¹¹

Sometimes the mediums would speak in verse,¹² sometimes in a variety of foreign languages the medium could not possibly have known.¹³ Ann Braude speaks of the trance mediums “voicing extemporaneous visions of heaven in verse.”¹⁴ For example, thirteen-year-old trance medium Susie Cluer “was popular for her poetic presentations.”¹⁵ A book of poetry given through popular mid-nineteenth century trance medium Lizzie Doten was published that we are privileged to have in our church library. A volume of the poetry that came through trance medium Ascha Sprague was published shortly after her unexpected passing to Spirit in 1862 at age 34.¹⁶ A compilation of some of the beautiful poetry received through various West Coast mediums was published in San Francisco in 1881.¹⁷ Nettie Colburn Maynard’s book describing her work as a trance medium in the Lincoln White House contains many lovely poems from Spirit.¹⁸

Cora Scott Richmond, one of the preeminent trance mediums of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was well known for the beautiful poetry delivered through her entranced body by her beloved American Indian guide, Ouina. Cora Scott Richmond began working from the platform as a trance mediums in 1851 at age 11.¹⁹ She would enter the lecture hall “already in trance.” After she was on the platform, the audience or committee chosen by the audience would present the medium with a topic, chosen to “confound the young girl.” Immediately, a learned discourse would be eloquently given

on the topic by one or more of her guides. Following the trance address, the audience could question the entrancing Spirit. They could also ask questions before the talks.²⁰

The audience or committee would then present another topic and Ouina would come through the medium and spontaneously give a lengthy and beautiful Spiritual poem.²¹ Harrison D. Barrett, the first president of the National Spiritualist Association, in his biography of Cora Scott Richmond, (the first vice president of the National Spiritualist Association), estimated that ten thousand different poems were given by Ouina in this manner.²² As the biography was published in 1895 and Cora Scott Richmond continued to work publicly for perhaps twenty-five more years, another several thousand beautiful Spiritual poems were probably delivered spontaneously through her by Ouina.

An epic poem of 235 pages, *Hesperia*, published in 1871, was given to humanity by Ouina.²³ Ouina gave an estimated thirty thousand name poems to individual people, completed and published a serialized novel, *Zulieka*, for the *Progressive Thinker*, one of the excellent Spiritualist periodicals of the day that continued well into the twentieth century, authored a book of poetry for children, *Ouina's Canoe*, and contributed many other works to the publications of her medium's time.²⁴

The poetry found in Spiritualism that has come from the higher side of life is among the most beautiful ever written. Only a smattering of what came into this world from Spirit is referred to here. The record of this outpouring from Spirit is contained in the vast literature that was generated by Spiritualism, particularly in the nineteenth century.²⁵

The record of our “massive popular movement,”²⁶ Spiritualism, is contained not only in the thousands upon thousands of books that were published²⁷ but also in the over two hundred Spiritualist periodicals that were mainly weekly newspapers, that we now know began publication in the nineteenth century. These periodicals recorded the activities of Spiritualists in their particular areas. There we find the texts of many trance addresses given through local mediums, the beautiful poetry that flowed through them, the record of the daily and weekly doings of our movement in each local area, giving us a more complete picture of Spiritualist activities throughout the North, East, West, and, to a lesser extent, South.²⁸

Mary T. Longley, M. D., another of the gifted trance mediums of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was involved with three of these periodicals as assistant editor, test medium, or both.²⁹ A tireless worker for Spiritualism from girlhood through womanhood, she was the third secretary of the National Spiritualist Association, and, for fourteen years, the test medium for the most prominent Spiritualist periodical of the nineteenth century, the *Banner of Light*.³⁰

At one point during her work as a medium, a little girl, recently passed, came to her from the Spirit World. As this child grew and matured in Spirit, she gave much knowledge of the Spirit life, Wisdom from the higher realms, and lovely poetry. At one of Mary Longley’s gatherings, a man, not a Spiritualist, was asked to pick a topic for a poem. He quickly chose “Immortality.” *Immediately* this poem, among the most beautiful of all, was given by the little girl through the entranced Mary Longley. We are privileged to share this, that it may once again bring its uplifting light into our world.

IMMORTALITY³¹

Life in a golden circlet runs,

With no beginning and no end;

It flashes on from suns to suns,

And with all tides of being blends.

Life is the product of the Soul;

Without it nothing breathes or moves.

Life doth all things in space control,

And it, immortal being proves.

There is no end to conscious life;

It pulsates through all time and space;

With it the universe is rife;

By it all worlds are held in place.

Forever stretching on and on

Through mortal spheres to heavenly zones

It sings the grand immortal song,

And it Divinity enthrones.

Sweet Immortality that glows

Like quenchless suns with vibrant fire!

Blest Immortality that knows

The ardency of pure desire,

To rise forever, grand and free;

*And by it, human spirits rise
To heights through all eternity,
From realm to realm of Paradise.*

*The earnest hope, the grand desire
And longing in the human breast
To ever press on higher, higher,
To holier mansions of the blest;
The precious faith, the craving true,
To live and live, and never die;
The earnest wish, forever new,
To cleave the regions of the sky,
And dwell in sweet supernal bliss,
Beyond the shades of earthly care,
To reach a higher world than this,
Where life is all supremely fair;
The quenchless fire to live beyond
These earthly years of toil and strife,
The cravings of affection fond,
All tell of life, immortal life.*

*The grand intelligence of man,
The conscious power and memory,
The power to move and act and plan*

*Are attributes of Deity;
And Deity can never die,
For life eternal is its name,
Its attributes so grand and high
In Wisdom's light forever flame.*

*Man is the sweet epitome
Of all that life can e'er contain;
Heir is he of Eternity,
A link in God's immortal chain.
His is the quenchless force and power
That flames into a living soul.
He rises onward, hour by hour,
E'en through eternal ages roll.*

*For God is Life, and Life is God,
And man a child of Deity.
Beneath the grand immortal rod
He travels to Infinity.
Onward and upward, age by age,
He rises unto grander heights,
Guided for aye by Wisdom's sage,
And led by Truth's eternal lights.*

*From land to land and zone to zone,
His soul may pass in Wisdom's school,
He gains its precepts for his own,
Is governed by "Love's Golden Rule."
There is no Death; the flowers bloom
From spring to spring in beauty rare.
They fill the air with rich perfume,
And make all life so sweetly fair.
And though decay may blight them here,
Their sweetness is not lost to life.
They bloom in heaven's supernal sphere
Beyond all wintry storm and strife.
There is no Death; the soul renews
Its potency from hour to hour;
It never can its luster lose,
It is endowed with noblest power
To soar aloft on viewless wings,
Towards the source of endless light,
And as it goes, it sweetly sings
Triumphant in its lofty flight,
"Sweet Immortality is free
To every soul that e'er was born,*

Its heritage Eternity,

It hails the grand immortal morn.”

Alike to poet and to sage,

Alike to peasant and to king,

It comes to all in every age,

And on its grand exultant wing

Each soul is lifted higher and higher

Towards the throne of perfect Love;

Forever fed by God’s own fire

The spirit rises far above

The weakness and the cares of earth,

The trials and the sufferings,

For, gaining by its higher birth

A mastery over mortal things,

It reaches out, and on and on,

Its lofty exultation grand,

And sweeping other worlds along

Finds Destiny on every hand.

* * * * *

For God Eternal is within,

God, in the soul that’s freed from sin

Proves Everlasting Life and Power
To be Man's grand, eternal Dower.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1989, pages 85-86.

² Ibid, page 19, 31.

Goldsmith, Barbara, *Other Worlds*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1998, page 78, 139.

Hardinge, Emma, *Modern American Spiritualism*, University Books, New York, 1970 (republished from the original printed in New York, 1869), page 55, 61, 68, 71.

³ Hardinge, Emma, pages 51-114, particularly page 51, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 71.

⁴ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 23, 85-86, 87, 90, 92, 93.

⁵ Ibid, page 21, 90, 92.

Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, Charles Partridge, New York, Tenth Edition 1866. (First edition published circa 1853), page 434, stated by the Honorable Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, United States Senator and Governor of Wisconsin, shortly after he retired from the Senate.

Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism Volume 2*, Partridge & Brittan, New York, 1855, page 48, stated by Judge John W. Edmonds, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York.

Hardinge, Emma, pages 61-62, 65, 71, 101, 104.

⁶ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 88.

⁷ Ibid, page 18, 20, 73, ("crowd of 5000" at a Spiritualist picnic. "...Spiritualist meetings were large and frequent...") 85, 88-89, 90.

⁸ Ibid, pages 66-73.

⁹ Ibid, page 86.

Hardinge, Emma, page 57.

¹⁰ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, 95, 97.

¹¹ Barrett, Harrison D., *The Life Work of Cora L. V. Richmond*, Hack & Anderson, Chicago, 1895, Pages 109-120.

Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, Pages 85-86, 96, 97.

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- ¹² Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 20, 85, 86, 115.
- ¹³ Hardinge, Emma, page 52, 57, 84, 86, 98, 101, 102.
- ¹⁴ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 85.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, page 86.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, page 115.
- ¹⁷ Thorndyke, Mrs. E. P., *Astrea or the Goddess of Justice*, Amanda M. Slocum, Book and Job Printer, San Francisco, 1881.
- ¹⁸ Maynard, Nettie Colburn, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist? or Curious Revelations from a Trance Medium*, The Progressive Thinker Publishing House, Chicago, 1917, (originally published in 1891), republished by the Stow Memorial Foundation, Indianapolis, 1983, pages 133-147.
- ¹⁹ Barrett, Harrison D., page 21.
- Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 85.
- ²⁰ Barrett, Harrison D., pages 104-118.
- Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 88.
- ²¹ Barrett, Harrison D., pages 101-102.
- ²² Ibid, pages 102-103.
- ²³ Ibid, pages 529-545.
- ²⁴ Ibid, pages 100-101, 547-557.
- ²⁵ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, pages 26-27, 80, 84, 121.
- Richmond, Cora L. V. Scott, "Presentation of Spiritualism: A Paper Arranged by the Guides of Mrs. Cora L. V. Scott Richmond for the World's Parliament of Religions, at Chicago, October, 1893," National Spiritualist Association, circa 1893, republished by the Golden Gate Church, San Francisco, 2002, page 12.
- ²⁶ Braude, Ann, *Radical Spirits*, page 19.
- ²⁷ Ibid, pages 26-27. Note: When *Radical Spirits* was written, it contained a reference to over 100 Spiritualist periodicals, those Ann Braude had uncovered up to that time. Subsequently, she did more research and developed a list of 214 Spiritualist periodicals described and listed in the following Note 28. Our church is privileged to have three bound volumes covering 1-1/2 years of *The Golden Gate*, a large

weekly Spiritualist newspaper published in San Francisco (1885-1890). Quickly examining a few issues, I found advertisements for two Spiritualist periodicals not on Ann Braude's list contained in the reference below. Perhaps there may have been 300 or more of these periodicals that began in the nineteenth century.

²⁸ Braude, Ann, *News from the Spirit World: A Checklist of American Spiritualist Periodicals, 1847-1900*, Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, Volume 99, Part Two, 1989, pages 399-462.

²⁹ Longley, Mary T., *The Spirit World*, Progressive Thinker Publishing House, Chicago, 1917, (originally published in 1908), see pages 2 and 3 of the unnumbered pages in the Biographical Sketch near the front of the book between the Introduction and Chapter 1.

³⁰ Ibid, page 75.

³¹ Ibid, pages 33-35.