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**Working Witches:
Fortune Tellers, Clairvoyants, and Astrologers in the Golden Age of Spiritualism**

Grace Kredell

December 2022

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Women's History
Sarah Lawrence College

Abstract

Scholars of Spiritualism have long held that the movement grew spontaneously, forming around the Fox sisters as news of their novel “spirit-rapping” spread through New York in 1849. My thesis argues that a wide spectrum of occult workers, already active in New York City, paved the way for these genteel celebrities and their followers. These working women were already refashioning their trade before Spiritualism’s arrival, evident by the myriad new professional identities they claimed. Through newspaper advertisements, public commentaries, and popular occult literature, I closely examine several professional monikers common in New York City at the time. Chapter One chronicles the widespread practice of fortune-telling and its focus on prophecies of romance. By examining the specific services of working-class practitioners and the recreational divination of middle- and upper-class women, I demonstrate how reactions to these pursuits differed across class lines. Chapter Two takes up clairvoyance, its origins in the medical practice of mesmerism, and professional clairvoyants’ partial claim to respectability based on adherence to a scientific methodology. Chapter Three addresses astrology, a centuries-old, male-dominated tradition that in the 1840s was increasingly claimed by women hoping to dissociate themselves from the stigma of fortune-telling. Studying these occult workers is crucial to complicating an overly simplistic story of Spiritualism’s rise and a step in recovering histories vital to modern practitioners, who continue to face discrimination and broken lineages.



Figure 1 - A Witch's Body is a House on Fire, Eliza Swann, 2016, artwork created for the "Void of Course" exhibition, Feminist Center for Creative Work

Dedication

For Grandma Carol, who introduced me to her occult library, Gabe Elder, my love, Priscilla Murolo, who called me “comrade” in a dream before I met her, for my mystic pals in arms, and the Golden Dome School community.

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Figure 2 - Past, Present, Future, Megan Mack, 2015, Promotional image taken for the author's psychic practice.

Preface: I Am Not a Fortune Teller

I began giving psychic readings for money four years after graduating from a liberal arts college in the aftermath of the Great Recession. For years, I struggled through a series of dead-end, low-wage jobs and internships on a perpetual quest for meaningful employment that would pay a living wage.¹ Through a queer creative writing group that openly embraced mysticism, I met “Intuitive Counselor” Liliana Barzola. During my first session with her, she remarked that I was “very psychic” and told me I could make a living as a psychic if I wanted to. This was the first time an older person opened the door for me to make more money. I was simultaneously thrilled and terrified by the possibility; could I take on the identity of “psychic” and all the stigma attached to this line of work? At the time, I did not feel like I had any other career prospects. The financial opportunity simply outweighed the risks.

I was no stranger to psychic practice. As I grew up in Los Angeles in the 1990s, my beloved grandmother worked at an occult bookstore called The Psychic Eye. Her roommate was a French psychic who gave me my first tarot card reading as a child. As I began to do psychic work for a living, I confronted head-on a family legacy I had thus far avoided dealing with. I have family members on both sides who could be called seers—people who pay attention to their dreams, are interested in astrology, talk to the dead, remember other lives in other bodies, practice divination, look out for Bigfoot, and perform other acts of folk magic. Further back, I can count ancestors who participated in the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement in the United States; beyond these folks, I can only imagine what my ancestors might have practiced.

¹ This quest is ongoing. While I perhaps naively turned to psychic work in hopes of ending this cycle of precarity, I have experienced chronic instability in this professional role. This situation is not unique to me and speaks to structural conditions that have affected my generation. For an explication and analysis of those conditions, see Helen Peterson, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2020), a read I found cathartic and illuminating.

As far as I know, however, nobody else in my family has ever charged money for being this way or having these interests.

As I set up shop as a witch, I worried about my professional credentials. A friend who runs a successful tarot business informed me that a family story and a statement of committed practice (“I have been reading tarot cards for over ten years.”) could be enough to attract a clientele. While I observed this to be true in this industry, it did not relieve my fundamental anxiety about my qualifications. To bolster my fledgling professional identity, I sought trainings and courses in a self-directed, experiential learning program I called “Esoteric Grad School.” My first formal teacher was my professional initiator Liliana Barzola, who instructed me in energy healing and clairvoyance. From there, I apprenticed with astrologer Adam Elenbaas (now known as Acyuta-bhava Das), received certificates in Reiki I and II, studied “the sacred arts” with Briana Saussy, became certified in past-life hypnotherapy techniques through The Weiss Institute, and completed Spiritual Insight Training I & II at Fellowships of the Spirit School of Spiritual Healing and Prophecy in Lily Dale, New York, a historic center of Spiritualism. In addition to these lengthier formal programs, I attended countless spiritual workshops, talks, and gatherings around occult subjects. I also got readings as often as possible from a wide range of practitioners, observing them closely.

I built community, cultivating friendships with fellow practitioners, people who identified as mystics, witches, brujas, herbalists, healers, tarot readers, psychics, intuitives, astrologers, clairvoyants, and mediums. I came to an understanding of the collective challenges and pitfalls involved in performing this type of labor. To begin with, telling people that you do this type of work for a living can be a fraught experience. Typically, you are met with aggressive

questioning, strong opinions, and requests for free demonstrations of your abilities. During a stand-up comedy show I attended at the Comedy Cellar in New York City, professional medium and comic Nelly Reznik framed our professional lot in this way as she introduced herself to the crowd:

Hi everyone, so, I am a little bit nervous to tell you guys how I make my money. I'm a psychic medium. If you don't know what that is it's two things. One is I talk to the dead and two is I basically connect with people's energy to help them with life guidance. Now I know what some of you might be thinking. I mean most people don't believe in what I do and I'm just like, *you got me! It's all fake*. I wanted to live just above the poverty line and be a social pariah.²

To claim this professional identity is to open yourself up to constant suspicion, critique, harassment, attack, and routine requests for free services.³ As I came out as a psychic to my community, many people treated me like a walking confessional booth, expecting me to hold space for them without any offer of payment or exchange. The public often expects us—predominantly a labor force of women and femmes—to be as available as confessor priests. However, no churches or institutions are providing us with a livelihood. This systemic devaluing of our labor is typical of jobs in the feminized care and service industries. As a result of these conditions, crafting a sustainable livelihood—in terms of both economics and emotional boundaries—is a challenge for me and for many other folks I know who perform this labor.

Defining occult services for the public is also a tricky business. In *Initiated: Memoir of a Witch*, Amanda Yates Garcia—known to the public as “The Oracle of Los Angeles”—writes

² *Veronica Mosey Comedy Class Showcase*, Comedy Cellar at the Village Underground, New York, New York, April 23, 2022.

³ I have been sexually assaulted doing this work and have colleagues who have been physically attacked. See also this recent news story about a female psychic murdered in New York City by a male client and called a “witch”: Eyewitness News, “Man Confesses to Queens Murder, Called Victim a ‘Witch’ Who Cursed Him: NYPD,” *ABC7 New York*, May 5, 2022, <https://abc7ny.com/queens-shooting-fatal-nypd-mother-shot-guisepe-canzani/11819780/>.

about her professional debut at an art gallery. She interrogates the criteria by which our services are judged, zeroing in on the implicit question on the table when we labor in this capacity:

Even though my oracle booth was in a gallery with other artworks, people immediately interpreted me as either a “real” conduit for the divine or as an exploiter of the naive and the credulous for personal gain. I can’t recall a time when I’ve seen someone look at a piece of art in a museum or gallery and say, “I don’t believe in this kind of stuff.” They might say they don’t like a piece of art, or don’t understand it, or feel like it’s some kind of elitist trick, but in all those cases, they’re dealing with it as an artwork. But to say that they don’t believe in it would require leaping to a philosophical position few artworks demand: do you believe in art? In this case, the question my piece brought up wasn’t “Do you believe in art?” but “Do you believe in magic?”⁴

Garcia defines magic as a practice versus a belief system. She views that practice as valuable and important to share with others. In New York State, where I practice, the law classifies my “fortune telling” work as a Class B misdemeanor unless I explicitly state that it is “for entertainment purposes only.”⁵ I do so on my website and client intake forms—to protect myself from legal liability. In my first few years of practice, I would put on an elaborate witch hat or a Medusa-inspired headband of snakes to perform a reading. In this get-up, I comforted myself with the thought that—*whatever* I was doing—it could plausibly be construed as performance art. In this legal context, my vocational costume functioned as further proof that I saw myself as an entertainer.⁶ My clients loved it. I wanted to be in on the joke, to own the otherness that gets projected onto my body. Eventually, I did not wish to wear the witch hat anymore. I longed for a way out of the cultural dunk tank with which I had made myself complicit.

⁴ Amanda Yates Garcia, *Initiated: Memoir of a Witch* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2019), 279-280.

⁵ See New York Penal Law 165.35.

⁶ Clients, especially in the party setting, expect you to look the part, a desire which continues the proliferation of offensive “Gypsy” costumes. For a sense of how professional psychics present themselves for such gigs, see “Top Psychics for Hire in New York,” *The Bash*, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://www.thebash.com/search/psychic-new-york>.

While I certainly view my work as a form of art—as Garcia does—it is also something else, and that “something else” is hard to name out loud and claim publicly. The most universal definition of this work that I hear in my professional community is a negative: “I am not a fortune teller.” This declaration functions to lessen the threat of legal problems, emphasizing important boundary lines around professional services in a statutory grey area. This magical phrase and “for entertainment purposes only” are also attempts to manage client expectations, usually in vain. Clients often come to us for clear predictions whereas the practitioners I know view the future as shape-shifting and changeable. Clients—ignorant of the methodologies and cosmologies in which individual practitioners are engaged—typically expect us to operate like vending machines, dispensing perfect, automatic information as to what they can expect. In fact, we are working with forces that are mysterious even to us. Therefore, practitioners I know consciously set ground rules, adhere to ethical guidelines, and acknowledge their work’s fundamental limitations and uncertainties. While we take pains to define our services carefully, I have found that clients and cynical observers often refuse to engage seriously with our perspectives, preferring their fantasies and assumptions about psychic practice.

When I search for my craft’s history, I am struck by a painful void, a place of missing information and erasure. While oral traditions remain, many of us are disconnected from this legacy and find ourselves confronting broken lineages. As a professional community, we struggle to obtain information about our history, as there are few institutions or organizations—especially ones of our own—that have been able to preserve this knowledge. This erasure is the result of age-old persecution and discrimination. In 2019, I decided to return to school in womxn’s history, as I was frankly fed up with the treatment my community receives. I hoped that a

reckoning with the past could spell a new path forward for me personally and for the community collectively. I wrote my thesis to contribute healing to what I consider to be a traumatized professional lineage.

In performing research, I discovered how historical laws and commentaries against fortune-telling focused on working-class communities and racialized “others,” for example, “Gypsies.” When occult workers today say, “I am not a fortune teller,” we are disassociating ourselves from the people who historically have been most targeted for performing this work. *What is really so wrong with being a fortune teller?* Western culture has traditionally personified fortune as a goddess (“Fortuna” to the Romans and “Tyche” to the Greeks) responsible for determining our lots in life, whose emblem is the wheel. *I will happily be an agent of said goddess if they need me.*

For many years, I have tortured myself, unable fully to accept myself in this role. I know I am not alone in this. The persecution occult workers face can easily become internalized, manifesting itself in chronic self-judgment, as well as suspicions, attacks, and critiques between members of our own community. When I could not accept my work, I found reassurance in the many wonderful practitioners I got to know through taking this professional leap. *They* kept me going through many challenging periods. The evidence I have uncovered as a historian has given my work as a practitioner a renewed sense of purpose. I speak as a psychic and a historian when I say we have important work to do together in the future.



Figure 3 - Illustration of Madame Rockwell, W. G. Jackman, Anonymous, *The Prophetess: Being the Life, Natural and Supernatural, of Mrs. B. —, Otherwise Known as Madame Rockwell, The Fortune Teller, for the Past Five Years at Barnum's Museum, in the City of New York* (New York, 1849).

Introduction

But, with whatever high or whatever lowly calling—or whether with any calling at all—summoned to that zion, she has come, and here she is, occupying the same high ground with Samuel and Baalam, and those of Delphos;— as truly a prophet she is— as really a recipient of prophetic light—as any of them; and if not commissioned to denounce Heaven’s wrath against the offending nations of modern times, yet it is not because those same notions have not richly deserved it, nor because she has not been ready and willing to do so. A prophetess she is, and would not be properly entitled with any other appellation. The spirit of prophecy is upon her, rests with her, and will not depart; and she lives and breathes in that high spiritual atmosphere, through whose rare medium the light of God in old times shone, and the word of the future vibrated to the most gifted of the great prophets, bearing to Moses the wisdom of the law, and to Zoroaster’s ears the far-off music of the moving spheres.

She tells fortunes— “cheap.”

— Anonymous, *The Prophetess*

On June 1st, 1850, an advertisement appeared in the *New-York Tribune* announcing that *The Prophetess*, an anonymously written biographical account of Madame Rockwell—the resident fortune teller at P.T. Barnum’s American Museum for nearly five years—would be available for purchase in a few days.⁷ It was unusual for a Barnum’s American Museum fortune teller to receive so much individual notice. Since Barnum’s first advertised Madame Rockwell’s engagement at the museum in December of 1844, her work had not attracted any press coverage beyond the routine advertisements Barnum’s published in the newspapers, listing out the various attractions available at the museum.⁸ Barnum’s American Museum made a habit out of hiring

⁷ “The Prophetess,” *New-York Tribune*, June, 1, 1850.

⁸ According to her biographical account, Barnum’s American Museum hired Madame Rockwell in November, 1844. See Anonymous, *The Prophetess: Being the Life, Natural and Supernatural, of Mrs. B. —, Otherwise Known as Madame Rockwell, The Fortune Teller, for the Past Five Years at Barnum’s Museum, in the City of New York* (New York, J.S. Redfield, 1849), 61. The earliest newspaper advertisement I could find for her services at Barnum’s is “American Museum,” *The Evening Post* (New York, NY), December 30, 1844, where she was announced as a “petrologist,” a person who performs divination by peering into stones. Her work with stones is discussed in Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 54-57, and 65.

occult workers⁹—primarily “Gypsy” fortune tellers—to serve visitors, but they were not the stars of P.T. Barnum’s enterprise.¹⁰ In the Barnum’s American Museum guidebook for the year 1850, fortune-telling is not even mentioned, let alone featured as one of the top human attractions at the museum.¹¹ So, why the sudden fuss over a *common* fortune-teller on June 1st of that year?

Coincidentally, that first week of June also saw the arrival in New York City of the Fox sisters, young white women from Hydesville, New York.¹² They had created a stir across the state in 1849, when they performed their novel form of occult work called “spirit-rapping” for mass audiences. Standing on a public stage, or seated for more intimate audiences, the Fox sisters appeared as the necessary conduit for spirit communication, which took the form of loud, knocking sounds. In other forms of occult work, the client or audience member was asked to trust the occultist’s subjective experience of the unseen, whereas these raps could be universally heard. Astonishingly, no one could discover the source of the Fox sisters’ mysterious noises, including learned men whom the sisters invited to investigate them. While polite society

⁹ In this thesis, I use “occult workers” as an umbrella category for this historical labor force. I do so primarily because of the precedent set by Tammy Stone-Gordon, “‘Fifty-Cent Sybils’: Occult Workers and the Symbolic Marketplace in the Urban U.S., 1850-1930,” PhD diss., (Michigan State University, 1998). As someone who could be called an occult worker, I do not prefer this term myself. “Occult” from the Latin *occulere* (to cover over, hide, conceal) is perhaps not the most helpful term for a workforce seeking more recognition and understanding. For a useful, early academic grappling with the term, read Robert Galbreath, “Explaining Modern Occultism,” in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Charles L. Crow and Howard Kerr (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 11-37. Ideally, I would like to see workers come together to decide upon best terms.

¹⁰ As an example, see the museum’s advertisement featuring an “English Gypsy Fortune Teller” in “American Museum,” *New-York Tribune*, July 22, 1844. Many of the women advertising as “Gypsy” fortune tellers during this era were not Romani people. A discussion of Romani fortune-telling is beyond the scope of this thesis, but see Ruth Elaine Anderson, “A Subtle Craft in Several Worlds: Performance and Participation in Romani Fortune-Telling,” Phd diss., (University of Pennsylvania, 1987), as a source on that subject.

¹¹ You can access Barnum’s 1850 guidebook through “The Lost Museum,” American Social History Project/ Center for Media and Learning, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, accessed November 15, 2022, https://lostmuseum.cuny.edu/archive/assets/images/archive/barnum_american_museum_illustrated.pdf.

¹² Another coincidence is that the Fox sisters set up shop that week at Barnum’s Hotel, owned by a cousin of P.T. Barnum. Because of this name coincidence, both scholars and popular writers have mistakenly connected the Fox sisters to Barnum’s American Museum. They never appeared there. Maggie Fox biographer Nancy Rubin has claimed though that P.T. Barnum made an offer to the Fox sisters, which they refused. See Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox* (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 63.

generally looked down on occult work as a hoax that took advantage of the “superstitious,” they viewed the Fox sisters' mediumship as something novel. It was a *physical* phenomenon that could be empirically observed and measured. If the existence of the spirit world could be scientifically proved, it would be nothing short of a miracle, with young women responsible for this breakthrough.

In 1847, a year before the Fox sisters claimed to communicate with spirits in their upstate New York farmhouse, other women were making newspaper headlines in New York City for their spiritual abilities. From the point of view of bourgeois commentators, one of the dangers of plebeian occult work was that it granted spiritual authority to women of color. On March 8th, 1847, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported the story of a Black female domestic worker who had convinced her employer, a white engraver, of her ability to communicate directly with God. The engraver's wife and sister were particularly captivated by her, and “in their religious zeal worked upon the man himself to lay aside his better sense and join in the general infatuation which prevailed in his family.” However, when this prophetess asked her employer to salute her each morning with “a holy kiss,” she had gone too far. Against his family's wishes, the engraver fired her and brought the case before a magistrate. All three women were committed to an insane asylum. As *The Eagle* reported, “The prophetess has been consigned to the Kings county lunatic asylum, while the wife and sister were now at a private institution in Flushing.”¹³ It becomes clear from this severe exercise of male authority that belief in the power of a Black female prophet had to be contained. Later that year, in September of 1847, *The Evening Post* shared an article from the *Cherokee Advocate* proclaiming the spiritual talents of a fifteen-year-old girl of

¹³ “Extraordinary Delusion,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 8, 1847.

the Creek nation, “what may perhaps be an interesting case in medical science.” While engaged in housework, she suddenly screamed and slipped into a trance. When she came to, she recounted her journey into the spirit world, including a private audience with Jesus, and spoke of events which would one day come to pass. It was reported that large crowds flocked to her.¹⁴

In contrast to these contemporary prophetesses, the Fox sisters, as young white women, could be marketed as relatively respectable. While Spiritualist mediumship was indeed unique and exciting, it built on a long legacy of women's occultism, including the “common fortune telling,” performed by Madame Rockwell. With the publication of *The Prophetess* in 1850, Rockwell reminded the public of who had been there all along, laboring to little fanfare. As *The Prophetess* fervently made Madame Rockwell's case: “For nearly five years now gone, she has sat in that Museum-box, receiving all comers, and rejecting none, submitting to all tests, using no paraphernalia of mystery to excite curiosity, or theatrical clap-trap to tickle the popular taste therefor.”¹⁵ “Theatrical clap-trap” most certainly refers to the Fox sisters' dependence on the sensational technique of spirit rapping. *Talk to the dead?* Madame Rockwell could do that too! Although mediumship was never advertised as one of her specialties, in *The Prophetess* she lays claim to that skill: “The people who dwell in the land of spirits, and even the angels of the inner heaven, are no strangers to our prophetess. When it is properly required of her, she can always have sight of them, and, had her vocation permitted it, would gladly have devoted a large portion of her time to contemplating those interior realms where they abide.”¹⁶ If nothing else, the book

¹⁴ “A Prophetess!!” *The Evening Post* (New York, New York) September 1, 1847.

¹⁵ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 70.

¹⁶ Ibid, 73-74. To illustrate this ability, *The Prophetess* even supplies a humorous anecdote about a client who waited outside Madame Rockwell's door, believing her to be busy with another client when in fact she was having a routine chat with her dead grandmother.

argued that Madame Rockwell was simply older and wiser than the Foxes and had much more work experience than these newcomers. As *The Prophetess* quipped: “The pleasant, lively spring-time of life has not commonly been the harvest-time of the mystical gift, and, whatever history may say, I am inclined to think that the maid of Orleans, of glorious memory, was an old maid and not a young one.”¹⁷ Although *The Prophetess* claims that Madame Rockwell was born with intuitive gifts, her “ascent” to fortune-telling “required careful teaching and training, much study and exertion, with some painful discipline.” She had not been struck by spiritual lighting like the Fox sisters, with their out-of-the-blue knocks from the spirit realm. Instead, she had earned her position through hard work, and personal sacrifice, industriousness that was an integral part of the Barnum’s brand image.

Historians have credited the Fox sisters with the birth of Spiritualism, the nineteenth-century mass movement in which predominantly white middle- and upper-class Americans spoke to the dead. While the Fox sisters are now popular legends, occult workers like Madame Rockwell are essentially unknown. As *The Prophetess* boldly announced in 1849, “The turn of prophecy has at length arrived; —the hour has come, and the *woman*.”¹⁸ Prophetic women arrived en masse during the Victorian era, but what women have been recognized for occupying this public role? Historian of occult work Tammy Gordon has stated that Spiritualism created a new mass market for occult work of all kinds.¹⁹ However, New York City newspapers of the day make clear that occult work was already enjoying growing popularity across class lines, a

¹⁷ Ibid, 37.

¹⁸ Ibid, 72.

¹⁹ Tammy Stone-Gordon, “‘Fifty-Cent Sybils’: Occult Workers and the Symbolic Marketplace in the Urban U.S., 1850-1930,” PhD diss., (Michigan State University, 1998), 1.

situation which rang alarm bells for commentators.²⁰ Over a year before the Fox sisters' debut in New York City, a *New York Daily Herald* reporter complained about occult work's growing public stature:

There is no class of vagrants that has given the police of our city more trouble, compared with the numbers engaged in the nefarious calling, than the imposters known as fortune tellers. In former days, some old black crone, living in a cellar or garret whose walls were almost of a color with her own night-tinted skin, used to impose upon the ignorant of her own complexion, and occasionally a weak-headed one of lighter hue, by aid of cards, or an inverted tea cup. But quite a different race of fortune tellers has arisen. They now occupy splendid apartments, and have reduced their humbug trade to a systematic affair. They no longer call themselves fortune tellers, but are known as astrologers, professors of palmistry, ladies or gentleman of information, clairvoyants, magnetists, ladies of science, and so on. They have their regular hours of business, and make a comfortable—some of them a splendid—living.²¹

Well before Spiritualism came along, occult workers were refashioning their trade, making bids for respectability by adopting new professional titles that emphasized a connection to scientific methodology. While the birth and blossoming of Spiritualism undoubtedly enhanced the marketplace for occult practices of all sorts, the prior existence of vibrant occult scenes did a great deal to prepare the ground for it.

In *The Prophetess*, Madame Rockwell's professional journey begins with a visit to a female Indigenous fortune teller in Hartford, Connecticut, who connects her to an "Indian Doctor," a wise teacher who provides the occult training which affords her liberation from a troubled domestic life. While Spiritualist practitioners commonly worked with Indigenous spirit

²⁰ As early as 1843, a letter to the editor appeared in the *New-York Tribune* bemoaning the fact that a respectable family "not Foreigners, but Americans, born, brought up and schooled in one of the neighboring counties of this State" patronized a fortune teller when a half-dollar went missing from their household, a story the letter-writer claimed "fully illustrates the frequency with which Fortune-Tellers are consulted." See "Astrology—Fortune-Telling—Dreams and Superstitions," *New-York Tribune*, May 2, 1843.

²¹ "Fortune Tellers and the Police," *New York Daily Herald*, February 8, 1847.

guides, Madame Rockwell has a flesh-and-blood relationship with her teacher.²² Forced apart by propriety, they can only continue their relationship ethereally, with the doctor visiting her as a “living ghost.”²³ Connected intimately in this way, they build a working relationship that increasingly resembles a romance. *The Prophetess* reminds Americans who have made a career of the occult of the debt they owe to Indigenous practitioners. Because of the cross-cultural dimensions of occult spirituality, literary scholar John J. Kuchich has proposed the use of a lower-case-s “spiritualism” to acknowledge a much wider canvas we must commit to unfolding if we are truly to reckon with diverse yet interconnected forms of occult work.²⁴ Spiritualism in the United States shares a great deal with a broad range of cultural traditions predicated on communication with the dead. In this thesis, I use capital-S Spiritualism to specifically refer to the white-dominated nineteenth-century movement and its pretensions, and lower case-s spiritualism to discuss workers like Madame Rockwell who were not members of this elite movement, but whose work shared its cultural context. Additionally, many occult workers of the mid-nineteenth century called themselves spiritualists for marketing purposes although they did not participate in the Spiritualist movement.²⁵

²² To read more about Spiritualist appropriation of Indigenous spirituality, see Molly McGarry, “Indian Guides: Haunted Subjects and the Politics of Vanishing,” in *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008) 66-93.

²³ See Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 25-30, for a description of these ghostly visitations.

²⁴ John J. Kuchich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), xii-xiii.

²⁵ See some examples of working-class female occult workers’ advertisements as spiritualists: “Astrology—Spiritualism,” *New York Daily Herald*, June 18, 1856; “43 Christopher Street—Mrs. H Roeder,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 14, 1861; “The Great Original Madame Byron,” *New York Daily Herald*, August 27, 1864; “A Test.—Mrs. Anna,” *The Sun*, July 6, 1871. Spiritualists had periodicals for their own community, for example, *The Banner of Light*, in which they printed notices about their work. You can access Spiritualist periodicals through The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals: <http://iapsop.com/>.

As I write, there exists an abundant and growing scholarly literature on Spiritualism, work that tends to decontextualize the Fox sisters from the larger field of occult work (spiritualist work)—especially the world of the popular occult—and its cultural hybridity. When we consider the public’s consumption of women's occult work during the mid- to late nineteenth century, the boundary lines of so-called Spiritualism become less than clear. In *Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War* (2016), historian Mark Lause identifies the “seeker” as a common character during this era, one who likely patronized female occult workers “high” and “low.” As Lause describes: “These people might attend private seances or privately consulted mediums and clairvoyants. They attended meetings, participated in seances, or quietly consulted fortune tellers, but felt no need to testify as to the veracity of spiritualism in their lives.”²⁶ In late June of 1850, after all the publicity occult work was attracting in New York City, *The Scientific American* felt the need to comment on this growing phenomenon, and named not only the Fox sisters, but also fortune teller Madame Rockwell and a clairvoyant, Semantha Mettler as typifying this trend.²⁷ If the *Scientific American* lumped them all together, why have scholars of Spiritualism separated them?

By and large, scholars of Spiritualism have yet to include fortune tellers like Madame Rockwell as a part of their histories. However, as the coincidence of June 1st, 1850 illustrates, Rockwell’s work was very much in dialogue—and competition—with the emerging Spiritualists. Fortune-telling on the whole has attracted little scholarly attention, as is the case with plebeian

²⁶ Mark A. Lause, *Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 16. Lause also claims that the Spiritualist movement “broadly took in a large number of traditional seers and fortune tellers who had always found a livelihood of some sorts, particularly in the prosperity of America,” Ibid, 108. I have found little evidence for this, but I am intrigued by his statement and I hope that more can be uncovered about this intersection.

²⁷ “Lights and Shades of Nonsense,” *The Scientific American*, vol. 5, no. 41, (1850): 325.

occult work more broadly, despite its eternal popularity in America.²⁸ Scholars once neglected Spiritualism too, but its deep ties to other nineteenth-century radical reform movements of the day—abolition, utopian socialism, women’s rights, the popular health movement—have elevated Spiritualism, attracting scholars interested in investigating this richly interconnected movement history. As a high-brow movement, Spiritualism boasted many thought leaders, men and women who left behind extensive paper trails. In contrast, other forms and lineages of occult work are less documented or well-preserved, making their practitioners far more challenging to study.

Spiritualism was not isolated from this broader occult framework, however. As a high-profile example, consider the occult lineage of Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for President of the United States. She was a working clairvoyant, a Spiritualist leader, and the daughter of a woman who worked as a fortune teller at local fairs. Woodhull said that her mother could have been described as a Spiritualist before the term existed.²⁹ Scholars’ treatment of Spiritualism as more worthy of study deprives today’s occult workers of a full and balanced

²⁸ Besides the work of Tammy Gordon, the best sources I’ve found on fortune-telling in the U.S. are Shane White, “The Gold Diggers of 1833: African American Dreams, Fortune-Telling, Treasure-seeking, and Policy in Antebellum New York City,” *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 3 (2014): 673-95, accessed November 17, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/sht114> and Natalie Zarrelli, “The Hidden World of Tenement Fortune Tellers in 19th Century Manhattan,” *Atlas Obscura*, December 4, 2015, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-hidden-world-of-tenement-fortune-tellers-in-19th-century-manhattan>. For two useful non-U.S. fortune-telling studies see, David Allen Harvey, “Fortune-Tellers in the French Courts: Antidivination Prosecutions in France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *French Historical Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 131-157, accessed November 17, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-28-1-131> and Alana Piper, “Women’s Work: The Professionalisation and Policing of Fortune-Telling in Australia,” *Labour History*, no. 108 (2015): 37–52, accessed November 17, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5263/labourhistory.108.0037>. For additional sources on plebeian occult work, see Lashawn Harris, “Black Women Supernatural Consultants, Numbers Gambling, and Public Outcries against Supernaturalism,” in *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Number Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 94-122, Jamie L. Pietruska, “Promises of Love and Money,” in *Looking Forward: Prediction and Uncertainty in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 199-247, and the U.K. study, Owen Davies, “Occult Practitioners,” in *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 199), 214-270.

²⁹ Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 19.

sense of our history. It also reifies the Spiritualist movement's own claims to exceptionalism, neglecting the fact that it borrowed heavily from Indigenous spirituality and very likely also from African diasporic traditions.³⁰ Additionally, for white Spiritualists, their own ancestral occult traditions were likely influential.³¹ In the literature on Spiritualism, very little space has been given to contemplating the influence of "old country" British and European traditions, even though the centuries-old Scottish discourse of "second sight" was undergoing revival when Spiritualism was born.³²

Overall, scholars of Spiritualism have been disinclined to discuss women's occult work in terms of labor history and working-class aspirations.³³ This obscures why many women who became Spiritualist mediums were attracted to the job in the first place.³⁴ It must be underscored

³⁰ White Spiritualism in many ways was a cannibalizing cultural force, absorbing and re-appropriating non-Christian spiritual traditions as it needed. Scholar Erin E. Forbes proposes, "It may even be that the ubiquity of death for enslaved and black Americans precipitated Spiritualism; the development of technology for communicating with the dead may have started with the abolition movement's practice of ventriloquizing enslaved person's experiences," see Erin E. Forbes, "Do Black Ghosts Matter?: Harriet Jacobs' Spiritualism," *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* 62, no. 3 (2016): 468, accessed November 16, 2022, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/634709>. Erin E. Forbes' work on Harriet Jacobs stands as a corrective to the scholars of Spiritualism who have been neglectful of its non-white participants. For interventions to this tendency, see also Dianca London Potts, "Holy Spirits: The Power and Legacy of America's Female Spiritualists," *shondaland*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.shondaland.com/live/a23652668/legacy-of-spiritualists/> and Margarita Simon Guillory, "Diversity Matters" (presentation, Lily Dale Assembly, Lily Dale, NY, August 8, 2020). The latter was unfortunately not recorded. In Guillory's presentation, she asked, "What happens to our historical narratives about Spiritualism when some voices are left out?" She made the case that Paschal Beverly Randolph, William Cooper Nell, Harriet Wilson, and Henry Rey should be included within Spiritualism.

³¹ Eldest Fox sister Leah devotes a whole chapter to family antecedents in her professional memoir, where she describes a "strange constitutional something" that had been passed down, resulting in spiritual abilities. A. Leah Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York: T.R. Knox and co., 1885), 74-88.

³² An exhibition of "mesmerism, or second sight" followed the debut of the Fox sisters in New York City, and was attributed to their success, see "More Rochester Knockings—Another Attempt to Speculate," *New York Daily Herald*, April 29, 1851. For a discussion of "second sight" discourse and its connections to mesmerism and modern spiritualism in the UK, see Elsa Richardson, *Second Sight in the Nineteenth Century: Prophecy, Imagination and Nationhood* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

³³ U.K. scholar Logie Barrow wrote a whole monograph on plebeian spiritualists, an approach which has not been taken up by U.S. scholars, see Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910* (London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

³⁴ It's significant to me that many of the stars of Spiritualism came from modest backgrounds and became their family's breadwinners; for example, the Fox sisters, Samantha Mettler, Cora L.V. Scott, and Victoria Woodhull.

that the Fox sisters—Spiritualism's designated founders—performed spirit rapping in order to make a living and were not stalwarts of the social movements often tied to Spiritualism.³⁵

Pathbreaking scholar of Spiritualism R. Laurence Moore in his *In Search of White Crows* (1977) notably devotes a whole chapter to women's mediumship as a new form of women's work.³⁶

Moore, however, stops short of connecting women's professional Spiritualist mediumship to the long legacy of women's occult work and witchcraft, although nineteenth-century commentators often connected female occult workers to the ancient Greek Oracle of Delphi and the Biblical Witch of Endor.³⁷ Paralleling academic discussion of sex work, scholars of Spiritualism are often mired in debates about the labor's very legitimacy; and they have, in large part, refused to consider occult work *work*. Feminist scholarship tends to be more concerned with weighing whether or not—and to what degree—women's mediumship was empowering or proto-feminist, coming to a verdict that could be summarized as “empowering, but limited.”³⁸ The seemingly

³⁵ Mark A. Lause, *Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era*, 126.

³⁶ R. Laurence Moore, “The Medium and Her Message: A Case of Female Professionalism,” in *In Search of White Crows* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1977, 102-129.

³⁷ As examples, the *Herald* calls the work of the Fox sisters and Spiritualism “not new, for it is in fact but the revival of the ancient oracles of Greece,” and goes on to explain this historical priestess work in “Spiritualism—The Newest ‘Ism’ and Its Philosophy,” *New York Daily Herald*, February 5, 1852; the *Herald* in an article discussing Spiritualist mediums as con artists, says “By the four mediums mentioned more jugglery, more gross trickery has been performed than by all their predecessors since the days of the Witch of Endor,” see “Municipal Spiritualism,” *New York Daily Herald*, September 10, 1865.

³⁸ Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Claudie Massicotte, *Trance Speakers: Femininity and Authorship in Spiritual Seances, 1850-1930* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017). Molly McGarry notes how, “Mediumship offered the possibility of work for young women, which would have paid more than other forms of labor,” but cuts this labor discussion short in order to address the controversy within Spiritualism regarding charging money for services. This never would have been a debate for working-class spiritualists. See Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 33. She cites a moving example of a female Spiritualist (Anna Henderson) who opposes this Spiritualist way of thinking, writing into *The Banner of Light*, “My experience is that it costs a medium just as much to ride a railroad car as it does any other person.” *Ibid*, 40.

endless academic meaning-making surrounding Spiritualist mediumship's gender politics and semiotics distracts from the practical considerations of why women took on this role.

As the *New-York Tribune* reported in 1881, "A New-Jersey widow couldn't earn \$6 a week at the wash-tub. She became a clairvoyant, and her income increased to \$60. It just shows that a man begrudges the quarter he pays for washing his shirt, while he will cheerfully give a dollar to stick his nose into the other world before the show begins."³⁹ For wage-dependent women with few job opportunities beyond domestic service, factory work, prostitution, and home sewing by the piece, becoming an occult worker—in this case, a clairvoyant—could provide an income magnificent by working-class standards. Occult work had no educational requirements, and few start-up costs. Additionally, it could be performed at home, alongside domestic work, including child-rearing. While plenty of men also performed occult work during the mid- to late nineteenth century, the public preferred women in this role, given women's long association with supernatural or spiritual powers—in short, witchcraft. As *The Scientific American* observed in its piece on occult work, "Give us the fair sex for finding out secrets."⁴⁰ Women's socialization as nurturers and care-givers undoubtedly reinforced this dynamic, and prepared women to perform this intimate service work.

In order to construct a broad picture of women's occult work during the mid- to late nineteenth century, I have largely turned to newspaper accounts, where this understudied form of women's work becomes visible, thanks to digitization efforts that make keyword searches possible. Reliance on newspapers imposed limitations too, however. Many female occult workers

³⁹ "A New Jersey Widow," *New-York Tribune*, November 6, 1881.

⁴⁰ "Lights and Shades of Nonsense," *The Scientific American*, 325.

utilized professional aliases, creating numerous dead-ends in my research. Press descriptions of these workers tend to be brief or non-existent, and interviews with them are rare, making it extremely difficult to reconstruct specific cultures and communities at work. Given these limitations, I chose to focus my recovery effort on female occult workers in New York City, the professional home of the Fox sisters and Madame Rockwell, and the newspaper capital of the world. Beginning in the 1830s, new, cheaper newspapers—what came to be referred to as “the penny press”—began to appear on the market. Occult workers were quick to advertise in these new urban dailies—papers such as the *New York Sun* (est. 1833), the *New York Herald* (1835), the *New-York-Tribune* (1841) and *The New York Times* (1851)—which reached a large swath of New Yorkers. Newspapers ran a lot of paid advertising by occult workers, benefitting from this stream of revenue, as well as from sensational reporting about the world of the occult that attracted readers. Overall, newspapers had a complicated relationship to occult work. Press coverage of this work was almost uniformly negative, but the bad publicity did not appear to harm the occult trade, only increase it.⁴¹

From January to May 1857, popular humorist and *New-York Tribune* columnist Mortimer Thomson went undercover for a series of articles entitled “The Witches of New York,” wherein he described getting his fortune told by various occult workers—almost all of them women—who advertised in the penny press. In general, Thomson characterized his subjects as a dishonorable bunch, working-class upstarts who swindled the public without remorse. Due to the

⁴¹ In all my searches, I have found only one positive account of a working-class female occult worker, incidentally, a news story about a 63-year-old woman who worked in New Jersey whose last name was Clark. *The New York Times* reports that she first came into her “powers” at a Methodist revival but, from girlhood, had an “emotional disposition.” The journalist describes her work in terms of fortune-telling, and she is said to have charged ten cents per session, which yielded a “neat little fortune.” She did not identify with the newer trends of occult work; as the article states, “While many of her clients insist that her power is of a Spiritualist or clairvoyant, the old lady herself protests against such an accusation.” See, “A New Jersey Prophetess,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1881.

popularity of his series, Thomson developed the material into a book of the same name, published in 1858 under his pseudonym “Q.K. Doesticks, P.B.” An approving *New York Times* review of the book laments contemporary witches’ relative freedom and safety compared to witches of yore, and advocates for a return to bygone punishments: “Witches are neither ducked nor hung now, as they were once, in New-England, but if the witches of New-York were occasionally subjected to the former process, the effect upon them would, no doubt, be wholesome.”⁴²

In October 1858, months before the book’s release and a year after the series in the *Tribune* ended, twelve female occult workers were arrested in a high-profile round-up ordered by Mayor Daniel Tiemann. At this time, occult work was technically illegal, but officially only a misdemeanor, resulting in a “disorderly persons” charge.⁴³ In general, occult workers were rarely arrested unless a client complained to the authorities, making this October 1858 round-up an exceptional event. Seven of those arrested had been featured in Thomson’s series, and notably, several identified themselves to the press as spiritualists when interviewed. While Thomson viewed working-class female occult workers as entirely disreputable, another *New York-Tribune* journalist covering the arrest saw them in a different light, commenting how “Most of them looked very respectable. The clairvoyants were very intelligent, and some of them rather

⁴² “The Witches of New York,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 1858. Incidentally, the authors calls all of Thomson’s working-class witches of “the spiritualistic order.” Although he was no lover of Spiritualism, Thomson never dared knock on the door of any prominent Spiritualist. The Fox sisters themselves were personal friends of the *Tribune*’s editor Horace Greeley.

⁴³ The laws against fortune tellers have their roots in “rogue and vagabond” statutes derived from British poor laws, on the books as early as the 1790s in the United States. See Christine A. Corcos, “Seeing It Coming since 1945: State Bans and Regulations of Crafty Sciences Speech and Activity,” *Jefferson Law Review* 39 (2014): 42, accessed November 22, 2022, https://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1407&context=faculty_scholarship

handsome. They seemed to take it very hard.”⁴⁴ Following this mass arrest, many of these workers simply returned to the trade, after paying fines. Within days, two of them even published advertisements, capitalizing on the notoriety the press coverage had afforded them.⁴⁵

For all their ostensible outrage at the occult trade, newspaper editors continued to print occult workers’ ads. A year after *Witches of New York* came out, a book by Lambert A. Wilmer, a vocal critic of the press, charged that newspapers with helping occult practitioners dupe the public: “While astrologers, fortune-tellers, and wizards of all kinds, continue to be *good advertising customers*, their mystic arts will never go out of fashion or become unprofitable in a country where the newspaper press is the principal illuminator.”⁴⁶ Occult workers’ ads remained a staple of New York City newspapers into the late 1800s and beyond⁴⁷, continuing to appear long after the public lost interest in Spiritualism.⁴⁸

On April 22nd, 1888, *The Sun* commented on the ubiquity of female occult workers, capturing their many functions in a description of a woman operating on West Twenty-Seventh Street:

⁴⁴ “Arrest of Fortune-Tellers,” *New-York Tribune*, October 23, 1858.

⁴⁵ See advertisements for Madame Prewster and Madame Widger, “Boarding and Lodgings,” *New York Herald*, October 30, 1858.

⁴⁶ See Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang; Or, A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers*, (Philadelphia, PA: J.T. Lloyd, 1859), 161.

⁴⁷ In 1895, *The Journal of American Folklore* published a study on occult workers’ advertisements, noting them to be a widespread urban phenomenon, see Henry Carrington Bolton, “Fortune-Telling in America To-Day. A Study of Advertisements,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 8, no. 31 (1895): 299-307, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/532745.pdf>.

⁴⁸ In 1888, Maggie Fox made headline news when she denounced Spiritualism and admitted to fraud, publicly demonstrating how she produced the rapping noises with her toe joints. See, “Done with the Big Toe,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 1888. She also authorized with her sister an account of the fraud: Reuben Briggs Davenport, *The Death Blow to Spiritualism* (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1888). Later, Maggie Fox would retract her statement, but the damage had already been done. See Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 241-249. By 1888, the Spiritualist movement had already lost a significant amount of public support. See “A Decline in Spiritualism,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1875.

The Twenty-seventh street woman is one of those rotund women of the lower class who tread in devious paths and reap a living out of the sins or follies or credulity of their neighbors. She disposes of illegitimate babies. Probably she also keeps some sort of a lying-in hospital. She says she used to. Probably she is also a fortune teller. A clairvoyant, a giver of lucky charms. She may also be a midwife and a medical specialist. Such women are numerous.⁴⁹

As this article demonstrates, the work of female occult workers was multi-purpose. My understanding of this fluidity has been aided by historian Shane White's construction of occult workers as "cultural brokers" who served as clearinghouses for many different types of information. In servicing clients, they were able to use their vast social networks to get things done and often fulfilled underground needs.⁵⁰ Female occult workers' ads testify to their services' fluidity, although much of what they offered was not always made explicit. Some services, like the brokering of unwanted children, the provision of abortion services, and referring women to divorce lawyers, became evident only through newspaper exposés.⁵¹

While I wish to acknowledge how multivalent occult work was and how many different titles practitioners employed—often interchangeably—each of this thesis's three main chapters focuses on a distinct type of work, exploring how its female practitioners perceived themselves and how the public perceived them. At the end of the day, all these women doing occult work could be reduced to witches, which is why I refer to their practice as "witch work." In all three

⁴⁹ "Babies to Give Away," *The Sun*, April 22, 1888.

⁵⁰ Shane White, "The Gold Diggers of 1833: African American Dreams, Fortune-Telling, Treasure-seeking, and Policy in Antebellum New York City," *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 3 (2014): 679, accessed November 17, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/sht114>.

⁵¹ For articles that link female occult workers to abortion services, see "The Account of the Doings of a Female Fortune Teller," *New York Herald*, August 10, 1871; "The Trunk Murder," *New-York Tribune*, September 2, 1871; "A Chapter of Crime," *New-York Tribune*, October 7, 1873; "A Physician Arrested," *The New York Times*, October 24, 1878; "Her Death Due To Malpractice," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1886. For articles on how women used occult workers to access divorce lawyers, see "The Clairvoyant Swindle: How the Fortune Tellers Turn Grist Into the Divorce Mill," *The Sun*, December 18, 1887 and "Hot for Divorce Sharks," *The Sun*, December 19, 1887.

chapters, moreover, *The Prophetess* serves as a guidebook, for it is a veritable encyclopedia of occult practice in mid-nineteenth-century America.

In Chapter One, I discuss fortune-telling's attractions for women across class lines as they grappled with questions of love and marriage, factors critical to their destinies. I address working-class women's specific services as fortune tellers and the reactions from journalists and other social commentators who linked their work to the sex trade and accused them of creating social disorder. Finally, I examine books produced by middle- and upper-class women that presented fortune-telling as a form of amusement, indicating genteel society's familiarity with the occult well before the arrival of Spiritualism.

In Chapter Two, I tell the story of clairvoyance, its origins in the medical practice of mesmerism, and the emergence of professional clairvoyants who leveraged its scientific origins to claim greater legitimacy than fortune tellers enjoyed. In this context, clairvoyants benefitted from the fact that the medical field was in flux, demand for their practice growing as a public in need of medical treatment increasingly rejected heroic medicine. To illustrate clairvoyance's alignment with and departures from older occult traditions, I compare the biographical accounts of two contemporaries, fortune teller Madame Rockwell and clairvoyant healer Samantha Mettler. This chapter also discusses new regulations that prevented clairvoyance's incorporation into conventional medical practice, despite its roots in medical experimentation and its runaway success within the occult marketplace.

In Chapter Three, I chart the rise of women advertising themselves as astrologers during a time when astrology had yet to be formally established in America. I discuss why the press viewed these women as fortune tellers in disguise, refusing them the same prestige given to male

astrologers of yore and to the modern male practitioners who briefly gained New York newspapers' confidence in the late nineteenth century. It was not until the early twentieth century that an American astrologer garnered enduring prestige nationwide: a woman who, notably, was criminally charged with fortune-telling, but won acquittal by establishing astrology as a practice more akin to science.

In the Conclusion, I discuss how contemporary occult workers use platforms like Instagram to advertise their trade, similar to how mid- to late nineteenth-century practitioners utilized the penny press. Recently, these workers have been plagued by online impersonations. These scams offer a lens through which to examine the continuity of historical challenges to the trade. One of the few newspaper articles calling attention to this issue uniformly labeled contemporary occult workers as “spiritualists.” Using this article as a springboard, I consider the after-life of Spiritualism, as its cultural currency as a social movement began to fall in the late nineteenth century. I reiterate how, before the birth of Spiritualism, occult workers were already embracing scientific paradigms in order to distance themselves from older, stigmatized labels—evident in their use of “clairvoyant” and “astrologer” over “fortune teller”. As Spiritualism faded, spiritualism reached its commercial peak in the early twentieth century, becoming a useful cloak for American practitioners of all stripes seeking to wrap themselves in a degree of respectability, a trend that continues today.



Figure 4- Illustration of a reading, Nellie Bly, *In Love with a Stranger, or Through Fire and Water to Win Him* (New York, 1892)

Chapter One

Sex, Class, and Fortune-Telling

There she sits, implying her wondrous power in all such mean or little matters as are queried by the motley crowd of visitors. Very well knowing what she is, she yet does well what she does; and the eyes which can look into the face of Heaven, she turns, for a fee, to peer after stolen goods, among pawn-brokers' shelves, or to seek information of the love-destinies of love-sick housemaids.

— Anonymous, *The Prophetess*

In 1889, famous female journalist Nellie Bly published an account in *The New York World* of her visit to “the veiled prophetess,” a fortune teller operating at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Thirteenth Street in Manhattan, nearby many different kinds of vendors selling their wares. “There is a tinge of superstition in everybody,” observed Bly as she noted her “unlimited amount of curiosity, a love for the strange, and a desire to see what plan a swindling fortune teller had originated” as motivations for her pilgrimage.⁵² Recalling her numerous previous visits to diverse occult workers, she mused how her dissatisfaction with their predictions had not dampened her search for magical insight. The mysterious veiled woman stirred her imagination. As she arrived at the fortune teller’s door, she remarked upon the presence of two young girls leaving a reading. “They were laughing in a half pleased, half frightened manner,” giggling and interrogating each other about the fortunes each had received.⁵³ For female New Yorkers, a trip to the fortune teller was a beloved pastime and one often pursued in the company of other women. For young women such as those Bly observed that day, it could be an important rite of passage, one sought in anticipation of courtship.

⁵² “The Veiled Prophetess: Nellie Bly has her Fortune Told by a Mysterious Witch,” *The New York World*, January 20, 1889, reprinted in Nellie Bly, *In Love with a Stranger* (1892-1893; reis., n.p.: Sordelet Ink, 2021), 273.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 274.

As Bly sat down to her reading, the subject of marriage quickly arose. The veiled prophetess asked Bly if she desired to marry, and Bly answered in the affirmative, “with the seriousness the question merited.” The veiled prophetess then instructed her to cut “the magic cards” and place her hands upon them while making a wish about the man she would like to marry. Bly admits that she did so “earnestly” as she imagined her fantasy man. She reckoned, “If one can get a husband by wishing, one might as well state all that one desires.” Fortune tellers created space for women to voice their true desires, however fanciful. As Bly received a description of the stranger she would marry one day⁵⁴, the veiled prophetess asked her, “Do you wish me to work for you?”⁵⁵ In this instance, the work entailed the sale of a love charm and instruction in ritual magic, actions that would help to ensure Bly’s victory in her romantic life.

While Bly was skeptical of the reading and refused the additional service, she was moved enough by the encounter to include a veiled prophetess character in her serial novel *In Love With A Stranger: or Through Fire and Water to Win Him* (1892-1893). In the novel, Bly’s romantic heroine, Kit Clarendon, winds up donning the fortune teller’s veil herself, impersonating an occult worker in a surprise meeting with the object of her affection. While the deception makes her nervous, she recognizes the act’s potential to tip the scales in her favor. As Bly narrates, “She would risk it. It would be a battle of woman’s wit and cunning against man’s knowledge.”⁵⁶ Under the safety of the veil, Kit tells her potential suitor that he is mistakenly in love with her romantic rival. As she touches his palm to read his future, their physical contact awakens an

⁵⁴ Nellie Bly eventually married millionaire manufacturer Robert Seaman in 1895. She was thirty-one years old, and he was seventy-three. See “Nellie Bly a Bride,” *The Evening World* (New York, New York), April 18, 1895.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 276-277.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

intense desire within her. Soon, this erotic encounter is disrupted by the real veiled prophetess, understandably incensed that an imposter is stealing her business. Despite his being duped, the young man becomes taken with the bold young woman who would dare read his fortune.

In the mid- to late nineteenth century, young, single women arrived in New York City in droves, significantly outnumbering men by 1840 and for the rest of the century, which made the marriage market particularly competitive, as the antics of Bly's plucky heroine attest.⁵⁷ In the city, women could experience tantalizing new freedoms brought about by access to wage work and separation from kin networks. For some women, this separation gave them license to socialize with men more freely and to choose their partners without family interference—a thrilling prospect but also one fraught with risks. On March 5th, 1844, the *New York Daily Herald* noted the particular draw of a lecture on the occult by Dr. Bronson, “All the girls in town must be there, and no mistake; for the very quintessence of love, courtship, and the philosophy of getting married, are contained in those things.”⁵⁸ Could going to see a fortune teller increase your chances of finding a good match? For many women, it simply made sense to enlist the help of an occult worker in this area of life, given the high stakes of partnership. Additionally, for women disconnected from intergenerational social networks and without friends in the city, fortune tellers' matchmaking services could furnish a means of survival.

In constructing their advertisements, fortune tellers appealed especially to women, marketing services in connection with love and marriage and offering protection from the common pitfalls women faced as they began and negotiated relationships with men. In a session,

⁵⁷ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 83-89.

⁵⁸ “Introductory Lecture to the Magnificent, Stupendous, and All-Moving Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century,” *New York Daily Herald*, March 5, 1844.

a fortune teller typically revealed the name of the future lover or spouse—a helpful starting point to begin one’s search in a city overflowing with strangers. The fortune teller also made the future husband easier to identify by outlining his appearance, moral character, and financial prospects. Fortune tellers typically sold love charms, powders, or talismans worn on the body or placed underneath the pillow to attract the love of their dreams. Some fortune tellers even provided women with a likeness of the mystery man, revealed by peering into an illuminated box, where an illustration of a generic man was shown through a viewfinder.⁵⁹ One fortune teller even sent a daguerreotype of the future husband in the mail, while another offered to show women their future partner in a dream.⁶⁰ While it is likely that some women doubted the veracity of such glimpses into the future, perhaps receiving an image of an archetypal man allowed even disbelieving women to voice their own preferences. For clients who could not openly take part in such discussion or wished to be discreet, fortune tellers offered services by mail, through which women received written instructions on winning a mate.⁶¹

If a client already had a love interest in mind but found her love unrequited, a fortune teller might offer to, as one put it, “make love mutual between parties where it does not now exist.”⁶² Unhappily married women could also consult with fortune tellers to assess possibilities for changing their situations.⁶³ Multiple female fortune tellers offered to transform drunken or

⁵⁹ “Arrest of a Fortune Teller,” *New York Daily Herald*, June 13, 1854.

⁶⁰ “Mlle. Marguerite Lamareoux Will,” *New York Daily Herald*, November 24, 1857 and “Madame Rosa,” *New York Daily Herald*, August 27, 1864.

⁶¹ “Madame B—, Recently from Germany,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 24, 1854.

⁶² “Mrs. Ladomus,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 2, 1854.

⁶³ “Astrology and Clairvoyance,” *New York Daily Herald*, June 20, 1859 and “Go and See Madame Snell,” *New York Daily Herald*, August 27, 1864.

unfaithful husbands into loving partners through magical means.⁶⁴ Women also went to see fortune tellers to seek guidance in the case of desertion, and some additionally offered methods of reunion.⁶⁵ The fortune teller Madame Starr also specifically addressed women who had been harmed in the courtship game, stating, “Ladies, take notice; you who have been deceived by false lovers, you who have been unfortunate in life, call on Madame Starr for advice and comfort.”⁶⁶ Whatever situation women found themselves in with regard to love and marriage, fortune tellers came prepared to deal with their problems.

Perhaps most alluringly, especially for newcomers to the city, many female occult workers of the mid-nineteenth century advertised “speedy marriages,” the quickest and surest path to economic security for women.⁶⁷ While it is hard to know all that this service entailed, the *New York Times* offers a glimpse in an 1855 interview of “Madame Prewster,” one of the so-called witches later profiled by journalist Mortimer Thomson. To succeed in her “matrimonial program,” Prewster kept extensive lists of eligible men and women in the city. For the price of ten dollars, a man received an introduction to a woman on her list. Presumably, Prewster did not charge women to be on these lists. When asked by the journalist about the class of patrons utilizing this service, Prewster described the men as individuals “in business all day” and the women as “principally school-teachers and shop-girls who are confined all day abroad and all night at home, and who have no opportunity to make acquaintances.” Later in the interview, she

⁶⁴ “A Fact,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 14, 1861 and “The Greatest Wonder in the World,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 17, 1862.

⁶⁵ “Astrologist—Madame Henri,” *New York Daily Herald*, September 17, 1862.

⁶⁶ “No Imposition.—The Never Failing Madame Starr,” *New York Daily Herald*, April 23, 1863.

⁶⁷ For “speedy marriages” advertisements, see “Astonishing To All,” *New York Daily Herald*, January 9, 1856; “Astrology.—Madame Lane,” *New York Daily Herald*, November 24, 1857; “Madame Harris Tells All The Events of Life,” *New York Daily Herald*, April 6, 1858; “Astrology.—Madame Leavy Can Be Consulted,” *New York Daily Herald*, September 16, 1859; “Madam Ray,” *New York Daily Herald*, February 8, 1860.

also mentioned rich women—including married women—typically older and “not very handsome” who also benefitted from her matchmaking service.⁶⁸ This type of client, Prewster hinted, might be interested in meeting the reporter interviewing her for the *Times* and his accompanying friend—young men of limited means and perhaps fortune-hungry.

Casting suspicion upon the nature of these services, the reporter insinuated that it must “sometimes occur that matrimony is not the result of your introductions, but that the results are unfortunate as far as regards the female.” Prewster flatly denied this charge, “visibly swelling like a hen whose brood has been outraged,” as she insisted that she protected the women on her lists. If a gentleman client treated a female patron unkindly, she barred him from accessing the service again and he could not reclaim his ten dollars. “That’s the way I’d serve him,” Prewster asserted. In the last year alone, Prewster claimed, she had brokered “over three-hundred happy matches,” and she went on to share a particular success story: a rich male client who hid his wealth in order to be accepted on his own merits. Prewster introduced him to a woman who not only accepted him as penniless, but offered to support *him*. The young woman was therefore pleasantly surprised when, after a modest ceremony, her new husband landed her in a sumptuous mansion on Fifth Avenue. “[H]e comes frequent to me to thank me for their happiness,” Prewster declared. Such a story printed in the newspaper could stoke a woman’s fantasies of social mobility in New York City, and what could be achieved if you played the marriage market right.

While the New York press portrayed women’s interest in the occult as universally naive—transcending class boundaries—commentators homed in on what they saw as its particular dangers for working-class women. On August 6th, 1852, as Spiritualism brought greater

68 “A Raid Among The Soothsayers,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 1855.

visibility to female occult workers in the early 1850s, *The New York Times* spoke to these putative dangers in a condescending commentary on fortune telling:

We have no sort of commiseration for those whose education has taught them the absurdity of astrology and fortune telling, and are foolish enough to throw away their money; but the ignorant, superstitious, poor sempstresses [sic], milliner's apprentices, book stitchers, housemaids, and that class of people, ought to be protected in some way from the humbug of these Fortune tellers.

These women were “compelled to struggle for a living, and gain their scanty subsistence by hours of toil at their various laborious callings. They work harder and scrimp themselves the more, to be able to save enough to go and see the fortune teller.”⁶⁹ The fortune teller’s typical fee of twenty-five cents to a dollar could be a sizable percentage of a working woman’s weekly income.⁷⁰ The article describes this class of women as having a genuine fortune-telling habit, and yet it was middle- and upper-class women who had the economic resources and leisure time to go to fortune tellers with such frequency.

This targeting of working-class women’s patronage as a social problem was nothing new, and resonated with earlier social discourses condemning fortune tellers. Perhaps the standard-bearer in this genre of social tract is British evangelist Hannah More’s *Tawney Rachel; or, the Fortune-Teller: With Some Account of Dreams, Omens, and Conjurers* (1801), about a dark-skinned itinerant woman who gains the trust of “silly girls” through the guise of fortune telling.⁷¹

⁶⁹ “Fortune Tellers,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 1852.

⁷⁰ See the wages for women as “inside workers” (Table 5) in the Appendix of Stansell, *City of Women*, 228.

⁷¹ See these eighteenth-century newspaper articles denouncing the work of fortune tellers in the U.K. and the U.S.: “Anne Gwynn,” *The Ipswich Journal*, June 7, 1740; “Grace Mann,” *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, September 26, 1741; “Mary Clayton,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 30, 1751; “More Truly the Moon,” *The Edinburgh Chronicle*, October 29, 1759 (a fortune teller told a servant that it was her destiny to be with her married master); “Wednesday Morning,” *The Public Advertiser*, April 24, 1761 (an old fortune teller invited in by a servant stole from the master); “Mary Hayes,” *The Public Advertiser*, November 16, 1765 (a fortune teller obtained sums of money from several maids employed by upper-class men); “Run Away from the Subscriber,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 12, 1768 (a servant fled her master, calling herself a fortune teller).

Though Rachel engages in numerous types of cons, her central act of duplicity in this moral tale involves a young, superstitious woman named Sally, described by More as a fan of occult literature. Engaging the eager Sally in a palm reading, Rachel provides a description of the man she is fated to marry, along with a suggestion of when and where to find him. Unbeknownst to Sally, Rachel has conspired with a ne'er-do-well to split Sally's dowry money in exchange for orchestrating the union. Delighted to see her prophesized suitor in the ordained spot, Sally goes through with the marriage, only to discover that her new husband is "very worthless and very much in debt." Addressing the Sallys of the world, Hannah More admonishes her readers, "Listen to me, your true friend, when I assure you that God never reveals to weak and wicked women those secret designs of his providence, which no human wisdom is able to foresee. To consult these false oracles is not only foolish, but sinful."⁷² It was not a woman's business to know "His providence." While More's final commentary is primarily a rebuke of heretical practitioners, the story's narrative speaks clearly to the dangers of seeking a spouse through fortune-telling, far outside the ordained channels for matchmaking.

Decades later, in 1844, popular, moralizing writer T.S. Arthur, who used the pen name "Timothy Shay," updated More's scenario in his cautionary tale "Nancy Newell and the Fortune Teller," which presents the itinerant country fortune teller as a conduit for pernicious urban influences. His "Tawny Rachel" is a crone named Mag who captivates the titular character, Nancy, a young, naive rural woman who, like Sally, becomes hooked through the offer of a free palm reading. Mag tells Nancy it is her destiny to marry a rich, handsome stranger, a prophecy

⁷² Hannah More, *Tawney Rachel; or, the Fortune-Teller: With Some Account of Dreams, Omens, and Conjurers* (London, UK: Howard and Evans, 1801), 15, https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-PN970_H69_T9_1801_003505092-1588/page/n1/mode/2up.

that unleashes new questions in Nancy's mind about the kind of life she is fated to lead. As she wrestles with Mag's foretelling, she grows discontent with her current life of rural household drudgery. Nancy loses interest in her steady relationship with a trustworthy, working-class suitor. Unsurprisingly, when a mysterious stranger fitting Mag's description miraculously arrives in Nancy's village, she is prepared to leave her rural life behind. Visits with Mag have fundamentally altered Nancy's desires. Predictably, as in *Tawny Rachel*, Nancy's dream husband is Mag's co-conspirator. Instead of robbing the victim of her dowry, however, this ruse deprives Nancy of a respectable livelihood; her new husband traffics her into the urban sex trade. After being forced to work as a prostitute⁷³ in New York City, she returns to her village to exact revenge, killing Mag. In a turn of narrative convenience, she expires before the police can arrest her for murder. After this spectacular ending, like More, Arthur (as Shay) provides his female readership with a final, explicit warning:

Let no innocent heart suffer itself to be a moment thrown off of its guard. Evil approaches in a thousand forms, and presses for admission at every door of the mind. New modes of betraying the young, the good, and the beautiful, are invented every day, and new snares laid for their feet in each avenue. Let every one beware.⁷⁴

By presenting his country fortune teller as a confederate of city criminals, Arthur connects older social discourses with new urban dangers. Like *Tawney Rachel*, Arthur's tale underscores fortune-telling's potential threat to vulnerable young working-class women.

Mirroring the plight of T.S. Arthur's protagonist, an urban legend persisted in the mid- to late nineteenth century that painted female occult workers as evil procuresses in disguise.

⁷³ In this thesis, I use "prostitute" and "prostitution" in deference to the nineteenth-century lexicon.

⁷⁴ T.S. Arthur (Timothy Shay), "Nancy Newell and the Fortune Teller," in *The Martyr Wife: a Domestic Romance* (New York: J. Allen, 1844), 96.

According to the myth, their real business was trafficking young, ignorant country women like Nancy Newell into the sex trade. Both the occult and the sex trades were thriving industries at this time, providing many women with financial independence. That male social commentators should link the two comes as no surprise. Both prostitution and fortune-telling offered for sale that which *should* be confined to the domestic sphere, within the bounds of marriage and family: women's bodies, minds, and perhaps even their intuitive faculties. For women to sell these resources for their own profit in the capitalist marketplace threatened patriarchal norms. The notion that occult work and sex work were closely connected can also be seen in vagrancy laws of the time, which listed fortune-telling and prostitution side-by-side in a roster of occupations of disorderly persons.⁷⁵

Mortimer Thomson also lumps the two together in *The Witches of New York* (1858), his investigation of the occult trade. In his first "Explanatory Chapter," he declares that "most of these humbug sorceresses are now, or have been in more youthful and attractive days, women of the town, and...several of their present dens are vile assignation houses."⁷⁶ He goes on to hash out the purported sex trafficking scheme whereby female occult workers conspire with "masculine go-betweens" to land female customers in brothels after they have been tricked into romances with male con artists. As Thomson writes of the fortune teller's parlor and the bawdy house, "There is a straight path between these two points which is travelled every year by hundreds of betrayed young girls, who, but for the superstitious snares of the one, would never

⁷⁵ See the discussion of both in "What is the Law Relative to Vagrancy," *New York Daily Herald*, March 30, 1855.

⁷⁶ Mortimer N. Thomson, *The Witches of New York* (1858; reis., Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Literature House, The Gregg Press, 1969), 20.

know the horrible realities of the other.”⁷⁷ However, in his numerous visits with occult workers, he never found any hard evidence of this connection, nor did the city’s newspapers provide fact-based exposés of fortune-telling’s links to the sex trade.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, men often repeated this rumor. A year after *The Witches of New York* appeared, the anonymous author of *Humbug: A Look at some Popular Impositions* repeated Thomson’s charges almost word for word.⁷⁹ Ten years later, journalist Junius Browne upheld the myth in his *The Great Metropolis, a Mirror of New York: A Complete History of Metropolitan Life and Society* (1869), proclaiming that female occult workers were “often directly employed by blacklegs and debauchees to secure for them some pretty and unsophisticated girl—one from the country generally preferred—and liberally paid in the event of success.”⁸⁰ In 1870, Joseph Hertford’s *Personals; or, Perils of the Period* described fortune tellers as “pestilent wenches” whose trade was merely “a cover to practices threatening the whole social fabric with dissolution.”⁸¹ Yet again, three years later, the anonymous book *The Spider and the Fly; Or, Tricks, Traps and Pitfalls of City Life* (1873), repeated the warning about “the straight path”

⁷⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁷⁸ The same year that Thomson published his book, New York City physician William Wallace Sanger published *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effect Throughout the World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858). It does not mention contemporary fortune tellers’ connection to the sex trade, but it does mention historical witches and witchcraft, including a “pretended witch” in ancient Athens who collected the money of brothel customers (Ibid, 47) and seventeenth-century witches’ meetings where the prime object was “the gratification of sensuality” (Ibid, 104). Additionally, there is no mention of female occult workers in Timothy J. Gilfoyle’s comprehensive *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992).

⁷⁹ The line is “There is a straight path between the fortune-teller’s den and the brothel, which has been traveled every year by hundreds of betrayed girls, who but for the superstitious snares of the one, would have never known the horrible realities of the other,” from Anonymous, *Humbug: A Look at some Popular Impositions* (New York: S.F. French, 1859), 61.

⁸⁰ Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1869), 146.

⁸¹ Joseph Hertford, *Personals; or Perils of the Period* (New York: Printed for the author, 1870), 191.

between the fortune teller's den and the brothel, this time referring directly to *Witches of New York*.⁸² This chorus of male writers uniformly denied young women's agency in their visits with fortune tellers, casting them as innocent, uninformed victims of the trade. Unable to comprehend *any* client's motivation for visiting a fortune teller, these remarkably similar commentaries ignore the possibility that the young women visiting fortune tellers were knowing participants in the more underground aspects of the trade.

In all likelihood, female occult workers who offered “speedy marriages” and services like Prewster’s “matrimonial bureau” connected working-class women to a casual form of prostitution. While it is impossible to determine the exact nature of these arrangements, the record does make clear that the very existence of this thriving underground female economy centered on fortune-telling created anxiety for male commentators. Whereas they peddled tales of exploitation, it is far more likely that fortune tellers and their female clients were in business together, perhaps the true source of the alarm expressed by Mortimer Thomson and others. In this business, fortune tellers would have brokered exchanges in which the clients traded their companionship and sexual favors for food, drink, entertainment, and other luxuries.⁸³ While the introductions made by female occult workers could have resulted in sexual assault, unlike in the scenarios imagined by T. S. Arthur and his like, women would have voluntarily entered into these exchanges. They likely did so to supplement low wages and experience a night on the town, for example. Overall, the fortune teller’s parlor brought people together across class and

⁸² Anonymous, *The Spider and the Fly; Or, Tricks, Traps, and Pitfalls of City Life* (New York: C. Miller & co., 1873), 61.

⁸³ On the common practice of “treating” in the nineteenth century and women’s “reasonable” resort to prostitution given women’s circumstances, see Stansell, *City of Women*, 176-177.

perhaps racial lines, a form of social mixing that Joseph Hertford likely had in mind when he accused the trade of fomenting social disorder.

Despite the endurance of narratives focusing on working women as fortune tellers' clients, there is substantial evidence that bourgeois women sought out occult matchmaking services too. In 1841, for example, the *Brooklyn Evening Star* offered this description of New Yorkers who patronized Lydia Liliberton, alias Taylor, a woman of color who foretold adultery by married people and predicted the future love interests of unattached young women: "such was the rage for discovery in these matters, that cabs and carriages, with respectable persons of both sexes, would be seen each evening wending their way to her domicile, to hear from the lips of this modern Sibyl the secret history of their own future destiny." Liliberton's practice came to light only when one of its "victims"—a respectable married woman—complained to the police. While accusing Liliberton of trickery, she described herself as "enchanted," betraying her genuine belief in Liliberton's supernatural abilities.⁸⁴

In *The Great Metropolis*, Junius Browne attempts to explain women's interest in the occult by connecting their patronage to irrational traits he viewed as characteristic of women's heart-centered natures:

Men long for wealth and power; women for love and beauty. Facts and reason influence those; feeling and imagination these. Hence women can never quite divest themselves of superstition. Their hearts make them believe in miracles, and they are never entirely sure the handsome prince they read of in the fairy tale, or the hero they worshiped in the delightful romance may not come to them some day, and claim them for his own.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "Suppressing the Occult Sciences," *Brooklyn Daily Evening Star*, March 13, 1841.

⁸⁵ Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 139.

Browne's fanciful description ignores the fact that, for women, "love and beauty" in connection with the prospect of romance and marriage for women are inextricable from "wealth and power," whose absence could make an unfortunate partnership most unpleasant. Browne's analysis cannot fathom that women had good *reason* to make a trip to the fortune teller as they navigated uncertainty in their marital prospects, perhaps the most significant influence on the course and quality of their lives.

While female fortune tellers fashioned their advertisements with an eye toward women's concerns, it is impossible to know that they acted in women's best interests or served as their advocates.⁸⁶ What is known is that many female fortune tellers read exclusively for women, and reports on these services from the mid- to late nineteenth century often mention how busy these workers were and thus how long one had to wait to see them. When Madame Prewster was arrested in a mass round-up of female occult workers in October 1858, a journalist commented on the "large number of women in an adjoining room, waiting with exemplary patience to have their fortunes told."⁸⁷ In this sense, fortune tellers' home businesses may have functioned as important social hubs for women, a private space wherein women could socialize before and after their readings. It does not stretch the imagination to wonder what unexpected friendships and alliances might have been forged in such spaces, where female strangers gathered to assert control over their destinies. All in all, it must have been a therapeutic site, where women could lay it all on the table, unburdening themselves to a wise listener who would not judge them for their circumstances.

⁸⁶ See "Truth is Stranger Than Fiction," *New York Daily Herald*, May 17, 1839, the story of a widow's journey to claim a large bequest. She sought out a prominent fortune teller to act as her "companion and protector."

⁸⁷ "The New York Sorcerers," *New York Daily Herald*, October 23, 1858.

One clue to fortune tellers' status and reputation in working-class communities lies in the popularity of a play called *Moll Pitcher; The Fortune-Teller of Lynn* by playwright J.S. Jones based on the life of a real prognosticator in Massachusetts.⁸⁸ The play ran for over thirty years (1841 To 1876) in the Bowery entertainment district near where many fortune tellers lived and worked.⁸⁹ In the play, Moll Pitcher works to undo the harm caused by a pirate, now disguised as a respected priest, who assaulted Pitcher as a young woman. As he threatens to blackmail a young female client of Pitcher's into marriage, Pitcher takes revenge, making use of her extensive social network and cunning to expose the fraud. It is likely that Moll Pitcher was a household name in New York City, given the success of the play and other materials produced about her legacy.⁹⁰ That this play found great resonance with working-class audiences suggests that it spoke to their experience of female fortune tellers and how they championed and protected women in their communities.

While records of working-class women's experience with fortune-telling are hard to come by, women of a different class did leave behind evidence of a strong, positive connection to

⁸⁸ J.S. Jones, *Moll Pitcher; or, The Fortune Teller of Lynn. A Drama in Four Acts* (Boston, MA: W.V. Spencer, 1855).

⁸⁹ For a sample of play notices, see "Bowery Theatre," *The Evening Post* (New York, New York) October 15, 1841; "Theatrical and Musical," *New York Daily Herald*, May 27, 1851; "National Theater," *New-York Tribune*, November 5, 1855; "Opera and Dramatic Matters," *New York Daily Herald*, November 5, 1860; "Wood's Museum," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1876.

⁹⁰ In 1879, *The New York Times* published a lengthy article about the real-life Moll Pitcher. The author stated, "She was very celebrated, and there was not a port in Europe into which American vessels sailed, flying the American flag, that had not heard of the wonderful powers of Moll Pitcher." See "The Prophetess of Lynn," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1879. A year later, another *New York Times* article appeared about her hometown of Lynn, MA, in which the journalist remarked, "It would be hard to find a person who has not heard of Moll Pitcher, the famous fortune teller." See "The City of Shoe-Makers," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1880. In 1894, *The New York Times* discussed how Moll Pitcher's chair and bonnet had been preserved, see "Relics of Brave Old Days," *New York Times*, September 2, 1894. A year after this, a book was published about her life and work, see Ellen M. Griffin, *Moll Pitcher's Prophecies, or The American Sibyl* (Boston, MA: The Eastburn Press, 1895). For an excellent contemporary discussion of Moll Pitcher by one of her descendants, see Ann Barrett, "Moll Pitcher Lecture," March 11, 2018, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA, MPEG-4, 34:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A__OBUBJ9r4.

this occult art. In 1835, fortune-telling was marketed in the form of a parlor game called “The Sybil’s Leaves,” wherein cards were shuffled and drawn, each describing a prospective mate.⁹¹ Perhaps due to the success of this game and others like it, in the mid-1840s, respectable female authors capitalized on popular interest in fortune-telling by creating a range of diversions for the middle-class parlor that centered on prophecies about romantic courtship. Imagine men and women gathered together for an afternoon or evening’s entertainment, the thrill of a match if a card’s description were to fit somebody in the room, and the romantic connections such playful prompts might facilitate! Whereas professional fortune tellers were accused of connecting young women with inappropriate, even dangerous, strangers, amateur fortune-telling through parlor games took place in the safe confines of participants’ social circle.

In 1844, the popular southern writer Caroline Gilman tried her hand at this new genre of novelty literature, publishing *Oracles from the Poets: A Fanciful Diversion for the Drawing Room*, which she followed up with *The Sibyl, or New Oracles from the Poets* in 1848. *Oracles from the Poets* poses questions such as “What is your character?” and “What is the personal appearance of him that loves you?” Players answered the questions by selecting a number and reading a corresponding verse that resembled a fortune teller’s comments.⁹² In her preface to *Oracles from the Poets*, Gilman evokes the sense of power young women gained through fortune-telling, describing how she was led to create the book after “observing the vivid interest taken by persons of all ages in a very common-place Fortune-Teller in the hands of a young girl.” She goes on to detail her own girlhood experiences with divination, a description that provides

⁹¹ Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 111.

⁹² Caroline Gilman, *Oracles from the Poets: a Fanciful Diversion for the Drawingroom* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), 17.

rare insight into what fortune-telling meant to young women, and the bonds that developed through secretive practice:

I do not know how far early associations may have influenced me, but I distinctly recollect the first Oracle of my childhood... One day I observed a group of girls of the senior class pass beyond the bounds and enter the church, which was opened for some approaching occasional service. I followed quietly. They walked through the aisle with agitated whispers, and ascended to the pulpit. Then each, in turn, opening the large Bible, laid a finger, with closed eyes, on a verse, and read it aloud, as indicating her fate or character. I well remember the eagerness with which I listened on the stairs, for I was afraid to crowd into the pulpit with the big girls. As they retired, I entered. I can recall the timid feeling with which I glanced round the shadowy building, the awe with which I closed my eyes and placed my small finger on the broad page, and the faith with which I read my Oracle.⁹³

In Gilman's narrative, young women's subversive use of the Bible for the purpose of fortune-telling is revealed as a common group ritual, and one cherished by Gilman. Her *Oracles* and *The Sibyl* offered a secular version of such activity that clearly appealed to adults as well as youth. Both books sold well, creating a market for other women to follow in Gilman's footsteps.

In 1846, Hannah J. Woodman published *Sybilline Verses; Or, The Mirror of Fate*, after experiencing her friend's "Fate Book," a handmade album of collected poetry which the friends used for divination purposes, a "source of much merriment in the social circle." Focusing on divination as a playful diversion in her own volume, she hopes her book will prove "instructive as well as amusing in its innocent mission."⁹⁴ Simplifying somewhat, she does away with Gilman's questions and instructs querents to pick a number between one and 103. Each number leads to two fortunes, one for ladies, and the other for gentlemen. In 1847, Sarah C. Edgarton Mayo published *The Floral Fortune-Teller: A Game for the Seasons of Flowers*. Drawing on the

⁹³ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁴ H. J. Woodman, *Sybilline Verses; Or, The Mirror of Fate* (Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1846), 3-4.

language of flowers in Victorian courtship, the volume offers romantic prophecies, spanning multiple subjects, such as the seeker's character, fortune, and future partnership.⁹⁵ Every participant is to bring a bouquet of five flowers, each a different color. The identification of each flower reveals an oracular snippet for that lady or gentleman. In the short preface to the game, Mayo goes to great lengths to emphasize the benign nature of these floral messengers: "At all events, they are pure and beautiful playthings for the fancy; and if any diversion on earth be innocent, it must be one whose instruments are poetry and flowers." Surely, such a genteel, feminine game of divination would not arouse suspicion. Even the prophecies themselves are beyond reproach, "drawn from the purest wells of English poetry."⁹⁶ In a tacit acknowledgment of the taboo against fortune-telling, Mayo's preface ends with a wish for the book's future: "God speed it on a harmless way!" By linking divination to refined literature and sentimental culture, authors like Mayo fashioned fortune-telling into an acceptable form of home entertainment for women.⁹⁷ The New York press did not disparage these fortune-telling books or the women who produced them; in fact, reviewers offered praise, calling them "clever" and "elegant" and recommending them as gift items.⁹⁸

When middle- or upper-class women engaged in amateur fortune-telling, the dominant culture viewed it as a harmless activity—in some cases, even beneficial to the community.

During the mid- to late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for middle- and upper-class

⁹⁵ Flowers in Victorian courtship were used to communicate secret messages. See Nancy M. Kendall, "How the Victorians Said it with Flowers," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 6, 2000, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2000/0406/p19s2.html#>.

⁹⁶ S.C. Edgarton, *The Floral Fortune-Teller; A Game for the Seasons of Flowers* (Boston: A. Tompkins, 1847), iv.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, iv.

⁹⁸ See "Poetical Fortune-Teller," *New-York Tribune*, December 19, 1844; "Sybilline Verses: Or The Mirror of Fate," *New-York Tribune*, January 9, 1846; "The Floral Fortune-Teller," *New-York Tribune*, June 5, 1846; "Wiley and Putnam Recent Publications," *The Evening Post*, October, 30, 1847.

women to perform as fortune tellers for the purposes of fundraising and amusement at charity events and local fairs.⁹⁹ Contained within these arenas, fortune-telling was merely a diversion, not a menace. In 1887, *The New York World* demonstrated this tolerance for genteel women's fortune-telling with the publication of "Katie's Stratagem," an illustrated story about a young woman who dresses up as a Gypsy fortune teller in order to effect change in her sister's relationship with a timid—but otherwise appropriate—suitor.¹⁰⁰ Early in the story, the author reveals that this is not the first time Katie has told a fortune. She has in fact just come back from performing Gypsy fortune telling at her convent school, where she successfully deceived both her classmates and the nuns with a spirited, "madcap" performance that recalls Gilman's treasured girlhood diversion. Returned from school, Katie is bent upon a new matchmaking scheme to unite her sister Sallie with a gentleman named Will Davis, whom Katie intuitively knows is in love with her sister: "he, like the rest of mankind, is too stupid to see that, so he holds back in fear, leaving poor Sallie in uncertainty." Katie describes her own intentions in these terms: "if I cannot manage to infuse a little more hope and courage into Will Davis's faint heart, why, then I am a disgrace to my new profession and shall retire in disgust." In disguise, she delivers the fortune to Sallie and Will. Afterward, Will finally finds the courage to propose, a happy event for all involved. Will is so grateful that he promises to return to the fortune teller and pay her more, at which point Katie reappears, calling for "Money, if you please, sir for the poor old gypsy's village pensioners." As she takes off her disguise, she salutes "her fortune-

⁹⁹ See as examples "Church Fairs," *The New York Times*, December 18, 1868; "The Charity Carnival-Fair in Aid of Orphan Asylum," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1871; "The Hebrew Charity Fair," *The New York Times*, December 12, 1875.

¹⁰⁰ "Katie's Stratagem," *The Evening World*, November 21, 1887.

teller's dress which had done such good service." As in the tale of Nelly Bly's spirited heroine Kit Clarendon, a genteel girl's experiment with fortune-telling leads to a happy union.

Fortune-telling's widespread popularity with women across class lines in New York City likely prepared the general public to accept the Fox sisters, but Spiritualism's particular success hinged on the growing acceptance of occult practice by the city's upper crust. Middle- and upper-class women's familiarity with fortune-telling in the decades prior to the arrival of the Fox sisters helps to explain their ready participation in occult practice under the banner of Spiritualism. Like the genteel women who performed amateur fortune-telling in their drawing rooms, the Fox sisters debuted their professional mediumship in the refined domestic atmosphere of a hotel parlor room, appearing for an exclusively genteel clientele. Spiritualism's founding myth of sudden and fervent interest in three young women's spirit rapping is complicated when viewed as a new chapter in a long history of women's occult work.

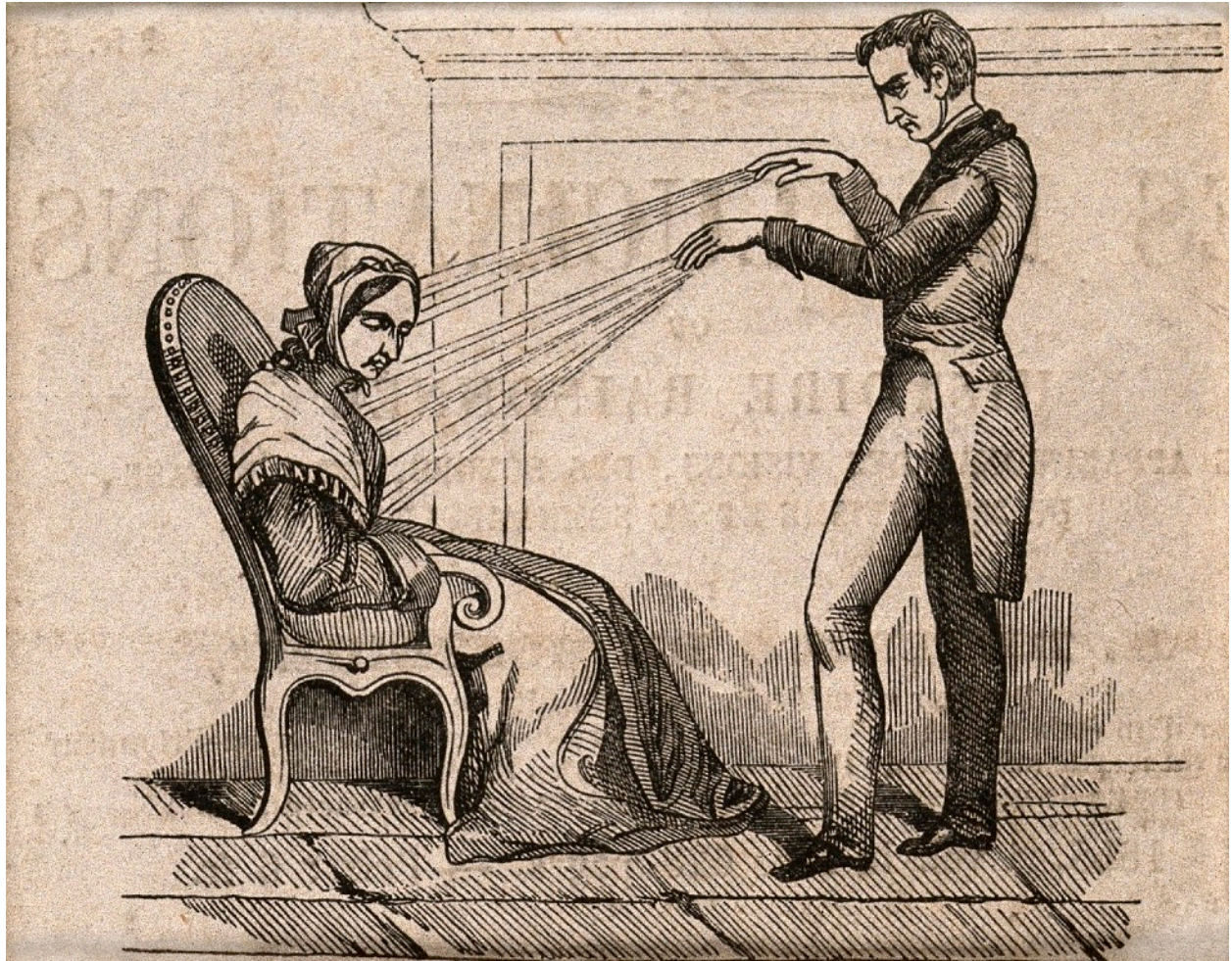


Figure 5 - A mesmerist using animal magnetism on a seated female patient, Plate from a French newspaper, ca. 1845, Welcome Collection, November 26, 2022, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/kxxcvn9q>

Chapter Two

Clairvoyance and Medical Science

The faculty of present seeing by mesmerized subjects, has in that time gained so many believers, that to affirm its truth has ceased to be heretical or ridiculous with any but those who live very far from the road and never take the papers.

- Anonymous, *The Prophetess*

On October 5th, 1867, the *New-York Tribune* reported the death of Elias Howe, Jr., the famous inventor of the sewing machine. Two months earlier, he had been at death's door, but he lived longer than expected due to the intervention of a female "clairvoyant," a term derived from the French "clairvoyance", denoting clear vision. As the *Tribune* described events, "The best physicians considered his case hopeless. Mrs. Mettler, a clairvoyant physician of New-York, was summoned as the last resort. He then, contrary to all expectations, rapidly recovered, and in twelve days was able to travel and come to this city."¹⁰¹ Samantha Mettler (1818-1880), was perhaps the most famous clairvoyant practitioner in New York City in the mid- to late nineteenth century.¹⁰² Prior to the rise of Spiritualism, New York City women had begun to attract notice as medical "clairvoyants," occult workers able to peer into the body and diagnose disease while in a trance state. Clairvoyant practitioners, working independently or at the behest of a doctor, enjoyed greater sympathy from the press than fortune tellers. This favoritism was due, in part, to clairvoyants' promotion of their practice as a novel science able to satisfy the immense need for medical care.

¹⁰¹ "Obituary: Elias Howe Jr.," *New-York Tribune*, October 5, 1867.

¹⁰² See the *New-York Tribune's* endorsement of her "Medical Clairvoyance," *New-York Tribune*, June 11, 1850. For published testimonials read "Clairvoyance in New-York," *New-York Tribune*, June 28, 1850 and "Remarkable Case of Clairvoyance," *New-York Tribune*, July 8, 1850. For a summary of the newspaper controversy concerning her practice, read "Speaking of Quarrels," *New-York Tribune*, October 6, 1857.

While clairvoyance had much in common with older occult female healing traditions such as the cunning or wise woman¹⁰³, mid-century American newspapers heralded it as the latest breakthrough in medical science. The work of clairvoyants gained cultural prestige and mainstream acceptance during this time due to its association with the popular scientific phenomenon of “mesmerism,” also called “animal magnetism,” or simply “magnetism.” Mesmerism derived its name from the Viennese physician Fran Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), who, when working in France in the late eighteenth century, theorized the existence of a subtle, magnetic fluid in the body that physicians could manipulate for healing purposes. While experimenting with animal magnetism, one of Mesmer’s students, Amand-Marie-Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, found that he was able to induce a deep trance state in a subject. He called the phenomenon “magnetic somnambulism”. In this state, many subjects reportedly provided detailed information about their own illnesses, and gained the ability to see inside their own bodies and prescribe remedies. This strange side effect of being magnetized was eventually deemed “clairvoyance,” or the ability to access information through extrasensory channels while in a trance state. This unexpected outcome of magnetization only added to the sensationalism of mesmeric practice. As Mesmer noted, his work drew fire on account of its association with clairvoyance: “It is because my assertions regarding the processes and the visible effects of animal magnetism seem to remind people of ancient beliefs, of ancient practices

¹⁰³ On this tradition, see Sinéad Spearing, *A History of Women in Medicine: Cunning Women, Physicians, Witches* (Philadelphia, PA: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2019), 5, 123. See also as general references on women’s historical healing work: Jeanne Achterberg, *Woman as Healer* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1990) and Elisabeth Brooke, *Women Healers Through History* (London: Aeon Books, 2020)

justly regarded for a long time as being error and trickery.”¹⁰⁴ While France’s scientific establishment ultimately rejected Mesmer, men continued to experiment and expand upon his ideas long after his death in 1815.¹⁰⁵

Mesmerism made its debut in New York City as early as 1829 in a series of lectures at the Hall of Science by Joseph Du Cummun—a professor of French at the United States Military Academy at West Point. These ideas not catch on in America however, until the mid-eighteen thirties, with the arrival of young Frenchman Charles Poyen, a disciple of the Marquis de Puységur’s model of magnetic somnambulism. Working within the lyceum model, which combined educational lectures with entertainment, Poyen began to cultivate an American audience for mesmerism, engaging viewers by picking volunteers from the audience to provide demonstrations. In Rhode Island, Poyen met a young woman named Cynthia Ann Gleason who was especially susceptible to being magnetized and became his subject in his traveling exhibition. With Gleason at Poyen’s side, presentations of mesmerism became a true hit in America. Gleason, like other magnetized subjects before her, could see inside the body and diagnose disease. Poyen and Gleason quickly spawned imitators and these new demonstrations of mesmerism caught the attention of powerful men. In 1837, William Leete Stone, the editor of New York City’s *Commercial Advertiser*—once publicly skeptical about “animal magnetism”—published a letter detailing his remarkable experiences with a blind clairvoyant girl at a demonstration in Providence, Rhode Island, that convinced him of magnetism’s efficacy. Stone’s

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 192.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on Mesmer, de Puységur, Poyen, and American practitioners of mesmerism, see Erica Janik, “Hypnotized: Mesmer and His Mental Magic,” in *Marketplace of the Marvelous: The Strange Origins of Modern Medicine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 147-181.

letter was widely read and went through multiple editions. David Reese, a medical doctor and an outspoken critic of mesmerism, blamed the letter for establishing “the reigning humbug in the United States” in New York City, “the theatre of humbugs.” Dr. Reese, and others like him in the scientific community were skeptical of animal magnetism on account of the same quality that made it successful, its potent mixture of scientific inquiry and popular amusement.

In the midst of mesmerism’s increasing visibility, Dr. Robert Collyer, an English physician who had previously lectured on phrenology, appealed to Rubens Peale, the owner of New York City’s Peale’s Museum, to present mesmerism there as well.¹⁰⁶ As Peale would later recount of his exchange with Collyer:

One day at dinner he said he wondered that I had not had any exhibition of mesmerism, that he thought it might be a profitable thing. I told him that I had no belief in it, to which he replied that if I would get some lady to be operated on, that he would show me that it was no humbug.

As the popularity of Cynthia Ann Gleason, Poyen’s subject, attests, women were preferred as clairvoyant subjects: they were perceived to be more passive and therefore more receptive to “magnetic” influences.¹⁰⁷ The titillating display of vulnerable female bodies in this sensationalized setting added to the appeal. In February of 1841 Rubens Peale began advertising Collyer’s mesmeric experiments with exclusively female subjects. In the presentations,

¹⁰⁶ Phrenology is the study of the form of the human skull as a method to determine one’s abilities and moral character. Though considered a pseudo-science today, like mesmerism, phrenology was in the mainstream of scientific thought in nineteenth-century America. Phrenology and mesmerism both focused on the power of the human mind. Robert Collyer and others sought to combine the two, what came to be called Phrenomesmerism or Phrenomagnetism, see Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 197-199.

¹⁰⁷ Amy Lehman has noted the “long history of women performing in trance states,” and names the Oracle at Delphi as one example in this tradition, see Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and The Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 17. Incidentally, when the Fox sisters debuted, many presumed they were clairvoyants. See, “The Mysterious Sounds—Their Displays of Intelligence,” *New-York Tribune*, September 11, 1850. The article states, “It has been supposed that the Misses Fox and Mrs. Fish, and others whom these sounds accompany, are *clairvoyants*, and that the thoughts are perceived and answered by *them*.”; emphasis in the original.

spectators could see a woman blindfolded and “magnetized” into a trance, which allowed her to perform acts of “sympathy” with Collyer, like raising the same hand at the same time. After these experiments proved successful, Peale decided to pay the woman two dollars for each performance and began advertising it as an attraction at the museum that visitors could witness as part of the twenty-five-cent admission fee. By April, Peale’s Museum’s main competitor, Barnum’s American Museum, had poached Collyer, and Rubens Peale was doing the magnetizing himself. By May, he was offering two demonstrations of mesmerism a day, and he now engaged the services of two women, one of them the blind Miss Mary Mattock—whom he had personally recruited at the city’s Institution for the Blind. Peale paid her the same as he did other clairvoyants, although her blindness had an additional value, as it helped dispel spectators’ suspicions that magnetists somehow signaled clairvoyants.¹⁰⁸

In the years following the well-publicized demonstrations at Peale’s Museum, other men who claimed the power to magnetize began employing clairvoyant women for various purposes, including medical services.¹⁰⁹ For example, a Mr. Johnson, “who has been experimenting for the last few years, in almost every part of the United States, upon the subject of Animal Magnetism” published in the *New-York Tribune* on August, 19th, 1843, that he had recently secured the services of a clairvoyant. This clairvoyant practitioner diagnosed disease and prescribed

¹⁰⁸ On mesmerism in New York City and Rubens Peale’s role in its development, see Edward John Nygren, “Rubens Peale’s Experiments with Mesmerism,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114, no. 2 (1970): 100-08, accessed November 16, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986028>.

¹⁰⁹ Female clairvoyants were also employed in the mid- to late nineteenth century to search for buried treasure, solve crimes, and other mysteries, such as ships lost at sea. For a treasure-hunting example, see “Digging for Money,” *The Evening Post*, August 16, 1843. For articles on their detective work, see “Asperities of Philanthropy,” *The Evening Post*, September 29, 1845; “Mysterious Disappearance,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1870; “Spiritual Detectives,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1873; “A Long Missing Husband Found,” *The New York Times*, November 19, 1885. For their work with missing vessels, see “The Atlantic and the Clairvoyants,” *New-York Tribune*, January 27, 1851; “Clairvoyant Consultations,” *New York Daily Herald*, March 13, 1870.

remedies “under the magnetic influence.” In his advertisement, Johnson particularly appealed to “those who have diseases of long standing, and who have been treated by physicians to no purpose.”¹¹⁰ By the end of the month, the *New York Daily Herald* had published a success story about his practice, based on the purported testimony of an unnamed female patient brought to Johnson because of chronic pain:

A lady of this city who has been afflicted for several years with a serious difficulty, and had spent several hundreds of dollars with different physicians, and in purchasing medicines, all of which had left her far worse than she was first, was induced by some friends to visit Mr. Johnson, at 149 Chambers street, and try his magnetism. His clairvoyant subject, examined her case, while under the magnetic influence, and prescribed remedies, which she has followed; and although it is but two weeks since, she called upon him yesterday, and stated that she had not been so well for three years as she was at that moment. She said, “I am well.”¹¹¹

This story would have been familiar to mid-century New Yorkers, many of whom suffered from poor health.¹¹² Women in particular were frequently diagnosed with chronic illnesses. Many patients owed their ill health to the ravages of the “heroic” tradition in medicine, which had gained traction at the end of the eighteenth century. Typical heroic treatments involved bloodletting, violent purging, and the administration of the toxic drug calomel (a laxative containing mercury), which often left patients far sicker than they had been when they sought a doctor’s help. As laypeople began to reject heroic medicine in the 1830s and 1840s, various competing practices appeared, creating a medical landscape that could be daunting for the public

¹¹⁰ “Magnetism Applied to Disease,” *New-York Tribune*, August 19, 1843.

¹¹¹ “Most Extraordinary Cure,” *New York Daily Herald*, August 30, 1843.

¹¹² The health of New Yorkers was particularly poor compared to the average American, given the extremely crowded living conditions and limited sanitation infrastructure. At this time, New York City had the highest death rate (one in thirty-five) of any American city. See Charles Rosenberg, “The Practice of Medicine in New York a Century Ago,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 41, no. 3 (1967): 223–224, accessed November 22, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44447269.223-224>.

to navigate.¹¹³ In the parlance of the time, “regular” doctors were defined by participation in formal training at medical colleges and by their connection to the heroic tradition, whereas “irregular” doctors incorporated new practices such as homeopathy, botanic medicine, and mesmerism.¹¹⁴ The chronically ill often sought out treatment by both types of doctors, but irregular practitioners had an edge over those who relied on painful heroic treatments. In this context clairvoyants were particularly desirable for their diagnostic services. A patient could potentially get to the root of an ailment without being subjected to regular therapies that might harm or even kill them.

By 1850, female clairvoyants increasingly took center stage in physicians’ advertisements of mesmeric services. As the following notice shows, for example, a clairvoyant could acquire such a large following among patients that she would be employed by multiple physicians:

CLAIRVOYANCE AND ELECTROMAGNETISM, by the greatest clairvoyant and magnetizer in this city. She will tell your disease and the medicine that will cure that disease. Over two hundred cases of chronic diseases were cured this last year by the great clairvoyant and electro-magnetizer. The clairvoyant is visited daily by some of the most skillful physicians of this city for the cure of disease. This wonderful clairvoyant was with Drs. Brown & Hollock, at 174 Chambers st. This same clairvoyant can be consulted

¹¹³ As evidence of this pluralistic landscape and clairvoyants inclusion within this broad field of medicine, see “Doctors Disagreeing About The Cholera,” *New York Daily Herald*, May 6, 1866. The article discusses treatments for cholera and describes the ongoing disagreements between practitioners: “The allopaths will always believe that the homeopaths administer water and sugar instead of medicines, and the homeopaths will always believe that the allopathists scare and dose people to death with their powerful purgatives and emetics. It is our opinion that the less anybody has to do with doctors the better. If the homeopaths can cure cholera more surely, easily and quickly than the allopathists the public will soon find it out, and *vice versa*; but if the Board of Health is to give an equal chance to all the physicians, the hydropathists, the clairvoyants, the mesmerists, the Thompsonians, the herbalists, the Swedish curers, the sangrados and the patent medicine men ought to have their share.”

¹¹⁴ For background information on the competing schools of medicine during this time, see Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), 79-112. To better understand the excesses of heroic medicine, see Barbara Griggs, *Green Pharmacy: The History and Evolution of Western Herbal Medicine* (Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1981), 148-154, 180-187, and 217-229. Read about the rise of The Popular Health Movement in the 1830s and 1840s as a reaction to heroic treatments in Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* (New York: Feminist Press, 2010), 69-85.

now at 116 Spring st, New York city, where she is doing wonders for the sick and suffering, after all other means have failed.¹¹⁵

Starting in the early 1850s, women began advertising themselves as “independent clairvoyants” able to enter into the magnetic state without the aid of a mesmerist.¹¹⁶ It’s unclear how such women came to break free of male supervision. However, as early as 1845, the *New York Daily Herald* announced an event at which a “large number of the Magnetic Profession from different parts of the country” would gather “to establish the truth of independent Clairvoyance.” The event featured a contest wherein clairvoyant practitioners competed to correctly describe the contents of a box.¹¹⁷ Four years later, in 1849, a famous magnetic healer, Andrew Jackson Davis, proclaimed his ability to “enter the clairvoyant state without the aid of Magnetism.”¹¹⁸ Whether they had taken their cues from Davis or simply realized that they could make more money by cutting out the middle man, by the 1860s women working as independent clairvoyants regularly advertised their services in the New York City dailies.

Many women were initially drawn to practice clairvoyance in order to relieve their own chronic illnesses, becoming professionals in the process. In 1850, the publishing house Fowler and Wells issued *The Clairvoyant Family Physician*, which described the clairvoyant practice of Mrs. Lucina Tuttle, who had been initiated into the field by her own illness, a tumor in the

¹¹⁵ “Clairvoyance,” *New-York Tribune*, May 27, 1850.

¹¹⁶ For examples, see Mrs. Johnson's ad for clairvoyance where she calls herself “an independent Clairvoyant” in the *New York Daily Herald*, March 1, 1851; Mrs. Hayes’ advertisement as an “independent clairvoyant medium” under “Clairvoyance,” *New York Daily Herald*, August 25, 1853; Madame Du Boice’s ad as “one of the greatest independent medical clairvoyant physicians now before the public,” in the *New York Daily Herald*, April 8, 1859; Cora A. Seaman's advertisement as an “independent clairvoyant” available for medical and business consultations in the *New York Daily Herald*, June 12, 1861.

¹¹⁷ “The Prize Box,” *New York Daily Herald*, July 10, 1845.

¹¹⁸ “Andrew Jackson Davis,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 16, 1949. To learn more about Davis and his role as a Spiritualist pioneer, see Robert W. Delp, “Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism,” *The Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (1967): 43–56, accessed November 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1900318>.

shoulder.¹¹⁹ While in a clairvoyant state, she explained the nature and location of her tumor. After being magnetized again, she underwent surgery to remove the growth, which confirmed her description. Thereafter, Tuttle began prescribing remedies for others. Her practice caught on quickly, which is not surprising given Americans' tremendous need for medical treatment at the time. *The Clairvoyant Family Physician* featured Tuttle's descriptions of various diseases and their treatment and also included copious testimonials from those who had benefited from her practice. As the book states, "The tidings spread rapidly; the sick and suffering who had failed to get relief from other quarters rushed in, till, unawares, an extensive practice was entered upon, and has thus far been continued with astonishing success."¹²⁰ The volume's introduction featured an essay on animal magnetism by a Mrs. S.G. Love, a fan who framed it as a scientific variation on old occult practices: "Seers and prophets and sages of the misty past, have seen dim glimpses of that which was to be the greatest and most sublime of all sciences, Animal Magnetism."¹²¹

The linkage between clairvoyance and older occult practices can also be seen in the anonymously authored biography of Madame Rockwell, the resident fortune teller at Barnum's Museum. Published a year before *The Clairvoyant Family Physician*, *The Prophetess* endorsed clairvoyance, while also highlighting older traditions with which Rockwell more readily

¹¹⁹ Fowler and Wells was the publishing company of brothers Orson Squire Fowler and Lorenzo Niles Fowler, plus Samuel Robert Wells (who married their sister Charlotte Fowler). Incidentally, Lorenzo's wife, Lydia Folger Fowler, was the second American woman to earn a medical degree (after Elizabeth Blackwell). This family promoted phrenology and related disciplines like mesmerism from their headquarters at 27 East 21st Street. They offered professional consultations, a free exhibition of curiosities, and educational materials, including their *American Phrenological Journal*, one of the most widely read periodicals in the United States. Notably, clairvoyant Samantha Mettler once offered her services through them. See, "Mrs. Mettler," *New-York Tribune*, January 21, 1851. The Fowlers actively encouraged women to visit their center and become practitioners themselves. For information on phrenology and its particular appeal to women, see Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th-Century America," *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 104-130, accessed November 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1600-0498.12015>.

¹²⁰ Although published in 1850, I had access to the 1855 version. Lucina Tuttle, *The Clairvoyant Family Physician* (New York: Partridge and Brittan), xvi.

¹²¹ Tuttle, *The Clairvoyant Family Physician*, v.

identified. Although she was never advertised as a clairvoyant, the book noted her previous work diagnosing disease. In acts of “sympathy,” she felt the symptoms of a client’s illness in her own body. More important, the book related how mesmerism had prepared her clients to accept several of her professional specialties, though not fortune-telling. Describing the evolution of her practice at the museum, *The Prophetess* detailed:

At first her attention was largely devoted to diseases and their cure, in which, by aid of the experience she had already acquired, as we have before seen, she was brilliantly successful. But after a year’s time she had to abandon it, except in rare cases, for the reason that her health suffered too much in enduring the various maladies of her patients, which, to a certain degree, and temporarily, were communicated, through sympathy, to her own system. . . . Common ‘fortune-telling’ has constituted the remainder of her business, and was the last branch in which she succeeded in commanding confidence; for the public had been prepared by the clairvoyance of mesmerizees to credit the existence of the two former faculties, but not for the third.¹²²

Did fortune-telling differ fundamentally from clairvoyance? Unlike clairvoyants, fortune tellers were known to engage in old-fashioned methodologies—such as cartomancy, tasseography, and chiromancy—that provided them with physical signs to decode and interpret.¹²³ While traditions of occult knowledge insisted that this sign-reading could be taught, it also involved a human faculty most commonly called intuition. As *The Prophetess*’s narrator explained—seemingly letting the reader in on a professional secret—“I will, however, here give a simple hint, that though seers may seem to see their sights in tea-leaves, cards, the inwards of animals, or other objects, yet the only office these substances serve is, being fixedly looked at, to concentrate the mind, more requisite, probably, in the exercise of spiritual vision than any other labor imposed

¹²² Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 63.

¹²³ These are all divination methods with long histories; cartomancy involves the use of playing cards, or other cards specifically created for divination purposes (for example, tarot cards); tasseography involves interpreting the shapes made by tea leaves; chiromancy is another name for palmistry, where marks on a person’s palm are analyzed. As a reference, see The Diagram Group, *The Little Giant Encyclopedia of Fortune Telling* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 1999)

on the mind.” In other words, all the different occult methodologies could be understood as ways to facilitate or stimulate clairvoyance, or what *The Prophetess* called “spiritual vision.”

To locate clairvoyants’ position in the occult marketplace of mid-century New York, it is helpful to compare and contrast Madame Rockwell with her contemporary: Samantha Mettler, the clairvoyant healer. In 1853, three years after the publication of *The Prophetess*, the reformer Frances H. Green published the *Biography of Mrs. Samantha Mettler, the Clairvoyant; Being a History of Spiritual Development and Containing an Account of the Wonderful Cures Performed Through Her Agency*.¹²⁴ The Spiritualists’ Harmonial Association released the biography to promote Mettler’s clairvoyant medical practice.¹²⁵ Despite their different professional monikers —“fortune teller” versus “clairvoyant”—the biographical accounts of Madame Rockwell (referred to as “Mrs. B.”) and Samantha Mettler reveal significant parallels, while also illustrating critical differences between their professional lineages and self-presentations.¹²⁶

Both women grew up in rural Connecticut, married young, and faced hardships and poverty in their marriages, which led them to pursue occult work. Like Lucina Tuttle, Madame Rockwell and Samantha Mettler both became initiated into professional occult practice through their experiences with chronic illness. As a young, sickly mother living in Hartford, Connecticut, Madame Rockwell visited an Indigenous fortune teller’s home, where she encountered an “Indian

¹²⁴ To learn more about Frances H. Green, see her biography: Sarah C. O’Dowd, *A Rhode Island Original: Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2004)

¹²⁵ Mettler didn’t specifically advertise as a Spiritualist, but she was claimed by the Spiritualist movement. Emma Hardinge Britten, Spiritualist leader and historian, wrote about her multiple times in her account of the movement. See Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism* (1872; reis., New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1970), 101, 104, 201-205, and 219-220.

¹²⁶ In this thesis, I use “Madame Rockwell” instead of “Mrs. B.,” for onvenience and ease of reading. Additionally, I have no documents to verify “B” as the first letter of her last name, but I can confirm that she advertised as “Madame Rockwell.”

Doctor”— an irregular doctor with no “other other fellowship or diploma than the blessings of numberless of these cast-off patients of physicians most regular and respectable.”¹²⁷ *The Prophetess* describes her at this moment as a woman with “a face pale like a corpse, and form thin like a shadow. Suffering is well enstamped on her yet young forehead, and evidently the serious things of the world are upon her.”¹²⁸ The Indian Doctor instantly recognized Rockwell’s occult potential, “in this palest of the pale-faces a sister of light, and the chosen recipient of supernatural knowledge.”¹²⁹ Without expectation of payment, the Indian Doctor dedicated himself to training her in occult practice. In a similar vein, Semantha Mettler’s biography describes her initiation into the occult by clairvoyant Andrew Jackson Davis, who diagnosed her after she fell ill at a Universalist picnic they both attended in 1844. After Davis examined her, he professed that she herself had “remarkable clairvoyant powers for the discernment and cure of disease.” After she received this “prophecy,” Mettler was overjoyed by a “hope of usefulness.”¹³⁰ Both women took up occult work after being pronounced healers by men, demonstrating a broken lineage of female occult traditions. In the past, women with spiritual gifts like Mettler’s and Rockwell’s would have been initiated and trained by older wise women in their communities.

And yet, while men initiated them into formal occult practice, both women’s biographies stress that personal qualities present since girlhood made their careers inevitable. Both Rockwell

¹²⁷ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 21.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 23.

¹³⁰ Frances H. Green, *Biography of Mrs. Semantha Mettler, the Clairvoyant; Being a History of Spiritual Development and Containing an Account of the Wonderful Cures Performed Through Her Agency* (New York: The Harmonial Association, 1853), 58.

and Mettler are described as sensitive children who loved nature and were naturally solitary. In *The Prophetess*, the narrator recounts many happy hours spent by the young Rockwell as she communed with a river, rocks, trees, birds, and squirrels: “*these* are her brothers and sisters, her pleasant playmates, and her safe companions.”¹³¹ For Mettler, a connection to nature provided her earliest religious inspiration. As a child, she sat for hours outdoors, “gazing and listening, and wondering, until a great sense of awe overwhelmed her with the vastness which she could neither find a line to measure, or a thought to reach.” “A sudden impulse” would turn her attention to a different part of the natural environment, and she would ecstatically connect to it like a pagan priestess of yore might have done.¹³² With nature as her temple, she unknowingly waited for her spiritual gifts to flower. As her biography relates, “through all these ministries of Nature, her Spirit-guardians were ever holding converse with the young Soul, that yielded itself to the attraction, without ever dreaming of the secret of its beautiful love. And thus were inlaid, in the very basis of her character, not only her wonderful intuitions, but the strength and power of endurance, which would be required to develop and sustain them.”¹³³ The portrayals of Rockwell and Mettler as sensitive young children spiritually connected to nature reflect both older traditions of witchcraft and nineteenth-century Transcendentalism, which revered a connection to the natural world as a source of inspiration.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 17.

¹³² Green, *Biography of Mrs. Samantha Mettler*, 10.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 11.

¹³⁴ In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson anonymously published *Nature*, which expressed reverence for the natural landscape, and conceived it as divine. This work became representative of the Transcendentalist movement, which published its flagship journal, *The Dial*, from 1840, until 1844. Witches’ gatherings have traditionally been depicted as happening in nature, and witchcraft in general as a practice is about connecting to the inherent power of the natural world.

Beyond exhibiting spiritual qualities, the young Madame Rockwell engaged in recognizably occult practices, acts of divination that Green's biography does not mention as a part of Mettler's girlhood. During her childhood, *The Prophetess* explains, Rockwell displayed foreknowledge of events: "For instance, she would, when no older than about seven years, say to her foster-mother that on that day, at a certain hour, certain visitors (naming them), would come. When asked how she knew this or why she said so, the only answer would be that she did not know how she knew it, but that she knew it." Additionally, *The Prophetess* describes the young Rockwell's stealthy habit of "going to the cupboard and pouring out tea into a cup, which she would then turn down and steadfastly look in, in vain search, how she knew not, for she knew not what."¹³⁵ According to *The Prophetess*, nobody had ever told her about the practice of tea-leaf reading; nevertheless, some knowledge of the tradition lived inside of her, straining to come out. On the other hand, Mettler is not explicitly connected to older female occult traditions, never engaging in divination before her clairvoyant practice begins.

Even if Rockwell and Mettler did not share a longstanding ability to divine the future, their biographies both describe instinctive non-conformists, girls who rebelled against the institutions of church and school. In Mettler's view, school unpleasantly disrupted her learning from nature: "At the end of the green stood the school-house; but this was by no means an agreeable feature, in the mind of the young Seeress. She early exhibited a most confirmed dislike to the restraint, both of school and study."¹³⁶ In *The Prophetess*, the narrator identifies school as the place where Rockwell's "most unhappy hours are endured—thanks to bad benches, bad air,

¹³⁵ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 18.

¹³⁶ Green, *Biography of Mrs. Samantha Mettler*, 10.

long sessions, and monotonous occupation (or want of occupation.)” Rockwell found church similarly disagreeable, and had to chew fennel-seed and calamus in order to stay awake, though these strategies only worked merely to the degree “that she can only nod a drowsy assent to certain abstruse propositions concerning free will and election, of which none of the congregation have the least doubt—or the most remote comprehension.”¹³⁷ At her Congregationalist church, the young Mettler internally questioned church doctrine, wondering “how it could be that God had made all inferior beings so happy in their several conditions, and the exterior world so beautiful, while, at the same time, Man, his highest and greatest work—unless he attained to certain conditions, which very few, or a very small portion of the human family could reach—should be punished eternally for sins which he had been led to commit, through the errors of a man and woman, who lived and died more than five thousands years ago!”¹³⁸ Intuitively, it did not make any sense to the young Mettler.

As Mettler and Rockwell officially embarked on occult paths, they each went through demanding training periods, a sharp contrast with the Fox sisters, whose gifts manifested suddenly in the spring of 1848 without any effort. Although Andrew Jackson Davis immediately recognized Mettler as a woman of great spiritual gifts, she had to be magnetized at least five hundred times over three years before she became a proficient clairvoyant, a situation that must have been grueling.¹³⁹ Madame Rockwell’s own training period with the Indian Doctor is much more difficult to follow in her biography, due in part to its sensational metaphysical elements. As the Indian Doctor took on Rockwell as an apprentice of sorts, he visited her in spirit; they

¹³⁷ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 15-16.

¹³⁸ Green, *Biography of Mrs. Semantha Mettler*, 14.

¹³⁹ Sarah C. O’Dowd, *A Rhode Island Original*, 99.

communicated through “spiritual speech,” a version of telepathy which required “intense muscular effort.” Notably, these spiritual exchanges did not prevent her from performing the household duties expected of her as a wife and mother. In fact, she absorbed occult teachings as she performed domestic work.¹⁴⁰ The Indian Doctor lectured her for nearly three hours a day for three years, in which time she learned “all she wished to know,” his chief concern being to impart to her knowledge of “the sciences of man” and also “the language of spirits.”¹⁴¹ During these communications, he showed her scenes of her past, present, and future that could be instructive to her development.¹⁴² In one of these visions, he revealed her as a medicine woman in the future, proclaiming, “You will heal the sick.”¹⁴³ To convince her of this destiny, he conjured up a past image of Rockwell as a child engaged in “botanizing”:

She has never heard the word [Botany]; yet so eager is she in her researches among the plants, that at this point of her life it is a customary mode of spending the weekly half holy-day to ramble in such places, and, with an eagerness that brooks no impediment and fears no danger, plucking and digging, dirtying her nails, scratching her arms, and tangling her hair, to make a most miscellaneous collection, which none in the village can neither claim nor classify.

The Indian Doctor’s evocation of her memories helped Rockwell understand her past instinctive behaviors in terms of latent witchcraft. Guided by him, Rockwell returned to this childhood pastime, gaining first-hand botanical knowledge over two summers in the woodlands surrounding Hartford, Connecticut. As she journeyed into the woods, she also read books based on the work of Samuel Thomson, the leader of a Jacksonian-era grassroots botanical medicine

¹⁴⁰ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 48.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴² These instructional visions share a similarity with Ebenezer Scrooge’s journey in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (1843), a possible inspiration.

¹⁴³ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 38.

movement.¹⁴⁴ The Indian Doctor, however, advised her to let go of this information in order to trust her instinct, which she cultivated by homing in on the sensation produced by a plant when she tasted it. After she gained a familiarity with the local plants, Rockwell tested her botanical remedies on family members, diagnosing them through premonitions she received about their illnesses. After two years of practice, Rockwell came to identify as a doctor of the botanical school of medicine, and *The Prophetess* describes how she was locally consulted and respected by others in this sub-field of medicine.¹⁴⁵

Botanical remedies were also at the center of Mettler's clairvoyant practice, although unlike Rockwell, she had no working knowledge of the plants. After Mettler finally mastered successful magnetization, she began diagnosing friends and family members in the late 1840s. Her biography describes her as immediately able to give accurate diagnoses, wherein she named herbs and plants as remedies, despite having limited knowledge about them. Initially, she had little faith in these plant remedies. Yet, after witnessing her patients' health improve through these botanical treatments, she became more confident of their efficacy.¹⁴⁶ While she grew to accept herbal medicine, her effectiveness as a healer did not rely on firsthand botanical knowledge the way that Rockwell's did. Instead, she deployed information transmitted to her through clairvoyance, a new-fangled scientific practice that had been disconnected from older occult traditions. Despite their professional differences, however, Mettler and Rockwell occupied

¹⁴⁴ As a boy, Samuel Thomson learned about medicinal plants from a female folk healer (Mrs. Benton) his family consulted. Thomson credited Benton as the inspiration for his botanical practice. See Erika Janik, *Marketplace of the Marvelous*, 25. For more information about Thomson and his botanical movement, see Michael A. Flannery, "The Early Botanical Medical Movement as a Reflection of Life, Liberty, and Literacy in Jacksonian America," *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, vol. 90, 4 (2002): 442-54.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 45.

¹⁴⁶ Green, *Biography of Mrs. Samantha Mettler*, 65-66.

common ground in the fact that their recovery of occult knowledge in the context of disrupted female healing traditions was nothing short of miraculous.

As Mettler and Rockwell established their professional practices, both women were censured by family members who viewed their work as disreputable due to its association with the occult. After Mettler set up shop as a clairvoyant healer, her family essentially disowned her. As her biography states, “They consider her avocation as not only *unchristian*, but also, what is probably worse in their opinion, as *unpopular* and UNGENTEEL.”¹⁴⁷ Despite its connection to medical science, clairvoyant practice remained a suspect occult methodology. With Rockwell, disapproval is most obvious in her desire to remain anonymous. Unlike Mettler, Rockwell did not practice under her own name, and even her biography refers to her only as “Mrs. B.” As *The Prophetess* states, “this reservation is made out of regard to the feelings of her family, who, she thinks (groundlessly perhaps), would dislike any greater publicity than is really requisite.” The narrator fantasizes about a day when even her “richest relatives” will wish to be associated with her practice given her potential for future prophetic greatness on the world stage.¹⁴⁸

Overall, fortune-telling was more stigmatized than the more modern, scientific practice of clairvoyance, but both practitioners on both fronts were persecuted as occult workers. On October 23, 1858, when a group of practitioners, mostly female and working-class, was arrested and brought before the Mayor—in the aftermath of Mortimer Thomson’s inflammatory “Witches of New York” series in the *New-York Tribune*—clairvoyants were given special consideration. As the *Tribune* reported, “The professional clairvoyants who were also arrested, are not, perhaps, to

¹⁴⁷ Green, *The Biography of Semantha Mettler*, 91.

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, *The Prophetess*, 11.

be classed with the astrologers and fortune-tellers, as we believe they mainly confine themselves to the treatment of the sick.”¹⁴⁹ Yet, even if they could avoid association with other occult workers, they were still far from respected. In the previous year, medical clairvoyant Elizabeth Seymour had been ridiculed for her trade when she testified as a witness in a scandalous murder case. *The New York Times* published a transcript of this courtroom exchange on February 3rd, 1857:

Q.—Have you a fortune, Ma’am?

A.—Nothing but my own earnings.

Coroner—Hem! What do you do for your living?

A.—I am a clairvoyant, and I examine persons that are sick, and I prescribe for them: we have many fine people whom the Doctors cannot tell what ails them, and I can.

[Laughter.]

Coroner—Aha! You can?

A.—Yes; you may laugh, but it is so; I have a case in Brooklyn, where the physician thought the part of a child too long; the father called me in and he is perfectly satisfied; you may laugh, but any time you have a mind to send a patient along I think I can examine the patient; [laughter;] ok! It is well enough to laugh at it.¹⁵⁰

Despite being ridiculed, Seymour successfully advertised her practice in the courtroom that day. While those present laughed, most had likely experienced a medical situation that baffled regular doctors. Her clairvoyant abilities aside, moreover, Seymour’s perspective as a woman was clearly valued in a case that dealt with a child's development.

As the discourse of “clairvoyance” and mesmerism gained increasing visibility in the 1840s and 1850s, women less respectable than Tuttle, Mettler, and even Seymour laid claim to

¹⁴⁹ “Arrest of Fortune-Tellers,” *New-York Tribune*, October 23, 1858.

¹⁵⁰ I have reformatted the original text for clarity. Incidentally, through this questioning, Seymour also revealed that her husband was unemployed and lived off her business. The trial was for the murder of prominent dentist Harvey Burdell on January 31st, 1857. Emma Cunningham, the murder suspect, was a client of Seymour’s. See “The Bond Street Murder,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1857. To read more about Seymour’s involvement in this case, see Benjamin Feldman, *Butchery on Bond Street: Sexual Politics and The Burdell-Cunningham Case in Ante-bellum New York* (New York: Green-Wood Cemetery Historic Fund/ New York Wanderer Press, 2007), 29-30.

this practice.¹⁵¹ In 1855, *The New York Times* interviewed a working-class clairvoyant, Mrs. Hayes, who worked with her husband to diagnose disease.¹⁵² Like Mettler, Rockwell, and Tuttle, Hayes connected her own frustrating experience with contemporary medicine to her initiation as a clairvoyant practitioner:

Well, it was all come of this left hand, (thrusting out a well-formed but unclean extremity.) You see a great many years ago when I was a young girl I was a kind of troubled with this hand. It swelled and swelled until it got to be big like my head, (I here directed my attention to the Seeress' head, and found it of such gigantic proportions that I felt deep commiseration for her girlish suffering,) and I had to go to Dr. Mott, who said he would have to have it cutted off. I felt kind of melancholy, you may think, when he told me this, and when a friend asked for to go to an electric doctor, I thought I'd try it anyhow. Well, the electric doctor, he magnetized me—Doctor Brown, he was— and after a few trials he said I was an excellent subject.¹⁵³

Understandably resistant to the amputation of her hand, Hayes sought out an “Electric” doctor.¹⁵⁴ Once magnetized, she tapped into her own intuitive medical wisdom. When asked in a clairvoyant state what would cure her, she gave the answer of raw clams—a treatment she claimed was successful. In recounting her own professional history, she also told the tale of a Dr. Gray of Lafayette Place who secretly kept a woman hidden in a back room to diagnose his patients. In addition, Hayes mentioned other doctors—one of the allopathic school and one of the homeopathic—who consulted her and were astonished by her gifts.¹⁵⁵ *The New York Times*

¹⁵¹ Mortimer Thomson profiled Seymour in his *Witches of New York*, calling her “pretentious” for pretending to be respectable. As he said of clairvoyants like Seymour: “They keep aloof from the greasier sisters of the profession, and they feel it due to the dignity of their station to reject the cards, the magic mirrors, the Bibles and keys, the mysterious pebbles and the other tricks which do well enough for twenty-five cent customers; to sojourn in reputable streets, in respectable houses, and to have clean faces when visitors come in.” See Mortimer N. Thomson, *The Witches of New York* (1858; reis., Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Literature House, The Gregg Press, 1969), 197-214.

¹⁵² Husband and wife teams were common in clairvoyant practice, where sometimes the husband was not a physician but a self-styled “professor.” This charade got one husband-and-wife team into trouble when a patient died. See, “Clairvoyance,” *The Evening Post*, November 29, 1844.

¹⁵³ “A Raid Among The Soothsayers,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 1855.

¹⁵⁴ An electric doctor employed magnetism, but substituted electricity for Mesmer’s universal fluid.

¹⁵⁵ Allopathic medicine belonged to the “regular” school, and defined itself as science-based.

reporter, however, was unimpressed by the “herbal concoction” Hayes prescribed him. He also noted the numerous anatomical mistakes she made during his visit to her. “So much for clairvoyance in New York,” he declared.

Though journalists could dismiss the practices of female occult workers like Mrs. Hayes, her testimony demonstrates the need for medical care that was not being met by conventional practice. The great public desire for accessible, alternative medicine made female clairvoyant practice seem eminently more virtuous than other occult specialities. Over the mid- to late nineteenth century, female occult workers of all classes made a booming trade of diagnosing disease in a trance state and also selling remedies: folk medicine that may have been connected to ancestral folk healing traditions. Working-class female fortune tellers widely claimed the title “clairvoyant” as well. This likely tarnished the reputations of clairvoyants hoping to distance themselves from fortune-telling, but did not decrease the overall popularity of this type of female occult work.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, new laws were passed to stop practitioners like Mettler, Hayes, and Rockwell from claiming status equal to that of physicians. On June 23rd, 1887, a bill prepared by the New York County Medical Society and approved by the state legislature was signed into law by Governor David Hill. It confined medical practice to individuals who had studied for three years with a physician of established reputation or graduated from a recognized school of medicine. The law’s stated purpose was “to crush out quacks, clairvoyants and other ignorant practitioners of the healing art.”¹⁵⁶ Clairvoyance required no particular education or training other than a willingness to be magnetized or enter into an

¹⁵⁶ “The Doctors Agree,” *The Voice*, June 30, 1887.

altered state. It was not part of the curriculum in any medical school. While up until this point, clairvoyants could be seen as serious contenders in a developing medical field, by the end of the nineteenth century, clairvoyants lost ground to regular doctors. They could no longer claim physician status but remained popular in the occult marketplace. Today, the professional title of “clairvoyant” persists and connotes relative prestige, likely due to this historical connection to the medical profession.



Figure 6- Evangeline Adams, “Evangeline Adams” Wikimedia Commons, November 25, 2022 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EvangelineAdams.jpg>.

Chapter Three

A Lady Learned in Astrology

She will speak respectfully of astrology too, on which subject she has read several works, and entertains more respect for the early astronomers than do we, who call those deep students fools but inasmuch as astrology, for the correctness of its results, depends upon the medium of the human science of figures, human accuracy of calculation, and human systems of interpretation, all finite their nature, and inasmuch as we remain still in considerable ignorance respecting the map of the starry heavens, which must be the very foundation of the science, its meagre fruits are well accounted for. Yet surprising to learn how many persons have come to her, who, even in this utilitarian region, have spent ten, twenty, thirty years, or whole lives, in poring over old tomes devoted to this occult science which we have generally considered to be long ago consigned to the grave of lost labors—to the grand *salle des pas perdus*, among the many chambers the tomb of the past.

— Anonymous, *The Prophetess*

The same year that *The Prophetess* was published, *The Evening Post* on December 13th, 1849, snidely commented upon a sold-out British edition of a “Prophetic Almanac,” remarking that “Astrology and superstition seem to be still rife with certain classes, in Great Britain.”¹⁵⁷ In England, astrologers revived the field by publishing sensational almanacs and new books that integrated astrology with other occult forms of knowledge.¹⁵⁸ Across the Atlantic, according to *The Prophetess*, there were numerous astrological enthusiasts in America too, but no American astrologers had yet emerged to capitalize on this growing interest. *The Prophetess*’s reference to devotees’ pouring over “old tomes” is plausible given that advertisements for occult books that appeared in the New York press in the 1840s included announcements about works on

¹⁵⁷ “Foreign Items,” *The Evening Post*, December 13, 1849.

¹⁵⁸ To learn more about the nineteenth century astrology revival in England and its eventual expression in the U.S., see Benson Bobrick, *The Fated Sky: Astrology in History* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 256-265. See also Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Volume II: The Medieval and Modern Worlds* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 205-238, for information on nineteenth century practitioners.

astrology.¹⁵⁹ While Madame Rockwell did not call herself an astrologer, she had an educated opinion about the practice. Other female occult workers like her surely knew enough of the field to give clients a taste of astrological fortune-telling, in which planets were mentioned in relationship to divinatory cards. For many eager to see something of astrology at work, a trip to a female occult worker may well have been the only option.

While *The Prophetess* addresses the demand for astrological services in New York City, it is unclear whether or not any of the city's occult workers in the mid-nineteenth century possessed enough knowledge of the field to give a proper consultation according to traditional standards.¹⁶⁰ It would take nearly a half-century for a substantive work of American astrology to appear on the market, a credit which went to the British-born Luke Dennis Broughton (1828-1898) and his posthumously published *Elements of Astrology* (1898). Broughton began offering astrological consultations in New York City in 1863, after leaving Philadelphia due to that city's harsh anti-astrology laws.¹⁶¹ His *Elements of Astrology*, part astrology textbook and part professional memoir, recalls the American astrological scene as he found it at mid-century:

I was acquainted with nearly every man in the United States who had any knowledge on the subject, and probably at that time there were not twenty persons that knew enough of Astrology to be able to erect a horoscope, and they were all either French, English or

¹⁵⁹ See as examples "September Book Sale Extraordinary," *The Evening Post*, September 9, 1841; "Large Sale of 2500 Volumes of Old English Books," *The Evening Post*, February 22, 1842; "Thursday Evening," *The Evening Post*, January 7, 1846; "Foreign Books, and curious and rare works, at lower prices than ever before sold," *The Evening Post*, September 16, 1847.

¹⁶⁰ Traditional Astrology or Classical Astrology refers to the main types of western astrology practiced prior to the mid-nineteenth century, including Greco-Roman Hellenistic astrology, and the Arabian, Medieval, and Renaissance European systems of astrology. An educated nineteenth-century astrologer would have been familiar with these branches.

¹⁶¹ See "Broughton, Luke Dennis (1828-1898)," *Encyclopdia.com*, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/broughton-luke-dennis-1828-1898>.

German. There was not an American, either man or woman, in the whole United States who could even erect a horoscope at that time.¹⁶²

While Broughton may have lamented the absence of a professional cohort in the United States, enterprising women in New York City sensed a business opportunity. For thousands of years, astrology had been male-dominated, but in New York City in the 1840s, it could be anyone's game.¹⁶³

In 1842, years before Broughton began advertising his practice in the United States, one New York City woman boldly declared herself educated in the craft. Announcing herself as “A Lady Learned in Astrology” in the *New-York Tribune*, she offered “private conversations on this science” instead of astrological readings, which law enforcers could construe as fortune-telling.¹⁶⁴ The mystery woman did not name a price for the privilege of partaking in her knowledge. After a series of such advertisements in the *Tribune*, she reappeared in June of 1843 in the *New York Daily Herald*, now revealing herself as Mrs. Willis, “The Lady of Information of future events and what has passed, learned in astrology and astronomy.” While this notice hinted at fortune-telling (“future events”), it defined her practice as a “science,” reminding readers of astrology's historical connection to astronomy.¹⁶⁵ She offered “private lectures” to women only at her home address. Lastly, her advertisement mentioned that, if visitors purchased any of her medicine (“corn and caucer [cancer] salve and a sure cure for the ague”), her astrological

¹⁶² L. Dennis Broughton, *The Elements of Astrology* (New York: The author, 1898), xiii.

¹⁶³ Astrology, an honored craft tradition for much of its history, required education women typically could not receive. It's probable that women practiced informally, learning through whatever they could glean or trained by male family members. Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive histories of women in astrology. For an informative podcast discussing the earliest female astrologers, see Chris Brennan, “Saturn as Feminine, and the Earliest Female Astrologer,” July 31, 2016, in *The Astrology Podcast*, produced by Chris Brennan, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:33:10, <https://theastrology podcast.com/2016/07/31/saturn-feminine-earliest-female-astrologer/>.

¹⁶⁴ “A Lady, learned in Astrology,” *New-York Tribune*, August 30, 1842.

¹⁶⁵ “Mrs. Willis,” *New York Daily Herald*, June 19, 1843.

information could be obtained gratis. While her sale of medicine invokes the long tradition of women's folk healing, presented under the guise of astrology, this ad likely also referenced astrology's long-standing role in the more elite field of medicine.¹⁶⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, most Americans lacked sufficient familiarity with the basic astrological principles necessary to discern the difference between what a serious male astrologer like Broughton offered and what a female occult worker like Mrs. Willis knew or could sense intuitively. When Mrs. Willis declared knowledge of the "science" of astrology, there were few if any male professional astrologers on the scene to engage in gatekeeping, or to educate the public about what exactly constituted respectable astrological practice. The transmission of astrological knowledge at this time could appear fundamentally mysterious, adding to the allure of an occult worker who claimed knowledge of this field. If potential practitioners wished to become adept, there were no formal programs they could attend besides the odd lecture. Broughton had learned the craft from his father, blessed with an inheritance few other professional astrologers of the nineteenth century could rightfully claim.¹⁶⁷ The only options for acquiring the craft were to find somebody knowledgeable to teach you, to engage in self-study by poring over old books, and or to glean what you could from popular divination manuals that included astrological tidbits.

Given the low bar for becoming an astrologer in mid-nineteenth-century America, it is not surprising that other female occult workers followed in Mrs. Willis's footsteps, laying claim to the field in New York City. By 1847, Mrs. H. Roeder appeared on the scene and offered both

¹⁶⁶ As an example of astrology's influence in the field of medicine, in the Middle Ages, the motto of the School of Medicine at the University of Bologna was: "A doctor without astrology is like an eye that cannot see," see Bobrick, *The Fated Sky*, 135. For more references, check his index under "medical astrology."

¹⁶⁷ In an ad for Madame Morrow, she states, "She is a descendent of a line of astrologers reaching back for centuries," see "Madame Morrow is Without Exception," *New York Daily Herald*, April 3, 1854. This claim was unlikely to be true but made for effective advertising.

men and women professional consultations on “Phrenology, Astrology, Palmistry and Science” for fifty cents. She promised to answer “all secret and lawful questions with regards to health, wealth and marriage, love affairs, journeys, law-suits, difficulties in business, sickness and death.”¹⁶⁸ These topics were fortune-telling mainstays, but Roeder’s services had greater appeal when cloaked in the scientific methodology of astrology. Later in 1847, another woman advertising astrology, Madame Duboyce, arrived in New York City having “returned from the South,” and announced that she would be happy to receive calls from people in need of consultations on “Phrenology, Physiognomy, Astrology, and Reading of the Planets, which pertain to past, present and future events.” Unlike other advertising astrologers or astrologists, she gave readers a tantalizing clue as to the field’s basic premise.¹⁶⁹ In her ad she stated, “The period of our birth is marked with some peculiar circumstances, that have a visible effect upon the future conduct of our lives.” Framing occult practice in terms of scientific cause and effect likely aroused the interest of potential clients. Like Mrs. Roeder, Madame Duboyce enumerated specific subjects that a consultation could address, naming “health, business, property, and love affairs” as her areas of expertise. Fortune tellers also addressed these subjects, but Duboyce drew a line between herself and them by specifying that she “uses no cards nor dice, and professes no witchcraft, but only what may be looked upon as Science.”¹⁷⁰ Like Mrs. Roeder, she charged fifty cents per consultation, twenty-five cents more than the fortune teller Madame Rockwell charged at Barnum’s American Museum.

¹⁶⁸ “Take Notice,” *New York Daily Herald*, May 14, 1847.

¹⁶⁹ These words are interchangeable in women’s advertisements of the period. Today, professionals in the area of astrology generally prefer the term “astrologer.” See Chris Brennan, “Is it Astrologer or Astrologist?,” *The Horoscopic Astrology Blog*, February 10, 2014, accessed November 22, 2022, <http://horoscopicastronomyblog.com/2014/02/10/astrologer-or-astrologist/>.

¹⁷⁰ “A Card.—Madame Duboyce,” *New York Daily Herald*, December 22, 1847.

Not long after, Madame Duboyce declared she would be leaving New York City, only to reappear, taking up even more advertising space to profess her knowledge of astrology. In 1848, an advertisement for her services appeared in the *New York Daily Herald*, under the headline “Phrenology and Astrology.”¹⁷¹ It featured lines from a poem: “To know by signs, to judge the turns of fate; Is Greater than to fill the seats of State.” The poem was authored by the ancient Roman poet Marcus Manilius to provide instruction on astrology. The poem could also be found in British astrologer Robert Cross Smith's *The Familiar Astrologer: An Easy Guide to Fate, Destiny, and Foreknowledge* (1832).¹⁷² Madame Duboyce's use of the poem alerted those clients who followed astrology with a serious interest that she was familiar with Smith's book, one of the few contemporary English-language astrology texts available in the United States. Years later, Luke Broughton would use these same lines from Marcus Manilius in his newspaper advertising.¹⁷³ A year after she deployed the poem, Madame Duboyce upped her advertising game again with a puff piece in the *Brooklyn Evening Star* in which an imaginary “we” offered the public a framework for distinguishing astrological pretenders from serious practitioners. “BE WISE IN TIME!,” the ad proclaimed:

WE CAUTION THE PUBLIC against being imposed upon by those who pretend to read the planets, stars, and sciences. Let it be known to all, that unless such persons can tell you the longitude of any planet you wish to name, either Mercury, Venus, Mars, or any other one you please to mention, then ask them to inform you what sign is rising in the eastern horizon at the time you are speaking with them, and what planet is assigned to that sign.—If they can answer those few questions, then venture to spend your money

¹⁷¹ “Phrenology and Astrology,” *New York Daily Herald*, September 30, 1848.

¹⁷² Robert Cross Smith published under the angelic pseudonym “Raphael.” For the poem in context, see Raphael (Robert Cross), *The Familiar Astrologer; An Easy Guide to Fate, Destiny & Foreknowledge, as well as to the Secret and Wonderful Properties of Nature* (London, UK: Printed for John Bennett), 57.

¹⁷³ See “Astro-Phrenology.—Prognostic Astronomy,” *New York Daily Herald*, September 18, 1863. Mrs. Roeder also used the Manilius poem in her advertising, see “Notice from the New York Herald,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 9, 1850.

with them; if they cannot answer correctly, then conclude they know nothing about the science, and you are about to be humbugged.¹⁷⁴

The ad goes on to describe the fictional narrator's experience with Madame DuBoyce and "the correctness and systematic form in which she conducted her business." An astrologer's ability to calculate a planet's longitude involved complex mathematics and would surely impress upon readers a sense of scientific credentials fortune tellers lacked.

By March 1850, female astrologers' advertisements had attracted sufficient notice that the *Evening Post* felt the need to advise the public against patronizing this new crop of "astrological fortune tellers."¹⁷⁵ The article's author began his amusing tirade by cheekily introducing the field of astrology as "the science, or rather the art," next noting how the practice "still flourishes in many of our cities and villages." Although the author mocked present-day astrologers, he admitted that astrology had once claimed the allegiance of many distinguished men and continued to claim "many disciples who cultivate its mysteries with a confiding and enthusiastic faith." The author frowned upon these serious students of astrology, whom he saw as akin to the historical gentleman hobbyists he made a point of naming. However, he did not consider serious astrologers' practices a public danger. What was problematic to the author was the increasing presence of plebeian occult workers calling themselves astrologers in newspaper advertisements. These workers he lambasted as standard fortune tellers in disguise. The article excerpted several such practitioners' "curious" advertisements, including one in which Mrs. Willis ("A Lady Learned in Astrology") claimed to be the first astrologer "that ever advertised in the city."¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷⁴ "Be Wise in Time!" *Brooklyn Evening Star*, April 7, 1849.

¹⁷⁵ "City Intelligence," *The Evening Post*, March 11, 1850.

¹⁷⁶ She claims in this referenced advertisement that she first advertised in 1841, which could be the case, but my search of digitized newspapers only reveals advertisements beginning in 1842.

article also named another female astrologer, Mrs. Birkmane, whose advertisements maintained that her practice was based “upon scientific principles.” Overall, the article’s author blamed this new scourge of fortune tellers masquerading as astrologers on “the fact that they are able to keep long advertisements standing in the column of the most expensive papers,” which he regarded as an encouragement or unofficial endorsement on the part of the press. He would have preferred that astrologers in New York be treated as they were in Philadelphia, where police often arrested them for false advertising.

By January of 1852, New York City’s most influential daily, the *New York Herald*, began to group all of its occult worker advertisements under the heading “Astrology.”¹⁷⁷ Readers no longer had to hunt through the miscellaneous ads or other sections of the paper to find an occult worker; now, all of their ads appeared in one place. Two years after this innovation, the *Herald* provided a window into the practices of the same occult workers who advertised in its pages in a lengthy article entitled “A Tour Among the Astrologers: How They Live—Where They Live—And What They Do.”¹⁷⁸ If readers were curious about what astrological services entailed, this was their opportunity to get a glimpse of what it might be like to receive a reading.

The article opened with an acknowledgment of press interest in the extraordinary claims made by

¹⁷⁷ One of the “curious” advertisements mentioned in “The City Intelligence” article by *The Evening Post* (1850) belonged to Dr. C.W. Roback, a wizard con artist who blanketed the dailies with ads, puff pieces, and testimonials about his magical astrology practice beginning in December of 1851. He also frequently wrote letters to the editor and submitted predictions. Not long after he appeared on the scene, the *New York Herald* created its “Astrology” section, which is likely not a coincidence, given the publicity Roback generated for astrology. Technically, Roback published the first astrology book in the United States, see Dr. C.W. Roback, *The Mysteries of Astrology, and the Wonders of Magic: Including a History of the Rise and Progress of Astrology, and the Various Branches of Necromancy; Together With Valuable Directions and Suggestions Relative to the Casting Nativities, and Predictions by Geomancy, Chiromancy, Physiognomy, &c. also, Highly Interesting Narratives, Anecdotes, &c. Illustrative of the Marvels of Witchcraft, Spiritual Phenomena, and the Results of Supernatural Influence* (Boston, MA: The author, 1854), but the book was plagiarized and discredited by serious astrologers. For more information about Roback and other “trash” astrologers, see Christopher Renstrom, “Trash Astrology: A History of Pop Astrology in America” (presentation, United Astrology Conference, Chicago, IL, May 25, 2018). Broughton also wrote about his brother visiting Roback, finding that he had no knowledge of astrology. See Broughton, *Elements of Astrology*, 452.

¹⁷⁸ “A Tour Among the Astrologers,” *New York Daily Herald*, April 23, 1854.

occult workers in the daily newspapers (among which the *New York Herald* was perhaps the flagship in terms of the sheer number of ads for occult services). The article noted that, in ads for “astrologers,” practitioners typically claimed magical powers and/or descent from a magical lineage, contradicting their simultaneous claims of scientific practice. To “test this science,” the article’s author had received readings from numerous astrologers advertising themselves in the city.

This tour took the author to both men and women, and he found both sexes lacking in knowledge of astrology, but he singled out the women for charges that they were simply fortune tellers. In his visits to three female “astrologers,” he found that all engaged in cartomancy and could not erect a horoscope based on astrological mathematics.¹⁷⁹ The only reference to astrology in the three women’s readings came from a “Lady Madam Clifton,” who commented on the man’s coloring and added, “The complexion changes once in life the same as a planet.” When the man asked Clifton if she could delineate his character—a feature common to traditional astrology readings and the erection of a horoscope—she balked: “Well, you know all them things yourself, I thought you came to see me about the future!” This utterance revealed her as a fortune teller. Additionally, she sold magical charms and medicines, a practice harkening back to older female occult traditions of witchcraft.

Lady Madam Clifton claimed that her “natural gift” for healing came from being born with a caul, referring to folk magic traditions whereby an infant born with a portion of the birth

¹⁷⁹ A horoscope is a graphic representation of the sky which gives the positions of the Sun, Moon, and planets, from the perspective of a specific time and place on Earth, for example, at an individual's birth. It is from the Greek word *hōroskopos*, from *hōra* meaning “time” and *skopos* meaning “observer.”

membrane remaining on its head was perceived as lucky or imbued with unique qualities.¹⁸⁰ Whereas astrologers' prowess resulted from cultivated skill and much study, fortune tellers typically claimed a magical lineage or origin from an exotic place associated with older mystic practices. Clifton's evocation of a caul as the origin of her powers aligns her with this trope in fortune-telling advertisements. Those who advertised themselves as astrologers distanced themselves from this heritage, avoiding some of the stigma attached to fortune-telling and, not incidentally, charging clients considerably more than a fortune teller typically could. All three of the female astrologers visited by the *Herald's* reporter defied the stereotype that cast fortune tellers as vagrants. The article profiled their clean, respectable dwellings containing "commonplace" furnishings instead of "mysterious" occult items. Claiming astrology had given these women what the reporter called a "comfortable independence."

In 1863, a decade after the *Herald* disparaged female astrologers, the paper found itself in the unusual position of defending them. An essay in the *London Review* newspaper had criticized the *Herald* for advertising occult services. This essay especially condemned advertisements placed by female astrologers, charging that they appealed to "heathen superstition" and that Americans' susceptibility to such beliefs reflected failures of the country's common school system. The *Herald* fired back, citing the warm welcome American Spiritualism had found in England ten years earlier. The retort went on to list prominent English persons—including titled individuals—who participated in occultism, making it a "fashionable" pursuit.¹⁸¹ Additionally, the *Herald* declared, "If the British editor will turn his eyes toward the most highly civilized city

¹⁸⁰ For more information on cauls and their history in folk magic, see R. W. Byard, "The Caul and its Relation to Drowning, Lawyers and Sorcerers," *Forensic Science, Medicine and Pathology*, vol. 17, 3 (2021): 526–528, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12024-020-00349-7>.

¹⁸¹ "The Herald's Advertisements and the English Press," *New York Daily Herald*, May 17, 1863.

in the world—Paris—he will find in some quarters hosts of female fortunetellers, spiritualists, mesmerists &c., inhabiting almost every house, and consulted repeatedly by the most fashionable ladies of the city, and even of the court.” Fundamentally, however, the *Herald* was defending the United States, not occult workers. Certainly, the *Herald* owed them a debt in return for their voluminous advertising, a significant source of income for this newspaper, but this did not constitute alignment with occult workers.

The same year that the *Herald* countered the *London Review*, Luke Broughton arrived in New York City, where he placed advertisements for his practice in the *Herald*’s astrology section. Broughton had complicated feelings about his ads’ appearing alongside the numerous notices for fortune tellers. Throughout his career, Broughton strove to educate the public about the practice of astrology and the differences between astrologers and other occult workers. His *Elements of Astrology* (1898) expressed resentment that, despite his substantial professional accomplishments, astrologers were grouped with “criminals,” including fortune tellers and clairvoyants:

...according to the “Penal Code” of the State of New York, I am classed among “prostitutes,” “gamblers,” “fortune-tellers,” “clairvoyants,” and people of “disreputable character,” and I am liable at any moment, upon any frivolous complaint, to be arrested, and even without a trial before a jury, to be consigned to prison for six months or required to give bonds to a large amount, that I will discontinue the practice of my profession.¹⁸²

While Broughton embraced an occult professional hierarchy that positioned astrology, with its claim to scientific methodology, high above fortune-telling, he nevertheless protested how the

¹⁸² Broughton, *The Elements of Astrology*, 390.

press treated female occult workers.¹⁸³ *Elements of Astrology* (1898) condemned Mortimer Thomson's *Witches of New York* in 1858 as an egregious misrepresentation of the workers it portrayed. "Under the belief, no doubt, that the devil cannot be painted too black," Broughton wrote, Thomson "appears to have told as many lies about them as he could well put together." Broughton also criticized the *New York Sun*'s disrespectful handling of a prediction by a female occult worker, whose particular field the paper did not report. As Broughton pointed out, "The 'Sun' did not say whether the woman was a fortune-teller, Gipsy, clairvoyant, spiritualist or astrologer; it simply stated that she was a 'witch,' and that term appears to cover everything of that nature."¹⁸⁴ While Broughton was undoubtedly suspicious of some female occult workers, he did not dismiss all of them out of hand. Notably, he took pains to address their work's potential merit while also distinguishing their practices from his beloved astrology: "I do not wish to say a word against clairvoyants, palmists, mind-readers, phrenologists, spiritualists and card-cutters, as I believe a number of them are honest in their calling. But at the same time these professions have nothing whatever to do with the science of Astrology, although they are often classed as Astrologers."¹⁸⁵

Despite drawing this boundary, Broughton recognized what he had in common with working witches: persecution. While some male astrologers in New York City did not wish to be

¹⁸³ Broughton was no stranger to press battles. He had a notable fight with the *New York Herald*, whose editor James Gordon Bennet called Broughton and his co-workers the "ghouls in the garret" for their occupation of a building at 814 Broadway. Broughton successfully operated the Eclectic Medical University and taught astrology at this location. Because of this press controversy, their landlord eventually evicted them. See "The Ghouls in the Garret," *New York Daily Herald*, January 14, 1867; "The Garret Ghouls: A Metaphysical Mill—The Infidel Bruisers' Chaw' Each Other Up," *New York Daily Herald*, January 28, 1867; "The Ghouls," *New York Daily Herald*, February 4, 1867. See also Bobrick, *The Fated Sky*, 261.

¹⁸⁴ Broughton, *The Elements of Astrology*, 416.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 452.

associated in any way with witchcraft, Broughton acknowledged a shared history that deeply affected all occult trades.¹⁸⁶ In *Elements of Astrology*, he identified this common heritage as four centuries of European witch trials, to which he attributed the execution of “*over eleven million heretics and witches, including Astrologers.*”¹⁸⁷ While he could practice astrology openly and even advertise in the newspapers, the contemporary treatment of occult workers left much to be desired in his opinion. He worried about the possibility of a return to the “dark ages.” Ultimately, however, Broughton concluded that time was on astrologers’ side. To call them tricksters, he wrote:

indicates an ignorance and prejudice that will not be believed one hundred years to come. The people in those days, when reading the history of the present time, will look back to the persecution of Astrologers, the Botanic and Homeopathic physicians, the Socialist and the Spiritualist, as they look back to the persecution of the “Witches,” “Heretics,” and “itinerant preachers,” who lived two hundred years ago.¹⁸⁸

Notably, he did not include fortune tellers and clairvoyants in this list of martyrs. In Broughton's mind, they may have been less worthy of professional exoneration or less likely to be redeemed in the future.

As female occult workers continued to attract public interest by advertising themselves as astrologers, the newspapers still cast them as glorified fortune tellers. In 1866, *The Sun* published “Timothy Budlong and the Astrologers,” a variation on classic cautionary tales about the dangers of patronizing female fortune tellers. In this case, the author reversed the sex of the naive client, a young man, who “in his country home... had heard of a famous astrologer whose intimate

¹⁸⁶ For an example, see astrologer Professor Wilson’s advertisement where he declares that he “has nothing to do with Geomancy, Conjuration, Palmistry, Cards, or any such humbugs—such deceptions are only practiced by imposters,” in “Astrology,” *Sunday Dispatch*, March 28, 1852.

¹⁸⁷ Broughton *The Elements of Astrology*, iv; emphasis in the original.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 431.

acquaintance with the planetary system gave her an insight into coming events.”¹⁸⁹ The reference to a renowned female astrologer indicates how much progress New York City women had made in claiming astrological practice as their own. Like the *Herald*’s “A Tour of the Astrologers,” the author of Timothy Budlong’s story discredited female astrologers; the famous astrologer’s method turned out to be palmistry, not astrology. As in T.S. Arthur’s “Nancy Newell and the Fortune Teller” from 1844, the astrological fortune teller advised her young client to pursue a partner wealthier than his young working-class sweetheart.¹⁹⁰ Following this bad advice, Timothy got neither girl, ending his faith in astrology. Like older cautionary tales about fortune tellers, this one posited young people from the countryside as the natural dupes of a female occult worker’s duplicity. In this case, it was a double deception in that a garden-variety fortune teller claimed knowledge of astrology.

In the 1870s, bolstered by the growing field of popular astronomy, interest in astrology continued to soar, spotlighting those who claimed knowledge of the subject.¹⁹¹ On March 11th, 1872, the *New York Times* weighed in on the trend in a piece titled “Modern Astrology,” whose author expressed a yearning for a mythical past in which venerable wizard-like men ruled the field and the astrologer:

¹⁸⁹ “Local News,” *The Sun*, October 23, 1866.

¹⁹⁰ See my discussion of “Nancy Newell and the Fortune Teller” in Chapter One, 35-36.

¹⁹¹ English astronomer Richard Proctor (1837-1888) was hugely responsible for popularizing astronomy in the Victorian era in the U.K. and the U.S. by lecturing widely and publishing many accessible books for the public. Proctor also lectured on astrology, as astronomy and astrology were inextricable for centuries of their history. In 1875, the *New-York Tribune* published one of his lectures. In his talk, he discredited astrology but also said, “No other method of divination of which I have ever heard seems worthy to be mentioned in company with astrology, which, though erroneous, had a foundation in thoughts well worthy of consideration.” See “Prof. Proctor in Boston,” *New-York Tribune*, November 22, 1875. The *New York Times* profiled him in 1877 when reviewing two of his publications, including his book *Myths and Marvels of Astronomy* (1877) which included a chapter on astrology. See “Myths and Marvels of Astronomy,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 1877. While astrologer Luke Broughton considered him an avid foe for debunking astrology as a science—countering his work repeatedly in his *Elements of Astrology*—Proctor likely generated significant interest in astrology.

was a figure to delight and dazzle the eye of romance. Tall, and with a venerable white beard, (no astrologer could have had a moment's faith without these advantages,) clad in that well-known flowing robe of black velvet, inscribed with the signs of the zodiac and still more mysterious hieroglyphics, the ancient astrologer as he was first dimly seen through the rather unpleasant smoke of his crucible, in that high-vaulted chamber at the top of the lonely tower which we are so familiar, must have been to his awestruck clients a most impressive object.¹⁹²

Romanticizing a time when male astrologers possessed both magical and academic glory, the *Times* distinguished the profession of yore from the practice of men and women who advertised as astrologers in the daily newspapers. These occult workers lived and labored in congested working-class neighborhoods instead of a "lonely tower." The *Times* called this lot "a tribe of wretched pretenders to the authority of the old-star-gazers, who dwell mostly in obscure back streets, call themselves by high-sound-names of exotic flavor, are all, without exception, seventh daughter or seventh sons, and will read any comer out of hand, for a dollar or two, a most alluring fortune." They were all simply fortune tellers claiming a storied profession. A year later, *The Sun* chimed in with similar sentiments, acknowledging the allure of ancient occult workers: "The seers or the magicians of the olden time, who could by reading the stars foretell the destiny of a nation or the career of an individual, were often men of superior intelligence for the times they lived in." On the other hand, the "so-called astrologers" of the present-day ought to be arrested. "Is there no statute under which they can be prosecuted?" *The Sun* asked. Unlike law enforcement in other cities, New York's authorities continued to overlook astrologers, even as they increasingly garnered negative press attention.

In 1881, news of impending astrological events and the resurrection of a purported prediction from the legendary English seeress Mother Shipton (1488-1561) brought

¹⁹² "Modern Astrology," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1872.

newspapermen to astrology's table to address the wide public interest in these prophecies.¹⁹³ A *New-York Tribune* article published on January 2nd, 1881, discussed the current panic. While the author revealed that the prophecy attributed to Shipton was a hoax, he conceded that astrological projections published in English almanacs were raising eyebrows. April of 1881 would see a conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter in Taurus, an astrological event that had not occurred in that sign since 1146, which then was “followed by the bloodiest of the crusades and a violent brandishing of the shillelah [sic].”¹⁹⁴ Famed English astrologers were now predicting disasters of all sorts, spreading forecasts that the article described as “samples of a full line of afflictions in assorted sizes which the prophets have in stock to suit every demand.” Readers were advised not to take these predictions seriously, though the article admitted that they made for thrilling reading.

The *Tribune* reported on these worrisome astrological omens at a moment when the year 1881 had been “prosperously entered” and there were few signs of ill-fortune on the horizon. However, by late January, a *New York Times* reporter had to admit that things had taken a turn for the worse, citing poor weather, devastating steamboat accidents, railway disasters, continuing conflict over the results of a divisive and allegedly corrupt presidential election, and a stalled appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁹⁵ While this reporter was not a believer in astrology, he found it “difficult to see how we can deny the claim of the astrologers that so far the presence of three planets in perihelion has been followed by disastrous and alarming results.” In March, *The*

¹⁹³ For more information about Mother Shipton and the famous 1881 prediction, see Ed Simon, “Divining the Witch of York: Propaganda and Prophecy,” *The Public Domain Review*, October 24, 2018, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/divining-the-witch-of-york-propaganda-and-prophecy>.

¹⁹⁴ “Astrology for 1881,” *New-York Tribune*, January 2, 1881.

¹⁹⁵ “Astrology,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1881.

Sun ran an article on the public's occupation with English astrologers' "most frightful predictions" for 1881 and concluded that, "Astrology is by no means dead, as many suppose."¹⁹⁶ When April arrived, a reporter for *The Sun* knocked on the doors of New York City's astrologers to ask for more information on the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction and what it foreboded. Male astrologers offered many prophecies of troubles around the world, including wars, blight in the fruit crop, and the spread of disease. The *Sun* also consulted with female astrologers, but found them lacking in predictions. "Of the half dozen women astrologers visited, none had heard that there was to be a noteworthy conjunction of the planets, and two or three became somewhat alarmed when told that such an event was to occur." While women advertising themselves as astrologers had been part of the city's occult landscape for decades, their failure to prognosticate on the scale of world events rendered them deficient in newspapermen's eyes.

Whereas the press had previously condemned both male and female astrologers as pretenders, in 1884 and 1885 the *New York Times* politely profiled several of the men, characterizing them as learned practitioners deserving admiration. In 1884 the *Times* featured "Dr. M," "an astrologer, not a common fortune-teller, but a genuine disciple of the Chaldean star-gazers."¹⁹⁷ In 1885, the *Times* surveyed the practices of two additional male astrologers—Professor De Leon and Dr. Paul—finding them dignified and their clients respectable people grateful for the men's expertise. As to the existence of female astrologers, the *Times* stated: "There are other astrologers in this city, but they are ladies who combine clairvoyance with

¹⁹⁶ "The Oracle of the Stars: What the Modern Astrologers Say the Planets Foretell for 1881," *The Sun*, March 20, 1881.

¹⁹⁷ See "Consulting the Stars: A Peep into the Mysteries of Astrology," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1884.

astrology, and are not to be ranked with these two distinguished Professors.”¹⁹⁸ However, the men’s newfound respectability would prove short-lived. Dr. Paul was arrested later in 1885, followed by Professor De Leon in 1886, events covered by multiple newspapers.¹⁹⁹ Whatever professional heights they had achieved, their involvement in occult work made them vulnerable.

While women had seemingly been left behind due to the arrival of more educated male astrologers in the last decades of the century, one female astrologer, Evangeline Adams (1868-1932) emerged by the end of the century and became the first-ever American astrologer with a nationwide following. She had studied astrology since she was a teenager, primarily with Dr. J. Herbert Smith, a Professor of Materia Medica at Boston University. Later, she studied with Luke Broughton. Adams initially rose to prominence due to a palm reading she reportedly gave to Warren F. Leland, the owner of the upscale Windsor Hotel on Fifth Avenue, which disastrously burned down shortly after the reading.²⁰⁰ The *New York World’s* article on the fire reported Adams’s prediction of the disaster, explaining that “she saw that there was evil in store somewhere according to his horoscope and told him so.”²⁰¹ Like many New York City female astrologers before her, Adams combined astrological readings with other forms of divination. After the Windsor Hotel fire catapulted her into prominence, Adams established a successful occult practice in New York, specializing in astrology but also employing palmistry.

¹⁹⁸ “Casting The Horoscope,” *New York Times*, July 5, 1885.

¹⁹⁹ “Dr. Paul In A Dungeon,” *The Sun*, December 24, 1885; “An Astrologer Arrested for Abduction,” *New-York Tribune*, December 25, 1886; “‘Prof.’ De Leon’s Crooked Career,” *The Sun*, February 8, 1887.

²⁰⁰ Read more about the fire and Adams’s prediction in Karen Christino, *Foreseeing the Future: Evangeline Adams and Astrology in America* (Brooklyn: Stella Mira Books, 2019), 68-74. Adams lived and worked in the Windsor Hotel at the time of the fire. She and her secretary escaped without incident.

²⁰¹ “Foretold the Calamity: Miss Evangeline Adams Read Mr. Leland’s Hand and Warned him of Evil,” *The New York World*, Monday, March 20, 1899.

Most likely due to her fame, Adams was arrested for fortune-telling in 1911 and 1914. In the latter instance, she contested the case in court, aiming to establish once and for all that astrology was a science, not an occult practice like fortune-telling. At the trial, Adams educated the judge and jurors on astrology's scientific principles and demonstrated its potential by reading a blind natal chart (which belonged to the judge's son). The judge, John J. Freschi, was convinced, describing her methodology as "an absolutely mechanical, mathematical process."²⁰² This grasp on science distinguished Adams's practice from fortune-telling. Freschi concluded that, "Every fortune teller is a violator of the law but not every astrologer is a fortune teller...the former is an oppressor, an imposter, the latter is surely not...."²⁰³ After winning this case, Adams focused almost exclusively on astrology, distancing herself from other divination methods.

Adams's success in court constituted a legal victory for some astrologers, protecting their right to practice in New York City without legal threat. However, the judge's distinction came at the expense of fortune tellers, along with other occult workers who had less of a claim to a scientific methodology. In fact, Adams's vindication was only possible through a disavowal of fortune-telling practices like palmistry that had made her practice successful in the first place. Her victory did not extend to every worker claiming to practice astrology. Less than a year later, another occult worker, Maude Malcom, who combined astrological insights with palmistry was arrested and convicted of "pretending to tell fortunes." Unable to defend her practice according to the standard created in Adams's case—that of pure scientific astrology—she was found to be disorderly and placed under bonds.²⁰⁴ Looking forward, the most sought-after astrologers since

²⁰² Christino, *Foreseeing the Future*, 107.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 108.

²⁰⁴ *People v. Malcolm*, 33 N.Y. Crim. 205, 90 App. Div. 517 (1915)

her time have been women combining astrology with other occult methodologies and spiritual insight.²⁰⁵ Whatever Judge Freschi's opinion, the public has historically been most drawn to a witch's astrology that incorporates elements of astrological science with alternate forms of divination.

²⁰⁵ In 1968, self-taught astrologer Linda Goodman published *Linda Goodman's Sun Signs*, the first-ever astrology book to make the *New York Times* bestseller list and the most popular astrology book ever published, selling over a million copies. For her significance, see Ian Anthony Waller, "Underneath Gendered Stars: How the First Famous Astrologer, Masculinity, The History of Psychology and the New Age Influence our Contemporary Perspective on Astrology as a Social Phenomenon," PhD diss., (UC Santa Barbara, 2020), 11, 37, 70. Waller calls Chani Nicholas "currently, arguably, the most well known astrologer on earth." Ibid, 56. For more on Chani Nicholas see, Amanda Hess, "How Astrology Took Over the Internet," *New York Times*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/arts/how-astrology-took-over-the-internet.html>, and Jazmine Hughes, "Your Favorite Internet Astrologer Wrote a Book," *New York Times*, January 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/04/style/chani-nicholas-astrologer.html>.

Conclusion

On November 30th, 2021, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article on the phenomenon of online impersonators pretending to be occult workers on Instagram, the go-to social media platform for accessing practitioners and learning more about their services.²⁰⁶ Many of these occult workers identify their offerings using the hashtag “witchesofinstagram.” Just as the penny press did in the mid- to late nineteenth century, Instagram has created a popular marketplace for occult services and brought attention to individuals performing this work. When I began my career as a psychic and a witch, I created an Instagram account to publicize my work. Previously, I had no interest in joining this platform. However, to reach a larger audience than friends and family, I recognized that I would need an outlet to inform a wider public of my services. Workers like me are almost always forced to operate as independent contractors. It is rare for occult workers to be classified as employees. Companies are hesitant to take on the risk of employing workers whose work is legally questionable and poses liability.²⁰⁷ Even practitioners who work for metaphysical shops are habitually categorized as contractors. Without the security, rights, and benefits that formal employees enjoy under the law, occult workers must create livelihoods by any means possible. Many workers I know credit Instagram for their ability to build and maintain successful businesses. However, the lack of transparency around this platform’s algorithms makes content creation a routinely stressful process akin to a constant gamble.

²⁰⁶ Deborah Netburn, “Psychics and Astrologers are Huge on Instagram. Now Scammers are Impersonating Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-11-30/astrologers-psychics-are-being-impersonated-on-instagram>.

²⁰⁷ Astrology apps may be the consistent exception, see “Work at Chani,” *Chani*, accessed November 25, 2022, <https://chaninicholas.com/careers/>.

As I immersed myself in the newspaper advertisements placed by occult practitioners of the Victorian era, I contemplated the parallels between then and now. If a historian were someday to take an interest in the discourse of #witchesofinstagram, I would want that investigator to know that there is a difference between the way we discuss our work in the marketplace and the way we talk amongst ourselves in our own communities. This gap is fundamental.²⁰⁸ In my research then, I take for granted that what occult workers shared in their advertisements and public dealings reveals only part of their story. For example, I know from experience that practitioners who gain the highest status and widest recognition on marketing platforms are not the most well-regarded among practitioners. In fact, many of the practitioners who enjoy our greatest respect do not advertise themselves on Instagram or even on websites. In my thesis, however, I had to rely on the written record; I could not capture the work of practitioners who were known only through word of mouth in local communities. This problem is exacerbated by the stigma of occult work, which has forced many practitioners, past and present, to operate in the shadows, taking care to leave few traces behind.

While platforms like Instagram can provide visibility, they are not built with workers' needs in mind. Like the newspapers I studied, which harvested occult workers' advertising dollars while ceaselessly mocking them, Instagram has no fundamental stake in practitioners' welfare beyond their ability to generate income for the platform. Instagram does not benefit directly from practitioners' sales, giving the platform no incentive to intervene on behalf of occult workers when impersonators threaten their reputations and livelihoods. Before the *Los Angeles Times* article appeared, workers in my community had prayed for press coverage for

²⁰⁸ There is a tremendous need for oral history work in this field, especially with older folks, and folks whose families have been practicing for generations.

months, hoping to bring much-needed attention to an issue that continues to have a profound effect on our morale and incomes. We and our forbearers have been chronically accused of fraud, and there has never been public sympathy for our plight. When scammers like the Instagram impersonators victimize us, the public often directs their anger at *us*, even though we are helpless to rectify the situation. Such hoaxes rely on the public's fervent desire for occult workers' services; once they've been cheated, their experience of victimhood resonates with the dominant culture's general mistrust of occult workers. On Instagram, impersonators typically direct-message potential victims with an affirming message before soliciting payment for a reading. Many people are so flattered by these individual communications that they miss or ignore clear warning signs and even cautionary messages from real practitioners. While it is disheartening that so many people have fallen for imposters on Instagram, this sad affair also underscores the power occult practitioners hold and the public's need for their services.

When the *Los Angeles Times* article appeared, I laughed out loud when I noticed that its author identified all of the workers on Instagram as "spiritualists." That is not how they identify themselves, although, in fairness, I should add that the reporter probably chose what she thought was the politest umbrella term. Her diction indicates how thoroughly the Spiritualist movement has dominated the history of occult work in the United States. Although my aim as a scholar is to call attention to this dominance and to help remedy it, I also wish to acknowledge the place of Spiritualism within occult workers' lives. After Spiritualism lost traction as an elite movement, it generated a network of churches that lives on to this day, attracting an array of spiritual outsiders in need of a respectable cloak for their practices. I have many theological and philosophical disagreements with Spiritualism; I find it overly self-important, perhaps the understandable

effect of the scholarship I am working to complicate. Even so, I am a member of the Spiritualist Church of New York City, which I joined for protection, for community, and to honor my Spiritualist ancestors.

Historically, Spiritualism was highly successful at gaining quasi-respectability, attracting influential people to its fold, and quickly becoming recognized as a legitimate religion fundamentally different from the occult practice of “vagrants.” Newspapers listed Spiritualist demonstrations and gatherings alongside items on other religions’ services, a tacit endorsement that no other occult group could claim.²⁰⁹ Despite the Spiritualist movement’s anti-structural ethos, members successfully organized, creating a collective shelter that endured the movement’s decline.²¹⁰ Occult workers later adapted this shelter to suit their own needs. They have successfully deployed Spiritualism in legal defenses and in the court of public opinion.²¹¹ While these practitioners may have had a genuine affinity with Spiritualist philosophy, its practical value as an acceptable cover for occult practice outweighed their devotion to its theology. This after-life of Spiritualism must be examined further. As Spiritualism’s political and intellectual vanguard faded in the nineteenth-century, Spiritualism not only endured but also diversified, as evidenced by the creation of the National Colored Spiritualists Association of the United States

²⁰⁹ As an example, see how a notice for Spiritualist worker Cora L.V. Hatch’s mediumship is listed under “Religious Intelligences,” *New York Daily Herald*, March 27, 1864. See also how a Spiritualist meeting was included in “Sunday Sermons,” *New York Herald*, April 6, 1869, alongside reporting on church preachers. Also notable is how Spiritualists claimed Sunday, the traditional day of Christian worship, to perform their work.

²¹⁰ For an illuminating read on the Spiritualist organizing process, read Anne Braude, “No Organization Can Hold Me,” in *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 162-191.

²¹¹ Spiritualism reached its peak as a commercial practice in the early-twentieth century, a more expansive timeline of Spiritualism that is rarely acknowledged by scholars who are focused on its social movement history. Read about how Spiritualist-identified female occult workers successfully defended themselves at a Congressional Hearing orchestrated by fanatical skeptic Harry Houdini in 1926 in Jeremy C. Young, “Empowering Passivity: Women Spiritualists, Houdini, and the 1926 Fortune Telling Hearing,” *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 2 (2014): 341–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43306017>.

of America in 1925.²¹² It is my hope, as a worker and as an official member of the Spiritualist church, that spiritualism can continue to transform, becoming a welcoming harbor for the most marginalized, those whose work continues to be persecuted and reviled.

When Spiritualism ascended in the mid-nineteenth-century, less privileged occult workers were quick to leverage it for their own marketing needs, engaging in savvy maneuvering that historians of Spiritualism have for the most part ignored. While Mortimer Thomson delighted in attacking occult workers en masse, he acknowledged working-class audacity, in contrast to the pretentiousness of Spiritualists. In his description, these workers “combine a little spiritualism of the other sort with the clairvoyance, and they can all go into a trance on short notice and rhapsodize with all the fervor if not the eloquence of Mrs. Cora Hatch; they can all do the table-tipping trick, and are up to more rapping than the Rochester Fox girls ever thought of.”²¹³ As a practitioner, I have much more respect for occultists who know what it is like to perform this work for the public than for the thought leaders, content creators, and product-slingers who profit off of the American obsession with *magic*, broadly speaking. The latter do not have the experience of representing the occult on the ground in emotionally draining, often demeaning work for clients poorly educated in the history and practices of occult workers. My work life led me to focus this thesis on non-Spiritualist historical actors, despite my own lineage’s connection to Spiritualism. When I am in a rowdy dive bar, giving back-to-back readings for a motley crew of demanding clients, I do not feel connected to Spiritualism’s genteel trappings. I feel much more kinship with Madame Rockwell at the crowded Barnum's American Museum, prepared to

²¹²Joyce Elaine Noll, *Company of Prophets: African American Psychics, Healers & Visionaries* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1991), 35-56.

²¹³ Mortimer N. Thomson, *The Witches of New York* (1858; reis., Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Literature House, The Gregg Press, 1969), 205-206.

perform misunderstood work for the masses. The *spirit* of this work is gritty, tenacious, and essentially outlaw; it lives within me, as it lived within the innovative, street-smart working-class women who utilized the penny press and created a space for themselves and their work against considerable adversity.

Then, as now, advertising occult services was a fraught pursuit. It exposed practitioners to significant dangers: penalties from the state, derision from commentators, and anger from the public. Before the advent of Spiritualism's particular brand of respectability politics, contemporary occult workers were already implementing strategies to maintain relevance, avoid arrest, and appeal to a genteel clientele. They adopted new professional monikers like "clairvoyant" and "astrologer" to align themselves with current and centuries-old (in the case of astrology) scientific practices. Female occult workers constructed these new professional identities to dissociate from fortune-telling, a trade long associated with racialized outsiders and criminals. Although this professional re-invention successfully attracted a large clientele, the fortune teller label stuck to these workers regardless of their efforts. This curse continues to haunt occult workers today. Well over a century later, modern occult workers continue to define themselves against fortune-telling, an instinctive choice often made without knowing the long history of this decision. Unlike working-class practitioners, social commentators did not call Spiritualists fortune tellers. While Spiritualism continues to count many detractors today, its alignment with Christian theology and a male-dominated divine order garnered the movement relative acceptance. In contrast, fortune-telling has deep connections to goddess culture and non-Christian spiritual traditions. While it is often cleaved from these cultural contexts, they are the foundation of its continuing threat to dominant American institutions. While scholars fixate on

Spiritualism, these older renegade plebeian practices hide in plain sight, overlooked because of the scorn generally attributed to these “lowly” manifestations of the occult trade. The remarkable persistence of workers encompassed by the wider, lower-case “s” spiritualism makes me proud to call myself an occult worker today.

In 2016, Christine Ferguson, a scholar of Spiritualist writing, posed a crucial question in her review of the academic discourse on Spiritualism:

Academic critics like myself have enlisted Victorian spiritualism for a remarkable profusion of analyses and ideological purposes over the last ten years, perhaps only some of which would be recognizable to its early proponents. How important is this disconnect, if at all? What is at stake, politically, ethically, and intellectually, in the ways in which contemporary critics have revived, aligned, and interrogated this dynamic heterodox movement? As the current surge of scholarly energy around Victorian spiritualism shows no sign of abating, these questions become more urgent than ever.²¹⁴

I was once told the story of a group of American spiritualists, excited about a scholarly conference in England on Spiritualism. They bought tickets and flew to the conference at great expense. After the first day of lectures, they decided not to stay on, feeling unwelcome and alienated by the content. As a working practitioner and descendent of Spiritualists, I have felt similarly alienated by the scholarly discourse on Spiritualism. My feelings may not matter to scholars, and I am okay with that. Reading this literature, however, I became intensely curious about these academics that are so attracted to Spiritualism. *I do not understand you, historians. Do you not talk to the dead?* Surely, I can accuse you of belonging to a necromantic trade. Scholars, the spirits are there for you too. *Listen.*

²¹⁴ Christine Ferguson, “Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,” *Literature Compass*, no. 9 (2012): 431.

In Memoriam: Honoring Female Occult Workers

Female occult workers' deaths were often considered newsworthy. For journalists, these passings could provide further opportunity to mock the occult trade and question why the public continued to patronize occult workers in the modern age. On December 30th, 1876, the *New-York Tribune* reported on the death by suicide of the middle-aged Madame Roeder (featured in Chapter Three), found dead in her bed the previous morning, with a glass of "Paris green"²¹⁵ on her nightstand.²¹⁶ The *Tribune* commented that she had been successful in her practice, "visited by numbers of persons every week." Despite her popularity, it was revealed at the coroner's inquest that "she had said that she was tired of life." Months later, *The Sun* ran an article that tabulated suicides recorded by New York City's Bureau of Vital Statistics.²¹⁷ "Fortune Teller"—a reference to Roeder—is included without further comment in the section where the article lists suicides by profession. This is a rare instance of neutral acknowledgement of a fortune teller's trade.

Another death notice reflects the mystery of women's occult practice and how little we know about its history. On December 16th, 1889, *The Evening World* reported on the death by fire of Ellen Hannigan, an older woman who lived alone. A sub-headline of the article announced her as "An Old and Lonely Woman, Whose History No One Knew."²¹⁸ Her immediate community knew little about her work, "She seemed not to work for a living, and her neighbors wondered where she got the money for the necessities in life." However, "Occasionally,

²¹⁵ Paris green is a highly toxic emerald-green crystalline powder historically used as a pigment, rodenticide and insecticide.

²¹⁶ "Suicide of a Fortune-Teller," *New-York Tribune*, December 30, 1876.

²¹⁷ "Statistics of Suicide," *The Sun*, March 11, 1877.

²¹⁸ "She Died by Fire," *The Evening World*, December 16, 1889.

handsomely dressed ladies, and once in awhile gentlemen, would call upon her and she gained the reputation of a Gypsy fortune-teller.” Authorities believed she died after “she went to bed whiffing her beloved pipe, and fell asleep with it burning; that then the bowl turned over and spilled tobacco on the bed clothes, setting them on fire, and that when she was aroused and found herself on fire, Mrs. Hannigan rolled out and under the bed in an effort to extinguish the flame.” Like other women called witches before her, Ellen Hannigan went out in flames. *The Evening World* noted that it was unlikely that a family member or acquaintances would come forward to claim her.

*A Spell to Recognize Female Occult Workers as Kin,
a Suggested Ritual Action*

Materials:

A candle, bowl of water, and offerings of your choosing

Light a candle. Recall the name or professional alias of a woman you read about in this thesis. Repeat her name out loud until it becomes a chant. Open yourself to receiving an impression, a thought, an image, or a sensation. Name other people, if you desire, womxn from the past or present who embody the archetype of the witch or magical womxn for you. Name any family members who practice magic, and invoke ancestors who practiced. Create a healing space for all the womxn throughout history who have made themselves available—often under extremely challenging circumstances—for consultations, continuing occult traditions that span centuries. Thank these womxn for keeping the gift of magic alive. Acknowledge how many of these womxn were undervalued for performing this role or not compensated at all. Some may have been victimized, murdered, or otherwise harmed for their labors. Offer them and yourself the space of the water to release any energies desiring to be transformed. Leave offerings inside the water and around the water bowl. Invite in clarity around your relationship with these workers, including how you might honor their legacy today.

Appendix: Newspaper Advertisements from Occult Workers

Fortune Tellers

CARD.—MRS. PREWSTER, FROM PHILADELPHIA
tenders her services to ladies and gentlemen of this city
in astrology, love, and law matters, interpreting dreams, &c.,
by books and sciences, constantly relied on by Napoleon; and
will tell the name of the lady or gentleman they will marry.
Also the name of the visitors. Residence 117 Clinton street.
Ladies seventy-five cents. Gentlemen one dollar.

Ad for Mrs. Prewster, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, March 28, 1851

MR. LADOMUS, NO. 298 CANAL STREET, CON-
tinues to tell past present and future events; likewise love,
courtship, and marriage. She will also make love mutual
between parties where it does not now exist. She will also
cause a thief to restore stolen property. Age or temperament
told for nothing.

Ad for Mrs. Ladomus, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, January 2, 1854

MADAME B—, RECENTLY FROM GERMANY,
would inform the ladies and gentlemen of this city,
that she will remain a few days longer, in order that all who
have not availed themselves of her wonderful art of winning
and retaining the most devoted affection of either sex may
have an opportunity of doing so. By enclosing one dollar in a
letter, pre-paid, she will furnish the necessary means. Her
success is truly astonishing. Address Madame B*****, Union
square Post Office.

Ad for Madame B—. *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, January 24, 1854.

A STONISHING TO ALL.—MADAME MORROW, THE seventh daughter, has a natural gift to tell past, present and future events, and all the concerns of life, even the very thoughts, and will cause speedy marriages, and show the likenesses of the intended husbands and absent friends, and will bring together those who are separated, who will enjoy the greatest happiness of matrimonial bliss. All who wish good luck may call soon for relief and comfort. Thousands have expressed their belief that she is the most wonderful astrologist in the world, or that has ever been known, though she practices nothing but what is reconcileable to philosophers. No charge if not satisfied. 76 Broome street, between Ornon and Columbia. Gentlemen not admitted.

Ad for Madame Morrow, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, January 9, 1856.

ASTROLOGY.

A WONDER—THE GIPSEY GIRL.—THIS RENOWNED and only true palmist in America, can be consulted with on all events of life, at 284 Broome street, near Allen street; fee 50 cents. N. B.—She can impart a secret by which any lady or gentleman can obtain the affections of the opposite sex. Charge extra.

Ad for an unnamed practitioner, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, March 4, 1856.

THE GREATEST WONDER IN THE WORLD IS THE young and accomplished Madame BYRON, from Paris, who can be consulted with the strictest confidence on all affairs of life; restores drunken and unfaithful husbands; has a secret to make you beloved by your heart's ideal, and brings together those long separated. Ladies 25 cents. Residence 90 Third avenue, above Twelfth street.

Ad for Madame Byron, *New York Daily Herald* Astrology section, January 17, 1862.

A TEST.—MADAME ANNA, FROM FLORIDA, SEVENTH daughter, born with a vast, medical and business clairvoyant and spiritualist, has that never failing secret to cause love and speedy marriage. No satisfaction no pay. Office 241 Third avenue, near Twentieth street.

Ad for Madame Anna, *New York Daily Herald* astrology, June 2, 1869.

A LADY THAT HAS EARNED \$70,000, ACKNOWLEDGED as the best living fortune teller, will teach a lady or gentleman the business; terms \$50; can always earn \$10 to \$20 daily. Address COMFORT, Herald office.

Personal ad offering to teach fortune telling, *New York Daily Herald*, business opportunities, January 1, 1871.

PERSONAL.
ANY FORTUNE TELLER, OLD FASHIONED (NO "astrology"), wanted. Send address to L. R. POWELL, Herald office.

Personal ad seeking a fortune teller, *New York Daily Herald*, personal, August 6, 1877.

CLAIRVOYANCE.

ALL DISEASE DISCOVERED and cured (if cureable.) Lost and stolen property discovered, the fate and whereabouts of absent friends made known, unerring advice on all business affairs, &c. by **MRS. and MISS SEYMOUR**, two of the most celebrated Clairvoyants in America, at their residence, 256 Division, near Clinton street, **New York**. Chronic Rheumatism, Liver and Kidney complaints, Spinal Affections, Pain in the Breast, Dizziness, Loss of Appetite, Debility, Dyspepsia, Costiveness, Piles, Head-ache, Scroffula, Pulmonary Affections, (Insipient Consumption,) Palpitation of the Heart, Coldness of the extremities, female weakness, irregularities, &c. &c. successfully treated and radically cured, (without mercury,) and satisfaction guaranteed to all or no charge made.

Ad for clairvoyance, *Brooklyn Evening Star*, amusements, December 6, 1851.

CLAIRVOYANCE. — ALL DISEASES DISCOVERED

C and cured, (if curable): lost and stolen property discovered; the fate and whereabouts of absent friends made known; unerring advice on business, &c., by **Mrs. SEYMOUR**, the most celebrated and only reliable Clairvoyant in America, at her family residence, No. 230 (new number) Division street, near Clinton street. Recollect, she is the only Clairvoyant that has ever said, "satisfaction guaranteed to all, or no charge made."

Ad for clairvoyance, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, May 9, 1852.

selling similar goods.

CLAIRVOYANCE.—MRS. HAYES, THE MOST EMINENT Clairvoyant, and the only Clairvoyant in this city that can give satisfactory examinations. Mrs. HAYES has been examining persons' systems for seven years, telling their disease, the cause, and the remedies that will cure them. Mrs. HAYES' Magnetic Office, No. 116 Spring-st., near Broadway, New-York City.

Ad for clairvoyance, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, May 9, 1852.

CLAIRVOYANCE.—REMEMBER "ROSE," THE greatest Clairvoyant of the age, can be consulted on disease or business, in the evening, at No. 206 Monroe street one door west of Gouverneur street, and at all hours of the day, at No. 50 Columbia street. Dr. Brown's celebrated Vegetable Compounds are prepared and sold as above.

Ad for Rose the clairvoyant, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, June 2, 1852.

CLAIRVOYANCE.—DR. HAYES AND MADAME HAYES, the original clairvoyant, magnetic and botanic physicians, can be consulted daily upon diseases, their cause and cure. Persons having friends gone to California, Australia, or elsewhere, can hear correctly from them by consulting Madame Hayes. Advice given on business and private transactions, &c., &c. Office 116 Spring street, near Broadway.

Ad for Dr. Hayes and Madame Hayes, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, February 15, 1853.

[Advertisement]
Clairvoyant and Psychometric Examinations,
with Prescriptions for Diseases, by Mrs PLATT, No. 762 Broadway, four coors above 8th-st., from 9 A. M. to 12, 2 to 5 and 7 to 9 P. M.

Ad for Clairvoyant and psychometric examinations, *New-York Tribune*, advertisement, March 10, 1855.

MRS. M. J. MABIN, Psychological Physician and
Therapeutist, No. 83 West 26th-st., New-York.

Office hours: 10 a. m. to 2 p. m. and 4 to 6 p. m. (Sundays and Wednesdays excepted) for ladies only. Examinations and prescriptions for gentlemen by letter.

TERMS—The first examination and prescription \$5, if the patient is present, and \$10 if absent. All subsequent examinations \$2. Persons applying by letter must state the name, sex and age of the patient, together with the leading features of the case. No charge to the truly poor.

The leading features of a case serve only to put the Psychological Physician in sympathy with the patient. In more than half the cases the disease is found to be different from what the party supposes. To persons unacquainted with the last unfoldings of the art of healing in the United States, to pretend to examine diseases at hundreds, nay thousands of miles from the patient, must look entirely preposterous; but nevertheless, the experience of every day shows that such examinations are far more accurate than any that have been or can be made by the old method. This modern revolution in medicine appeared first in Germany; the examinations were made in the magnetic or clairvoyant state, but this was only the first step. The next was made here. The examiner does not pass into the unconscious state, but has only to abstract his mind and the patient appears before him with the interior of the body open to his view. After a thorough examination, and having traced the disease to its cause, the Psychological Physician writes down the diagnosis and prescribes for the case.

Ad for Mrs. M. J. Mabin, *New-York Tribune*, medical, February 8, 1856

MRS. M. J. MABIN, Psychological Physician and
Therapeutist, No 83 West 26th-st., New-York.

OFFICE HOURS—10 a. m. to 4 p. m., Wednesdays excepted.

TERMS—The first examination and prescription \$5, if the patient is present, and \$10 if absent. All subsequent examinations \$2. Persons applying by letter must state the name, sex and age of the patient, together with the leading features of the case. Examinations made in the interior, not the clairvoyant, state.

On Sunday the truly poor will be examined and prescribed for without charge.

Ad for Mrs. M. J. Mabin, *New-York Tribune*, medical, March 10, 1856

DYSPEPSIA AND FITS.

DR. O. PHELPS BROWN,

The great curer of Consumption, was for several years so badly afflicted by Dyspepsia, that for a part of the time he was confined to his bed. He was eventually cured by a prescription furnished him by a young clairvoyant girl. This prescription given him by a mere child, while in a state of trance, has cured everybody who has taken it, never having failed once. It is equally as sure in cases of FITS as of DYSPEPSIA. The ingredients may be found in any drug store. I will send this valuable prescription to any person on the receipt of one stamp to pay postage. Address Dr. O. PHELPS BROWN, 21 Grand-street, Jersey City, N. J.

Ad for Dr. O. Phelps Brown, *The New York Times*, advertisement, November 5, 1859.

A NATURAL SEER.

Great cures effected in all diseases by Mrs. PRICE, the great Seer or natural Clairvoyant, who has lately arrived in New-York, and can be consulted at No. 343 Canal-st., (old No. 94.) Hours from 9 to 4.

Ad for Mrs. Price, *The New York Times*, advertisement, April 18, 1860

CORA A. SEAMAN, INDEPENDENT CLAIRVOYANT.—
Medical and business consultation, day and evening
The science she unfolds, so satisfactory to all, it is unnecessary to give illustrations of the astounding results, continues
at 239 Division street.

Ad for Cora A. Seaman, Independent Clairvoyant [sic], *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, March 17, 1862.

A LADY PHYSICIAN, 363 GOLD ST., BROOKLYN,
gives magnetic, clairvoyant treatments for disease, ner-
vous prostration, paralysis, impotency, specialties; ex-
hausted brain workers guaranteed a cure.

Ad for a lady physician, *New York Daily Herald*, special notices, November 25, 1877.

Dr. R. T. Hallock has removed to No. 324
Broome-st., corner of Chrystie-st., one block east of the
Bowery.
N. B. I have in my employ an excellent Clairvoyant.

Ad for Dr. R. T. Hallock, *New York Tribune*, special notices, July 15, 1879.

ANNIE LOOMIS (NEE GRACE COURTLAND), LON-
don, Mesmeric Physician and Clairvoyant, 1,257 Broad-
way.—London reference, Sampson Low & Co., Fleet st.;
Janet Rees (authoress). American reference, A. K. Loring,
publisher, Boston. Cures effected of 20 years' standing.
Saturdays free to the poor.

Ad for Annie Loomis, mesmeric physician, *New York Daily Herald*, astrology, July 15, 1879.

Mrs. E. J. French, Physician.
WONDERFUL CURES
Made through her Clairvoyant Powers at No. 443 Broadway.
CALL AND SEE FOR YOURSELVES.
Office Hours, 10 a. m. to 4 p. m., and 2 to 4 p. m.
Examination and Prescription Five Dollars.

Mrs. C. J. French, (late of Pittsburgh, Pa.) CLAIR-
VOYANT and HEALING PHYSICIAN, Office No. 443 Broad-
way.

Hours, 10 a. m. to 1 p. m., and 2 to 4 p. m.
All morbid conditions of the Human Organism delineated and
prescribed for with unparalleled success.

Ads for Mrs. E. J. French, *New-York Tribune*, special notices, July 15, 1879.

MESMERIC EXAMINATIONS OF
DISEASE, at 174 Chambers-st., by a celebrated
Clairvoyant. Office hours from 9 A. M. till 5 P. M. Office
established in 1842. my14 1m*

BEAUTIFUL HAIR The Proprietor

Ad for mesmeric examinations, *New-York Tribune*, medical, July 15, 1879.

Astrologers

A LADY, learned in Astrology, will give Ladies private conversations on this science at her Rooms, at No 265 Elizabeth-st., near Bleecker. au30 1w*
BOARD HOTEL—Brown's Mansion

Ad for A Lady, learned in Astrology, *New-York Tribune*, advertisement, September 3, 1842.

MRS. WILLIS, the Lady learned in Astrology, has returned from the South. She can be seen at her residence, No. 83 Rivington street, corner of Orchard, where she will give Ladies private Lectures of future events and what is past, on this science, for a short time. Name on the door and under the bell-pull. a16 1m15*

Ad for Mrs. Willis, *New-York Tribune*, advertisement, May 1, 1844.

MRS. WRIGHT, a lady learned in Astrology and Astronomy, will give ladies Private Lectures on Future Events, and what is past, on this science, at her residence, No. 188 EXETER STREET, between French and Hillen streets, 2d door from Hillen, name on the door. Mrs. Wright is the daughter of the celebrated Astrologer, Mrs. Willis, of New York, who is said to be the first lady that ever advertised this science. Mrs. Wright can be consulted from 8 in the morning until 9 in the evening. Price 50 cents. N a4-tA29*

Ad for Mrs. Wright, daughter of Mrs. Willis, *The Baltimore Sun*, amusements, August 11, 1848.

TAKE NOTICE—Mrs. H. ROEDER respectfully informs the the ladies and gentlemen that she can be consulted professionally, at her residence, No. 231 Division street, on Phrenology, Astrology, Palmistry, and Science, and give true and satisfactory information and advice of their affairs through life, and answer all secret and lawful questions with regard to health, wealth, and marriage, love affairs, journeys, law-suits, difficulties in business, sickness and death. Terms 50 cents.

m14 It*c

MESMERISM AS IT IS!—A surgical operation on a somnambulist while in an unconscious state! Dr THIERS will lecture on the extraordinary condition of the human system during a mesmeric or pathetic state, presenting thereby the *rationale* of monomania, mental hallucination, witchcraft, sympathetic convulsions, nervous congestion, catalepsy, &c., at the Methodist Church, No. 78 Allen street, near Grand, this evening, (Friday) commencing at 8 o'clock. Admission 12½ cents.

my14 It*c

Ad for Mrs. H. Roeder, *New York Daily Herald*, advertisement, May 14, 1847

A CARD.—MADAME DUBOYCE wishes to say to her friends of New York and its vicinity, that she has returned from the South, and located herself at No. 7½ Bowery, corner of Division street, at the building known as Croton Hall, on the third floor, over the Museum, where she will be happy to receive calls on Phrenology, Physiognomy, Astrology, and reading of the Planets, which pertain to past, present, and future events. The period of our birth is marked with some peculiar circumstances, that have a visible effect upon the future conduct of our lives, which Madame D. will read and explain to the astonishment and satisfaction, and she will answer all lawful questions concerning health, business, property, and love affairs, to those who will favor her with their patronage. She would say furthermore, that she uses no cards nor dice, and professes no witchcraft, but only what may be looked upon as science. Madame D. can be consulted from 8 o'clock in the morning until 10 in the evening. Terms 50 cents each.—P. S. Madame D. does not expect to remain in the city but a short time longer.

d21 2t*r

Ad for Madame Duboyce, *New York Daily Herald*, advertisement, December 22, 1847.

PHRENOLOGY AND ASTROLOGY—

To know by signs, to judge the turns of fate,
Is greater than to fill the seats of State;
The ruling stars above, by secret laws,
Determine fortune in her second cause.
These are a book, wherein we all may read,
And all should know, who would in life succeed,
What corresponding signs in man display
His future actions, points his devious way.
Thus in the heavens, his future fate to learn,
The present, past, and future to discern,
Correct his steps, improve the hours of life,
And, shunning error, live devoid of strife.

MADAME DUBOYCE is at present in the city, and can be consulted on the above science, in regard to Health, Wealth, Friends, Enemies, Lawsuits, Love, Courtship, and Marriage, at her residence, No. 169 Division street, at any time during the day and evening. Terms, from 50 to 25 cents for ladies, and 50 cents for gentlemen.

Ad for Madame Duboyce, *New York Daily Herald*, advertisement, September 30, 1848.

BE WISE IN TIME!

WE CAUTION THE PUBLIC against being imposed upon by those who pretend to read the planets, stars, and sciences. Let it be known to all, that unless such persons can tell you correctly the longitude of any planet you wish to name, either Mercury, Venus, Mars, or any other one you please to mention, then ask them to inform you what sign is rising in the Eastern horizon at the time you are speaking with them, and what planet is assigned to that sign.— If they can answer those few questions, then venture to spend your money with them; if they cannot answer correctly, then conclude they know nothing about the science, and you are about to be humbugged. We have called upon Madame DUBOYCE, and was really astonished at the correctness and systematic form in which she conducted her business. The sciences she practices, the truths she unfolds, is really worth the earliest attention of those who wish to consult her upon health, wealth, difficulties in business, law suits, love affairs, courtship, marriage—in fact, upon all affairs in life. This is truly the same lady that lived in Division street some few years since, and has returned, and now resides at 169 Division street. A large willow tree is before the door. Terms 50 cents.

N. B.—Instructions given in the above science on moderate terms. April 7. 1aw3mS.

Be Wise in Time!, *Brooklyn Evening Star*, advertisement, April 7, 1849.

Evangeline S. Adams

SCIENTIFIC

ASTROLOGY

Will Open Her Studio September 27

402 Carnegie Hall

NEW YORK CITY

Telephone 584 Columbus

Miss Evangeline S. Adams became suddenly famous by her remarkable prediction of the Windsor Hotel fire. The ill-fated proprietor, Warren Leland, confirmed the story before his death. He expressed the greatest confidence in Miss Adams and her reading of the stars.—New York Sunday Journal, April 30, 1899.

Circular, including General Indications for the current year, will be sent free on application.

Ad for Evangeline Adams, *New-York Tribune*, educational supplement, September 25, 1909.

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