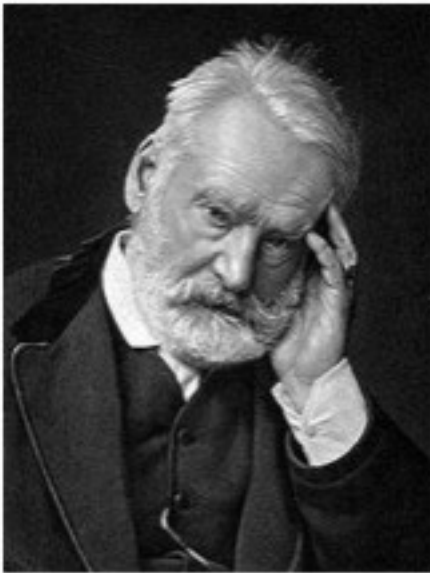


Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

The mediumship “epidemic” ignited by the strange rappings in the Hydesville, New York, home of the Fox family during March 1848, reached France in 1850. One of the Frenchmen intrigued by the various mediumship phenomena was the renowned author, poet, and statesman Victor Hugo (February 26, 1802 to May 22, 1885). After being exiled to the English island of Jersey by Emperor Napoleon III in 1852, Hugo met a number of Spiritualists living on the island and began taking part in séances.



Hugo was a Christian out of habit and custom, but, according to Matthew Josephson, one of his biographers, he became, in 1853, “spontaneously and unconsciously a real Christian – though a heretical one, suggesting the Gnostics or Manicheans of olden times.”¹ It was during September 1853 that Delphine de Girardin, a childhood friend and journalist, introduced Hugo to table tilting.

According to French philosopher and historian Ernest Bersot, mediumship quickly became a passion in France. People sat around tables for hours in anxious expectation of hearing from the spirits. During the winter, it was the most popular evening pastime. The Catholic Church condemned it, but few paid attention.

On January 4, 1855, Hugo wrote to de Girardin: “The tables tell us the most surprising things. I wish I could tell you about them and kiss your hands – or wings!...A whole system of cosmogony that I have been brooding over – and partly written out – during the last twenty years, has been confirmed by the tables, and with magnificent elaborations. We live nowadays in sight of a mysterious horizon which changes all perspectives of our exile; and we think of you to whom we owe the opening of this window.”²

During her 1853 visit with the Hugo family, Mme. de Girardin suggested they experiment with some table tipping after dinner one night. She explained the process – the sitters, at least those with psychic powers, place their hands on the top of the table and wait for it to raise one leg, sometimes two. When the spirits were ready, they would tap out messages on the floor, one tap for “Yes,” and two for “No.” Or a number of taps would indicate a letter of the alphabet, e.g., five taps for “E.”

Highly skeptical, Hugo declined. However, his wife, Adèle, agreed to it. Nothing happened that first night. They tried again the next night, but still without results. It took another five or six nights of patiently sitting around a table before it began tapping out words, and then only after Hugo, his sons Charles and Vic-

tor-Francois, and two other friends, joined the two women. It was later concluded that Charles was the medium. When Victor Hugo asked for an identity, the table tapped out, "d-e-a-d g-i-r-l." When he asked for a name, the table tapped out, "L-E-O-P-O-L-D-I-N-E." Léopoldine was Hugo's beloved daughter, who had drowned 12 years earlier at age 19.

Charles Hugo asked where his sister was. "O-F-G-O-D" came the reply. Further questioning followed in which short answers were provided. However, Hugo remained skeptical, suggesting that the sitters somehow made the table act through their thoughts. If it were indeed a spirit, Hugo wondered how he could know for sure it was his daughter and not some impostor spirit posing as her. After a number of other sittings, he apparently came around to believe that it was his daughter's spirit communicating.

In a subsequent sitting, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th Century Swiss social reformer, communicated and answered some questions relative to the nature of heaven in somewhat abstract terms. When Charles Hugo asked Rousseau why nature wants men to fear death. "God wants man to live, and therefore hides the nature of death from him," Rousseau replied.³

What may have convinced Hugo was communication on December 9, 1853 from André Chénier, a French poet, who was executed at the guillotine on July 25, 1794. He tapped out the remainder of the poem he had been working on just before his execution. It was in the same style as his work when living. While there is apparently an opposing view holding that it was more in Victor Hugo's style, it was recorded that Victor Hugo was not present at that particular séance. Chénier also produced new poems in the highest literary style, joining together a number of the poems he wrote when alive.

Chénier told of his last moments on earth, seeing the slop basket swaying beneath

his head, half-filled with blood from those executed before him, and, suddenly, hearing the odd creaking sound above his head. After the sensation that his head was falling into the slop basket, he found himself far above his headless body, his soul body being enveloped in a diaphanous sheath. He then felt the presence of his mother and mistress. He observed a luminous line separating his head from his body as his head rolled into the gutter and his body was dragged away.

During February 1854, the Jersey circle made contact with a spirit identifying himself as Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism. Hugo asked Luther why God does not better reveal himself, to which Luther replied: "Because doubt is the instrument which forges the human spirit. If the day were to come when the human spirit no longer doubted, the human soul would fly off and leave the plough behind, for it would have acquired wings. The earth would lie fallow. Now, God is the sower and man the harvester. The celestial seed demands that the human ploughshare remain in the furrow of life."⁴

Later in 1854, a spirit claiming to be Galileo communicated and was asked about the nature of the universe. Galileo responded with a long lecture, which, in effect, said that he didn't know much more than he did when in the flesh. "How can you expect me to tell you about the tenants and the borders of infinity when it is not tenantable and when it has no borders?" Galileo tapped out. "No one has ever been privy to the confidences of that immense being who is the accused, namely mystery itself. It has no intimate friends who can confide its nature to you; it alone knows its secret...I, Galileo, declare that I do not know the contents of infinity; I don't know where it begins and where it ends; I don't know what comes before, after, in the middle, to the right, to the left, east, west, south, or north; I don't know its inside or its outside;...Where is it going? I have no idea."⁵

Still, Hugo continued to ask other spirits the same questions, finally deciding that he wasn't going to ask again. He explained that it had become obvious to him that the world of the sublime will not allow itself to be forced to reveal its secrets.

Hugo's experiences with mediums led him to approach death with a positive philosophy. "When I go down to the grave, I can say, like many others I have finished my day's work, but I cannot say I have finished my life," he penned. "My days will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes on the twilight to open on the dawn."⁶

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¹ Josephson, Matthew, *Victor Hugo*, Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1942, p. 405.

² _____, p. 408.

³ Chambers, John, *Conversations with Eternity: The Forgotten Masterpiece of Victor Hugh*, New Paradigm Books, 1998, p. 36.

⁴ _____, p. 104.

⁵ _____, p. 200.

⁶ Savage, Minot, *Can Telepathy Explain*, G. Putnam and Sons., 1902, p. 208.