



adelma von vay



Anton Rozman

ADELMA VON VAY AND WORLDWIDE SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENT

International symposium on life and work of Adelma von Vay - Ljubljana, 03. december 2012

Introduction

Dear colleagues, dear guests,

At the beginning I would like to express a heartfelt welcome to all of you. Besides that, I direct my gratitude to the Institute for the Study of Christian Tradition and the Municipality of Slovenske Konjice to give us the opportunity to meet at this wonderful and mysterious place, created by Jože Plečnik, to present our researches and views on the life and work of Baroness Adelma von Vay.

It has to be emphasized that till recently Baroness Adelma von Vay represented to great majority of us an unknown land, as it was only a year or two ago when we, due to a series of strange coincidences, got the opportunity to begin to explore her life and work and the spiritualist tradition in Slovenia in general. Therefore, we request your comprehension and tolerance in regard to the possible inaccuracies.

The intention of my presentation is, as said in the synopsis, to present a historical, conceptual, and to some extent philosophical background of Adelma von Vay's life and work, as understood and presented by some of her contemporaries and some modern researchers of world-wide movement which is generally referred to by the words *spiritist* and/or *spiritualist*.

I present here a shortened version of the paper.

Year 1870 as a turning point in European history

Let us begin with the sketch of Vienna in 1870, the year when Adelma von Vay's main work, *Spirit, Power and Matter*, was published. It was a special year for this capital of music, as right at the beginning of the year, on January 6th, the Society of Music Lovers (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde) inaugurated their new building, now famous Musikverein. But two other important events happened in Vienna that same year: a death of Josef Strauss (August 20, 1827 – July 22, 1870), representing the sunset of era of romanticism and realism, and a birth of Oscar Straus (6 March 1870 – 11 January 1954), representing the dawn of new era of modernism.

Year 1870 is considered also by many historians as a turning point in the history of Europe. In that view, Roberto Vivarelli is saying: “This view of the events of 1870 obviously implies that a radical change took place in European Society at that time, a change in the underlying assumptions guiding all practical activities. Thus, important as this turning point was for the new developments that arose on the level of factual events – the affirmation of German hegemony over the continent, for example – it was even more important for the significance that those events came to assume by virtue of the new principles they embodied. In this way, one can say that 1870 opened a new phase in European history, new because qualitatively different – of a differing *Zeitgeist* – from the preceding phase.”¹

Influence of occultism

Famous historian of the history of the occult, James Webb, writes that “What was happening was the final collapse of the old world-order which had first been rudely assaulted during the Renaissance and Reformation. ... just when the Age of Reason seemed to be bearing fruit in the 19th century, there was an unexpected reaction against the very method which had brought success, a wild return to archaic forms of belief, and among the intelligentsia a sinister concentration on superstitions which had been thought buried ...”²

Nevertheless, Alison Butler asserts “...that the continuation of a magical tradition during the age of scientific advancement and secularization reflected the relevance of spiritual organizations, and the occult revival to intellectual history as a valid popularization of the rational interpretation of the world, ...”³

But “Monroe’s dissertation challenges previous scholarship by presenting the long history and development of the alternative beliefs which shaped occultism, and the inherent occult revival of the nineteenth century.”⁴

Occultism

The word *occult* comes from the Latin word *occultus* (clandestine, hidden, secret), referring to “knowledge of the hidden”.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *occult* was first used in 1545, meaning that which is “not apprehended, or not apprehensible, by the mind; beyond the range of understanding or of ordinary knowledge.” In 1633, the word received an additional meaning, denoting the subject of “those

¹ Roberto Vivarelli, *1870 in European History and Historiography*, University of Florence, Seminari internazionali per Federico Chabod, Perugia, June 1980.

² James Webb, *The Occult Underground*, (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 21-26.

³ Alison Butler, “Magical Beginnings: The Intellectual Origins of the Victorian Occult Revival.” *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, No. 9, 2003, pp. 78-95.

⁴ Monroe, John Warne. “Cartes de visite from the Other World: Spiritism and the Discourse of Laicism in the Early Third Republic.” *French Historical Studies*, 26 (2003): pp.119-153 through Katie Anderson, *The Occult Revival in Nineteenth Century France*.

ancient and medieval reputed sciences, held to involve the knowledge or use of agencies of a secret and mysterious nature (as magic, alchemy, astrology, and theology).”

While in *The Occult Roots of Nazism* Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke offers the following broad definition of the word: “Occultism has its basis in a religious way of thinking, the roots of which stretch back into antiquity and which may be described as the Western esoteric tradition. Its principal ingredients have been identified as Gnosticism, the Hermetic treatises on alchemy and magic, Neo-Platonism, and the Kabbalah, all originating in the eastern Mediterranean area during the first few centuries AD.”⁵

In addition, he says that behind various forms of occultism lies “a strong desire to reconcile the findings of modern natural science with a religious view that could restore man to a position of centrality and dignity in the universe.”⁶

Occultism and Esotericism

The word “esoteric” derives from the Greek *esotericos*, and is a comparative form of *eso*, meaning “within”. Its first known mention in Greek is in Lucian’s ascription to Aristotle of having “esoteric” (inner) and “exoteric” (outer) teachings. The word later came to designate the secret doctrines said to have been taught by Pythagoras to a select group of disciples, and, in general, to any teachings designed for or appropriate to an inner circle of disciples or initiates. In this sense, the word was brought into English in 1655 by Stanley in his *History of Philosophy*. Esotericism, as an academic field, refers to the study of alternative, marginalized, or dissident religious movements or philosophies whose proponents in general distinguish their own beliefs, practices, and experiences from public, institutionalized religious traditions. Among areas of investigation included in the field of esotericism are alchemy, astrology, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, magic, mysticism, Neoplatonism, new religious movements, connected with these currents, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century occult movements, Rosicrucianism, secret societies, and theosophy.

“As it is evident, this functional definition of esotericism emphasizes the root meaning of the word “esoteric,” inner. By their emphasis on the hidden, inner, or secret nature of their knowledge or perspective, esoteric groups or individuals reveal themselves. The occult is thus a subset of the phenomenon of esotericism.”⁷

By the 1840s, Western Europe and North America were seeing the beginnings of what would become a major revival of interest in Western esotericism and occultism. Though many of the key ideas of the revival were centuries old, they took on modern guises.

⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, NYU Press, 1985, p. 17.

⁶ Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, NYU Press, 1985, p. 29

⁷ Arthur Versluis, *The “Occult” in the Nineteen-Century America*, The Davies Group Publishers, 2005, p. 2

Esotericism and Spiritualism

“Antoine Favre ... explained that Spiritualism ‘does not belong to the history of esotericism properly speaking, but would be closely associated with it because of its wide influence and because of the problems it raised.’ In other words, Spiritualism though exerting influence upon various Western Esoteric groups could not itself be classified as a form of Western Esotericism because of its ambiguous definition. Because Spiritualism only required one common belief, it remained open to numerous interpretations and denominations.”⁸

Occultism versus Science

“Occult writings often derided mechanistic science and rationality, and many scholars have seen the occult revival as a response to the scientific materialism of the nineteenth century and the waning of institutionalized Christianity. Yet it would be wholly inaccurate to see the occult revival as simply anti-scientific. Historical work on the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century has dispelled the notion that scientific rationality explicitly excluded the occult from early modern science. See, for example, Hutchison, who sought “to re-evaluate current conceptions of the role of occult qualities in the Scientific Revolution” by showing shifts in understanding of occult qualities from “insensible,” as opposed to “manifest” qualities, to one in which occult qualities were considered to be “unintelligible” to science. Hutchison notes that “many leaders of the Scientific Revolution can be seen to be explicitly urging the acceptability of occult entities.”⁹

“Similarly, historians of the nineteenth-century occult revival have begun to emphasize that occultism’s relationship to science was not a simple rejection. Alison Winter has shown that mesmerism, for example, grew from medical discourse and continued to challenge emerging institutions of scientific validation. Far from being a marginalized pseudoscience, “mesmerism became the occasion for contests over authority in science, medicine, and intellectual life alike, and these contests revealed the location and character of such authority to have been more insecure than historians appreciate”¹⁰

Occultism and Perennial Philosophy

“The term *philosophia perennis* contained the concept that there is in existence an ancient religion or tradition that transcends time and has been available to all initiates throughout world history ... originated in Agostino Steuco’s publication *De perenni Philosophia* (1540).”¹¹

“... there is another tendency among occult organizations – a belief in the existence of a pure tradition that God (or the gods) imparted to humanity. This one ‘universal philosophy’ contained absolute

⁸ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 7.

⁹ Mark Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, Chicago, 1998, The University of Chicago Press, p. 4.

¹¹ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 170.

Truth though through the years it has been diluted by priests and rulers who used this tradition to oppress others. The belief in this ‘universal tradition’ and the idea that it can be recovered by the initiated ... resembled an earlier Western Esoteric concept found throughout the ancient philosophy of the Western world (especially during the Renaissance) known as the *prisca theologia* and the *philosophia perennis*. These ideas were rooted in the Hermetic and neo-Platonic writings of Numenius (ca. 140 CE), Plotinus (ca. 205-270 CE), Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and George Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355-1452).”¹²

Occult Healing

“Paracelsus (A.D. 1493-1541) seems to have been the first, among Westerns at least, to ascribe magnetism to the human body, and to suggest the use of this human magnetism for the cure of disease; in his time magnets must have been used for this purpose, as we can judge not only from his expression of “human magnetism”, but also from a work by Cardan, dated 1584, in which “there is an account of an experiment in anaesthesia, produced by the magnet”, and it is stated that “it was then customary to magnetize rings, which were worn round the neck or the arm, in order to cure nervous diseases.”¹³

“The Chaldean priests, the Parsis, the Hindus, and other civilized people of antiquity, also practiced cure by touch. ... The Egyptian sculptures show figures in magnetic positions, and the habit of taking to the sick cloths impregnated with a holy person is often met with in antiquity, and is spoken of in Acts, xix, 12. The cures wrought by Vespasian at Alexandria, as recorded by Suetonius and Tacitus, were obviously magnetic, and the idea of the curative properties of the “King’s touch” was but an inheritance from the time when the priestly functions attached to the royal office carried with them this healing power”.¹⁴

Nor was this use of human magnetism for the cure of diseases the only kind of magnetic phenomenon known to the ancients. Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, and other classical authors mention somnambulism, a state which may supervene naturally or be artificially induced, and is, in either case, a phenomenon now included under “hypnotism”. Nor can there be much doubt as to the nature of the utterances of the sacred virgins in pagan temples.”

Mesmerism

“Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) ... did not take his doctor’s degree until 1766, when he chose for his subject “The influence of the Planets on the Human Body”, following Paracelsus in the theory that the

¹² Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 169.

¹³ *Animal Magnetism*, by Binet and Fere. English Translation, 1888, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Hypnotism and Mesmerism – part II*, by Annie Besant, *The Universal Review*, for February, 1890 – Adyar Pamphlet 202, 1935, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India, p. 32.

¹⁵ *Somnolism and Psychism*, J. W. Haddock, M.D., 1851. p. 7 through *Hypnotism and Mesmerism – part II*, by Annie Besant, *The Universal Review*, for February, 1890 – Adyar Pamphlet 202, 1935, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India), p. 32.

planets influenced the human body through a subtle magnetic fluid. A Jesuit professor of Astronomy at Vienna, named Hehl, drew his attention to the loadstone as a curative agent, and Mesmer and Hehl together performed a number of experiments with magnetized steel plates. Some jealousy arose between them, apparently from Mesmer having discovered that “magnetic passes”, movements of the hand from above downwards, much increased the value of the steel plates; what is certain is that Mesmer and Hehl fell out, and that Mesmer’s proceedings so roused against him the Medical Faculty of Vienna that he was obliged to leave that city. He visited various towns, performing many cures in the hospitals and elsewhere, and after a varied experience came to the conclusion that the human body could produce effects similar to those produced by the magnet, and that “animal magnetism” was a powerful curative agent.”¹⁶

“Socially and culturally, mesmerism was first received, popularized and debated among elite, intellectual circles.¹⁷ “Ironically, the practice of mesmerism was also often deemed a theatrical falsity or “quackery” by elitists and the upper class. Why mesmerism was given so much attention can probably be attributed to the questions and concerns that it raised. Intellectuals wondered about the implications of mesmerism and how it could impact philosophical, political and social thought. Mesmerism and hypnosis were practices that involved unseen powers but were a popularized by the belief that they worked and were seen to have worked. What made mesmerism such a widely spread topic was because although it was a direct challenge to science and tangible objects, it was also fueled by its relation to the growing science of electricity and magnetism.”¹⁸

“A not exclusive list of the mesmeric developments would mention its influence on German Romantic culture, on Naturphilosophie and the philosophies of Schelling and Schopenhauer that developed the concepts of “indeterminism”.¹⁹ In France philosophy magnetism and its later development influenced the works of Maine de Biran and Bergson (Bergson was also president of the Society for Parapsychological Research.).

Mesmerism in Slovenia

“The idea that some people have special powers in their hands – the modern term would be bioenergy – and can use it to cure other people, is thought to be of Indo-European origin (Minarik 1971: 26). In the mid of 19th century Mesmer’s magnetism was well known in Slovenia. The most famous individual, who was involved in magnetism, certainly was the priest Jurij Humar, the “miracle worker” from Primskovo (where he served as a priest from 1876 to 1890), who is said to have cured people with his personal magnetism (see Žurga 1969). Humar himself (1819–1890) had no explanation for his unusual

¹⁶ Besant Annie, *Hypnotism and Mesmerism* – part II, The Universal Review, for February, 1890 – Adyar Pamphlet 202, 1935, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India, p. 39.

¹⁷ Silvia Mancini; J. Vale, “Animal Magnetism and Psychic Sciences, 1784–1935: The Rediscovery of a Lost Continent,” *Diogenes* 48 (2000), p. 2.

¹⁸ Patricia Fara, “An Attractive Therapy: Animal Magnetism in Eighteenth-Century England”, *History of Science* 33 (1995) pp. 127–177.

¹⁹ Bell Matthew, “The German tradition of psychology in literature and thought, 1700–1840”, *Cambridge Studies in German*, p. 176.

powers. The only similarity he could see was with Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), a doctor from Vienna, who was the first to study the effects of magnets and the magnetic field on healing. Jurij Humar was widely held to be a very successful healer with exceptional powers, and numerous foreigners visited him to be treated. The peasants of Dolenjska thought that Humar was omnipotent because of his successful treatment of people, and because of the story that he had once resuscitated a dead woman (Trdina 1987: 868). After his death people continued to visit his grave for treatment, and some do so even nowadays.”²⁰

Spiritualism

“The history of Spiritualism remains a fascinating and incomplete study in its own right with numerous practitioners who have been neglected by modern history.”²¹

“Historically, there are all varying types of Spiritualist groups including Christian orthodox and progressive agnostic belief systems; however all of these seems to agree on one overriding philosophical tenet – *that departed spirits of the recently deceased can communicate with the living through human beings known as mediums* – this belief is the main principle that unites all Spiritualists. ... What many people do not realize is the enormous influence that Spiritualism exerted on Victorian culture. Numerous famous individuals were influenced by this movement including Arthur Conan Doyle, Mary Todd Lincoln, and Victor Hugo to name just a few.”²²

“... one of the most eminent of modern American jurists, John W. Edmonds, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New York, declared in a London magazine that there were then at least ten millions of Spiritualists in the Unites States of America. No man was so well qualified at that time as he, to express an opinion upon this subject, for not only was he in correspondence with persons in all parts of the country, but the noble virtue of the man as well as his learning, his judicial impartiality and conservatism, made him a most competent and convincing witness. And another authority, a publicist of equally unblemished private and public reputation, the Hon. Robert Dale Owen, while endorsing Judge Edmonds’ estimate adds [*The Debatable Land between This World and the Next*, p. 174- London Ed. 1874] that there are at least an equal number in the rest of Christendom. To avoid all chance of exaggeration he, however, deducts one-fourth from both amounts and (in 1874) writes the sum-total of the so-called Spiritualists at fifteen millions. ...”²³

²⁰ Židov Nena, *Methods of Alternative Medicine – Are they really quite new in Slovenia?* *Etnolog* št. 10, 2000, p. 139-159.

²¹ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 1.

²² Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 2.

²³ Olcott H. S., *Spiritualism and Theosophy*, Adyar Pamphlet No. 104, August 1919, Lecture delivered at the rooms of the United Service Institution of India, Simla, 7 October 1880, Theosophical Publishing House Adyar, Chennai (Madras) India.

Spiritism and Spiritualism – the difference

The words *Spiritism*, *Spiritualism* and *Spirituality* are conceptually different and were best explained in Allan Kardec's Introduction to *The Spirits Book*.

“When new matters arise, new words regarding them are needed for the sake of clarity of language in order to avoid the confusion inherent in the multiple meanings of various terms. For example, the words *spiritual*, *spiritualist* and *spiritualism* each have a well-defined meaning. To give each of them a new meaning in order to apply it to the Spirits' Doctrine would be to multiply the already numerous causes of ambiguity. Strictly speaking, spiritualism is the opposite of materialism and everyone who believes there is something within them that is more than matter are spiritualists; however, it does not necessarily follow that they must therefore believe in the existence of spirits or in communications with the invisible world. Therefore, instead of the words *spiritual* and *spiritualism* for designating this latter belief, we have coined and employed the words *spiritist* and *spiritism*.

These two terms reflect their origin and their fundamental meaning, and they therefore have the advantage of being perfectly understandable. We will leave spiritualism to its own signification. Hence, we will say that the principle of the Spiritist Doctrine or Spiritism is based on the relationship between the material world and the invisible world, the latter being inhabited by beings known as spirits. The adherents of Spiritism will be called Spiritists. ... In a specialized sense, *The Spirits' Book* contains the Spiritist Doctrine; in a generalized sense, it is linked to spiritualism and represents one aspect of it. That is why we have inscribed the words on the title-page: Spiritualist Philosophy.”

Spiritualism in the United States of America

Modern Spiritualism then actually began in 1848 at the Fox household out in the city of Hydesville, New York. “The weird behavior of two country girls, the one twelve and the other nine, ... was like a spark to power for the release of religious fancy; for Margaret and Kate Fox were supposed to have picked up again the thread of communication between the world of human consciousness and the world of disembodied spirits, and thus to have given fresh reinforcement to man's assurance of immortality.

“The Davenport brothers were pioneers of the early Spiritualist movement for their cabinet séances, physical mediumship, and international touring. By the end of their career which spanned the Victorian age from 1855 until 1877 they had become internationally renowned having performed sittings in the United States, Canada, England, France, Russia, and as far as Australia.

“The three most famous American mediums deserve somewhat more extended treatment. The first of the trio is Daniel Dunglas Home ... While a child, spiritual power manifested itself to him to his terror and annoyance. ... He was thus cast on the world without friends, but the power that he possessed raised him friends and sent him forth from America to be the planter of Spiritualism all over Europe.”

²⁴ Kardec Allan, *The Spirits' Book*, translation Anna Blackwell, Boston, Colby and Rich, 1893, p. i.

“The second ... was Andrew Jackson Davis. His function seemed to be that of the seer and the scribe, rather than of the producer of material operations. ... he became the clairvoyant and a mesmeric lecturer, and in this capacity began to excite wonder by his revelations. He diagnosed and healed diseases, and prescribed for scores who came to him, surprising both patients and physicians by his competence. Then he began to see “into the heart of things,” to descry the essential nature of the world and the spiritual constitution of the universe. In 1845 he delivered one hundred and fifty-seven lectures in New York which announced a new philosophy of the universe. They were published under the title, *Nature's Divine Revelation*, a book of eight hundred pages. Davis then became a voluminous writer. He published his *The Great Harmonia* (Boston 1850); *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse* (New York, 1851); *The Penetralia* (Boston, 1856); *The Present Age and Inner Life* (New York, 1853); and *The Magic Staff* (Boston, 1858). He edited a periodical, *The Herald of Progress*.”

“Thomas Lake Harris, the third great representative, was much attracted by Davis’ *The Divine Revelations of Nature*, but developed spiritistic powers along a somewhat different line, that of poetic inspiration. In his early exhibitions of this supernormal faculty he dictated two epics, containing occasionally excellent verse, under the alleged influence of Byron, Shelley, Keats and others. ... an English publisher, tells us that Harris dictated and he wrote down *The Lyric of the Golden Age*, a poem of 381 pages, in ninety-four hours!”

“Two of the most eminent representatives of the movement in its earliest days were Prof. Robert Hare, an eminent scientist and the inventor of the oxyhydrogen blow-pipe, and Judge Edmonds, a leading jurist. Both these men had approached the subject at first in a skeptical spirit, with the intention of disclosing its unsound premises; but they were fair enough to study the evidence impartially, with the result that both were convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena. Both avowed their convictions courageously in public, and Judge Edmonds made extensive lecture tours of the country, the propaganda effect of which was great.”²⁵

Spiritism in Europe

When Spiritualism made its way across the Atlantic to the shores of France it was renamed Spiritism by Allan Kardec as it was already explained.

“Kardec agreed that magnetism revealed the fluidic action and was based primarily on faith; however, Spiritism revealed another power which could be combined with the power of prayer. For Kardec, Spiritism and magnetism remained two distinct belief systems though a person could be healed with the assistance of a magnetizer who was assisted by a spirit. ... Kardec writes that ‘magnetism prepared the way for Spiritism’, and he adds that he accepted magnetism for decades before becoming a Spiritist.”

“Kardec went to establish the Society for Spiritist Studies (*Societe des etudes spirites*) and in 1857 published *The Spirits Book* (*Livre des esprits*) ... written in a similar style as the Catholic Catechisms ..., followed by the *Book of Mediums* (*Livre des mediums*) in 1861. This book provided detailed directions for establishing an autonomous Spiritist group ... The content of this work was extremely practical and attempted to answer any questions that the aspiring Spiritis may have wondered about;

²⁵ Kuhn Alvin Boyd, *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom*, 1930, p. 22.

... Kardec's Spiritism remained accessible and as a result grew to great numbers. In 1869 edition of the *Revue Spirite* it was estimated that in Europe Spiritists numbered around one million six hundred thousand of those residing in France.”

“One biographer has noted that though Kardec's presentation of ideas was original, the concepts themselves were not. In fact, many of his doctrines were simply derived from mid-nineteenth century French Romantic Socialist thinkers such as Fourier, Eugene Pelletan and Jean Reynaud who focused on the concepts of charity and the ‘law of progress’ which both became basic tenets of Kardec's Spiritism.”²⁶

Orphic Society and Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899)

Novelist and statesman Edward Bulwer-Lytton's involvement with the occult began in the atmosphere of Mesmerism. During the 1850s Bulwer-Lytton conducted researches and experiments in spiritualism and Mesmerism. His reputation as an initiate rests on his novel *Zanoni*, which is the most significant occult novel of 19th-century English literature.

“Emma Hardinge Britten was an influential Spiritualist and occultist ... Eventually she was discovered by a mystical circle in the 1840s called the ‘Orphic Society’ which was joined by prominent figures in the history of Western Esotericism including Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1805-1873) the well-known occult author, Richard James Morrison (1795-1874) the astrologer who went by pseudonym Zadkiel, and the British diplomat Sir Charles Wyke to name a few. ... The Orphic Circle clearly played an influential role in the development of magic and occultism in England during most of the 19th century; ...”²⁷

Emma Hardinge Britten played a pivotal role in organising and bringing together Spiritualists both by her powerful inspired speaking and her ability to communicate by pen and publish to a wider audience. From 1856 until the end of her life she was a frequent contributor to many Spiritualist journals, using several pseudonyms as well as her own name. She also edited several Spiritualist journals. In addition to *The Christian Spiritualist* at New York (May 1854-May 1857), which she edited only during the last year of its publication, she founded and edited *The Western Star* at Boston (July-December 1872) and *The Unseen Universe* at Manchester (April 1892- March 1893). More significantly, she edited the English Spiritualist journal, *The Two Worlds*, for the first four years of its long existence (November 1887-February 1892). Britten was also the author of two massive histories of Spiritualism, *Modern American Spiritualism* (1870) and *Nineteenth Century Miracles* (1883). Also, she and her husband edited and published two books for Chevalier Louis de B—, based on the doctrines and practices of the Orphic Circle: *Art Magic* (1876), a treatise on the history and theory of magic, and *Ghost Land* (1876), an occult biographical novel.

²⁶ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 133.

²⁷ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, pp. 294-295.

Seven Principles of Spiritualism

At the first National Conference in 1890, Emma Hardinge Britten advocated her concept for the fundamental basis of Spiritualist philosophy which later became the Seven Principles of Spiritualism that are widely accepted by Spiritualists and Spiritualist organisations around the world. Resolutions were carried unanimously that have since shaped the direction of Modern Spiritualism.

The Fatherhood of God.

The core belief of the religious philosophy of Spiritualism is the acceptance of a Divine Energy. This force, whatever name given to it, has created all there is and sustains all its creation. The 'Spirit of God' exists within and around everything. It is within all of us: we are all children of God so are part of one family. We acknowledge God as our Father.

The Brotherhood of Man.

We are all part of the universal creative force and therefore one family in God. The operation of true Brotherhood throughout the world would create betterment to the lives of many, bringing equality, security and peace. Spiritualists try to understand the needs of others and help all people regardless of race, colour or creed.

The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.

Communion with divine energy is a natural and essential part of existence. Communication between Spirit itself and its creations is an inbuilt ability. Spiritualists use this ability for communication directly, or via a medium, between those in the spirit world and ourselves. This is not supernatural; it is a normal activity. The main purpose of communication with the spirit world is to provide the evidence which supports our philosophy. The Ministry of Angels brings enhanced wisdom to enlighten the individual, society and the world in which we live. This includes those who are dedicated to the welfare and service of mankind bringing inspiration guidance and healing.

The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul.

Spirit is part of the 'Creative Force' and thus indestructible. Energy cannot be destroyed; it can only change its form. After death the physical body is left behind whilst the soul continues to exist in a different dimension that we call the spirit world. The individual personality continues unchanged by the event we call 'death'.

Personal Responsibility.

In His wisdom, God has given us enormous potential; we can use that potential to improve our own lives and the lives of others. We have the ability to make decisions throughout our lives as we see fit. What each of us makes of our life is our Personal Responsibility no one can replace or override that right. No other person or influence can put right our wrong doings.

Compensation and Retribution hereafter for all the Good and Evil deeds done on earth.

This Principle expresses the natural law of 'cause and effect'. This law operates now, on earth, as well as in the spirit world. As we move through life making choices, the outcome of those choices affects our soul growth. When we leave this earthly life there will be no divine judgement. We will have the opportunity to reassess, take stock and decide what might have been done differently.

Eternal Progress open to every Human Soul.

Eternity does not begin at death; Progress is open to all now! Any action, or intent to change, to

promote soul growth and progression, creates a positive reaction. There will always be the opportunity to develop and move forward, no one is ever deprived of the all embracing love of God.

Emma Hardinge Britten lived and worked in close contact with esotericists, magicians and other occultists for nearly two-thirds of a century, with Spiritualists for nearly half a century, and with Theosophists for nearly a quarter of a century. By the end of her life, therefore, she had developed an extremely far-reaching network of acquaintances within these three overlapping groups of people, although it was largely limited to the United States and England. It is along this network that her direct and indirect influence made itself felt. Her original synthesis of religious, magical, occult, social and political ideas and ideals was an extremely powerful and attractive one in its day, and retains considerable power even now.

Scientists

“Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913) is best remembered for his role as the independent co-founder for the theory of natural selection alongside Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary theory. ... He believed that the evolution of humanity was unique for the reason that man had evolved a mind which protected him from the laws of natural selection. This unique evolution was the result of unknown forces working within the universe.”²⁸

In Spiritualism, Wallace would find the answers that would fill in the metaphysical gaps that his scientific theories had left unfilled. Spiritualism appeared to be an obvious religion for any scientist based upon Wallace’s view that “Spiritualism is an experimental science and affords the only sure foundation for a true philosophy and a pure religion ... it, and it alone, is able to harmonize conflicting creeds ... it appeals to evidence instead of faith, and substitutes facts for opinions.”²⁹

Witnessing definite spiritual phenomena in 1865 he began “his journey into Spiritualism. He would not be the only scientist to join the ranks of Spiritualism. There were several other well-known scientist who believed in the basic tenets of Spiritualism during this time period as well. These included: Sir William Crookes, chemist, Sir Oliver Lodge, physicist, Richard Norris Wolfendon, psychologist and oceanographer, and Cromwell Fleetwood (C.F.) Varley, engineer, to name but a few.”³⁰

“Dr. Perty, Professor of Natural Science at the University of Berne; Prof. Hoffmann, of the Würzburg University; Dr. Boutlerof, Professor of Chemistry at St. Petersburg; Prof. Zöllner, of Leipzig, author of *Transcendental Physics*; Camille Flammarion, Astronomer Royal of France; Professors Hare and Mapes, of the United States, and numbers of others. All these were driven to accept the theory generally understood as ‘Spiritual’, as the only one which covered the facts with which they had become familiar.”³¹

²⁸ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, pp. 315-318.

²⁹ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 325.

³⁰ Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, p. 319.

Decline of Spiritualism

“In the 1870s there was talk of a decline (whether actual or imagined) in the Spiritualist movement across the Western world due primarily to the rise of countless exposures of ‘reputable mediums’. Evidence of this decline was suggested by Frank Podmore the historian of Spiritualism and in the public’s general attitude as summarized in the following New York Times article titled ‘A Decline in Spiritualism’ published on 23 February 1875: “... From the ‘eight to eleven millions’ of men and women in the country, who, according to the assertion of Mr. Alfred Wallace, a noted English writer, may be classed as believers in Spiritualism there has come up no great declaration of belief ... The decline, once fairly begun, will be rapid. ... This ‘decline’ would impact both Britten and Blavatsky who were attempting to establish themselves as the reformers of this fading movement and to institutionalize this religious tradition both philosophically and methodologically. In essence, they were attempting to instigate a revival of Spiritualism. In order to accomplish this goal, these two women needed to procure impressionable and dedicated converts who would take a philosophical interest in the ideals of Spiritualism not just by attending the occasional séance, but by ordering books, attending lectures, and paying dues. Thus, the Theosophical Society was formed out of this desire to revitalize Spiritualism and to organize it philosophically.”³²

Spiritism in Austria

An important researcher in the field of magnetism was Baron Carl Ludwig Reichenbach (1788–1869), a chemist and expert in mining, who discovered Paraffin, Creosote, and some fractions of mineral oil. In 1844 he claimed to have discovered a new force which he named ‘Od’, ‘the Odic or Odylic Force’, which was similar to Mesmer’s ‘Universal Flood’, but unlike Animal Magnetism thought to be bi-polar.³³ Another important figure in Austria was Baron Lazar Hellenbach von Paczolay (1827–1887), a philosopher, politician and prolific author, close friend of German philosopher Carl du Prel and astrophysicist Friedrich Zöllner. He succeeded in bringing a number of mediums to Vienna for experiments, including Eglinton, Slade, and Bastian and wrote a number of books and papers, the most prominent being: “Eine Philosophie des gesunden Menschenverstandes” (A Philosophy of Sober Common Sense), “Die Vorurtheile der Menschheit” (The Prejudices of Man) in 3 volumes and “Geburt und Tod als Wechsel der Anschauungsformen oder die Doppel-Natur des Menschen” (Birth and Death as Change of Modes of Perception or the Double-Nature of Man).³⁴

In 1840s and 1850s a Hungarian nobleman, Count Ferencz Szapary (1804–1875), published in Paris number of books about somnambulism, magnetism and magnetotherapy in German language, but it was only in 1860 when Constantin Delhez, presumably a Belgian national living as a French language teacher in Vienna, imported spiritism to Vienna by publishing translations of Kardec’s works in

³¹ Kislbury Emily, *Spiritualism in Its Relation to Theosophy*, F.T.S. A paper read before the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1892)

³² Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society – The History of a Spiritualist movement*, Boca Raton, Brown Walker Press, 2012, pp. 308-309.

³³ Peter Mulacz, Vienna - <http://parapsychologie.info/history.htm>

³⁴ Peter Mulacz, Vienna - <http://parapsychologie.info/history.htm>

German language. He also established first spiritist association and run the spiritistic magazine 'Light of the Beyond or a Selection of Flowers from the Garden of Spiritism - A Journal for Spiritist Science and Doctrine', which mainly contained spiritualist teachings and trance transcripts. A frequent contributor to Delhez' journal was also Baroness Adelma von Vay.³⁵

Adelma von Vay writes (*Nineteenth Century Miracles*, Spiritualism in Austria, pp. 413-415) that "in fact Spiritualism never obtained much foothold in Vienna. In Buda-Pesth it was quite otherwise."

Adelma von Vay's spiritistic and aristocratic connections - 1

The first account on Adelma von Vay's involvement in the mainstream of European Spiritism comes from William Henry Harrison (1841-1897), Editor of the leading spiritualist newspaper *The Spiritualist*, who used to mention, on the advertising page of the *Spiritualist*, that "The Contributors to its [The Spiritualist] pages comprise leading and more experienced Spiritualists, including many eminent in the ranks of Literature, Art, Science, and the Nobility of Europe." Then, in continuation, he brings a list of these contributors, which includes a great number of Adelma von Vay's correspondents as presented by her in her book *Aus Meinem Leben* (From my Life - Vol. II, pp. 943-982): Prinz Emil de Sayn Wittgenstein, Lady Marie Caithness, Robert Dale Owen, Alexander Aksakov, Alfred Russell Wallace, Mrs. Makdougall Gregory, Emma Hardinge Britten, Leon Favre (Consul-General of France at Trieste), Benjamin Coleman, Miss Emily Kislingbury.

Adelma von Vay's spiritistic and aristocratic connections - 2

There are other prominent Spiritualist which are mentioned in Adelma's Diary as her correspondents, as for instance aristocrats: Baron Lazar de Paczolay Hellenbach, Baron Heiter von Schreckenbug, Baron von der Koone, Grafın Katharina Emerich and her husband, Leonhardt von Lindeck, Ulrich von Cilli, Graf Fritz Oberndorf, Graf Otto von Solms-Rödelheim, Ida von Kleist, non-aristocratic spiritualists: Joseph Rodes Buchanan, William Denton, Eugene Crowell, Caroline Corner, Professor Glücklich, Gustav Wilhelm Gessmann, Benjamin Kovacs, G. N. Gamow, Constantin Delhez, Alexander Redwitz, Maximilian Perty, Alexander Jung, Prosper Schücking, Vinzenz Chiavacci, Florence Marryat, Rene Caillie, Madame Collignon, Cicely L'Estange, Manne Cyprien Vignes, Fenzi Parisi, Dottor Urbanetti and mediums: Franziska Friedmann, Lotti Fowler, Elisabeth Guppy, James M. Peebles, and so on.

Adelma's and her husband connection with and involvement in the operation of the Theosophical Society have yet to be confirmed. It is obvious, from the passages from *Isis Unveiled* and *Old Diary Leaves*, that she was H. P. Blavatsky's and H. S. Olcott's close friend and correspondent, but this correspondence has yet to be discovered and examined.

³⁵ Peter Mulacz, Vienna - <http://parapsychologie.info/history.htm>

Adelma von Vay's role in the spiritualist movement

Most certainly Adelma von Vay's greatest contribution to the Spiritualist movement was the publication of the book *Geist-Kraft-Stoff* (Spirit, Force and Matter) in 1870. About a year later she was among the founders of the Verein spiriter Forscher (Society of Spiritist Researchers), the others being Odon von Vay, her husband, and the first president of the Society, Dr. Adolf Grünhut (1826-1906), pioneer of the spiritist movement in Hungary and author of two volumes book *Studies in Spiritism* in Hungarian language, Mr. Anton Prohasker and others. The Society based its work on the principles revealed in Adelma's book and regularly published a spiritist magazine.

Adelma was regular contributor to several Spiritualist magazines: *The Banner of Light*, *The Spiritualist* and *The Medium and Daybreak*, her article *Haunting Spirits* was included by W. H. Harrison's in his book *Rifts in the veil*, and her report on the *Spiritism in Austria* was included by E. H. Britten in her historical review of Spiritualism, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*.

It is somehow strange Adelma's book *Spirit, Force and Matter* was translated into English as late as in 1948, for it was the first write-up which brought to the light some basic principles of spiritualist cosmogony. Moreover, the *Art Magic* by Chevalier Louis de B—, which was edited and published by E.H. Britten, seems to reveal in the Introductory's Sections I and II the same principles.

Till now the research of Adelma von Vay's life and work has opened more questions than it offered answers, therefore this Symposium actually represents the beginning of proper research of Adelma's influence as a spiritist, healer and humanitarian.
