

Reflections of mesmerism in literature

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SUMMARY

Controversial procedures in medicine are likely to be discussed in the community as everyone is interested in their health. If the practice is subjective, that is, clear proof is not readily forthcoming, there are likely to be both strong supporters and opponents. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when the dissemination of news was slow, such controversies lasted many years and were likely to appear in novels, drama and poetry of the period. This article gives examples of animal magnetism, mesmerism and hypnosis in contemporary literature.

Key Words: mesmerism, animal magnetism, hypnosis

Mesmerism, animal magnetism, hypnotism, psychotic trances, somnambulism, phrenology, clairvoyance, the occult and spiritualism are as interwoven as a tangle of long forgotten string lurking at the back of a drawer. Similarly interwoven are the threads that weave between science and literature.

Franz Anton Mesmer graduated from the University of Vienna in 1766 and practised in the city. For a number of years he practised traditional medicine. After eight years or so he found he could calm and relieve the symptoms of hysteria, depression and convulsions by a combination of close attention to the patient, hand movements and the application of magnets or magnetic forces. Gradually becoming more adept and successful, Mesmer's fame spread when he went to Paris in 1778 where he told society of his ability to heal through the most marvellous, invisible means. It was the era of the gentleman scientist. Many lesser citizens also enjoyed discussing science, the more obscure or novel the better. The fact that much of what was claimed was disproved by clear thinking analysis did not diminish the thrill of attending a new theatrical demonstration, a discussion in someone's rooms or the excitement of allowing oneself to be a patient or a subject. It was a pastime in which real knowledge and learning was often lacking. Scientific proof as we know it today was completely lacking.

The following year in 1779 Mesmer published *Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal* and convinced steadily increasing numbers of patients that their symptoms had been alleviated, or in some

cases even cured, during their attendance in his dimly lit and spectacularly decorated rooms. Mesmer claimed his magic, magnetic fluid somehow unblocked obstructions within the patient that were causing ill health or mental disharmony. He often used a rod to direct the magnetism.

The middle classes struggled to understand these new, allegedly scientific discoveries but were unwavering in their belief. Physicians became jealous of Mesmer's numerous patients. Seeing a financial opportunity in these reactions, Mesmer began to train assistants and colleagues. It became almost routine (or fashionable) for patients to undergo a crisis or even convulsions before the 'cure' manifested itself.

CAN ANIMAL MAGNETISM BE SUBSTANTIATED?

Debates raged and in 1784 two French Royal Commissions were set up to investigate animal magnetism or mesmerism. The first was established with members of the Paris Faculty of Medicine and the Royal Academy of Sciences¹. The second was composed of members of the Royal Society of Medicine¹. Both reports were sceptical suggesting the claims of success were in many instances influenced by gullibility, hope, exercise, change of diet and the body healing itself over time. Not one instance of a cure of a patient ill from a known and serious cause was observed.

These reports caused major controversy. Pamphlets galore were published by the supporters of Mesmer (among them Charles d'Eslon—but he later first wavered and then became critical—and Charles Hervier) and his detractors (Jean Jacques Paulet and the medical profession generally).

A third report was not published until 1800 because it was intended originally only for the king as it

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concerned the possible sexual opportunities afforded to male magnetists when treating female patients². The danger was that:

L'homme qui magnétise a ordinairement les genoux de la femme renfermés dans les siens; les genoux et toutes les parties inférieures du corps, sont par conséquent en contact. La main est appliquée sur les hypocondres et quelquefois plus bas sur les ovaires,
and this causes problems because:

... la plupart des femmes qui vont au traitement du Magnétisme ne sont pas réellement malades. Beaucoup y viennent par oisiveté et par amusement; d'autres qui ont quelques incommodités, n'en conservent pas moins leur fraîcheur et leur force; leurs sens sont tous entiers; leur jeunesse a toute sa sensibilité. Elles ont assez de charmes pour agir sur le médecin; elles ont assez de santé pour que le médecin agisse sur elles: alors le danger est réciproque.

An earlier French report in the *The Gentleman's Museum* concluded:

*Finally, the touch, imitation, and imagination, are the three greatest causes of the effects attributed to Magnetism. M. D'Elson seems to acknowledge the later; but the Committee cannot agree with him, that so dangerous a remedy ought to be employed: for convulsions are a strong disorder in themselves, and, if suffered to be communicated in this manner, may extend to a whole city.*³

Elizabeth Inchbald, an English playwright who quickly responded to current topics for her new plays, in 1789 wrote *Animal magnetism: a farce of three acts* in which mesmerism is satirised. Along with the usual love affairs, a doctor who has failed some exams and wishes to learn about animal magnetism is imposed upon by a de Marquis de Lancy's valet disguised as a doctor.

Doc. I presume, Sir, you are Doctor Mystery, author, and first discoverer of that healing and sublime art, Animal Magnetism.

La F. (the disguised valet) I am ...

Doc. Astonishing give me proof of your art directly;—do satisfy my curiosity.

La F. I will—by this wand, in which is a magnet, in a particular position, I will so direct the fluid, that it shall immediately give you the most excruciating rheumatism, which will last a couple of hours; I will then change it to gout—then to strong convulsions—and after into a raging fever—and in this manner shall your curiosity become satisfied. (Holds up his wand as if to magnetize.) ...

Doc. (Whispers him) Pray, Doctor is it true what they report, that he, who is once in possession of your art, if he pleases, make every woman who comes near him, in love with him?

*La F. True—it certainly is.*⁴

This excerpt from act one encapsulates the concerns with animal magnetism (and mesmerism and hypnosis), charlatan doctors, spurious claims and the uses to which unscrupulous men might stoop in their relations with ladies.

Even scientists like Erasmus Darwin mentioned mesmerism in their writings, though with a touch of scepticism. In *The Botanic Garden* (1791), when writing about witchcraft, superstitions, folklore and diving, Darwin added to the lines:

“Thrice round the grave CIRCAE prints her tread
And chaunts the numbers which disturb the dead”⁵,

the footnote:

*... in this very year, there were many in France, and some in England who underwent an enchantment without any diving rod at all, and believing themselves to be affected by an invisible agent, which the Enchanter called Animal Magnetism!*⁵

In a typical 18th century love story, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (1790), men pretending to be poisoned are restored to health by a doctor using a magnet⁶.

EXAMPLES OF APPARENT SUCCESS

The French Revolution (1789–1799) temporarily displaced French interest in magnetism and the subject; personalities who feared the guillotine

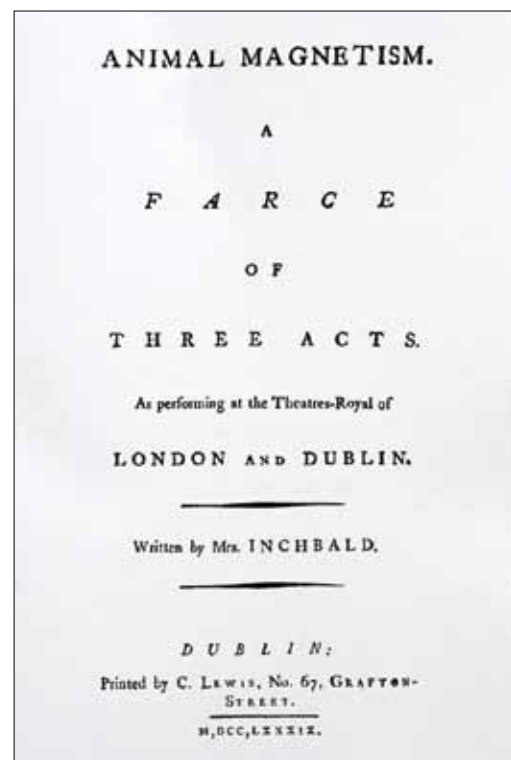


FIGURE 1: Title page from Inchbald's 1789 play, *Animal magnetism*.

migrated to other European countries. Military and other officials, who of necessity remained in France, used the opportunity to spread the mysteries of magnetism among their colleagues. Three Puységur brothers, educated aristocrats who held high military positions, found they had some mesmeric skills and could bring about apparent cures. They found the will of the operator to be important and, at least to some extent, the willingness or suitability of the person to be treated. Patients tended to fall into a sleep or a somnambulant state. This was called artificial somnambulism or magnetic somnambulism (to distinguish it from natural somnambulism or sleep walking). The Puységurs still believed in the principle of the magnetic or vivifying fluid but regarded the will as important; the importance of the will was a step toward hypnotism, a term coined by James Braid in 1843⁷.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was well read in German metaphysics; he wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in 1789. He tells the tale of a sailor buttonholing and delaying a person on his way to a wedding by fascinating or mesmerising him with a long story.

*He holds him with his skinny hand,
‘There was a ship,’ quoth he.
‘Hold off! Unhand me, grey beard loon!’
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.
He holds him with his glittering eye –
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years’ child:
The mariner hath his will.
The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot but choose to hear ...⁸*

Coleridge and Scottish doctor John Brown (1735–



FIGURE 2: Illustration by J. Noel Pateon, ‘The mariner and the wedding-guest’. In: Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Art Union of London, 1863.

1788), who had died just before the composition of the poem, believed that the human nervous system could be influenced by stimulation; Brown’s methods included exercise, alcohol or opium and Coleridge’s the recitation of poetry. Both are in some way homologous or analogous to mesmerism. Also demonstrated is the common experience of being unable to leave the determined storyteller, raising the question: how much is politeness and how much is the power of fascination?

In Germany in 1811 C. A. F. Kluge published a summary of magnetism⁹. He described the heat felt by the patient, the streaming movements and responsive sleep or somnambulant episodes in which he or she speaks spontaneously or on demand. He also defined the following attributes of the typical magnetiser: in good health, confident, between 25 and 50 years old, passes made with the flat of the hand and fingers, from the head downwards. The effect of the passes could be reinforced by breathing on the affected part or with the aid of magnetised wood, glass or water. Kluge believed that the ganglia of the sympathetic nervous system, rather than the brain, were involved.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was mesmerised by Jane Williams in 1820 at Pisa in order to avoid surgery for kidney stones. Two years later he wrote about the experience in *The magnetic lady to her patient*:

*Sleep, sleep on! forget thy pain;
My hand is on thy brow,
My spirit on thy brain;
My pity on thy heart, poor friend;
And from my fingers flow
The powers of life, and like a sign,
Seal thee from thine hour of woe;
And brood on thee, but may not blend
With thine ...
‘The spell is done. How feel you now?’
‘Better—Quite well,’ replies
The sleeper.—‘What would do
You good when suffering and awake?
What cure your head and side?—’
‘What would cure, that would kill me, Jane:
And as I must on earth abide
Awhile, yet tempt me not to break
My chain.’¹⁰*

Mary Shelley (née Godwin) was Percy Shelley’s second wife; they fell in love in 1814. Her well known *Frankenstein* (1818) contains references to mesmeric trances. The origin of *Frankenstein* (whose name was that of the creator of the monster, not the monster himself) sprang from a competition between Byron, his doctor (John Polidori), Mary and Percy Shelley and others to compose a supernatural story.



FIGURE 3: Illustration by Theodore von Holst from an edition of *Frankenstein* published in 1831 by Colburn and Bentley, London.

What started as a thought or a dream became a conversational tale, then a short story and finally a novel that has mesmerised many readers. It is the likely the inspiration for Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897), a tale full of spells, trances, telepathy and mesmerism.

Following Mrs Inchbald's play⁴, many stage presentations had somnambulistic or mesmeric content including ballets, plays, vaudevilles and operas. An excellent example is *La somnambule, ou l'arrivé d'un nouveau seigneur*¹¹, a ballet pantomime performed in Paris in 1827 with music by Fernand Hérold. Others include *La villageoise somnambule, Ou les deux Financées, La petite somnambule, Ou coquetterie et gourmandise* and *La Somnambule du Pont-aux-chou*.

In 1842 Honoré de Balzac published *Ursule Mirouët* (set in 1829), a novel from *La Comédie Humaine*. Balzac's interest in mesmerism is made clear in lengthy passages about magnetism, mesmerism, hypnosis and clairvoyance. Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier also wrote about these subjects.

In England, while many denounced the scientific basis of mesmerism, travelling showmen (eager to make a living from fascinated untravelled, unsophisticated villagers and townspeople) kept the subject alive. A showman from France or Germany had slightly more cachet than a native-born and such was the case when Baron Dupotet, who could hardly speak English, came to London in 1837 as a strong believer in mesmerism who wished to make money.

His enthusiasm infected Professor John Elliotson, a busy but advanced-thinking doctor at London University who practised at the University College Hospital. Elliotson started to use mesmerism in his practice. He often demonstrated his new found skills on two sisters who suffered from epilepsy. They also seemed precocious and came to like their renown, overplaying their part, claiming be able to see death looming over fellow patients and able to read with parts of the body other than their eyes. Consequently the College Hospital decided in the last days of 1838 that Professor John Elliotson should no longer practise magnetism or mesmeric phenomena¹² in its wards. However the students were sad to see him go and gave him a handsome farewell and a gift in April 1840.

Elliotson's renown and his more successful cases, coupled with the appearance of other popular lecturers such as Charles LaFontaine and fuelled by controversy and conflicting claims, caused popular interest and opinion to grow. Elliotson defended his beliefs in 1843 by establishing *The Zoist*, a journal that ran for 10 years. The title is derived from a combination of Greek words referring to the body including the brain (phrenology) and life itself (mesmerism). In this publication mesmerism and phrenology were sometimes linked as phrenomesmerism.

The editor of a rival journal poked fun at the logo on the cover of *The Zoist* suggesting that it represented Elliotson reading and surrounded by a pair of scantily clad patients or assistants¹³. This referred to Elliotson's choice of his two principal subjects (Elizabeth and Jane O'Key) at University College London.

MESMERISM AND HYPNOTISM

Some saw Elliotson as a misguided quack, but interest in mesmerism or hypnotism continued to spread worldwide. It was a popular topic among the middle and upper classes while the less well educated proved to be susceptible to mesmeric trances. He quarrelled with many fellow mesmerists including James Braid, a scrupulous researcher who coined the terms hypnosis and hypnotism. However it seems that Elliotson was, apart from his obsession, considered a professional doctor by many grateful patients. In fact, Thackeray dedicated *History of Pendennis* (1849) to him by modelling the character of Dr Goodenough on Elliotson.

To Dr John Elliotson

My Dear Doctor;

Thirteen months ago, when it seemed likely that this story had come to a close, a kind friend brought you to

my bedside, whence, in all probability, I should have risen but for your constant watchfulness and skill. I like to recal [sic] your great goodness and kindness (as well as many acts of others, showing quite a surprising friendship and sympathy) at that time, when kindness and friendship were most needed and welcome.

And as you would take no other fee than thanks, let me record them here in behalf of me and mine, and subscribe myself,

Yours most sincerely and gratefully,

*W. M. Thackeray*¹⁴

In 1838 Charles Dickens attended a demonstration of mesmerism by John Elliotson at University College London. Dickens thereafter on several occasions attempted to use mesmerism, principally it seems to assist in his writing but also to exercise power to control the audiences that attended his public performances.

Looked at dispassionately, both the mesmerist and the mesmerised exert power over each other. The mesmerised is needed by, and thus exerts a degree of power over, the mesmerist, especially if the performance is to be repeated.

One of Dickens' subjects, Madame de la Rue, suffered from headaches, insomnia and convulsions and was not in the least cured by mesmerism—rather the reverse, the symptoms became more severe—nevertheless she seemed to be diverted by his experiments and desired his interest in her dream-like visions while mesmerised. It has been suggested that these activities added to Dickens' matrimonial difficulties.

In *Oliver Twist* Dickens refers obliquely to mesmerism; Oliver experiences *a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things around it ... although our senses of touch and sight be for the time dead ...*¹⁵

Another passage in Dickens' last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, has strong mesmeristic overtones. Rosa is learning music from Mr Jasper who is in love with her. When she is asked by a friend whether she loves him, she denies it saying:

*Ugh! ... He has made a slave of me with his looks. He has forced me to understand him, without his saying a word ... When he corrects me, and strikes a note, or a chord, or plays a passage, he himself is in the sounds, whispering that he pursues me as a lover, commanding me to keep his secret. I avoid his eyes, but he forces me to see them without looking at them ... tonight when he watched my lips so closely when I was singing, besides feeling terrified I felt ashamed and passionately hurt. It was as if he kissed me and I couldn't bear it, but cried out.*¹⁶

Alexander Dumas published *The Mesmerist's Victim*

(or the *Countess de Charny*) in 1852, the fourth book in the Marie Antoinette series. It is the story of relatives battling over a will. Reminiscent of the theatre of Mesmer's rooms—darkened, filled with music and mysterious signs—chapter 6 contains Mesmer himself dressed in purple:

*At this particular time an extraordinary man had appeared in Paris, endowed by faith with incalculable power, and controlling magnetic forces in all their applications. Not only did this great unknown (who still lives) heal from a distance the worst and most inveterate diseases, suddenly and radically, as the Savior of men did formerly, but he was also able to call forth instantaneously the most remarkable phenomena of somnambulism and conquer the most rebellious will ... His features, singularly contorted, have a terrible and even blasting aspect. His voice, which comes from the depths of his being, seems charged with some magnetic fluid; it penetrates the hearer at every pore.*¹⁷

Edgar Allen Poe's *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* (1845) lacks an understanding of mesmerism but is in his usual horrific style. A man who is within minutes of death is mesmerised and remains apparently sleeping, and occasionally answering questions, for nearly seven months until on attempting to awaken him from his induced sleep his body crumbles and liquefies into a putrid mass in less than a minute as though the mesmeric state has been able to temporarily halt normal decay. Elizabeth Barrett Browning rightly expressed "dreadful doubt as to whether it can be true"¹⁸.

Poe wrote two other tales of mesmerism: *Mesmeric Revelation* (1844) in which a mesmerised subject discusses death, God and the make-up of the universe; and *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains* (1844) in which only after 12 attempts does a mesmerist finally succeed in bringing a subject under his control.

In India from 1845, James Esdaile used mesmerism as an effective anaesthetic while removing the huge scrotal tumours endemic to the region¹⁹. Remarkably, even his native assistants were able to use the procedure effectively given sufficient preparation. The deputy governor of Bengal appointed a committee that selected 10 patients for a trial to see if Esdaile's claims could be substantiated. After three patients were rejected as unsuitable (the first for drinking, the second because he could not be hypnotised and the third because he was unwell from other causes), the remaining seven were successfully treated and their tumours removed with little or no pain. Esdaile performed over 250 operations using mesmeric anaesthesia in his 20 years in India. Meanwhile back in England, there had been at least as many widely varied and successful instances of mesmeric

anaesthesia. On the whole, however, physicians preferred to consider that such operations were falsified in some way, perhaps because not all patients could be put under the influence and also because of natural conservatism.

Dr Richard Bailey has kindly drawn my attention to an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in December 1945 that discussed Esdaile's mesmeric practices and the application of mesmerism to dentistry.

*The time may arrive when vain and foolish old ladies will walk off to their dentists, and, during a mesmeric nap, change their teeth, as coolly as they may now drop in at Robinson's to have their hair cut.*¹⁸

A year earlier on 16 July 1845, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a lead article by W. B. Clarke on mesmerism in which he claimed:

*We had never known or heard of mesmerism in Australia until Mr Cunningham's recent experiments, one before a select party of philosophically curious at the Sydney Hospital and another a private house.*¹⁹

Mesmerism was first practised in Australia in 1854 when Caroline Harper Dexter (Lynch) arrived from Nottingham. She had been educated in France at a time when enthusiasm for mesmeric phenomena was high. In 1858 she set up a practice in Collins Street, Melbourne, under the name of Madame Carole, working as a herbalist, mesmerist and clairvoyant but eschewed spiritualism. Most of her patients were women; women did not like to discuss their

health concerns with male doctors. Then, as now, many patients wanted more than anything to talk to a sympathetic ear. Dexter attempted to attract a supply of new patients with her publications, *Ladies' Almanac: the Southern Cross or Australian Album and New Year's Gift* (1858) and *The Interpreter: an Australian Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science and Art* (1861).

Henry Handel Richardson's mother visited Madame Carole. Walter Richardson, her father, learned about mesmerism as a medical student in Edinburgh. In 1870 he founded the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists. Her parents' interests are reflected years later in the thoughts of the chief character in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930).

Robert Browning's poem, *Mesmerism* (1855), arose from the combination of two influences, first his wife's interest in John Elliotson and second their conversations with Edward Robert (son of the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton) in Florence in the early 1850s. In this city at the time, mesmerism, spiritualism and associated psychical phenomena were popular topics.

Browning's poem allows differing interpretations;



FIGURE 4: The cover of the Ladies Almanac, the Southern Cross, or, Australian Album and New Year's gift: the first ladies almanac published in the colonies published by W. Calvert, Melbourne, 1858.

MADAME CAROLE
Herbal Physician, Mesmerist and Clairvoyant,
114 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE.

TESTIMONIALS.

It is to certify that Madame Carole has been to my knowledge a curative operator as a Medical Mesmerist, in many of those dangerous and debilitating diseases which are peculiarly incident to females.
G. F. VON VIETTINGHOFF, M.D.
Homoeopathic Dispensary, Myddleton Square, London, 1862.

Consulte, Globe Road, Sydney, 1865.

Dear Madame—It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge my belief in your high professional attainments, and in stating my conviction that you are a lady well qualified in the "gift of healing," as I find my wife's professedly "incurable" disease has been cured by your treatment and care.
HENRY BART,
Coraal Général de Belgique en Océanie.

To Madame Carole. Collins Street, January 23rd.

Dear Madame—Some time ago I wrote you a short note, stating how very much my little boy had improved under your treatment.
It is with great pleasure and gratification that I am now able to inform you of his complete recovery from those distressing pains he was suffering from when I first placed him under your excellent system of treatment, which I may say I did not do until I felt convinced that under the doctor's hands he was daily getting worse.
I am also happy to say that his health generally has very much improved, and he is now growing a strong boy.
I beg to remain, dear Madame, yours very truly,
To Madame Carole. R. BALDERSON.

We the undersigned have great pleasure in adding our names to the testimony of others who have also been restored from sickness to health by Herbal Medicine and Mesmerism as employed by Madame Carole, whose skill and successful merit entitle her to those testimonials.

EUROPE.	AUSTRALIA.
A. Blake, M.D., H.M.S.	S. Donovan, Esq., J.P.
Rev. Wm. J. Masters	Captain G. H. Wilson
Countess Launfeld	Mrs. MacKenzie
Mrs. Col. W. T. Baker	Mrs. Dinwoodie
Mrs. Major L. Shreve	Mrs. Jordan
Professor Pechowikow	Wm. Lynch, Esq.
P. G. Heroldson	Rev. J. L. Moore
Baron Max V. Hermann	Mrs. Stanford
Messrs Johannes Roango	Mons. Solier
Captain G. H. Matthews	Miss Balch
Mrs. G. Julian Herney	Miss Barry
Madame Gohlsch	— M'Mullan, Esq.
Abraham H. Lowe	J. B. Williams, Esq.
Mrs. Somerville Wood	J. G. Macle, Esq., F.M.
Adolphus Ackermann, Esq.	Mrs. W. T. Clarke
Abraham John Moss	J. C. Hooper, Esq., F.M.
	Miss G. German

FIGURE 5: An advertisement extolling the efficacy of Madame Carole's cures from *The Interpreter: an Australian monthly magazine of literature, science and art* published by Gordon and Gotch, Melbourne, 1861. p. 2.

one of which is certainly the attraction of one lover to another (at night, through rain and woodland) perhaps by thought transference and the abandonment of will at the request of the beloved. How this might be accomplished is clear from the title of the poem, *Mesmerism*.

*And must follow as I require,
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire
To the source of the tractile fire:
Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine.
Out of doors into the night!
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left nor right
From the pathway, blind with sight—
Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind—
... While I—to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true.²²*

Whether the subject was given the idea beforehand by her lover—led to believe that the journey is expected of her or how her own desires shaped her actions—is no clearer than the way in which a hypnotist with a powerful character may induce a less forceful subject to obey his instructions.

In 1868 Wilkie Collins wrote about somnambulism in *The Woman in White*. Collins claimed he was frequently mesmerised by one of his mistresses, Caroline Elizabeth Graves, to ease his pain. This woman may even have been the original 'woman in white' that Collins, his brother Charles and painter John Everett Millais saw in the moonlight fleeing an abusive partner who had been mesmerising her. Collins immediately followed her. He later told his companions about her, emphasizing she was of good birth.

Jean-Marie Charcot and his associates in France from the 1870s studied in a scientific manner the stages of mesmerism. Charcot became very influential²¹. He opened his clinic once a week to audiences including doctors, journalists and the public. Sigmund Freud was one notable attendee. Charcot's work and reputation are praised in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the novel that is built on trance-like states and hypnotism.

... of course you understand how it act (sic), and can follow the mind of the great Charcot – alas that he is no more! – into the very soul of the patient that he influence. No? Then, friend John, am I to take it that you simply accept fact, and are satisfied to let from premise

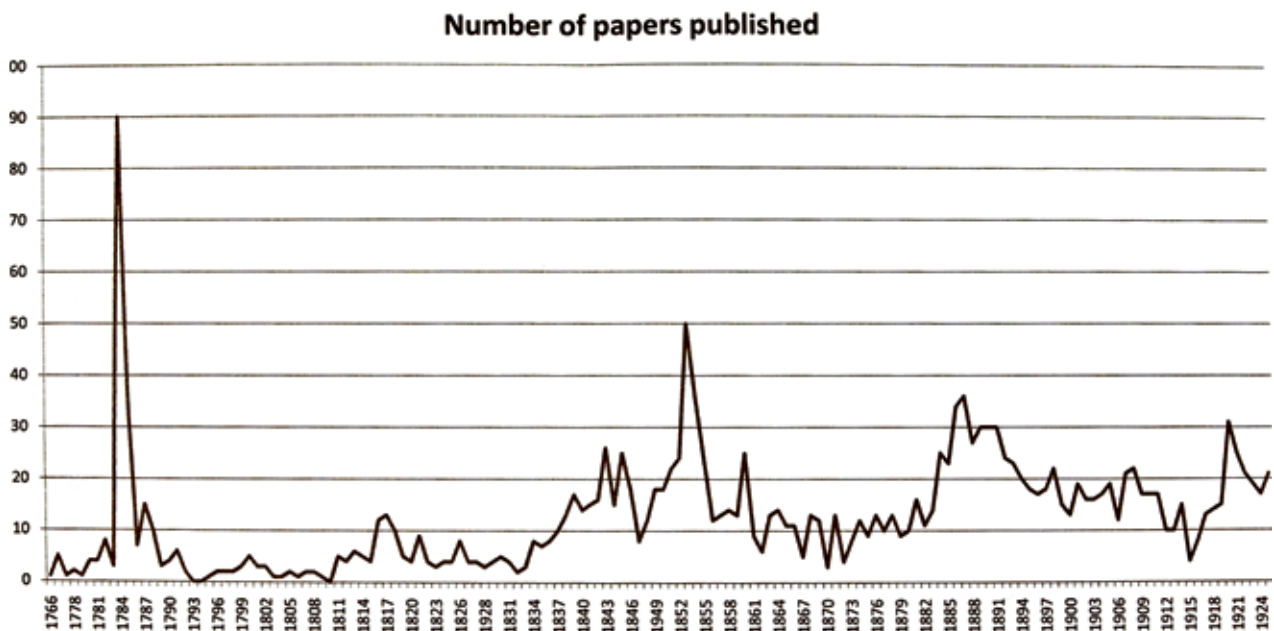


FIGURE 6: Publications concerning mesmerism and allied subjects year by year. Data extracted from Crabtree, A. 1988.

to conclusion be a blank? No? Then tell me – for I am student of the brain – how you accept the hypnotism and reject the thought-reading. Let me tell you, my friend, that there are things done today in electrical science which would have been deemed unholy by the very men who discovered electricity—who would themselves not so long before have been burned as wizards. There are always mysteries in life.²⁴

In George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), Svengali (who popularised the staring hypnotic gaze) enables a young woman to sing in public through hypnosis. When Svengali has a heart attack, the woman fails as she is no longer hypnotised. The *Trilby* hat became popular after its modish appearance in the stage play.

An indication of the interest in mesmerism and its allies over the years can be gauged by plotting the number of serious studies on mesmerism and related subjects published (Figure 6). To add to this graph all the publications in literature and the performing arts that mention mesmerism would be a fascinating exercise. Would the two graphs follow one another?

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Most of the original scientific papers quoted can be found in the Richard Bailey Library at the Australian Society of Anaesthetists' head office in Sydney. The Library has well over 300 works on mesmerism.

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