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Abstract

Antebellum mesmerism posed a challenge to the prerogatives of self-mastering reason from within the scientific tradition itself. Though mesmerism is now most familiar as the sensational stage-practice and quack cure that drew criticism from Hawthorne and Henry James, its sympathizers considered it a theory of sensory error. Mesmerists claimed that the trance replicated the physiological effects of deception, allowing them to study swindling in laboratory conditions. Concluding that sensory error was ineradicable, they refuted Lockean pedagogy's claims to reform the errant senses. One could at best manage delusion, through the self-doubt that liberalism had enjoined only its marginalized types—credulous women, laborers, racial inferiors—to practice. Mesmerism transvalued these figures, praising their powers of self-suspicion and condemning the ridiculous confidence of reason. Tracing the American mesmeric tradition from the science's first appearance there as a falsehood, in 1784; through its limited practice in the 1790s; to its extensive popularity from the 1840s to the end of the century, I find in its performances an alternate sensory public capable of including among its knowing subjects hysterics, renegades, and castaways. Rather than thinking of American publics as being formed through agreement on the procedures of reason, then, my project proposes that we see them as forming around the procedures of sensation that mesmerism discloses. Through readings of *The Coquette* (1797), *Edgar Huntly* (1799), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1853), and other works of fiction, I argue that this tradition constitutes a resource for the novel in holding open the gates of the public sphere to a pluralistic range of knowledge-producers. Forming oxymoronic crosses between good liberals and strange, errant, but insightful mesmeric knowers, American fiction creates stereoscopic images of impossible subjects.

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**THE SCIENCE OF ERROR:
MESMERISM AND AMERICAN FICTION, 1784-1890**

Emily Ogden

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The Science of Error: Mesmerism and American Fiction, 1784-1890

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Emily Ogden

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ABSTRACT

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Emily Ogden

Supervisors: Amy Kaplan and Nancy Bentley

Antebellum mesmerism posed a challenge to the prerogatives of self-mastering reason from within the scientific tradition itself. Though mesmerism is now most familiar as the sensational stage-practice and quack cure that drew criticism from Hawthorne and Henry James, its sympathizers considered it a theory of sensory error. Mesmerists claimed that the trance replicated the physiological effects of deception, allowing them to study swindling in laboratory conditions. Concluding that sensory error was ineradicable, they refuted Lockean pedagogy's claims to reform the errant senses. One could at best manage delusion, through the self-doubt that liberalism had enjoined only its marginalized types—credulous women, laborers, racial inferiors—to practice. Mesmerism transvalued these figures, praising their powers of self-suspicion and condemning the ridiculous confidence of reason. Tracing the American mesmeric tradition from the science's first appearance there as a falsehood, in 1784; through its limited practice in the 1790s; to its extensive popularity from the 1840s to the end of the century, I find in its performances an alternate sensory public capable of including among its knowing subjects hysterics, renegades, and castaways. Rather than thinking of American publics as being formed through agreement on the procedures of reason, then, my project proposes that we see them as forming around the procedures of sensation that

mesmerism discloses. Through readings of *The Coquette* (1797), *Edgar Huntly* (1799), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1853), and other works of fiction, I argue that this tradition constitutes a resource for the novel in holding open the gates of the public sphere to a pluralistic range of knowledge-producers. Forming oxymoronic crosses between good liberals and strange, errant, but insightful mesmeric knowers, American fiction creates stereoscopic images of impossible subjects.

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Preface
The History of Error

In the final weeks of the year 1784, the London publishing house of J. Johnson came out with a translation of a French treatise that had debunked a highly popular medical treatment. The English edition only lagged four months behind the original. But news of the French volume's sensational contents had spread at the speed of scandal, and by December of 1784, J. Johnson et al. had to admit that the "temporary and unfounded hypothesis" of which they proposed to offer an exposé had already been exposed several times over by the periodical press. Under those circumstances, the volume's introduction conceded, "it may...be asked, why it should be thought necessary to give to the public a translation of papers" relating to a known "imposture." There were several possible answers; but the one on which the publishers themselves "would place the principle stress" was that the text formed part of "the history of the errors of mankind," which was perhaps "the most instructive study in the world" ("Introduction" xvii). In other words, J. Johnson justified the publication of its known falsehood on pedagogical grounds, as novelists did with their fictions. According to the Lockean theory of education so influential in late eighteenth-century America, if one wanted to be able to identify lies, cons, and tall tales in the wild, one had to practice on already-exposed ones. Reading novels, for example, would "habituate [the] mind to remark the difference between truth and fiction," William Hill Brown ventured in *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), so that the reader would "never be misled...by the meretricious *dress* of a pleasing tale" whose

untruths served the ends of swindlers (53). Exposed falsehoods, the J. Johnson introduction reasoned, could perform a similar function of training the eye to see deceit.ⁱ

The noble fiction in question here was originally the creation of a charismatic Austrian physician named Franz Anton Mesmer, who had been promoting his system of healing and natural philosophy in Paris for six successful years. Mesmer claimed he had discovered a previously unrecognized invisible fluid, distinct from electricity and magnetism but similar to both, which he called "animal magnetism" and which others soon called "mesmerism." This fluid permeated the cosmos, filling the spaces between celestial and human bodies. It also flowed inside the body, traveling by means of the nerves (which Mesmer seems to have pictured in the traditional way: as tube-like conduits for a fluid). Animal magnetism's unobstructed flow through the nerves was essential for health; any blockage caused disease. Curing illness, then, was a matter of clearing such obstructions, something Mesmer did by a variety of means: by passing his hands over the patient's body in alignment with its animal-magnetic poles; by collecting patients around a *baquet*, a tub of metal and magnetized water designed to facilitate the flow of magnetism in their bodies; and by having music played on a pianoforte. These methods brought patients to convulsive "crises," in which they seized, shrieked, went into hysterics, and even vomited. The crisis was the sign of a cure: it indicated that obstructions in the magnetic fluid had been cleared and health restored (*Report 25-27*).ⁱⁱ

So Mesmer and his partisans said. French state science demurred. The *Rapport des commissaires chargés par le roi de l'examen du magnétisme animal* (1784) was the exposé of which the London publisher J. Johnson produced the translation. It recorded

the experiments of the group of natural philosophers—including one Benjamin Franklin—appointed to investigate Mesmer's new science. The commissioners accepted that the crises were real—the patients, with one or two exceptions, were not "faking it"—but they maintained that these symptoms had nothing to do with any external force. Instead, the "imagination," the faculty responsible for calling to mind objects not present to the senses, had precipitated the patients' crises. The commissioners explained that by an unconscious and mechanical physiological process, any idea in the imagination tending to rouse the passions could so excite the nervous system that convulsive movements and even sensory hallucinations might result. They considered animal magnetism, with its intimidating public treatments and spectacular effects, to be a prime example of an impassionating and nerve-irritating idea. By imagining the crises they had seen Mesmer's manipulations produce in others, the patients had inadvertently brought about similar symptoms in themselves. But because the patients had neither consciousness of nor control over these mechanical effects originating in their own bodies, they experienced their crises as coming from an external source—and they believed that external source to be animal magnetism (*Report* 96-99).ⁱⁱⁱ

In the U. S., where mesmerism had attracted scant attention before the Franklin report appeared, the report itself was summarized and commented upon from Hartford, Connecticut, to Charleston, S. C., with the imagination mentioned in the briefest redactions. When Americans took an interest in mesmerism more or less for the first time, they took an interest in it as a known falsehood. In other words, mesmerism was debunked in the U. S. before it was proposed there. J. Johnson had been right: people did

want to learn about falsehoods in which they had never believed. But if readers turned to the Franklin report for the training in doubt that the publishers suggested could be found there, they would have been frustrated in their aims. The report actually contained a formidable challenge to the project of self-training in virtuous skepticism. Imaginative excitement as the report described it happened involuntarily and below the level of awareness; and no conscious pedagogy could address it. Rather than offering a chance to educate one's Lockean senses, the report broke the news that such training was doomed to be incomplete.

But this may not have been entirely surprising for the report's readers. Part of what accounted for mesmerism's absorbing interest in the U. S. was the fact that although Americans had not encountered this particular invisible fluid before, they had met with others like it. Beginning, as is unusual among mesmerism's historians, with this science's reception as a falsehood, I argue in Chapter One that the Franklin report crystallized what many readers already suspected: that imagination acted to deceive the observer not only in religious experience but in observation of the natural world as well.^{iv} Late eighteenth-century Americans were very familiar with the excesses of religious "enthusiasts," who were deceived by their own active imaginations into seeing signs of God. But it was beginning to seem as though this problem was not confined to religion. Impassionating experiences on all sides—electrical demonstrations, miracle cures, magnetic prestidigitations—seemed likely to trigger imaginative delusions like those Mesmer's patients experienced; and how, if that did happen, could one produce reliable knowledge? This was a question with consequences that went well beyond the epistemological. For

the early republic, delusion carried dark associations of thrall to swindlers and seduction by demagogues; the very health of the democracy seemed to depend on citizens avoiding the kind of dependence and error into which Mesmer had drawn his patients.

The Franklin commission could not lay these specters to rest, but its report did furnish a language in which to discuss them; the commissioners could not annihilate error, but they could bring its sources into focus. And as the problem of imaginative error was redacted and discussed, deplored and pored over, something peculiar happened. Though it was supposed to be a mechanical process, the very opposite of a person, imagination nonetheless came to seem personified as a seducer and swindler in the body, standing in the way of knowledge-production. What follows in the coming chapters is, in a sense, an extended history of this possessing demon—a figure who at first had not been a figure at all, but only a mechanical process in the body, and who, decades later, would become something tantamount to a knowing subject. But in 1784, the questions were: was there any way to stop this stowaway in the enlightened body and mind from covertly manufacturing error? And if not, was there some way to live with it?

In a strange twist, mesmerism itself would inherit the task of answering these questions: of maintaining diplomatic relations with the mechanical body. By the time mesmerism appeared in the U. S. as a possible truth—in the late eighteenth century in Philadelphia and New York, and in the 1830s throughout the eastern states—its practitioners had found their angle of counterattack. The commissioners were right, these mesmerists seemed to concede, that the trance was a state of sensory error. But they were wrong in concluding from that fact that no magnetic fluid existed. On the contrary, what

the magnetic fluid did *was* precisely to stimulate the imagination into states of errancy—but not errancy only. The mesmeric trance, the post-Franklinian practitioners said, was at once a state of delusion *and* a state of insight. Mesmerism was a means of tapping into submerged and mechanical ways of knowing. These practitioners did not try to suppress the mechanical imagination; instead, they made a treaty with it. They learned to incorporate it into empiricism.

These chapters tell the story, then, of a protracted negotiation with error. When the first U. S. practitioners of mesmeric science appeared in Philadelphia in the 1790s, some fifty years earlier than historians have realized, they presented figures very much like Mesmer's patients—except for one thing. These new mesmeric subjects, called "somnambulists," still lost the use of their ordinary senses while entranced. But at the same time, they became extraordinarily *accurate* perceivers of the very forces—electricity in particular—which it had seemed impossible, at the time of the Franklin report, to observe without imaginative interference (Chapter Two). Somnambulists of the 1830s elaborated this idea, presenting their own passivity as fitting them to be scientific instruments for detecting invisible forces. They thereby insinuated themselves into the strong subject-position of the scientific observer (Chapter Three). And stage-mesmerists of the 1840s showed educated men falling into spectacular delusions about the simplest of objects while under the trance. They hinted that error was pervasive in all experience, so that everyone—not just the mesmeric clairvoyants around whom the suspicion of hysteria still lingered, or scientific investigators observing difficult objects—had to

reckon with the vicissitudes of the mechanical body, both its ways of interfering with knowledge and its ways of making it.

Two complementary gestures characterize U. S. mesmerism from 1784 until the late nineteenth century, being repeated in a variety of forms throughout the period. One is the transvaluation of error as insight: the untrustworthy and hysterical patients that the Franklin report described become, in later mesmeric theory, paragons of empiricist virtues. And the second gesture is the generalization of the problem of imaginative error to all kinds of subjects and all kinds of objects, not just excitable observers seeing awe-inspiring things. These gestures tended to augment each other. On the one hand, mesmerists asserted that the errors of the hysterical and the weak-minded could also make them exceptional empirical observers; on the other, they insinuated that well-educated and able-bodied men were not as invulnerable to error as one might think. And thus mesmeric discourse became the home of a novel proposal about who could be trusted to produce knowledge: not the over-confident liberal individual, but rather the hesitant and often socially marginalized figure of the clairvoyant somnambulist.

There are a few things to notice about this proposal. First, it is transvaluative; that is, it takes a figure that Lockean pedagogy rejected—the dependent and deluded enthusiast—and turns her into an exemplar of observational virtues. Marginalized figures—women, suggestible subordinates—could stake knowledge-claims on these grounds. Second, mesmerism's clairvoyant subject makes public, not private, knowledge; she belongs, that is, to a public sphere. And finally, as will become important momentarily, the proposal of the clairvoyant as knower is by genealogy empiricist. That

is to say, it deals specifically with who is good at *sensing*, and, especially at the beginning, with who is good at sensing prestigious scientific objects: electricity, animal magnetism. Whatever use we may find for the mesmeric subject, it emerges out of the cultures of empiricism.

Mesmerism, I want to argue, can help us to reimagine the public sphere. The self-confidently rational liberal individual, whose roots lie in the Lockean pedagogical subject the mechanical imagination threatened, has remained a central but disappointing figure in American studies—notably in Michael Warner's influential work. Liberalism lies at the heart of our models of public discourse and the making of knowledge, and the value it places on individual freedom and on the possibility of universally recognized standards of rationality seems indispensable. And yet the figure of the liberal knower trails the tacit assumption that a free and knowing citizen will be white, propertied, and male. Warner's own work has sought liberalism's pluralist moments, as when he attends to the pliability of liberalism as a rhetorical tool for feminism (*Publics* 39-41); and Elizabeth Dillon, too, has cautioned that liberal publicity's masculine ideals nonetheless accommodated female writers (36-39). My own project joins these efforts to remain in dialogue with liberal publicity while seeking to expand its range. Mesmerism's credulous and mechanical figures, having arisen in opposition to the liberal individual, reach beyond the liberal pale, encompassing hysterics, renegades, and castaways. Dwelling in the paradox of figures who register at once as public knowers and as rejects, mesmerists momentarily held the gates of the liberal public open.

It may seem like wishful thinking to take dependent and errant mesmeric subjects—subjects who called themselves instruments, and who were blind as often as they were insightful—as genuine political alternatives. Dependence is dependence, and error error, one might say, and there is no use in pretending that attempts to transvalue these would obviate the need for agency, consent, and rationality. To be sure; and yet dwelling in oxymoron and paradox is already the predicament of those of us for whom liberalism remains an important element of the social imaginary. Modern subjects are enmeshed in webs of constraint and contingency that make the entirely independent subject seem a fiction. And after psychoanalysis—not to mention the Franklin commission report on the imagination's mechanical operations—the full self-consciousness and self-presence of the Lockean knower is no longer so plausible either.^v If clairvoyants and mechanical knowers can seem like mystical and uncanny beings, this is precisely because the people who imagined them had as hard a time as we might now with seeing anything positive in dependency and self-absence. And yet if there is one thing harder to believe in than the positively dependent subject, it is the actually independent and entirely rational one—much as we might need the fiction that this unicorn exists.

Fiction may be precisely the place to turn for a full acknowledgment of at once the paradox and the necessity of the mesmeric self. Novels makes characters by the reorganization of signs; and they are free to make illogical and inconsistent combinations. Doing so is a means of imagining persons who are unimaginable at a given moment: oxymoronic subjects at once mechanical and liberal; unconscious and self-narrating;

passive and self-fashioning; excluded from the making of public knowledge, and yet marked, in mesmeric performances, as privileged knowers. American novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries turned to mesmerism's empiricist observers and its instrument-like clairvoyants in order to recuperate mechanicity, forming subjects unimaginable otherwise. American fiction's engagement with the subject of Lockean pedagogy is profound, and yet in the very seduction novels that establish this link the most strongly, one can already see recoveries of mechanical knowledge, and the creation of interiorities for the mechanical self. Eliza Wharton, in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), is the first example here of such an oxymoronic subject: represented as driven by her mechanical body, she is nonetheless self-narrating and self-aware, just what the mechanical person ought not, by definition, to be (Chapter One).

In the second chapter, the somnambulistic Edgar Huntly in Charles Brockden Brown's novel of that title combines the liberal young man and the somnambulist, seeming to redeem some—but not all—mechanical bodies lying beyond the pale of a European town in Indian country. In Chapter Three I excavate from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) a knowing clairvoyant subject where there had seemed to be only a seduction victim; Priscilla's very bondage, I argue, indicates the novel's efforts to suppress a Transcendentalist counter-public in which women's mesmeric knowledge threatened to change the epistemological hierarchies of the Brook Farm parlor. And in the final chapter, I find in *Moby-Dick* the imagining of an immersed knowledge of the whale—one in which the distortions and interferences of the subjective imagination in fact constitute the object in its wholeness. Hunters engaged in the hunt

transcend the division of the knower from the known, becoming subjects and objects at once. All these are knowers who err, autonomous subjects who depend on others: oxymorons, in short, comprised of equal parts communicating member of the public sphere, and excommunicated automatic body. For these novels, the oxymoron is both a fallacy and a rhetorical technique: a fallacy, in that it describes a logical impossibility; a rhetorical technique, in that logic itself is always historically conditioned—and only the rhetoric of paradox can imagine what logic proscribes.

If mesmerism's oxymoronic subjects can convene a more inclusive public sphere, whose membership includes at least reconnaissance missions into the terrain of the unspeakable or unknowable, then it will be important that these subjects' intellectual roots lie in popular empiricism: in mesmerism's engagement with the production of scientific knowledge. It has been difficult for American studies to find much common ground with the intellectual traditions of the sciences. There are good reasons for this. Max Weber, above all as digested by the Frankfurt school, has shaped our understanding of empirical knowledge-production as a thing too much like production on any other assembly-line in that it excludes ethical considerations and deals only with means—never with ends.^{vi} From this standpoint, empiricism has not seemed promising as an ethical source; it has looked more like an evasion of any discussion, however framed, of value. But giving up on science as an ethical domain risks reinforcing a "two cultures" divide which is itself part of the problem. Immanuel Wallerstein has argued that the current institutional structure of the disciplines, in which the sciences collar the right to "the legitimate assertion of truths" while scholars in the humanities find themselves consigned to "the

ghetto of those who sought, who merely sought, to determine the good and the beautiful," is system working powerfully to keep science unaccountable to ethics.^{vii}

Thus assenting to a bifurcated epistemological field, in which the true is quarantined from the good, puts one in danger of recapitulating "the bizarre concept of the value-neutral specialist;" doing so only repeats, in other words, the very alienation of science from ethics which one would have liked to undo (*EW* 183). One approach to the resecting of these traditions is to uncover the unexpected ways in which scientific knowledge has served as an ethical source, thereby making particular practices available as usable pasts: "genuine alternatives to, and perhaps in, the present," as James Livingston puts it (36).^{viii} The empiricist subject visible in mesmerism—a knower who is dependent but civically competent, errant but knowing, visible in public and yet found along the margins of liberal identity—has its ethical sources in empiricism, and can offer one such usable past. We can find in this empiricist subject both a connection to science's ethical archive, and a way of rethinking publics around an expanded community of knowers. Studies of the liberal public often get caught in the double bind of needing the shared standards of knowledge that public reason has often provided even as the exploitative pasts and presents of such standards seem to contaminate them beyond use. I find in mesmerism's legacies the possibility of an alternate tradition: a transvaluative empiricism that would recuperate as subjects of knowledge precisely those whom the Franklin commission had once counted as the sources of errant and epistemologically worthless experience. By including the Franklin report on mesmerism in a "history of error," the house of J. Johnson had hoped to *make* error history—to consign it to the

unenlightened past. My account, on the other hand, takes mesmerism's engagement with the sensory error to be an important object of cultural history in itself—and the site of emergence for an ethos of the dependent and credulous subject.

Notes

ⁱ The *Report's* London edition was available for purchase by December 1784 ("Classified Ads") and was translated by William Godwin (see Benjamin Vaughan, letter to William Temple Franklin, 12 Oct. 1784, Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society; ts., Franklin Papers, Yale University; and Fara, "Attractive Therapy"). On Lockean pedagogy I follow Fliegelman, *Prodigals* 5-28.

ⁱⁱ My account draws on Riskin, *Science* 188-225; Pattie, *Mesmer*; and Gillispie, *Science and Polity* 261-87. On theories of nervous action, see Rousseau, "Science and the Discovery of the Imagination" 108-35.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1784, there were in fact two reports on mesmerism, one from the Academy of Sciences committee that Franklin and the chemist Antoine Lavoisier chaired; and one from the Academy of Medicine. The two reports are published together in the London translation, and there, as well as in English-language redactions, they tend to be imperfectly distinguished from each other.

^{iv} The major histories of mesmerism and hypnotism dealing directly with the U. S. begin in the 1830s, including Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*; Gauld, *History*; and Fuller, *Mesmerism*. In *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, however, Ann Taves places 1830s mesmerism on a continuum with eighteenth-century conflicts over religious experience on which I touch in the first chapter.

^v Borch-Jacobsen, *Emotional Tie* 119.

^{vi} Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 16-23; on the Weberian influence, see Outram, "Enlightenment" 37.

^{vii} Wallerstein, *European Universalism* 63, 79. This work is subsequently abbreviated *EU*.

^{viii} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have articulated a promising method for such reparative work. A concept of scientific truth and error, Daston and others have argued, inseparably contains an ethical component in that it defines the "good" subject—it prescribes techniques of selfhood, or "epistemic virtues," that lead to the production of trustworthy knowledge according to it (*Objectivity* 39-41, 185). Daston calls a method that approaches this ethical component of scientific knowledge-making "historical

epistemology," reflecting the interest it takes in grounding epistemological concepts like "objectivity" and the "fact" in social terms ("Moral Economy" 24). This method has been highly influential, even paradigm-defining, in the history of science; Shapin, *Scientific Life*; Dear, "Truth to Disinterestedness;" and Riskin, *Science*, take related approaches. Related approaches to the categories of knowledge as subject to historical change in other fields include Poovey, *History of the Modern Fact*, and Crary, *Techniques*.

Chapter One

Mesmer's Demon: Fiction, Falsehood, and the Mechanical Imagination

This history begins with an error—or, to be more precise, it begins with the absorbing interest a certain error seemed to hold even for people who had never themselves committed it. When U. S. readers first read about the Franklin commission's investigation, in articles on and excerpts from the Franklin report that were published up and down the Atlantic coast in 1784 and 1785, mesmerism had never yet been practiced in the U. S.^{ix} Why take notice of—and even pleasure in—the exposure of a fraudulent practice in which one has never oneself believed? Why pore over the details of a falsehood? J. Johnson and company, the London publishers of the English-language report, had argued for the usefulness of learning about a "temporary and unfounded hypothesis," as we saw in the preface. The "history of the errors of mankind" could, they suggested, have a pedagogical utility: one could practice detecting imposture by scrutinizing the lineaments of the Mesmeric error ("Introduction" xvii).

Perhaps early American readers turned to the Franklin report with some such project in mind. If so, they would have encountered complications. In order for reading the "history of error" to be useful and improving in the way the publishers imagined, a precise nesting of plots had to take place. The mesmeric patients' decline into error had to provide the reader with an occasion for drilling himself in doubt, and that training had, in turn, to ensure his own ascent to sturdy rational subjecthood. The reader's successful self-training, the real-life *bildungsroman* of which he was the hero, then formed the base unit of a larger narrative of progress in which the human race, as the collective

protagonist, entered triumphantly into what J. Johnson called an "enlightened age" ("Introduction" xix). Reading a seduction plot led to living a *bildungsroman*; living a *bildungsroman*, multiplied over an entire culture, added up to enlightenment on a grand scale.

But the commissioners' theory of the mechanical imagination rejected a premise on which this whole assembly line depended: the notion that error was a conscious process. If imagination could operate without conscious knowledge as the Franklin report said it could, any deliberate training of the mind would have limited power against this secret unruliness. The crucial middle step of the J. Johnson crescendo—conscious self-training—teetered on the brink of incoherence. One might think one had mastered the mechanical body even while it committed its travesties just beyond the scope of awareness. As though good empiricism were a state of the soul—like election or damnation—for which no surefire earthly sign existed, the Franklin report suggested that clear-sighted Lockeans could never be entirely sure of their own righteousness. One's struggle to master unconscious error would end in a verdict tightly sealed against one's own inquiries—not just circumstantially, not just most of the time, but always, and by structural necessity.

In the case of the Franklin report, then, the busy exercise of skepticism was to leave a persistent remainder. I argue that as the report—along with the action of imagination it described—was redacted and discussed, triumphed over and worried over, something shifted for its American readership. Rather than having exposed the problem of swindling, the report called attention to the problem of imagination: a set of

unconscious processes of which no voluntary control was possible. Although at first defined as the opposite of conscious subjecthood, the mechanical imagination blossomed, under this obsessive attention, into an inner adversary—Mesmer's demon—who thwarted one's efforts at empiricism. This seducer within, moreover, did not merely frustrate one's efforts to know: it seemed to *possess* and to *withhold* facts, rather than simply standing in the way. In other words, that which the Franklin commission defined as the *obstacle* to knowledge—in this case, the mechanical body—they wound up also producing as a *repository* of knowledge of its own.

This strange emergence of knowledge out of error is the event we will be tracing out of the Franklin report and into mesmerists' own later practice. But fiction offers the first instance of the paradoxically errant knower in this account. The eponymous heroine of Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) is a contradiction in terms: ruled by her imagination, whose physiological vagaries Foster describes in detail, she is nonetheless self-narrating. In the character of Eliza Wharton, Foster takes a condition that is a litmus test for failed subjecthood—being driven by one's mechanical body—and retools it as a self-conscious state. Mesmerism was eventually to join fiction, in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, as the discourse responsible for humanizing the mechanical body and treating it as the repository of knowledge; it would fall into position as at once the science of perceptual error and the interpreter for the voice of that part of the body and soul defined as mechanical. But here, Foster's novel is the first to take the plunge, vaulting beyond the pedagogy-seduction axis into the underworld of machine-driven persons in order to retrieve and rehumanize its shades.

I. Secular Enthusiasm

Mesmerism, like seduction, belonged to a category that posed special problems for the Lockean pedagogical narrative—objects inspiring awe, fear, and desire—and this was a major reason its debunking attracted Americans' interest. One was supposed to improve one's powers of judgment through experience. But such training was both difficult and dangerous when practiced on these troublesome objects, whose very idea might be enough to excite the imagination. In these cases, experience would initiate not the narrative of *bildung*, or education, but its opposite: the seduction plot. In late eighteenth-century America, the most familiar form of this empiricist dilemma was religious enthusiasm. During the Great Awakening that swept the Anglophone Atlantic during the 1730s and 1740s, critics had condemned the more spectacular manifestations of God's direct presence at revival meetings like the ones John Wesley convened. Opponents of the revivals claimed that a person imagining divinity stood in danger of thereby causing physical symptoms in herself and then erroneously taking those symptoms for signs of the Spirit. "Enthusiasts," Locke wrote, mistook their own internal vicissitudes—"the Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain," as he put it—for indications of the nature and will of God (698).^x But could natural events stir enthusiasm too? Might it be that any force, whether natural or supernatural, whose very idea inspired awe or terror—as animal magnetism could hardly fail to do—risked heating the imagination, arousing the passions, and leading the would-be "dispassionate" observer

into illusions like the ones Mesmer's patients sustained? So the commissioners would claim: Mesmer, for them, was a secular version of a revivalist preacher.

From early periodical reports on the Mesmer controversy, it was clear enough that the sensational new force of "animal magnetism," though unfamiliar in itself, must fit somewhere in the wide band of experience tending to inflame the imagination. Part of what made the Franklin report so appealing was that it seemed to offer the chance of understanding—and controlling—the imagination's role in such experiences. In the redactions of the commissioners' report that appeared in American papers, readers were presented with phenomena they could interpret either as Mesmer did, or as Franklin did. In other words, either they were reading about a legitimate demonstration science—so mesmerists implied with word and gesture—or, as the Franklin commission urged, they were reading about a sad case of mystical fanaticism. Yet there was a third possibility: mesmerism might have been some combination of the two. The experience of late eighteenth-century public life would have provided readers with excellent preparation for conceiving of this third option. Science looked fanatical: even as Americans put a premium on experiential knowledge of the wonderful and surprising branches of natural philosophy, they especially mistrusted their own senses—and demonstrators' good faith—in such cases. And Protestantism looked scientific: while some associated revivals with delusion and enthusiasm, others considered them as a way of getting good solid empirical facts about the divine. Methodists like Wesley and Reform ministers like Jonathan Edwards attached importance to knowing divine grace by direct personal experience. One part of the value of tracing out the American reception of mesmerism's

falsehood lies in the way it lets us see that the mutual foils "Enlightenment" and "evangelism" are trumped by a physiological category that transcends and unites them: the mechanical imagination. The report articulated a growing sense that with spectacular forces like electricity and animal magnetism on the loose, the problem of enthusiasm could not be confined to supernatural objects, but affected experience in scientific experimentation as well. Americans turned to the Franklin report out of a sense that how imaginative error worked was a thing worth knowing—and also, probably, out of a sense that such knowledge would protect them from its operation in themselves. Such a talisman would be useful in lecture halls and at revivals, during courtship and in lightning storms.

When Americans first learned in 1784 of Mesmer's mysterious new force, they readily identified him as a member of the confraternity of scientific demonstrators, a motley crew if ever there was one. In the late eighteenth century, these impresarios wore tracks along the Atlantic coast from Boston to the Caribbean, giving performances that were a promiscuous mixture of magic, fraud, and what one observer called "those almost unexplored branches of natural philosophy," meaning magnetism and electricity, "that create wonder and surprise" ("Signor Falconi" [3]). Presenters could administer painful shocks or set model houses on fire with an electric jolt meant to imitate lightning; in one experiment, they even made a woman appear to breathe fire if anyone had the audacity to try to embrace her, a trick known as the "electric kiss" (Delbourgo 88, 115-19; Schaffer "Self Evidence" 333). Some conjured, some deceived, some educated and improved; and it was not always easy to tell the difference between these subspecies. Before the French

royal commission had been convened, Franklin's London friend James Hutton wrote to ask him whether Mesmer's art could be compared to that of "Shew-Men who by means of a magnet about them...by tapping a person on the Shoulder, could make his watch stand, and by another Tap I suppose in another Direction return its movement as it was." As Hutton compared Mesmer to a magnet-turner, the popular demonstrator known to his American audiences as "Signor Falconi" drew comparisons to Mesmer: in 1785, the rumor flew from Jamaica to Charleston, S. C., that animal magnetism really existed, and that Falconi had "given proofs of his being in possession of the secret." Whatever the truth of this tidbit of gossip, it was certain that Falconi could "cause [a watch] to stop or go, at the pleasure of the company, without touching it," just as Franklin's friend Hutton had imagined that Mesmer might do. Mesmer mesmerized; Falconi magnetized; and both surely coveted the praise Falconi once earned but which Hutton, at least, would have extended to neither of them: that of being a "profound student" of natural philosophy.^{xi}

Mesmer's practices and those of his pupil, Charles Deslon, whom the commissioners observed, were certainly designed to create the impression of profound study—though the Franklin commission would dismiss them as nothing but a display of pyrotechnical know-how. Mesmeric treatment made rich and varied reference to the culture of scientific demonstration. At the center of any orthodox treatment room stood an instrument called a *baquet*, a large wooden tub filled with metal pieces and water which "according to M. Deslon, served as a reservoir of [animal] magnetism," as one American redaction explained ("Account of the Report" 164). This device is best understood as a transliteration of the Leyden jar, perhaps the most widely recognized

philosophical apparatus of the moment (Riskin, *Science* 199; Delbourgo 14-16, 98). The Leyden jar consisted of a glass container plated with metal inside and out and filled with water, with an electrified wire threaded into it, and it was understood as condensing and storing electrical fluid just as the *baquet* stored animal magnetism. This condensed electrical fluid would discharge itself in a spark or painful shock if any material that conducted electricity—metal, for example, or a person, or a chain of people all holding hands—touched both the wire and the outside of the jar at once. Mesmerists wanted to suggest that the *baquet* could produce a similarly spectacular—and also curative—jolt of animal magnetism. Up to fifty patients could gather around Deslon's *baquet* at one time, each holding an iron rod connected to the apparatus. Like audience volunteers around a Leyden jar, patients linked thumbs with each other in a circle and sometimes were connected by a rope; in this way, "the impression received by the left hand of the patient, communicates through his right, and thus passes through the whole circle," as the commissioners explained (23). The clear implication was that a power as great as electricity coursed through their joined bodies.^{xii}

One way of describing mesmerism's appeal is to say that it seemed plausible in the context of contemporary science. Electricity, like animal magnetism, was considered to be an extremely fine and—for the most part—invisible fluid "diffused thro' all of Space," as Boston lecturer Dr. Archibald Spencer put it, and having odd effects on more tangible matter. Yet if plausibility worked in Mesmer's favor, still more useful was the fact that the unlikely and, as one article put it, the "Apocryphal" were standard ingredients of demonstration science. Being a bit far-fetched probably helped, rather than

hindering, mesmerism's case. An article printed many times over compared Mesmer to a remarkable fish, popular on the demonstration circuit, which could stun its prey. The article reasoned that "those who have often seen the Electrical Eel, give such an electrical shock to a small fish in the same tub...without touching" know that, "strange as it may appear, it is not impossible but the same power may be found out by man." Mesmer, the writer thought, had done so. The article observed that, "[h]owever Apocryphal the curiosities in [animal magnetism] may appear, yet they are not more extraordinary than the qualities ascribed to a subtle fluid" like electricity or magnetism.^{xiii} From a lay perspective, this was quite true. "Appear[ing] Apocryphal" was the great hallmark of demonstration science itself.

But the Franklin commission, in its *Report*, preferred to keep the apocryphal as a religious and not a natural-philosophical category. The commissioners considered Mesmer to be a secular mystic, charging "that in subduing the imagination by solemn preparations, by extraordinary proceedings, [and] by the confidence and enthusiasm inspired by magnificent promises," mesmerists managed "to exalt the tone of sensible and nervous fibers" so much as to produce the bodily symptoms of the crisis (10). If religious enthusiasts had been overawed by the thought of divinity, mesmeric enthusiasts lost their wits over the thought of the subtle fluids. According to the commissioners, the stage business of Deslon's public treatment suggesting the workings of the subtle fluids did just that: it *suggested* what was not really present. The *baquet*, the ropes, and the iron wands "contained no substance either electric or magnetical," as the commissioners assured themselves by means of an electrometer and an unpolarized needle, which would have

detected magnetism (24). These apparatuses merely made patients *believe* a subtle fluid was circulating, thereby exercising their imaginations to such a point that their bodies began to react—and violently. In fact, we probably owe the commissioners' finely drawn portrait of mesmeric practice to their conviction that this science was nothing but show. If it was to be plausible that Deslon's prestidigitations had "subdued the imagination" to the point of producing convulsions which the commissioners themselves called "astonishing," they had to make clear just how good the mesmeric show was. Only then would it be plausible that its effects on the imagination could be so dramatic. Only then would it seem likely that, as the commissioners claimed, "the imagination, and the imagination alone," was "that active and terrible power, by which are operated the astonishing effects, that have excited so much attention to the public process" (96-98).

These astonishing effects went by the name of the "crisis," an extraordinary state in which the mesmerist's prestidigitations and philosophical procedures culminated. The patient shook and shuddered; laughed, coughed, and vomited; and, then, in theory, got well. Mesmerists claimed that the crisis marked the disease's turning point as the body worked convulsively to break through an "obstruction" in its flow of animal magnetism. In a state of health, they said, the animal-magnetic fluid flowed freely in the body through the tube-like nerves. Illnesses occurred when this circulation became obstructed, just as, according to regular medicine, blockages in the four ordinary humors could cause disease. The key to restoring health was to increase the strength of the magnetic flow in the body by building it up in the *baquet*, the rope, and the room in general. Soon the fluid would be coursing through the body at such a strength that it would break through any

obstructions—causing both a crisis and a cure (Deslon 35). The commissioners, on the other hand, saw in these convulsive effects no genuine resemblance either to electric shock or to the salubrious crisis of a body healing itself from illness, but instead an analogy to religious convulsionaries who had caused physical symptoms in themselves by imagining God. They theorized that such effects required, first, a predisposing condition: sensory overload. Deslon's clinic, in the commissioners' report, figures as a flood of sensations: "[t]he bucket is surrounded with a crowd of patients; the sensations are continually communicated and recommunicated; it ought to be expected that the nerves should be at length worn out with this exercise." At length the nerves would become "irritated" (96): their fibers grew oversensitive to the slightest feeling or idea in the imagination. As the commissioners saw it, when patients in such a state of irritability were confronted not just with the bustle of the public process, but with Deslon's practices designed specifically to call the awe-inspiring and convulsion-inducing subtle fluids to mind, their already-inflamed nerves gave way. They began to convulse and to have sensory hallucinations.

In order to prove their theory, the commissioners had to isolate two things from each other: the patient's belief that he or she was being magnetized, and the magnetist's performance of the practices he claimed transmitted magnetic fluid. They had to subject patients to magnetization without their knowledge; and they had to make patients believe they were being magnetized when in fact they were not. In doing so, the commissioners conducted the first known study to make use of a placebo; by deceiving the patients about whether or not they were really being worked upon, the commissioners could see how

much of an effect the patients' beliefs had on their symptoms—a dramatic one, as it turned out (Kaptchuk; Riskin, *Science* 190). When they directed Deslon to magnetize one woman from another room, while she was engaged in discussing a commission, they found that nothing happened to her. In other experiments, they created conditions where patients would think they were being magnetized while in fact they were not. From these experiments, the commissioners drew two conclusions: first, that Deslon's magnetic passes caused no symptoms if the patient did not know she was being treated; and second, that if a patient was made to believe that she was being treated, she would go into a crisis whether Deslon was really making the magnetic passes or not. Imagination was both necessary and sufficient; magnetism was neither.

U. S. readers quickly recognized the report as accusing the patients of a secular version of religious enthusiasm. John Adams had hoped, for example, that the report would "annihilate the Enthusiasm" for Mesmer's practices in France ("Boston, Nov. 29" [2]). Charles Thompson, a member of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1784 to tell him that the Marquis de Lafayette (a devout proselyte for animal magnetism) had presented Mesmer's science to the Society: the Marquis, he said, "had come over quite an enthusiast in favour" of mesmerism.^{xiv} Franklin himself saw the comparison and heard about it from others. Readers complained, he told William Temple Franklin, that the report's description of the "Force of Imagination...as occasioning Convulsions, &c." may be used "by Infidels to weaken our Faith in some of the Miracles of the New Testament." The critics of enthusiastic

religion in the earlier part of the eighteenth century had had to contend against the same accusation.^{xv}

As one article concluded, "[t]he result of their experiments is, that no such fluid, as that described by Mesmer, exists." Mesmer, the commissioners said, had produced all his effects "without there resulting any addition to the sciences, either of philosophy or medicine." In this last statement, the commissioners were selling their own transformation of Mesmer's work short, as the event proved. Mesmerism *was* an "addition to...philosophy [and] medicine" as the occasion for the commission's theory of error.^{xvi} The Franklin report became the ubiquitous source text for denunciations of extraordinary experience in religion and philosophy alike. For the rest of the American century, whenever anyone wanted to cast doubt on a cure, a subtle-fluid spectacular, or a religious manifestation, Franklin's rout of Mesmer sprang to mind. For example, Perkinism, a practice of curing illness through the application of mineral magnets, drew relentless comparison to Mesmer's science. One paper disparagingly called Perkins the "modern *Mesmer*" and declared that in his experiments, as in the Austrian's, "the imagination only was affected." Perkins's cures, said another, came from "force of imagination," as "that eminent philosopher Dr. Franklin" had proved to be the case in "the pretended *Animal Magnetism*."^{xvii} Southern revivals were said to be a species of animal magnetism, and Benjamin Rush declared his readiness to use imagination to his advantage in medicine. "I reject the futile pretensions of Mr. Mesmer to the cure of diseases, by what he has absurdly called animal magnetism," a bluff Rush told his medical students at the University of Pennsylvania in 1789. But Rush went on to

encourage his pupils to "avail [them]selves of "[t]he facts which [Mesmer] has established [which] clearly prove the influence of the imagination and will upon diseases" (Rush 163-69; "Medicus" [2]). The commission, not Mesmer, had established the role of imagination in healing—and in sensation. But Rush's confutation of the two is a good example of how closely mesmerism was associated in readers' minds with the theory of imaginative error that first debunked it.

Was Mesmer a mystical empiricist, or an empirical religionist? In the end, that question has to be discarded. Instead, the value of tracing out the American reception of mesmerism's falsehood lies in the way it lets us see the consolidation of religious and scientific experience. The report articulated a growing sense that with spectacular forces like electricity and animal magnetism on the loose, the problem of enthusiasm could not be confined to supernatural objects, but affected experience in scientific experimentation as well. In the course of natural-philosophical trials, it sometimes happened that, as the "electrician" Loammi Baldwin put it, seeing the kite he was flying in a storm outlined in fire, "reason accused imagination of error." James Delbourgo has suggested that in the late eighteenth century, Americans like Baldwin began fearing "secular enthusiasm:" if a divine thunderbolt could overheat the imagination and commandeer the senses, why not a natural one?^{xviii} The report on mesmerism provided both a vocabulary and a *locus classicus* for such cases. The expanded powers it gave to imagination in the realm of secular experience account for why such readers of the report as John Adams, Benjamin Rush, and Charles Brockden Brown, all of them familiar enough with religious enthusiasm, could recognize in the Franklin report something they considered to be

strikingly new.^{xix} It took the imprimatur of Franklin and European state science to bring the possibility of imaginative deception in secular events into broad circulation. Thus the redactions Americans read of the Franklin report did more than add one more mystical or natural-philosophical spectacle to a late eighteenth-century scene already glutted with both. The redactions also provided readers with a way of interpreting the sensory delusions to which such experiences gave rise: as the involuntary effects an excited imagination had on the body. And they seemed to hold out the promise of protection: by knowing how imaginations worked, one could shield oneself from their deceptive effects.

II. Possession

The report broke this promise, however. The theory of imagination that the commissioners offered foreclosed on the possibility of controlling imagination through knowledge of it. Conscious education could do little against unconscious operations. J. Johnsonian attempts to treat the report as a pedagogically useful narrative of imagination's errors—a seduction plot in which Mesmer played Lovelace to his patients' collective Clarissa—ran aground against this difficulty. What exercise in doubt, which is fundamentally a matter of will and consciousness, could ever train or mend the involuntary processes of imagination? Despite eighteenth-century Americans' faith in disbelief, it was not clear even to them that skepticism could ever be extreme enough to cope adequately with this particular error-making machine. Because the problem of

mechanical imagination could not be dismissed from the attention, it acquired definition, moving inward from the periphery.

It was November of 1784, three months after the commission had published its results in French, and still some time before the J. Johnson translation would be put up for sale, when the first U. S. paper announced the errors of Mesmer and his patients with ill-concealed relish. In the reception of the Franklin report, glee over the foiling of a seducer at first overshadowed the troubling facts about imagination. "Whoever looks over the history of successful imposture," Boston's *American Herald* lamented piously, "will be mortified to find, by how various arts the credulity of the public, has been successfully converted into a mint for coining princely rewards." The *Herald* had an inside track on Franklin's victory over fraud: it presented its readers with an anonymous letter written from Auteuil, then a suburb of Paris, by "an equally distinguished Statesman of our own country with him [Franklin] that is mentioned in it." For knowing Bostonians, this may well have been enough to identify the *Herald's* correspondent as one who, despite his recurring objections to what seemed to him Franklin's libertine ways, was prepared to unite against a common enemy. "All Paris, and indeed all Europe, is at present amused with a kind of physical new light or witchcraft, called Animal Magnetism," wrote this statesman; a "masterly" report, by Franklin and others, would, he thought, soon be enough to "annihilate the Enthusiasm" for Mesmer's black art. The correspondent: John Adams, then serving as an American envoy to France. The report, Adams crowed, "shews very clearly that this Magnetism can never be useful, for the best of all possible reasons, viz.—*because it does not exist*" ("Boston, Nov. 29" [2]).^{xx}

Adams gleefully sneered at Mesmer as a "German Empirick [i.e., quack]," whose last trick had been played; and other redactions followed suit. It was as though, in the exposing of this "Empirick," a decisive victory for the forces of enlightenment had been achieved. The commission report had danced around the question of whether Mesmer was a conscious charlatan, but Adams' letter and the redactions that appeared in the spring of 1785 rushed in where Franklin had feared to tread. They presented Mesmer's downfall as the tale of a seducer frustrated. Mesmer's theory, as one of these articles put it, was "calculated to ravish belief, and overturn common sense" and aimed at "subduing human hopes and fears." His "pretended discovery" was "a mere chimera, founded only in the imagination;" a "fanciful system;" and a "visionary [i.e., far-fetched] doctrine." This unscrupulous quack had been challenged in the past, but he had gone on brazenly promoting his system, because he "was not a character to be thus discouraged; he had already sacrificed his credit as a philosopher...and resolved to accomplish that by perseverance, which he had not been able to carry by *coup de main*."^{xxi} Adams had called democracy a Lovelace seducing the people; now Mesmer stood revealed as another vicious destroyer of virtue and obstructor of enlightenment.

As Franklin triumphed over Mesmer, so readers of the report—like readers of seduction fiction—could learn from his example to recognize the fictions and falsehoods of other seducers. The deactivated mesmerism of the Franklin report offered something very much like what the literary historian Catherine Gallagher has described as the use of eighteenth-century fiction: it gave readers a chance to practice the important modern skill of doubting (336-40). If they were to avoid financial and sexual ruin, readers had to

suspect others of being confidence men, rakes, and demagogues. It was best to learn to do this safely, in the controlled setting of fiction and already-exploded falsehood. Jefferson, a staunch anti-Mesmerian living in Paris at the time, thought Franklin had made Mesmer safe for educational consumption. He was to recall that "the Animal Magnetism of the maniac Mesmer...received it's [sic] death's wound from his [Franklin's] hand in conjunction with his brethren of the learned committee, appointed to unveil that compound of fraud & folly." Jefferson was sure, as he wrote in the fall of 1784, that mesmerism had "received it's [sic] quietus," and he had done his part to keep it from starting up in America; on a single day in November 1784, while living in Paris, he sent off six copies of the French edition of the Franklin report to his American correspondents to inoculate them against mesmeric falsehoods.^{xxii} Adams, too, expected that the report would be enough to cause "the Phrenzy to evaporate" ("Boston, Nov. 29" [2]). (These wishes did not come true, a fact to which one hundred more years of mesmerism after 1784 bore witness). On all sides one confidently expected the growth of individuals and civilizations from a credulous youth to prudent enlightenment. Surely this error had now been dispatched for once and for all. Surely the plot had been thwarted.

But the problem was that there were *two* plots. Even as the report offered a vicarious triumph over one seducer, it introduced another still more insidious: Mesmer could be debunked, but that only transferred one's attention to the machine manufacturing error within. The mesmerist had not worked alone. Adams saw this clearly, despite his hopes. His letter in the *Herald* had been addressed to a person only identified as a "Medical Professor," really Benjamin Waterhouse of the Harvard Medical School. To

Waterhouse, Adams posed the problem of this other, covert seducer. The report, he said, showed that "[t]he professors of the art have acquired sometimes a surprising ascendancy over the imaginations of their patients, so as to throw them into violent convulsions, only by a few odd gestures." If it really was true that "this faculty of the mind [i.e., imagination] can produce [such] terrible effects upon the body," he told Waterhouse, "I think you physicians ought to study and teach us some method of managing and controuling it" ([2]). Even the commissioners feared they might succumb to this "active and terrible power" when they submitted to be magnetized themselves. In order to "become acquainted by their own sensations with the effects ascribed to this agent," something they were "extremely curious" to do, they took care "not to observe too minutely what passed within them." They explained that, "[t]here is so intimate a connection...between the volitions of the soul and the motions of the body," that they feared attention to one part of the body plus thoughts of animal magnetism could accidentally produce effects in themselves just as it had done in the patients (*Report* 40, 84). Perhaps magnetism did not exist; but imagination did, and that alone provided ample cause for concern.

As Adams' letter began, so the American reception of animal magnetism would continue: as a volatile mixture of the wish to learn from Franklin how to recognize and defeat a Lovelace, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the unease of recognizing that if imagination really had the powers the commission attributed to it, such training might be useless. By conceding that the convulsions and other troubling symptoms of the patients were unfeigned, the Franklin commission had placed itself under a logical obligation to

propose an alternate cause for them. And that cause—imagination—could hardly avoid being in some respects just as disconcerting as the chimerical animal-magnetic fluid it had replaced. Thus the truths about the terrible power of imagination which the Franklin commission established were at least as important as the falsehoods about mesmerism it exposed. Animal magnetism did not exist; and yet, the commissioners wrote, "[n]othing is more certain than that a stupendous power here exists, which actuates the patients, subdues them, and of which he who magnetises seems to be the depository" (27-28). The power of their own imaginations put patients "absolutely under the command of him who magnetises them."^{xxiii} The mechanical process within abetted the charlatan without, almost as though imagination were Mesmer's direct counterpart in the body: a malevolent inner seducer.

This slide into personifying imagination as an unruly being to "manage and controul" is all the more striking in light of the fact that given the historical source of the mechanical imagination, a seducer—or indeed any subject with consciousness and volition—was just what imagination ought not, by definition, to be. The commissioners understood the convulsions and sensory hallucinations that imagination produced in Mesmer's patients as resulting from a mechanical process taking place in the body. The word "machine" may now call up images of moving metal parts, of the artificial as opposed to the living. But in pre-industrial New England and France the word's associations were somewhat different: it meant primarily a self-sufficient system which could maintain its own motion and equilibrium and had no need, at least after being set going, of deliberate intervention from any consciousness or deity. Machines could sustain

self-regulating circulations of some complexity; but what they could not, by definition, do, was to *think*. Mechanicity's opposite was not the organic, but the rational and the conscious.^{xxiv} Only because they considered the body to be mechanical—independent from mind or soul—could the commissioners credibly insist that the convulsions and extraordinary experiences of mesmeric patients could fool the experiencers themselves. Had these processes depended on the soul, they could not have appeared alien and external to it. The imagination was supposed to be mechanical *as opposed* to animate or designing. How, then, could it come to seem like a personified inner adversary?

The answer lies in the return of an idea Cartesian physiology had suppressed. Descartes was the first and most influential to treat the body as having mechanical processes entirely independent of consciousness; his physiology, then, was the first to make imaginative error conceivable in terms like the ones the commissioners later developed. Only after Descartes could the body be autonomous from the soul, so that it would be intelligible for it to *fool* the soul. Scholastic psychology, following Aristotle, had modeled the soul as tripartite; every task of the mind and body, including such processes as respiration and digestion, was overseen by one of these parts (Park 464-69). Descartes reasoned that one ought not to posit a complex entity like mind or consciousness as the initiator of bodily movements which could be adequately explained by mechanical principles alone. In his major work on physiology, the *Treatise on Man* (1662), he advances the hypothetical supposition that the body is "just a statue or a machine made of earth" and formed by God with infinite ingenuity. The *Treatise* is an extended thought experiment in operating this automaton: any function that Descartes

believes a machine made by God could theoretically do, he assigns to the automatic body. He comes to the conclusion that most of the functions of life which earlier Aristotelian philosophy had called functions of the soul, including the passions, can be accounted for by mechanical principles, without any need for psychic oversight. He therefore trims the soul's territories to its "rational" functions alone.

Descartes de-animated, or disenchanting, the body, treating it as a set of self-sustaining fluid circulations (99). He followed a long tradition now defunct in also considering nervous functions to operate by fluid circulation: a substance called the "animal spirits" carried motor and sensory information through the hollow, tube-like nerves. Descartes, as one American paper glossed him in 1805, insisted that "all the movements of our members, independent of the thinking faculty, may be performed without the soul's contributing thereto, by the mere power of the animal spirits and the disposition of our limbs" ("Biography" 46). The animal spirits carried motor commands; and they were also the medium for the imagination's effects on perception. An idea in the imagination tending to excite the passions could actually heat the body, causing the animal spirits to circulate through the nerves at increased speed, finally affecting the senses and the limbs. Unchecked, that excitation could lead to sensory and motor effects more and less severe, including convulsions and sensory hallucinations something like those religious enthusiasts and Mesmer's patients experienced.

This system was entirely mechanical, operated by heat and hydraulics; it was emphatically *inanimate* in the etymological sense. But the repressed returned. The mechanical imagination had a peculiar tendency to become personified, as though it were

the very thing it ought, above all, not to be: a soul—or even worse, a demon from pre-enlightened days possessing the self. Perversely enough, Descartes' theory, itself so parsimonious in the rationing of consciousness, provided the basis for what might be called a physiological echo of demonic possession. A now-obsolete adjective which the commissioners used to describe the corporeal effects of imagination expresses this odd contretemps: the commissioners called the body's inveigling of the soul "automatous" (88-89). This word could mean *both* automatic—that is, self-moving, like the circulation of the blood—and autonomous (literally, self-legislating or sovereign) like the rational soul. The *autonome* and the *automaton*—the autonomous subject and the machine—are supposed to be opposites. But in the commission's theory of imaginative delusion, they do seem eerily combined. One part of the body-soul complex, the imagination, could create mechanical effects that would actively mislead another part, the intellect, almost as though the imagination were an inscrutable alien intelligence possessing the body. Imagination, as Jessica Riskin has written, could "hijack the senses," offering its own productions in the place of real sense data and blinding reason to the deception (Riskin, *Science* 217). This (dis)possessor was supposed to be mechanical, decentralized, unpersonified. Nonetheless it appeared as a subject, as though taking on the shape of the prized belongings—self-knowledge and self-determination, the defining properties of the liberal individual—with which it threatened to abscond.

III. Automatic Fictions

If the Franklin report had seduction plots, seduction fiction has more epistemological complexity than we sometimes remember. Certainly these novels offer moral instruction, cautioning against falls from one particular virtue, chastity, and titillating readers with a record of vice. But chastity—especially in the contest of intellects and wills that leads up to the carnal moment of keeping or losing it—is in these fictions primarily an epistemological problem: the problem of managing the mechanical imagination, which colludes with seducers as much as it colludes with mesmerists. Knowledge, as we have seen, is in any case carnal: it depends fundamentally on masterful use of the body's senses and on dominion over its vagaries. In this light there is nothing strange in the fact that the words "credulity" and "delusion," with their variants, incessantly appear in the first American seduction novels, as when the heroine of Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794), seduced to leave England for America and there abandoned, laments in a letter to her parents that her deceiver now "scorns the credulous girl whom his art has made miserable" (84). Fail to practice virtuous doubt, these plots intone, and be ruined.

As it charges the reader to doubt, suspect, and disbelieve—"prudence" is the name for this most prominent virtue in the novelistic *blazon*—a text like Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) also acknowledges the same undertow we have been tracking through mesmeric plots. Seduction fiction dwelled on the epistemological problems the mechanical imagination posed. It depicted an extraordinary and passion-

inspiring experience—love—which could defeat empirical reason just as impassionating experiences in religion and science could do. One natural philosopher of social life wrote facetiously that "[l]ight, heat, . . . electricity, Galvanism, Perkinism, animal spirits, the social feelings, especially when *love* is concerned, and the stimulus of society . . . are all intimately connected or different modifications of the same matter" (Fessenden 265). At the very least, all these categories were connected in their tendency to awe, overwhelm, and rouse the demonic imagination. A doomed lover in William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* and the late-eighteenth-century electrical experimenter Loammi Baldwin shared a worry: Baldwin, who saw white fire ring his kite in a storm but worried that he had imagined it out of fear, wrote that "reason accused imagination with error;" and Brown's character lamented that "[o]ur imagination dresses up a phantom to impose on our reason . . . we fall in love with the offspring of our brain" (95). The "deluded female" (Brown 29); the coquette who "imagines herself superior to delusion" (Foster 55); the reader whose own "thoughtless credulity" she will one day rue (Rowson 32); these form the ranks of a cautionary parade exhibiting both moral and epistemological sins. As Brown puts it, "[m]iserable reasoners are we all" (95). Imagination, for Brown, is an Evil Genius, a Mesmer's demon; it deliberately creates phantom sense impressions, leading reason astray. And reason, an easy mark, follows.

Thus even as seduction fiction's pedagogical surfaces announce it as a tool for training readers proof against the demonic imagination, it, like the Franklin report, has undercurrents tending elsewhere. In this final section I want to turn from mesmerism's seduction plots to the novel itself, in particular to Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*

(1797). This novel furnishes the last dimension to the personification of the mechanical self which we have been tracing here, this strange byproduct of frustrated liberal pedagogy. When practice in doubt fails to deliver real-life mastery over one's mechanical imagination and its unconscious operations, the transparency of the novelistic character offers, I want to suggest, a fictional equivalent to such mastery. Making the character a proxy for one's unruly imagination, one masters the manageable character instead of the unmanageable demon within. Catherine Gallagher has written that the pleasure we take in novelistic characters comes in part from the fact that we find them easier to understand, more readable, than we find ourselves. If it weighs on readers to find that their best efforts at introspection run aground on a puzzling opacity, then the "relief" fictional characters provide, Gallagher argues, consists in offering a projective substitution: characters' "knowability" for "our own comparative unfathomability" (357). The knowable and the unknowable take on an historically and even scientifically specific form in the picture of error animating the Franklin report and the culture of extraordinary experience—and, I argue, in seduction fiction itself. Here, the fictional character does not substitute for the reader's entire self, but for its one unconscious and involuntary part: the mechanical imagination.

Treating seduction fiction as having such a compensatory purpose acknowledges the strength of its pull toward the commandments of liberal subjecthood. But this approach also makes it possible to avoid inadvertently abetting that narrative or affirming its coherence. It thus offers a third way in a central critical debate relating to the genre which Marion Rust has sketched in relation to Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*. One set of

critics, Rust notes, treats the novel as the story of "a woman undone by passion;" by extension, the novel is seen as warning against the effects of an ill-regulated citizenry on the fortunes of a republic. Another group, in which Rust includes herself, resists a straight account of the novel's didacticism, offering instead a deconstructive reading of the ways in which omissions and seams in the text make visible the fact that no agency—and therefore no self-regulation, no virtuous independence—is within reach for a young unmarried woman like Charlotte, ruined or not. Treating the novels as having a supplementary purpose—as achieving subjecthood for their readers phantasmatically, but never in actuality—is a way of doing justice both to their insistence on the necessity of independence for the virtuous matron, and their acknowledgement of its impossibility. The moment of taking up the text as a proxy through which mastery over imagination can be demonstrated is also, from another perspective, a moment of conceding that such mastery is possible in no other way.^{xxv}

The purpose of this intimate relation between reader and character is the establishment of a simulacrum of control, but control is not its only effect. Because of the particular way of offering knowledge that the novel has at its disposal, this relation tends, I want to argue, to give the mechanical body an interior life. What is different about seduction fiction's errant characters, in comparison to religious enthusiasts, the dupes of phony scientific demonstrations, or Mesmer's patients as they figure in the Franklin report, is that they are represented as self-conscious. According to the Cartesian picture, we ought not to find the unconscious and involuntary mechanical imagination giving an account of itself; and yet this is what we do find in *The Coquette*. The novel

tells the story of a woman seduced by the "volatility" of her animal spirits and the activity of her fancy—by, in short, mechanical effects of imagination. Yet this imagination-ruled character narrates and explains this fall herself, in the letters that make up the text.

Eliza's "volatility" marks her as a character in thrall to her mechanical imagination. "Volatile" is a physiological term of art referring to the tone of the "animal spirits"—the same nervous fluid which, in Cartesian-influenced accounts of imaginative error, deprived other inhabitants of the automaton-body of their self-control (39, 107). "The cause" of her ruin, Eliza Wharton explains, "may be found in that unrestrained levity of disposition, that fondness for dissipation and coquetry which alienated the affections of Mr. Boyer from me" (145). A spirit that is volatile is easily excited when heated, and therefore easily agitated and "dissipated." "Dissipation," another key word of the physiological vocabulary of seduction, connotes as much the evaporation and exhaustion of the animal spirits as the social frivolity that brings that physiological exhaustion about (13). The dissipation of volatile spirits belongs to a Cartesian picture of the body, in which the heat of the internal fires speeding the circulation of the nervous fluid was every bit as much a mechanical process as fire that burned without. If brandy evaporated in a burst of flame when one held it to a match, then volatile animal spirits, too, tended to explosion under the heat of imagination. Like Mesmer's convulsing patients, the passionate in love had what amounted to false experiences; the "ebullition," or boiling, of the animal spirits reaching their brains left them incapable of judging or even seeing properly. The reader of these novels is presented, then, with characters in whom the mechanical processes of the body—the "volatile" animal spirits heated into

frenzy by the overactive imagination—take over completely. In a sense, it would be true to say that when she is overcome with imagination, Eliza simply *is* mechanical, ruled by physiological processes and not by conscious will.

One is invited, at these moments, to enter the straying Eliza's psyche and to master her mechanical imagination. This one feels one could do decisively, with a kind of certainty and clarity that is unachievable in the management of one's own inner worlds with their lurking invisible demons. The obviously vacant and enticing role, like an avatar whom no one is driving, is Eliza's abandoned reason. It seems as though someone ought to take this role up, to curb her mechanical imagination; and if there are boundaries between the physiological and the social that make such a usurpation seem strange—how can one person be a body to the other's mind?—the novel has already repeatedly violated these frontiers. Perhaps the most concrete example of such a tantalizing breach is in the form of Eliza's run-on letters. Here she recounts to one wise friend the sober counsels of another, who begins, in the reported dialogue, by warning her not to try to reform the seducer Sanford: "I cannot conceive that...a [virtuous] lady would be willing to risk her all upon the slender prospect of his reformation. I hope the one with whom I am conversing, has no inclination, to so hazardous an experiment. Why, not much. Not much! If you have any, why do you continue to encourage Mr. Boyer's addresses? I am not sufficiently acquainted with either yet, to determine which to take...my fancy and my judgment are in scales. Sometimes one preponderates, sometimes the other. Which will finally outweigh, time alone can reveal. O my cousin, beware of the delusions of fancy! Reason must be our guide if we would expect durable happiness" (51). The dialogue runs

together until it all seems to be in Eliza's voice—and in a sense, of course, it is. Who is speaking comes to matter less than whether the speaker is ranged on the side of Sanford, imagination, and Eliza; or reason and Eliza's friends. And as the differences between physiological and social battles seem less and less salient, the reader can take up the controls, treating the work of managing and judging Eliza as a surrogate for an analogous, but impossible labor: that of controlling the mechanical imagination in herself.

If the novel tugs its readers toward making a character into a physiological process, it has also, itself, made a physiological process into a character. And this character is more than a shadowy possessor or *anima*; it is a narrator, a subject with manners and decisions, and even a deliberator with a degree of self-awareness. In Foster's novel, we see physiological volatility—the mechanical process of imagination with which this history began—becoming conscious of itself. Remorse over ruin is one form this awareness takes; but there is also expression, even argumentation, as Eliza's letters sue for the right to be mechanical, volatile, coquettish. While she exclaims, "[m]y heart beats high in expectation of its fancied joys," and "[m]y sanguine imagination paints, in alluring colors, the charms of youth and freedom," her letter analyzes, with some lucidity, the cause of her predicament (29). The relieving transparency of the character to which Gallagher refers our pleasure in fiction is created here in part through the illusion that Eliza is to a degree *self*-consciousness and *self*-transparent—even if conflicted. By the twisted chain we have been untangling here, the demand to master one's mechanical imagination—to distance it, dominate it, keep it under wraps—leads

instead to a fiction in which a mere automatic process arrives at self-consciousness. It becomes, if not a person, then that consequential simulacrum of the person: the novelistic character.

Conclusion: Falsehoods Come True

Mesmerism would inherit the task of maintaining the relationship to the emergent mechanical self which the Franklin commission, in a sense, had begun. The first hint of this unholy alliance was already present in the Franklin report itself, though not in any of its U. S. redactions. The commissioners relate a conversation they had with the mesmerist Deslon in which they told him the conclusions of their study: that imagination, and not any animal-magnetic fluid, had brought about the patients' symptoms. He quite affably replied, they say, "that he thought he might lay it down as a fact, that the imagination had the greatest share in the effects of animal magnetism; he said that this new agent [i.e., the animal-magnetic fluid] might be no[ne] other than the imagination itself" (*Report* 100). Deslon was not the only one to come to this conclusion. Instead of collapsing in the face of the Franklin commission's attack, mesmerism was to appropriate its terms. Mesmerists quickly began to insist that in fact this problem of false experience that the Franklin commission had identified—this problem of the imagination's power to counterfeit experience—had been just what they had been investigating all along. Animal magnetism, they soon said, was the medium in which the pathological imagination worked; it simply *was* the fluid by which deception accomplished itself. When they

manipulated the magnetic fluid, they said, they were experimenting with the human capacity for delusion. The Franklin report had offered a hybrid of scientific experiment and seduction fiction, and these mesmeric performances would do the same. They included both a theory of error and a narration of it, in which the entranced volunteer impersonated—as an actor does a character—the mechanical imagination.

Mesmerism's is an Enlightenment history, but one running transverse to the railroad-straight rivalries of error and error's eradication, progress and anti-progress, pedagogy and seduction. It helps to remember that Mesmer himself began as a son of Enlightenment. He was catapulted into fame in 1775, when he performed a feat of disenchantment: he debunked the cures of exorcist Johann Joseph Gassner, saying that the cures were really the result of Gassner unconsciously directing the animal-magnetic fluid into patients' bodies (Midelfort 17-21). At this moment, Mesmer's position with respect to Gassner looked a great deal like what the gimlet-eyed commissioners' position would be with respect to Mesmer himself ten years later: Mesmer said exorcism was just animal magnetism; Franklin et al. would say animal magnetism was just imagination. Each of these gestures of disenchantment declared itself as putting false animisms in the past, out of the way of the progress of knowledge; and one is supposed to see a maturation from the first to the second, as humanity comes out of its nonage and furthers its rejection of enchantment. But the intricate repetitiveness of the gestures tells another story. It speaks less of the progressive and lasting eradication of diabolical intelligences than of their persistent return as and in corporeal automatisms. The demons leaving the landscape appear to have fled into the body. If there is development (as opposed to pure

repetition) in anything here, it is not to be found in some increasingly comprehensive deletion of the demonic, but in the sharpening focus on this would-be eliminated mechanical self as the site of an alternate consciousness, will, and knowledge. This emergent figure—like nineteenth-century American mesmerism itself—was the bastard child of two enlightened founding fathers: Mesmer, and Franklin.

Notes

^{ix} Four periodical abridgements of the Franklin report, each of which was reprinted multiple times in different locations along the Atlantic coast, determined the bulk of what American readers would have encountered. The first group of redactions includes many printings of an article patterned after a Charleston, SC piece of February 1785, "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman at Paris" [3]. The first appearance of this article is in a London paper in 1784: "A Wanderer." However, the numerous subsequent American printings for the most part take the Charleston essay as their source. This article appeared in early 1785 in Philadelphia; Providence; Falmouth, MA; Newburyport, MA; Salem, Hartford, CT; Burlington, NJ and elsewhere. A second, smaller group of newspapers gave a more detailed redaction of the report, including direct quotations from Mesmer's own work. This article appeared in Boston in 1785 as "Account of the Report of the Committee" 163-66, and was also printed in Worcester and New Haven periodicals. Thirdly, two nearly identical articles on Mesmer's "pretended discovery" gave the Franklin report extensive treatment, appearing in New York and Philadelphia in the summer of 1785: see "Animal Magnetism!" [Supplement 1]. Finally, a fourth set of articles, detailing the Franklin commission's experiments and their results, also appeared that summer in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Salem: see "Following Are the Principal Experiments" [Supplement 1].

^x On religious enthusiasm in the U. S., see Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions* 13-118; Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm* 178-94, and Garrett, *Spirit Possession* 105-39. See Goldstein, "Enthusiasm or Imagination?" 29-49, and Riskin, *Science* 216, on the "*convulsionnaires*" of Saint-Médard, a Jansenist sect that arose in the 1720s and 1730s after the death of a deacon, as precursors of mesmeric patients. James Delbourgo makes a persuasive argument that American enlightenment is no disembodied affair—that, on the contrary, the corporeal effects of a force like electricity are important objects of discussion and experience (*Wonders* 2-4 and *passim*), and that "secular enthusiasm" (a term Delbourgo also uses) threatened in natural events. I differ from Delbourgo,

however, in that I see the Franklin commission report as having played an important role in making the terms "imagination" and "enthusiasm" current in discussion of natural-philosophical observation.

^{xi} "[Signor Falconi]" [3]. Falconi advertised the watch trick in "Boston Theatre" 71; and was rumored to be a mesmerist in "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Kingston" [3]. On Falconi, see Tigner, "Magic and Magicians" 673. To Hutton's letter, James Hutton to Benjamin Franklin, 2 May 1783, franklinpapers.org [unpublished], no reply from Franklin is extant. Delbourgo's important work on American electrical demonstrations of the eighteenth century informs my discussion in this section.

^{xii} Mesmer, and many electrical demonstrators, still understood electricity as a fluid made of fine particles which could be "condensed," or concentrated, in a jar: see Gillispie, *Science and Polity* 264-65. Franklin had earned his spot in the Paris Academy of Sciences by proposing an alternate theory of electricity closer to the one we hold now; see Heilbron, *Electricity* 344-71. To clarify the metaphors of the *baquet*, I describe the Leyden jar in the prior set of terms.

^{xiii} "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman at Paris" [3]. On the electric eel, see Delbourgo, *Wonders* 65-199; Spencer quoted 29. On the similarity of electricity and animal magnetism, see Riskin, *Science* 196 and Darnton, *Mesmerism* 10-11.

^{xiv} Charles Thompson, letter to Thomas Jefferson, 6 Mar. 1785, Boyd, ed. *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* VIII: 15-17.

^{xv} Franklin, letter to William Temple Franklin, 25 Aug. 1784.

^{xvi} *Report* 56-60; "The Following Are the Principal Experiments" [3]; "Animal Magnetism!" [Supplement 1].

^{xvii} "Extract of a Letter from a Physician" [2]; "A. B.," [1]; "Miscellaneous: Perkins's Metallic Points" [4].

^{xviii} Loammi Baldwin quoted in Delbourgo, *Wonders* 2-4, 62ff.

^{xix} "Boston, Nov. 29" [2]; Rush, "Extracts;" Brown, "For the *Literary Magazine*" 83-89. Historians have concurred that the report consolidated new powers for (and fears of) imagination: Riskin, *Science* 191-92 and Daston, "Fear and Loathing" 16-30.

^{xx} This letter also appeared as Adams, "John Adams as He Lived."

^{xxi} "Foreign Intelligence" [2]; "Animal Magnetism, from the American Edition of the Encyclopedia" 278; "Account of the Report," 164; "Animal Magnetism!" [Supplement 1].

^{xxii} Jefferson wrote to Charles Thompson, James Currie, James Madison, John Page, David Rittenhouse, and Francis Hopkinson on the 11th, and continued to do periodic dances on Mesmer's grave in his correspondence; he is quoted from Thomas Jefferson, letter to William Smith, 19 Feb. 1791. See Boyd, ed., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* VII: 504, 508, 514, 518, 570, 602, 635, 642; VIII: 246, IX: 379.

^{xxiii} "Animal Magnetism!" [Supplement 1].

^{xxiv} Riskin, "Wetware" 99; Schaffer, "Automata" 126.

^{xxv} Rust describes this debate in Rust, *Prodigal Daughters* 61-63, offering Barnes, *States of Sympathy* 45, as an instance of reading seduction fiction in terms of its pedagogical aims.

Chapter Two
In Praise of the Credulous Reader:
Charles Brockden Brown's Demonstration Science

But what form of knowledge, after all, is sufficiently singular, esoteric, or regional to be given only at a single point, in a unique formulation?...What figure of science, however coherent or tight it might be, does not allow more or less obscure forms of practical, moral, or mythological consciousness to gravitate around it?

—Foucault, *History of Madness*^{xvii}

In the late eighteenth-century U. S., demonstration science became the source of a new and counter-liberal subject: the credulous empiricist. Beliefs about what error is and how it is to be avoided; about delusion and its ethical valence; about sensation and the exercises and disciplines of selfhood necessary to keep it from being misled: a tacit mutual agreement about these constituted the public of U. S. demonstration science. But by the 1790s, these agreed-upon beliefs were in a state of transformation. Imagination's mechanical effects stood beyond the reach of conscious training, as the Franklin commission's report on mesmerism had suggested. Popular empiricists could no longer convene their public on the grounds of its members' accomplished Lockean self-sufficiency, their imperviousness to secular enthusiasm and error. On what grounds, then? Exhibitors of electrical machines and their audiences; mesmerists and their stage-volunteers or patients; all stood in need of a theory of empirical knowledge that could accommodate imagination's vicissitudes in the awestruck body. They stood in need of a subject who could be an ideal observer and maker of empirical facts despite—even because of—her rampant imagination. They were falling out of step, in other words, with

Lockean pedagogy's social imaginary: if getting the mechanical body under control in the way that popular Lockeanism dictated was in fact impossible, then one had to learn to know enthusiastically.

The mesmerists who began inserting themselves into the Atlantic scientific demonstration circuit in the 1790s—the first to perform in cities and towns in New England and points south to Charleston—took a stab at imagining an enthusiastic observer and the body of knowledge-producers to which she might belong. To the extent that they succeeded, they built a new enlightenment public: one that could include automata, dupes, seduction victims, and hysterics among its knowing members. Following a developing strain of mesmeric practice in France, these performers offered a strange new sight. It seemed that under the trance, some patients—even as their senses turned faulty in precisely the way that the Franklin commission deplored—also became capable of strange other empiricisms. While the trance "suspend[ed] some of their external senses for awhile," they developed remarkable abilities: they could see into bodies to diagnose disease, detect the invisible electric fluid, or read books and music in the dark.^{xxvii} The perpetrators of demonstration culture's most damning error—enthusiasm—turned into experts at its most prized kind of observation—seeing electricity. What had counted as fraud now counted as a source of privileged knowledge; delusion was wisdom; credulity was insight. Mesmerism became a site at which demonstration science thought through the psychology of its own perceptions, and determined to revalue the credulous subject as a knower.

Redeeming error of this particular kind—error that came out of the defeat of reason at the hands of the determined body—would also amount to reconsidering the axes of gullibility and skepticism, autonomy and thrall, that organized political and, for that matter, novelistic rhetoric in the early republic. In other words, much more than error belongs to this history of error. What we have been tracing are the peregrinations of the subject-called-errant through a domain that goes beyond her problems of producing knowledge, and into her social fortunes; her associations in the novel, medicine, natural philosophy, and politics; her physiological makeup; and her moral character. It is a question not just of error, but of the whole matrix of social information around error: of a complex we might call "credulity." Mesmerism's French success showed "the credulity of the public;" seducers preyed on the "credulous fair;" patent-medical patients fell "the dupes of a blind credulity;" and the "monarchic & aristocratic chains...rivetted on mankind" would only fall when "ignorance, credulity, and priestcraft" finally came to an end and modern democracy prevailed.^{xxviii} Credulity really meant *both* delusion and thrall. To be credulous was to be deluded in such a way that one parted company with one's money, one's enfranchisement, or one's chastity; to be deluded in such a way as to lose one's position as a full communicant of a democratic public. To be credulous was to be unworthy of participation in the social contract. Demonstration science provided an alternate space of social recognition—a counter-public—where automatic persons could be included in a knowledge-making enterprise. But it also did something else: it provided an archive of positively-valued credulity on which other discourses—the novel,

medicine, even political thought—could freely draw in their own efforts to transvalue subjects accused not just of gullibility, but of dependence.

One such translation is Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). Brown experiments here with making the credulous subject—not the autonomous Lockean—the base unit of the social contract. I will be arguing that in this novel, Brown uses demonstration science's new credulous subject to revive the deluded reader of romance. Mesmerism's own transvaluation of this subject serves as an archive for Brown's investigation. And yet my ultimate goal here is not merely to explicate *Edgar Huntly's* scientific contexts or to account for the presence of science "in" literature. Instead, I understand the novel as a particularly subtle tool for understanding the cloud of ideas and materials around credulity—for writing, in short, an historical epistemology of error. Rather than treating the novel primarily as an object to be explicated through the illumination of its scientific contexts, I want to look at it as an explicator, in its own right, of science's social fortunes. Novels may stand at precisely the right distance from intellectual and material history to make possible an account reducible to neither.

A growing body of work places Brown's novels—and indeed early American literature more generally—in the context of what Brian Waterman calls a "transnational intellectual culture."^{xxix} In this respect, the project of reading science and literature together has benefited from the transnational turn: it seems appropriate, even urgent, to read the events of global modernity—or to put it a different way, enlightenment—into the U. S. literary tradition. Critics have made *Edgar Huntly*, in particular, a focus of this

effort, so that we can now read the novel in the context of eighteenth-century medicine; Humean political economy; transatlantic liberalism; and New York intellectual cosmopolitanism.^{xxx} Where my project can be distinguished from the general impulse of this body of criticism, however, is in seeing enlightenment—in particular, demonstration science—not as a larger context for U. S. liberalism, but as a counter-weight to it: as the place in which an alternate tradition, equally an enlightenment tradition, took shape.

Around the credulous subject formed new proposals about social relations: to what extent they could involve compulsion, deception, and delusion; what counted as doing good; what counted as respecting the reason of others. In other words, the acceptance of knowing persons is not only about subjects and the recognition of subjects. It is also about the formation of new social imaginaries. In the credulous subject, I want to argue, something neglected returned: the need, in a contract society, not just for perspicacity but for belief. In that case, the revaluation of credulity also amounted to an interest in recognizing the enthusiastic, romantic, quixotic, mechanical, volatile, and involuntary elements of the social relation. The willingness to believe and depend sometimes denigrated as "credulity" or "imagination" closely resembled, once you looked at them squarely, the necessary social commodity of trust—confidence, instead of the tendency to fall for confidence games. Coming out of alignment with liberal concepts of the subject, mesmerism would come into alignment with these other needs—it could even begin to imagine a counter-liberal public.

I will argue, first, that mesmerism made enthusiastic error the source of privileged insight in the context of the natural-philosophical demonstration stage. This revaluation

spread outward, in turn, from the problem of error to its twin in the credulity complex, the problem of compulsion. Though accused of being apologists for coercion and dependence, mesmerists actually launched a critique of the enlightenment language of freedom. Mesmerism allows us to see, I argue, how calling people credulous and mechanical did not identify a physiological deficiency, but rather brought into being a social subordination. In *Edgar Huntly*, the credulous subject and the empiricist public to which she belongs become the archive for a narrative experiment in making belief part of the modern social bond—an experiment I trace from Brown's non-fictional writing on mesmerism and demonstration science into his novels. Finally, Brown's novel is a test case for what the novel knows about science: for how it outlines in fire the kite-strings tying the changing categories of knowledge-production to the terms of social life.

I. Knowing Enthusiasts

When mesmerism appeared as a falsehood on New England shores, it articulated a dilemma already troublesome to the natural-philosophical demonstration public: the problem of secular enthusiasm. Spectacular events electrical and magnetic alike—the electric kiss with its stream of fire, the magical stopping of watches, the fiery ignition of kites in thunderstorms—all these were awe-inspiring enough to cause imaginative error; and yet they were also the inseparable adjuncts of electrical investigation. When mesmerism appeared for the first time as a *truth* in the 1790s, it offered a solution to—or at least, a symbolic resolution of—the same problem. Mesmerists who began treating

patients by magnetic passes on the American demonstration stage in the nineties cut the Gordian knot of enthusiasm by the simple expedient of transvaluing error. To the Franklin commission's charge that mesmeric patients were deluded about the evidence of their senses, these new practitioners gaily acceded. It was precisely this errancy, they now claimed, that acted as the gateway to other, extraordinary capabilities. By putting a special new kind of mesmeric patient into the trance before an audience, these practitioners could create an observer who was deluded about the immediate evidence of her senses but supremely receptive to other, subtler stimuli. "It seems," said the British mesmerist John Bell of such subjects, "that being deprived of their external senses, their intellects become stronger" (*GP* 68). Not only did delusion and knowledge consort promiscuously with one another, but the former made the latter possible. Withdrawing attention from the ordinary senses, patients saw elsewhere and otherwise.

And of what objects were these new mesmeric patients, called "somnambulists," such gifted observers? Precisely those which were most prestigious and elusive to demonstration science. What clairvoyant somnambulists saw formed an index of demonstration culture's valued objects. One of the special faculties of the entranced patient was the ability to see electricity itself. The external senses dampened, patients "could see electric fire" when Bell rubbed a glass tube, he said (*GP* 72).^{xxxi} If Loammi Baldwin saw lightning-fire in his kite experiments and accused himself of imaginative error, clairvoyants welcomed the same visions as evidence of their perceptual privilege. Mesmerism began to take on the role of meta-discourse within demonstration science, proposing new ideals of observation. Rather than insisting on an observer whose body

was impermeable to enthusiasm, mesmerists now produced subjects who were all that Lockeanes were not: deluded, absent, mechanical—and gifted observers of electricity.

In 1792, a mesmerist named Dr. Robinson congratulated the citizens of Baltimore on their opportunity to see the new animal magnetism in action in "that happy season of the year, when the wind was so favorable as to blow so many Magnetists to Baltimore."^{xxxii} Not just a wind, but a front, had blown magnetists into cities along the Atlantic coast at around the same time.^{xxxiii} These were the practitioners who were to bring the figure of the knowing dupe to the U. S. stage. They still had much in common with Deslon and Mesmer, promising "to produce crises" like the ones the commissioners had observed in Deslon's treatment salon.^{xxxiv} They still explained the crises in the same way, too: the crisis happened when they had directed into the patient's body a stream of the animal-magnetic fluid so powerful that it could break obstructions in the patient's nervous circulation. And they still claimed, by these means, to treat diseases from hysteria to gangrene to the "Kings evil," or scrophula, a skin disease once believed to be cured by the royal touch.^{xxxv} But there was also a distinctly new phenomenon on display here: magnetic somnambulism.

This variation on the trance would become every bit as important for mesmerism's subsequent history as the crises had been; it would also provide the site at which practitioners transvalued imaginative error.^{xxxvi} One of Mesmer's pupils, the Marquis de Puységur, had found in the 1780s that under the influence of the magnetic passes, some patients displayed symptoms that were markedly different from those of the ordinary mesmeric crisis. Rather than convulsing and expectorating fluids, these patients went into

a state Puységur thought was physiologically identical to sleepwalking. They lost the ability to perceive ordinary sensory objects, but gained extraordinary knowledge, sometimes even explaining the roots of their own diseases.^{xxxvii} These patients also became unusually sensitive to the commands of the magnetist, a susceptibility often demonstrated by limb paralysis; "the operator," claimed Robinson, who practiced these techniques, "can raise the leg or arm of any person from off a table without touching."^{xxxviii} The mesmerist's own actions remained much the same: collecting the patients around water or even a tree that had been "magnetized," passing their hands in a polar direction along the body, staring into the patient's eyes, and using crypto-electrical apparatus like the modified Leyden jar of the *baquet*.^{xxxix} John Bell, whose savant-somnambulists we have already encountered, brought these new techniques to England after learning them in France, publishing a collection of lectures, *The General and Particular Principles of Animal Electricity and Magnetism* (1792). From there, travelling the low road of piracy and plagiarism, mesmeric "somnambulism, or sleep-walking" made its way to the American stage.^{xl}

There, the somnambulist appeared as a paragon of error turned to insight. She still had much in common with the mesmeric patient. About her hovered the lingering suspicion, if not full-blown conviction, of hysteria. She remained a bad empiricist: with somnambulists, Bell said, it was as though someone had "suspend[ed] some of their external senses for awhile [sic]" (*GP* 68). She even had the kind of heightened nervous circulation—induced by the mesmerist as a means of cure—with which the Franklin commission had associated enthusiasm. But she also became the perfect instrument for

sensing electricity that the demonstration natural-philosopher might wish he himself could be. One person Bell had entranced saw a "glass conductor" which "to him appeared very luminous;" Bell reported that "he also saw my hand all luminous; I rubbed the nose of a gentleman present, which he saw luminous" as well (*GP* 78). Mesmerists had made the mechanical imagination into something like an auxiliary sense, one better suited than the ordinary senses were for observing natural science's most elusive objects.

There is perhaps no more potent example of the way practitioners now turned disreputable weakness into epistemic strength than the figure Bell called the "*malade-medecin*," or invalid-physician. Some somnambulists—who were often women with nervous disorders—found that the special knowledge the trance imparted to them was the knowledge of illness itself. They could identify diseases of which, when awake, they knew nothing, and they could prescribe "many herbs [of which] when awake they did not [even] know the names" (*GP* 74). Bell hypothesized that with their external senses disengaged, these patients could pick up the animal-magnetic vibrations that marked illness. Yet there is a symbolic, as well as a physiological, register here. Mesmerism seemed to deliver a self-curing version of the disease of imaginative thrall. What caused the enthusiast's error—her mechanical body running amok under the illicit dictates of imagination—now facilitated in the somnambulist a knowledge that *exceeded* anything available to a person in a normal mental state. "No physicians," Bell declared, "can tell the...disease of a person, so well as a *somnambule*" (68). The *malade-medecin* represented a hope made flesh: that somewhere on the other side of the inevitably errant body, there was nonetheless a means of knowing the truth. It was as though science,

having accepted the impossibility of fully arming a fact-maker against imagination's pitfalls, now took imagination itself to be the very foundation of empiricist vision.

Here demonstration culture offered the rudiments of a new subject: the errant empiricist. Scientific demonstration was a web of social transactions: looking, knowing, doubting, and believing; giving and receiving an electric shock; taking a dose of mesmeric fluid; volunteering to have one's watch stopped; telling the future; diagnosing an illness by animal-magnetic means and having one's diagnosis credited. And now, in these transactions, recognition came to a figure who had lacked it. The mesmeric somnambulist was just like an errant mesmeric patient, except now her credulity counted as insight. Demonstration culture had been in a lockstep with liberalism, deploring imagination's predations on reason—its vulnerability to seduction, swindling, and demagoguery. But then, at the moment of maximum tension which we investigated in the first chapter, it broke partially free. Completely eradicating imagination from the act of knowing no longer seemed possible; and with that, the coordination between empirical knowing and liberal political being was no longer complete. Now, on the mesmeric stage, one looked at deluded nervous patients as though they knew something. If they knew something, perhaps one should listen when they said something: perhaps they belonged in a rational public that had to be re-jiggered to include them. Mesmerism was beginning to imagine a counter-liberal subject.

II. Sovereign Automata

This was a shift that would have implications beyond the cultures of popular-scientific knowledge. The condition mesmerism revised into a source of empirical data was that of imaginative error, when the body, understood as a system of mechanically circulating fluids, overthrew the soul. But it was this very same determined body, understood in the same physiological terms, which attached to the unprivileged term in other formations: thrall as opposed to autonomy; seduction as opposed to virtue; slavery as opposed to citizenship. Just as the Franklin commission had accused mesmeric patients of error, it had deplored in them the signs of a servile attachment to the magnetist. Visiting Deslon's treatment room, the commissioners had been dismayed to find that "[a]ll of [the patients] are absolutely under the command of him who magnetises them," so that "a word, a look, a sign recalls their attention."^{xli} The new mesmerists had transvalued error; could they do the same with this scandalous thrall? If there could be an enthusiast observer, could there be a sovereign automaton, a mechanical subject whose mechanicity not only left intact his claims to knowledge, but also his claims to autonomy? Mesmerists would indeed experiment with revaluing the practitioner's apparent command over the somnambulist—and her apparent physiological thrall—just as they had revalued the somnambulist's errancy and the practitioner's fraud. But this attempt was to involve greater complications than had the revaluation of error. Was it possible to extend recognition to the determined and mechanical body without issuing a blanket apology for coercion?

Bell recounts the story of one patient who declared herself an automaton while under the trance—declared herself, that is, a determined body operating without rational

control. He had put the woman, a harpsichordist, "in *Somnambulism*, before her music master, and several other musicians." Once in the trance, she "sat down to her harpsichord, took her book, and looked for her last lesson, which she played better than when awake." This despite the fact that "the room was dark"—a fact significant because it meant she played by an inner sense, not by ordinary visual reading of her sheet music (*GP* 71-72). As with somnambulists in general, the harpsichordist's senses dulled as her knowledge in another direction—in this case, musical ability—sharpened, as if to say that with blindness came incomparable insight. This compensatory formation should be familiar so far. But in that she considered herself an automaton—a wind-up music machine—her case takes us beyond questions of knowledge to questions of compulsion. The harpsichordist made her self-interpretation clear when, after playing for some time, as Bell reports, she "stopt suddenly." Asked what the trouble was, "she said she must be charged more;—they are like a machine which requires to be wound up" (*GP* 71-72). Automata began appearing on the American demonstration stage in the 1790s, and music-playing automata were a particularly common form, including, later in the century, multiple harpsichord-playing automata at the Columbian Museum in Boston.^{xlii} Bell's harpsichordist resembled one of these: an electrical machine or a clockwork automaton which had to be "charged," as she put it, or "wound up," as Bell said, in order to perform its round of mechanical tasks.

Mesmerists admitted they had a power to compel their patients analogous to the power a "mechanist," or automaton-maker, had over his creature.^{xliii} But they insisted that they exercised their influence for good. Establishing an "empire of strength" over the

patient was inseparable, they said, from the work of the cure (*GP* 15). To mesmerize, Bell explained, the operator used his own nervous circulation to alter the patient's. By an effort of will, Bell could "direct the fluid towards the diseases and affected *viscera*;" the patient's nervous fluid, in turn, received the effects of this exertion and changed its motion depending upon it (*GP* 24). But, Bell insisted, mesmerists only used their "magnetic virtue," or power, for virtuous ends: "to eradicate illness, instead of oppressing the individual" (*GP* 15, 17). Theirs was a benevolent tyranny; and their patients, correspondingly, practiced a wholesome automatism.

Could one take this seriously? Weren't mesmerists simply bald-faced apologists for coercion? To the popular political philosophy embodied in Franklin-report redactions, that was exactly what they were. "Benevolent tyranny" and "wholesome automatism" were oxymorons on the Franklin commission's view. A person could not exercise tyrannical force without that act being unethical in itself; conversely, one could not succumb to tyranny without moral abandonment. The Franklin report rattles off the instances that belong to such a category, even as it adds mesmerism to the number: the religious enthusiasm as among "the tremblers of Cevennes;" crowds in theaters; "rebellions" among armies; seduction, swindling, and demagoguery—all these relations showed disrespect for the freedom and reason of one's interlocutor, and for one's own freedom and reason (*Report* 91-93). It hardly mattered whether mesmerists were frauds who manipulated patients' imaginations, or alchemists who actually could use a substance called the "animal-magnetic fluid" to manipulate patients' nervous circulations directly. In either case, they stood condemned as disreputable tyrants. And as for their patients,

these poor creatures at best deserved pity, and at worst contempt; for they were obscurely responsible for their own descent into moral turpitude.

This is, however, very far from being the only way to read mesmerists' attempts to recover mechanical figures and the relations of coercion in which they were ensnared. One can also interpret mesmerism's vocabulary of benevolent tyrants and free automata as a critical commentary on the way the language of freedom underwrote the reality of thrall. Language like the Franklin commission's pretended simply to *identify* despots, dupes, and slaves; to describe neutrally, in other words, relationships of coercion that already existed. But really it was performative, not descriptive. Calling someone mechanical actively excluded him from the comity of the rational and free, even as it appeared neutrally to identify those who were excluded by nature. The automaton or the mechanically driven enthusiast ranked with the "servant" and the "slave:" responsible for his own exclusion, dangerous in her lack of self-possession. One magazine editor accused his arch-rival of being a "mere automaton, in the hands of [his] masters," who had been "purchase[d]...as they purchase negroes in Virginia, or hire[d], as they hire servants in New-England" (Rusticoat 1). One hardly wanted the press in the hands of such a toady to despotism. In Locke's toxic and beautiful formulation, "[h]ow almost can it be otherwise, but that he should be ready to impose on others Belief, who has already imposed on his own?" (698). Automata, servants, slaves, enthusiasts: their evident disrespect for their own reason made them likely to disrespect the rational powers of others. The social body seemed justified in meeting such a danger with violence and exclusion.

It was in this light that being a knowing automaton—as the harpsichordist declared herself to be—could register as the reclaiming of a marginalized category. Mesmerism had the potential to extend recognition to those who have been marked as automatic, creating a counter-public which would include these demoted types as meaningful actors. And indeed, if we return to Bell's harpsichordist, it is not at all clear that her "automatism" meant subjugation. Instead it seems to have constituted a position of authority from which she could speak and even dictate terms, in a form of what the historian of mesmerism and hypnosis Henri Ellenberger calls "bargaining" (151). Ellenberger cautions that the control of the mesmerist or hypnotist over the patient "has often been misunderstood" by historians—and for that matter, by contemporaries—as a case of the mesmerist "forc[ing]" suggestions on the patient (150). Instead, the cure might be seen as a kind of bond, a rapport—which mesmerists interpreted literally as a magnetic attraction—between doctor and patient. When the harpsichordist stopped playing, Bell says, he "asked the cause," at which point, in a single explanation, she both interpreted her own state and stated her desire: "she said she must be charged more" (*GP* 71-72). Bell acceded to her explanation—he agreed that she was "like a machine"—and there is every reason to think he also acceded to her request, and re-performed the magnetic passes.

This does not particularly look like thrall. What it looks like, in fact, is a mutually defined contract. If so, then something remarkable has happened. The objections above to automata and other mechanical bodies are uniquely those of a contract society. It is precisely the idea of the social body as a group of rational individuals constituted through

mutual consent that makes a mechanical or compelled citizen such an object of fear and loathing. The impostor or swindler is the worst; next his victim, who may be the cracked seal by means of which despotism infiltrates democracy. Neither swindler nor dupe respects rational consent. So it is very difficult to get someone defined as enthralled to be recounted as a member of the social body—but this is precisely what happens with the automaton harpsichordist in Bell's text. She gives and withholds consent: she decides, by "stopp[ing] suddenly," how long the performance is to continue and under what terms. She and Bell bargain, and even to some degree share the power of describing the event in which they participate.

Bell took notice of negotiation of this sort across the spectrum of his mesmeric patients; when they did not want to answer, they simply declined. It was true, that while in the trance, somnambulists were under the mesmerist's command, and spectacularly so. They would "do many surprising things as you please to desire them"—a perfect obedience, except for the caveat Bell soon adds: "provided they are willing" (*GP* 68). One somnambulist refused to take off her garter when asked, even though all the men present at the trial had left the room; this demonstrated not the incompleteness of her trance in particular but the moral wholesomeness of trance in general (*GP* 76). As with the harpsichordist, these desired performances had also to excite the subject's own desire if they were to be carried out. Those who had styled themselves invalid-physicians "seldom will answer any questions, foreign to...diseases," Bell noted (*GP* 70). The mesmerist's "empire of strength" was never quite complete. It seemed to catalyze, rather than containing, somnambulists' own powers. In the trance, after all, somnambulists

became capable of feats of knowing and sensation that exceeded anything of which the mesmerists themselves were capable. The power to make another person know what one does not know oneself is an ambiguous kind of power indeed.

Mesmerism visualized, then, a sovereign automaton. And in fact there was some mandate for seeing mechanicity as productive and virtually sentient in the eighteenth-century associations of the word "machine." Rather than an industrial apparatus (and supervising worker) alike limited to a single task—and constrained to that task, moreover, by the totalitarian supervision of some overseer—one can imagine instead something more like an extremely complex clockwork toy. Once wound up, it may perform a set of unpredictable and complicated actions—including speech and the production of affect—before winding down. We might think of automata in a literal sense: a mechanical drummer-boy who played his instrument with a "lifelike air" at Baker's Museum in New York in the 1790s, for example ("Curiosities" 3). But we would do better still to think of a *human* machine: the Cartesian mechanical body when turned loose—whether through sleep, pathology, religious fervor, imagination, or the actions of a mesmerist—from the controlling soul. For the sleepwalker; for the entranced patient who invents diagnoses and prescribes medications whose name she does not know while awake; for the "wound up" harpsichordist who plays skillfully, but only so long as she wishes; mechanism is less a matter of determinism than of excess of effects to causes, an excess of the "subjugated" clairvoyant's knowledge in comparison to that of her "controlling" mesmerist. Mechanicity was not stale, calcified, and determined, but rather *overdetermined*, *overproductive*, mysteriously knowing.

Granted, the mesmeric self was extraordinarily receptive to the dispositions and wishes of others—trusting toward legitimate and duplicitous proposals alike. But it was not will-less. The trance involved a form of consent to play—or a play version of the social contract. The new mesmeric practitioners had revalued, not eliminated, the magnetic rapport that the commissioners had only been able to understand as tyrannical and superstitious. They had revalued the type of the automaton—paradigmatically excluded from the comity of rational men—and had folded it back in to the range of parties to the social contract. In the process, they changed the mesmeric bond from a relation of domination to something more like an arrangement for mutual benefit. Mesmerism brought back to the surface, I want to argue, something that was a necessary concomitant of contracts themselves: the inclination to believe others—to credit them. This inclination had been traveling incognito in the enlightenment imaginary—as though it were a stowaway from some romantic age—under the unflattering name "credulity." Now the mesmeric public established itself as a zone where one was free to value the "credulous" and confiding forms of the social bond.

III. Belief, intransitive

Charles Brockden Brown recognized the promise of mesmerism as a way of thinking through credulity as a means of doing good. When he read the Franklin report on Mesmer's animal magnetism, he thought the commissioners had missed the point entirely. Their investigation, he wrote in the "Student's Diary" feature of his *Literary Magazine*,

had yielded compelling proofs of "the power of imagination or belief over diseases," but these valuable facts were as pearls before swine. When the commissioners "discovered, or thought they discovered" that imagination was at the root of mesmerism's effects, "the matter, in their opinion, was settled, and Mesmer and Deslon were considered as detected and condemned." The commissioners had learned too well the lessons fictions and falsehoods could teach in the art of doubt; they were armed so strong in skepticism that the "surprising instances of the irresistible power of the rod and 'baquet'" could do nothing but furnish them with occasions for "invective against the impudence of imposture, and the credulity of mankind" (85-86). In their haste to disavow and deplore the mechanical imagination, Brown thought, these skeptics had blinded themselves to its usefulness as a form of connection and cure. Instead of dismissing credulity out of hand, Brown thought, one should "consider whether this power, whencesoever derived, is exerted for good or bad purposes, and condemn and renounce, or applaud and imitate accordingly" (86). For Brown, in other words, sovereign automatism and benevolent tyranny were real possibilities. Credulity—the "power of imagination" not to create, but actually to *deceive*—might have its place in modern social relations.

No eighteenth-century American novelist could write such things without thinking of romance. The novel's characteristic task—and this is particularly clear in the U. S., where in the 1790s seduction fiction was at the heart of the tradition—had been to inoculate the reader against credulity and thrall, the paramount evils of social life. "Romance" was the shorthand term novelists used for this complex of ills they inveighed against. "Your truly romantic letter came safe to hand," writes Eliza Wharton's prudent

friend Lucy Sumner in Foster's *The Coquette*. It "would make a very pretty figure in a novel" (107). Defeating the romance was for fiction-writers what exposing Mesmer was for Paris academicians: a ticket to modernity. That anathematized genre stood in for archaic error; for chivalric dependence; for all the perils of suggestibility; and, in short, for the loss of reason itself—for being led "like an *ignis fatuus* from the path of rectitude" (Foster 57). Rejecting it was part of the duty of a modern and democratic form. The novel's disciplinary relationship to romance's credulous readers created its own enlightenment identity.

Brown, I want to argue, saw in demonstration science the possibility of reversing the novel's pedagogy—of making it a training-ground not in doubt, but in belief. And yet his novels did not merely return to the old romantic machinery of "[p]uerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras"—subjects Brown thought the European gothic had trotted out far too often.^{xliv} The goal was not to revive romantic subject matter, but to revive romance-readers. In the credulous subjects of the demonstration circuit, one could see subjects every bit as "deluded" as a bad novel-reader who were nonetheless knowing, even free. Without abandoning the ideal of accurate observation, demonstration science had tried to rescue states of credulity and thrall as dispositions appropriate to the natural-philosophical observer. Perhaps, in that case, they could also be dispositions appropriate to the citizen. Brown turned to demonstration science to test that possibility. In the same installment of the "Student's Diary" where he defended the utility of mesmerism, Brown also analyzed a magic trick by Signior Falconi—he of the philosophical sleights-of-hand and the amazing stopping watch—and

recounted the history of the most famous automaton of the century, the Turkish chess player: another staple of demonstration science (83-89). In mesmeric trials; in automaton performances; in the effects of electricity; one saw observers at the mercy of their mechanical bodies who nonetheless could produce knowledge. It is not that the topic of credulity's value had never been broached in the novel; as we saw in *The Coquette*, the personification of the reviled mechanical imagination could occur in the midst of an apparently full-on pedagogical offensive. But still, the overt valuing of credulity had the ring of the new. And precisely the seduction novel's highly polarized pedagogy of skepticism, its generic pledge to expunge credulity, made it a potent form for digesting the social meaning of demonstration science's new experiments in subjecthood. Natural philosophy, of all things, was to rehabilitate the romance-reader.

In Brown's essay on mesmerism, he detaches the physiological state, the mental outlook, the *practice*, in short, of credulity, from the validity or fraudulence of its objects. He wants to revive the believer, not the objects of belief; the reader, not the books. For his purposes, it does not matter whether the mesmeric fluid exists—he, for the record, did not think it did. What is valuable, instead, is the way mesmeric trials demonstrated credulity's positive effects as a bodily disposition. In other words, Brown makes belief intransitive: "believe" becomes a state-of-being verb, not an action undertaken upon an object. In his essay on mesmerism, Brown compares this new cure to an older treatment: that of the skin disease scrophula, or the king's evil—so called after an old belief that the monarch's touch could cure it. "A modern reader will smile," Brown writes, if anyone should suggest that "this virtue might actually reside in the monarch" (86). Only an

anointed king—a king by divine right—could cure by laying on of hands, and the modern contract society existed insofar as it rejected sovereignty of this kind: government's mandate had to come from the consent of the governed. And yet the loss of belief in the king's false divinity had meant the loss of some real cures. Once, patients the monarch had touched sometimes recovered "merely by the ardent conviction" that they would be cured. Their own belief saved them. But in a skeptical society, "what is called the progress of knowledge" had made such cures impossible. Considering the lack of any other effective cure for scrophula, "we shall be apt to think," Brown wrote, "that knowledge, at least *in this respect*, has gone back instead of forward." The enlightenment gesture of doubt had robbed medicine of its only cure—a faith cure—for a "formidable" disease. Under these circumstances, it would perhaps have been better, Brown suggests, for the "modern reader" to read less skeptically (86-87).

From the perspective of seduction fiction in its most incredulous moment, such an attempt to rehabilitate the attitudes of delusion would have seemed quixotic in the literal sense: living in a romantic past. Brown played with that epithet; in one of his stories, a woman ridicules the "frenzy of quixotism," which would lead a worse reader than she to see in a harmless lunatic's behavior "those imaginary tokens and perils which abound in wildest romance." A few pages later she is dead at his hands (Brown, "Somnambulism" 345). Tabitha Tenney and Charlotte Lennox warned their readers not to be "female quixotes;" Brown in effect told his that they might want to reconsider. But reconsidering did not mean returning to a false or pre-modern belief. What one witnesses in Brown's discussion of the king's evil, instead, is the splitting of the atom of belief. The monarch

and his "virtue"—at once his power and his rightness, as in the oldest definition of the word—turn out to be separable, with separable benefits.^{xlv} The attitude of belief has an autonomous value, a value independent from the validity of its objects. This insight is not romantic anti-modernism; on the contrary, it is an insight available exclusively from a modern and disenchanted perspective. Only to one who has dismissed out of hand the possibility that the king has some intrinsic curing virtue is the perception available that belief itself, and its physiological effects on the believer, might be the repository of power.

Brown and the mesmerists shared a suspicion that, in their zeal to exorcise dependence and delusion, superstition and slavishness, *Aufklärer* like the members of the Franklin commission might have cut away some healthy tissue; and both were trying, in their own ways, to heal the wounds. Brown and Bell disagreed about whether the magnetic fluid was real. But they agreed that there existed *some* force—call it imagination, animal electricity, or animal magnetism—which could cure the body when an ill person submitted to the direction of a healer, and which could also connect members of the *social* body in relations of mutual benefit. Mesmerists, too, returned to the king's evil as a touchstone. Practitioners such as Dr. Robinson of Baltimore claimed that their magnetic passes were the disenchanted essence of this superstitious old gesture: kings had once sent animal magnetism into their subjects without realizing it.^{xlvi} Brown thought imagination had worked these archaic cures; Bell, Robinson, and other mesmerists thought the fluctuations of an equally modern invisible fluid, animal magnetism, had done it. For both camps, what was valuable in mesmerism—whether as a

failed or as a successful doctrine, it made no difference—was its promise as a site for rehabilitating, and making modern, the physiological power of credulity.

Both sides were trying to describe a new ethos one might call, following a formulation of Bell's, "magnetic virtue." When referring to the lost efficacy of the king's touch, Brown used the word "virtue" in its oldest sense: as a way of referring to the intrinsic power—and also goodness—of a person or thing. By the late eighteenth century, this definition was receding except when connected to archaic objects, like an anointed monarch. Virtue as a quality of a person had become, instead, a practice of rule-following: a matter of "conformity...with the principles of morality" and "observance of the recognized moral laws."^{xlvii} But the ontological meaning of virtue did survive into the nineteenth century as a way of referring to the properties and powers of scientific objects—and in particular, to magnetic substances.^{xlviii} When Bell referred to the "magnetic virtue" concentrated in the body of a healthy person, he was using the word in precisely this sense. Now Brown wanted to distribute the kingly virtue outwards—to make it the physiological property of those who believed, not a property attaching to the king himself. Bell's mesmeric fluid was distributed in just this way—in nervous systems and between them, and even in objects. This "magnetic virtue" I am imagining, the hybrid of Brown's and Bell's thought-experiments, would recuperate as a modern phenomenon the quality of a body imbued with "credulity," giving this quality the positive ethical value with which Brown, in particular, invests it. The dependent relationship could be beneficial; the mechanical and involuntary mind could know; the

credulous patient could be cured by her deceiver: each of these experimental statements includes a gesture of recovery—recovery of the disposition to depend and to believe.

Brown's enlightenment was, then, an alternative enlightenment. Its corrective gesture sprang from the intuition that reason, in expunging objects of "archaic" belief, had also expunged a *practice* of credulity that was far from having outlived its usefulness. *Edgar Huntly's* engagement in the making of a new national imaginary is legible in these terms. One element of the novel's nationalist project, or one way in which it signifies, is the production of an *enlightenment* imaginary: the U. S. being, in the eyes of its most enthusiastic boosters, the last word in modern political experimentation. If Brown emphasizes credulity and romance in the national imaginary, this is also at one and the same time to emphasize it in the transnational project of reason to which the American venture claimed to belong. Everywhere appeared the same worry about the seducing and misleading imagination: in seduction fiction, in electrical experiments, in mesmeric frauds, and in the political economy of a government by the all-too-easily-seduced people—those whom Adams called a collective Clarissa. But credulity also seemed necessary to each of these projects: government, science, love. Brown found an acknowledgement of this necessity—a means of thinking through a credulous enlightenment—in, of all places, empirical science. Demonstration science had, after all, tried to rescue states of credulity and thrall as states compatible with the philosophical gaze. Thus in one of the most prestigious activities of modern reason—natural-philosophical experimentation—popular demonstrators had begun permitting, for fleeting instants, that the credulous subject should also be the knowing subject. And this would

authorize, for Brown, the placement of such a Quixote—a somnambulist, no less—at the heart of the portrait of the new "field of investigation" the enlightenment's nation furnished to "the moral painter" (*EH* 3).^{xlix} In *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799), Brown would give demonstration science's mechanical citizen the interiority—and the social specificity—of narrative.

IV. 'Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker'

What is the relationship, in *Edgar Huntly*, between the title character's tendency toward credulity—the paradigmatic quality of the romance-reader—and his somnambulism? Just before taking his first perilous sleep-walk through the Pennsylvania wilderness in which Brown's novel is set, Edgar Huntly—one of two somnambulists in the story—falls for a confidence-game that destroys his hopes of marriage. That much, at least, he has in common with the eponymous heroine of Foster's *The Coquette*, who is taken in by the duplicitous Sanford's blandishments. But here the similarities end, because the tale Huntly believes is not, in fact, a swindle after all, but a true story deserving of the credit he gives it. This is what happens: at around the midpoint of the novel, a stranger comes on horseback to Huntly's house late at night. Huntly's friend Waldegrave has recently been murdered, and the stranger, Weymouth, says Waldegrave's estate owes him money. In support of his claim, he unfolds a romance of the high seas. After making his fortune as a merchant shipper in Europe, Weymouth entrusted part of his money to Waldegrave for safekeeping and invested the rest in a ship-full of cargo,

with which he set sail for America. But disaster struck, in the form of gothic set-pieces like a shipwreck and imprisonment in a convent with popish Portuguese monks. Destitute otherwise, Weymouth now counts on the money he sent Waldegrave to sustain him. The machinery of the novel thoroughly erases any record that might have existed of the deposit; as Weymouth points out, "all...evidence, all vouchers and papers, which might attest my veracity...are buried in the ocean " (*EH* 150). It is a case for the kind of primary credulity Brown valued in mesmeric patients—or, inseparably, a case for the prudent mistrust with which seduction fiction's virtuous characters arm themselves against swindlers.

Huntly is in the position of a reader of romance: listening to Weymouth's story, he must distinguish truth from what William Hill Brown would have called "meretricious falsehood."¹ In its skeptical moment, a seduction novel might have used a narrative-within-a-narrative like the one Weymouth tells to train readers in doubt—as when, in Hill Brown's own *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), the reader hears second-hand of an "Ophelia" who found that her own "credulity" had decoyed her into an affair with her brother-in-law (50-51). But in *Edgar Huntly*, pedagogy's battery is reversed. Weymouth's tale, however romantic, is also true. It is an occasion for Huntly to model the readerly disposition of credulity. Brown's novel practices a pedagogy of confidence, not doubt. For Huntly, Weymouth's "bare assertion" is enough—even though, by trusting to it, he disenfranchises himself. Huntly, engaged to Waldegrave's sister Mary, had depended on her inheritance from her brother to be able to marry. Now, with the money to be handed over to Weymouth, the two have no prospects. But, as he says to his fiancée, "[t]he

story...would have won thy implicit credit" (*EH* 154). Justice, in this case, took imagination, not skepticism.

Huntly, the creditor of swindlers, the credulous auditor of Weymouth's romance, appears here not as a cautionary example but as a model of just behavior. But if *Edgar Huntly* marks a return to romance, it does not mark a return to archaism—no more so than did Brown's piece on the king's touch. There, Brown had no interest in salvaging belief *in* the divine king, but wanted only to recover belief *as* a practice of confidence and affective investment. His intervention in the staged contest between the novel and the romance had much the same structure. Brown's novel does not revalue the topics of romance, but rather its readers, for whom the gullible Huntly is a proxy. Windmills may stay buried in the past, but the "frenzy of quixotism" they inspired must be revived (Brown, "Somnambulism" 345).

Edgar Huntly, I want to argue, performs the experiment of making the credulous and mechanical subject the base unit of the social contract. That, I take it, is the meaning of attributing to the novel's benevolent central figure every characteristic of a dupe except the fact of having actually been swindled. And for an image of a positive credulity—a credulity that can count as knowledge, and as moral behavior—the novel turns to demonstration science, and to, as the preface puts it, "one of the most...wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame:" somnambulism (*EH* 3). The somnambulist, demonstration culture's credulous subject, helps Brown to conceive of the person who could be the atomic particle of a confiding and gullible contract society: this is what Huntly's somnambulism has to do with his trust of Weymouth. "Sleep-walkers" were

physiologically identical to John Bell's mesmeric "somnambules," differing from them only in that their condition was natural rather than induced; in fact, American mesmerists used the two terms interchangeably to refer to the mechanical and insensible trance state.^{li} In the novel, these types are credulous, too. Credulity seems to catalyze Huntly's sleepwalking: immediately after believing Weymouth's romance, he disappears, unconscious, into the forest. Huntly is at once an honorer of contracts and a mechanical being; a trance patient and a scrupulous citizen. In his character, the novel extends demonstration science's positive portrait of error and thrall.

But narrative can do two things with demonstration culture's figure of the credulous subject which the living tableaux of mesmerist and patient do not in themselves accomplish. Here, the novel becomes a means of reading the social consequences and contexts of an intellectual-historical shift like mesmerism's revaluation of credulity. The first of the novel's unique aptitudes is its capacity to create the impression of interiority in the new credulous subject. *Edgar Huntly's* very subtitle expresses this innovation. *Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* is an oxymoron: like a mesmeric somnambulist, a sleep-walker remembers, and in fact *experiences*, nothing; it is this lack of self-consciousness, this self-absence, that excludes him from rational publics. Giving a mechanical being an interior life—and especially, making him particularly *good*, as Huntly at first seems, at honoring contracts—extends the definition of personhood. In this way, *Edgar Huntly*—and demonstration science—work to nudge the boundaries of social recognition outwards.

Yet if we ask *how* the novel makes interiority, we come to what is probably the more important of narrative's two distinct contributions to the material-intellectual history of the credulous subject. Fiction is a sociable, magpie-like form; if it makes new interiors, it does not make them out of whole cloth. It works through bricolage rather than fabrication, rearrangement of signs as much as invention. This puts its speculations in contact with history. *Edgar Huntly* must take the materials for its new credulous subject from wherever they lie. And where they lie is not random. The constellation of social materials around the mechanical and credulous self is, on the contrary, highly organized. It includes the opposition of the seduction victim and the prudent woman; of the natural philosopher and the mesmeric patient; of the good republican and the bad automaton; of the citizen and she who is outside the pale of the social contract.

Thus as *Edgar Huntly* labors to fill the blank space that is the "memoir of a sleepwalker," this is where it must go to hunt and gather: it must collect materials from liberalism's bone pile. Bell's somnambulists had eerie knowledge of electricity; this is not where the talents of Brown's two sleepwalkers lie. Instead, they have a special faculty for seeing broken contracts. Traveling unconscious through a Pennsylvania woods several generations of the Penn family had taken from the Delaware Indians in contracts more and less fraudulent, they reckon with a dispossession that those with eyes decline to see. It seems, in this novel, to take an enthralled and errant somnambulist both to honor contracts—like that between Weymouth and Waldegrave's *de facto* executor, Huntly—and to see contracts, like the one between the Pennsylvania proprietors and the Delaware Indians, that had been broken. The sleepwalker's interior life becomes an archive of

propertied liberalism's antitypes, and an anthology of its punishing narratives. The psychology of the despised mechanical mind becomes the repository of history's despised persons.

It may be generally true of the novel as a form that it makes interiority by bricolage, but *Edgar Huntly* offers a particularly graphic example of this piecemeal work. Its avowedly central plot—the memoirs of the eponymous sleepwalker—is absent from the work in a strict sense. This is by medical necessity, since the first-person narrator of these memoirs, Huntly himself, neither remembers nor originally experienced his own episodes of sleepwalking. So if there is a memoir of a sleep-walker here, it must be constructed metonymically. It must be that this central missing narrative acquires meaning from the glow of the many subplots surrounding it. I want to read these subplots—Huntly's observations of another sleepwalker, Clithero Edny; his negotiations with Weymouth; his own foiled plot of marriage; and his violent and discontinuous killing rampage among the Delaware—as reflections into the gap of the main narrative. These social materials form the novel's work of bricolage. They tell us what the interiority of the sleepwalker is, filling the gap that is the sleep-walker's missing memoir.

This gap in fact exists as a textual artifact—or as the lack of one—located, in Huntly's account, just after Weymouth tells his romance and receives credit in return. At this point, Huntly sleepwalks for the first time. He wakes in the woods with no idea of how he got there, his last memory being of the moment when he fell asleep in his bed. He describes each moment of sensation up to the brink of unconsciousness, showing the incremental subtraction of rationality from the human frame, and then its incremental

return. "I remember, as it were, the instant when my thoughts ceased to flow," he writes, with the "as it were" acknowledging that perhaps one cannot remember the end of thinking—or, for that matter, the moment when the "senses [are] arrested by the leaden wand of forgetfulness" (*EH* 159). Both of these experiences probably belong in the paragraph break that occurs just here, before Huntly "emerg[es] from oblivion by degrees so slow and faint that their succession cannot be marked" and finds himself in a cave, with no idea of how he arrived there (*EH* 159). This brief white space in the text, and only this space, contains the trance itself. It is the one moment when the novel actually recounts the "memoirs of a sleepwalker." No more eloquent statement of the mechanical body's exclusion from social life is possible: it cannot even be narrated, incorporated into that story-telling process by which novels create the impression both of interiority and of contractual trust. Yet the novel will insist on approaching this gap asymptotically closely from every side until some image of the trance state materializes. It will turn inside-out this dark and recessed cavern in which Huntly finds himself, so that it becomes a fully navigable above-ground landscape—but a wilderness nonetheless.

V. A Manuscript in a Box

The wilderness in question is Norwalk, the tract of former Delaware land on the edges of which Huntly's Pennsylvania village lies. The narrator's first act in the novel, long before he sleepwalks himself, is to follow another somnambulist into these woods: his neighbor's Irish servant, Clithero Edny. This is the plot that most directly reflects into

the blankness of Huntly's own flight to the cavern. It is here where the novel conducts its systematic investigation into the physiological state of the sleepwalker, with Huntly himself making Edny the "subject of [his] scrutiny." His "minute inquiries" into Edny's physiological state fill, by proxy, the blank space lying between the memories of bare sensation in Huntly's account of his own unconscious fugue (*EH* 15). They tell us what sleep-walking is like.

But Huntly also has a project relative to Edny that mirrors the novel's project relative to the mechanical body itself. He wants to recognize this somnambulist as a person, to return him to the comity of ethical men: to "subdue his perverse disdain...of himself" (*EH* 95). Recognizing Edny's membership in an ethical community requires, for Huntly, that something like interiority be discovered in him. And yet his actions as a sleep-walker lack precisely this: an inner observer who judges, decides, remembers. The novel has an emblematic image for this difficulty: the autograph manuscript locked in a mechanical box of curious workmanship. More than one such object appears in the story. These totems represent, I want to argue, the novel's project of discovering and unlocking an interior life—a soul—hidden within an automatic body. But a question haunts this endeavor: is there really any manuscript there?

Clithero Edny first appears on the mechanical box side of this equation, as automatic and unconscious as any mesmeric somnambulist. Huntly first discovers Edny's illness while looking for the murderer of his friend (and his fiancée's brother) Waldegrave. He encounters a mysterious figure who returns again and again in his sleep to "the fatal Elm" under which Waldegrave was shot, weeping at its base (*EH* 7). He

identifies the sleep-walker as Edny. Huntly suspects him of being Waldegrave's murderer, and begins following him in his nocturnal wanderings in the hopes of extracting his secret. Like a mesmeric somnambulist, Edny is senseless but knowledgeable during his fugues: "[his] exertions [are] mechanical" and when Huntly calls out to him, Huntly's voice "seem[s] scarcely to have made any impression on his sense" (*EH* 31, 71). And as with a mesmeric somnambulist, "the spell by which his senses were bound" seems rather to release than repress other intelligences (*EH* 23). Edny is agile and even purposeful in his movements—when he wants to cross a fence, he "cautiously remove[s]" its bars, and "as deliberately replace[s]" them (*EH* 18). He acquires a canniness proportionate to his unconsciousness.

Brown makes a few knowing nods to mesmerism's history, links which connect the novel to the demonstration culture that helped him to imagine the mechanical subject. In his short story, "Somnambulism: A Fragment" (1805), probably written at around the same time as *Edgar Huntly* (Krause 463) and closely resembling it on many points of plot, a man worried for his fiancée's safety on a journey unconsciously follows her while sleepwalking and kills her himself. That story is prefaced by a clipping from a 1784 Viennese newspaper—a paper, that is, from Mesmer's home town in the year of his rise and fall. Even the elm to which Clithero gravitates is a storied tree; the first mesmeric patients to fall into somnambulism of the kind that Bell and his followers later took up did so around an elm that the Marquis de Puységur had charged with animal magnetism, and the magnetizing of trees made it into American performance. Bell, for example, had

included in his set of lectures instructions on how "to *magnetise* a Tree," in the fashion of "the late...*Puységur*" (*GP* 77-78).^{lii}

But there is one major difference between Edny and a mesmeric somnambule: the absence of any mesmerist amounts to an even more adamant emphasis on the somnambulist's knowledge and autonomy than mesmerism itself had accomplished. Edny is a man compelled without a master, deceived without a deceiver. There is no hint of anyone controlling the sleepwalker for good or for ill. Instead, the dyad of compulsion reappears in inverted form, as a pure dyad of knowledge. Rather than the mesmerist, in full possession of his faculties, commanding the somnambulist, here the somnambulist drives reason hard. Wherever Edny wanders, Huntly follows, though he be led into "a maze, oblique, circuitous, upward and downward" as if the unthinking sleepwalker wished "to bewilder or fatigue his pursuer" (*EH* 23). Reason, in the shape of Huntly, mimics errancy and bewilderment—physically at first, as he tracks Edny through the forest, and later morally, when he becomes a somnambulist himself. Here the imaginative, mechanical character leads, rather than following. It is as though reason has to forfeit itself—has to take on the form of mechanical imagination, even of madness—in order to acquire the knowledge the mechanical body possesses. Like the *malade-médecin*, or diagnosing somnambule, Edny finds in the somnambulistic state a kind of independent knowledge which reason must bargain to obtain. But his lack of any puppeteer—indeed his tendency almost to puppeteer Huntly, who follows wherever he leads—makes the emphasis on his autonomous knowledge still more palpable.

The more that Edny seems to hold secret knowledge, the less he is like a mechanical box, and the more he is like a manuscript: in other words, he seems to be imbued with the kind of interiority that this "memoir of a sleep-walker" wants to attach to somnambulistic bodies. It turns out Huntly is right that Edny has a painful secret—only it is not the one Huntly expects. Edny had nothing to do with the death of Waldegrave, but he nearly killed his patroness, the wealthy Mrs. Lorimer, in a fit of madness. Believing he would be sparing her intolerable suffering, Edny had tried to kill the woman who raised him from poverty while, in effect, sleepwalking: "my exertions were mechanical," he tells Huntly, when the latter finally extracts his confession; "my will might be said to be passive" (*EH* 71). Completing his resemblance to an infatuated mesmeric patient or a secular enthusiast, Edny was suffering under delusions: he had inadvertently killed his patroness's brother, and he thought the shock would kill her—slowly and painfully—in turn. To the superstitious Clithero, his strange sense of compulsion shows that he must be possessed; as he puts it, "my intellects [were] perverted by diabolical instigations" and by a "daemon that possessed me" (*EH* 83). To Huntly, by contrast, nothing but Mesmer's demon possesses Edny—nothing, that is, but his mechanical body. For Huntly, the disclosure of involuntarism and unconsciousness at the moment of the attack is expiating, not damning. "His will was not concerned in this transaction," Huntly protests in Clithero's defense. He merely "acted in obedience to an impulse which he could not controul, nor resist" (*EH* 91). In Edny's very mechanicity, Huntly wants to recognize his humanity. *Because* he is mechanical, he deserves to be brought back indoors, back into the comity of rational men.

Yet Edny frustrates Huntly's benevolent objects: after telling Huntly the tale of his misfortunes—his own memoir of a sleep-walker—Edny disappears into Norwalk. He has again become a mechanical cipher; and Huntly tries to solve the riddle by opening a mechanical puzzle-box. After Edny has been absent several days, Huntly decides to go to his chambers at his neighbor Inglefield's house and to search them for clues. He needs, he tells himself, to know whatever Edny's "own narrative might have withheld" since "a thousand conceivable motives might induce him to pervert or conceal the truth" (*EH* 115). He needs, in other words, some evidence about Edny's interior life. What he finds is precisely a mechanical contrivance with an unreachable interior—a metonymic figure for Edny himself. Clithero, it seems, has considerable "mechanical ingenuity" and has constructed a strong-box that none but he can open (*EH* 114). The box can only be unlocked by hidden and ingenious gears and springs, impossible for any but the maker to find. Its sides, Huntly says, were joined "not by mortice and tenon; not by nails, not by hinges:" in short, "[t]he means by which they were made to cohere were invisible." And though one of the six sides had, Huntly surmised, to be a lid, there was "no lock nor key-hole," and "by what means [the lid] was fastened, the most accurate inspection could not detect" (*EH* 114). Huntly believes he sees before him a machine filled with Clithero's prized possessions—with the evidence of an interior life. The box is a figure for Clithero's mechanical body redeemed by some indwelling rational soul, in other words.

At length Huntly manages to open the box, by searching for "some spring... which might forever elude the senses." His efforts bear fruit: "[a] touch, casually applied at an angle, drove back a bolt, and a spring, at the same time, was set in action, by which the

lid was raised above half an inch" (*EH* 117). Opening the box, Huntly finds only emptiness—and machinery: "numerous compartments, none of which contained anything of moment...[t]ools of different and curious constructions, and remnants of minute machinery" (*EH* 117). Is Clithero an empty subject? a mechanism only? Such a result that would represent the failure of the novel's project. Mechanism and emptiness are just the opposite of what Huntly had hoped to discover in the box. What he wanted to find, by contrast, was something more like an autograph manuscript, the mark of original feeling and genius. And in fact, it turns out that this is just what Clithero ordinarily kept in his puzzle-box: a manuscript written by his patroness, which "had never been published, but had been read by many, and was preserved by her friends as a precious monument of her genius and her virtue" (*EH* 120). Huntly finds it later, buried in another box of similar construction, so that minute machinery and autobiography stand in juxtaposition. Perhaps the work of the novel is *finding* a manuscript in an automaton box—detecting humanity, in other words, in the mechanical sleepwalker. Or perhaps, as I tend to think, the novel works to *put* a manuscript there. *Edgar Huntly's* fiction about its own production is, after all, that it is the autobiographical manuscript of a sleepwalker, written in the context of a contract: Huntly's lengthy letter to the woman he has promised to marry. This *Memoir of a Sleep-Walker* works to grant interiority to its own mechanical box: the somnambulistic narrator himself.

Fittingly, then, Huntly's first act in his own life as a somnambulist is to break into a mechanical trunk of his own construction, take out a set of manuscript letters which are his prized memento of the departed Waldegrave, and hide them from himself. When at

home in the evening just before Weymouth's arrival with his romantic tale, Huntly is troubled by a discovery: Waldegrave's autobiographical manuscript has gone missing. Like Edny, Huntly had exercised his considerable "mechanical genius" to construct a cabinet of "singular structure" with a secret drawer which "opened by the motion of a spring, of whose existence none but the maker was conscious" (*EH* 134). In this drawer, Huntly, like Clithero, stored the prized manuscript. But the text has disappeared. "I was not conscious of having taken it away, yet no hands but mine could have done it" (*EH* 134). It later turns out that he removed the manuscript from the drawer and hid it in the attic of his uncle's house while in his first brief somnambulistic trance, which took him only through his house, not into the woods. Huntly had already exposed himself to a kind of mimetic contagion by mirroring Clithero's somnambulistic wanderings. Now, it is as though his belief in Clithero's fundamental innocence and his belief in Weymouth's honesty, when Weymouth arrives to tell his tale, had conspired to put him over the edge. He, like Clithero, becomes possessed by the mechanical body. He, too, turns so confiding as to become the most extreme kind of credulous subject: a somnambulist. He now wanders into the woods and returns to where, in this analysis, we started: to the amnesiac break in the memoir's text that is at once the cave in which Huntly awakes and a dark pit of mechanical oblivion.

Huntly has to be both manuscript and box at once, because the work of making a new subject is always a matter of combining discontinuities—of shoving together two oppositely valued states. Thus Huntly is both an enfranchised liberal extending a gentleman-like credit to others—to Edny, and to Weymouth—and also a man

dispossessed, without property on which to marry, and without property even in his own reason. He has wandered out of his family's home without giving notice or taking a coat. Now he finds himself bewildered, forced to climb laboriously out of a cave into which he has fallen; he even has to make a "ravenous and bloody meal" of a wild-cat he kills in order to stave off desperate hunger (*EH* 168). Across this transformation Brown writes the deep ambiguity of credulousness for a society based on mutual agreement. The bond of trust is both necessary, and the road to trust's very disintegration: in swindling, in seduction, in demagoguery, in fraud. Huntly's double occupancy—his existence both as a benevolent contractual partner, and as a lunatic—is inextricable from the novel's project of extending recognition to the credulous and mechanical body by granting it the appearance of interiority. Putting a manuscript in a mechanical box, or writing a paradoxical "memoir of a sleep-walker," means precisely this, attaching opposites together: mechanicity to citizenship, prudent credit to rash credulity. Recognizing a new kind of subject can only work by this kind of bricolage: by pressing together two mutually exclusive and opposed social types in the hopes that the force of collision may unite them, making something new.

VI. An End to Recognition

We are now equipped to ask about the second part of the novel's project: not interiority *per se*, but the bricolage by which the novel fashions its image. What are the social materials that make up mechanical interiority as this "memoir of a sleep-walker"

constructs it? Of what is this patchwork inner self made? It is made, I want to argue, of dispossession and broken contracts. This is the special knowledge of the somnambulist, the specific social information used to construct his material life. The novel's manuscript in a box records the exclusions and frauds to which those marked as irrational are subject: it has something in common with the crooked deed to Indian lands which, in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), portraits and mesmerically haunted houses would enclose. Thus Clithero loses everything when he first enters the state he thinks of as demonic possession: once a trusted factotum promised money, land, and marriage, he forfeits all of these. Huntly loses—in fact, steals from himself—his treasured relic of Waldegrave as well as the marriage he himself had contracted. Neither Huntly nor Edny has yet finished losing. But one can see already where the piling-up of subplots tends.

The final major subplot reflecting in on the empty memoirs of a sleep-walker—Huntly's murderous rampage through Norwalk—retraces the history of a contractual exclusion more severe: the dispossession of the Delaware.^{liii} Escaping, by strenuous effort, the cave in which he wakes, Huntly discovers a Delaware war-party sleeping at the mouth, his one through-way to water and food. They have with them a young white girl as a captive. At first it seems as though Huntly's encounter with the Delaware, a bloodbath that lasts for almost the entire remainder of the novel, will be narrated as the *righteous* breaching of contract—the *casus belli* for an Indian war. And for a time, it is narrated this way. With a great show of reluctance—with a great show of honoring "the mildness of [his] habits, [his] antipathy to scenes of violence and bloodshed, [and his] unacquaintance with the use of fire-arms"—Huntly determines that he must kill the

sentry and rescue the girl (*EH* 193). This is not the kind of benevolent act that is supposed to characterize him. But he represents himself as virtually compelled—only by passing the war party can he find food and water; only by finding them can he survive. He tells his fiancée, "Safety to my life...was within view. How could I hesitate?" And yet, he assures her, "I did hesitate. My aversion to bloodshed was not to be subdued but by the direst necessity" (*EH* 178). He was at death's door; they had taken a white child. Conquered both by the chance circumstance of his own near-starvation and by the Indians' malice-beyond-malice, Huntly seems to have a *casus belli* beyond reproach. But still the justice of his just war has not been exhausted. After leaving the cave, he refrains from continuing his killing spree until after finding his own gun in Delaware possession, and inferring the worst: "I needed no proof of my calamity more incontestable than this," he writes. "My uncle and my sisters had been murdered" (*EH* 185). He had no choice; it is almost as though he would annex to himself the excuse he once made for Clithero: that "[h]is will was not concerned in this transaction" (*EH* 87).

Yet compulsion is a double-edged sword; and with this, the very centerpiece of Huntly's self-exoneration, his just-war doctrine begins to fall apart. Huntly's sense that he is driven to violence is perhaps a bit *too* much like Clithero's mechanistic. Even as the vindication of his actions requires that they have been committed under duress, it requires, too, that his reason remain intact. And, by his own account, it does not. Huntly admits that "I was not governed by the soul which usually regulates my conduct." (*EH* 192). As reason slips from him, he becomes a waking version of Clithero: a waking sleepwalker. He approaches closely to being the novel's great impossibility, a conscious

and self-narrating mechanical body. Like Clithero, who considered himself possessed by a "daemon," Huntly "a spirit vengeful, unrelenting, and ferocious" (*EH* 192). The question will be what narrative this speaking automaton, this mechanical box, discloses. This narrative, not Huntly's would-be *casus belli*, will be the meaning of this final violent subplot; this will be the historical light it reflects in on mechanical darkness.

And the narrative disclosed is an account of broken contracts—though this time on a far larger scale. Huntly takes refuge in a cottage which turns out to belong to Old Deb, a Delaware Indian woman displaced from her land during Huntly's lifetime, and whom Huntly had known in childhood. Hereby hangs a confession. In "former Indian wars," Huntly explains, "my parents and an infant child were murdered in their beds; the house was pillaged, and then burnt to the ground." Like Clithero, Huntly seems to carry out mechanically an earlier nightmare; "most men," he says, "are haunted by some species of terror or antipathy" related to a childhood misfortune (*EH* 173). Huntly's rampage is a waking sleepwalk, and one governed by a memory of an Indian attack in his childhood. And here, Huntly represents the European Pennsylvanians, and not only himself. Brown's novel is haunted by two moments: the 1737 Walking Purchase, in which Penn's sons used a fraudulent map to trick the Delaware into giving up more than twice the land they intended; and conflicts in the 1750s, when Huntly's parents were killed and when Old Deb refused to leave her land with the rest of the Delaware. Wandering, dispossessed of his faculties, Huntly discloses this chain of dispossessions—at once repeating them through his brutality and making them visible.

Penn's heirs wanted to base their negotiations with the Delaware in 1737 on William Penn's past friendship with them and on the claim that the Indians had been paid for, and had agreed to give, a large tract of land in 1686. But the maps of the territory that the English negotiators offered were intentionally deceptive. The maps omitted an important boundary, the Tohickon Creek. The Delaware had been willing to give up the land below Tohickon Creek since 1686, but not the land below the Lehigh River. But the map depicted the latter boundary in such a way as to make it appear to be Tohickon Creek. The Lehigh in fact lay far north of the land they wanted to give up. Then too, the land changing hands was to be measured in steps: the distance a man could walk in a day. But Penn's sons hired multiple swift runners, positioning them so that a fresh runner could relieve a tired one all along the course for the run. Through these subterfuges, the English seized much more land than the Delaware had intended to sell. Though the English suppressed their protests, the Delaware were outraged at the European occupation of their land and continued to cite it as their own cause of war throughout the conflicts of the 1750s.^{liv}

Huntly sleepwalks a swindle that haunted relations with the Indians still in the 1780s: in Chad Luck's memorable phrase, he "sleepwalk[s] the Purchase (291)." Huntly's doctrine of just war worked as though to establish a perpetual state of emergency, in which questions of property cannot arise: his family has been killed, his own life is in danger. Yet the raiding party has a just-war doctrine of their own, which Huntly's fastidiousness on the topic of personal violence dissembles. In this, Huntly is a good representative of the Pennsylvanians, who assiduously suppressed the Delaware's

complaints about the Walking Purchase throughout the remainder of the century. When, in the 1750s, the Delaware made it known that the reason for their attacks was the 1737 Purchase, the Pennsylvanians riposted that the Delaware, having never complained about the purchase before, were now tricking it out as "a *casus belli* after the fact."^{lv} In fact it was false to claim that they had not complained; they had steadily voiced their outrage from the time of the purchase until the late eighteenth century, as the historian Steven Harper shows (*Promised Land* 72-73). Yet the Pennsylvanians and their allies represented the Delaware as double dealers who could not be trusted to understand, remember, or abide by contracts. Encouraged by a negotiator for the Penns, Canassatego, an Iroquois prominent in diplomatic relations with the British, chided the Delaware for being "Women" who "can no more sell Land than Women" now that they had reneged, as he put it, on their previous arrangements with the British in the 1737 purchase. He forbade the Delaware to engage in any further land transactions.^{lvi} Official Pennsylvania reports, writes Harper, "paint a pervasive image of gullible, childish Delawares easily duped," who, after accepting the Walking Purchase for years, suddenly exploded in retributive violence (*Promised Land* 73).

Where now is *Edgar Huntly's* magnetic attraction to and defense of the credulous subject? Why do the Delaware not activate it? I suggested that the novel would do things: make interiority for those beyond the pale, thereby offering them recognition; and use social materials to do it, thereby disclosing secret histories. But the phrase "beyond the pale," versions of which I have used a few times, takes on a more ominous meaning now. The "pale" is one way of referring to the fenced European settlement. Even as the

novel becomes more radical in the social materials it divulges, constructing its somnambulist selves not only through personal and fictional disenfranchisements but through collective and historical ones, it places bounds on, even retracts, its former gestures of recognition. We hear the echo of the Delaware's grievances, the "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" that is the novel's digression into the history of Old Deb. But at the same time, the narrative also invents a new logic of exclusion which will unravel some of its work at acknowledging persons.

Outside of the play of the mechanical and the rational, outside the play of belief and swindle, lies another category of beings in reference to whom the question of fair dealing never arises; and in the novel, the Delaware belong to this category. Foucault called it the "counter-natural."^{vii} Under an enlightenment conspectus, the merely *unnatural* is no longer easily appropriated as a negative category: illness, insanity, and violence are all "natural" under certain conditions. A stranger taxon had to come into being: nature as Nature did not intend it. Some animals, some humans, are born to be savage; and insofar as that is so, they belong to the counter-natural. Within nature, they also pit themselves against it; and man's work is to extirpate them. In *Edgar Huntly*, the "detested race" of panthers belong to this category, and so do the Delaware (*EH* 124). It is more than a little jarring to see with what aplomb the romantic imagination incorporates a hatred for nature in its love for nature. Though Huntly "never delighted in carnage and blood," and "wood-cocks and squirrels" were safe from him—he took pleasure, he says, in "watch[ing] their gambols and flittings, and invit[ing] them to my hand"—with a fierce animal like a panther it is different. These "enemies of man and of

the harmless race that sported in the trees" he tried "to exterminate wherever they could be found" (*EH* 124). The ferocious Indians remain outside with the Catamount; their credulity and mechanicity do not quite count as human. This is the very definition of being beyond the pale: being part of the wild, not the ill; being irretrievably depraved, not momentarily absent from the control of one's automaton body. Mechanism may be redeemable; but not all exclusion is mechanical. And for this other kind, this counter-natural kind, there is no court of appeal, no dialectical or even merely benevolent recovery.

At the end of the novel, though, the unraveling of recognition goes farther and faster, so that in its final pages the novel seems to be hurriedly retracting the boons it had extended to the mechanical body. It undoes even Clithero as a possible subject, and belatedly punishes Huntly's indulgence toward him. It is as though, having made the utopian gesture of extending recognition to the mechanical—of accepting mechanicity as a part of the human, despite its troubling association to error and thrall—some memory of propriety jerked the novel back from the precipice. Huntly learns that Clithero did not really bring about his patroness's death, as Clithero himself believed, and he conveys these glad tidings, thinking that such a reprieve will allow Clithero to find peace. But his news has the opposite effect. Clithero still suffers under the compulsion to kill her, and he damns Huntly for furnishing him with the means to carry out this will that is not his own will. Huntly had believed that "his understanding was deluded by phantoms in the mask of virtue and duty" and not that his mind was "utterly subverted" (*EH* 290). But he had been wrong. The book ends with Huntly's former teacher, Sarsefield, sending

Clithero to Benjamin Rush's Pennsylvania Insane Asylum, and condemning Huntly, telling him to "be more circumspect and more obsequious for the future" (*EH* 292). The law of Lockean pedagogy is restored: those among the credulous who are educable, like Huntly, must submit to correction; those who are not, like Edny, must disappear behind a pale of a very different kind.

Pushing at the boundaries of what kinds of subjects can have recognition is a utopian gesture, so long as it lasts, so far as it is effective. If the novel ventures out a certain distance and then stops, and even retraces its steps, this is just what does happen with utopias: they tend to unmake themselves. For Fredric Jameson, who follows Adorno on this point, the utopian is precisely that which "cannot be successfully fantasized."^{lviii} It is that which, from a given historical position, cannot be allowed to stand—cannot be posed without being retracted or mutilated. The novel retracts the gesture of recognition in which it made mechanical somnambulists human; its gesture of disclosing broken contracts goes only so far. Yet retraction and mutilation have very different consequences for different aspects of *Edgar Huntly's* project. Social recognition is not a durable thing. That is because it is performative: once granted, it can most certainly be taken away, by the very act of announcing its retraction: by precisely the act of retracing and undoing that the end of *Edgar Huntly* performs. The disclosures that were the by-product of making mechanical interiority, on the other hand, are not nearly so reversible. They belong to the kind of chemical reaction that is uni-directional in time: once made, they can be dissembled, obfuscated, suppressed—but they cannot be entirely unmade. The novel extends, then retracts, its recognition of Edny; it does not even extend

recognition to the Delaware in the first place. It does, however, disclose a series of broken treaties. This it cannot quite recant. One of the tricks about a plot is that it unfolds in time. Even when a narrative commits apostasy, a record of its original promise remains. This is not nothing, even if it is also not enough.

Conclusion: The Automaton Indian

No inherent quality in the racialized body prevented it from being recuperated through the dialectic of mechanical knowledge, even if Brown's novel does not follow that path. Signior Falconi, known to us already from his magnet-turning tricks and his natural-philosophical showmanship, began showing in the 1790s an android—that is, human-shaped—machine he called the Automaton Indian. The figure held a hunting-bow, and would shoot at "a board with several numbers placed on it, and any lady may desire the figure, to shoot at a particular number, which it will instantly do with the greatest exactness." Or an audience member could "write one of the numbers painted on the board, which may be folded up, and before it is seen by any one present the figure will strike the number written."^{lix} No one knows exactly how Falconi accomplished the trick. In cases where the audience-members called the number out, Falconi or an assistant may have stood behind the board and attracted the arrow with a magnet. It also seems likely, as one historian has argued, that Falconi's automaton was of the kind that concealed a human operator—like the chess automaton Brockden Brown wrote about in his *Literary Magazine* piece (Tigner 673; "Student's Diary" 84).

However it was accomplished, the performance had some of the qualities of the mesmeric performances contemporary with it. Falconi worked on the same demonstration circuit as mesmerists did, accompanying his automaton with electrical and magnetic apparatus; and a Jamaican correspondent of Charleston's *South-Carolina Gazette* even passed on the news, in 1785, that Falconi was "in possession of the secret" of animal magnetism.^{ix} The Indian shares with the somnambulists of this period a strange combination of omniscience and subordination. The Indian's mind-reading inseparably represents both the audience's apparently seamless oversight over their bodies and his, *and* his occult powers. If the automaton and the holder of the secret number represent, respectively, body and mind, then in a sense it is true that the holder of the number has absolute *control* over the automaton Indian, as though by thinking she could move his limbs—just as she can move hers. Part of the pleasure of the performance, in fact, is that it gives the audience member the kind of absolute control over *a* mechanical body which, in the age of enthusiasm, she cannot have over hers. She might be compared to a reader of seduction fiction imagining that she could puppeteer a wayward character, bringing her back into line with rationality's dictates. If the problem of enthusiasm drives a wedge between the rational mind and the material body it is supposed to control, Falconi's performance phantasmatically reinstated that control, with the Indian as a stand-in for the mechanical body.

And yet on the other hand, however impotent, the automaton is also the omniscient one. In this psychodrama it is in the *body*, not the mind, that the power of mind-reading lies. He has privileged means of knowing which the audience cannot

possibly explain. The performance vaults beyond a definition of knowledge as that which only a conscious and pre-constituted subject can produce, and into something else: the oxymorons of credulous wisdom, mechanical subjecthood. This is representation, to be sure. No person really subsists here—the automaton is not an actual subject achieving recognition in the space of the performance. Yet this very fact of its division from the real is what makes this performance a site for rethinking mechanicity. The Indian can become a figure for the scientific observer in whom automatism is a virtue. Here, being racially marked connects the Indian to mechanical knowledge in the same way that gender-marking typically connected mesmerist somnambulists to it. Here, then, something like mesmerism's transvaluation of mechanicity and thrall—and of the marginalized subjects to whom these are imputed—makes itself available for the raced as for the gendered subject. As in mesmerism, too, the transvaluative move comes through the cultures of knowledge—and it happens on the demonstration stage.

Another racially marked automaton, the Turkish chess-player, once furnished Benjamin with an allegory of historical materialism's bad faith, its disavowed dependence on theology. This elaborate machine included a turbaned savant seated before a chess board, who beat expert upon expert at his own game—all by means of an ingenious operator concealed within. But we might read this assemblage differently: not as an expression of a materialism's dissembled spiritualism, but as an allegory for the extension of social recognition to the mechanical body. *Edgar Huntly* tried to put a manuscript in a box, a memoir in a sleep-walker, and, we might say, an interior in the automaton. Having a subject—a soul—inside an automaton's mechanical body was a materialization of this

project. Falconi's Indian was probably, secretly, just such a materialization: this knowing automaton probably did enclose a covert soul, a hidden personal operator. In his "Student's Diary" miscellany on demonstration science, Brown gave a lengthy account of the Turkish chess-player's fortunes. There, he reveals that the automaton was operated by a "well-instructed boy" whose death "put an end to the master's exhibition, for either another pupil sufficiently docile, apt, and faithful could not be found, or his education would not quit cost" (84). The ingenious machine had been the outer crust of a perfect little Lockean: obedient, well-educated, and loyal. But now there was only an empty mechanical body where that puppeteering subject had stood. Perhaps the Turk would become *self*-puppeteering, inhabited by his own immanent soul, and enclosing his own manuscript. Perhaps he would become the emblem of a credulous, mechanical, and post-contractual public.

Notes

^{xxvi} Foucault, *History of Madness* 163.

^{xxvii} Bell, *General and Particular Principles of Animal Electricity and Magnetism* (1792), 71-74, 79, and *passim*, quoted from 68. This work is hereafter abbreviated *GP*. A largely identical text was published in Lancaster, PA, in the same year under the title *Animal Electricity and Magnetism Demonstrated*.

^{xxviii} "Extract of a Letter [. . .] Dated March 1, 1791" [1]; "D.," "For the Albany Chronicle" [2]; Foster, *Coquette* 63; "Boston, Nov. 29" [2].

^{xxix} Waterman, *Republic of Intellect* 9. Other recent investigations of early American culture and enlightenment include Delbourgo, *Wonders*; Parrish, *American Curiosity*; Rivett, "Tokenography."

^{xxx} Waterman, *Republic of Intellect*; Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*; Luck, "Re-Walking the Purchase;" Murison, "Tyranny of Sleep."

^{xxx} In a dark room, so could anyone; but the important point is that Bell valued precisely the perception that had sometimes appeared to be an artifact of secular enthusiasm.

^{xxxii} "Animal Electricity [. . .] by Doctor Robinson" [4].

^{xxxiii} In addition to Robinson in Baltimore, these included William Kerr, who advertised in Washington in 1793 ("Animal Electricity [. . .] by William Kerr" [1]); I. Baylis, who advertised in Philadelphia in 1792 ("Animal Magnetism: To the Learned" [4]); Thomas Wood, in Charleston, S. C. in 1793 ("Dr. Thomas Wood" [3]); and a Dr. Hickling, in 1792 in New York ("To the Public" [3]).

^{xxxiv} "Animal Magnetism: To the Learned," [4].

^{xxxv} "Animal Electricity [. . .] by Doctor Robinson" [4].

^{xxxvi} Henri Ellenberger was the first to recover A. M. J. de Chastenet de Puységur's importance for the history of mesmerism, hypnotism, and psychoanalysis (*Discovery* 70); see also Gauld, *History* 39.

^{xxxvii} Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud* 38-53; Gauld, *History* 39-50.

^{xxxviii} "Animal Electricity...by Doctor Robinson" [4].

^{xxxix} See Chapter One. Bell also describes these techniques (*GP* 27-32).

^{xl} Quoted from "Animal Magnetism: To the Learned," [4]. On Bell's work in London, see Fara, "Attractive Therapy" 138. Bell's *General Principles* appeared in Pennsylvania in a slightly altered form, perhaps pirated, as Bell, *Animal Electricity and Magnetism Demonstrated* (Lancaster, PA 1792). Fara suggests (164n65) that Bell may have emigrated to the U. S., but the evidence is slight; certainly he was still in London at the time of this American publication. However, he was highly influential among mesmerists traveling in the U. S. Advertisements for demonstrators performing from New York to Charleston, SC show clear debts to Bell's language; it is even possible that some of these performers delivered his lectures as written. An advertisement from a 1792 New York paper mentions Bell specifically ("To the Public" [3]); others duplicate his and each other's language so closely as to be clearly from a common source. See endnote xxxiii above.

^{xli} "Animal Magnetism!" [Supplement 1].

^{xlii} One of the most famous android (that is, human-shaped) machines of the eighteenth century was the flute-player of Jacques Vaucanson, which blew air into a working flute (Riskin, "Wetware" 102-103; Schaffer "Automata" 136). American musical androids included an "Automaton drummer" at Baker's Museum in New York, and multiple musical automata at the Columbian Museum in Boston, which advertised "Three Figures which play the Organ and Clarinets in concert" and "Three Figures which play the harpsichord and hautboys in concert" ("Columbian Museum" [4]; "Curiosities" 3).

^{xliii} "The human body," insisted one Cartesian among them, "is neither more or less than...[a] machine" whose faulty workings the mesmerist fixes ("Dr. Thomas Wood," [3]).

^{xliv} Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 3, hereafter abbreviated *EH*.

^{xlv} OED, "virtue," *n.*, I.1.a.; see also the use of virtue to refer to the occult powers of objects, such as precious stones, II.9.a.

^{xlvi} See also Bell, *GP* 45.

^{xlvii} *OED*, "virtue," *n.*, I.2.a.

^{xlviii} *OED*, "virtue," *n.*, II.10.c. and II.11.b.

^{xlix} The nation succeeded psychology as a frame for reading *Edgar Huntly* for such critics as Krause, Gardner, and Rowe (see also Murison 244, 266n1). The frame of transnational enlightenment in a sense combines both these approaches to the novel, in that it addresses both the nation and psychology in their historical contexts as enlightenment projects.

ⁱ Brown, *Power of Sympathy* 53.

ⁱⁱ "Animal Magnetism: To the Learned" [4]. See also "Animal Electricity [. . .] by William Kerr" [4]. Murison perceptively reads the novel in terms of natural somnambulism; magnetic somnambulism, however, is also an important context, one that colored and increased interest in sleep-walking itself at this moment ("Tyranny").

ⁱⁱⁱ One Philadelphia mesmerist promises to explain the magnetizing of trees ("Animal Magnetism: To the Learned" [4]); Brown, "Somnambulism" 335). Note, however, Krause's alternate reading of the elm ("Penn's Elm" 464).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ On *Edgar Huntly* and the dispossession of the Delaware, the literature is substantial; see in particular Krause, Rowe, Luck, and Luciano.

^{lv} Harper, *Promised Land* 73-79.

^{lv} Quoted in Harper, *Promised Land* 73.

^{lvi} Quoted in Harper, *Promised Land* 81, from a 1742 speech. On the Penn negotiator, James Logan, and his relations with the Delaware, see Harper 54-57. There is some controversy over whether calling the Delaware "women" had the same meaning—that is, those barred from property negotiation—for Canassatego as it did for the Europeans (Harper 81-85; Starna, "Diplomatic Career" 151-52). Jane Merritt suggests a mediating view: she notes that "[h]istorically, Indian women enjoyed a certain degree of economic autonomy and control within native households" and proposes that Canassatego deliberately used European concepts of gender for his trope ("Metaphor" 77-79). Harper argues, however, that the "significance of this gendered identity [for the Delaware] has been understated;" Delaware leaders took the epithet as a grave insult (72, 85). On Canassatego (also spelled Canasatego) and his life as a speaker and negotiator in the 1740s, see Starna, "Diplomatic Career" 144-63.

^{lvii} Foucault, *History of Madness* 151. Dana Luciano's reading of *Edgar Huntly* sees the mechanical body, as represented by Edny and then Huntly, as continuous with the savage body I am calling "counter-natural" here; my own sense is that while this conflation does arrive in the novel's final pages, when *Edgar Huntly* undoes its own work of recognition, there is in the rest of the novel a productive difference between mechanicity and the "utterly subverted" savage body (Luciano 13; *EH* 290).

^{lviii} Jameson, "Politics" 41.

^{lix} Quoted from "Boston Theatre" 71. Falconi advertised his automaton in Boston, Charleston, and Providence: see also "City Theatre" 3; "Theatre [. . .] Seignior Falconi" 2.

^{lx} "Extract of a Letter from [. . .] Kingston" [3].

Chapter Three

Knowledge-Plots: *Blithedale* and the Rivalries of the Parlor

In 1837, not a mechanical Indian, but a young woman in a mesmeric trance, divined the written contents of a folded piece of paper—though this one was a bit better protected. Beyond being folded, it was also "enclosed...between two thick cards," doubled in "a deep-blue sheet of paper, to prevent the transmission of light" and sealed "with a number of wafers."^{lxi} According to the clairvoyant, Loraina Brackett of Providence, R. I., the enclosed letter read:

No other than the eye of Omnipotence can read this in this envelopment.

***** 1837

with the asterisks representing the portion that she could not make out.^{lxii} Brackett got the message right, give or take a few words. And so if it really was only the eye of Omnipotence that could have read this in this envelopment, then evidently the eye of Omnipotence was blind—a thing that might have pleased any number of mesmerism's characters; for Brackett, who had done the seeing, had lost her vision in an accident.^{lxiii} A skeptic had sent the letter for her to "read" mesmerically through the envelope, withholding the contents until after he got his letter back by return mail, sealed with his own seals, along with the results of Brackett's investigations. These he duly received. The episode appeared in four monographs on mesmerism published in New England in 1837 alone. Mesmeric somnambulism, now going full swing again in the U. S. after a lull since the turn of the century, had found its sightless seer.^{lxiv}

Mechanism, perceptual error, insight: Brackett combined all the major elements of the American mesmeric tradition. As for perception, she was blind—doubly so, in fact, because in addition to her infirmity she wore a blindfold during her readings—and yet she saw what no one else could see. While entranced, she became a sensitive, mechanical body whose directing soul was in a "profound slumber" (Stone 16). Like Mesmer's first patients, she even had a nervous illness (Stone 10-11). In the course of mesmeric treatments for this illness, she discovered her clairvoyance—and, like Bell's nervous patients, her ability to diagnose the diseases of others: she was an "invalid-physician." Brackett stunned Margaret Fuller, who took an abiding interest in mesmeric practice, by handing her a note correctly describing Fuller's own illness; years later, Fuller still kept "those penciled lines, written in the stiff, round character proper to the blind" as a record of what "the world at large" styled "Credulity," but what Fuller thought might be the science of "more rapid and complete...intercourse between mind and mind."^{lxv} This new phase of American mesmerism had begun when the French physician Charles Poyen, who practiced the same kind of mesmerism Bell's disciples had done, began lecturing in New England not long after his arrival there in 1834.^{lxvi} He had converted to the cause after a Paris diagnosing somnambule cured his own lingering illness (*Progress* 40). In some ways, not much had changed: the debate still raged between those who thought mesmerism to be a tissue of imaginative delusions, and those who thought it might be a technique for redeeming the errant sensorium. But Poyen's arrival ushered in a phase of unprecedented popularity for American mesmerism;

practitioners sprang up thick and fast throughout New England, and they would continue to be plentiful, in one form or another, until well after the Civil War.

Beyond the popularity and durability of his brand of mesmeric science, Poyen has another claim on our attention. He presided over a shift in the way the combined error and insight of the mesmeric subject was understood—a shift that would help to construct a subject-position from which passive female clairvoyants could speak as authoritative knowers in mesmerism and in the Spiritualist movement that followed it. He began to describe clairvoyants as "instruments" which were "infinitely more susceptible of changes and modifications than any scientific machine" that human beings could devise (*Letter* 35). On his view, Brackett's reading of the concealed sentence would have come from her sensitive nervous system's ability to pick up animal-magnetic vibrations left by the hand of the writer; in another case, where the writer was present in the room, she might have learned the contents by detecting the animal-magnetic vibrations from his mind. Poyen's new theory may have begun as a way of explaining clairvoyant's errors: like other sensitive instruments, they were easily deceived by experimental noise, sometimes picking up animal-magnetic vibrations from an object other than the one they were supposed to be "reading." But in explaining credulity in this way, Poyen wound up aligning the mesmeric clairvoyant with a new ethos of the scientific perception then emerging in the observational sciences: the idea that a good observer ought to be as much like a machine—as much like his own sensitive instruments—as possible. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have called this ethos "mechanical objectivity;" and clairvoyants, if they really were what Poyen said they were, looked like paragons of

virtue according to its tenets.^{lxvii} Absent-minded and passively sensitive, they seemed empty of will and of subjective distortion.

This is a period of American history where our thoughts tend to be on the movement that is supposed to have *celebrated* the subjective: Transcendentalism. And yet among the contemporaries of figures like Emerson and Hawthorne—among, in fact, their correspondents, their intimates, their friends, and their wives—were a host of Poyennian clairvoyants, mesmerists, and inquirers into animal-magnetic phenomena. Brook Farm, in particular, was over-run. These other Transcendentalists investigated a form of knowledge that would not be active, but receptive, a form of knowledge that would require a strenuously achieved passivity—that of the sensitive scientific apparatus. And yet instrumentality, here, actually wound up being a *subject*-position, since it amounted to the virtuous stance of the good scientific observer.

We are familiar with the Transcendentalist *annus mirabilis* of 1836. But the year that followed—1837, when four books discussing Loraina Brackett were only the tip of the iceberg in terms of mesmeric publications—has its own role to play in the history of the American subject. Here, the errant and yet insightful mesmeric sensorium—this sensorium that had by this time already given a public voice of sorts to hysterics, Irish mental cases, and seduction victims—established what would turn out to be a lasting purchase on the virtuous position of the objective observer. To allow this development to become visible, however, we will have to rethink the ways that the canonical authors of the mid-century—and in particular Hawthorne, in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)—have taught us to think about mesmerism and its subjects.

The story I will be telling here moves through a series of transformations: from Poyen and his instrumentally knowing clairvoyants; through the intellectual-historical problems that surround objectivity, romanticism, and their relationship to each other; to the teeming life of Poyennian mesmerism in the Brook Farm and Transcendentalist circles, and in particular to a clairvoyant, Anna Parsons, who was the habituée of both; finally, I come to Hawthorne's novel. I will be making two closely interrelated arguments. The first is that the instrument-position Poyen devised for his clairvoyants became a powerful *subject*-position, paradoxically enough, among the Transcendentalists, as I demonstrate through a case study of Parsons. She will be the next in our series of mesmeric oxymorons: figures who, by the very fact that under a dominant logic they are contradictions in terms, manage to usher new publicly recognized persons into being. She was both instrument and instrument-wielder, passive receiver and active knower.

The second argument is that the emergence of mesmeric subjects of this type has tended to be obscured from view by *The Blithedale Romance*'s polemic against mesmerism as a form of mass spectacle—a ruse which we have too often read straight. The mesmeric practice of people like Parsons, I will suggest, had much less to do with spectacle than with knowledge, and much less to do with the mass than with the public forms of a smaller circle—the letters, the conversation, the character-reading—which we might think of as the public of the parlor. Anti-mesmeric rhetoric often raised the spectre of mass publicity—and the woman on stage—in order to dissemble what was really an objection to women as knowers; and *The Blithedale Romance* has often decoyed readers

away from knowledge, and toward the spectre of sexualized thrall, in just this way.

Mesmerism shifted the epistemological order of the parlor within the Brook Farm circle and beyond it; it changed who could speak from a position of authority, and what authority looked like. This event is legible even in *Blithedale*, once one draws away the veil.

Brackett met a skeptic's challenge and saw with "the eye of Omnipotence;" and if there was not omnipotence in the new instrumental subject, there was certainly power. But what is at stake is not only that the mesmeric tradition offered recognition to the unrecognized, or even power to the powerless. Subjects also matter because they let us narrate history. And so my aim here is to extract a different subject—a different Veiled Lady—from Hawthorne's novel than the one we have come to expect. It will then become possible to see, in the place of the mesmeric victim, the mesmeric knower. The kinds of subjects we imagine and the kinds of historical narratives we construct are mutually restrictive—and also mutually productive. The arrival of Poyen in New England, and the taking-up of his ideas in Transcendentalist circles, can be the fulcrum for an account of how the dependent and credulous patient becomes a knowing and civically competent scientific observer: it collects the questions of credulity from the past, and shapes mesmerism, and ultimately its important outgrowth, Spiritualism, for the future. Priscilla, and not Coverdale; the Brook Farm clairvoyant Anna Parsons, and not the Concord lion Emerson: these may be the most promising biographies to follow into modernity.

I. Imaginative Instruments

When Poyen arrived in the U. S. in 1834, it had been fifty years since the publication of the Franklin report. But the field of mesmerism was still organized as that event had ordered it: around axes running from skepticism to belief, independence to thrall. That meant that, like Bell, mesmeric practitioners of the thirties had to cope with the imputations of fraud and imaginative delusion in their practice—or better yet, to turn such imputations to their own ends. Historians of the American branch of the science have equated the absence of practice with the absence of discourse, and so have not treated the decades between 1800 and Poyen's arrival in the thirties.^{lxviii} But we misunderstand the thirties and forties if we ignore the fact that the discourse of mesmerism was already highly structured, and along Franklinian lines, when Poyen "introduced" the science to Americans soon after his arrival in 1834 (Poyen, *Progress* 40).

The first two decades of the century represented a return to the Franklin report's way of viewing mesmerism—to viewing it, that is, as an enthusiastic delusion. Bell's somnambulists faded from the American stage for the moment, even as this style of mesmerism continued to be practiced in France and Germany.^{lxix} But any Franklinian feast-day—the occasion of the publication of his *Memoirs* in 1818, for example—still brought forth a tribute to the vanquisher of "credulity."^{lxx} And each enthusiastic fraud, whether religious or medical, drew an inevitable comparison to "the operations of Mesmer."^{lxxi} As Charles Brockden Brown had once lamented, animal magnetism and its

imaginative effects seemed to serve as little but an occasion for bemoaning, as one periodical did, "the remarkable impositions on the credulity of mankind."^{lxxii}

But in the 1820s and early 1830s, physicians in France and in Germany began taking animal magnetism seriously again.^{lxxiii} At the Paris hospital Hôtel Dieu in 1820, the French Academy of Medicine conducted a trial of magnetism which returned more favorable results than had the Franklin commission, and American publications, including *Silliman's*, the nation's leading scientific periodical, reported the new results. As one writer put it, "it must be acknowledged that the commissioners...with Dr. Franklin in their number, were clearly mistaken; and that Mesmer ought to be regarded as a man of real genius."^{lxxiv} This, of course, roused the keepers of the Franklinian flame, who reasserted the old objections with still more vehemence. Benjamin Waterhouse actually repeated them verbatim. He, recall, was the addressee of the letter John Adams wrote from Paris in 1784, where Adams announced the conclusions of the Franklin commission, confident that the "Phrenzy must evaporate" under such a blow. Imagine Waterhouse's dismay, then, when he found the *Medical Intelligencer* falling for the old Mesmerian scheme more than forty years after the fact. He sent them the full text of Adams's 1784 letter, which the *American Herald* had published at the time; Waterhouse thought the letter still "very much to the purpose." The *Intelligencer* dutifully reprinted it in 1826, and other periodicals also set mesmeric effects down to "the influence of the imagination."^{lxxv} Even the J. Johnson translation of the Franklin commission's *Report*, which we first encountered on the occasion of its 1785 publication, saw the light of day again; the Philadelphia house of H. Perkins reprinted it in 1837.

But all this was to no avail. The interest in animal magnetism had reached critical mass. Within a few years after Poyen's 1834 arrival, the science spread throughout New England. Mesmerists and clairvoyant somnambulists were plentiful in Boston, New York, Salem, and especially Providence, which became, as historian Alan Gauld writes, "the Mecca of American magnetism" and was an early base of Poyen's operations (181). By 1837, Providence had at least "six professors of the science [who] studied under...Poyen, and are now equally or better [sic] magnetizers than their instructor." Even this observer, one of Poyen's detractors, said that by 1837 mesmerism "claim[ed] for its supporters a large share of the intelligent men of the country," including Brown's president, Francis Wayland (Durant 46-47). Poyen himself was, by that time, on a well-received tour of New England with the somnambulist Cynthia Gleason, which received significant press coverage. On that tour, he met Elizabeth Peabody, Hawthorne's future sister-in-law, and delighted her by telling her that she had great promise as a magnetist.^{lxxvi} Early on, even physicians received Poyen's lectures well, though later their ardor would cool; the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* called Poyen "a scholar, and a well-educated physician" in 1836.^{lxxvii} Meanwhile, his influence also spread by print; he published actively in the medical and popular press.^{lxxviii}

Poyen established a magnetic tradition in the U. S. that would have a durability unmatched by anything that came before it. From the mid-thirties through the 1880s, mesmerism and its variants were to remain in the public eye practically without intermission. That did not mean, however, that practitioners were now free to ignore the old problems of credulity and error: the imputations that there was no magnetic fluid, but

that patients' imaginations could account for all the supposedly "animal-magnetic" effects. On the contrary, this issue was still as fresh as it had been when the first U. S. practitioners appeared in the 1790s, in the wake of the Franklin report. Poyen, like Bell, had to contend with it.

The way Poyen and his disciples finessed the problem of error would shape the role the mesmeric subject could have in U. S. intellectual history—but not in a way they could have foreseen. In fact, from one perspective, what they did hardly differed from Bell's approach fifty years before. Poyen belonged to the same sub-tradition as Bell, those who produced a sleep-like state by using passes of the hand to direct magnetic fluid into the body "through the medium of the nerves."^{lxxxix} Most people felt little beyond "a sort of stiffness, of sleepiness, and dizziness" when magnetized.^{lxxx} But a few became somnambulists, like the patients that so interested John Bell. They could diagnose, read sealed letters, even see distant places, while at the same time losing ordinary perceptual ability. As Poyen put it, they entered "a state during which the senses of hearing and sight are stopped," while "the cerebral faculties" remained "wholly sound," or even became "singularly exalted."^{lxxxii} The same paradoxical set of sensory aptitudes in Bell's patients had seemed to redeem error by making it the precursor to special insight.

But Poyen's school of magnetizers gave this combination of error and insight a new wrinkle, and one that would ultimately do much to found clairvoyants' claims to be considered as knowing subjects. He described somnambulists as sensitive scientific instruments whose nervous systems, on the one hand, could both pick up finer vibrations than the ordinary senses—hence their visions—and, on the other hand, could be easily

miscued by experimental "noise"—hence their errors. Under the trance, Poyen said, clairvoyants became "the most *complex, nice*, organized and living instruments," and were "infinitely more susceptible of changes and modifications than any scientific machine or apparatus that can be devised and made by man's hands" (*Letter* 35). In the somnambulistic state, they were "so much influenced by the *vital emanations emitted* around [them]," that their nervous systems developed a property "analogous to the property of electrometers to mark the quantity and nature of electricity contained in the atmosphere, or emitted by certain electrified bodies" (*Letter* 48). Clairvoyants, by analogy to electrometers, measured the "animal magnetism" that emanated from people and objects. It was this sensitivity that allowed them to intuit the contents of letters, to divine the origins of a disease in the body, and to pierce out the secret vices of other people in the room.

But the same sensitivity also meant they could be easily miscued by "vital emanations" coming from irrelevant objects. Brackett could read text in a sealed envelope, despite being both blind, and blindfolded; nonetheless, a mesmerist could easily lead her into misidentifying an object that was handed to her. Poyen gives an example from the performance of one of his students, Dr. Fiske, a dentist from Salem—who may, in fact, have been the same man who later gave Sophia Peabody Hawthorne mesmeric treatments over Nathaniel Hawthorne's vehement objections.^{lxxxii} In this case, Fiske gave a somnambulist water, but willed that to the somnambulist, it would seem to be brandy. He handed it to her, "she drank some of it; and...exclaimed apparently in displeasure, '*it is rum*'" (Poyen, *Letter* 16). "[E]ven the most lucid somnambulists," Poyen

wrote, "are often dupes of their own imagination;" they could not always tell whether they were picking up the wishes and beliefs of people in the room, or the emanations of the objects they were supposed to "read" (*Letter* 19). But this was just to say that like any sensitive registration machine, a clairvoyant had to be protected from interference. Somnambulists' errors did not invalidate their clairvoyance; if anything, they tended to substantiate it. One does not give up on compasses because they lose their true bearing while in the neighborhood of a magnet; rather, what makes the compass work most of the time is also what makes it fail in these special circumstances. If one wanted to make use of clairvoyance—to have a somnambulist diagnose a patient, for example—it was simply a matter of isolating her from stray emanations. Poyen had not expunged the imaginative susceptibility of which entranced subjects had long been accused. He had instrumentalized it.

But what did it mean that the mesmeric tradition, which had seemed to be tending toward allowing mechanical bodies to be subjects, had now begun calling them machines again? How could this lead, as I have been suggesting, to the strengthening of clairvoyants' claims as good scientific observers? It might seem that, on the contrary, clairvoyants had become mere tools to be turned toward the mesmerist's ends—dupes, after all, in this mesmeric system. But there is a major reason to think something more complicated, and more promising, was afoot: being like one's instruments was precisely the model for the ideal scientific observer at this mid-century moment. "[I]t was a nineteenth-century commonplace," write the historians of science Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "that machines were paragons of certain virtues...Instead of freedom of

will, machines offered freedom from will—from the willful interventions that had come to be seen as the most dangerous aspects of subjectivity" (*Objectivity* 123). Trance patients, with their automatic bodies and their quiescent wills, already exemplified the mechanical virtues. Poyen and his fellow-experimenters—clairvoyants and mesmerists both—molded their practice to this new ethos of observation. Under this conspectus, instrumentality could actually be a *subject*-position: that of the good scientific observer.

Daston and Galison have argued that from the late eighteenth century through the middle of the nineteenth century, a new ethos they call "mechanical objectivity" emerged in one observational science after another. It is under this ethos that Poyennian clairvoyants were ideal observers. Ideally, one recorded perceptual information as a machine would: sensitively, tirelessly, but without preconceived notions or desires, just as clairvoyants did. Practitioners became preoccupied with the worry that their desires for a particular result would influence their perceptions. Smoothing out a scientific image so that it represented an ideal type, formerly the valued work of trained observers, now became anathema. Any intervention of that kind now seemed an unwarrantable intrusion, a distortion arising from twin vices: epistemological desire that the facts should fit abstract and orderly "theories," a kind of thirst for theoretical beauty; and the investigator's intellectual vanity, or bias toward evidence that would confirm his own pet hypotheses. "To be objective," write Daston and Galison, "is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower...Objectivity is blind sight, seeing without interference, interpretation, or intelligence" (*Objectivity* 17). The unconscious and involuntary mechanical subject of the mesmeric trance—able to diagnose illnesses or see electricity,

as Bell's clairvoyants had in the 1790s, and yet curiously absent from her own act of knowing—looked like a legitimate observer under this new conspectus. "Blind sight" was certainly what someone like Loraina Brackett had. Absent, senseless, and mechanical while under the trance, she gave "readouts" of the impressions striking her soul.

Thus if Poyen's clairvoyants were instruments, this did not mean they were mere pawns in someone else's game. Being like a machine meant being considered an exemplar of virtue; and that, in turn, meant being granted the authority that acknowledged virtue commands—being allowed, even, to outdistance the mesmerist. "[C]clairvoyants," wrote one practitioner, "are no sooner mesmerized than they soar above the mesmerizer,—they see and understand his brain and all its weak points,—they depend upon him for going into the state and for being brought out of it again, but with this their dependence upon him ends" (Barth 172). Defending trance-subjects against the accusation of mechanical error had required conceiving of mechanical insight: making them into fine-tuned electrometers. But now, an electrometer itself was the model for the knowing subject in the observational sciences. Poyen's clairvoyants were shining examples of mechanical objectivity, and that did not make them the mere tools of others. It gave them power as knowledge-producers in their own right.

II. The Romanticism Complex

Margaret Fuller visited Loraina Brackett and defended her passionately in a review of a mesmerist's book; Sophia Peabody Hawthorne sought magnetic treatment;

Elizabeth Peabody, her sister, tried to learn from Poyen how to give it to her. These three were not the only ones of the Transcendentalist circle to respond with enthusiasm to the idea of mechanically objective subjecthood. I will shortly be arguing that mesmeric clairvoyance represented an under-appreciated strain in that development in American intellectual history called Transcendentalism. But given Daston and Galison's argument about objectivity, this may seem strange. Daston and Galison see mechanical objectivity as in part a reaction against romanticism. And the Transcendentalists—however much they bridled against any attempt to define them—were nothing if not romantic. How, then, is it possible that mechanical subjecthood would sprout up and even flourish among them?

The key here is to change the way we see the series of corrections and adjustments that happened in and around the multi-national Romantic movement. The willful self that German Romanticism celebrated did provoke backlashes. And mechanical objectivity might be seen as one of these: the theory-mongering, confirmation-seeking, and self-willed form of subjectivity against which the mechanically objective observer struggled was in a sense the Romantic self. But this apparent opposition is really indicative of a broader agreement between Romanticism and its redressers: an agreement about the division of knowledge between the "subjective" and the "objective." Indeed, those terms as now used entered the English language through Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), the same work which did so much to bring German Romantic philosophy to the Anglophone world—and to the Transcendentalists.^{lxxxiii} But Coleridge's "idealism," imbibed from early nineteenth-

century German philosophy, "did not oppose objectivity," according to Galison; "on the contrary," it was in the midst of Romantic thought that "there emerged, in its first and powerful form, the 'modern' concept of an objectivity that always implicated the self."^{lxxxiv} That is to say, Coleridge did not renounce objectivity in favor of idealism; rather, he simply *divided* the two into separate kinds of knowledge, which had to be sought through appropriate methods. For Romantics and scientists, "there was a grave danger, a fear that in willing, desiring, intending, and schematizing, the image of nature would tell us no more than what we wanted to hear." And this "was the problem of knowledge as it was given."^{lxxxv} One had to apply the techniques of self—whether discipline, or introspection—that suited the kind of knowing at hand.

Thus the Romantic wish for drugged, ecstatic self-enclosure and the objectivist wish for self-control are thus closely intertwined knowledge-projects, both depending on a lively sense of the mediating and subjective quality of perception (Crary 9). And there was nothing to stop a single person—Coleridge, for example—from pursuing both natural knowledge and poetic knowledge under different circumstances. One thing the two enterprises shared was that they were post-Lockean, in the sense I have been developing in earlier chapters. Both rejected the pedagogical notion that subjects could be trained to avoid "credulity" once and for all, to have uncomplicated perceptions of objects untainted by their own desires and passions. Seeing objects as they were meant doing one's best to filter out subjective impulses, one's "enthusiasm"—and everyone, not just nervous patients, had to do this. By the same token, there was nothing wrong, *per se*, with "enthusiastic" flights of fancy, if what one was trying to do was to write a poem.

Subjectivity and objectivity ought to be seen, then, not as two opposing world views, but as a shared conviction that at a given moment, either you will know something about the subject, or you will know something about the object—but you will not know about both by a single method and disposition of the self.

What we can see in Poyen's mesmerism, then, is not a rebuttal to romanticism, but rather one form of knowledge-claim which romanticism's division of subjects from objects had made thinkable. In that respect, Poyen owed something to Ralph Waldo Emerson and his circle. In the 1820s and 1830s, a set of young American Unitarians—soon to be called the Transcendentalists—had begun reading the literature and philosophy of British and German Romanticism. They were dissatisfied with Unitarianism and with the way the Lockean philosophy of mind embedded in it discredited direct religious inspiration as "enthusiastic."^{lxxxvi} In search of a positive enthusiasm, they took special interest Coleridge's works on German philosophy. There they found not just a positive take on enthusiasm—Coleridge's "subjectivity"—but also a branch of knowledge in which one sought to *suppress* the subject—"objective" natural knowledge. Emerson, Margaret Fuller, James Freeman Clarke, and others read Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and his *Aids to Reflection* (1829), published in America with prefatory notes by one of their number, James Marsh. And they read Madame de Staël (*De l'Allemagne*, 1813) on the same topics. They became a major source of this philosophy—this way of thinking about subjective and objective knowledge—in American culture. Quite a number of the Transcendentalists became supporters of

mesmerism's objectivist approach to knowledge; other members of this "'club of the like-minded'" in which "no two...thought alike" were very much against it.^{lxxxvii}

Both positions made sense given the intellectual-historical roots of Poyen's practice. If the subject and the object were divided from each other—if, as Emerson wrote in "Experience" (1846), "souls never touch their objects," one might respond by "hold[ing] hard to this poverty, however scandalous," as Emerson exhorted in that essay (243). One might, in other words, live in and accept the irremediable subjective distortions of perception. Or, on the other hand, one might look for certain exceptional souls who—almost—*could* touch their objects, by virtue of emptying themselves, becoming mechanical instruments. This was part of what a figure like Loraina Brackett represented for Fuller, Clarke, and others.

While always keeping in mind that these two paths diverged in the same woods—keeping in mind, that is, that both mesmerism and Emerson's philosophy were ways of responding to the division of knowledge between objectivity and subjectivity—I want to ask why those who picked mesmerism did so. To be sure, cross-pollination was frequent; we should expect to find the practice of clairvoyance also participating in Romantic idealism of a more familiar kind. But to the extent the two ethics of knowledge-production can be separated, does the objectivist subject have something new to bring to the table? Nathaniel Hawthorne begged his fiancée Sophia Peabody not to "let an earthly effluence from Mrs. [Cornelia] Park's corporeal system bewilder thee," when Peabody went to Park, another member of the Transcendentalist milieu, for mesmeric treatment.^{lxxxviii} On the other hand, Sophia's sister Elizabeth had been learning from

Charles Poyen in person how to magnetize; "I do not know but I shall try to cure Sophia," she wrote.^{lxxxix} Orestes Brownson hated mesmerism; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Bronson Alcott's wife Abigail, Emerson's aunt Mary Moody Emerson, and numerous Brook Farmers, including founder George Ripley, were sympathetic to it.^{xc} What motivated the division? And does the objectivist side something to say about American intellectual history which we cannot find in the more familiar notion of the Transcendentalist, or romantic, subject?

III. Measuring Emerson

I would like to propose that we read this division among the club of the like-minded in terms of the efforts of one part of the circle—primarily, the women who were mesmerists and clairvoyants—to claim a greater part in the privilege of making knowledge in the semi-private space of the Transcendentalist parlor. Practitioners of mesmerism found in the objectivist principles of these sciences a means of appropriating the right to speak and to know: if they could be transparent measurers of the emanations of objects, that translated into a kind of authority. By beginning as a humble instrument, the mere voice for the self-expression of objects, the clairvoyant could come to occupy a powerful subject-position: that of the scientific observer. The position of observer had the peculiarly oxymoronic quality that each of our mesmeric subjects have possessed: of enclosing the subject in the not-subject, the manuscript in the automaton box, the agent in the empty, simple, transparent, passive, and unresistant body. Here, too, the mechanical

observing subject was sheep's clothing for a novel species of wolf: in the guise of being a mere messenger of the properties of objects, the clairvoyant could speak for herself.

Seeing this possibility will mean reconsidering the familiar thesis that mesmerism was above all a site for thinking through, as Richard Brodhead put it, "the historical emergence, at midcentury, of a more massively *publicized* order of entertainment in America" (53). This, for Brodhead is "what the Veiled Lady registers" in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).^{xci} This way of reading *Blithedale* has also become a way of reading mesmerism: as essentially representing the seduction at once of mass audiences and of private women. This reading obscures, however, an historical shift of perhaps equal importance, which is also visible through the gauzy narrative of Hawthorne's novel. Mesmerism saw the emergence of a means by which young, invalid, clairvoyant women could speak from a position of knowledge, as though they were scientific observers; and such a shift quite naturally posed a threat to those who already had the privilege of fact-making not on the stage, but in the private life of the circle. In other words, the threat of the clairvoyant, I want to argue, was not the seduction of innocence on the stage, but the shifting of the parlor's epistemological pecking-order.

A new interpretation of mesmerism and *Blithedale's* engagement with it turns on one quite simple fact about the novel, and one observation drawn from mesmerism's prior history. The fact is that *Blithedale* is an historical novel. It takes place not during the heyday of Spiritualism, the 1850s, when spirit-mediums mounted the stage, but "twelve or fifteen years ago"—between, that is, 1837 and 1840, when, as I will show, the typical clairvoyant reading happened in semi-private (6). Being an historical novel does not, of

course, stop *Blithedale* from engaging with the later developments in stage mesmerism contemporary with its publication. But it does at the very least raise the possibility that if this earlier phase had the distinct stakes of re-dividing the shares of private knowledge—as I will argue it did—then the novel may also be engaging with this redivision—as I will argue it is.

The observation drawn from mesmerism's prior history, to be placed alongside the fact of *Blithedale*'s 1837 setting, is this. The very same themes which we typically recognize as marking worry over women's publicity—complaints of imaginative contagion, mass hysteria, seduction, and fraud—have marked anti-mesmeric rhetoric from the beginning. In particular, they have marked challenges to its claims to produce knowledge from unprivileged subject-positions—positions, in fact, in which one had hardly recognized the presence of any subject at all. References to the contagion of hysterical behavior in crowds and at theaters go back to the Franklin commission's report, and they are not only a way of talking about mass publicity; they are also a way of discrediting figures like Parsons, Loraina Brackett, and other speakers whose mechanical bodies and marginal social positions mutually reinforced each other. Hawthorne thrilled with fear, in a letter to Sophia Peabody asking her not to be magnetized, at the idea that "there would be an intrusion into thy holy of holies—and the intruder would not be thy husband!"^{xcii} Emerson thought that "Animal Magnetism" and other new sciences like phrenology seemed mere displays of nervous illness, "the phenomena of Disease & too fuliginous & typhoid in their character to attract any but the physician."^{xciii} Mesmerism, Emerson wrote, "broke into the inmost shrines, attempted the explanation of miracle and

prophecy, as well as creation," than which nothing could be "more revolting to the contemplative philosopher!"^{xciv} And these polemics have continued to inform our own reading of mesmerism: that it threatened to bring women into public, and to turn the heads of crowds.^{xcv}

But what hides behind these questions of purity and publicity are, as from the beginning of mesmerism's American history, really questions of knowledge. I want to take Anna Parsons—a young invalid, clairvoyant and Brook Farm habituée—as the figure for a renovated Priscilla, a Veiled Lady remarkable less for her own subjugation, than for her power to subjugate others; less for the deception and betrayal she suffers, than for the knowledge she seems to possess. Anna Parsons, under the trance in Transcendentalist parlors, did not so much fall under the spell of powerful men as find the means of speaking hard truths to them. Parsons was right in the heart of the Transcendentalist ferment.^{xcvi} She serves here, therefore, as a case study in what it looked like to advert to objectivist principles among them—and thereby to succeed in carving out a role in the public-private scene of the parlor—at the time when *The Blithedale Romance* is set.

Parsons never, from all I can discover, went on stage. She only participated in readings that happened in the homes of her friends, and in the fora of Brook Farm. Parlor séances like these were more typical than we think. It is surprising to learn that when Poyen travelled to give lectures, the clairvoyant with whom he worked, Cynthia Gleason, did not join him on the lecture-hall stage. "I never performed any experiments on her before the public but three times only," Poyen writes; instead, he said, "I have

usually experimented upon Miss G., as well as other individuals, in presence of select classes, in private rooms, and for no other purpose than to illustrate the principles [of]...my lectures" (*Progress* 119). And indeed, testimonials to American clairvoyant phenomena, which made up a substantial part of the typical 1830s mesmeric text, generally refer to private experiments like the one in which Parsons participated.^{xcvii} That does not mean these gatherings had no public element; what mattered about the experiments, in fact, was that they could count as public knowledge, be published, and circulate between friends. What was missing was the stage. The threat of a performance like Parsons', I want to argue, came not from its quality as a spectacle but from the strength and the content of its knowledge-claims—and the way these claims tended to constitute a new observing subject. The vectors that met in her performances will guide us into an unfamiliar epistemological order in which, under the right conditions, Parsons could look down on Emerson.

This is what she did on one evening in 1846, when a group gathered at the house of Sarah Huidekoper Clarke and James Freeman Clarke for a "mesmeric experiment."^{xcviii} Present were Joseph Rodes Buchanan, the mesmerist; his wife, the clairvoyant Cornelia Buchanan; Emerson's wife Lidian Emerson; and Anna Parsons herself. The company tested Parsons' powers, presenting her with "five or six autograph letters."^{xcix} She then gave a series of mesmeric readings of the emanations of character she could detect by touching the letters while blindfolded. The idea was that the writer left animal-magnetic clues to his character in the paper, which the sensitive Parsons could then pick up.

That night, Ralph Waldo Emerson appeared in spectral form—the only way he was ever likely to appear for experiments in the "Mesmeric influence," of which, Margaret Fuller told him, "you make so light, so wittily." When Parsons held in her hand a letter Emerson had written, she made a few criticisms of the former's character which struck Fuller, who was not present but learned the details from Sarah Clarke later, as "a most refined expression of the truth, whether obtained by clairvoyance or any other means." Parsons did not know whose letter she held—though she seems to have had a strong inkling, however acquired, that it was Emerson or Alcott—but she intimated of the letter-writer that "he is not perfect...there is something wanting." At this, it seems, the company pricked up their ears in excitement: what was the fault?

But, Fuller reports, "they could not get her beyond this for some time;" she insisted that "she could not *criticize* the person." As clairvoyants often did, Parsons husbanded her knowledge; she had a good sense of dramatic timing. Buchanan offered "to magnetize the organ of self-esteem, that she might overlook [i.e., look down upon] him." Finally, while still protesting that she could not "overlook" the unknown writer, because of his great nobility of character—"I might many, but not him," she protested—she nonetheless took him to task: "If he could sympathize with himself, he could with every one."^c Fuller thought this trenchant to a degree, and one gets the impression that she and Sarah Clarke publicized it as much as they could. Parsons had achieved a paradoxical coup: she had presented herself as having scientific and objective knowledge of a great Romantic soul.

IV. Psychometers

The form of mesmeric clairvoyance at which Parsons excelled synthesized the knowledge that came from a sensitive registering instrument, and the knowledge that came from poring over the contents of the soul. Strictly speaking, this was a bit illogical, as the Romantic order would have separated these two kinds of knowing. But as we have repeatedly seen in the history of mesmerism, it tended to take an oxymoron to make a new knowing subject. The instrumental knowledge that Poyen had made out of the sensitive clairvoyant's equally insightful and erring body now reorganized itself to storm the soul. Joseph Rodes Buchanan, the mesmerist present at the Clarke séance, called the branch of the science which he, Parsons, and other Transcendentalists practiced "psychometry." Psychometry "literally signific[ed] *soul-measuring*," Buchanan wrote, "being analogous to the words, thermometry, barometry, electrometry, and similar terms, which signify special measurements." Just as a "barometer measure[d] the weight (*baro*, weight) of the atmosphere...the psychometer measure[d] the soul (*psyche*)" (3). A Poyennian offshoot, psychometry imagined the mesmerically sensitized body as an instrument analogous to the many new instruments for measuring changes in forces which the senses could only crudely detect. And yet its privileged object was the Romantic subject: Buchanan's clairvoyants usually "read" the vital emanations from manuscript letters, as Parsons did, rather than diagnosing or identifying objects while blindfolded, as was more common among the Providence clairvoyants. The terms "psychometer" and "psychometrist" were used interchangeably: the clairvoyant was both

the instrument and its operator. A psychometer could give others insight into their own innermost selves, making her a valuable consultants in the important Transcendentalist task of self-cultivation.

I want to look at the oxymoron of psychometry in some detail, in order to see how Parsons occupied at once the position of instrument and seer of character. For the first of the two sides to Parsons' knowledge, her instrumentality, it helped that she was a passive and even sickly young woman. Her abilities as a psychometrist probably first manifested themselves in the sick-room under the influence of mesmeric medical treatment; certainly that was the case for many clairvoyants of the first half of the nineteenth century.^{ci} Fuller, Harriet Martineau, and Sophia Peabody, for example were all treated by mesmerists.^{cii} Beyond the passivity born of illness, Parsons was "a good child" and "a delicate girl."^{ciii} Marianne Dwight, Parsons' close friend, thought she was "transparent enough" to receive invisible vibrations from nature's objects.^{civ} Georgiana Bruce Kirby, the prison reformer and Brook Farm familiar, had high hopes that she might manage this coup of passivity, because, as she writes, "I had a passion for analyzing character, [and] could describe them so accurately that they would be recognized by their friends" (161). But Kirby was not passive enough. "No matter how negative a mental attitude I assumed," she writes, she could not quite become quiescent enough that her mesmerist, a friend she only names as "Cornelia H.," could "overrule my consciousness" and "subdue my will" (161). No matter how much she emptied herself of subjectivity, in other words, no mesmeric business resulted. She could not achieve Parsons' instrumentality.

And yet however much Parsons' knowledge-mandate came from emptiness and objectivity, her activities also mirrored those of this subject-cultivating circle. Buchanan had recommended psychometry as a means of "self-culture," since "every defect of character conceals itself from the one whom it degrades, by perverting his judgment and taste"—and Parsons took this task up.^{cv} What was in some contexts an anti-romantic form—the exactitude of a scientific instrument—became here the means of assuming a romantic identity. Her practices might have been an essay on social life in the circle. Emerson wrote that at Brook Farm "[t]he art of letter-writing...was immensely cultivated," so much so that "letters were always flying not only from house to house, but from room to room" ("Historic Notes" 364). Parsons did the readers of correspondence one better: she scrutinized letters for traces more objective than language, traces of the writer's soul—which she, by her gifts, could put into words. And she did the same thing with the reading of literary manuscripts, another great Transcendentalist past-time. Charles King Newcomb sent his poetry to Emerson, who praised him as the "subtlest observer and diviner of character I ever met" ("Historic Notes"). Parsons turned sensitive character-reading back on the sensitive character: she managed to get Newcomb to send poems to her too, though at first "[h]is delicate nature shr[a]nk so from laying itself open to observation."^{cvi} Fuller pronounced Parsons' reading of Newcomb "excellent" and thought she had "seized with force many leading traits"—though perhaps Newcomb himself disliked what Parsons saw. Fuller had to ask him several times before he finally forked the reading over.^{cvi}

Mass publicity, thrall, spectacle, and seduction are singularly absent here. What one sees, instead, is a competing form of knowledge circulating in half-public forms: the letter read over not just by the recipient, but by her friends; the item of gossip passed from place to place; the reading copied fair and handed out; the poem recited in the sitting-room. But these semi-private forms are not therefore unimportant or sub-historical. One sees in psychometry a form of knowledge that could extend beyond the favorite activities of character-analysis and cultivation and into the philosophical underpinnings and future goals of as important an institution as Brook Farm. In a reading that took place there in 1845, Parsons sparred with a spectral Charles Fourier, whom she seemed to see embodied before her as she held his text. Upon Parsons telling Fourier that in life he had been "more intellectual than spiritual, " he appeared "so mournful he looked almost reprovingly at her." But, when she asked him, "Isn't it so?...he acknowledged it."^{cviii} Parsons had claimed the right to bandy words with the master. Yet her mandate came out of an insistence on her own emptiness, her willingness to be identical with the instrument of her own body. Marianne Dwight, a Brook Farm resident whose copious correspondence has been an important historical source on the community, sent notes of Parsons' reading far and wide. Albert Brisbane, the Fourierist; William Henry Channing, a resident at the Farm; and the poet Newcomb all praised Parsons' Fourier reading, and Brisbane and Channing appear to have been present at the time.^{cix} Parsons' projection of powerful subjects—like her ventriloquization of their characters in her readings—began to clear a subject position she herself could occupy. She was part instrument, and part great Romantic—or, in this case, Associationist—soul.

V. Rivalries of the Parlor

In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), a sickly young girl unconsciously mimics the more powerful writer of the "sealed letter" she holds in her hand (51). Anna Parsons, holding Emerson's correspondence during the Clarke family's mesmeric experiments, "assumed a tone and emphasis" that reminded her hearers of Emerson, as Fuller told him in her letter.^{cx} Hawthorne's Priscilla does the same while holding a note from Margaret Fuller. Her "air, though not her figure" and "the expression of her face, but not its features" materialize the writer—whose magnetic traces, Buchanan would have said, lingered in the paper. Parsons, for her part, used her sensitivity to embody a more powerful figure—even to approach that figure's influence and importance. But not Priscilla. In Hawthorne's novel, the psychometrist disclaims her powers. It is as though they are divided from her, not-her—and not in the dialectical way we have been discussing. When Miles Coverdale tells Priscilla she looks like Fuller, she looks "very much discomposed" and wishes "people would not fancy such odd things in me!...How could I possibly make myself resemble the lady, merely by holding her letter in my hand?" (52). Modesty was one thing. There was much of unconsciousness and "virgin reserve" about Anna Parsons (*Blithedale* 203). She had to be "innocent" and "a good child."^{cxii} But the point was to turn these virtues into a voice that belonged to her and redounded to her credit. Parsons did not disclaim property in her readings, or in her abilities. She looked over the transcripts of her readings, solicited opinions on them, and

circulated fair copies among her friends, just as Charles Newcomb would have passed around a poem.

It is almost impossible to see in the innocent victim that is Priscilla the figure of a rival novelist, but that, I think, is what the type of the psychometrist represented in the Transcendentalist circle: another sketcher of characters, another revealer of souls, another "Author" who allows "the creatures of his [her] brain" to "play their phantasmagorical antics," as Hawthorne describes his own task in the preface (1).^{cxii} It would not be possible to see this rivalry by following the strict protocols of the *roman-à-clef*, despite my opening comparison between Priscilla and a real Brook Farm figure, Anna Parsons. Linking the characters of Hawthorne's *Blithedale* to the Farm's own crew has always been good sport, and Parsons would not be a bad choice for Priscilla. But reading *Blithedale* only as a *roman-à-clef* would beg precisely the question I want to explore here. The procedure of matching characters to their historical counterparts takes it as axiomatic that a character has basically the same size and shape as a subject. Perhaps Zenobia is Fuller, or perhaps she is Elizabeth Peabody; perhaps Hollingsworth is Alcott, or perhaps he is Emerson. However that may be, characters count as persons; and Hawthorne's rearrangement of signs is a matter of rearranging whole subjects. Making Parsons Priscilla might seem like the shortest distance between the novel and mesmerism. But what it would obscure is the way in which Parsons constructed her own subjecthood by *multiplying* characters. The relation of subjects to characters was precisely *not* one to one in her practice. Parsons was at once an instrument and a soul; a reader of objects and a knower of moral truth. She ventriloquized powerful figures like Emerson and Fourier,

even as she remained herself, a passive instrument. It took *more* than one character—Anna and Emerson, or Anna and Fourier—to make the subject that was the psychometrist Parsons.

The way Parsons put a subject together out of these disparate pieces is a prime example of what the mesmeric subject, at its best, could do: by the movement of paradox and oxymoron, it could create subjects who were not supposed to exist. I want to argue here that Hawthorne's novel runs this procedure in reverse, dis-assembling, into several characters, the threatening creature that was the somnambulist in the parlor. Priscilla, then, is at once a figure for the psychometer and less than one. In this *roman-à-clef*, such as it is, the psychometrist-figure is a key that fits in a triple lock: the qualities of the somnambulist subject are distributed, I want to argue, among Westervelt, Zenobia, and Priscilla, rather than being secreted only into Priscilla herself. Interpreting the novel in such a way as to undo this displacement changes everything, because those problems that adhered to the relation between Priscilla and these two figures drop away. *Priscilla* is in bondage to Westervelt, but the *psychometrist* in fact possesses Westervelt's own power to enthrall—and perhaps, more troublingly, even his unscrupulousness. *Priscilla* is the passive victim of Zenobia's deceptions and manipulations; but the *psychometrist* has Zenobia's ability to draw veils of illusion between herself and the spectator. The drama of the novel is apparently a triad of bondage and freedom from which Priscilla must be rescued by a Hollingsworth committed to helping women fulfill their sacred domestic vocation. But if we let this triad register as three faces of someone like Anna Parsons, we see something very different: a figure, the psychometrist, whose very passivity is a

disturbing power, who may be peddling knowledge, fiction, or fraud, and whose ability to sketch characters in the semi-private space of the parlor may threaten the epistemological monopoly of the novelist.

If we are to reassemble the psychometrist from these fragments, it is certainly the character of Priscilla who furnishes the sensitive and passive body capable of being turned to scientific ends. An invalid, she "ha[s] much unaccountable nervousness" accompanied by the "higher and imaginative life within" that made Parsons, too, a clairvoyant (186). Besides reading letters through the envelope, she travels in mind to distant places, as Loraina Brackett, according to one account, did; Brackett saw Battery Park City in a trance, though in ordinary life she had never been there.^{cxiii} Priscilla, too, "sometimes talked of distant places and splendid rooms, as if she had just left them;" and, like Brackett, perceived the imperceptible: "hidden things were visible to her...and silence was audible." (187). Priscilla has the faculties that let Parsons fashion a position of parlor authority: embodying Emerson, and speaking hard truths to Fourier. But as soon as we have to do with any property in Priscilla's character-making faculty—her ability to tell truths or fictions—we must turn to Zenobia and Westervelt. This power is diverted, and to various degrees, perverted, until it comes streaming out the magnetized fingers of these other, darker figures. In this *ménage-à-clef*—or *roman-à-trois*—Westervelt and Zenobia absorb both the evil and the agency that might have been attributed to a psychometrist. They wick away anything distasteful of which a psychometrist might be accused: that she might either be one of these female "imaginary

monsters," as Hollingsworth puts it, who want autonomy from men; or that she might be a fraud (123). But they also neuter Priscilla as a knowledge-producer.

Some occult affinity between Priscilla and Zenobia exists from the beginning—a mystery that seems to find its adequate unfolding in the late revelation that they are sisters. But perhaps when Priscilla "bet[akes] herself into the shadow of Zenobia's protection" (32), we have to do not just with foreshadowing, but with a meta-commentary on the novel's own methods: it has secreted away any will to power on the psychometrist's part—perhaps will in general—into this other character. "I never have any free will" is how Priscilla puts it; Zenobia has will to spare (171). At least one of Zenobia's aptitudes is an exact counterpart of Priscilla's: she can "attitudinize," or assume the expression and aspect of others. Zenobia is the woman who, if she took on the air and expression of Margaret Fuller, would mean it. Good performers of "attitudes" seemed to become the historical personages they were playing in allegorical "*tableaux-vivants*," and in this game, a Blithedale favorite, Zenobia so excelled that she "made one feel it an intolerable wrong to the world, that she did not go at once upon the stage" (106). The hint of deception that hangs about good mimicry—"the illusion which a great actress flings around her"—Zenobia leaches away from Priscilla's innocent and unwitting attitudes.

Westervelt appears to be the harder case as an alter-ego for the psychometrist. Is he not, after all, the very person who holds her "a blindfold prisoner," who keeps her "enthralled in an intolerable bondage, from which she must either free herself or perish" (190)? But if we stand firm in the face of the sensational issue of bondage, and direct our

attention toward the more prosaic one of fraud, things clarify. Discovering that Westervelt's brilliant set of teeth "were a sham," lined with a band of gold at the gums, "affected me oddly," says Coverdale (95). The man was false from crown to toe, "a moral and physical humbug" (95). But many feared this to be the case not of mesmerists, but of their clairvoyants. Charles F. Durant, who denounced animal magnetism in his *Exposition, or, A New Theory of Animal Magnetism* (1837), makes this accusation repeatedly. In fact, Durant's position is that the *clairvoyants* are the defrauders, and the mesmerists the dupes. His investigation of the teeming Providence mesmeric community yields only one magnetizer who is not "*sincere and honest*" in his belief in the science (182). Of the clairvoyants, he more often concluded that they "feigned the whole" (132). He broke it to one mesmerist, whom he thought sincere, that the man was an intellectual cuckold—"your wife has *deceived you!*"—she being the clairvoyant with whom the man worked (134). Loraina Brackett, who saw with the eye of omnipotence at the beginning of our narrative, was, he said, "insipid, immodest, vulgar and disgusting," and "feigned blind" (163).

Durant's book gives the impression of an undissembled misogyny. But his vitriol also contains a modicum of recognition: in calling Brackett a fraud, he acknowledged a woman who may have been his counterpart—who may even have been his better—in the confidence games that no doubt circulated around and through the sincere inquiries of the Providence circle. For Brackett may or may not have been a fraud, but Durant certainly was one—though for scientific purposes. His book is the account of a Franklin-commission-like experiment which he conducted on the Providence magnetizers. He

promoted a theory of how magnetism worked—one which he knew to be fraudulent—with the goal of showing that clairvoyants, either through credulity or deceit, would dutifully perform the symptoms they knew the theory predicted. Like the Franklin commission, he found that the effects of magnetization conformed to the subject's expectations, not to fact. But all this left Durant as great a faker as any of them. As he wrote, "[i]t is easy to construct a false theory, but to uphold it, requires *duplicity*," though he knew the "honest and sincere" magnetists "would forgive the employment of *duplicity* to undeceive them" (72, 131). So Durant wound up among the mountebanks; I suspect, though, that he also enlisted at first in the ranks of the dupes. His book bears suspicious marks of having been started as a pro-magnetist tract whose angle changed mid-stream when Durant discovered, or thought he discovered, his own deception. The first four chapters sympathetically render the theory and history of the practice, and then abruptly break off into description of Durant's duplicitous experiments and the libeling of his enemies. Perhaps, as sometimes happened to Melville, Durant could not quite afford to scrap his botched book, and so he simply carried on as best as he could after his conversion. Durant adds a preface explaining that these initial, and apparently sympathetic, chapters were meant to be "satirical"—if they were, they are not a success—and publishes the whole (53).

But whether it was out of rage at his own deceit, or only out of a big-hearted desire to save the public from credulity, Durant saw in Brackett a genuine rival in the production of knowledge, or of fraud. He did not respect his enemy, but at least he did not accuse her of having "kept, as I religiously believe, her virgin reserve and sanctity of

soul, throughout it all," as Coverdale affirms of Priscilla, subtracting her from any moral economy of knowledge or fraud whatsoever that might circulate around mesmerism (203). Parsons was modest and virginal, to be sure. But she was conscious of her own knowledge—she was emphatically *involved* in the performances of passivity she mounted. And she certainly did not disclaim property in the knowledge she produced. In the case of her well-received Fourier reading, in fact, where her friend Marianne Dwight took dictation as Parsons spoke in the trance, Dwight and Parsons went over the transcript afterwards so that Parsons could revise it as she saw fit.^{cxiv} Her correspondence with Dwight, then living at Brook Farm, is full of references to her active role in making her character-sketches: to soliciting manuscripts to be read, sending readings to others for comment, and discussing readings once made. Dwight was always curious to know what social secrets Parsons had recently learned by psychometric means, and so were the other Brook Farmers. "Did you have good readings?" Dwight asked her in one typical 1844 letter. "Do tell me about them."^{cxv} Copies and rumors of Parsons' readings traveled back and forth between Boston and Brook Farm, via the depot of Elizabeth Peabody's bookshop. Her psychometric character-sketch of Newcomb's manuscript made the rounds so thoroughly—reaching, among others, Fuller and Emerson—that finally Newcomb became uncomfortable and threatened to take it out of circulation, prompting Dwight to exclaim, "Oh! it is too good and too beautiful and too true to destroy! I hope it will not be done."^{cxvi}

This domestic collaboration at the making of character-sketches, so typical of the Transcendentalist mesmeric strain, sounds quite a bit like the practice of a novelist—

especially one such as Hawthorne, who excelled at the portrait. Certainly Parsons' psychometry—which is "essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact," as Hawthorne describes romance in his preface—resembles story-telling more closely than it resembles thrall (2). And there is, after all, one character in *The Blithedale Romance* who has something like the psychometric faculty undivided. Coverdale, too, characterizes and analyzes, and watches the central players whom he "had kept so long upon my mental stage, as actors in a drama" (156). Parsons' ill health meant she watched the events of Brook Farm from afar; and Coverdale, too, is an invalid at the beginning of the novel. He has acquired, while sick, "a species of intuition—either a spiritual lie, or the subtle recognition of a fact—which comes to us in a reduced state of the corporeal system" (46). Both Coverdale and Parsons observed and adjusted the actors in their dramas from the close air of a sick-room. In the period of his illness, a curious intimacy springs up between Priscilla and Coverdale, since, as he says, "my weakly condition...supplied a medium in which she could approach me" (51). There is, here, just the shadow of a meeting on equal ground: the weakened poet, and the gifted weakling. For this moment, the novel allows Priscilla to make character-sketches; it is here that she attitudinizes Fuller, "one of the most gifted women of the age," as though, like Parsons with Emerson, she were occupying Fuller's gifts (51). There is almost an Anna Parsons here; but finally, Coverdale remains possessed of his secure position as the novel's only avowed character-reading invalid. By the end of the novel, the psychometrist, shorn of her duplicity and her evil through Zenobia's suicide and Westervelt's disappearance, can become a mere Priscilla for Hollingsworth.

But Parsons—indeed, the mesmeric investigator Fuller—hover at the edges of this psychometric match-up, suggesting that a knowledge-plot, rather than a seduction-plot, may really be what haunts this novel. The problem with the clairvoyant is supposed to be the way she perverts women's best attributes—those of being the private "Sympathizer" in the home—and trots them out on stage (122). But Hollingsworth, whom I am quoting here, says so in the same breath as he calls public women "poor, miserable, abortive creatures" who may be "really neither man nor woman" (123). Even Coverdale is shocked at this turn to sexual shaming—which is certainly some part of what Durant directed toward his targets, and of which there is a suspicion even in Hawthorne's letter to Sophia Peabody about her "holy of holies." This shaming is a technique, I think, rather than the expressing of an opinion. It is a way of saying something so shocking that it would stop a movement that had little to do with an assault on sexual purity, and much to do with changing the hierarchies of knowledge. Mesmerism posed the threat not of an absence, but of a *rivalry* in the parlor: not women removed from the home, but women transformed within it.

Coverdale, returned to town from Brook Farm and disconnected from its residents, rediscovers the three masquers whom he has been observing in the novel: Westervelt, Zenobia, and Priscilla (156). They have taken a house as Priscilla resumes her performances as the Veiled Lady, and the rear window of their parlor, as it turns out, faces Coverdale's. Seldom has a novelist made heavier weather of a meta-theatrical trope: this rear window, as it would be extremely difficult to miss, is really a stage. Like "actors in a drama," Coverdale's characters make their appearances. Zenobia stands "like

a full-length picture... between the heavy festoons of the window-curtains;" when she catches Coverdale spying on them, she lets fall "a white linen curtain between the festoons of the damask ones" which closes "like a drop-curtain of a theatre, in the interval between the acts" (156-59). But perhaps, when a parlor is most insistently a theater, we ought to suspect that it may be only a parlor after all. "Realities," after all, "keep in the rear, and put forward an advance-guard of show and humbug" (149). Scenes of "intolerable bondage" and the parading of "blindfold prisoners" are this novel's equivalent of this false front—a front we need not intolerantly call humbug, but only one of the many curtains and festoons of fiction. The veil that is the Veiled Lady covers other anxieties beyond spectacle: not that women will be spirited out of the home, but that they will begin claiming the right to speak from objective knowledge in the home's own semi-public spaces.

In 1844, when Anna Parsons saw the departed Fourier floating before her as a spiritual presence, it was still some years before the moment when the Fox sisters would hear (and, as it turns out, surreptitiously make) the knocking sounds they interpreted as spirit-rapping. That 1848 event has long been interpreted as the beginning of Spiritualism. It is then when clairvoyants became mediums: rather than speaking for objects they held in their hands, they became instruments for spirit-"controls" who spoke through them. The Fox sisters' rappings made the first loud noise to travel all the way from the Summer-Land to Rochester, New York. But a more illuminating context, even origin point, for Spiritualism, and for Hawthorne's later engagement with it, would be Parsons' occupation of august subjects as a means of asserting her own knowledge-

claims. Spiritualism took from mesmerism the form of the trance; it also took the ruse of speaking for the eminent and absent as a way of speaking for oneself. Ann Braude and others have made clear that such performances led to an enfranchisement of women as public speakers: a large-scale version of Anna Parsons' project.^{cxvii} Parsons had made herself part commanding subject—part Emerson, or Fourier—and part passively registering instrument. This fictive combination made visible, and even brought into being, to the extent that showing oneself is always making oneself, the person that was Anna Parsons. She used mesmeric objectivity to conjure souls, including her own.

Notes

^{lxi} Hartshorn, "Appendix" in Deleuze, *Practical Instructions* 293.

^{lxii} Ibid.

^{lxiii} Durant, *Exposition* 163.

^{lxiv} Different versions of the story appeared in the publications cited above (Durant, however, was a skeptic), and in Stone, *Letter* 50-51 and Poyen, *Letter* 6. All of these publications—including Hartshorn's "Appendix" to the *Practical Instructions*—appeared in 1837.

^{lxv} Fuller, "Review" 172. Fuller, too, was treated for spinal problems by a New York practitioner; see Lott, "Preaching Mysticism" and Manson, "'Trance of the Ecstatica.'"

^{lxvi} Poyen describes his conversion to mesmerism in *Progress* 38-42. He came to the U. S. via family property in Guadeloupe and Martinique, where—by his own unfortunately brief account—he practiced mesmerism on slaves. Little to no historical research on mesmerism in the French Antilles exists for this period; see, however, François Régourd's work on mesmerism in Saint-Domingue in the eighteenth century ("Mesmerism" 311-32).

^{lxvii} Daston and Galison describe the rise of this new ethos in *Objectivity* (2007).

^{lxviii} See, for example, Gauld, *History* 179. Gauld's multi-national history of mesmerism and related practices naturally selects for the most active periods in the U. S.; Bruce Fuller's U.S.-centered history also treats Poyen's arrival as the effective beginning of mesmerism there (*Mesmerism* 17). The important exception is Ann Taves's *Fits*,

Trances, and Visions (1999); Taves's treatment of religious enthusiasm in relation to animal magnetism informs my summary of the early nineteenth century here.

^{lxi} Gauld, *History* 111-24; 141-62.

^{lxx} "Anecdotes of Dr. Franklin" [2]; see also "From the Analectic Magazine" [2]

^{lxxi} "From the Amherst Cabinet" [1]; see also "Candidus," "Credulity" [2]; and "Extract of a Letter to the Editor" [2].

^{lxxii} "Animal Magnetism: For the New-England Journal of Medicine, &c." 40. Brown's friend Samuel L. Mitchill, editor of the *Medical Repository*, was a notable exception; he wrote on two cases of natural somnambulism in the U. S. between 1810 and 1820 and probably followed developments in French and German magnetism with interest (Mitchill, "A Double Consciousness," 185-186; Mitchill, *Devotional Somnium*; Waterman, *Republic of Intellect* 21-22, 194).

^{lxxiii} On the French practice, see below. Notices of the German practice were more limited, but include "Observations on Animal Magnetism" 34-39, and "Animal Magnetism," *American Quarterly Review* 443.

^{lxxiv} "From *Silliman's*" [2]. A detailed review of the documents of the trials also appeared in 1823 ("For the *Port-Folio*" 163-64). On the trials, see Gauld, *History* 128-29.

^{lxxv} "Animal Magnetism," *American Quarterly Review* 427, 447; Waterhouse, "John Adams" 123-24; "Boston, Nov. 29" [2].

^{lxxvi} Elizabeth Peabody to Mary Peabody, 18 June 1836. Quoted in Stoehr, *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists* 38.

^{lxxvii} "Animal Magnetism," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 418-19. Poyen was soon to lose the *Journal's* good opinion; later that year, they panned a publication of his ("Magnetical Experiments" 322).

^{lxxviii} Gauld, *History* 181. In 1836, Poyen published four articles in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* and one in the *Boston Pearl*, a popular magazine.

^{lxxix} Poyen, "Institute of France." The origin of this tradition lies in the practices of the Marquis de Puységur; see Gauld, *History* 39-52.

^{lxxx} "M. Poyen's Lectures on Animal Magnetism" 9. This article in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* is an extract from a lecture of Poyen's in Boston in 1836.

^{lxxx} "M. Poyen's Lectures" 9, 12.

^{lxxxii} Dr. Joseph Fiske (1811-1882), of Salem, treated Sophia Peabody "almost daily" in the late 1830s (Moore, *Salem World* 246); see also Stoehr, *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists* 32-63.

^{lxxxiii} Daston and Galison, *Objectivity* 30-32. On Coleridge and the Transcendentalists, see below note lxxxvi.

^{lxxxiv} Galison, "Objectivity Is Romantic" [n.p.].

^{lxxxv} *Ibid.*

^{lxxxvi} My account of Transcendentalism as the confrontation of the Unitarians' Lockean empiricism and German idealist philosophy in this paragraph draws upon Packer, "Transcendentalists" 331-61; and Gura, *American Transcendentalism* 23-45.

^{lxxxvii} James Freeman Clarke, quoted in Gura, *American Transcendentalism* [vii].

^{lxxxviii} Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody, Brook Farm, 18 Oct. [1841]. Hawthorne, *Love Letters II*: 62-66.

^{lxxxix} Elizabeth Peabody to Mary Peabody, 18 June 1836. Quoted in Stoehr, *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists* 38.

^{xc} See Marianne Dwight to Anna Q. T. Parsons (hereafter abbreviated MD and AQTP), 27 April 1844; MD to Franklin Dwight, 6 Aug. 1845; MD to AQTP, 11 Aug. 1845; and Orvis, "Note on Anna Q. T. Parsons," in Orvis, *Letters* xiv, 13, 108-10. See also Stern, *Life of Margaret Fuller* 220-22.

^{xc1} See also Castronovo, "'That Half-Living Corpse,'" 231-58, for a more recent articulation of this reading of mesmerism and *Blithedale*.

^{xcii} Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody (hereafter abbreviated NH and SP), Brook Farm, 18 Oct. [1841]. Hawthorne, *Love Letters II*: 62-66.

^{xciii} Emerson, *Journals* 5:388.

^{xciv} Emerson, "Historic Notes " 337.

^{xcv} Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters* 48-68; Castronovo, "'That Half-Living Corpse'" 231-58.

^{xcvi} In particular, Parsons has her place in history as the addressee of most of Marianne Dwight Orvis's letters from Brook Farm, which are a major historical source on life in the community (Orvis, *Letters*).

^{xcvii} See, in addition to Poyen's *Progress* (1837): Stone, *Letter* (1837); Deleuze, trans. Hartshorn, *Practical Instructions* (1837), which is a translation of a French work which includes records of recent American experiments; Poyen, *Letter* (1837); and even Durant, *Exposition* (1837), which, though the work of an opponent of mesmerism, includes records of many parlor experiments in Providence.

^{xcviii} Quoted from Margaret Fuller to Ralph Waldo Emerson (hereafter abbreviated MF and RWE), 2 Feb. 1844; see also SMF to RWE 28 Jan. 1844 and SMF to RWE [14? Feb.?] 1844, in Fuller, *Letters* 3: 175-82.

^{xcix} MF to RWE, 28 Jan. 1844, in Fuller, *Letters* 3: 175-80.

^c *Ibid.*

^{ci} Winter, *Mesmerized* 60-78; Braude, *Radical Spirits* 142-61.

^{cii} On Martineau, who was for a time mesmerized by her servant, see Martineau, *Letters*. On Fuller and mesmerism, see Manson, "'The Trance of the Ecstatica'" 298-324; and Lott, "Preaching Mysticism" 57-112.

^{ciii} Orvis, *Letters* xiii-xv; MD to AQTP, [Summer 1845], in Orvis, *Letters* 103-104; and Sarah Freeman Clarke, reported in MF to RWE [14? Feb.?] 1844, Fuller, *Letters* 3: 181-82.

^{civ} MD to AQTP, [Summer 1845], in Orvis, *Letters* 103-104.

^{cv} Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, 2: 2-3.

^{cvi} MD to AQTP, 4 June 1844, in Orvis, *Letters* 19-21.

^{cvii} MF to Charles King Newcomb, 9 June [1844]; and MF to CKN, 8 July [1844], in Fuller *Letters* 3: 201, 206-207.

^{cviii} "Two Readings of Fourier's Character by Anna Parsons," in Orvis, *Letters* 185.

^{cix} MD to Franklin Dwight, 6 Aug. 1845, and MD to AQTP, 11 Aug. 1845, in Orvis, *Letters* 108-10.

^{cx} MF to RWE, 28 Jan. 1844, Fuller *Letters* 3: 177.

^{cx} See note ciii above.

^{cxii} Samuel Coale, in *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*, also sees a relationship in Hawthorne's novels between fiction-making and mesmerism; Hawthorne's fiction, he writes, "participates in the very acts of mesmerism it...thematically or morally opposes" (161). While I would not argue for the formal dependence of fiction on mesmerism, as Coale does, I share his sense that for Hawthorne the two were parallel, and competing, activities.

^{cxiii} Stone, *Letter* 21.

^{cxiv} MD to Franklin Dwight, 6 Aug. 1845; and MD to AQTP, 11 Aug. 1845, in Orvis, *Letters* 108-10.

^{cxv} MD to AQTP, [1844], in Orvis, *Letters* 6-7.

^{cxvi} MD to AQTP, 4 June 1833, in Orvis, *Letters* 19-21.

^{cxvii} Braude, *Radical Spirits*; Alex Owen makes a similar argument about the British spiritualist movement in *The Darkened Room*.

Chapter Four

Labor's Clairvoyance: *Moby-Dick* and the Mesmeric Stage

Introduction: Who ain't a hysteric?

By the late 1840s, U. S. mesmerists had developed a procedure for making an educated man into an errant and imaginative enthusiast: by that time one saw men, as well as veiled ladies, going under the influence. But here, rather than transforming itself into insight, the trance tended to produce a spiral of ever more spectacular error. By putting a volunteer in a trance, one mesmerist said, you could make him believe "that the moon or a star falls on a person in the audience, and sets him on fire, and you can make him hasten to extinguish it." You could "show him a boy or girl," and make him "see in them the lost father or mother standing before him," and "give...the warm embrace." Or you could make him hallucinate a river with "a steamboat crowded with human beings" and then make him see "the boiler burst, and the boat blow up, with his...wife or child on board;" you could cause him to see their dead bodies before him, "and to freely shed...the tears of affection and bereavement."^{cxviii} Instead of making knowing subjects out of deluded ones, this strain of mesmeric performance focused exclusively on error. These practitioners, who have subsequently been called "electrobiologists" after the name some of them used, struck error into the hearts of good liberal knowledge-producers. No longer just the nervous and seducible women of the Franklin report, or frail clairvoyants like Anna Parsons, the errant figures in these performances are able-bodied and often well-educated men.

Practically from the moment the Franklin commission report defined the animal-magnetic trance as the ultimate state of imaginative error, one mesmeric practice after another set out to revalue delusion itself as a form of knowledge. We have encountered these gestures in the previous chapters. And yet adjusting the rules of engagement in the knowledge-making public—changing what kinds of subjects count as knowers—is a two-way process. Revaluing the errors that marginal subjects commit is one thing; making the mechanical imagination seem consistent with ordinary subjecthood and ordinary experience is an equally significant change. The foregoing chapters have been, for the most part, about the former of these two: about bringing errant subjects in from beyond the pale. But fully viable mechanical subjecthood also requires that there be no other option besides recognizing human dependence, involuntarism, and unconsciousness—that everyone identify with, and be obliged to make the compromises of, an enthusiast or hysteric. Electrobiological performances that pulled the rug out from under the liberal knower were a step toward this work of reimagining. They tended, ultimately, toward a redefinition of all subjects as mesmeric subjects. Everyone had the susceptible, impressionable, and enthusiastic body that led, in the worst case, to error and dependence; and both the knowing and the consenting subject would have to be reimagined in such a way as to accommodate this fact.

Melville's *Moby-Dick*, I want to argue, takes up the work of making a new subject of knowledge, proposing its own companion figures to the psychometrist. It is not only that the novel imagines its characters in complex mesmeric bonds that make specific reference to electrobiological practice, though this is true. Rather, the novel's whole

framework for understanding perceptual knowledge engages with this new set of mesmeric performances, which offered not just a theory of what the trance was but a theory of how perception worked, and of how it went wrong. *Moby-Dick* approaches the problem of perception doubly, as is always Melville's way: at once gamesomely and metaphysically. First, in the Ishmaelian voice, Melville takes advantage of the notion that sensing is a perilous business, and one that is easily derailed. Beginning from this postulate, *Moby-Dick* transvalues the epistemological labor of its sailors, mariner-collectors whose work in the fields of sense the metropolitan makers of knowledge despise and underrate. Sailing under a jaunty banner declaring that the whale is "*a spouting fish with a horizontal tail*," Ishmael insists that it is with the mariner-collector, he who does the hard work of sense, that the real prestige of knowing ought to rest.

And yet this dispute about the hierarchy of natural-historical knowledge-production is a way-station. The novel rolls onward to the absolute problem of perception: if everyone is the credulous dupe of the gods—furnished with senses that can no more be trusted than those of a religious enthusiast or a mesmeric patient—then what definition of the knowing subject might be hazarded? What definition might be tolerable? Beyond Ishmael's loyalty to the laborer and Ahab's delusion, *Moby-Dick* pursues a new relation between the subject and the object of knowledge. This relation transcends both Ahab's agony and Ishmael's pique, yet still redresses both. Alongside the figure of the antebellum clairvoyant, we will ultimately place Melville's sailors, as knowers who vault beyond the problems of the subject-object division.

I. Scoresby's Promotion

Whether mesmeric clairvoyants testified to the fluctuations of electricity, imagination, disease, or moral character, they were generally bringing news of something hidden from the ordinary senses: a subtle fluid, or the pulsations of temperament left in an autograph manuscript. The difficulty of sense in these domains made their success as observers prestigious, and it made themselves valued subjects. But outside the charmed circle of this extreme skepticism, sensation might barely count as a skill at all. Especially when the object was obvious—as big, for example, as a whale—mere accurate perception could seem to be a lowly labor, a mere preliminary to reason. So it certainly seemed to the British anatomist John Hunter, one of Ishmael's whipping-boys in "Cetology." "[G]ain being the primary view" of those who pursue whales as "articles of traffic," Hunter had once complained before the Royal Society of London, the "researches of the Naturalist are only considered as secondary points, if considered at all" (1). The anatomist saw lamp-oil manufacture and natural history as locked in a zero-sum game in which the investigator could barely pry a whale-cub specimen out of the harpooner's unctuous clutches. Whalemen were merely recalcitrant servants, remiss deliverers of goods.

But this was a misleading complaint. Hunter needed hunters, as his auditors at the Royal Society knew perfectly well. From its seventeenth-century beginnings the Society had urged mercantile travelers, however humble, to collect data and specimens from the

empire's far corners and to return their spoils to the metropole for analysis. The first volume of its *Transactions* had even offered this body of men a few sets of highly detailed instructions for data-gathering, thereby constituting them as a global armada of laborers prepared to take meteorological readings, preserve specimens, describe native peoples, and make maps ("Directions"). These instructions did not so much let the mariner-collector into the community of knowledge-producers as keep him out, making observation an invisible preliminary to the real epistemological work of reason. In other words, while the measurement of electricity or of a soul might require an observer gifted to the point of clairvoyance, whale-watching merely required a docile one.

Captain William Scoresby was one such compliant observer. In Ishmael's pecking-order of cetologists in *Moby-Dick* (1851), Scoresby could have been better, and he could have been worse. Unlike the armchair natural-philosophers of the Royal Society, Ishmael admitted, he was at least a "real professional harpooneer and whaleman"—but one unfortunately hampered by his inferior object, the Greenland whale.^{cxix} In the 1820s Scoresby had been one of the better-known members of the class the anatomist Hunter loved to hate: the mariner-collectors. A century and a half after the publication of the Royal Society's directives for travelers bound on far voyages, Scoresby might have been following the same instructions. He collected specimens and meteorological readings while on his northern voyages and brought them back to the professorates of Glasgow and Edinburgh for analysis. In his northern journeys, Scoresby amassed data on a stultifying array of scientific questions whenever he was not busy hunting. He recorded the color, specific gravity, and "saltness" of the Greenland Sea; he compiled

meteorological tables showing the "appearance, colour, transparency, density, degree of Dryness, and state as to Electricity, of the atmosphere;" he studied snowflake morphology with his polar-chilled microscope; and he collected and described birds, whale cubs, and marine "Animalecules, &c."^{xxx} In all this Scoresby was an *homme couvert*, as were mariner-collectors in general: his intellectual property was of uncertain value without the imprimatur of his metropolitan correspondents. In his whaling years, the 1820s and 1830s, Scoresby seldom published a section on a scientific topic without explanatory notes and a certificate of approval from some Edinburgh professor (*Journal* 399, 410, 467). It was his to report, and not to wonder why. In the division of natural-historical labor as Scoresby knew it, the lowly work of observation belonged to the unskilled and the far-flung, while propertied and centralized reason gathered both the raw data and the prestige to itself.

Moby-Dick's first salvo in the revaluation of the whaleman's knowledge is roundly to reject this system to which the earnest Scoresby acquiesced. Ishmael refuses to have the whale expropriated from sea to metropole. His definition of the whale—"a spouting fish with a horizontal tail"—receives its unanswerable mandate from Nantucket lore. "By the above definition," the reader is assured, "I do by no means exclude from the leviathanic brotherhood any sea creature hitherto identified with the whale by the best informed Nantucketers" (137). A natural-historical definition stands only so long as it meets this test, and no longer. Nantucket whalemen are the ultimate in cetological expertise as far as Ishmael is concerned, followed not particularly closely by hunters of inferior species. Scoresby, though a whaleman, is limited by his inferior prey like an

artist by substandard materials. Poor Linnæus, with his misguided notion that the whale is an aquatic mammal and not a fish, can barely cling to the lintel of this pantheon. Told Linnæus's theories, Charley Coffin, of Nantucket, "profanely hinted they were humbug" (137). Linnæus, the Cuviers, Lacépède, and our old acquaintance, the Royal Society anatomist John Hunter, all fall before the Coffins' marling spikes.

Ishmael scoffs at a series of quotes from the likes of these, in which he seems to catch the naturalists in admissions of their inadequacy, of their "[u]nfitness to pursue our research in the unfathomable waters" and of an "[i]mpenetrable veil covering our knowledge of the cetacea" (134). The only book that could describe the whale would be the one that contained the entire sea: Ishmael's "Bibliographical System" of cetological taxonomy does not so much take whales to books, as books to whales. The sperm whale and right whale are "Folio Whales," accommodated by the publication format that suits their proportions (137-38). Only in his element, the chapter punningly declares, is the whale legible. Even a whale skeleton on a South Sea island—let alone in a European museum—is insufficient; "timid untravelled man" ought not to expect to learn anything about the whale "by merely poring over his dead attenuated skeleton" (453). The text of *Leviathan* is difficult, and part of the non-circulating collection of only one library: the sea. This rebellion against the hierarchies of natural history is not a rejection of scientific knowledge *per se*.^{cxxi} Instead, the point is to valorize one part of scientific labor: the work of sense, which, in the case of cetology, undervalued mariner-collectors perform—and which occurs at sea.

Scoresby himself rebelled in a different way: he decided to get out of the game. Perhaps his middling position in the cetological ranks had begun to chafe; perhaps, after taking all these pains to buoy others' flights of reason, Scoresby began to feel—as his contemporary Melville did when turning from his early travel narratives to the writing of *Moby-Dick*—"a longing to plume [his] pinions for a flight" of his own.^{cxvii} What avowed fiction did for Melville—giving him license to interpret, try out, appropriate, plagiarize and opine—experimental magnetism was to do for Scoresby. By the time the Arctic explorer appeared in Melville's novel as a not entirely useless observer, the real Scoresby had put in for a promotion in the system of scientific knowledge-producers. He had begun experimenting with iron magnets, and with the magnet of his own soul. He had become, in other words, a mesmerist. Scoresby hypothesized that a single unknown fluid—a "hitherto undefined agency...the servant of the Great Creator"—might explain animal and mineral magnetism (*Magnetical Investigations; Zoistic Magnetism* 118).^{cxviii} Now, instead of observing the obvious, he would keep careful records of the tantalizingly invisible. If he had craved prestige, he would find it here.

II. Apples and Oranges

Scoresby did not so much turn the colonial system of knowledge-production on its head as change his own position in it, moving from his original billet the top of the ranks of the mariner-collectors to a new berth among middle ranks of the natural philosophers. But while Scoresby saw in mesmerism a means of his own advancement, other

practitioners saw the means of reorganizing the labor hierarchy of knowledge-production. Scoresby's foray into mesmerism in Liverpool coincided with the arrival in Scotland of a particularly popular and influential American branch of that science, whose practitioners may even have influenced him. If so, this was another thing—along with an impatience with the natural-historical hierarchies—which he shared with Melville. "Electrobiology," a popular form of stage mesmerism which emerged in the late 1840s in the U.S., made all sensory tasks seem as perilous as the electricity and divinity with which somnambulists had long contended. The electrobiologists in a sense took one aspect of the Poyennian trance—the way a clairvoyant sometimes misidentified a perfectly obvious object because her finely tuned senses picked up the wrong vibrations—and magnified this error into an entire spectacle. Rather than being an outlying condition, the erring sensorium that could be traced all the way back to the Franklin report was pervasive, even universal. If so, then sensation could be a prestigious task—one to be valued, not one to be treated as a preliminary to the synthetic work of reason. It was to electrobiology, I will be arguing, that Melville ultimately turned for his model of difficult and valorous perception in *Moby-Dick*.

Electrobiology's signature spectacle was that of a volunteer, typically a man, making rudimentary sensory errors. In one lecture in Scotland, the African-American mesmerist H. E. Lewis performed a typical experiment on observer delusion. Lewis's admiring chronicler, the mesmerist William Gregory, exoticized Lewis, attributing his powers in part to his race; but he also insisted on Lewis's "pure and disinterested love of science" (96).^{cxxiv} Having placed an audience-member in a trance by gazing into his eyes,

Gregory recounts, Lewis presented the man with an apple, but then told him that it was an orange, just as a Poyennian mesmerist might have told a clairvoyant that a glass of water was really rum. Gregory describes the trance-subject's reaction to Lewis's assertion that the apple was an orange:

At first he denied this, but by degrees he began to feel doubtful. At last he said, 'It is certainly very yellow,' (it was dark brown). He then took a sly glance round the company, each of whom had an apple, but found them all yellow too. He next cut out a piece with his finger, looked at the inside, smelt and tasted it, and concluded with, 'Well, it *is* an orange, but yet I know I took an apple into my hand' (Gregory 349).

No amount of rational testing would suffice to enlighten this travesty of a scientific observer. The man misperceives the apple's color; he then tries the perfectly reasonable method of comparing it to other apples, but finds that they, too, have all turned orange. Next he dissects the apple, in case anatomy might furnish some clue. He tries out his other senses: he smells it, tastes it, and finally cannot escape the conclusion that "it *is* an orange," even though he remembers taking an apple into his hand. There is nothing wrong with this man's reasoning process; the problem is that the mesmerist controls, and distorts, his sensations. Without accurate sensation, practitioners like Lewis implied, reason could accomplish nothing; and accuracy was not so easy to achieve.

Electrobiology's tendency was to make levels of delusion formerly appropriate only to occult or mysterious substances—God, electricity, the souls of others—the ordinary state of the sensing subject. Credulity, it suggested, was widespread. For mesmerists like Lewis, everyone was in danger of enthusiasm, even when it came to observing the most prosaic objects. These practitioners were extraordinarily pessimistic

about the human sensorium and the ease with which it could be misled—but this was another way of saying that they considered accurate sensation to be a positive feat in itself. In their pessimism about the senses, these practitioners also responded in a more general way to the ethos of "mechanical objectivity" that Poyen's clairvoyants took up in such detail by becoming "instruments." These practitioners, too, thought one had to be on constant guard against the deceitful senses and the subjective distortions that could appear to be facts. And they shared with the practitioners surrounding Poyen many techniques for entrancement—"magnetic" passes, gazing into the patient's eyes—and a belief that the trance was a matter of one person directing an invisible fluid into the body of another.

But they tended to de-emphasize the process of entrancement and to eliminate clairvoyance altogether, the better to highlight the trance subject's perceptual errors. Of this perennial feature of the trance state, they had a unique interpretation. For them, the trance was a way to reproduce the ordinary mediations and distortions of sense in laboratory (or stage) conditions. They claimed that the physiological effects of trance were identical to those of swindling, demagoguery, and fraud. They extended to all observers the malady of enthusiasm: anyone might suffer from the heightened and delusive condition of the seduction-victim's sensorium. This meant that the problems of accurate sensation were no longer confined to enthusiastic subjects and spectacular objects. They were a general dilemma.

Watching error turned out to be an extraordinarily popular pursuit. Despite their predecessor Poyen's impressive reach, the electrobiologists had "perhaps a wider impact

than any others had done before them" in their mid-century lecturing to American and, later, to British audiences.^{cxxv} Their influence may have come in part because of their more extensive use of the stage-lecture and their more limited use of the parlor experiment. Though not a "school" in any collaborative sense—on the contrary, mesmerists like Dods, Lewis, J. Stanley Grimes, and H. G. Darling were rivals—the group shared not only a theoretical rationale for mesmeric phenomena based on physiology, but a set of performance practices of which detailed records exist.^{cxxvi} Lewis demonstrated mesmerism in upstate New York and in Britain, covering "the sciences and...many topics of moral reform" in his lectures.^{cxxvii} Meanwhile, Dods lectured on six consecutive nights to audiences of two thousand in Boston.^{cxxviii} What these large and far-flung audiences saw were cautionary tales about the dangers of taking sense for granted. Having entranced the subject, the electro-biologist would try a first command, which was almost always, "you cannot open your eyes."^{cxxix} Deprived of sight—incapable of sensing—the educated and healthy men these mesmerists often stressed they were taking as their subjects lost everything. Dods boasted that "you can make him [ie., the entranced person] see that a cane is a living snake or eel; that a... handkerchief is a bird, child, or rabbit; or that the moon or a star falls on a person in the audience, and sets him on fire" (*Philosophy* 214). Randomly chosen from the audience, such a deluded subject could function as an everyman, a median case of the human sensorium.

It might seem as though, however ordinary a subject might be when he mounted the stage, he was ordinary no longer once he went under the magnetic ether. But that was not how electrobiologists interpreted their own practice. They considered the trance to be

only a special form of the ordinary distortions and mediations afflicting the human sensorium. Their version of mesmerism acted as a kind of test probe for investigating credulity under artificial conditions. Ordinary perception, according to them, operated by means of a fluid that traveled between the eye, or other sensory organ, and the object perceived. This was a version of the old familiar nervous fluid—and it was also what passed between the subject and the mesmerist in the trance. This fluid, which the mesmerist Grimes called "etherium," "communicate[d] light, heat, electricity, [and] gravitation," as well as "mental emotion," or commands of the will, "from one body to another, and from one mind to another" (18). Just as the mind could receive a visual impression via "the agency of electricity" along the optic nerve, it could also receive impressions conveyed to it by the pulsations of the ether by a deceiving mesmerist (Dods, *Six Lectures* 51). And perception and trance alike required credulity—or, as Grimes called it, "credenciveness" (34). This phrenological organ received the ethereal pulses that accompanied all forms of knowledge and persuasion, from conviction based on ocular proof to belief in outright fraud. Thus the mesmerist was like a personification of the problem of mediated perception and even of mediated knowledge, a worst-case scenario of what could happen on the way from the object to the eye, or from the speaker to the credulous ear. Credulity—or, to use Grimes's term, credenciveness—could mislead anyone.

The pessimistic theories of nineteenth-century optics furnished a model of faulty perception to the electrobiologists. So many newly-understood physiological processes intervened between the object in the world and the image of the object produced in the

eye that grasping the object-in-itself was not at all certain, and a state of trance-like misperception might well be the norm. Physiologists found example after example of non-correspondence between perception and object. In one paradigmatic experiment, the reader following along at home is asked to "take a stick of red sealing-wax and place it between the eye and a sheet of white paper; after keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the wax for a short time...you will be able to see beside it the *ghost* of a blue wafer." As the author warns, if we put our faith in the senses in cases like these, "we should be led to believe in all sorts of spectres."^{cxv} This "ghost" of a blue wafer is the pure artifact of physiological processes; no corresponding object exists in the world. Mesmerists imbibed physiologists' suspicions that the normal, healthy eye threw major obstacles in the way of accurate perception; in fact, they themselves became important popularizers of optics in the U.S.^{cxvi} Thus mesmerism was at once a means by which the highly mediated and distorting processes of perception became known to a broad public, and a key site for analysis of what such a model of perception meant about the position of the human subject in the object world. To electrobiologists, the meaning was clear: the lowly work of sense had now to be exalted, praised, and labored over.

In making the physiology of perception a centerpiece in their models of the trance, electrobiologists bordered on the shift in the ethics of observation that had served the New England clairvoyants. They, too, were preoccupied with the idea that accurate perception depended on a relentless self-policing "to repress the willful intervention of the artist-author" and to keep artifacts of subjectivity out of perception.^{cxvii} But their way of engaging with this shift was different. Practitioners of psychometry like Anna Parsons

had offered their own emptiness while entranced, their pure receptivity to the emanations of objects, as a version of the will-less subject to which the natural sciences aspired. The electrobiologists, on the other hand, worked rather to popularize and generalize the state of dreading one's own credulous sensorium—a thing which would make the objectivist gifts of an Anna Parsons more generally coveted. The credulity of mesmeric patients and seduction victims had always had this other, more troubling side: the dark insinuation that everyone, not just hysterical women, was vulnerable to error. The Franklin commission members had anxiously tried the mesmeric fluid on themselves, fearing that their own imaginations might become over-active; electrical experimenters had combated secular enthusiasm in their experiments. But electrobiology extended these effects to stable subjects looking at perfectly prosaic objects: the entranced dupe might mistake "a watch for a snuff-box, a chair for a dog, &c. &c" (Gregory 193). Grimes wrote, "If he [the trance subject] is well inducted, you may tell him that he cannot step, or speak, or see, or hear, or taste, and he cannot do it. Tell him that water is rum, or ink, or hot, or cold," and he will believe you (245-246). Parsons had carved out a place for herself using the new skepticism toward the senses—a place which someone more used to being automatically granted the privileges of rationality might have scorned to take. Electrobiologists now seemed to suggest that *no one* ought to be presumed a good observer; that everyone would have to scramble at the edges of the community of knowledge-producers as Parsons had done. If so, then the center of gravity of that community had shifted dramatically toward the mechanical and credulous subject.

Electrobiologists did not only suggest that error was more prevalent than the audience-member might think; they threatened him with error's dire consequences. The widening cataract of falsehoods that spilled out from the electrobiologist's fatal command "you cannot open your eyes" resembled the pyramid of mistaken beliefs that one could construct on the basis of an incorrect perception. It also resembled romance. Dods, recall, knew how to show a trance subject a vision of a burning steamboat, and then "make him see the boiler burst, and the boat blow up" and weep over the "lifeless corpse" of some beloved passenger (*Philosophy* 214-315). Grimes saw the criminal potential in such fictive power. At Saratoga Spa—and here it is significant that places for taking the water-cure were notorious haunts for swindlers—he "made a young man of excellent character take worthless waste paper for bank notes, and give me a written obligation for a large sum of money" (233). Grimes did not press his advantage, but he stressed that a dishonest man might not be so forbearing; the subject "could be made to sign any thing—a deed, or marriage contract...or anything else" (234). It was not incidental that the trance could end in making a white man think he was "a negro, a female, a dog" (245). Even a trance that did not end in such an explicit reduction in status reversed the hierarchy of perception. Grimes's "young man of excellent character" found himself a Clarissa to Grimes's Lovelace: a credulous subject, in short.

Grimes's experiment at the Saratoga Spa mimicked fraud, but it was not fraud: it was fiction. His sham contract with the young man possessed the crucial additional quality of being directed toward auditors or readers who knew it was a sham. His performance had the tripartite structure of seduction fiction: he played the seducer, the

young man the victim, and the audience the readers who were at once implicated in the man's mistake—they, too, would be likely to fall for Grimes's schemes if he had entranced them—and free of it, capable of seeing it clearly or even learning from it in a way the entranced subject could not. But Grimes did not so much practice a pedagogy of self-improvement as a pedagogy of self-recognition. It was not that one ought to cultivate the power of resisting falsehood, but that one ought to adjust one's world view in order to recognize the permanent depravity of the senses: one could never infallibly resist falsehood, and nothing but an unrelenting self-suspicion could prevent disaster. In this trance that represented the ordinary frailties of sense, Grimes said, "the subject, and all his property, and other legal rights, [were] at the mercy of the operator" (234). The trance was leveling in its very form. It added "young men of excellent character" to the list of credulous readers and seducible subjects; and it included pedestrian objects and ordinary contracts among the experiences that could provoke enthusiasm. That seemed to make the ordinary work of sense prestigious. And yet electrobiology also teetered on the brink of hopelessness or paranoia. Could anyone see rightly? Was everyone enthralled to mesmeric swindlers?

III. Ahab's Problem

Moby-Dick would take from electrobiology and popular optics the idea that ordinary perception was fraught with troubling mediations, and that accomplishing it took skill. But if the novel, in its gamesome moments, allows the fact of being a Nantucketer

to solve the problem of perceiving the whale, just as often the bottom drops out of the joke and it seems that *no* accurate perception is possible. One must go a-whaling; and yet even that may not be enough. Electrobiolgy's reversal of the hierarchy of reason and observation did more than make perception hard, and therefore valorous. It made it impossible. Melville's novel, I want to argue, makes a parallel movement. Starting with playful declarations about infallible Nantucket eyes, it ultimately struggles with the same problem popular lecturers in mesmerism and optics addressed in the 1840s. For *Moby-Dick*, too, it is impossible to perceive an object directly without also seeing the intervening curtains of one's own distorting subjecthood—and here, subjecthood is defined radically as including even visual artifacts made by the unconscious physiological processes of the eye. The novel is not so much critiquing an Emersonian *choice* to impose one's own subjectivity on visible objects as responding, just as Emerson and his circle did, to the disturbing idea that one cannot *help* imposing one's subjectivity on the visible.^{cxxxiii} Ahab, rather than being a pathological outlier, becomes a typical or representative subject in a novel where all human beings become the victims of what electrobiology saw as the general curse: a sensorium that could not escape its own subjective taint. If sensation was always subject to mediations—by desire, by the structure of the eye, by the intervening mesmerist—what kind of knowledge could stand?

In order to answer this question, the novel must do more than insist upon the whaleman as the most expert and the best-located subject of knowledge, the only one who has the skills and the territory to read the whale as he is. It has to revise subject-object relations. This work happens around Ahab. In past chapters we have investigated

the oxymoron as the means of forging of a kind of subjectivity all but unthinkable except through logical fallacy and contradiction. The self-aware mechanical body of Foster's *Coquette*, the liberal somnambulist of Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, the self-fashioning machine that was the psychometer Anna Parsons: each of these crosses made visible the possibility of a new kind of knower: one who was mechanical, unconscious, or instrumental, yet nonetheless sovereign, observant, even clairvoyant. Ahab is our final oxymoron.

But in Ahab, the contradiction functions differently. In his character, the novel performs the *undoing* of the mesmerist, not the making of a new subject. But undoing the mesmerist also takes apart the mesmerist-somnambulist dyad—and paves the way for seeing dependence and error not as the qualities of subordinates and slaves, but as features of the general predicament. At first, the novel posits a tyrannical relation between Ahab and the crew. Then it begins, at the same time, to unravel Ahab's power: if he is a tyrant, he is also self-tyrannized; if a mesmerist, he is also a somnambulist. Positing tyranny and then dismantling it is different from never positing it at all. The point of this labor is to use the tyrannical or mesmeric dyad in order to extract from it an image of the dependent and deluded subject—but then, by contradiction and retraction, to make the mesmerist fall away, leaving only a whaleman whose eerie knowledge is no longer contaminated by thrall. The *Pequod's* crew will represent a form of immersed and mechanical knowing, in which subjective vision does not distort objects, but rather constitutes them in their fullness. Thus the undoing of the mesmerist will clear ground for another subject: the clairvoyant laborer. But first, enter Ahab. The steps of this

making and unmaking of the tyrant are the following: Ahab is a mesmerist; Ahab is a somnambulist; and Ahab is average.

The first link in the chain of imagining this mechanical self is the positing of Ahab's control, described in electrobiological terms, over his crew: Ahab is a mesmerist. The scenes of the novel where Ahab most exerts his demagogic powers, especially "The Quarter-Deck," where he first seals his pact with the crew, show him as a mesmerist manipulating the nervous fluids of his subjects. By the end of Ahab's quarter-deck speech, "something"—perhaps the "nervo-vital fluid" whose existence Dods hypothesized—passes from his nostrils into Starbuck's lungs, and "constrainings seize" the mate: "Starbuck now is mine;" Ahab exults, and "cannot oppose me now, without rebellion" (164). Thereafter, "Starbuck's body and Starbuck's coerced will were Ahab's, so long as Ahab kept his magnet at Starbuck's brain" (164, 212). As in the mesmeric rapport, Ahab's control over the crew involves the maintenance of an unstable permeability between his body and theirs. After the quarter-deck scene, Ahab is mechanically and bodily attached to the crew. His "one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve;" they are his "arms and legs," so that he can move them as his soul could move his own body (167, 568). As mesmerists theorized, there is no difference between the commands of his own nerves, and the commands he sends to these extensions of himself.

Ahab even avails himself of one of the electrobiologists' stranger techniques of entrancement: making the subject stare at a doubloon.^{cxxxiv} Dods had his volunteers keep their eyes fixed on a small metal disc he called an "electro-magnetic coin" as a means of

putting them into a trance (*Philosophy* 217). Dods thought the coin was, in effect, a battery made out of money. He instructed novice practitioners to use "a five-cent piece" to construct a two-sided galvanic battery out of zinc and copper wired together; by staring at the coin, subjects allowed its electrical current to penetrate their retinas. Like Dods, who entranced his subjects using galvanic batteries and Leyden jars, Ahab also mesmerizes using electricity: in "The Quarter-Deck," where he announces the *Pequod's* quarry and nails the doubloon to the mainmast, he aims to shock the assembled crew into compliance with the "fiery emotion accumulated within the Leyden jar of his own magnetic life" (165). If the coin delivered Dods' subjects into fictions that deluded and bewildered them, the doubloon Ahab nails to the mast accomplishes much the same thing for those who stare at it. One way to interpret *Moby-Dick*, then, is as the bending of the crew to Ahab's monomaniac design; in that case, the mesmerist becomes one more figure to add to the pantheon of tyrants and defrauders to whom a democratic society is vulnerable.^{cxv}

But this would be to ignore the crucial fact that Ahab, if he is a mesmerist, is also a somnambulist—and not just metaphorically speaking. If the doubloon "inducts" the crew, to use a term of art from Grimes, Ahab is the first to go under the ether. While he paces the deck at the beginning of "The Doubloon," Ahab's "riveted glance fasten[s] upon the riveted gold coin there" as though he were following Dods' instructions that "[t]he eyes should be placed upon the coin as though they were riveted" to it (*Moby-Dick* 430; *Philosophy* 216). Melville uses the language of mesmeric thrall as often to display Ahab's bondage as to describe his binding of others. Fedallah magnetizes him; he sleep-walks;

and even monomania, as Grimes understood the disease, is a case of the entrancement of one part of the mind by another. Electrobiography imagined a pervasively errant sensorium, where every subject suffered from the delusions the Franklin commission had once confined to Mesmer's nervous patients. *Moby-Dick*, in its reworking of the galvanic coin, proposed the ultimate evidence of universal delusion: the entrancement of a mesmerist.

Monomania was, according to Grimes and others, a self-induced mesmeric state. Grimes explained that monomania occurred when one part of the mind, or a phrenological organ, became "excited to such a degree as to overcome the...boundaries" that normally kept separate parts of the mind "insulated" from each other. "Just as one man may induct [mesmerize] another," Grimes wrote, "so may one organ induct another organ in the same man" (32-33). As Gregory wrote, "many insane persons appear, when we study the symptoms as they are described by writers on the subject, to be, in fact, only in a peculiar magnetic state" (266). Ahab's monomania, in Melville's terms, is just such a usurpation. The wounded part of Ahab claims control: "his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark" (185). The monomaniac "usurpation" is, like the trance state, to be compared to illegitimate governance. Despite the appearance the monomaniac presents of an uncompromising autonomy and willfulness, he is like the entranced subject whose "self-will" is temporarily overthrown, so that his insanity achieves "a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own," overcoming his other faculties (202).

This self-tyranny has its external manifestation in Fedallah, almost as though self-compulsion could not quite be posited. Flickering in and out of focus, Fedallah seemed

by some "unaccountable tie...to be linked with Ahab's peculiar fortunes; nay, so far as to have some sort of a half-hinted influence; Heaven knows, but it might have been even authority over him; all this none knew" (231). His "unaccountable tie" to Ahab—where the two alternate in the role of mesmeric victim—prevents the dyad of mesmerist and somnambulist from ever coming quite into focus. The parallel of Fedallah and Lewis, who made a Scottish audience-member see oranges for apples, is not exact; Lewis's authority was more real, and in particular more articulate, than the shadowy and silent Fedallah's. And yet Lewis's jeremiads on sensory error—on the mind's propensity to take apples for oranges—may have succeeded in part because of an analogous disappearing act he, as an Orientalized figure, could also perform. Fedallah is not always real: sometimes he is a person; sometimes a projection of some tyrannizing part of Ahab's psyche. Electrobiological experiments performed a similar operation. There, the trance represented the ordinary errors of perception, with the mesmerist merely intervening to stimulate a slip-up. Perhaps for his audience, Lewis, too, disappeared partly into the erring psyche of the test subject, occupying the position less of mesmerist than of internal pathogen. And not a new or unusual pathogen, either: only the normal, mediated, desiring, and flawed state of the human sensorium.

Ahab's problem—the reason he tyrannizes the crew and himself—is just this fallen state of the senses. His injury is the Goethean one: the impossibility of coming to grips with the real (the injuring, insulting, dismasting real) through the wall of appearance that is alone intelligible to the senses. Ahab tells Starbuck, "All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks....If man will strike, strike through the mask!

How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall" (164). The whale is a surface appearance; but behind him, somewhere, is the inscrutable real. The impossibility of knowing the object in itself is, to Ahab, the great insult requiring vengeance against the "libertine" gods; yet the impossibility of knowing has also made vengeance—except the mad vengeance of a monomaniac—impossible. Equipped with inadequate faculties—he cannot tell appearance from reality—Ahab argues that his best course is to treat appearance as though it *were* real. But this monomaniacal decision has much in common with the normal predicament of the subject. If Ahab is doomed to live in a world of specters of the eye—doomed, as Emerson put it, to "hold hard to this poverty, however scandalous"—so is everyone. This is, according to electrophysiology's theory of perception, the general disease. Ahab is not willfully Emersonian, but necessarily so. He, like everyone, inhabits "these bleak rocks" where Tantaluses reach for delicacies they can never touch.^{cxv}

Ahab, in other words, is average: his predicament is everyone's, so long as subjectivity counts as a contamination of the objects of perception. This problem of vision that maddens him he shares with the entire crew. In "The Whiteness of the Whale," Melville's Ishmaelian essay on the crew's reasons for undertaking the hunt, the fallen condition of the human sensorium is expressed in these same terms from Goethean optics: those Emerson, mesmerists and other itinerant scientific demonstrators would have used.^{cxvii} In the *Conversations with Eckermann*, which Melville read, Goethe wondered "whether a colour really exists externally to ourselves, or whether it is only a

seeming colour which the eye has itself produced," because "the eye has need of change...so urgently that it produces colours itself if it does not actually find them."^{cxxxviii} Do even the colors we see, as Goethe put it in his popular account, "belong to the eye?" (20-21). This question haunts the *Pequod's* crew, and whiteness is its symbol: Melville refers to the "theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot" (165). Color appears only to our eyes and through their processes—nature in its unmediated state would be "palsied" like a "leper." Ahab's and the crew's hatred of the whale come down to the same epistemological problem: of seeing colors where there is really a palsied whiteness, of seeing, in short, a mark of their own contaminating subjectivity where they might have seen real objects.

IV. Subjects and Objects

What, if anything, is to be done about this grim situation? The novel comes to propose a change in what the object is, making the irretrievable subjectivity of perception into a virtue. And that inevitably leads, too, to a change in what counts as a successful knowing subject. *Moby-Dick* insists that the whale is not complete—that it is not really itself—without the presence of its appropriate perceiver, the whaleman. Where "The

"Whiteness of the Whale" and Ahab's metaphysical ravings disclose observers tortured by the knowledge that it is impossible to see anything their own eyes have not colored, Ishmael's natural-historical investigations come to take such coloration as the ground of knowledge, not as an obstacle to it. This is Melville's answer to the problem of subjects isolated from objects by the distortions of sense. This answer carries with it the memory of the refusal—both in Ahab's monomania and in the crew's—to ignore the fact that things in themselves are forever uncontactable. Beyond that, it carries, too, something of electrobiology's promotion of the lowly labor of sense over the lofty labor of reason. But it also fashions a knower whose tainted perception is a solution, rather than a problem, because that taint alone completes the object of vision.

If the whaleman is the whale's privileged interlocutor, in other words, this is not only because he is in the right place, or has the right kind of expertise. It is because the act of hunting is required to constitute the whale fully: "[o]nly in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his angry flukes...can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out" (453-54). If we take this statement quite literally—that only in the hunt is the whale the whale—then the problem of mediated perception drops away. Rather than it being a problem for the eye to color all it sees, it is only when the whale *does* take on coloring from the hunter's eye that it is truly itself. This is why, to a landsman, true tales of the sea can seem to be the wildest romance, and the white whale can seem "a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory" (205). The landsman cannot see the object that the hunter's eye conjures; it will never be there for him.

In the hunt, subjects and objects lose their ordinary isolation—and lose, therefore, the problem of mediating sense. There is no longer anything to mediate. When Ishmael describes, in "The Line," what is required for the sailors' survival, he is also describing a oneness with the motion of their surroundings tantamount to a sublime mechanical accuracy: "when the line is darting out, to be seated then in the boat, is like being seated in the midst of the manifold whizzings of a steam-engine in full play, when every flying beam, and shaft, and wheel, is grazing you." And yet the whaleman too must be in motion "in the heart of these perils;" so that "only by a certain self-adjusting buoyancy and simultaneousness of volition and action, can you escape being made a Mazeppa of, and run away with where the all-seeing sun himself could never pierce you out" (280-281). Gone is the naturalist's hope of seeing things still: instead, thought and volition are immediately in contact with the motion of the boat—a direct objective perception which is also a direct subjective experience. There is no separating the motion and thought of the sailor from the motion of the line and boat; that thought is part of the object, "boat," itself.

Central to physiology's investigation of the limits and mediating corruptions of the senses—the same investigation that reached American audiences through the electrobiologists—was the realization that the senses were not even fast enough to track the human body's own actions. The physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz, who showed that there was always an interval of time between will and reaction, the time it took for the "command" to travel along the nerves, thought that at least our case was better than the whale's: "happily the distances are short which have to be traversed by our sensuous

perceptions before they reach the brain," he wrote; "otherwise our self-consciousness would lag far behind the present...With an ordinary whale the case is perhaps more dubious; for in all probability the animal does not feel a wound near its tail until a second after it has been inflicted, and requires another second to send the command to the tail to defend itself" (Helmholtz). Whether Ishmael would have agreed with this image of a slow-thinking, slow-moving whale seems extremely doubtful. But both Helmholtz and Melville meditate on a similar problem: what happens when the speed of experience exceeds the maximum capacity of the nerves of perception and motion? What happens when sense meets its limits?

In the early 1850s, Helmholtz designed a machine which could immediately measure and record the tiniest movements of a vivisected muscle, setting it up so that the movement of the muscle fiber actually displaced a stylus that recorded the magnitude and speed of the movement, recording what one of his successors would later call "the language of the phenomena themselves." In that way, he created an instrument whose capabilities obviated any need for the feeble and distorting senses.^{cxviii} For Daston and Galison, this is one of the characteristic methods of the "mechanically objective" scientist: using a machine to replace the more limited senses.^{cxl} But Melville imagined a different way out of the impasse of subjective perception—a different way of letting "phenomena" speak in their own language. Rather than subtracting his observing whalemen from the objects they saw, he made them integral parts of the object. The sailors' very mechanicity—their inability to contemplate themselves or the whale as though removed from the action—was what constituted their knowledge. They were like

Melville's mechanical carpenter, who was "a pure manipulator; his brain, if he had ever had one, must have oozed along into the muscles of his fingers" (468). Their actions brought them out to the tips of themselves until they were nearly objects giving self-reports, like Helmholtz's direct-registration instruments—or like psychometers in the Transcendentalist circle, who felt the pulsations of things in their own nerves.

Natural historians had no hope—not, or not only, because they had never seen a living whale, but because they were not the appropriate subjects to complete this object. And this was what made their depictions of whales so hopelessly in error. In their presence, and without the hunter, the whale simply became unintelligible. Frederick Cuvier, whose "Sperm Whale is not a Sperm Whale, but a squash," of course "never had the benefit of a whaling voyage (such men seldom have)" (262-3). But even face to face with a sperm whale, Cuvier would not have been face to face with a sperm whale. The whale was no more or less than what "actually appears to the eye of the whaleman" (260). Garneray, whose depictions of the hunt Ishmael approves, must have been "either practically conversant with his subject, or else marvellously tutored by some experienced whaleman" (266). What matters in Garneray's depiction is not so much the whale's shape—avoiding any suspicion of the squash-like—but action. Garneray's whale is "just risen beneath the boat," with the boat in the very act of breaking apart, "just balancing upon the monster's spine." And above all, "standing in that prow, for that one single incomputable flash of time, you behold an oarsman." It is really this moment in undivided time, rather than the bounds of the whale's body, that defines the edges of the object. The oarsman, who is "half shrouded by the incensed boiling spout of the whale,"

can hardly be distinguished from him in Garneray's engraving (266). These bounds, or rather the lack of them, describe the whale for Ishmael.

The whale was the object of and for the hunt; and separating and stilling it as an object to be represented would be "about as correct as a drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent the noble animal itself in all its undashed pride of hull and spars" (263). Instead, "the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself" (264). The whale needs no careful peeling in order to remove subjective husks and contaminates, because the whale is itself only when covered in—distorted by—the hunter's subjective experience. What knowledge requires, in fact, is an immersed and subjective reading. Melville describes the calm sea as a place where "fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate, and form one seamless whole" (492). Limitations on sense have provoked a revolution in the concept of the object, as that which the correct subject sees. But this is as much as to say that "fancy" has found a place in "fact": that which might have been defined as imaginative distortion now makes, with the body of the whale, a single and indivisible thing. After all, the errors of Mesmer's patients, more than fifty years before, had amounted to nothing more or less than mistaking the vicissitudes of their own bodies for qualities of the object-to-be-known. The patients had mistaken fancy for fact. But for knowers like the sailors and Anna Parsons, such an interpenetration is saving rather than damning. For Parsons, whose soul was so thoroughly in the tips of her fingers that she could read by touching objects, the vicissitudes of the body *were* the facts: it was by these vibrations in her own nervous fluids that she read what she held. The sailors, too, mix

their own subjectivity with the whale in a way that would have once registered as enthusiasm, but which now registers as the only true means of measuring objects. Labor has found its own form of clairvoyance.

Notes

^{cxviii} Dods, *Philosophy of Electrical Psychology* 214-15.

^{cxix} Melville, *Moby-Dick*, eds. Parker and Tanselle, 135. Subsequent parenthetical citations of the novel are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

^{cxx} Quoted from Scoresby, *Account* xiv, 1; and *Journal* 157, 419, 424ff. On Scoresby, see Winter, "Compasses" 77; Stamp and Stamp, *Scoresby* 140-50.

^{cxxi} The reading of *Moby-Dick* as anti-scientific is long-standing; but recent representatives include Parrish, *American Curiosity* 310-14; Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* 132-33; Buell, *Writing* 212-13. While I agree with these critics that the novel is disapproving of certain scientific practices and kinds of knowledge, I see it as positioning itself *within* science—on the side of the mariner-collectors—rather than as standing outside of a scientific project more monolithically conceived.

^{cxxii} Herman Melville to John Murray, 25 Mar. 1848, *Correspondence* 106.

^{cxxiii} On Scoresby's investigations in mineral and animal (i.e., mesmeric) magnetism, see Winter, "Compasses," and Stamp and Stamp, *Scoresby* 115-39, 213-14.

^{cxxiv} Gregory knew James Esdaile's then-recent book, *Mesmerism in India* (1846) which had contended that Indians were uniformly susceptible to the trance (Winter, *Mesmerized* 187-212), and extended Esdaile's hypothesis to include the African-American Lewis.

^{cxxv} Gauld, *History* 187; Winter, *Mesmerized* 281-87.

^{cxxvi} Similar rationales for mesmeric phenomena appear in Gregory, *Letters* (in a discussion of Darling's and Lewis's performances); Grimes, *Etherology* 142-62; and Dods, *Philosophy* 30-31, 221-25. See also Gauld, *History* 231. Evidence of rivalry—and complaints of mimicry or plagiarism, that highest form of flattery—appear in Dods, *Philosophy* 201 and Grimes, *Etherology* 12-13.

^{cxxvii} Quoted from an 1848 article in the *North Star*, which reviews Lewis's mesmeric and reform lectures ("Henry E. Lewis"). On Darling and Lewis, see Gregory, *Letters* vi. On Lewis, see also King, "Shadow of a Mesmeriser;" and Nadis, *Wonder Shows* 102.

^{cxxviii} Dods, *Six Lectures* iii-iv. Other electrobiologists also spoke before large audiences, including Grimes and Darling (Gauld, *History* 183ff., Fuller, *Mesmerism* 69).

^{cxxix} Dods, *Philosophy* 209; Gregory, *Letters* 344; Grimes, *Etherology* 142.

^{xxx} Lardner, *Popular Lectures* 8; Lardner is also quoted in Grimes, *Etherology* 64-65. Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810; English trans. 1840) made this colored spectrum

experiment famous (20-21); but popularizers like Dionysius Lardner made it widely known in Britain and the U. S. On this experiment, see also Crary, *Techniques* 68-69.

^{cxxx} Dionysius Lardner was a mesmerist as well as a lecturer on optics, and Dods and others included optical theory—sometimes modified and rearranged—in their mesmeric lectures.

^{cxxxii} Daston and Galison, *Objectivity* 120-21.

^{cxxxiii} Here my emphasis differs from those who read the novel as a rejection of Ahab's Emersonian hubris (Wolf, "When is a Painting" 144). Instead, I see the novel as treating the Emersonian predicament as a general and inevitable one: what counts as knowledge when we know we impose our subjectivity on the visible? See Chapter Three on the various ways the Transcendentalists answered this question.

^{cxxxiv} Dods, Grimes, and Darling used this technique (Dods, *Lectures* 217; Grimes, *Etherology* 13). See also Gauld, *History* 187. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*, 83-89.

^{cxxxv} Critics have noted Ahab's mesmeric powers; see, for example, Weinauer, "Hawthorne, Melville" 297-320.

^{cxxxvi} Emerson, "Experience" 260.

^{cxxxvii} *Moby-Dick*, eds. Mansfield and Vincent, 704-705; Wallace 169-70, 603; Giesenkirchen 3, 16.

^{cxxxviii} Quoted in *Moby-Dick*, eds. Mansfield and Vincent, 704.

^{cxxxix} Quoted from Marey, *Animal Mechanism* iii; see also Braun, *Picturing Time* 9. On Helmholtz, see Borrell, "Instrumentation," 54; Holmes and Olesko, "Images of Precision," 200.

^{cxl} Daston and Galison, "Image of Objectivity" 81. In this earlier and briefer version of their discussion of "mechanical objectivity," reprised in *Objectivity* (2007), Daston and Galison include such machines as evidence of the new ethos; see, however, Joel Snyder's objection in "Visualization" 379-97.

Epilogue
Starting Her Up: American Modernity and the Mesmeric Subject

From this time there was no need of putting pressure on her; her own springs were working; the fire with which she glowed came from within.

—James, *The Bostonians*^{cxli}

At the beginning of Verena Tarrant's career as a trance-speaker for women's rights in *The Bostonians* (1886), her father Selah, a humbug-of-all-trades, still has to "start her up" (42). He performs magnetic passes just as mesmerists did for their somnambulists in the 1830s; and once Selah had "just calmed her down by laying his hand on her a few moments," Verena would begin to speak (44). At first she looked "serious and sightless," a latter-day somnambulistic seer, and spoke "incoherently, almost inaudibly, as if she were talking in a dream;" but then gradually "it seemed to come" and she started to lecture (44, 48). The fact that the "it" here has no clear antecedent is no artifact of my excerption; James's novel persistently narrates Verena as the object of an undecidable subject-pronoun. The "it" takes action everywhere: "flow[ing] through her," "pass[ing] into her," and "com[ing] right down from—well, wherever it does come from," as the stage-promoter Matthias Pardon puts it (42-43, 101). Characters take stabs at resolving the "it" into any number of things—Verena's "inspiration," her words, the tone of her voice, the magnetical fluid—but never with much conviction (38). Where does it come from? "[W]e don't pretend to say that," Verena's mother replies (101). Even before Verena does away with her father's role in the stage proceedings, both Selah's own false

modesty—"I will drop right out if I don't seem to vitalise"—and the narrator's contempt mark him as out of the running: he is not the "it" (101). Really, this pronoun that hovers around Verena is pure grammar, a syntactical device for putting all her verbs in the passive voice while still not assigning them to any other actor. It makes her a mesmeric subject: she acts by being acted upon.

This is the direction in which the mesmeric tradition had been tending: toward imagining a dependent figure whose dependence, nonetheless, had reference to no tyrant—and might even be an acceptable attribute of a knowing and civically competent subject. Verena, the "daughter of a 'healer'" who "had sat on the knees of somnambulists" in her childhood, belonged by family and by type to the tradition that aimed to transvalue the errant body (239, 66). And at this late-century moment, the mesmeric subject had nearly lost—as Verena had—the need for a controlling mesmerist to "start her up." Just as Melville's *Moby-Dick* undoes the mesmerist Ahab, *The Bostonians* also undoes the ludicrous Selah, so that in both novels the only member of the magnetic pair left standing is the nominally subservient one, whose credulity and thrall now look more like gifts of special knowledge than like the marks of thrall. Verena's somnambulistic speech, now that "her own springs were working" was "exquisite; so fresh and poetical" (42, 161); and the *Pequod's* crew have been granted the special boon of a "self-adjusting buoyancy," the one and only way of seeing the motion of the hunt as it is (280).

From the mid-century it is possible to trace forward a widening delta of positively-valued mechanical subjects. Verena seemed the realization of the idea of a living and self-moving mechanical body who could keep her own "fire" alight and move

by her own "springs" (131). So had the mediums of the Spiritualist movement of the 1850s and 1860s. Spiritualism is now in the Tarrant family's past, to her mother's relief, but Verena's own practice still owes much to it. She begins in the tradition of trance-speech, a practice in which women lectured while under the mesmeric trance but not necessarily on behalf of any particular spirit. Verena is the instrument of "it:" that mere pronoun that keeps her just this side of avowed authorship. Spiritualists, too, thought of themselves as instruments; if women were "weak," one believer wrote in 1866, this nonetheless meant that their "*nerves* are intensely sensitive...Hence sickness, rest, passivity, susceptibility, impressionability, mediumship, communication, revelation!"^{cxlii} Mediums sought, on the one hand, to be ever more mechanical, ever more transparent instruments to receive the messages the dead wanted to send; one Philadelphia chemist and Spiritualist believer even invented a machine, called the "Spiritoscope," that would help keep any involuntary movements of the hand on the Ouija board from adding subjective distortion to spirit communications.^{cxliii} In this way, they were the true heirs of "psychometers" and clairvoyants: they made themselves into knowing subjects by making themselves into instruments. Ann Braude has persuasively argued that the way in which women could represent themselves as mere conduits for the spirits led to a kind of sublation of their own passivity: "[w]ith the encouragement of spirits, women did things that they themselves believed women could not do" (83). Like Verena, they learned to start themselves up.

There is a singular "buoyancy"—a word on which Melville plays three times in the last page of *Moby-Dick*, when Ishmael floats up through the fatal whirlpool—to the

gesture of accepting the mechanical body as a producer of knowledge. Verena's labor at knowing is "very easy to her" and strikes Olive Chancellor as "like some brilliant birthday-present" (42, 50, 90). The sailors of "The Line" live in the fallen world of labor and death above which Verena, while being "set going" on stage, seems to float unharmed. And yet they, too, are lifted on the wave: they have been granted the special boon of a "simultaneousness of volition and action" that makes them knowing (281). This floating lightness among contingency is what brings Ishmael, "buoyed up" through the whirlpool on Queequeg's coffin, to the comic ending of his own plot, even as Ahab dives tragically down (573). Buoyed up, rising above, laboring without exhaustion, and flying, as Loraina Brackett did in spirit, to Battery Park City, clairvoyants constituted an archive of lightness. They offered the image of release from seeing dependence and credulity as tragedies, the image of a new and expanded pool of knowing subject.

And yet we seem to be heading, here, for a kind of apotheosis of the mechanical self that has its own problems. This is a tendency of Spiritualism's in particular: its rhetoricians sometimes erred on the side of the helium-filled. Is the goal for figures like Verena to assimilate entirely the "it" that acts through them, to claim their own self-conscious subjectivity? Perhaps, but the trouble is that an uplift of this kind would also be a form of forgetting. There is a tension here between two possibilities: recognition and the writing of history. Dissolving the grammatical passive voice, the "it" that hangs about Verena, might be the necessary step for giving a trance speaker an avowed public persona. And yet in the "it" lies Verena's connection to history—and to this particular formation of the underdog subject as mechanical. If one gets caught entirely in the

updraft—if one breaks entirely free from the heavier sense that the mechanical body is a despised thing being recuperated against the odds—then it may be that the conflicts to which mesmerism's oxymoronic subjects bore witness get left below.

Perhaps, as far as the purely grammatical "it" is concerned, the direction forward is not "its" disappearance into Verena. Perhaps it is in this oxymoron—in Verena's insistence that "it isn't *me*"—that her interest as a subject resides (43). Without "it," she loses her contact with the place beyond the pale from which the mechanical subject always seems to be coming. We might even say that the usefulness of the idea of the mechanical subject depends upon its incompleteness. Only while there is a strenuous effort of recovery actually in process—only, that is, in the heart of quickest perils—can the transvaluative gesture work. So we return to the oxymoron, that logical fallacy and rhetorical technique at which the novel so excels, to look again not for the divine consummation of Spiritualism, but for the tensions and contradictions of the mechanical subject.

If one is looking for incompletions and recalcitrance, for creatures eerily like subjects but also apparently excluded from the comity of persons, William James is the most promising guide into mesmeric modernity. In his 1890 essay "The Hidden Self," James took trance phenomena to be an "Unclassifiable Residuum."^{cxliv} "Medicine," he wrote, "sweeps them out; or at most, when in an anecdotal vein, records a few of them as 'effects of the imagination,' a phrase whose meaning...it is impossible to make precise" (361). Conceptually speaking, this was precisely true: imagination simply served, in many medical studies on the mesmeric and Spiritualist phenomena that are James's

subject here, as a catch-all term for the uninteresting. But historically speaking, "imagination" held a wealth of meaning. It meant not the accidentally unclassified, but the intentionally swept away: the mechanical body that was the constant undertow to liberal subjecthood. James recognized that alongside the public of the "college-bred gentry," there existed another one, "a public [that] keeps and transmits from generation to generation the traditions and practices of the occult" which could furnish an archive of these unclassified experiences of the hidden and automatic workings of the mind (362).

What interested James in particular among these *residua* was double consciousness, which was a particularly aggravated form of the somnambulistic trance that occurred in certain hysterics whom the French psychologist Pierre Janet was investigating.^{cxlv} In these cases, instead of simply going into a separate state of trance, which she might not remember when she awoke, a subject could develop two fully formed, but separate, sets of memories, physical habits, preferences—two personalities, in other words. Often the second, trance personality knew things the ordinary self did not know. Some of these hysterics, in fact, "could...go back and explain the origin of many of their peculiarities which would else be inexplicable" (366). It is this feature of James's explanation that shows the way toward a late-century means of resting in the mesmeric oxymoron. These hysterics, by another name, were self-diagnosing clairvoyants. In the "split-off, limited, and buried, but yet fully conscious self" that the trance revealed, they had knowledge of their own past traumas—knowledge that might cure them (370).

In treatment, this double self might resolve into singleness again. But for the writing of history, the two selves may need to remain in their divided state. If we hold

the two persons of the hysteric—one visible, and one "hidden"—apart for a moment, we have, again, the mesmeric oxymoron-subject. This figure is not fully a subject in either position, but only in the combination of what the two vantage points know, and what they remember. This painful state of illness also needed *not* to be cured, as W. E. B. Du Bois knew. "The Negro," he wrote, "ever feels his two-ness" as a kind of double consciousness. But in his "longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self...he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (38-39). Du Bois's Hegelianism pushes him toward sublation. But the echoes of the mesmeric tradition remain here, in being "born with a veil" and with "second sight"—and in declining to undervalue this hidden self which had fallen under the shadow of race (38-39). The direction forward, for this project, is to ask what it looks like in mesmeric modernity—in James, in the novels of Pauline Hopkins, in Du Bois—to refuse Spiritualist updrafts and dialectics in favor of the oxymoron of double consciousness. The mesmeric tradition was at its most vital when it sustained, rather than resolving, its double vision, holding together the oxymoronic pairs—mechanical body and self-conscious narrator; automaton box and autograph manuscript; instrument and soul, Verena and "it"—as stereoscopic images of impossible subjects.

Notes

^{exli} James, *Bostonians* 131.

^{exlii} Quoted in Braude, *Radical Spirits* 83.

^{exliii} This was Robert Hare, whose instrument is described in his *Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations* (1855); on Hare, see also Kneeland, "Robert Hare" 245-60.

^{cxliv} James is borrowing here from Alfred Binet, whose *On Double Consciousness* (1889-90) is under review.

^{cxlv} Janet, *Automatisme psychologique* (1889), another of the books under review in James's essay.

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Abbreviations:

America's Historical Newspapers *AHN* American Periodicals Series *APS*

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