THE ROMANTIC TRANCE: MESMERIC THEMES
IN COLERIDGE, HOFFMANN, SHELLEY, AND POE

A Thesis

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by:
Barbara Jean Schultz, B.A.

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Master's Examination Committee:  Approved by
Albert J. Kuhn
Richard T. Martin

Adviser
Department of English
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VITA

June 29, 1961 . . . . . . . Born - Cleveland, Ohio
1983 . . . . . . . . . . . B.A., Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio
1983-1984 . . . . . . . Teaching Assistant, English Department, Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English

Studies in: Romanticism
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CHAPTER I
Mesmerism and its Trance

Influential in the late eighteenth and much of the nineteenth-century, mesmerism had grown out of the Enlightenment as a medical scientific discovery, promising solutions to mankind's problems through control of natural forces. Beginning basically in Austria, it spread to France, Germany, England, and America. Mesmerism was popular on both sides of the Atlantic, with two separate journals established specializing in mesmeric theory. In London Dr. John Elliotson created The Zoist: A Journal of Cerebral Physiology and Mesmerism in April 1843, and in New York Magnet appeared in June 1842.¹ Fred Kaplan, in Dickens and Mesmerism, calls the movement one of the many "fashionable obsessions" in early nineteenth-century London and considers it a "controversy and a scandal,"² which probably accounted in part for its popularity.

The following description of a typical nineteenth-century


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mesmeric "session" gives an idea of the controversy involved:

Mesmer, wearing a coat of lilac silk, walked up and down amid the palpitating crowd, together with Deslon and his associates, whom he chose for their youth and comeliness. Mesmer carried a long iron wand, with which he touched the bodies of the patients, and especially those parts which were diseased; often, laying aside the wand, he magnetized them with his eyes, fixing his gaze on theirs, or applying his hands to the hypochondriac region and to the lower part of the abdomen. This application was often continued for hours, and at other times the master made use of passes. He began by placing himself en rapport with his subject. Seated opposite to him, foot against foot, knee against knee, he laid his fingers on the hypochondriac region, and moved them to and fro, lightly touching the ribs. Magnetization with strong currents was substituted for these manipulations when more energetic results were to be produced. The master, erecting his fingers in a pyramid, passed his hands all over the patient's body, beginning with the head, and going down over the shoulders to the feet. He then returned again, to the head, both back and front, to the belly and the back; he renewed the process again and again, until the magnetized person was saturated with the healing fluid, and was transported with pain or
pleasure, both sensations being equally salutary. 3

Given such wondrous science and art, mesmerism stirred the imagination not only of physicians, but of Romantic writers and theorists too. A number of major writers transformed the tenets of mesmerism into extensions of their own philosophies. The healing aspect of mesmerism especially became a symbol for spiritual healing in Romantic literature. In addition to this "life force," the mesmeric trance became for the Romantic writers a means to explore the mysterious and supernatural, to search for knowledge beyond man's limited ken. In order to better understand the Romantics' fascination with mesmerism, we need to survey briefly the original movement.

Franz Anton Mesmer was apparently not a charlatan. 4 His concept of the "cosmic" or "mesmeric" fluid was not original or even unusual, considering other views at the time. Newton's "discovery" of gravity, Franklin's concept of electricity, and the German philosophers' ideas of galvinism (for example, those of Ritter and Schelling)


4 Mesmer was born in Iznang, on Lake Costance on May 23, 1734 and died on March 5, 1815. From Vincent Buranelli, The Wizard from Vienna (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1975), pp. 27, 204.
all deal with some type of "fluid" or "life force" which permeates the universe, penetrating nature as well as man and even—as Schelling believed—inorganic matter. These fluids, many philosophers thought, joined man to nature and unified all.

Still Mesmer's scientific endeavors might appear to be questionable. One biographer points out that a variety of swindlers, astrologers, and occultists at that time attempted to prove that the universe exerts an influence over man, an idea similar to Mesmer's discoveries. In this context, one can understand the mistrust of Mesmer's theories and experiments and the difficulty scholars had in accepting not only his concepts of healing but also of the universal, mesmeric fluid. "One fanatic," as D. M. Walmsley notes in his biography of Mesmer, "saw the devil in his person and called upon the throne and the church for protection against his malpractices."

Mesmer himself did not originate the science which acquired his name. He did coin the phrase "animal magnetism," though his followers later substituted "mesmerism" for it. (Both terms are synonymous for the purposes of this essay.) Animal magnetism, however, is

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5 Buranelli, p. 35.
not interchangeable with mineral magnetism. Mesmer chose that term because of similar properties between the two, as in the attraction between the magnet (or mesmerist) and the metal (or subject).

Ideas akin to mesmerism prevailed long before Mesmer's time. He took his teachings from two traditional tenets: the idea that a universal, invisible fluid penetrates all animate and inanimate objects, giving them its vital force (similar to the concepts of heat or electricity); and the idea of healing by touch.⁷ These two concepts intertwine in practice to form mesmerism. When the universal fluid flows easily through the body one is healthy, but if the fluid is somehow inhibited (which results in an illness), the physician-mesmerist must be called upon to restore the flow. Mesmer believed that this fluid was the source of all disease and health, asserting that "There is but one malady, and one remedy, the perfect harmony of all our organs and their functions produces health. A malady is only the aberration from this harmony: the cure thereof consists to re-establish disturbed harmony."⁸


⁸ Quoted from Wyckoff, p. 91.
The interrupted flow can be restored through the magnetic touch of the mesmerist. Through stares, touch, or hand passes he sought to set up the ebb and flow of the mesmeric fluid through the patient's body. Once the ebb and flow were established he forced the fluid to break through the obstruction that originally caused the disease. The flow being restored, the patient was cured. The healing touch (along with trances, the "evil-eye," and the power of the will) has of course a long history, as in the Royal Touch of kings and queens "curing" subjects of certain diseases such as scrofula. In fact, it was an order by the Elector of Bavaria to settle a dispute over "touch healing" that caused Mesmer to develop the tenets involved into his own form of mesmerism.9

Original or not, Mesmer and his followers believed that they had uncovered the fundamental truth behind all other similar concepts and methods. They thought they had a key to understanding the workings of the universe and to the power within it. Kaplan explains the implications which mesmerism, the product of science and imagination, now promised:

Mesmer's doctrine caught historical currents of both intellect and emotion as they moved forward, often in conflict, from the rationality

9 See Buranelli, pp. 17-25.
and the sentimentality of the eighteenth century. It offered science and progress almost instant solutions to ancient problems. Disease, corruption, discord, war could be cured and eliminated. But like other utopian visions of the period, mesmerism appealed to the heart as well as to the head. And consequently it had not only a strand of scientific but also an elaborate weave of Romantic and revolutionary utopianism that contained threads from western society's inheritance of religion and magic.¹⁰

Utopianism, in particular, through mesmerism began to be emphasized. A secret organization entitled "The Society of Harmony" was established by Mesmer and a few other peers, Nicholas Bergasse and Guillaume Kornmann, to promote the teachings of mesmerism. This society later split from Mesmer and turned political in its actions, promising to reform society through its policies.

In spite of its many offshoots, mesmerism began originally as a scientific, natural method for curing physical (but mostly psychosomatic) illnesses. Mesmer maintained that his cures were neither miraculous nor supernatural; they were the results of natural phenomena. Nor did he directly credit God with the existence of the mesmeric fluid and its cures. Johann Gassner, a

¹⁰ Kaplan, p. 7.
contemporary exorcist and fatih healer, Mesmer claimed was "superstitious," not religious.\textsuperscript{11}

Vincent Buranelli asserts of Mesmer's later career that his theories moved from a rational to a more Romantic and almost supernatural view, quoting him thus: "[Animal magnetism] is the universal means of healing and preserving human beings. It is an artificial sixth sense. . . . Only feeling can render the theory intelligible to us."\textsuperscript{12}

Here, Mesmer suggests that nature appeals more to the instincts than to the intellect, an underlying current of Romantic thought. Buranelli carries Mesmer's thoughts one step further in stating that ". . . reason depends on the senses, but instinct has a direct connection with nature and therefore has certain powers denied to reason. Instinct's use of animal magnetism makes the difference."\textsuperscript{13}

What started then originally as a rational, scientific theory for curing the body began to extend to the exploration of the supernatural. J. B. Beer calls animal magnetism an attempt to "link the physical and metaphysical."\textsuperscript{14} This link could give man an idea of his

\textsuperscript{11} Walmsley, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{12} Quoted from Buranelli, p. 144.

\textsuperscript{13} Buranelli, p. 195.

potential, what he might accomplish and possess. Some mesmerists went even further, suggesting that mesmerism provided God-like power. Jesus, they thought, was a mortal with strong mesmeric charisma, a view with different implications: it emphasized his mortal level; or it elevated man's spiritual power. The latter emphasis was especially attractive to the Romantics, to whom the God-in-man motif was important. In mesmerism, man has God-like powers, the ability to cure and to possess universal knowledge.

One can see why this discovery was so exciting—but at the same time frightening, with its numerous possibilities for good, healing, exploring the supernatural, or evil and manipulation of the power for one's own good. With great power comes great responsibility. Were mortals capable of dealing with this kind of knowledge and the responsibilities it brings? Even Dickens was "rather alarmed" on the first occasion of practicing mesmerism.\(^{15}\) Besides its workings, its source was enigmatic. Neither Mesmer nor his followers could pinpoint the mesmeric fluid's source or explain its properties or powers. The third proposition of his *Memoir on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism* states "This reciprocal action [the mesmeric influence] is subordinated to

\(^{15}\) Kaplan, p. 70.
mechanical laws that are hitherto unknown." Such mystery made its power awesome and frightening.

Still other mesmerists believed that the source of the mesmeric fluid originated not from an outside, mystical, divine, or cosmic influence but within man's will. Kaplan notes that many—usually "second generation"—practitioners believed that the magnetic force existed invisibly within the body as opposed to the universe and could be directed from mesmerist to subject through the power of the will. 

Romantic writers dealing with mesmerism seem to have been less concerned about its source than about its workings and results. The crucial element of mesmerism most used by them was the hypnotic trance. To cite Kaplan on this feature:

The central mesmeric experience is that of sleep-waking, in which we awaken from the dreams of illusion and see the truth of reality. But to the everyday consciousness, these moments of insight within mesmeric trance are like dreams, so different do we feel ourselves and so special is the quality of what we see.

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17 Kaplan, p. 19.
18 Kaplan, p. 217.
The hypnotic trance had of course intrigued Mesmer, who stumbled upon the discovery of hypnosis by accident.\textsuperscript{19} He realized the significance of sleep, stating that "Sleep is not a negative condition or simply the absence of wakefulness . . . the human faculties are not always quiescent but are actually as active as during wakefulness."\textsuperscript{20} Mesmer could place his subjects into a state between sleep and wakefulness in which they would obey commands given by him (the purpose of the trance) even though their faculties were no longer operating as they would normally.\textsuperscript{21} The subjects could answer questions, make predictions, act out orders, even suffer paralysis if Mesmer so wished. Such a mysterious trance and its properties fascinated Romantic writers.

The method of inducing a trance is fairly static for most mesmerists and usually simple, providing the subject is willing. It can be set up through indirect means, "humanly magnetized" objects, and over a distance.\textsuperscript{22} One of Mesmer's followers, the Marquis de Puységur (1751-1825), gave instructions on how to

\textsuperscript{19} The trance was not an integral part of Mesmer's first theories, but as its unique qualities were developed it overshadowed the other aspects of mesmerism.

\textsuperscript{20} Quoted from Buranelli, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{21} Buranelli, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{22} Kaplan, p. 42.
When you touch an invalid in order to heal him begin by placing one hand, or both hands, on that part of the body where he feels the pain; or, if he is not in pain place one hand on his stomach and the other on his back, opposite. This preliminary touching is necessary to establish the communication between the vital fluid of magnetism and that of the magnetized person. . . . With steady purpose you will desire to do the best for your patient, and since somnambulism is the most beneficial state for this end you will concentrate to produce this effect. Placing your hand on his head you will move it gently and gradually downwards over his eyes, hold it there a few moments, your gaze fixed on your action and your attention concentrated on your purpose.23

Buranelli describes the other side of the relationship—the subject's point of view in one of Puységur's trances. His version of the mesmeric trance (less convulsive than Mesmer's) is the one most typically used in Romantic accounts of mesmerism.

The subject went to sleep and then did ordinary things as if he were awake—answering questions, making suggestions, reporting coherent and objectively verifiable events. He was hypnotically blind at the time. Objects

23 Quoted from Walmsley, p. 146.
right before his eyes did not exist for him if the hypnotist said they were not there. When he awoke, he recalled what the hypnotist instructed him to recall. And the condition lasted as long as the hypnotist made it last. 24

Mesmer had noted certain inexplicable occurrences while the mesmerized subject was in a trance. For example, the subject could diagnose his own illness and even those of others, identify the best cure for his illness, see objects at any distance, predict future events, and receive impressions from a will other than his own (i.e. from the mesmerist). Also, Mesmer wondered why the subject was not always endowed with such faculties, why these faculties appeared most developed through animal magnetism, and how they could be perfected. According to Buranelli, Mesmer concluded that "hypnotic sleep is a condition in which the outer senses become subservient to the inner sense, and the inner sense becomes in tune with the objective world." 25 As the subject deepens into the trance, the outer senses shut down, and the inner sense begins to relay messages and commands and acts as a substitute, allowing the subject to "see" without the outer sense of eyesight, to "remember" when memory has faded and to speak coherently and

24 Buranelli, p. 119.
25 Buranelli, p. 191.
logically even though the other pathways to his intelligence are closed. Mesmerized subjects could even rationally explain the motivations for their seemingly irrational actions performed in their ordinary state. Dickens and Elliotson had also noted the phenomenon that mesmerized subjects can "see" with their eyes closed. They believed the subjects were in a "special state of receptive consciousness in which communication can be effected through means other than through physical organs."

Attempting to explain these unusual occurrences, Mesmer thought that the mesmeric rapport established between operator and subject is actually a communication between the inner senses of the two people involved. Strange happenings of telepathy or clairvoyance could be explained on the basis of this communication. Mesmer told his biographer, Karl Wolfart, that this "inner sense" also allowed mesmerized patients to enter into a harmony with nature and to see into the past and future. Subjects in a trance often had such abilities of prophecy and clairvoyance to which unmesmerized people were

26 Buranelli, p. 119, 191.
27 Kaplan, pp. 152-53.
28 Buranelli, p. 192.
29 Tatar, p. 45.
insensitive. Kaplan has described, for example, the famous mesmeric experiments on the O'key sisters (seemingly a hoax) which Dr. Elliotson and Dickens had observed. While in their mesmeric trance, the sisters had visionary, clairvoyant, and predictive powers. They accurately knew about matters of life and death. Elizabeth O'key could even predict the imminent death of a patient.

The mesmeric trance, then, was an especially fascinating feature of mesmerism. In a trance the subject could apparently experience supernatural knowledge. His ordinary mental faculties were changed so that a new reality appeared. The trance projected the subject's consciousness from a world of limited physical experiences into a world where virtually no physical or mental boundaries existed. Mesmerism could be the means, as Jung-Stilling has suggested since then, to release one from physical inhibitions and to place one within the spiritual or supernatural realm. Buranelli presses its potential further, claiming that,

Momentous consequences follow. Since the inner sense is in touch with the cosmos and with all the interrelated parts of the cosmos, reacting to them in their timelessness, therefore, there

seems to be ideally no limit to human knowledge (whatever practical impediments there might be).³¹

³¹ Buranelli, p. 192.
CHAPTER II
Mesmerism and the Romantic Impulse

Mesmerism had a powerful appeal to the Romantics, embodying many of their interests. It suggested new aspects of the mysterious, seemingly limitless powers of the mind and the nature of the imagination, which many Romantic poets and theorists sought to explore. "For the Romantics," as Kaplan asserts, "real life, ultimate life was mental life."32 The Romantics' view of the mind includes much more than mere rational thought, emphasizing indeed "the mind as a power independent of rational deliberations and syllogistic movements."33 Mesmerism thus seemed at once a proof of the power of one's inner sense and a vehicle for the exploration of the capabilities of the mind.

Mesmerism and the imagination seemed to share creative yet shadowy powers. The mesmeric trance, like the imagination, could conjure up visions, insights, and inspirations and resembles the Romantic dream vision,

32 Kaplan, p. 230.
33 Kaplan, p. 230.
recurring in the writings of William Blake, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats to name but these. The Romantic dream vision and the mesmeric trance usually represent a special type of vision, whether prophetic, as in Blake’s "A Vision of the Last Judgement," poetic, as in Keats’ "Ode to Psyche," or illusory, as in Hoffmann’s "The Sandman."

Mesmerism was also a prime candidate for Romantic fascination for a number of reasons. It dealt with man’s instincts, fantasy, Gothic horror, and the supernatural, especially in its mysterious source and influence. No doubt such occult qualities of mesmerism helped to attract the attention of Coleridge, Hoffmann, Percy Bysshe and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and Edgar Allan Poe. J. B. Beer notes that the Romantics were intrigued by demons and viewed them as symbols for mysterious and creative energies of the mind and spirit. Shelley, in particular, notes that animal magnetism, as well as demons "good bad or indifferent," are indications of the existence of the supernatural. 34

The quest for the deepest knowledge of the world and the supernatural is a recurrent theme in Romantic literature. Goethe’s Faust and Lord Byron’s Manfred show some of the extremes of such a search. Hoffmann’s characters

34 Quoted from Beer, p. 104.
also often aim at a higher knowledge. Shelley's and Keats' appeals to their muses too reflect a yearning for profound wisdom and inspiration. The mesmeric trance promised such universal and supernatural knowledge. In Poe's "Mesmeric Revelation," the benefits of the trance are described as,

... while in this state, the person so impressed employs only with effort, and then feebly, the external organs of sense, yet perceives, with keenly refined perception, and through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs; that, moreover, his intellectual faculties are wonderfully exalted and invigorated; that his sympathies with the person so impressing him are profound; and, finally, that his susceptibility to the impression increases with its frequency, while, in the same proportion, the peculiar phenomena elicited are more extended and more pronounced.\(^35\)

Mesmerism thus acts like a stimulant, intensifying human awareness even to the level of universal knowledge. In a sense, the trance becomes a mystical shortcut to inspiration—especially artistic inspiration. This notion implies that every person (who can be mesmerized successfully) has the potential to become an artist to some

degree since basically the artist's task is to relay the inspiration which he has experienced. This idea also echoes the Romantic emphasis on the wisdom of the common man. A case in point is described by the Count Maxime de Puységur, the Marquis' younger brother, in which his gardener has access to profound knowledge while in a mesmeric trance:

It is from this simple man, this tall and stout rustic, twenty-three years of age, enfeebled by disease or rather by sorrow, and therefore the more predisposed to be affected by any great natural agent, it is from this man, I repeat, that I derive instruction and knowledge. When in the magnetic state he is no longer a peasant, who can hardly utter a single sentence; he is a being to describe whom I cannot find a name. I need not speak, I have only to think before him, when he understands and answers me. . . .

Like William Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper," the gardener is an ordinary laborer who works close to nature, yet has an inner depth and beauty from which one can learn.

Mesmerism reinforced the Romantic idea of man's oneness with nature because the practice of animal magnetism relied on the natural forces. The cosmic force in the universe, animal magnetists held, is the mesmeric fluid. When a mesmerist magnetizes his subject, he is

36 Quoted from Wyckoff, p. 114.
in fact controlling the ebb and flow of the vital force which permeates the cosmos. Inasmuch as Romanticism may be seen as "the expression of the absolutely unlimited powers of the special man who was in touch with and could control the cosmic force in the universe," the term "mesmerism" might be substituted above for "Romanticism." This control of this natural force and access to universal knowledge through nature—or mesmerism—of course suggest God-like power, an important Romantic motif seen, for instance, in Faust, Manfred, and even Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. 38

Although many Romantic writers viewed mesmerism as a means towards heightened perceptions and insights, a few centered on such "original" aspects of mesmerism as its healing powers. 39 Like Freudianism, in one respect, mesmerism had originated as a method of cure which later came to have a more widespread importance. Mesmer indeed was as influential to the late eighteenth and much of the

37 Kaplan, p. 238.

38 Frankenstein was also influenced by the contemporary "discovery" of another natural force, galvinism, in which, as Richard Holmes points out, both Shelleys were interested. From Richard Holmes, Shelley the Pursuit, (London: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 626.

39 It is surprising that, in medicine, mesmerism was used to "exorcise" illness from the body, but in literature, Coleridge, Hoffmann, Poe, and even Shelley seem to ignore the possibility of "exorcising" illness from the mind.
nineteenth-century as Freud has been to the twentieth-century. Freud even acknowledged his debt to Mesmer in his theories of hypnotism and therapy through trances. Although both methods of therapy developed far beyond medicine and influenced social and literary ideas, the original healing and soothing powers of mesmeric sleep were still needed. Some Romantics desired a rejuvenation or at least a peaceful respite from their worldly troubles. Wordsworth calls on sleep, naming it the "Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!" Shelley's and Keats' pleas for a revivifying sleep seem more urgent than Wordsworth's because of the severely debilitated spiritual, mental, and physical states in "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" and "Sonnet to Sleep." The different types of sleep, whether narcotic from which Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" resulted, mesmeric as in Shelley's "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient," or ordinary as in Keats' "Sonnet to Sleep," brought forth similar results of rest or rejuvenation for the Romantics.

Besides fascinating sleep, mesmerism offered a variety of attractions. As Kaplan notes, it offered many psychological and ideological complexities so that "one

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40 Walmsley, pp. 185-86.

could pick and choose what one wanted and needed."

Most Romantic writers chose not to focus on its physically healing powers, and dispensed with the paraphernalia of mesmerism in their writing. Baquets, or healing tubs of magnetized water, wands, and magnetized objects were replaced by simple hand passes or mesmeric stares in the works of Coleridge, Hoffmann, Shelley, and Poe. Extending the ideas of the magnetizing eye, Hoffmann even uses mesmerizing eyeglasses and telescopes.

But all of these four Romantic writers, though they represented the three different cultures of England, Germany, and America, shared a common interest in the mesmeric trance. They focused on it and its results—Shelley and Poe more explicitly than Coleridge and Hoffmann—in various ways, as a part of the Romantic exploration of the imagination, as a method of curing and restoration, as a means of destruction, as an aspect of the supernatural and occult, and as an access to spiritual and universal knowledge. Because several works from these authors are less widely read than others, I give a short synopsis of each, with the exception of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" of course.

E. T. A. Hoffmann used mesmerism in several of his tales, including "The Magnetist" and "The Vow." His use

42 Kaplan, p. 7.
of the trance in "The Sandman," however, is more intriguing than in his other stories because of its subtlety and suggestion of evil. The tale opens with a letter from Nathanael, away at school, to his friend Lothar telling him he has just seen the man he believes was responsible for his father's death many years ago. He then describes to his friend his childhood memories of Coppelius, a lawyer and dollmaker, who is now in the guise of a barometer dealer and optician named "Coppola." Whenever Nathanael's parents would be expecting Coppelius for an evening, his mother would say "The Sandman is coming" in order to hurry him and his brothers and sisters to bed. Although the mother was referring to the fictional childhood character who sprinkles sand in children's eyes when they refuse to sleep at night, Nathanael believed she meant Coppelius and eventually identified the two as one person.

Nathanael also writes to Lothar of the time he spied on his father and Coppelius. His father, thinking his son was sound asleep in bed, was apparently working with Coppelius on alchemical experiments, the lawyer demanding "Give me eyes! Give me eyes." At this Nathanael

43 "The Sandman" in Selected Writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, trans. and eds. Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 142. The entire story can be found on pp. 137-67. Although I am familiar with the original German text, the English translation will be used.
shrieked and was discovered by the two men. Seeing Coppelius angered by Nathanael, the father immediately begged mercy for his son, but the evil automaton-maker threw Nathanael near the fire and threatened, "Now we have eyes, eyes, a beautiful pair of children's eyes!" while pulling cinders from the fire to sprinkle in them. The father finally persuaded Coppelius to leave the boy's eyes alone but the evil dollmaker then proceeded to examine Nathanael's hands and feet, "unscrewing" them as if he were a model for one of his own dolls. The frightened boy then fainted, waking up later "as from the sleep of death." How much of this incident the boy imagined is uncertain. About a year later, however, Coppelius returned. That same night an explosion occurred. The children rushed to their father's room and found him lying on the floor, dead, his face charred black, and Coppelius nowhere in sight.

Nathanael's childhood experiences had made a strong impression on him, thus the excited reaction when he saw Coppola. Lothar and Klara, Lothar's sister and Nathanael's fiancée, attempt to calm him down, reassuring him that Coppelius and Coppola could not be the same person and that his imagination has overpowered his

44 Hoffmann, p. 142.
45 Hoffmann, p. 142.
reasoning. Although Nathanael reluctantly acknowledges that Lothar and Klara are probably right, his usually cheerful disposition turns into one of gloomy brooding and depression, causing a serious rift with Klara and eventually leading to a duel with Lothar. Fortunately, the duel never takes place and the three are reconciled with each other.

Later at the university Nathanael must move to another house because of a fire at his former dwelling. He now lives across from Spalanzini, an eccentric professor at the university and Coppola's friend, and his "daughter" Olympia and can see directly into her room where she sits immobilized, gazing at Nathanael as if she were sleeping with her eyes open. The reader later learns that Olympia is a mechanical doll. Nathanael never seems to realize this, however, even though he notices that her eyes are oddly fixed and lifeless.

Shortly thereafter Coppola visits Nathanael again. Forgetting Klara's and Lothar's assurances, he flies into a rage but later calms down and, as an apology for his anger, buys a spyglass from him. As he looks through it out the window, he involuntarily focuses on Olympia. Suddenly her eyes seem to be filled with life. He becomes enchanted with her and, forgetting Klara, he courts the doll, dancing with her at a ball (much to the amusement of the guests), speaking to her of love and philosophy,
and visiting her whenever possible.

His obsession with Olympia grows so strongly that he plans to marry her. As he is climbing the stairs near her room hoping soon to tell her of his love, he hears a loud argument between Coppelius/Coppola and Spalanzini. They are fighting over the automaton, each one claiming ownership. Finally Coppola wrenches the doll away from the professor and escapes. Apparently in the struggle, Olympia's eyes fall out. After Nathanael sees the black holes remaining in the doll, he realizes she is lifeless. This sight is too much for Nathanael, and his mind snaps.

Eventually Nathanael recovers in a madhouse. All seems well. He, Klara, and Lothar have been reunited, and the entire episode with Coppola and Olympia has been temporarily forgotten. One day, however, as Nathanael and Klara walk through town, they decide to see the view from the town hall's tower. At the top, Klara points to an unusual small grey bush which appears to be moving toward them, which seems to be the distant figure of Coppelius. Nathanael pulls Coppola's spyglass from his pocket for a clearer view, but sees Klara through it instead, and lapses back into insanity.

Nathanael then tries to throw Klara from the tower, but Lothar rescues her and carries her down to safety. Part of the crowd gathered below in the market place wants to climb the tower and overpower the mad Nathanael.
Coppelius, who has just joined the crowd, reassures them, laughs, and says, "Ha, ha! Just wait; he'll come down on his own." Nathanael sees the lawyer and jumps off the tower to his death screaming "Ah, nice-a eyes, nice-a eyes."

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" is one of his less known poems although it follows in part a Shelleyan pattern of physical and spiritual debilitation and a later revivification by an outside force or influence, as in "Ode to the West Wind." Because "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient" is relatively unknown and short, it will be given in its entirety:

I
"Sleep, sleep on! forget thy pain;
   My hand is on thy brow,
My spirit on thy brain;
My pity on thy heart, poor friend;
   And from my fingers flow
The powers of life, and like a sign,
   Seal thee from thine hour of woe;
And brood on thee, but may not blend
   With thine.

II
"Sleep, sleep on! I love thee not;
   But when I think that he
Who made and makes my lot

46 Hoffmann, p. 167.
As full of flowers, as thine of weeds,
Might have been lost like thee;
And that a hand which was not mine
Might then have charmed his agony
As I another's—my heart bleeds
   For thine.

III
"Sleep, sleep, and with the slumber of
   The dead and the unborn
Forget thy life and love;
Forget that thou must wake forever;
   Forget the world's dull scorn;
Forget lost health, and the divine
   Feelings which died in youth's brief morn;
And forget me, for I can never
   Be thine.

IV
"Like a cloud big with a May shower,
   My soul weeps healing rain
On thee, thou withered flower;
It breathes mute music on thy sleep;
   Its odor calms thy brain!
Its light within thy gloomy breast
   Spreads like a second youth again.
By mine thy being is to its deep
   Possessed.

V
"The spell is done. How feel you now?"
"Better—quite well," replied
The sleeper,—"What would do
You good when suffering and awake?
   What cure your head and side?"
"What would cure, that would kill me, Jane;
   And as I must on earth abide
Awhile, yet tempt me not to break
My chain.⁴⁷

On the other side of the Atlantic, Edgar Allan Poe explored mesmerism in his writings. His interests in the powers of the mind and the supernatural probably led to his studies of the mesmeric trance, which he uses in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," "Mesmeric Revelation," and "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case." The first tale revolves around Dr. Templeton, the physician-mesmerist, and Bedloe, the patient-subject, whom he has been treating for neuralgia for many years. Bedloe relates to Templeton and the narrator the events which happened to him as he took his customary daily walk through the mountains. He explains that he became lost in a fog, when suddenly the mist cleared and he found himself at the foot of a mountain, looking down onto a plain where a battle was taking place. Feeling compelled to join the weaker party in the insurrection, he was shot in his temple by an enemy's long, black poisoned arrow, resembling a serpent, and died immediately. He then experienced, he explains, a kind of "nothingness" or darkness. This lasted until a shock flowed through his body jolting him back to familiar territory, and he returned home.

The narrator believes Bedloe's experience was merely a dream. Doctor Templeton, however, believes otherwise because when Bedloe was experiencing these events in the mountains, the doctor, at home, was writing down the details of the insurrection of Cheyte Sing, in which his friend Oldeb had taken part many years ago. Oldeb's actions exactly matched Bedloe's in the "dream." In fact, according to Templeton, the startling physical resemblance between Bedloe and Oldeb caused the doctor to make Bedloe's acquaintance years ago.

About a week after Bedloe's curious tale, the narrator notices an obituary in the local paper. Bedloe had died as a result of topical bleeding used to cure a cold and fever he had contracted in the Ragged Mountains. Dr. Templeton had mistakenly applied a poisonous "sangsue" with the other bloodletting leeches, and it fixed itself to a small artery in his temple. According to the obituary, the singsue can usually be distinguished from the leeches by its blackness and serpentine movements.\(^48\)

In "Mesmeric Revelation" the subject, Vankirk, wants the narrator—mesmerist, P., to question him about the existence of the soul while he is mesmerized. Vankirk wishes to know more about death and God and feels he can

\(^{48}\) Poe, pp. 896-905. His other two tales, "Mesmeric Revelation" and "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case" are also taken from this edition.
acquire this knowledge with the assistance of mesmerism and P.'s direct questioning. The "experiment" takes place, and Vankirk expounds on the essences of God, spirit, and matter, even though the mesmerist has difficulty understanding all of the subject's ideas. Near the end of their discussion, Vankirk dies, leaving P. wondering if the subject actually had been addressing him from the other world. 49

In "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case," another type of mesmeric experiment occurs. The narrator-mesmerist, P., wonders if a man can be mesmerized at the point of death and if so, how the powers of mesmerism will interact with death. Valdemar, the subject, agrees to try the experiment and is mesmerized just before his death. While in the trance he "dies." His eyes roll open; his face turns white; and his jaw slackens. The onlookers huddled around his bed hear an unusual voice seemingly coming from a vast distance or deep cavern, announcing "I am dead." 50 Apparently however his soul is still bound to his body because of the mesmeric influence. Thus the doctors and mesmerist believe that mesmerism arrested death.

49 Poe, pp. 908-16.
50 Poe, p. 1070.
Valdemar remains in this state for almost seven months until P. attempts to awaken him. As soon as P. partially rouses him, Valdemar demands to be quickly and fully awakened. P. complies, believing that his subject now will be able to recuperate. Instead Valdemar immediately rots away, turning into a "nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence." 51

Using these texts as points of departure, I want to show how these Romantic writers exploited the mesmeric trance for its healing and constructive or destructive powers. As we shall see, the power of course is neutral; man's use of it determines its quality.

51 Poe, pp. 1064-72.
CHAPTER III
Mesmerism's Healing and Life Forces

Romantic writers generally focused more on mesmerism's spiritual possibilities and effects instead of on its organically healing powers. Shelley, however, emphasized both of these mesmeric properties. Perhaps he based his writings of animal magnetism on his own wishes to relieve his mental and physical sufferings. In "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient," the mesmeric trance becomes a healing, life-giving force, allowing the subject to experience gratefully a temporary respite from his pain. Thomas Medwin, who first published the poem in The Athenaeum in 1832, describes Shelley's torments and his resulting explorations for a mesmeric cure:

Shelley was a martyr to a most painful complaint, which constantly menaced to terminate fatally; and was subject to violent paroxysms which, to his irritable nerves, were each a separate death. I had seen magnetism practised in India and at Paris, and at his earnest request consented to try its efficacy. Mesmer himself could not have hoped for more complete success. The imposition of my hand on his forehead instantaneously put a stop to the spasm,
and threw him into a magnetic sleep, which for
want of a better word is called somnambulism.
Mrs. Shelley and another lady [Mrs. Williams]
were present. The experiment was repeated more
than once. During his trances I put some
questions to him. He always pitched his voice
in the same tone as mine. I enquired about his
complaint, and its cure—the usual magnetic
enquiries. His reply was, "What would cure me
would kill me" . . . [Shelley answered in
Italian.] He improvised also verses in Italian,
in which language he was never known to write
poetry.\footnote{52}

In The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Medwin adds:

After my departure from Pisa, he was magnetized
by a lady, which gave rise to the beautiful
stanzas entitled "The Magnetic Lady to Her
Patient," and during which operation, he made
the same reply to an inquiry as to his disease,
and its cure, as he had done to me,—"What would
cure me would kill me,"—meaning lithotomy.

Mrs. Shelley also magnetized him, but soon dis-
continued the practice, from finding that he
got up in his sleep, and went one night to the
window, (fortunately barred,) having taken to
his old habit of sleep-walking, which I men-
tioned, in his boyhood, and also in London.\footnote{53}

\footnote{52 Quoted from The Poetical Works of Shelley,
p. 421n.}

\footnote{53 Thomas Medwin, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley
(London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 270.}
Besides Shelley's physical ailments he also had "mental demons." His contemporaries Jane and Edward Williams saw two conflicting sides of the poet: the practical and the supernatural, the latter which Neville Rogers in Shelley at Work has termed a "demon self." Eventually, he was forced to find relief from the "demon" through animal magnetism. However, the cure was only temporary and the "demon" returned. Shelley's statement, "What would cure me would kill me," suggests the permanence of his torments and the limitations of the powers of mesmerism.

Shelley issued his own guidelines for inducing the mesmeric trance. He believed it was easier for a magnetist to hypnotize a member of the opposite sex than of the magnetist's own, hence the "Magnetic Lady" in Shelley's poem. Kaplan thinks that Shelley's reversal of the "typical" genders of the mesmerist and subject in the poem relates more about the poet than about the movement. This idea seems valid in view of the fact that Coleridge, Hoffmann, and Poe centered on the more typical male-female or male-male mesmerist-subject.

55 Rogers, pp. 286-87.
56 Holmes, p. 627.
57 Kaplan, p. 12.
relationship. Shelley might also be hinting at the implicit sexuality of the trance, which many contemporary skeptics of mesmerism believed as dangerously corruptive. Many were suspicious of the dubious body contact involved between the (usually) male mesmerist and the (usually) female patient to establish the current of the cosmic fluid. Then too, the mesmerist's ability to control his patient's movements and actions frightened the onlookers and raised doubts in their minds concerning the mesmerist's integrity. Shelley perhaps might also have chosen a female mesmerist to suggest maternal qualities, whose soothing touch calms his tormented soul. Richard Holmes suggests that the relationship between doctor and patient appealed to Shelley because "in its mixture of intense intimacy and clinical detachment, he found some expression of his emotional needs."\(^58\)

Shelley's other "requirement" for evoking a magnetic trance also sets him apart from the other three above mentioned Romantic writers who discuss mesmerism. He believed that the mesmerist must have "pure motives" in order to mesmerize; the true motives of the magnetist and subject must agree and be genuinely sincere.\(^59\) Perhaps this idea relates to Mesmer's (and others') realization

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\(^{58}\) Holmes, p. 627.

\(^{59}\) Holmes, p. 626.
that the subject must want to be mesmerized in order for the trance to work. The Magnetic Lady, sympathizing with her subject's pain, consoles, "My spirit on thy brain; / My pity on thy heart, poor friend." Both the mesmerist and the subject are concentrating upon relieving the poet's torments; both motives agree, and the trance begins. Shelley's prerequisite of "pure motives" is unusual in Romantic mesmeric writings because most mesmerists in such literature can hypnotize their subjects regardless of their wish or will. Thus, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and Hoffmann's Coppélius mesmerize their subjects regardless of their motives (as will be explained later). Coppélius' evil motives, for example, will obviously not coincide with his unsuspecting victim's wishes. Perhaps Shelley's view of mesmerism as a benevolent, healing life-giving force prompted him to believe that one's motives must in turn be sincere and charitable. As in Prometheus Unbound, the mind must be pure of prejudice before rejuvenation of the world can take place.

Shelley intertwined physical and spiritual healing in his poem by borrowing several descriptions of the techniques of mesmeric therapy. The Magnetic Lady first establishes the flow of the mesmeric fluid between the subject and herself through the use of hand passes: "My hand is on thy brow." After creating the contact this fluid, which Shelley calls "the powers of life,"
flows from her fingers. She proceeds to the next step in curing the "sleeper," overcoming the obstruction which inhibits the free flow of the mesmeric fluid within him; and she succeeds.

The poem now begins to transcend mere mesmeric physical healing and becomes rather an image of spiritual rejuvenation. Her curative powers seem to draw the agony out of his soul and fill it with peace. To Shelley mesmerism is a healing sleep of forgetfulness, not only of the negative aspects of life, but also of the good:

Sleep, sleep, and with the slumber of
The dead and the unborn
Forget thy life and love;
Forget that thou must wake forever;
Forget the world's dull scorn;
Forget lost health, and the divine
Feelings which died in youth's brief morn.

After draining the sleeper's torments, the Magnetic Lady fills his soul with refreshing, "healing rain" and calming "music."

Like a cloud big with a May shower,
My soul weeps healing rain
On thee, thou withered flower;
It breathes mute music on thy sleep;
Its odor calms thy brain;
Its light within thy gloomy breast
Spreads like a second youth again.
Her healing powers have flowed from her soul to his, binding him to her: "By mine thy being is to its deep / Possessed." He has yielded completely to her power in order for his soul to be freed from pain. Shelley describes the soul's workings in the seven lines above through physical imagery and sensations, the only way the reader—someone not in a mesmeric trance and not exposed to its spiritual healing—can understand its soothing effects on his soul. The Magnetic Lady's restorative powers lie in the promise of spring: her healing soul is like a spring shower, like the odor of spring flowers, like the light of spring itself. The poet-patient is thus revived, into a second youth, a reincarnation of his former self. The rejuvenation which the West Wind is prayed to for by the poet, here is imagined as a universal revivifying power. Although the patient feels "Better—quite well," the mesmeric trance has its limitations; only death will bring about a permanent cure.

Like Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses mesmerism as a vehicle for healing or enriching powers. Unlike Shelley, however, he centers mostly on its spiritual benefits instead of its physical ones. As a well-read scholar, Coleridge was aware of animal magnetism. In "The Power of the Eye in Coleridge," Lane Cooper states that mesmerism was the vogue on the continent when
Coleridge was a youth. Numerous mesmerists, such as De Mainduc, toured England, specifically London and Bristol, and lectured for pay on the topic, some making a rather large profit. Cooper suggests that Coleridge, like any other youth of his day, was well aware of the controversy and phenomenon of mesmerism simply because of its popularity.

In 1818 Coleridge notes indeed that he had been a student of mesmerism. In a letter to the editor of *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* he outlined his opinion on the importance of the topic:

Dear Sir: Some time ago, I ventured to recommend an article on Animal Magnetism, purely historical, for the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana*. Since then the celebrated Professor Blumenbach, for so many years the zealous antagonist of Animal Magnetism, has openly recanted his opinion in three separate paragraphs of his great work on Physiology, which is a text-book in all the hospitals and Medical Universities in Europe; and this too happens to be in the edition from which Dr. Elliotson has recently translated the work into English. Cuvier had previously published his testimony, viz. that the facts were as undeniable as they were difficult to be explained on the present theory. The great names of Hufeland, Meckel, Reil, Autenrieth, Soemerring, Scarpa, etc., etc., appear as attesters of the facts, and their independence of the imagination
of the patients. To these must be added the reports delivered in the courts of Berlin and Vienna by the several committees appointed severally by the Prussian and Austrian governments, and composed of the most eminent physicians, anatomists, and naturalists of the Prussian and Austrian States. In this country, the rising opinion of our first-rate medical men is that the subject must sooner or later be submitted to a similar trial in this country, in order that so dangerous an implement (if it should prove to be a new physical agent akin to the galvanic electricity) may be taken out of the hands of the ignorant and designing, as hath already been done on the Continent by very severe laws. Putting the truth or falsehood of the theory wholly out of the question, still it is altogether unique, and such as no history of the present age dare omit. Nay, it may be truly said that it becomes more interesting, more important, on the supposition of its falsehood than of its truth, from the great number and wide dispersion of celebrated individuals of the highest rank in science, who have joined in attesting its truth; especially as the largest part of these great men were for a long time its open opponents, and all, with the single exception of Cuvier, its avowed disbelievers. Add to this that as an article of entertainment, and as throwing a new light on the oracles and mysteries of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian Paganism, it would not be easy to point out its rival. These are the grounds on which I rest my continued recommendation of such an article as well worthy the attention of the
conductors of your great work. One other motive will not be without its weight in your mind. I have some grounds for believing that a work of this kind is in contemplation by persons from whose hands it ought, if possible, to be rescued by anticipation, as it will, I know, be a main object with them to use the facts in order to undermine the divine character of the Gospel history, and the superhuman powers of its great founder; a scheme which can be rendered plausible only by misstatements, exaggeration, and the confounding of testimonies—those of fanatics and enthusiasts with the sober results of guarded experiment, given in by men of science and authority. 60

As is here shown, although Coleridge was fascinated by the remarkable phenomenon of mesmerism and its powers in society, he was nevertheless uncertain of its validity. Twelve years later he wrote, "My mind is in a state of philosophical doubt as to animal magnetism." 61 However, he cannot completely dismiss the issue, explaining his reluctance to discredit it in his marginalia in Robert Southey's Life of Wesley:

And among the Magnetizers and Attesters are to be found names of men, whose competence in

60 Lane Cooper, "The Power of the Eye in Coleridge," in his Late Harvest (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), pp. 72-76.

respect of integrity and incapability of intentional falsehood is fully equal to Wesley's, and their competence in respect of physio- and psycho-logical insight and attainments incomparably greater. Who would dream, indeed, of comparing Wesley with a Cuvier, Hufeland, Blumenbach, Eschenmeyer, Reil, &c.? Were I asked what I think, my answer would be, that the evidence enforces scepticism and a non liquet;--too strong and consentaneous for a candid mind to be satisfied of its falsehood, or its solvability on the supposition of imposture or casual coincidence; too fugacious and infixable to support any theory that supposes the always potential, and, under certain conditions and circumstances, occasionally active, existence of a correspondent faculty in the human soul. And nothing less than such an hypothesis would be adequate to the satisfactory explanation of the facts;--though that of a metastasis of specific functions of the nervous energy, taken in conjunction with extreme nervous excitement, plus some delusion, plus some illusion, plus some imposition, plus some chances and accidental coincidences, might determine the direction in which the scepticism vibrated. Nine years has the subject of zo magnetism been before me. I have traced it historically, collected a mass of documents in French, German, Italian, and the Latinists of the sixteenth century, have never neglected an opportunity of questioning eye-witnesses, e. g. Tieck, Treviranus, De Prati, Meyer, and others of literary or medical celebrity, and I remain where I was, and where the first perusal of
Klug's work had left me, without having advanced an inch backward or forward. Treviranus, the famous botanist's reply to me, when he was in London, is worth recording:—"Ich habe gesehen was (ich weiss das) ich nicht würde geglaubt haben auf Ihre Erzählung," & c. "I have seen what I am certain I would not have believed on your telling; and in all reason, therefore, I can neither expect nor wish that you should believe on mine." 62

That Coleridge wants to believe wholly in the phenomenon of mesmerism is clear; but his own encyclopedic learning inclines him to "philosophical doubt."

Walmsley, Mesmer's biographer, offers some explanation for Coleridge's suspicions. According to him, Coleridge had studied Carl Wolfart's book, Mesmerism or the System of Reciprocal Influences, and "showed scorn for Mesmer's theories . . . because he considered them too materialistic." 63 Coleridge decided that mesmerism's "most successful Professors have been men of weak judgement," 64 an idea later reinforced to him by Ludwig Tieck's impression of Wolfart as "lacking in mental and bodily vigor." 65

62 Coleridge, Table Talk, pp. 83-84, n. 2.
63 Walmsley, p. 176.
64 Quoted from Walmsley, p. 176.
65 Walmsley, p. 176.
Coleridge had also read Carl Alexander Kluge's *An Enquiry into Animal Magnetism*. In his marginalia to this study, Coleridge notes: "One human being can act on the body as well as the mind of others to produce a morbid state . . . the Instrument through which the Magnetizer operates, is the only mystery." This instrument he thought might be connected to a "warmth sense," and he made a distinction between electricity and animal magnetism, which many contemporaries thought were identical.

How fully Coleridge believed in mesmerism is questionable, then, but he did use its conventions—especially the trance—in his works. Lane Cooper believes that the motif of a "fixing" and a "sudden release" running throughout *Lyrical Ballads* alludes to characteristics of the mesmeric trance. He specifically cites the eye imagery in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as referring to Coleridge's larger theme of mesmeric power. According to Cooper, this repetition of mesmeric imagery is a serious fault in Coleridge's work because Cooper considers mesmerism "unimportant" and "trivial." But J. B. Beer disagrees with Cooper and points out that linking an

66 Quoted from Walmsley, p. 177.
67 Walmsley, p. 176.
68 Cooper, pp. 84, 95. My question to Lane Cooper is why would he spend thirty pages on such an "unimportant" and "trivial" topic?
element in Coleridge's works to one influence is dangerously narrowing the interpretation of them.\textsuperscript{69} This is a valid point. Coleridge blends many ideas together, and mesmerism to be sure is not the most prominent issue in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." As Coleridge explained in his letter to the editor of \textit{Encyclopedia Metropolitana}, mesmerism is part of a long history of the occult and cannot be separated entirely from it. Cooper's emphasis on the eye imagery needs a larger scope: Coleridge's fascination with the powers of the eye manifests itself in many ways—\textit{one} of which is mesmerism. Instead of rejecting the "repetition" of eye and mesmeric imagery, the reader should appreciate the variation—which mesmerism represents—on the theme of being spellbound.

The magnetic "emanation" from the eyes of the Ancient Mariner holds the Wedding Guest entranced. The following stanza, although excised later, gives obvious clues to the Mariner's power:

\begin{quote}
Listen, O listen, thou Wedding-guest!
"Marinere! thou hast thy will:
"For that, which comes out of thine eye,
doth make
"My body and soul to be still."\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{69} Beer, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{70} Quoted from Beer, p. 152.
\end{flushright}
Like Shelley, Coleridge uses some of the conventional trappings of mesmerism for inducing the trance. The Mariner first "holds him with his skinny hand,"\(^{71}\) thereby establishing the flow of the mesmeric fluid between the Wedding-Guest and himself. Although the Guest fears the Mariner's "skinny hand" and "glittering eye" (ll. 228-29)—both which can hold him physically and mesmerically—the Mariner succeeds in mesmerizing him and releases his physical hold: "Eftsoons his hand dropt he" (l. 12). Lane Cooper explains that although this line may mean that the Wedding-Guest at first takes hold of the Mariner's hand in order to free himself, and then desists as the spell begins to work, it may otherwise mean that the Mariner drops his hand, since now he can hold the Wedding-Guest by the power of the glittering eye.\(^{72}\)

The Wedding-Guest then falls deeply into a mesmeric trance, brought on by the Mariner:

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,


\(^{72}\) Cooper, p. 85n.
And listens like a three years' child:  
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone;  
He cannot choose but hear;  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
The bright-eyed Mariner (11. 13-20).

The Mariner and the Guest partake in a typical mesmerist-subject relationship. The Mariner is the authority figure, controlling the actions of the submissive Guest (who is like a "three years' child") through the hypnotic trance. Figuratively, the Guest listens attentively as one would listen curiously to such an eccentric storyteller. Literally, the Mariner "hath his will"; the Mariner has taken control of the Guest's voluntary power, making him listen to his tale.

Coleridge here uses the mesmeric trance as a literary device. It helps to create the frame of the poem as a narrative, mesmerizing the reader as well as the Guest, builds a sense of awe, mystery, and the occult around the Mariner which emphasizes the occult within his tale, and enables the Mariner to create a vivid picture of the tale itself, because the subject's attentiveness is sharpened and attuned to the mesmerist's thoughts while in the trance. By creating such a vivid story, the Mariner can relate the sins he committed and his "recovery" more effectively. In this sense he uses mesmerism to teach spiritual enrichment to the Guest. The Mariner presents his "moral"—to
respect life and love in order to prevent spiritual death—through his vivid imagery. The story leaves a strong impression on the Guest, who becomes a "sadder and a wiser man" (l. 624).

Using mesmerism to capture the Guest's attention is not unusual for the Mariner; he is merely tapping one of nature's forces, the mesmeric fluid. Maria Tatar explains Schelling's idea, which Coleridge seems to echo in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," that nature is a visible manifestation of spirit and that spirit is an invisible form of nature. So mesmerism, a natural force, becomes indirectly related to the "spirit," which suggests that the Mariner, who uses mesmerism, is attuned to both nature and spirit, a characteristic he was lacking when he shot the albatross. Regaining that characteristic, he now has the ability to draw on nature's powers, improving spiritual life for himself and the Guest.

Kaplan notes that the mesmerist possesses special powers of the eye, "the key organ of transmission of the

73 Tatar, pp. 71-72.

74 Kaplan believes Dickens has a similar view of nature and mesmerism: "the rejection of the mesmeric fluid, the force suffusing all things, even oneself . . . is a denial of oneself and others. It is the Dickens version of Coleridge's 'death-in-life'" (p. 169).
mesmeric fluid."75 Romantic writers therefore gave their mesmerists—and sometimes their subjects—special optical qualities used in different ways. The Mariner's eyes, we have noticed, are bright and glittering (ll. 3, 40), telling the reader of his special—even supernatural—powers while magnetic current flows from them.

On the other hand, Doris Falk in her essay on Poe believes the magnetist's special powers showed in the subject's eyes. She points out that many mesmerists believed the magnetic current flowing through the subject's body created a type of luminosity in him which could be seen in his eyes.76 In "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," the narrator describes Dr. Templeton's subject, Bedlow, whose eyes, in their "ordinary condition" were "totally vapid, filmy and dull as to convey the idea of the eyes of a vulture, or even of a long-interred corpse." In "moments of excitement," however (no doubt including mesmeric trances), "the orbs grew bright to a degree almost inconceivable; seeming to emit luminous rays, not of a reflected, but of an intrinsic lustre, as does a candle or the sun."77

75 Kaplan, p. 128.
77 Poe, p. 897.
This luminosity might be the result of an "animating fluid" in the body caused by the influence of animal magnetism as seen in both Poe's and Hoffmann's works. Bedloe's eyes seem to "spring to life" from mesmeric influence; and this power of animation seems to be Hoffmann's explanation of the nature of the mesmerist's special abilities. Hoffmann's idea of life-giving power leans toward the darker side. Whereas Shelley's Magnetic Lady and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner restore physical and spiritual health, Hoffmann's evil Coppelius brings "life" to a doll in order to ruin Nathanael.

In one of his many variations of eye imagery, Hoffmann allows Coppelius to give "life" to Olympia, the automaton, in several ways. "Coppola," in fact Coppelius in disguise, manufactures various forms of eyeglasses, a fitting profession for a mesmerist whose power depends upon his eyes. The spyglass which Nathanael buys from him animates Olympia when he looks through them. \(^7\) Also, Olympia's own eyes give her life; without them, she appears lifeless. Nathanael finally

\(^7\) Hoffmann, pp. 156–57. The creation of life in "The Sandman" has various meanings which will not be explored in this essay. For example, one could argue that Coppelius merely created the "appearance" of life in Olympia; like Coppelius' alchemical search for gold, his creation of life is also false and fruitless. However, Olympia's life is real enough for Nathanael and that phenomenon will be explored.
realizes that Olympia is merely an automaton when he clearly sees that "in the deathly pale waxen face of Olympia there were no eyes, but merely black holes. She was a lifeless doll."79 Even Nathanael's gruesome version of the childhood story of the Sandman, one of the motifs running throughout the story, threatens the loss of eyes:

He is a wicked man who comes to children when they refuse to go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes till they bleed and pop out of their heads. Then he throws the eyes into a sack and takes them to the half-moon as food for his children, who sit in a nest and have crooked beaks like owls with which they pick up the eyes of the human children who have been naughty.80

Coppelius (or Coppola) seems to be the grotesque, real-life version of the Sandman character. Parallels are that both are evil; both of their "professions" deal with the eyes, with the manipulation of sight and with sleep; and both have superhuman qualities, Coppelius being able to create "life." Hoffmann thus uses mesmerism as a force of black magic. Whereas Poe's narrator in "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case" utilized mesmerism's

79 Hoffmann, p. 163.
80 Hoffmann, p. 139.
life-giving power for sustaining life, Hoffmann's Coppélia actually created it.

Of all these writers, Poe seemed to be most interested in exploring and explaining the actual possibilities and capabilities of mesmerism. To give this "quasi" science a sound basis, he presents these explorations as a factual case study in "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case." In this narration mesmerism becomes a force so powerful that it can disrupt the natural processes of death and decay. The mesmerist, in this case the narrator "P.," keeps Valdemar, the fatally sick subject, from dying and thereby halts the decaying process through the mesmeric trance.

"Mesmeric Revelation" becomes another experiment into mesmerism. P. writes: ". . . man, by mere exercise of will, can so impress his fellow, as to cast him into an abnormal condition. . . ." 81 Valdemar's mesmerist decided with his permission to see how far this "abnormal condition" could be pushed. Valdemar, P. notes, was "a good subject for the mesmeric experiment" because "his temperament was markedly nervous." 82 However, P. had difficulty in completely mesmerizing Valdemar because, P. believes, "I always attributed my failure at these

81 Poe, p. 908.
82 Poe, p. 1065.
points to the disordered state of his health."\(^{83}\) Yet near the time of Valdemar's death, he falls into an "unusually perfect state of mesmeric trance," and P. can now control the movements of Valdemar's right arm which P. "had never perfectly succeeded [in doing] before."\(^{84}\) Valdemar is now held bound to life by P. through the trance. It is ironic to note that Mesmer's intended use of animal magnetism was to restore order and health to the body. However, P. cannot restore order to Valdemar's body; actually, the "disordered state of his health" had prevented P. from completely mesmerizing him. Instead of curing him, P. merely sustains life temporarily.

P. controls Valdemar's life, keeping him from dying for "nearly seven months."\(^{85}\) Valdemar can die only if he is released from the trance. The mesmeric sleep thus did not free him from death, but only postponed it. As P. arouses Valdemar from the almost seven month trance, the subject implores the mesmerist to release him from it so he can die: "'For God's sake!--quick!--quick!--put me to sleep—or, quick!—waken me!—quick!—I say to you that I am dead!'"\(^{86}\) Although the narrator believes

\(^{83}\) Poe, p. 1065.

\(^{84}\) Poe, p. 1068.

\(^{85}\) Poe, p. 1071.

\(^{86}\) Poe, p. 1071.
that the release of Valdemar from his trance will bring him back to life, Valdemar is instead freed from this horrific life-in-death state and succumbs willingly to death. P. has sustained life through the mesmeric trance, but has not prevented death.

Valdemar's own will plays an important role in determining his own death. He willingly submits to be mesmerized, thereby giving up his self-control to the mesmerist. But once partially out of the trance Valdemar can regain his own will; he is no longer totally under P.'s power and refuses to succumb to the trance again. Doris Falk points out that "For Poe [animal magnetism] is an amoral force operating within the mind and body, linking consciousness and 'physique,' animating both." She seems to believe that Valdemar's sustainment of life is a result of mesmerism's power to bind body and soul. While this appears to be true in "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case," Poe typically uses mesmerism as a means of freeing the mind from the body in order for the mind to explore the universe without the restrictions of the senses (as in "Mesmeric Revelation"). Doris Falk's belief that for Poe mesmerism "animates" is not truly applicable to Valdemar. P. has sustained life in his

87 Falk, p. 537.
subject—not created it. He has merely postponed death and decay.

After P. releases Valdemar from the trance, his body decays instantly:

... his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk—crumbled—absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed ... there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence.  

Perhaps Valdemar's decay would not have been so grisly if the narrator had mesmerized him earlier, before the process of dying began. When P. asked Valdemar if he could mesmerize the dying man, he "replied feebly, yet quite audibly, 'Yes, I wish to be mesmerized'—adding immediately afterwards, 'I fear you have deferred it too long.'" As the narrator induced the trance upon Valdemar, the doctors noted that the "patient was already in the death agony."  

Like the Struldbrugs of Gulliver's Travels who are trapped for eternity in their aged, decayed state, Valdemar is bound to the stabilizing mesmeric trance long after the debilitating process of death has begun. With the help of mesmerism, P. appears

88 Poe, p. 1072.
89 Poe, p. 1067.
to have prolonged life, as well as the process of death and decay. Whereas Coleridge and Shelley explored the healing, spiritual powers of mesmerism, Hoffmann and Poe focused more on its grotesque exploitations of life.
CHAPTER IV
Mesmerism's Death Force

Mesmerism's death force is more representative of Hoffmann's and Poe's works than of Coleridge's and Shelley's. This section will discuss specifically the German and American writers' use of its lethal powers. Hoffmann typically combines mesmerism's death force with its supernatural qualities and potential for evil.\(^9\) On the other hand, Poe generally removes the evil possibilities in mesmerism, but retains the destructive powers of its death force.

Hoffmann deals largely with the supernatural in his tales; his characters are often the puppets of larger, sometimes darker powers. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner had acknowledged the strength of these powers by describing his compulsion sporadically to narrate his tale:

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

\(^9\) For proof that Hoffmann was familiar with mesmerism, see Tatar, pp. 122-23.
Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns (ll. 578-85).

For Hoffmann mesmerism is a part of both the supernatural and mortal worlds. It is an indication of the existence of the supernatural and a mortal method of control by one person over another. In a sense, the mesmerist's control over his subject parallels the influence of the supernatural over mortals. In "The Sandman" both forms of control are intertwined in the same character. Nathanael realizes that he is under the power of a mortal—with supernatural qualities. The narrator notes that "Coppola had exercised a disastrous influence on his life."91 This influence, says the narrator, changed Nathanael's views about man's freedom to man's sense of enthrallment:

. . . he was always saying that any man, although imagining himself to be free, was in fact only the humble plaything of dark powers, which it was vain to resist. Man must humbly submit to whatever fate has in store for him. He went so far as to insist that it was foolish to believe that man's creative achievements in art or science resulted from the expression of free will; rather, he claimed that the inspiration requisite for creation

91 Hoffmann, p. 151.
comes not from within us but results from the influence of a higher external principle. 92

Man, thus, was a captive of dark, fateful powers.

In Poe's "Mesmeric Revelation," Vankirk would probably agree with Nathanael's ideas on inspiration. Only through the mesmeric trance, when the subject is connected to the vital force of the universe, can Vankirk be inspired; art comes from higher powers. However, Vankirk might disagree with Nathanael's belief that these powers are dark and manipulative. They seem positive, or at least neutral, and they allow man a glimpse of the infinite. Coleridge and Shelley also do not explore the excessive, evil manipulation which the mesmerist can exert over the subject.

In Hoffmann's "The Sandman," as far as the other characters are concerned, Coppélius' control of Nathanael seems to be only a figment of the youth's imagination. Klara, Nathanael's fiancée, attempts to steer him away from his dark musings, saying, "Be convinced that these strange figures are powerless; only your belief in their hostile influence can make them hostile in reality." 93 She warns him later that Coppélius "will exist and work on you only so long as you believe in him; it is only

92 Hoffmann, p. 151.
93 Hoffmann, p. 146.
your belief which gives him power." Nathanael disagrees with her and believes he is helplessly in Coppelia's power, a common belief for a subject towards his mesmerist.

Through Nathanael (and Klara), Hoffmann questions the source of the power which Coppelia has over him. Is the source something beyond mortal limitations—good or evil—or does it originate in man's will or imagination? The answer appears to vacillate to both sides. Coppelia appears to have caused Nathanael's great misfortune and finally his death; yet Nathanael is the only character affected by him. Klara, for example, later finds domestic happiness with another man, apparently forgetting her troubles with Nathanael. Even his father's death, which Nathanael thought Coppelia caused, can be explained by an unfortunate mishap through an alchemical explosion. Hoffmann does however use certain terms which suggest that Nathanael is helplessly in Coppelia's mesmeric control. When Nathanael sees Coppelia's eye-glasses, for instance, normal wares for an optician, he is irrationally "overcome by an insane horror," and when he looks through Coppelia's spyglass, he "involuntarily" focuses on Olympia.

94 Hoffmann, p. 151.
95 Hoffmann, p. 156.
Hoffmann's characters often have worthy goals, but their obsessions to obtain these goals narrow their worldly vision and are condemning. Nathanael, for example, becomes obsessed with the doll, Olympia, who represents a higher reality and poetical beauty to him. While her qualities might be ideal, his attraction to her is corrupting, damaging his social relationships, including those with Klara and his close friend Lothar, and indirectly causing his own death. Nathanael's father had the same fate: his obsession with alchemy brought about his death.

In Hoffmann's and Poe's tales, mesmerism sometimes becomes a means to satisfy obsessions. Nathanael, for example, is entranced by Olympia with the help of Coppelius' mesmerizing spyglass. While under his "spell," Nathanael's thoughts are focused only on Olympia. Poe's Dr. Templeton seems obsessed with the similarities between Bedloe and Oldeb and uses mesmerism to establish the necessary doctor-patient relationship between himself and Bedloe in order for the doctor to learn more about him and his past. With the indirect help of mesmerism, both of these obsessions result in death.

In "The Sandman" though Hoffmann does not use the term "mesmerism" specifically, he does make many allusions to it. Instead of practicing mesmerism exclusively, Coppelius is more like an evil magician with the powers
of mesmerism included in his "bag of tricks." Nathanael describes his childhood memories of Coppelius thus:

... but we children were most revolted by his huge, gnarled, hairy hands, and we would never eat anything they had touched. He had noticed this and took pleasure in touching, under some pretext or other, some piece of cake or delicious fruit which mother had slipped on our plates, so that, tears welling up in our eyes, we were unable to enjoy the tidbit intended for us because of the disgust and abhorrence we felt. He did the same thing on holidays when each of us received a glass of sweet wine from our father. He would pass his hand over it or would even raise the glass to his blue lips and laugh demoniacally, and we could only express our indignation by sobbing softly. 96

Here Coppelius' touch and hand passes allude to mesmerism and his use of it for destruction.

In another of Nathanael's childhood memories, he describes the first time he saw Coppelius working on alchemical experiments with his father: the child was "riveted to the spot, spellbound." 97 On a literal level, he is no doubt fascinated with the secret experiments; however, might he not also be paralyzed in a mesmeric

96 Hoffmann, p. 141.
97 Hoffmann, p. 141.
trance by the evil Coppelius? For after the two men discover him, the frightened child faints: "But everything around me went pitch black; a sudden convulsive pain flashed through my nerves and bones—I felt nothing more."98 This pain appears similar to the crisis which mesmerized subjects experienced while in the trance. Later, Nathanael compares this faint to the "sleep of death"; Coppelius seems to be able to cause both.99

Coppelius' eyes and occupations also seem to befit a mesmerist. His eyes "sparkle" and "flash" "piercingly."100 The occupation of his "incognito," Coppola, is optometry (as already mentioned), a perfect cover for an evil mesmerist. Then too, Coppola is also a barometer dealer, which lends a kind of parallel to mesmerism. Barometers, like mesmerists, share the same medium for their work: barometers measure pressure in the air, and mesmerists use the cosmic fluid which is transported through the atmosphere.

98 Hoffmann, p. 142.

99 Hoffmann, p. 142. The crisis was the moment in which the subject's illness reached its often very painful peak before the actual healing began. Perhaps another allusion to mesmerism is the personality change which occurs in Nathanael's father whenever Coppelius visits. Kaplan notes that the subject shows different personalities in a magnetic trance (p. 118). The father, for example, usually cheerful would become quiet and pensive (p. 138). Perhaps he is also under Coppelius' mesmeric influence.

100 Hoffmann, pp. 140, 155.
Coppelius' (or Coppola's) instruments seem to magnetize Nathanael. His spyglass, for example, appears to put Nathanael into a trance, as when his eyes fix upon Olympia: "Nathanael leaned on the window as if enchanted, staring steadily upon Olympia's divine beauty." It is difficult to determine whether the spyglass is the sole cause of Nathanael's trance because Olympia seems to bewitch him as well. When he hears her sing and play the piano he is "completely enchanted." A parallel also exists between Nathanael and Olympia. They both appear to be Coppelius' puppets. Nathanael describes his first glimpse of the doll as, "... her eyes seem fixed, I might almost say without vision. It seemed to me as if she were sleeping with her eyes open." The doll itself resembles a mesmerized subject.

Nathanael never completely breaks free from Coppelius'—and Olympia's—control. His only "lucid" moments occur, we are told, when he is "awakening":

But even in clear and sober moments, those, for example, which followed his awaking in

101 The idea that magnetized objects can help to mesmerize a person is a common belief. Cf. Mesmer's iron wands and baquets.
102 Hoffmann, pp. 156-57.
103 Hoffmann, p. 158.
104 Hoffmann, p. 148.
the morning, when Nathanael was conscious of Olympia's utter passivity and taciturnity, he merely said: "What are words? Mere words!" 105 Hoffmann uses the term "awake" to show the slipping grasp of Nathanael's trance. Unfortunately, Nathanael falls back into it. Later in the tale, after he had recovered from the "death" of Olympia and Coppelius had disappeared, Nathanael "awoke as from a deep and frightful dream." 106 The trance becomes suspended until Coppelius returns to the scene, once more mesmerizing Nathanael.

Coppelius' mesmeric power over Nathanael allows him to see certain properties which do not exist in reality. As Nathanael looks intently through the spyglass, the mechanical doll Olympia comes to "life": "her glances were inflamed with ever-increasing life." 107 The mesmerizing glass makes Nathanael see life (and love) where there is none, a "reversal" of the typical mesmeric vision of a truer, finer view. Coppelius' spyglass does not develop Nathanael's human faculty of sight (as an ordinary glass would), but rather blocks his normal mortal sensations and pulls him into a different, evil, supernatural world. Maria Tatar explains that animal magnetism

105 Hoffmann, p. 162.
106 Hoffmann, p. 165.
107 Hoffmann, p. 156.
can be a potentially "dangerous insturment" which can call forth "all the horrors of an alien spiritual world," into which the spyglass apparently leads him.

Not only does Nathanael believe Olympia is alive, he falls in love with her. He comes to believe that she represents a higher poetical realm. Hoffmann often deals with the fatal conflict of societal reality and the poetical world in his tales. Usually the true artist must forsake his niche in society in order to partake in this higher, poetical realm. Nathanael gives up his fiancée and friends in order to pursue Olympia and believes he has made the correct choice. However, Olympia does not truly represent the poetical world; Nathanael's inspiration has an evil source in Coppelius, who gave her a false life and him a false love with the help of mesmerism. He follows thus an illusion.

The false love between Nathanael and Olympia jeopardizes the real love between Nathanael, Klara, and Lothar. Nathanael's obsession with Olympia causes a rift between Klara and himself and harsh words from Lothar. The situation leads to a duel. Just before the fight actually begins, they realize they realize the gravity of the situation and stop, exchanging apologies. Then,

108 Tatar, p. 130.
we learn, "Nathanael felt as if a heavy burden which had weighed him to the ground had been lifted, as if by resisting the dark powers that had gripped him he had saved his whole being from the threat of utter ruin."  

Then Nathanael's love for Klara reawakens. Coppelius' and Olympia's deadly influence has been temporarily lifted.

Nathanael's "love" of Olympia perhaps also suggests self-love, a common theme of corruption and self-destruction in German Romantic literature. In his obsession with her, he feels she agrees with his thoughts because she replies only "Ah" whenever he speaks to her. He also fancies that she loves his writings because she listens to them "reverently" and "sighs" as he reads them aloud. This blind love for Olympia helps to ruin Nathanael.

Besides Olympia and the magnetized spyglass, Coppelius also uses Nathanael's fear and awe of him to bring the youth to his death. Often the subject's fear and awe of the mesmerist help to establish a stronger bond and deeper trance, giving the mesmerist more power over the subject. Coppelius seems to realize his advantage. Nathanael notes that Coppelius had taken great delight

110 Hoffmann, p. 154.

111 Hoffmann, pp. 159–62. The reason for her "Ahs" and sighs is probably the noise of the mechanical whirrings in her.
in scaring him as a youth.\textsuperscript{112} Also, Nathanael's confusion of him with the Sandman gives a frightening, powerful, mystical, and evil aura to Coppelius. Nathanael's mother would tell him and his siblings, "The Sandman is coming, I can already hear him," in order to send them to bed before Coppelius would arrive for his evening visits.\textsuperscript{113} Eventually Nathanael identified the Sandman and Coppelius as one person. His mother attempted to explain to him that "The Sandman is coming" is merely a phrase which "means that you are sleepy and can't keep your eyes open any longer, as though someone had sprinkled sand in them."\textsuperscript{114} But he could not separate the two, who joined in his childhood imagination as: a harmless harbinger of sleep; an evil fictional man who preys on children; and his father's acquaintance who is responsible for taking him away from his children and later for his death. In this sense, Nathanael's fear of the Sandman, who brings sleep, parallels his fear of Coppelius, who brings death. This childhood fear of Coppelius extends into Nathanael's adulthood. Whenever he sees or is reminded of the optician, he becomes hysterical, a panic that helps to end Nathanael's life. For when he looks

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\textsuperscript{112} Hoffmann, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{113} Hoffmann, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{114} Hoffmann, p. 138.
\end{flushleft}
through Coppelius' spyglass in the tower, he slips again into hysteria, tries to kill Klara, and then commits suicide.

Nathanael's panic shows that Coppelius' control was still powerful. Nathanael's jump to his death was thus probably Coppelius' last mesmeric command to him. In the market place with the rest of the crowd, Coppelius had said of the raving Nathanael in the tower, "Ha, ha! Just wait; he'll come down on his own." Then he looked up to see Nathanael, upon which: "Nathanael suddenly froze, leaned forward, caught sight of Coppelius, and with a shattering scream of 'Ah, nice-a eyes, nice-a eyes!" jumped over the railing." Coppelius' eyes and mesmeric command compel Nathanael to his death. A mesmerized subject must perform tasks which the magnetist requests; scholars have noted that "Such a request would indeed be a command."

Coppelius was not the only mesmerist to have such control over his subject. Dr. Templeton, in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," exerts strong control over his subject, Bedloe, who experiences the same sensations simultaneously as his mesmerist, a feat which occurred

115 Hoffmann, p. 167.
116 Hoffmann, p. 167.
117 Kaplan, p. 166.
often in general mesmeric experiments. In this tale, a tragedy similar to Nathanael's death occurs because of the mesmerist's strong control. Dr. Templeton unwittingly makes Bedloe reenact the events of the Indian insurrection and places a posthypnotic "death wish" in him. Sidney Lind has suggested that metempsychosis took place between the bodies of Oldeb and Bedloe, which explains their peculiar similarities. But evidence in the story suggests that Bedloe was rather an unplanned victim of the power of mesmerism. For example, he was in a trance-like state when he participated in the reenactment of the insurrection. His movements were for the most part involuntary, suggesting a mesmeric trance in which the mesmerist has control over the subject's body.

Could Dr. Templeton restrain this mesmeric power? Kaplan remarks that early English mesmerists believed that they could conduct mesmeric fluid, but they could hardly control it, sometimes thereby creating a dangerous situation. Templeton cannot control mesmerism's power or does not know the extent of its influence. Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy, a mesmerist popular in the first half of the nineteenth-century, notes that "Great mental energy, sustained concentration of the will

118 Kaplan, p. 166.
119 Kaplan, pp. 165-66.
of magnetic phenomena, is necessary to control its influence." Writing down the events of the uprising, Templeton used enough "great mental energy" to bring about mesmerism's influence yet perhaps not enough to control it. Since Templeton identified Bedloe so closely with Oldeb, the doctor's thoughts on Oldeb and the insurrection were strong enough to hypnotize Bedloe.

The narrator of the story states that a mesmeric "rapport" existed between Templeton and Bedloe; he was an ideal subject for mesmerism: "sensitive, excitable, enthusiastic" and his imagination was "singularly vigorous and creative." Although the narrator declares, "I am not prepared to assert, however, that this rapport extended beyond the limits of the simple sleep-producing power," he does admit that "this power itself had attained great intensity." But the narrator himself cannot be trusted as omniscient; like Templeton, he does not know the limits of mesmeric power, and only intimates its strength. The reader can rely on other clues in the tale which suggest the strong rapport between Templeton and Bedloe. The doctor, for example, can hypnotize Bedloe without the latter's knowledge:

120 Quoted from Kaplan, p. 199.
121 Poe, p. 898.
122 Poe, p. 898.
Only at the twelfth attempt at hypnotism was the triumph complete. After this the will of the patient succumbed rapidly to that of the physician, so that, when I first became acquainted with the two, sleep was brought about almost instantaneously, by the mere volition of the operator, even when the invalid was unaware of his presence.123

The easy induction of mesmeric sleep results from an extremely strong rapport. Since Templeton's control over Bedloe was so powerful, it is plausible that Bedloe could be hypnotized unknowingly over a great distance.

Other features of strong mesmeric rapport are the projection of thoughts from the mesmerist to the subject and the subject's ability to transcend time and space. These characteristics of mesmerism suggest that Templeton, while writing down the events of the insurrection, had simultaneously hypnotized Bedloe even though he was beyond sight and, through the process of thought transference, made him "leave" the Ragged Mountains to reenact the events the doctor was transcribing. As the Ancient Mariner's tale "comes to life" vividly for the Guest, Templeton's memories of the insurrection of Cheyte Sing become real for Bedloe. Chauncy Hare Townshend, an early

123 Poe, p. 898. The idea of mesmerizing an unsuspecting subject from a distance is not unusual in mesmeric experiments. Kaplan gives such examples, one of which concerns Dickens (pp. 83-84).
nineteenth-century mesmerist and one of Poe's sources, has listed examples of shared sensations and clairvoyance between the mesmerist and the magnetized subject.124 Bedloe's experience in the Ragged Mountains might be another example.

Bedloe appears to be compelled to reenact the events which had eventually caused Oldeb's death, making them real for Bedloe. He explains:

Very suddenly, and by some inconceivable impulse, I became intensely imbued with personal interest in what was going on. I seemed to feel that I had an important part to play, without exactly understanding what it was. . . .

And now a new and altogether objectless impulse took possession of my soul. I spoke a few hurried but energetic words to my companions, and, having succeeded in gaining over a few of them to my purpose, made a frantic sally from the kiosk.125

Bedloe's emotions also are beyond his control, as he relates: "Against the crowd which environed me, however, I experienced a deep sentiment of animosity."126 He fights against people who are unknown to him. These

125 Poe, pp. 901-02.
126 Poe, pp. 901-02.
compulsions and involuntary feelings seem stronger than Bedloe's wishes. He appears powerless, a puppet in their grasp, which is a typical feeling for a mesmerized subject.

Bedloe's incident suggests that psychic powers exist which are greater than mortals' conception—or control of them. After hearing Bedloe's "dream," Templeton declares: "... the soul of man to-day is upon the verge of some stupendous psychical discoveries." 127 Probably Templeton—and Poe—are alluding to one of those recent exciting discoveries, mesmerism. Templeton's lack of control of these psychic powers causes Bedloe's death. He contracts "a slight cold and fever... attended with great determination of blood to the head" from his trip to the Ragged Mountains. 128 His treatment by Templeton, we are told,

resorted to topical bleeding. Leeches were applied to the temples. In a fearfully brief period the patient died, when it appeared that, in the jar containing the leeches, had been introduced, by accident, one of the venomous vermicular sanguisues which are now and then found in the neighboring ponds. This creature fastened itself upon a small artery in the right temple. Its close resemblance to the medicinal leech caused the mistake to be

127 Poe, p. 903.
128 Poe, p. 904.
overlooked until too late. 129

As in reenacting the insurrection, Bedloe must act out a death resembling Oldeb's. Oldeb was killed by a poisonous arrow which resembled a long black creeping serpent, the same characteristics of a sangsue.

Still, Bedloe's death is puzzling. Would not an apparently skillful doctor recognize the difference between a leech and a poisonous sangsue? This confusion seems to point to a power greater than human control.

It appears that Bedloe must completely reenact the entire Indian insurrection—all of Templeton's mesmeric "commands"—including Oldeb's death. Neither Bedloe, nor Templeton seem to be able to control their actions. Perhaps Templeton is so caught up with the physical similarities, the mesmeric experiments, and the insurrection, that subconsciously he places the snakelike sangsue, resembling Oldeb's poisonous arrow, on Bedloe's forehead. Lind suggests that the resemblances of the leech and the arrow are coincidental. 130 But Bedloe's death is so unusual that it suggests something beyond coincidence. Knowing the appearance of the sangsue, Templeton perhaps uses it (subconsciously) to complete the last detail of Bedloe's mesmeric "dream."

129 Poe, p. 904.
130 Lind, p. 1085.
Unfortunately, Bedloe's life is beyond his—or the doctor's—control.

Critics of Poe's tales have other explanations for the similarities between Bedloe and Oldeb. Doris Falk believes that Bedloe is actually Oldeb; through mesmerism's power of suspended animation, Templeton has kept Oldeb alive after his supposed "death." The friendship between the doctor and Oldeb, Falk insists, encouraged the flow of magnetism with Bedloe. However, this view disregards the fact that Templeton met Bedloe some time after Oldeb's death. Too, the narrator remarks that Templeton had a difficult time establishing a sound mesmeric rapport with Bedloe.

Sidney Lind has a different explanation for the unusual occurrences in the tale. He insists that Templeton believed Bedloe's reenactment of the Indian insurrection was a result of metempsychosis which occurred between Oldeb and Bedloe. The main reason Templeton befriended Bedloe, the doctor says, is because of the startling resemblance between him and Oldeb. However, earlier in the story the narrator remarks that Bedloe's looks changed because of his neuralgic attacks, observing:

131 Falk, p. 543.
132 Poe, p. 897.
133 Lind, pp. 1084-85.
It seemed to be [Bedloe's] design rather to insinuate than directly to assert that, physically, he had not always been what he was—that a long series of neuralgic attacks had reduced him from a condition of more than usual personal beauty, to that which I saw.\textsuperscript{134}

The narrator believes that Bedloe, after the attacks had physically changed him, now resembles Oldeb's picture. Did Bedloe actually look like Oldeb before the attacks changed him; or did Templeton merely imagine that Bedloe resembled his deceased friend? Perhaps through the mesmeric trances (assisted by the neuralgic attacks), Templeton "transformed" Bedloe's physiognomy, through a series of facial contortions, into resembling Oldeb's appearance. This suggestion is not improbable, for in mesmeric trances the mesmerist can control the body of the subject if he wishes. The resemblance then of Bedloe and Oldeb might not be coincidental at all, as Lind believes it is,\textsuperscript{135} but a deliberate although perhaps subconscious attempt by Templeton to "re-create" his deceased friend.

In sum, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" has a tragic ending. The same force which helps Bedloe through his neuralgic attacks also destroys him; mesmerism has the

\textsuperscript{134} Poe, p. 897.

\textsuperscript{135} Lind, p. 1085.
potential for being constructive or destructive. Still, the tale is not as deliberately evil as "The Sandman," in which the mesmerist purposely sets out to ruin his victim. In the end, the obsessions of the two characters (Nathanael with Olympia and Templeton with the similarity between Oldeb and Badloe) end in death, in tragedy.

Clearly then, the negative nature of the death force in mesmerism attracted Hoffmann and Poe to very different purposes and ends. Hoffmann exploits the deliberate destruction the mesmerist knowingly causes while Poe centers on the unfortunate, accidental use of its lethal aspects (though also combining them with the purposeful usage of mesmerism's curative powers) in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains." The mysterious possibilities of the trance including its potential for evil is the literary motive in both.

The positive aspect of mesmerism's death force may be seen in Poe's narrator-mesmerist in "Mesmeric Revelation," and Shelley's poet-patient. Poe seems to be attracted to mesmerism in part because its trance resembles death. Many other writers dealing with mesmerism compare the trance to sleep, but Poe, through his narrator "P.,” specifically enumerates the trance's deathlike qualities in "Mesmeric Revelation." P. writes:
... man ... can so impress his fellow, as to cast him into an abnormal condition, whose phenomena resemble very closely those of death, or at least resemble them more nearly than they do the phenomena of any other normal condition within our cognizance. ... 

Such states of death and mesmeric sleep resemble each other so closely that the narrator-mesmerist is not certain in which state Van Kirk is, as P. tells us:

As the sleep-waker pronounced these latter words, in a feeble tone, I observed upon his countenance a singular expression, which somewhat alarmed me, and induced me to awake him at once. No sooner had I done this, than, with a bright smile irradiating all his features, he fell back upon his pillow and expired. I noticed that in less than a minute afterward his corpse had all the stern rigidity of stone. His brow was of the coldness of ice. Thus, ordinarily, should it have appeared, only after long pressure from Azrael's hand. Had the sleep-waker, indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows? 

136 Poe, p. 908. It is ironic that Poe, over sixty years after the mesmerism movement had started, compared Mesmer's healing trance, thought by many to cure all ailments, to death.

137 Poe, p. 916.
Vankirk gives the reader a clue why the deathlike state of a trance is so "desirable." While he is mesmerized, P. asks him to explain his statement, "the mesmeric state very nearly resembles death." Vankirk replies:

When I say that it resembles death, I mean that it resembles the ultimate life; for the senses of my rudimental life are in abeyance, and I perceive external things directly, without organs, through a medium which I shall employ in the ultimate, unorganized life.\footnote{\textsuperscript{138}}

Doris Falk suggests that Poe's use of animal magnetism to "suspend animation" is "a minor consideration, almost an afterthought."\footnote{\textsuperscript{139}} But, in fact, Poe uses animal magnetism in a crucial way as a positive substitute for death. "Mesmeric Revelation" appears to be a reversal of "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case." Whereas the latter tale reveals the horror and the life-in-death powers of mesmerism, "Mesmeric Revelation" relates the trance to death in a positive way, showing that through the trance one can acquire the peace and spiritual knowledge of the afterlife, which heretofore could only be reached through death.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{138}} Poe, p. 914.
\footnote{\textsuperscript{139}} Falk, p. 543.
Writing earlier than Poe, Shelley has a similar interest in mesmerism's deathlike trance in "The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient." While in the trance Shelley's poet-patient diagnoses his disease (a typical mesmeric ability), realizing that what would cure him would kill him. The idea of death, a deep peace, a sleep of forgetting, is attractive to him: "And as I must on earth abide / Awhile, yet tempt me not to break / My chain." Mesmerism gives the subject this glimpse of peace, and hence cure for his ailment. The only permanent form of this cure would be death itself, a drastic step which the patient is not yet prepared to take, however attractive it may be. In this aspect mesmerism holds the same type of fascination for Shelley as it does for Poe, as a mysterious spiritual state of being.
CHAPTER V

Mesmerism and Knowledge of the Supernatural

Some Romantic writers, including Shelley and Poe, accepted mesmerism as evidence of the existence of a spiritual realm. The trance’s peculiar characteristics provided a fertile ground for the debate of materialism and spiritualism, body and soul. An early nineteenth-century magnetist, Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy asserted:

And if anyone should ask what is the moral tendency of the doctrine of animal magnetism, I should answer, that it obviously tends to establish the spiritual ascendancy of man over . . . material conditions . . . and affords a precursory evidence of a future state of being, which belief in itself cannot fail to suggest those principles of self-government and moral conduct which alone can promote the real welfare and happiness of society.140

Another contemporary mesmerist, Jung-Stilling stated a similar view of mesmerism: “light, electric, magnetic, galvanic matter, and other, appear to be all one and the

140 Quoted from Kaplan, p. 20.
same body. This light or ether, is the element which connects body and soul, and the spiritual and material world together. Kaplan explains further, also quoting Jung-Stilling:

In the battle against anti-Christian materialism and against Christian naturalists, magnetism was a potent weapon that "undeniably proves that we have an inward man, a soul, which is constituted of the divine spark, the immortal spirit, possessing reason and will, and of a luminous body, which is inseparable from it." As if providing a rationale for a sophisticated ghost story, Jung-Stilling imagined that animal magnetism could enable an individual "in the present life" to "detach his soul" from his body, obliterating the restrictions of time and space, and make contact with "the world of spirits." The ghost story, then, for Jung-Stilling, was not only metaphor but context, an attempt to weave together the new science and the old religion on the assumptions that were always implicit in Christian supernaturalism.

Mesmerism, then, according to Jung-Stilling, not only proves that the soul exists but also allows the living subject to separate the soul from the body.

141 Quoted from Kaplan, p. 17.
142 Kaplan, p. 17.
Poe's Valdemar, Vankirk, and Bedloe exemplify Jung-Stilling's theories. In "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case," animal magnetism appears to be the only connection between the subject's body and soul, thereby sustaining his life. In "Mesmeric Revelation," mesmerism allows Vankirk's soul—or at least his mind—to detach itself from his body to meld with the universe. Bedloe, in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," transcends the restrictions of time and space during his mysterious "dream" in the mountains.

Shelley seems to have thought that mesmerism proved the existence of the soul because the trance distinguished the soul from the body, allowing thus a positive identification of one's spiritual nature. Thomas Medwin suggests that Shelley deducted the immortality of the soul from his first encounter with mesmerism. Medwin writes:

Shelley had never previously heard of Mesmerism, and I shewed him a treatise I composed, embodying most of the facts recorded by its adepts, and he was particularly struck by a passage in Tacitus, no credulous historian, who seriously related two cases (witnessed he says by many living) in Egypt, that might stagger the most sceptical. "Does it lead to materialism or immaterialism?" Shelley thought to the latter—"that a separation from the mind and body took place—the one being most active and the other an inert mass of matter." He deduced from this phenomenon an additional
argument for the immortality of the soul, of which no man was more fully persuaded.\textsuperscript{143}

Elsewhere, Shelley also seems to relate mesmerism to the supernatural. Neville Rogers points out in \textit{Shelley at Work} the poet's comparison of Christian miracles and mesmerism:

They may have been produced by a peculiar agency of supernatural intelligences, analogous to what we read of animal magnetism and demons good bad or indifferent who from caprice or motives inconceivable to us may have chosen to sport with the astonishment of mortals.\textsuperscript{144}

Poe's Vankirk seems to be a converted skeptic. In "Mesmeric Revelation," Vankirk states that originally he did not believe in immortality; however, as a subject of mesmerism his experiments now prove otherwise, for he recalls,

\[\ldots\] I only half felt, and never intellectually believed. But latterly there has been a certain

\textsuperscript{143} Medwin, p. 270. Richard Holmes, however, argues that Medwin manipulates Shelley's words to prove that Shelley believed in a divine spirit and contends: "\ldots the belief in an immaterial 'soul,' like the immaterial 'ghost,' did not seem to Shelley to have anything to do with the existence of a Deity" (p. 527). In Medwin's quote, however, Shelley does not seem to correlate mesmerism with the existence of a deity.

\textsuperscript{144} Rogers, p. 67.
deepening of the feeling, until it has come so nearly to resemble the acquiescence of reason, that I find it difficult to distinguish between the two. I am enabled, too, plainly to trace this effect to the mesmeric influence. I cannot better explain my meaning than by the hypothesis that the mesmeric exaltation enables me to perceive a train of convincing ratiocination—a train which, in my abnormal existence, convinces, but which, in full accordance with the mesmeric phenomena, does not extend, except through its effect, into my normal condition. In sleep-waking, the reasoning and its conclusion—the cause and its effect—are present together. In my natural state, the cause vanishing, the effect only, and perhaps only partially, remains. 145

Here, mesmerism brings a higher logic and rationalization in man to find answers to spiritual dilemmas because abstractions, Vankirk believes, cannot convince the soul or intellect (only the will) about spiritual matters; the ordinary method of philosophy is too narrow. For example, it sees qualities merely as objects. 146 Like Shelley, then, Vankirk uses mesmerism to prove the actual existence of the soul and the supernatural and as a method to investigate its qualities.

145 Poe, p. 910.
146 Poe, pp. 909-910.
Poe's narrators especially call upon mesmerism, though it was strictly introduced as a medical science, to delve into supernatural mysteries which science cannot solve. The trance becomes a means for inspiration for the artist or author, connecting him to the vital force of the universe. Kaplan explains thus the possibilities of mesmerism:

... the mesmerists promised that the mind had special powers which, if properly stimulated, could put the individual in touch with his past, his present, and his future. ... Through mesmerism the mind indeed could know its own powers.\textsuperscript{147}

Many mesmerists believed that the mesmerized patients had certain knowledge which they were not aware of while in a normal state of consciousness. This knowledge ranged from diagnosing patients to predicting the time of their deaths, even when these hypnotized subjects had no prior experience in medicine. Poe extends the knowledge of medicine to the knowledge of spiritual matters. All of Poe's mesmerized subjects are incapacitated by an illness—two even to the point of death. However, the mesmerists' main purpose for inducing mesmeric trances in these subjects is not for reasons of health. Health may be a factor, but the real desire is

\textsuperscript{147} Kaplan, pp. 144-45.
to explore the subjects' mind or the supernatural realm. The narrator thus in "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case" notes the "unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence. The glassy roll of the eye was exchanged for that expression of uneasy inward examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-waking, and which it is quite impossible to mistake." 148 Valdemar's physical movements parallel the inward workings of his mind.

According to Vankirk in "Mesmeric Revelation," mesmerism offers the individual many benefits. Besides being a type of anesthetia (though not necessarily a cure), it stimulates the mind into a heightened awareness—most importantly, of spiritual issues. This heightened awareness is not available to Vankirk or others through normal consciousness. Chauncy Hare Townshend suggests that the universal mesmeric fluid and the heightened sensibility of the mesmerized subject allows him to perceive objects of which the unmesmerized are not aware. Mesmerism also enables the subject to reach his inner consciousness. Different from drug-induced sleep, which dulls both body and mind, mesmeric sleep permits the mind to remain sharp. 149

148 Poe, pp. 1067–68.

149 Townshend, pp. 211, 274.
Poe deliberately calls the mesmerized subject "sleep-waker," instead of the usual term "sleep-walker" or somnambulist. Lind notes that Poe took the term from Townshend, who substituted that word for "somnambulist" because "sleep-waker" better described the mesmerized subject. Poe uses this oxymoron to show the degree of consciousness of the subject in a mesmeric trance; for it is through sleep that the subject is actually "awakened" into a higher level of awareness and insight into himself, an experience of immortality or the supernatural. Vankirk reminds the narrator-mesmerist: "You have often observed the profound self-cognizance evinced by the sleep-waker—the extensive knowledge he displays upon all points relating to the mesmeric condition itself. . . ." The narrator-mesmerist P. has noted the remarkable state of the magnetized subject:

. . . while in this [magnetized state], the person so impressed employs only with effort, and then feebly, the external organs of sense, yet perceives, with keenly refined perception, and through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs; that, moreover, his intellectual faculties are wonderfully exalted and invigorated. . . .

150 Lind, p. 1089.
151 Poe, p. 910.
152 Poe, p. 908.
Townshend himself tested this idea of the mesmerized subject's perceptions. One of his subjects, Antoine Ranieri, notes that in a trance the nervous system acquires all of the energy which the muscular system appears to have lost. In explaining why perceptions can be intensified through mesmeric sleep, Townshend says that in a trance the outer senses are restricted, but the few sensations that do remain are intensified; and while mesmerized, the subject's mind can act independently of the external organs of sense. An example might be Beethoven composing music while deaf. But the subject's perceptions are not miraculous because the mesmeric fluid is universal:

When once we see clearly . . . the communication between all portions of the universe is continuous and incapable of interruption—that there is a pervading medium filling all things, permeating all—the extended sphere of mesmeric faculties appears no longer miraculous.153

Under the trance the subject can experience knowledge beyond human ken; yet still must deal with the limitations of a mortal vocabulary when explaining this knowledge. Kaplan has suggested that "In sleep-waking the subject loses most verbal inhibitions, producing a flow of language that in effect seems to create a new

153 Townshend, pp. 231, 250, 272, 387.
personality for the speaker, quite different from his waking personality." To some extent, this appears true. However, in "Mesmeric Revelation," Vankirk's vocabulary is still inhibited. His trance does allow his mind or soul to escape the limitations of his body and to acknowledge the existence of God; yet he has difficulty in describing the experience to the mesmerist because the descriptions of God and immortality are beyond the limit of restrictive mortal diction.

Vankirk not only has difficulty with appropriate words but also with the logical order of his statements. He does not organize his argument; P. does. It is the prodding of P.'s questions that gives Vankirk's philosophical "lecture" its framework. Not thinking through human logic while mesmerized, Vankirk does not need a superficial order imposed upon his ideas in order to understand them; his revelations are immediate. On the other hand, P.'s merely mortal thought processes must form Vankirk's statements into a recognizable pattern in order for him to grasp their meaning.

154 Kaplan, p. 150.

155 One of the main topics of Doris Falk's essay is the idea of animal magnetism as an organizing force. I tend to disagree with her—although perhaps I do not understand the usage of her term. She comments, for example, on the "organized" argument which Vankirk presents to P. (p. 544).
The trance lifts other human limitations from the mind besides the senses and patterns of thought. While mesmerized the subject can transcend the limits of his body. Poe's magnetized subjects Vankirk and Valdemar "travel" beyond their corporeal confines to the spiritual realm. While mesmerized, Vankirk realizes the nature of God and life, an experience directly inaccessible to the mesmerist P.\textsuperscript{156} In "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case," Valdemar's soul or mind appears to leave his body during his death while still in the mesmeric trance. He speaks to P. and the others surrounding his deathbed. The narrator describes his "voice":

\begin{quote}
... no similar sounds have ever jarred upon the ear of humanity. There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then, and still think, might fairly be stated as characteristic of the intonation—as well adapted to convey some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears—at least mine—from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth. In the second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.\textsuperscript{157}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{156} Poe, pp. 910-16.

\textsuperscript{157} Poe, p. 1070.
Valdemar's unusual voice suggests he is not speaking through the ordinary human channel of speech.

Both Vankirk and Valdemar have special abilities while mesmerized. Their minds or souls have access to knowledge which ordinary, unmesmerized mortals do not have. The narrator-mesmerists, in both tales "P.," realize the potential of their subjects' abilities and use them and animal magnetism to seek out for themselves knowledge of the supernatural (in "Mesmeric Revelation") and the afterlife (in "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case"). Valdemar's mesmerist, for example, believes that it is necessary for one to attempt to magnetize another at the point of death apparently only for the purpose of knowledge. P. explains:

... in the series of experiments [in mesmerism] made hitherto, there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission:—no person had as yet been mesmerized in articulo mortis [on the brink of death]. It remained to be seen, first, whether, in such condition, there existed in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence; secondly, whether, if any existed, it was impaired or increased by the condition; thirdly, to what extent, or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process.158

158 Poe, pp. 1064-65.
P. then magnetized the terminally ill Valdemar in order to experiment with the trance and death.

The trance's mysterious connection to supernatural knowledge is explained, in part, by the tenets of early mesmerists. Doris Falk, noting an important but often forgotten concept of the cosmic fluid, asserts that "Mesmer and his followers had used the term 'animal magnetism' to indicate an autonomous physical force pervading both the animate and inanimate worlds, accounting for the mesmerists' therapeutic powers..." 159 Although Poe placed less emphasis on the healing powers of mesmerism provided by the fluid, he did center on the universal knowledge gained through the trance. The cosmic or universal fluid perhaps can explain Vankirk's revelation. When the subject is mesmerized, his mind or soul is freed from his corporeal limitations and is in touch with the cosmic fluid which pervades the universe. 160 The mesmerized subject then can "perceive external things directly, without organs, through a medium which shall employ in the ultimate, unorganized life." 161 Townshend was convinced that mesmeric revelations always show truth because the coloring of human judgement through

159 Falk, p. 536.
160 Perhaps this idea accounts for Valdemar's voice coming from a "vast distance," somewhere in the universe.
161 Poe, p. 914.
the senses or organs is eliminated.162

Above all, then, mesmerism was attractive to Romantic writers because it seemed to appeal to a "higher" form of consciousness than the subject, in wakefulness, was aware of. It could put human consciousness in touch with the spirit which "rolls through all things." The resulting heightened awareness thus enabled the mesmerized subject to look beyond the "veil," to see the supernatural, into the very "life of things." The mesmeric fluid that had been a physically healing tool used by doctors was thus changed by some of the Romantic writers into an access to spiritual power and healing.

The mesmeric trance also reveals special knowledge ranging from the reason for suffering on earth163 to the identity of the individual. Poe's narrator-mesmerist P. magnetizes Vankirk in order to discover whether one's individuality exists after death. The magnetized Vankirk asserts that the human soul does not merely return to God but exists as a separate entity.164 Vankirk's revelation of such mysteries of the universe does not seem unusual when one reads a similar occurrence between a mesmerist and sleep-waker (and perhaps the very source for Poe's

162 Townshend, pp. 273-74.
163 Poe, p. 916.
"Mesmeric Revelation") in Townshend's Facts in Mesmerism:

Can the soul ever die?
Certainly not. It is the soul which is the only true existence, and which gives existence to all we apprehend.
Whence came the soul?
From God, who by his thoughts created the universe.
Is there a future punishment for evil-doers?
Undoubtedly, a great one.
In what will it consist?
In seeing themselves as they are, and God as he is. 165

Mesmerism, like death in "Mesmeric Revelation," answers all of the mortal questions except one: "the nature of the volition, or motion, of God, that is to say, the motion of the unparticled matter." 166 Of this deliberate exclusion one might suggest that such knowledge seems to be the only element separating God from man. Perhaps Vankirk sees that this distinction is necessary for the definitions of God and man. But more important is the idea that only death or mesmerism will reveal the other workings of the universe. 167 P. and Vankirk use

165 Quoted from Buranelli, p. 222. For Poe's other influences, see Buranelli, p. 224.
166 Poe, p. 914.
167 See Poe, p. 914.
mesmerism as a kind of Faustian search for the type of knowledge which heretofore only death had revealed.

The acquisition of such knowledge, however, seems to relate tragically more to death than to mesmerism. After explaining universal workings to P., Vankirk expires. His death suggests that no living mortal can possess this knowledge; death is the cost for such wisdom. Although P., still alive, has heard Vankirk's discourse, it is doubtful that he completely comprehends it because his thinking is limited to the human senses and thought processes whereas Vankirk's mind has been freed by mesmerism—and death.

Like Poe, Hoffmann does explore the inspiration which the magnetized subject feels. Maria Tatar has suggested that, in Hoffmann's tales, the mesmeric trances, like poetical inspiration, block normal vision and instead open up the "inner eye." In "The Sandman," however, the vision of the mesmerized subject Nathanael is not completely blocked; he can still "see"—especially what the mesmerist Coppelius wants him to, as in the false vision of life in the doll Olympia. Nathanael's inner eye is never totally developed to the point of true artistic inspiration. "The Sandman" is a tale which depicts the evil of mesmerism.

168 Tatar, p. 149.
In the tale "Don Juan," Hoffmann shows both sides of mesmerism: the evil manipulation of the mesmerist and, as in Poe's works, the poetic inspiration of the trance. A traveller, the narrator (also a musical composer) is staying at a hotel in which the opera Don Juan is being performed. He attends the performance, describing it as it progresses, and during the intermission, Donna Anna appears magically in his loge (although others said she lay unconscious in her dressing room throughout the entire intermission). They converse about poetical inspiration, the beauty of music and Don Juan. The narrator feels as if Donna Anna has opened up an entire new world to him. She then leaves him and finishes her role on stage, and dies the following morning. "Don Juan" appears to be more of a tribute to Mozart's opera, to explicate its beauty and sophistication, instead of a demonstration of the powers of mesmerism; still, the tale does essentially show Hoffmann's often vacillating views of animal magnetism. 169

Don Juan depicts the evil, manipulative side of mesmerism. With "piercing eyes," he appears to have "mastered the magic art of the rattlesnake, [so] that he is capable of exercising such secret power over women

that one look suffices to enslave and destroy them."\textsuperscript{170} Don Juan uses his "art" of mesmerism to control and manipulate "the human puppets who surround him,"\textsuperscript{171} eventually leading them to their destruction. His conquests are as trapped in his power as he seems to be in his own doomed destiny.

But Hoffmann also shows in "Don Juan" mesmerism's power to uplift the soul into a poetical, supernaturally artistic realm. Donna Anna mesmerizes the narrator in order to heighten his awareness to allow him to appreciate fully the opera. She appears in his loge and magnetizes him with her enchanting eyes, thus: "Donna Anna . . . was standing behind me, her expressive, unhappy eyes fixed upon me in a piercing stare. I stared back at her, struck dumb."\textsuperscript{172} After her visit, the narrator's appreciation and understanding of the opera are intensified, as he notes, ". . . for the first time the inner workings of the masterpiece were exposed to me and I was permitted to witness and examine the fantastic phenomena of a strange world."\textsuperscript{173} For the narrator the mesmeric trance became an access to the sublime, artistic realm.

\textsuperscript{170} Hoffmann, "Don Juan," p. 430.

\textsuperscript{171} Hoffmann, "Don Juan," p. 431.

\textsuperscript{172} Hoffmann, "Don Juan," p. 432.

\textsuperscript{173} Hoffmann, "Don Juan," p. 433.
first act had delighted me, but after this remarkable adventure [with Donna Anna] the music affected me in the most extraordinary way. It was as though a long-promised fulfillment of the most unearthly dreams were now actually being realized. As does Poe, Hoffmann here uses the mesmeric trance as a means for artistic inspiration and knowledge.

The movement of mesmerism, I hope I have shown in part, is indeed a richly varied one. Beginning first as a product of medical science, it broadened its functions and appeal so as to support and complement Romantic ideas on nature, the supernatural, the imagination, and man rejuvenated. The mesmeric trance especially provided Romantic writers with numerous possibilities for ideas and images of good and evil. With its potential to be either life-giving or deadly, the mysteriousness of this power and its source led such Romantics as Coleridge, Hoffmann, Shelley, and Poe to link it to the spiritual and supernatural realms. While Coleridge and Shelley used mesmerism as a means of rejuvenation and evidence of the spiritual, Poe employed the trance to probe the secrets of the supernatural. On the other hand, Hoffmann exploited the evil manipulation a mortal mesmerist can exert over his subject, a kind of early prototype of

174 Hoffmann, "Don Juan," p. 433.
Svengali or Dracula. The diversity of its appeal, and its adaptability to literary use, made mesmerism an enduring Romantic theme. Attractive to the early Dickens, the mesmeric movement merged eventually into the great vogue of spiritualism of the last half of the nineteenth-century.
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