Preamble

Animal magnetism – a farce?

> Amateur theatricals are all very well in private places. Charles, and John, and Frederick, are then 'at home', and have none but their friends to look on at their odd performances, which of course, though they laugh at, it is all 'in confidence'.[1]

On a chill November evening in 1848, a select audience gathered in the Banqueting Hall of Knebworth House, the Hertfordshire home of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, to witness a charitable performance of Elizabeth Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism: A Farce in Three Acts*. The play was arranged and produced by the popular author Charles Dickens. Among the actors – all amateurs – were Dickens himself, who took the role of the Doctor, jealous guardian to a young girl amorously pursued by John Leech, the *Punch* caricaturist, in the guise of the Marquis de Lancy. These two male leads were supported by Dickens's illustrator, George Cruikshank, who acted the part of Jeffrey, the Doctor's comic manservant; and by Mark Lemon – founding editor of *Punch* and a contributor to both the *Illustrated London News* and Dickens's *Household Words* – who played La Fluer, valet to the Marquis de Lancy. The other roles, including those of the Doctor's ward, her maid and various gallants, were taken by associates of the fashionable author and his host.[2]

Though undoubtedly graced by a celebrity cast of literati well experienced in amateur dramatics, this lively comedy of disguise, deception and sexual intrigue, enacted by a handful of players in a single interior set, seems at first sight hardly a topical drama for the mid-nineteenth century. Having been

first produced in 1788 at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in the presence of its author, *Animal Magnetism* was neither a new nor even a recent play.[3] In context, it appears curious that a gala evening such as this – arranged to raise donations for the endowment of a Curatorship of Shakespeare's House in Stratford-upon-Avon – failed to attract an original drama by Dickens, or even a revival of Bulwer-Lytton's popular 1840 drawing-room comedy, *Money*. Indeed, *Animal Magnetism* appears to have been sufficiently ephemeral so as not to receive so much as a bare acknowledgement in John Forster's recollection of the evening in the once-authoritative *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872). The only title on the programme explicitly recalled by Forster in his biography of the author is that of *Every Man in His Humour*, apparently the main entertainment of the evening, and an appropriate enough choice given that Shakespeare himself had acted in Ben Jonson's comedy in 1598.[4]

An eighteenth-century farce such as *Animal Magnetism* may thus appear an odd choice for an evening dedicated to a sixteenth-century dramatist and presented by a group of men associated with the depiction, in word and image, of thoroughly nineteenth-century issues. Its presence on the programme might well have been motivated simply by the need to maintain the jovial atmosphere of the evening by deploying a work that required few props and no changes of scene. Low comedy such as farce draws upon the atemporality of ridiculous situations, interpersonal confusion and – frequently – bawdy or suggestive dialogue, rather than the precise detail of historical or contextual knowledge. Even acknowledging this, however, *Animal Magnetism* cannot be regarded as a play in any way exceptional among the English comedies of the late eighteenth century. Falling from public favour in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it was not regularly revived in the Victorian era in the way that other comedies, such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) or *The School for Scandal* (1777), were. Dickens alone seems to have judged *Animal Magnetism* worthy of repeated production, prefiguring its presentation at Knebworth with a charitable performance at the Haymarket Theatre, London, in 1848 and a number of provincial engagements in the same year.[5]

Animal Magnetism was also repeated at Knebworth in 1850, with Augustus Leopold Egg – the painter of detailed and morally symbolic works such as the triptych *Past and Present* – replacing Cruikshank in the role of Jeffrey.[6] In 1857 Dickens revived the play again, albeit with a Spanish rather than French setting, in a production that cast the novelist Wilkie Collins in the role of one of the two menservants.[7] On that occasion, *Animal Magnetism* was played in association with Collins's own melodrama of trance and

telepathy, *The Frozen Deep* – a production in which Dickens, Lemon and Egg also acted.[8] An amateur production always, in these few revivals, *Animal Magnetism* appears to be an odd but consistent recurrence in Dickens's amateur-dramatic repertoire, a work that presumably holds a personal interest for its director or producer that may not necessarily be readily evident to an audience, however indulgent.

There is a sense, however, in which Inchbald's eighteenth-century farce *might* be regarded as a work not unduly anachronistic for consideration by a mid-nineteenth century audience. The specific plot device through which the play's sexual duplicities are enacted is grounded in an intellectual and medical doctrine popular in the 1780s, the animal magnetism of the title. An eighteenth-century precursor to the many medical disciplines and practices which were, by 1848, laying competing claims to the increasingly respectable title of hypnotism, the theoretical dogma of animal magnetism was controversial even at the time of the play's conception.[9] Though the medical efficacy of animal magnetism – that is, the diagnostic, curative and clairvoyant theory initially popularised by the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer – had been institutionally dismissed by successive enquiries under authorities as diverse as the French monarchical and revolutionary governments and the British Medical Association, the controversy that was associated with both its claims and the activity of its practitioners persisted well into a nineteenth century arguably as rich in disputable pseudosciences as it was in scientifically credible advances. If Mesmer's original conception of animal magnetism, with its vision of an intangible, universal and manipulable fluid, was largely discredited and clinically discarded by 1848, the common language through which animal magnetism was both conveyed and disputed retained a residual power that unavoidably shaped the reception of subsequent practices such as hypnotism. Animal magnetism, or mesmerism as it was often called, was arguably an unavoidable linguistic – and thus conceptual – correlative of *any* form of later trance-based curative, anaesthetic or diagnostic practice, whatever its formal appellation. As the hypnotist J. Milne Bramwell noted, in a book published long after the magnetic theory had been discredited, 'the influence of Mesmer continued to be widely felt: numerous observers in different countries produced phenomena resembling those he had shown, and explained them in much the same way'.[10] The controversy that surrounded animal magnetism, likewise, was apt to attach itself to its successors, however much they diverged intellectually from the fluid-based dogma of the eighteenth-century physician.

To recall animal magnetism within the drama or fiction of the nineteenth century was thus to invoke by implication a rich cultural tapestry in which the specificities of multiple professional practices vied for attention with the vagueness of popular imagery, where the controversies of the 1780s freely interchanged with those of the succeeding century, and where the sincere practitioner was at times congruent with the charlatan in a linguistic field that consistently deployed the same imagery for both. In short, during the nineteenth century the dogmas of animal magnetism, however loosely understood, persisted not merely as a memory of the past but also in a contextual relation to contemporary representations of both clinical professionalism and medical charlatanry. Indeed, because the assumptions and terminology of animal magnetism remained associated with later theories of the mind and body, Inchbald's play was perhaps potentially more farcical in 1848 than it had been even sixty years earlier, at the height of its novelty.

For Dickens, though, there may have been a yet more personal context which motivated his abiding interest in Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* and its presentation of eighteenth-century mesmerism. Dickens himself claimed a facility in magnetic practice. This much is evidenced by a letter sent by him to John Forster whilst the author was on holiday at Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight in 1849. John Leech, Dickens's co-player at Knebworth some ten months earlier, had become 'very ill with congestion of the brain' having 'been knocked over by a bad blow by a great wave on the forehead'. Though Leech had been 'very heavily bled', presumably by a local surgeon or apothecary, he had apparently become 'seriously worse' in Dickens's opinion.[11] Thus, as Dickens recalls:

> I proposed to Mrs Leech, to try magnetism. Accordingly in the middle of the night I fell to; and, after a very fatiguing bout of it, put him to sleep for an hour and thirty-five minutes. A change came on in the sleep, and he is decidedly better. I talked to the astounded little Mrs Leech across him, when he was asleep, as if he had been a truss of hay … What do you think of my setting up in the magnetic line with a large brass plate? 'Terms, twenty-five guineas per nap.[12]

Dickens's light-hearted conclusion only partially masks his apparent conviction that *this* act of mesmerism at least had provided not merely a type of temporary anaesthetic relief to the 'alarming state of restlessness' hitherto suffered by his unfortunate friend but also an improvement in his condition upon waking.[13] Though no specific detail is advanced as to what specific technique the author had utilised in order to induce the patient's

trance, it is clear that some prolonged or 'fatiguing' effort was involved on the part of the amateur magnetist.

If the account rendered in Dickens's private letter is to be believed, therefore, this was no self-conscious administration of a placebo to a gullible and tired friend, and no deliberate fraud enacted against the 'astounded' witness. Apparently, also, Dickens's mesmeric intervention was an act which embodied no egotistical bravado beyond an ironic suggestion that a successful author might exchange his celebrated literary practice for an uncertain medical one. To all intents and purposes, if Dickens's account is taken at face value, the author's actions in that private space upon that September evening were sincere, altruistic and, withal, successful. Their recollection in both letter and biography, however, differs diametrically from the markedly less than favourable presentation of mesmerism embodied in the script of Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism*. Dickens's likely involvement in the selection and production of that specific play on more than one occasion thus again seems rather curious. It may well be that the play was proposed each time as being nothing more than a lively distraction, but it still seems unlikely that a writer so familiar with the power of ridicule would have embraced so consistently a farce directly relevant to a practice for which he appears to have entertained nothing other than sincere and inquisitive regard.

The choice seems even odder, given Dickens's friendship with Dr John Elliotson, Professor of Medicine at London University and Senior Physician to the North London Hospital. As well as being something of a medical consultant to literary celebrities – he enjoyed the professional patronage not only of Dickens but of William Thackeray and Wilkie Collins also – Elliotson was apparently a charitable figure as favourable to his poorer clients at the hospital as to wealthier visitors attending his Conduit Street consulting rooms.[14] Elliotson's alleged identity with the unnamed Physician of *Little Dorrit* (1856–7), who 'went, like the rain, among the just and unjust, doing all he could' cannot be conclusively proved, though his association with Thackeray's Dr Goodenough in *The History of Pendennis* (1848) appears to be long accepted.[15] Forster's assessment of Elliotson as one 'whose name was for nearly thirty years a synonym with us all for unwearied, self-sacrificing, beneficent service to everyone in need' is indicative at least of one side of the doctor's public reputation.[16]

Dickens and Elliotson had become involved in a charitable publication in 1844, and had also travelled together in the countryside near Geneva in 1846.[17] The author had dined with the Professor on the occasion of

the latter's resignation from the faculty of University College, a move prompted by institutional unease regarding Elliotson's public experiments with mesmerised patients.[18] This dining invitation, which Dickens recalled in a letter to George Cruikshank, is especially significant in context.[19] Dickens, according to Forster, had 'always sympathised … with Dr Elliotson's mesmeric investigations', and with Cruikshank – another participant in the Knebworth amateur theatricals – had twice attended demonstrations of magnetic practice at the North London Hospital.[20] These mesmeric experiments, though, were to be the focus of the other – less desirable – component of Elliotson's public reputation, that of a physician who, if not actually a quack himself, was the dupe of both fraudster practitioners and wily patients who exploited the contemporary vogue for spectacular public displays of mesmeric practice. Dickens, it must be stressed, maintained his friendship with Elliotson during and after the controversy that saw the Professor not merely estranged from the faculty of University College Hospital (as the North London Hospital had by then become) but the subject of disparaging editorial comment in *The Lancet* and other professional publications on the occasion of his delivering the annual Harveian Oration in 1846.[21]

There is, undeniably, a sense in which *Animal Magnetism* may be said to satirise the often spectacular behaviour exhibited by both eighteenth-century magnetists and their mesmerised patients. But the medical practitioners depicted in Inchbald's script – and no doubt the individual interpretations actually acted by Dickens and Leech during the production of the play – do *not* resemble qualified Victorian physicians, such as Elliotson, who deployed magnetism in the ostensibly clinical context of the hospital or the consulting room. The professional status of Inchbald's Doctor, indeed, is questionable. The Doctor's first appearance upon the stage is characterised by his indignation at having been censured by a presiding medical faculty who 'have refused to grant me a diploma – forbid me to practice as a physician, and all because I don't know a parcel of insignificant words'.[22] It is clear, indeed, from Inchbald's script, that the Doctor is as inept in conventional therapeutics as he is in the obviously false magnetism later taught to him by the equally ignorant valet, La Fluer. The Doctor admits that though 'a dozen or two of my patients have died under my hands' yet 'I have this morning nine visits to make'.[23] Lisette, his ward, replies, with obvious irony:

> Very true, Sir, a young ward has sent for you to attend his guardian

> – three nephews have sent for you to attend their uncles, very rich men – and five husbands have sent for you in great haste to attend their wives.[24]

The real focus of *Animal Magnetism*, arguably, is thus not mesmerism itself but rather the gullibility of those who regard it from a position of ignorance. These figures – typified by Inchbald's incompetent Doctor – are apt to apprehend magnetism as a panacea not so much for human illness in general as for their own misfortune specifically, whether this latter be financial impecuniosity or a lack of success in amorous adventures. This is most certainly the case in *Animal Magnetism*.

Such individuals amongst the uneducated public are ready prey for the quack mesmerist who may promise unlikely but desired benefits through the exercise of his alleged art. However, quack mesmerists are also – because of their strident claims to proficiency within magnetic science – the only available external study resource for those experimentally engaged in the development of mesmerism as a curative rather than simply profitable activity. The sincere metropolitan medical researcher may thus easily be equated with the quack lecturer upon a provincial platform merely because his presence has at some stage been observed at such a performance – often, ironically, by *another* medical practitioner equally curious about, but less convinced by, the claims of animal magnetism.[25] Elliotson may well have been deceived by the manipulations of some of his working-class magnetic subjects, as the medical press frequently insisted following University College Hospital's institutional rejection of his public mesmeric experiments in 1838.[26] As Dickens no doubt would have asserted, though, the gentlemanly and charitable doctor would have been far less easily swayed by the claims of those who practised mesmerism for strictly pecuniary motives.[27]

Itinerant and quack mesmerists, operating outside of the formal control of the various colleges and bodies which regulated British medicine as a profession, were certainly still in evidence in the mid-nineteenth century. These practitioners consistently attracted the disdain of the medical press, as much for their presumption to professionalism as for the often grotesque details presented as emblematic of their actual practice. A letter to the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal* dated 16 February 1843 is representative of many similar dismissals. The writer intimates, with some evident irony regarding the social origins of his subjects:

> I lately attended a lecture upon animal magnetism given by *two*

> *gentlemen*, one of whom had been apprentice to a carpenter, and the other had formally gained, as I am informed, an honest livelihood as a marker in a billiard-room. In the present instance ignorance and impudence went hand in hand to the amusement of most of the audience, who now talk of the evening with some little shame, as if they had been witnessing the jugglery of some miserable country fair.[28]

If the writer's closing sentence is implicitly scathing with regard to the taste here exhibited by 'the good folks of Kent', he is more pointedly insistent that 'similar scenes have been patronised by such a man as Dr Elliotson'.[29] The statement, of course, begs the implicit question as to whether Elliotson himself might have been conscious of 'some little shame' when reflecting upon whether his own presence had added a veneer of gravitas to a performance – and a doctrine – here deemed ridiculous by a lay audience as well as an educated clinical observer.

Dickens could thus produce *Animal Magnetism* with no likelihood of offending his medical friend simply because the play could not be readily interpreted as a satire either upon Elliotson or his magnetic experiments. Elliotson's ability in *conventional* therapeutics was never questioned by the professional bodies with which he was associated, and, though his non-mesmeric practice was often innovative and controversial – he pioneered, for example, the use of the stethoscope and the deployment of quinine – it remained grounded in the physiological medicine practised by his contemporaries.[30] Again, in Inchbald's play the celebrated Dr Mystery – an oblique portrayal of Mesmer – does not actually appear, his role being usurped by the opportunist La Fluer. La Fluer, it might be added, is not a lower-class pretender to medical professionalism but a mere tool in a romantic adventure, and one whose knowledge of mesmerism is demonstrably as superficial as that of the incompetent Doctor he deceives.[31] Produced in a Victorian context, Inchbald's play is a comedy of ironic ignorance, truly a farce, and certainly not an immediate satire on either nineteenth-century revisions of Mesmer's doctrine or its best-known practitioner in contemporary England. The focus of the farce, in 1848 at least, would appear to be the gullibility of the layman rather than the malpractice of the professional.

Given Dickens's taste for the grotesque and his central role in the drama, the production raises the further question, indeed, as to how much the dignified, frock-coated lecturer Elliotson could be made to resemble not

merely the sham practitioner La Fluer but also the theatrical figure of Franz Anton Mesmer. This latter, according to an 1851 account by the physician Herbert Mayo, was wont to 'slowly and mysteriously' circulate amongst his patients 'affecting one by a touch, another by a look, a third by passes with his hand, a fourth by pointing with a rod'.[32] Such fripperies are not easily associated – at least in the indulgence that often colours obituary retrospect – with a gentleman who on his decease was described as one of the 'oldest and most distinguished members' of the medical profession.[33]

In its revivals in London, at Knebworth, and across the English provinces, *Animal Magnetism* – an eighteenth-century text – and animal magnetism – an eighteenth-century doctrine – are crucially ensheathed in a network of nineteenth-century contexts. This network embraces discourses pertinent to the expression of historical and contemporary magnetic practice. It recalls popular and clinical appreciations of the perceived validity and effectiveness of the practice during two adjacent periods in the history of magnetism, and it embodies also the intensity of formal and informal debate between sincere believer and sceptical derider. Exemplified in Dickens's individual dramaturgy, this imbrication of the language of the former century with the consciousness of the latter is arguably typical of the British experience of animal magnetism and its conceptual descendents.

Unlike its French counterpart, British interest in animal magnetism is predominantly a nineteenth- rather than an eighteenth-century phenomenon. Certainly, it has long been held that the Viennese doctor's arrival in Paris was keenly anticipated. One nineteenth-century account intimates that Mesmer 'reached Paris in the month of February, 1778, whither the fame of his miracles had gone before him, and where many persons were expecting him with impatience'.[34] Derek Forrest, writing 170 years later makes much the same point when he argues that

> Mesmer's reputation … had preceded him to Paris. Traveller's tales and newspaper accounts of remarkable cures led to a general expectation that Parisians were soon to benefit from this mysterious therapy.[35]

Once established in fashionable Parisian society, Mesmer and his practice became the subject of both idle gossip and serious debate in drawing rooms and salons, and were discussed extensively across the pages of articles, pamphlets and books.[36] No such intensity of either interest or polemic was evident upon on the other side of the English Channel, however. Robin

Waterfield, in *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (2002), intimates that 'magnetism was known in Britain before the nineteenth century, but it seems to have aroused little interest'.[37] Forrest argues further, however, that prior to the 1837 visit by the Baron Dupotet – the so-called 'Fourth Pope of Animal Magnetism' and a nominal follower of Mesmer who had practised at the Parisian Hôtel Dieu – 'Britain had remained largely unaffected by the French mesmeric furore'.[38]

The latter judgement appears somewhat hasty, if not harsh. Certainly, articles and announcements in the eighteenth-century British press evidence an awareness of Continental mesmerism, as Waterfield suggests in passing.[39] Popular newspapers acknowledged the existence of French and Belgian societies premised upon 'the tenets of Mesmer', even where they denounced as 'impostors' the oath-bound 'adepts' who 'pretend to a knowledge of all the profound mysteries of magnetism'.[40] A translated edition of the French Royal Commission's report on Mesmer's practice was likewise advertised to anyone who cared to consult its negative conclusions regarding the efficacy (and indeed existence) of animal magnetism as theorised by Mesmer, though – as Forrest intimates – the opinions of Benjamin Franklin and his learned associates may well have 'received little notice' in Britain at the time.[41]

Possibly more significant, though, are the few newspaper references which acknowledge the presence of a fledgling magnetic industry on British shores. Indeed, English-language instruction in mesmerism was actually available in London in the year in which Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* was first produced, though the 'New System of the World' promulgated at Golden Square appears to be intimate to an alternative induction by the 'College for Instructing Pupils in Mesmer's Philosophy of Animal Magnetism', based at Hatton Garden, Holborn.[42] The Reverend J. Bell, named in association with both conclaves, is intimated as being a member of Mesmer's 'Philosophical Harmonic Society at Paris', and may well be the translator or author of the advertised 'first Number of the New System of the World, in the English and French languages, price 2s, 6d.'.[43] Bell claimed to be 'the only person authorised by the Society to Teach and Practise Magnetism in England'.[44] If this latter assertion suggests that Bell possibly feared the commercial rivalry of other practitioners not authorised by the Parisian school in which he had been instructed, those not committed to magnetism were less convinced as to the place mesmerism actually occupied in British culture at the time. Horace Walpole, for example, suggested that 'Animal Magnetism

has not yet made much impression here' in 1784, only four years prior to Bell's advertisements.[45] Robin Waterfield is probably also correct in suggesting that the French Revolution was to seriously inhibit the further dissemination of Continental magnetic literature within Britain.[46]

What is clear, therefore, is that magnetism as a theory was known in late eighteenth-century Britain, and that its reputation in France may have been, for a limited number of wealthy initiates, supplemented by actual observation or practical experience upon English shores. *Detailed* knowledge of what might actually happen at a British magnetic séance, however, was less readily available to those unwilling or unable to pay the (usually unspecified) fees associated with instruction: as one advertisement tellingly noted, 'Any Lady or Gentleman of respectability that wish to be instructed in any of these classes of science, may know the terms of teaching, &c., by sending or applying'.[47] The stress on 'respectability' here is almost certainly significant. Magnetism in its eighteenth-century British incarnation would appear to have been at times marketed through the appeal that an association with 'The foreign Princes and Ladies, who are members of this science, that are now in England' might bring to the parvenu.[48] '[T]he initiating of students' by such colleges was arguably as much a matter of induction into an allegedly prestigious social circle as it was to a hermetic science.[49] For these reasons, magnetism was not a mass movement within any British social class or intellectual profession, and did not enjoy the immense periodical presence which mesmerism had achieved in Paris. British magnetism at the eighteenth-century *fin de siècle* was almost certainly more than the very slight presence envisaged by both Forrest and Waterfield, but it was still at best a shadowy reflection of the popular interest it had become in France.

The obscure nature of British magnetism has, however, shaped the manner in which historians of hypnotism have regarded the relationship between the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth-century heyday of British magnetic practice. Rather than acknowledging in detail the evidence that *is* there – the advertisements for expensive inductions and arcane publications, the invitations to public lectures and private demonstrations, and the indignant dismissal of such things by an often Francophobe British press – historians of hypnotism have characteristically dwelled upon the Parisian experience before proclaiming the genesis (usually in the 1840s) of a seemingly unprecedented 'Mesmeric Mania' or 'Mesmeric Campaign' in Elliotson's London.[50] In such surveys, it is as if the fifty years between 1788 and 1838 (the year of Elliotson's departure from

University College Hospital) had exhibited no distinct trace of mesmerism in the British popular and clinical consciousnesses, no published writing by which both the residual and the innovative might be said to engage with each other over the territory of animal magnetism. Instead of this rich field of distinctively British practice and interpretation, the reader of historical studies of hypnotism is all too often presented with a rather artificial linearity, an intellectual and epistemological process that links Mesmer and his Continental associates with Elliotson and his British contemporaries as if eighteenth-century dogma was absorbed in the original French by all concerned. Elliotson's successors and contemporaries – most notably James Esdaile and James Braid – are rhetorically distanced in such accounts from the earlier debate, so that the many conceptual descendants of magnetism – practices and theoretical disciplines with names as diverse as odylism, somnambulism, lucid sleep, Braidism, human hibernation, trance, phreno-magnetism, phrenohypnotism and, of course, hypnotism – gain a semblance of distinction, a suggestion of discrete conceptual boundaries that may not have been so distinct and concrete to their practitioners.

This demarcation is further enforced by a characteristic dependence upon a somewhat narrow – even selective – body of evidence that favours the debate as enacted in mainstream clinical journals such as *The Lancet* and *British Medical Journal* rather than that associated with the popular and non-specialist publications which disseminated it beyond the medical profession. Such accounts may lack the experimental apparatus associated with the assertion of credible clinical proofs and refutations, but they are a reflection of what animal magnetism and its successors actually *meant* to the vast majority of interested observers. Accessible to the non-specialist as they were, popular writings such as these were to significantly shape the opinions of non-clinical commentators and writers of fiction. Again, they may well have also informed the broader leisure-time reading of those with a clinician's grasp of the debate upon animal magnetism. Distanced to a greater or lesser extent from the personal polemic and contemporaneity of clinical debate, such writings arguably contributed to the retention of earlier magnetic ideas and phraseology in the nineteenth-century popular consciousness, and demonstrably perpetuated both well into the high Victorian era and its *fin-de-siècle* coda.

Literary critics have in recent years readily responded to the fact that the vast majority of English-language fictional portrayals of magnetic or hypnotic phenomena were produced in the nineteenth – rather than the eighteenth – century. These critics appear, laudably, to accept the common ground

and the shared language that lie between the pseudoscience of mesmerism and the aspiring science of hypnotism.[51] Historians of hypnotism, however, have been less inclined to consider the perplexing possibility that the hypnotic practice of the nineteenth century does not entirely depart from the magnetism of the eighteenth, and that the languages and characteristic gestures of both are sufficiently congruent to tincture any new development with the colour of a rediscovery. As one popular medical guide opined as late as 1901, 'The oldest hieroglyphics indicate that the production of mesmeric phenomena was known to the ancient Egyptians long before any book was written'.[52] So, too, was mesmerism known to those – practitioner and layman alike – who nominally perceived its ostensible successor, hypnotism. Novelty is thus always underpinned by a degree of familiarity, resemblance suggests relationship, and meaning is never absolutely fixed into a temporality associated with the time of publication. Inevitably, in the rhetoric both of fiction and of medicine, curative hypnotism may seemingly always exchange places freely with stagy mesmerism, and the charlatan exchange his showy garments – however temporarily – for the sober mantle of the clinician.

That Devil's Trick is not a 'history' of magnetism and hypnotism in the tradition of scholarly but accessible works such as Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (1998), Derek Forrest's *Hypnotism: A History* (2000) or Waterfield's *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (2004). Though it acknowledges the mutability of magnetic and hypnotic practice, and the apparent chronological transition between the dominance of the fluid theory of Mesmer and that of the more conventional physiological practice of Braid and his successors, the central conceit of *That Devil's Trick* is one of co-existence and retention rather than evolution and succession. Because of the conventional mode of history that structures hypnotism as a successor to (but not necessarily a conceptual descendant of) mesmerism, the terms 'magnetism' and 'hypnotism' cannot satisfactorily be used interchangeably.[53] However, in *That Devil's Trick*, the former is regarded as being unavoidably integral to the latter, constituting a correlative at some times, a corrective at others. In this respect, *That Devil's Trick* goes somewhat against the grain of those twentieth-century works that declaim a disciplinary separation through which magnetism is envisaged as a mere pseudoscience and hypnotism a pioneering form of proto-psychology. The boundaries thus established between the two are at best questionable and at worst misleading. Indeed, the possibility that magnetism – or even

the evocatively named mesmerism – were still actively promulgated and practised at the end of the nineteenth century is not disprovable. There is no discrete age of animal magnetism, no unequivocal era of hypnotism, no *absolute* separation between the two that can be satisfactorily enforced through either chronological or conceptual criteria. This is *not* to say that magnetism and hypnotism are essentially the same thing. There *are* perceptible differences of technique and epistemology, but these differences are persistently challenged in both medical and popular culture because the similarities between the two practices are capable of being so consistently recalled.

That Devil's Trick differs further from conventional histories through its contention that popular accounts of magnetic and hypnotic practice constitute a comparable form of evidence to those derived from clinical publications. The latter have a restricted (that is, a predominantly professional) audience, and thus a necessarily limited influence. The former are not merely more widely disseminated as mass media but also represent a telling index of how magnetism and hypnotism appear in the non-clinical gaze. The retention of clinically outmoded techniques and apparently disproven theories in such popular accounts may perpetuate the magnetic past in the popular mind, thus questioning further the assertions of authoritative clinical statements. *That Devil's Trick* is not a simple history of hypnotic practice, therefore, but rather a study of how the nineteenth-century popular mind – the public rather than clinical mind – envisaged, elided and expressed both magnetism and hypnotism. Alison Winter is without doubt the pioneer in the acknowledgement of more popular sources in charting the demarcation of the endurance of mesmeric practice across the nineteenth century: *That Devil's Trick*, in many respects, supplements and addresses the script of *Mesmerized* through access to a considerably more dense body of detail derived from the most widely disseminated publications in the British metropolitan and provincial press.

The fluid nature of that popular mind, of course, may also be discerned in generically fictional as well as specifically journalistic depictions of both mesmeric practice and magnetic epistemology. These fictional accounts are, like their journalistic counterparts, characteristically free from the professional discipline imposed elsewhere by clinical definitions which strive to separate allegedly progressive practices from earlier incarnations now deemed residual or regressive. The interventions into the ongoing discourse on magnetism made by some authors of nineteenth-century fiction are necessarily acknowledged in *That Devil's Trick*, though it must be emphasised

that the current volume should not be considered as a critical work cast in the mould of, for example, Maria M. Tatar's *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (1978), Daniel Pick's *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (2000) or the detailed individual essays which make up the 2006 collection *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, edited by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne. Readings of what Tatar terms 'the linguistic texture' of fiction implicitly place an emphasis upon the author's contextual and contemporary knowledge, his research and his interpretation.[54] *That Devil's Trick* effectively supplements such studies by conveying, possibly for the first time, the widely disseminated cultural archive of images, reputations and fears through which the reading public may have approached the mesmeric fictions of its day. In emphasising the pervasive nature of a popular press, the volume acknowledges the predispositions and prejudgements that may be embodied in a popular audience. Such things colour, mobilise and contextualise their consumption of both fiction and stage melodrama. As Alison Winter suggests, 'By the 1840s, most Victorians would have had some idea of what went on in a mesmeric séance'.[55] It might be further suggested that those same Victorians would almost certainly have entertained a body of knowledge on that topic which far exceeded the superficial imagery of entranced subjects and potentially predatory mesmerisers. This popular and enduring cultural archive is the focus of the current volume. Its written contexts as reproduced in *That Devil's Trick*, drawn as they are from widely circulated popular reportage, may thus be judiciously applied by literary critics to an extensive range of mesmeric fictions far exceeding those examples enumerated in the current volume.

That Devil's Trick opens and closes with brief readings of two popular fictional texts separated by almost a century. If the preliminary discussion of Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* may serve to indicate how the conventions of the eighteenth century were still potent in the Victorian era, the concluding references to George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) and Paul Potter's 1895 stage adaptation of the novel demonstrate how those clichés were further adapted in the light of the development of mesmeric, and nominally hypnotic, practice. Between these two exemplars of mesmerism in fiction and drama may be found an at times equally imaginative version of the practice and practitioners of animal magnetism as reproduced in newspapers and popular journals between the eighteenth-century *fin de siècle* and that of the nineteenth century.

Such sources, with their wide dissemination at all levels of literate and semi-literate society, inform the three chronological chapters at the heart

of *That Devil's Trick*. The first of these, 'The Epoch of Mesmer', concentrates initially upon how British readers perceived the work of Mesmer, his followers and his imitators on the Continent of Europe in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter represents the first substantial study not merely of British attitudes towards Mesmer after the initial rise of mesmerism but also of the tangible public knowledge of the techniques and technologies deployed first in Paris and latterly in London. These latter are traced from Mesmer's *baquet* by way of the metallic tractors of the American Elisha Perkins, which enjoyed a brief vogue in the United Kingdom at the turn of the nineteenth century, to distinctly British deployments of Galvanism and the Leyden jar. The independent development of a specifically British mesmerism is then charted from the rise of the first indigenous practitioner in the British Isles, the Irish physician John Bonnoit de Mainaduc. From Mainaduc the chapter moves to consider the influence of one of Mesmer's immediate disciples, the Marquis de Puységur, upon the later British practitioners whose work forms the subject of the second chapter, 'Medical Magnetism'.

Chapter 2 charts the transition of mesmerism from its initial theatres of the salon and the drawing room into the regular hospital system. The chapter opens with an extensive reading of the influential career of Baron Dupotet, popularly known as 'the English pope of animal magnetism', a French savant who, having practised mesmerism at the Parisian Hôtel Dieu, was accepted on to the wards of the Middlesex Hospital and, later, of University College Hospital. It considers in detail how mesmerism was practised in the United Kingdom from the late 1830s using a variety of popular sources both favourable and polemical, before analysing the sexual allegations which were to be associated with the Baron's practice. These caused him to be compared with the controversial eighteenth-century English doctor James Graham, inventor of the Celestial Bed, an ingenious aid to conception which employed a magnetic system analogous to mesmerism. From Dupotet, the chapter then moves to consider the adoption of magnetism by Richard Chenevix and John Elliotson, both of whom enjoyed considerable reputations as practitioners of conventional physiological and chemical medicine. Chenevix is a significant but strangely understudied figure in the history of British mesmerism; Elliotson is better known, though critical interest in his work has been largely confined to the controversy surrounding his public displays of the apparently entranced O'Key sisters at University College Hospital. That controversy has been played out in histories of mesmerism largely with reference only

to professional assessments of Elliotson's work, with a particular emphasis upon attacks made upon the Doctor in *The Lancet*. *That Devil's Trick* contrasts these with reports in the non-medical press, and provides an innovative insight into how the non-professional might have regarded one of the most spectacular medical controversies of the early nineteenth century.

Elliotson's departure from University College Hospital is usually regarded in mesmeric histories as the effective termination of his activity in British practice. Chapter 3 corrects this mistaken assumption, by advancing a detailed reading of the Doctor's involvement with the London Mesmeric Infirmary, a well-funded institution patronised by the nobility which, none the less, faded quietly into obscurity around 1870. The chapter also considers the work of two other exponents of the deployment of mesmerism as an aid to surgery. The work of the Scot James Braid is analysed in its attempt to codify hypnotism as a physiological practice quite distinct from the fluid epistemology of mesmerism. The chapter's consideration of popular accounts of surgery under mesmerism at the mid-century leads the analysis from Braid to Elliotson, Topham and Esdaile. The latter's work in India, and the systematic study which recorded Esdaile's anaesthetic experiments in India are also revealed in unprecedented detail, as is his brief intervention into military surgery.

The Conclusion briefly charts the hitherto obscure final years of British mesmerism. Its reading of the Victorian *fin de siècle* embraces not merely the representation of mesmeric practice on the stage and in fiction but considers, with reference to contemporary reports of the work of Jean-Martin Charcot in the British popular press, the reasons why such an interest might have arisen when magnetic practice was in such a profound decline.

That Devil's Trick is a highly detailed and innovative study. It has departed from the sources of evidence usually deployed in histories of mesmerism, and has adopted instead the ephemeral and yet pervasive archive that is popular reportage. It might be, perhaps, a methodological pointer as to how the other pseudosciences of the Victorian period could best be revealed in all their richness and variety.

Notes

1 Anon., 'Haymarket Theatre – Amateur Performance', *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 May 1848, p. 4, cols 4–5, at col. 4.

2 Frederic George Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil* (London: Frank T. Sabin, 1890), 3 vols, Vol. 1, p. 124.

3 Inchbald, indeed, was almost a forgotten dramatist. Though her 'once-popular comedy *Wives as they Were and Maids as they Are*' had been revived at the Haymarket in 1848, it was considered an absurdity by reviewers and not part of the repertoire of 'our legitimate drama'. See Anon., 'Theatres and Music', *John Bull*, 13 May 1848, 311–12, at p. 312, col. 1.

4 John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892), p. 398.

5 Anon., 'Haymarket Theatre – Amateur Performance', p. 4, col. 4. The reviewer is notably scathing regarding the 'entertainment' provided by the preceding performance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and drily remarks that 'Mrs Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* [was] resorted to as a restorative at the conclusion'.

6 See Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878), pp. 296–333, reprinted in Philip Collins, ed., *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 92. For details of the provincial tour, in which *Animal Magnetism* was produced alongside both *Every Man in His Humour* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, see Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, Vol. 1, p. 112.

7 Kitton, *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*, Vol. 1, p. 124.

8 See Wilkie Collins, 'Introductory Lines (Relating the Adventures and Transformations of *The Frozen Deep*)', in Wilkie Collins, *The Frozen Deep* and *Mr Wray's Cash-Box*, ed. William M. Clarke (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996), 3–5; Anon., 'Notes on the Life of Augustus L. Egg', *Reader*, 44 (31 October 1863), p. 516.

9 See, for example, the sardonic coda to Anon., 'Extract of a Letter from Paris, April 23 [1787]', *The World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 4 May 1787, p. 4, col. 1.

10 J. Milne Bramwell, *Hypnotism: Its History, Practice and Theory* (London: Alexander Moring, 1906), pp. 3–4.

11 Charles Dickens to John Forster, 24 September 1849, quoted in Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, p. 389.

12 Charles Dickens to John Forster, 24 September 1849, quoted in Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, pp. 389–90 (original ellipsis).

13 Charles Dickens to John Forster, 24 September 1849, quoted in Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, p. 389.

14 Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1990), p. 244; Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991), p. 257.

15 Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. John Holloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 768; Humphry Rolleston, 'Irregular Practice and Quackery', *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 17/5 (May 1927), 501–8, at p.504, col. 1.

Pendennis is dedicated to Elliotson, the dedication recording how the physician 'would take no other fee but thanks'.

16 Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, p. 236. J. E. Cosnett, 'Dickens and Doctors: Vignettes of Victorian Medicine', *British Medical Journal*, 305 (19–26 December 1992), 1540–2, at p. 1542, col. 2.

17 See Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, pp. 236, 322–3. The charitable publication was a volume by a carpenter, John Overs, entitled *Evenings of a Working Man, Being the Occupation of His Scanty Leisure* (London: T. C. Newby, 1844). Written and published to ensure a modest income for Overs's family following the author's impending demise from consumption, the volume was prefaced by Dickens and dedicated to Elliotson.

18 See Derek Forrest, *Hypnotism: A History* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 165.

19 Charles Dickens to George Cruikshank, 28 December 1838, reprinted in Madeline House and Graham Storey, eds, *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–2002), 12 vols, Vol. 1, p. 480.

20 Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 143.

21 *The Lancet*, 13 June 1846, p. 662. Dickens, indeed, took an interest in Elliotson's finances shortly before the Professor's death: see Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 191.

22 Elizabeth Inchbald, *Animal Magnetism, A Farce in Three Acts, as Performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden* (Dublin: P. Byron, 1777), p. 9.

23 Inchbald, *Animal Magnetism*, pp. 9, 10.

24 Inchbald, *Animal Magnetism*, p. 10.

25 See, for example, the editorial to the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*, 31 July 1844, pp. 269–70.

26 *The Lancet*, 15 September 1838, pp. 873, 876.

27 Such sentiments, indeed, are implicit in the comments regarding Elliotson's apparent sacrifice of personal fortune and professional income alike in the causes of altruism and principle which conclude his long obituary in a provincial newspaper. See Anon., 'The Late Dr Elliotson', *The Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*, 11 August 1868, p. 2, col. 5.

28 H. Imlach, 'Animal Magnetism', *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*, 4 March 1843, p. 458, col. 2 (original italics); cf. F. S. Burman, 'More Mesmeric Impostors', *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*, 4 November 1843, 101–2.

29 Imlach, 'Animal Magnetism', p. 458, col. 2.

30 Anon., 'Dr Elliotson', *The Morning Post*, 3 August 1868, p. 3, col. 5.

31 See, for example, La Fluer's woeful attempt to define the universal fluid when inducting the Doctor into the magnetic practice popularly associated with Dr Mystery. Inchbald, *Animal Magnetism*, p. 12.

32 Herbert Mayo, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions, with an Account of Mesmerism* [1851] (Westcliff-on-Sea: Desert Island Books, 2003), p. 92.

33 Anon., 'Obituary', *The Examiner*, 8 August 1868, pp. 508–9, at p. 508.

34 Anon., 'Animal Magnetism', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1/6 (July 1830), 673–84, at p. 675, col. 2.
35 Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 17.
36 Forrest, *Hypnotism*, pp. 27–8.
37 Robin Waterfield, *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (London: Pan, 2004), p. 157.
38 Forrest, *Hypnotism*, pp. 122, 125. Forrest is quoting Alexandre Erdan, though the footnote to the quotation on p. 122 does not give a precise page reference.
39 Waterfield, *Hidden Depths*, p. 157.
40 Anon., 'Extract of a Letter from Paris, April 23 [1787]', p. 4, col. 1.
41 'Animal Magnetism' [advertisement], *St James's Chronicle, or the British Evening Post*, 16 December 1784, p. 3, col. 4; Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 125.
42 'New System of the World' [advertisement], *The World*, 26 May 1788, p. 1, col. 2; 'College for Instructing Pupils in Mesmer's Philosophy of Animal Magnetism' [advertisement], *The Morning Herald*, 7 June 1788, p. 1, col. 2.
43 'New System of the World' [advertisement], p. 1, col. 2.
44 'Lectures' [advertisement], *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 10 November 1786, p. 1, col. 1.
45 Quoted in *The Academy*, 139/1 (25 February 1882).
46 Waterfield, *Hidden Depths*, p. 158.
47 'College for Instruction in Elementary Philosophy' [advertisement], *The World*, 26 June 1788, p. 1, col. 2.
48 'College for Instructing Pupils in Mesmer's Philosophy of Animal Magnetism' [advertisement], p. 1, col. 2.
49 'College for Instructing Pupils in Mesmer's Philosophy of Animal Magnetism' [advertisement], p. 1, col. 2.
50 Waterfield, *Hidden Depths*, p. 157; Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 169.
51 Consider here, for example, one of the most recent studies of mesmerism in the age of hypnotism: Hilary Grimes, 'Power in Flux: Mesmerism, Mesmeric Manuals and du Maurier's *Trilby*', *Gothic Studies*, 10/2 (2008), 67–83.
52 Edward Bliss Foote, *Dr Foote's Home Cyclopedia of Popular Medical, Social and Sexual Science*, Twentieth Century Revised and Enlarged Edition (London: L. N. Fowler, 1901), p. 829.
53 Note here Alison Winter's lucid tabulation of the scholarly debate upon mesmerism in *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 10.
54 Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. xi.
55 Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 2.