

AMONG THE SHADOWS: THE INFLUENCE OF
MESMERISM ON IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF
MATTHEW ARNOLD, LORD TENNYSON, AND
ROBERT BROWNING

By

JENNIFER TENBRINK

Bachelor of Science in Biology

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces, NM

2001

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 2009

AMONG THE SHADOWS: THE INFLUENCE OF
MESMERISM ON IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF
MATTHEW ARNOLD, LORD TENNYSON, AND
ROBERT BROWNING

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Linda Austin

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Edward Jones

Dr. Richard Frohock

Dr. A. Gordon Emslie

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several people helped with the process of this thesis, all of them important, and all of who deserve a great deal of credit for sticking with me through these many years.

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Linda Austin, for her continued support and enthusiasm during this sometimes frustrating but ultimately rewarding project and for introducing me to this very mesmerizing subject.

My mother, Nancy Tenbrink, is single-handedly responsible for ensuring that I completed my work after an illness threatened to derail my academic plans. She was patient when I was at my wits end, encouraging when I was ready to quit, and never wavered in her belief that I was worthy of this pursuit. Thank you, Mom, I literally could not have done this without you.

To my professors Dr. Edward Jones, mentor extraordinaire, Dr. Richard “Cortez” Frohock, and Dr. William Decker for their willing involvement in my thesis.

And finally, to those people for whom “friend” is such an inadequate word: Rama, Erin, and Betty Ann, you understand better than anyone because you were there.

Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. MATTHEW ARNOLD AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY	16
III. LORD TENNYSON AND IDENTITY'S ELIXIR	36
IV. ROBERT BROWNING AND THE LOSS OF IDENTITY.....	56
V. CONCLUSION.....	82
REFERENCES	89

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE RISE OF MESMERISM

In the small English town of Tynemouth, in the year 1844, author Harriett Martineau lay prostrate on her sickbed suffering from an uterine illness that had plagued her for the past five years. Standing over her, moving his arms and hands in slow, controlled motions just above her body, was Dr. Spencer T. Hall. The motions, designed to direct and correct the flow of energies in the body, were part of a radical new medical treatment called mesmerism. All other attempted treatments had failed Martineau, but now, under the ministrations first of Hall and later two other mesmerists, her pain disappeared and she lived the next ten years in good health.

Mesmerism swept through Victorian England beginning in 1837-38 as both a serious scientific and medical phenomenon and as a spiritual gateway to the mysteries of life, death, and the nature of the human soul. Prominent figures in science and literature saw in the flow of energies and mystifying trance a key to the health of the body and mind, while other equally prominent scientists and authors denounced mesmerism as a fraud and its practitioners as charlatans. For those who believed in the effects of mesmerism, many saw it as a remarkable discovery, but others saw a dark and dangerous power. Nowhere is the malevolent nature of mesmerism better expressed than in the poetry of Robert Browning, and nowhere is the belief in its marvel more strongly found

than in the poetry of Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson. The diametrical views of these influential poets together create a picture that centers around the Victorian search for identity and its connection to mental health. Arnold and Tennyson viewed mesmerism as a mechanism through which identity was sought and repaired; but for Browning, mesmerism led to the loss of identity and self.

The phenomenon of mesmerism began in the late eighteenth century with the work of Austrian scientist Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer began developing his revolutionary theory in 1772 while studying at the University of Vienna. Mesmer borrowed extensively from the work of Richard Mead to formulate his theory of a magnetic fluid which infused all matter. Mesmer termed this magnetic fluid *animal magnetism*.¹ The fluid, he argued, could be manipulated through the use of magnets to alter the concentrations of the fluid in various objects and parts of the body. The concentrations, in turn, affected health. Mesmer originally believed that by using magnets to move concentrations of the fluid from one object to another, or from one part of the body to another, he could heal ailments from respiratory illness to blindness. Later, he modified his practices by eliminating the use of magnets, claiming that people with large concentrations of animal magnetism in their bodies, such as himself, had the power to manipulate the force without the aid of magnets. Mesmer began using his hands, passing them in repeated movements over the affected site. He would also sit knee to knee with his patients, holding their gaze with his own, to induce a trance.²

¹ Maria Tatar, Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978). Tatar explains that Mesmer formulated his theories of a magnetic fluid based on Paracelsus's cosmic fluid.

² Frank Pattie, Mesmer and Animal Magnetism: A Chapter in the History of Medicine (Hamilton, NY: Edmonston, 1994). In his book, Pattie also connects Mesmer's personality to the controversy that

The success of Mesmer's treatments quickly established him as a popular doctor at the Austrian court. In particular, his success with a young musical prodigy, Maria Theresia Paradis, garnered much attention. A favorite of Maria Theresia Hapsburg, Paradis suffered from blindness from a very young age. Her parents brought her to Mesmer for treatment, and under his care she regained some of her eyesight. The success turned out to be his undoing. At this time, Austria suffered from an unstable political climate and many political figures were wary of anyone who gained too much favor at court. Political opponents of Mesmer turned his success with Paradis into scandal. They convinced her family that Mesmer's relationship with the girl was inappropriate, and her parents subsequently had her removed from his house, refusing to allow the treatments to continue. The blindness soon returned, but the scandal ruined Mesmer's reputation, forcing him to flee to France in 1777.³

In Paris, Mesmer found a willing and fertile ground for his practice. By 1780 he was so popular that he was forced to create a method of mass treatment in order to accommodate all his patients. He developed the *baquet*, a large metal tub with a wooden bench running along the inside. This bench allowed groups of patients to sit together. Mesmer would then use the conductive properties of the metal to direct animal magnetism through all the patients simultaneously. Mesmer also found pupils in Paris eager to learn the secrets of his practice; it was these students who changed the term animal magnetism to reflect its creator, and thus animal magnetism became mesmerism. Two students in particular, the esteemed physician Charles d'Elson and the Marquis de

surrounded the acceptance of his theories. Mesmer's difficulty with the Austrian, French, and Swiss authorities had a large impact on their refusal to accept his claims.

³ For more information regarding the scandal, see Geoffrey Sutton, "Electric Medicine and Mesmerism." *Isis* 1981: 375-92.

Puységur, helped establish animal magnetism as a serious practice. D'Elson would quietly continue his practice until his death in 1786 while Puységur developed artificial somnambulism, a precursor to hypnotism.

Both Mesmer and his students petitioned the Royal Academy of Science for official sanction of their practices on several occasions, but skepticism within the scientific and medical communities prevented these sanctions. However, in 1784, King Louis XVI authorized a commission to determine if the animal magnetic fluid did indeed exist. Members of the commission were experts from all fields of science and included Antoine Lavoisier, Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, Jean Sylvain Bailly, and Benjamin Franklin. While Mesmer never agreed to provide empirical evidence of his theories, students of Mesmer were more willing to try. The commission determined that while Mesmer did affect cures in his patients, there was no evidence to support the existence of his animal magnetism. The finding destroyed Mesmer's practice, and he was once more forced to flee. D'Elson also suffered from the ruling, but the commission supported the work of Puységur, and he continued his practice for many years. The reason for Puységur's success was political. He gained approval by establishing a positive personal relationship with the members of the Commission, whereas D'Elson, not so respectful of the Commission's authority, failed to win their confidence.⁴

After Mesmer's departure from Paris, many of his pupils continued to study and practice his theories. They also began leaving France to practice in other parts of Europe. It was not until 1838, however, that mesmerism made a significant impact in England. Dupotet de Sennevoy, a French mesmerist, assisted Dr. John Elliotson in performing a

⁴ Tatar refers to Mesmer as the "transitional figure" between "primitive rites of exorcism" and "modern psychoanalysis" (3).

series of mesmeric demonstrations in London. Four years later, a demonstration by the Swiss mesmerist Charles LaFontaine caught the attention of James Braid, a Scottish physician. Elliotson's and Braid's interest in mesmerism soon effected a similar interest in their colleagues, and the applications of mesmerism in surgery quickly made mesmerism a popular and controversial subject in the medical community. Braid dismissed Mesmer's claim of a magnetic fluid, but supported the use of the trance as an anesthetic. His experiments into the induced trance led to his formulation of *hypnotism*, a practice which survived to modern times. Unfortunately, Mesmer's reputation followed LaFontaine to England, and Braid's interest in mesmerism drew criticism from members of the medical community even as mesmerism gained support from other members. However, the controversy brought attention to mesmerism and its medical applications, attracting famous figures including Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Harriet Martineau. As mesmerism began appearing in popular literature, its influence, and its controversy, grew.⁵ In contrast to countries such as France and Germany, England never enacted legislation restricting the practice of mesmerism.⁶ Therefore, mesmerism was able to persist and flourish in England in a way it had been unable to on the continent.

While the popularity of mesmerism was due in large part to LaFontaine and Braid, mesmerism made the journey from the continent to England a second way. While LaFontaine's demonstration had an immediate impact on the medical community, the work of Dugald Stewart brought mesmerism from the continent to England as a psychological application. Stewart made mesmerism relevant to the psychological theories of the time by linking mesmerism to the practice of introspective psychology, a

⁵ For more on the controversy surrounding mesmerism, see Allison Winter, Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967).

⁶ Roy Porter, "Under the Influence': Mesmerism in England," History Today (1985): 25.

field which began in Scotland in the 1700s. Thomas Reid, the Scottish empiricist whose ideas became the foundation for introspective psychology, said:

It is his own mind only that [man] can examine with any degree of accuracy and distinctness. This is the only subject he can look into. He may, from outward signs, collect the operations of other minds, but these signs are for the most part ambiguous, and must be interpreted by what he perceives within himself.⁷

It was this same inwardly directed exploration that the mesmeric trance could allow, although the trance, with its access to the subconscious, was a more powerful method than introspection alone.

Sir William Hamilton, a Scottish metaphysician, would later take Reid's idea and extend it where “the infinitely greater part of our spiritual treasures, lies...hid in the obscure recesses of the mind,”⁸ thereby creating introspective psychology. Stewart took Hamilton's ideas even further. Although Stewart, like Braid, found the mystical aspect of Mesmer's theories ridiculous, he believed that further scientific experimentation should be applied to animal magnetism.⁹

Due to the work of Stewart and Braid, mesmerism quickly became an accepted practice among doctors, especially for the treatment of the insane. William Gregory, a medical doctor and professor of chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, wrote:

⁷ Thomas Reid, Philosophical Works: with notes and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton 1764-1790 (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1983) 98.

⁸ Sir William Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic Part 1 Volume 1, ed. H.L. Mansel and John Veitch (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872) 236.

⁹ Ekbert Faas, Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 37.

I am now convinced that the treatment of the insane will not be so complete or so efficient as it may become, till mesmerism is regularly introduced into the practice of every asylum...Mesmerism is not less powerful on the sane, nay it is more so; probably because in many cases, the essence of insanity is some disturbance of the natural distribution of odyle¹⁰ in the system...There is, however, another reason why the physician ought to study mesmerism, in its relation to insanity. It is this: many insane persons appear, when we study the symptoms as they are described by writers on the subject, to be, in fact, only in a peculiar mesmeric state. I mean they have a consciousness distinct from their ordinary consciousness, just as happens in the mesmeric sleep.¹¹

Here Gregory articulates the layering of human consciousness where multiple consciousnesses exist simultaneously. Ekbert Faas explains why mesmerism had such broad psychological appeal: “Like psychology proper, but unlike mental pathology, [mesmerism] dealt with human consciousness in a state of basic sanity. Like mental pathology, but unlike psychology, it focused primarily on abnormal states of consciousness.”¹² Mesmerism focused on the unconscious and altered consciousness as natural and sane components of the human mind. It was a third means of explaining the human mind, independently drawing upon aspects of both mental pathology and psychology to provide understanding of how human mentality functioned.

Although French practitioners had already established mesmerism as a concept by the time of its Victorian popularity in 1838, scientists and doctors still disagreed on the

¹⁰ William Gregory, *Animal Magnetism or Mesmerism and Its Phenomena*, (New York: Arno P, 1975) 108. According to Gregory, the term “odyle,” described the force that a magnet exerts.

¹¹ Gregory, 108.

¹² Faas 34.

suitability of its use. Gregory was one of the proponents of mesmerism located among the Victorian medical community. A balance between a sometimes zealous enthusiasm and strict scientism, Gregory was a moderate among those debating mesmerism. As a Victorian, Gregory provides a firsthand medical perspective, as well as insight, into the internal conflict doctors as a group experienced regarding mesmerism. His writings on mesmerism not only influenced others in his field, but also authors such as Harriet Martineau and George Eliot. Gregory dealt with everything from the effects of mesmeric sleep to mesmeric paraphernalia such as crystals and magnets. However, while he was an advocate, he stressed caution in the practice of mesmerism, especially among amateurs, as he believed ignorance led to dangerous consequences. Other doctors who opposed the practice of mesmerism reflected and amplified his concerns.

One of those doctors was William Carpenter, who provides an account of the debates of the 1850s in his book *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Etc.: Historically and Scientifically Considered* (1877). His vigorous assault on mesmerism and its supporters, acted as a counterbalanced Gregory's persuasive writings. Through the book, Carpenter's purpose centered on debunking the claims of mesmerists by providing scientific explanations for the various phenomena associated with it. The attacks Carpenter made against mesmerism illustrate the debates attempting to constitute the nature of scientific proof, as well as the evaluation of empirical proof against intuition. For those who opposed mesmerism, Carpenter was the premier authority, and he became the representative voice of their group. Originally two lectures Carpenter delivered on separate occasions to the London Institute, the arguments in the book highlight the

struggle within the scientific community to define and confirm the authority of science, with mesmerism as the fulcrum.

In contrast, Joseph Haddock endorsed the significance of intuition. Haddock, like Gregory, wrote to persuade his colleagues of the benefits of mesmerism in medicine. Despite his reliance on non-scientific forms of evidence, he nevertheless presented a convincing case for pursuing the widespread induction of mesmerism as a tool in medicine. Resting toward the extreme end of the spectrum, Haddock appealed to those members of the public who held more fanatical loyalties to mesmerism. His arguments supporting mesmerism relied entirely on intuitive proof of the existence of a mesmeric force, elucidating an opposing view to Carpenter's critique. The arguments further expose the state of the scientific community during the time mesmerism flourished. Haddock reprimanded the actions of those colleagues who protested against mesmerism for overlooking its potential: "But the curious and interesting phenomena displayed by vital magnetism, or mesmerism, instead of being calmly and carefully investigated by all inquiring minds, especially by those whose profession and pursuits ought to have interested them in inquiry, have, in too many instances, been scornfully and contemptuously neglected."¹³ Carpenter was one of the targets of this remark. Although Haddock's reasoning is suspect because he did not rely on empirical evidence, the point is a good one, especially in light of Carpenter's ambivalent reception of the work of James Braid. Braid adapted Mesmer's work on animal magnetism to develop his own theories and practices, which he termed *hypnotism*. Hypnotism was in essence similar to animal magnetism in that it induced a trance and had comparable applications, but the methods and motivations behind its development were entirely scientific.

¹³ Joseph W. Haddock, Somnolism and Psycheism (New York: Arno P, 1975) 2-3.

This scientific background made Carpenter's support of Braid significant when in regard to the debate over the definition of proof.¹⁴ Carpenter made a telling remark when he said, "the grandiose pretensions of Mesmer...find the most ready welcome among the sceptical votaries of novelty who paved the way for the French Revolution."¹⁵ The statement provides connections to larger issues of mesmerism's reception in England, namely the political motivations behind the scientific arguments. Politically, mesmerism was often condemned because it was linked to the instigation of the French Revolution and the chaos which resulted in its aftermath. Mesmer, during his time in Paris, constructed amphitheaters for audiences to observe his demonstrations of trances. The seats closest to the stage were reserved for the nobility, while the seats toward the back could be used by any member of the public. The inclusion of all classes in one space led the aristocracy to believe Mesmer sympathized with the proletariat at a time when political instability would shortly result in the French Revolution. The truth, however, was that Mesmer had no particular sympathies for the proletariat and would have been more likely to seek recognition from the nobility. The inclusion of the proletariat in his demonstrations was probably due to his desire to spread mesmerism. Whatever his motivation, the result of these demonstrations was a permanent association between mesmerism and the French Revolution.

Although the elements of the mesmeric trance and hypnotism were the same, Carpenter was willing to support Braid where he was unwilling to support Mesmer. This was due to Braid's formulation of the term hypnotism and the couching of his research in

¹⁴ For more on how mesmerism impacted the debates on the nature of proof see Winter, "Mesmerism and Popular Culture in Early Victorian England," *History of Science* 32(1994): 317-43.

¹⁵ William B. Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Etc.: Historically and Scientifically Considered* (New York: Appleton, 1897) 5.

terms of scientific proof such as scientifically conducted experiments, distanced hypnotism from mesmerism enough that hypnotism became acceptable to Carpenter. The scientific basis of hypnotism gave it the political sustainability mesmerism lacked.

Braid's advances marked the start of the downfall of mesmerism. Hypnotism offered an alternative to mesmerism, and, eventually, anesthetic alternatives such as ether and chloroform replaced mesmerism entirely as a serious medical practice. But while Braid marks the beginning of the end of mesmerism's influence on the Victorians, understanding how the controversy that surrounded mesmerism influenced Victorian society is best served by a visit to the beginning. As Mesmer himself was controversial, part of what made mesmerism so disputable was his reputation. In fact, the minds of the public so intertwined Mesmer and mesmerism that they did not distinguish between the value of Mesmer as a person and the value of the applications of mesmerism. Additionally, the same conflicts found in the discussions of mesmerism by contemporary Victorians continue to color the scholarship of later critics.

Mesmerism, at the time of the Victorian poets, was a popular and widespread means for discovering the mysteries of the human mind at a time when psychology was just beginning as a science. Psychology, the study of the psyche, began as a branch of philosophy. Use of the term dates back to the early sixteenth century; the first recorded use is in Croatian humanist Marko Marulić's work *Psichiologia de ratione animae humanae*. The term continued to grow in popularity on the continent. But in England, the phrase "mental philosophy" was used to describe the study of the mind until the middle of the nineteenth century when William Hamilton's extensive use of the term

“psychology” replaced the term “mental philosophy.” Hamilton’s preference for the term “psychology” in turn reflected a growing interest by Victorians in mental sciences.

The increased interest in psychology came at a time when the Victorians were experiencing a crisis of identity. This crisis began with a resurgence in the application of the Enclosure Acts in 1760 which continued until 1832. The Enclosure Acts removed common lands from the public and awarded them to private owners, requiring that all such private lands be fenced at the expense of the owner. Enclosure ate away at the traditionally open countryside, changing the face of the English landscape and the historical rural community. Inhabitants of the country and city alike felt this loss deeply, as seen, for example, in the poetry of John Clare, whose “Helpstone” and “To the Rural Muse” lament the stone walls crisscrossing the fields as the death of nature and tie the act of enclosing to obscurity and the death of memory. For Matthew Arnold, nature was an integral part of identity, and he felt the loss of the open English countryside damaged an individual's ability to have a complete identity.

In addition to altering the face of the English landscape, enclosure altered the configuration of the population. Because the Enclosure Act required owners to fence their property, many people who received plots of land from the redistribution of common lands could not afford the added expense. This situation forced poorer land owners to sell their lands and move from rural communities to urban centers such as London. The influx of new residents changed the cities forever. London, once a relatively small and quiet city, became overcrowded, noisy and filthy. The city filled with strangers. Wordsworth, in “Tintern Abbey,” described the countryside as an escape from

“the din of towns and cities” (126-27), providing “tranquil restoration” (31). In the city, man became separated from himself, and once separated, lost.

A second legal policy caused another migration from the rural to the urban in 1815. The Corn Laws, prohibiting the import of foreign corn and designed to inflate the price of domestic corn, led to an economic crisis. With no alternative to expensive domestic corn, the working class was forced to pay the inflated prices. Many workers in both the country and city lost their jobs, and those in the country fled to the city in the hopes of better opportunities.

The Enclosure Act and the Corn Laws left everyone feeling displaced. People no longer had a solid sense of identity. For those remaining in the country, the fencing of common land meant that the poorer classes lost their sense of shared support. They became isolated from one another as the open fields where neighbors once grazed their flocks together were converted into private lands. People who moved from the country to the cities left their homeland where they had lived for generations and with it the familiar agricultural way of life. In the cities, they were cut off from the nature which had been an integral part of their daily lives. They were surrounded by strangers and forced to work in dirty factories at jobs that would have seemed meaningless and disconnected compared to work on the farm. The city dwellers who had been used to the small-town feel of urban life suddenly had to cope with anonymity. The stress of overcrowding interfered with their sense of individuality and role within their community.

The exotic yet accessible nature of mesmerism made it particularly appealing to the Victorians at this time of tremendous social upheaval. They were desperate to understand why their living conditions had changed so dramatically and why they felt so

disconnected and miserable. The recent development of psychology as a formal discipline had stimulated a popular interest in the workings of the mind, and mesmerism fed into this interest through Elliotson's demonstrations of the trance. The trance offered a cure-all: it healed a variety of physical and psychological maladies, it generated new debates on the meaning of life, and it opened up spiritual realms. Mesmerism was strange and unusual with a slightly dangerous quality that made it a tantalizing curiosity, and Mesmer's occult reputation only added to its allure. The performance of the trances provided entertainment and a diversion from everyday life. Whether or not one agreed with the validity of mesmerism, it was still a fascinating subject.

By the time of Dr. Elliotson's demonstrations in 1838, the Victorians had been suffering from rapid and significant changes to their society for decades. Economic depression, overcrowding, and the loss of the rural space left the early Victorians groping for answers to questions of who they had been, who they were, and who they would become. These conditions created an atmosphere in which the tenets of psychology became of paramount interest. In turn, the interest in psychology paved the way for other methods of investigating the inner recesses of the mind. Mesmerism, with its potential to unlock the great mysteries of the mind, became attractive to poets such as Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson.

Mesmerism significantly influenced the theme of identity in the poetry of Arnold, Tennyson, and Robert Browning. Arnold's connection to mesmerism centered on his search for identity, while Tennyson sought cures for problems of identity, and Browning warned against the dangers of a possible loss of identity. My discussion begins with an overview of Arnold's background and influences on his life which connect him to

mesmerism. It continues with an examination of his “modern disease,” a concept which motivated his explorations of the unconscious and prompted his theory that true identity was hidden. Through analysis of three of his poems, “Self Dependence,” “The Buried Life,” and “The Scholar Gipsy,” I will illustrate Arnold's belief in the potential of mesmerism to uncover identity. Following the discussion of Arnold, I will move on to Tennyson and his focus on the healing properties of mesmerism with respect to identity. I will explain the connection between the history of mental illness in the Tennyson family and Tennyson's interest in the medical applications of mesmerism, and also link Tennyson's epilepsy to the Prince's seizure's in the poem, “The Princess.” My analysis of “The Princess” will illustrate Tennyson's belief that mesmerism could help the individual form a healthy, fully developed identity which allowed a more complete integration into society. My final chapter departs from the previous two with Browning's negative view of mesmerism. I will discuss how mesmerism was an anathema to Browning's concept of individualism and how his relationship with his wife colored his feelings. My analysis of “Mesmerism” and “Mr. Sludge, the Medium” will reveal that Browning felt mesmerism obliterated identity and that mediums promoted the destructive influence of mesmerism on society.

CHAPTER II

MATTHEW ARNOLD AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Matthew Arnold's relationship with mesmerism was a complicated and often contradictory one. The relationship centered around Arnold's obsession with and search for identity. For Arnold, identity was comprised of two selves. The first, the surface self, was the self a person presented to the world. This self was designed to be accepted by society and avoid judgment and criticism. The second self, the true self, was complex and deeply buried beneath layers of consciousness. Arnold was exposed to the concept of the true self through the Romantic poets in such poems as Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805). This true self was hidden to protect it from external judgment and criticism. Arnold believed this true self was a succession of selves, each one building on the previous self; this meant that the true self was fluid and changing. This fluidity created a problem: identity was not fixed and therefore could not be pinned down. As a result the search for identity was permeated by irony. Not only did Arnold believe identity was too deeply buried in the unconscious to ever be revealed, but if revealed, he felt it was too complicated to be articulated.

To Arnold, who was engaged in explorations of the unconscious, mesmerism had pertinent applications. Through trances, mesmerism offered the chance to reach into the unconscious to an extent not previously available. However, mesmerism's connection to psychology posed a difficulty as Arnold did not find psychology a legitimate means of

exploring the mind.

Despite Arnold's ability to make psychological insights, he felt psychology could not really elucidate what was "buried" in the mind. He expressed through his poetry the need for an individual to find the hidden self he believed existed below layers of identity. Although he was suspicious and doubtful of psychology, Arnold felt mesmerism offered a potential new way of delving into those layers. Arnold explained his issues with psychology in 1880 when he criticized the philosophy of Joseph Butler, an eighteenth century philosopher who wrote about mental philosophy. According to Arnold:

What [Butler] calls our instincts and principles of action, which are in truth the most obscure, changing, interdependent of phenomena, [he] takes as if they were things as separately fixed, and palpable as the bodily organs which the dissector has on his table before him. He takes them as if, just as he now finds them, there they had always been, and there they must always be...Butler's error is that of the early chemists, who imagined things to be elements which were not, but were capable of being resolved and decomposed much farther.¹⁶

Psychology attempted to break down and categorize components of the mind, an attempt Arnold felt was futile due to the complex nature of the mind. Psychology's efforts to define the undefinable, was, to Arnold, a useless endeavor.¹⁷

Identity became an important concept to Arnold as he grew convinced that people, including himself, were afflicted with a "modern disease" he described as a "divorce from oneself."¹⁸ Writing to his friend, Arthur Clough, Arnold once confessed, "these are

¹⁶ Arnold, Passages from the Prose Writings of Matthew Arnold (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1880): 309-10.

¹⁷ Faas, 132.

¹⁸ Qtd in Faas, 123.

damned times - everything is against one - the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury...the absence of great natures...and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties.”¹⁹ Arnold believed contemporary society was afflicted with this modern disease; the cure, he determined, was self-knowledge. Self-knowledge differed from self-consciousness in that self-knowledge attached meaning to the information self-consciousness supplied. Arnold believed each person had an unknown “hidden self,” or rather, a “succession of selves,” each of which was not aware of the others, but which interacted in a way that he described as a “river,” flowing together to form the complete identity. Like the fluidity of the river, a person's identity was not fixed. The succession of selves that formed the river culminated in the most current self, which was built upon all the selves that came before. It was this current self that Arnold sought to know, but as the current self was also changing, the search was difficult. That the hidden self was unknown did not, in the early stages of Arnold's search, mean that the hidden self could not be known. The hidden self was a part of a “buried life” that Arnold believed all people led, but of which they were not necessarily aware. The hidden self contained those thoughts, desires, and characteristics that were independent of the judgment of society.

Arnold also felt that many issues in society stemmed from a widespread dissociation of people from their selves. The cure to this disease, self-knowledge, could be obtained through the journey of discovering the hidden self and the buried life.²⁰

¹⁹ Qtd in James Logenbach, “Matthew Arnold and the Modern Apocalypse,” *PMLA* 104.5(1989): 848.

²⁰ Faas 132.

Arnold felt that without self knowledge, no other knowledge was possible. The method of achieving self knowledge came through contact with nature and emulation of its independent qualities. As more and more of the population left the rural countryside for the city, the connection with nature was lost, as was the ability to find one's true identity. The self that existed in the city, therefore, was a false, surface identity, one that was easily accessible and served as the self that interacted with other people without the danger of being judged unworthy. The true self was much more difficult to access, but the true self was the one that needed to be accessed and revealed. The real and complete identity existed with this true self, and much of Arnold's poetry depicts his struggle to uncover his own buried identity and be himself.

Knowledge of the self was a concept important to the Romantic poets that preceded Arnold and whom Arnold emulated. Wordsworth in particular was an important influence and Arnold modeled many of his poems on Wordsworth's works. But self-knowledge for the Romantics was much simpler to discover than Arnold believed. For the Romantics, introspection and quiet self-reflection were enough to gain knowledge of the self. Arnold's true self was too deeply buried for introspection to suffice. He sought other methods with which to access the true self. Mesmerism, which moved beyond introspection into the normally inaccessible unconscious, seemed to offer the ideal solution.

Arnold would have been exposed to the concept of mesmerism fairly early in his life. His father, Dr. Thomas Arnold, found in mesmerism answers to spiritual questions, and the biggest philosophical influence on Arnold's life, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, saw in mesmerism explanations for the mystery of the creative process. Through their

influence, it is likely Arnold was exposed to applications mesmerism offered in the exploration of the unconscious. This exposure, in turn, would have had an impact on Arnold's concept of the hidden self and the ability to discover this self. Through mesmerism, it was possible to explore the human soul and even, perhaps, discover the hidden self.

As a public figure, Arnold's father is perhaps most notable for his educational reforms while headmaster of Rugby. His reforms impacted the whole of British education, and his influence extended even to the United States. The entire Arnold family was quite close, and biographer Norman Wymer describes the family on the event of Thomas's death as "a family sadly shaken by the death of a husband and father whom they all adored."²¹ Thomas Arnold Jr., Matthew Arnold's younger brother, said of the relationship between their father and his children that he "delighted in our games and sometimes joined in them."²² Although known as a stern and intimidating, though beloved, headmaster to his students, for his children, "on the whole love cast out all fear, for he never held us at a distance."²³ The close relationship with his family indicates that Thomas did have a strong influence on his son. Arnold was probably familiar with his father's work with mesmerism, although their interests in its applications would have differed.

As a doctor of Divinity, Thomas Arnold was a staunch defender of Christianity. But critics of mesmerism argued it "was dangerous because it could undermine the legitimacy of biblical miracles."²⁴ Thomas felt that mesmerism actually prevented

²¹ Norman Wymer, *Dr. Arnold of Rugby* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1954) 7.

²² Qtd in Nicholas Murray, *The Life of Matthew Arnold* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996) 21.

²³ Murray 21.

²⁴ Winter 271.

secular encroachment into Christianity, an encroachment which attempted to find a natural explanation for miracles. “There exists a lurking fear,” he said, “of these phenomena, as if they might shake our faith in true miracles; and therefore men are inclined to disbelieve them in spite of testimony; a habit far more unreasonable to our Christian faith than any belief in the facts of magnetism.”²⁵ The mysterious mechanisms of mesmerism, staring into the eyes or moving the hands in rhythmic repetitions, affected patients through invisible means. The seemingly miraculous aspects of mesmerism could allow people like Thomas Arnold to interpret them as a manifestation of divine activity. Thomas said of mesmerism that it had “always excited my curiosity” and that “above all Animal Magnetism” could reveal the “principle of animate life.”²⁶ In 1838, Winter notes, Dr. Arnold was “actively seeking news of mesmerism.”²⁷

The religious aspects of mesmerism that interested Thomas Arnold probably did not excite his son, since Matthew Arnold was never interested in the spiritual realm as his father was, but he would have been aware of it from an early age. This early exposure would later be coupled with a secondary, academic source when Arnold discovered Goethe.

For German Romantics, such as Goethe, the trance could be directly tied to the process of artistic creation. As Maria Tatar explains:

the trance thus represented only one half of the equation for poetic inspiration.

Like the great mystics of the past age, they urged the necessity of pushing beyond the trance to reach an even purer clarity of mind in which...intoxication and self consciousness are daringly mingled. Yet they did not ignore the steps leading to

²⁵ Qtd in Winter, 397.

²⁶ Qtd in Winter, 397.

²⁷ Qtd in Winter, 397.

that clarity, and the mesmerist theories seemed to answer some of the questions about the exalted states of consciousness that precede the creative process.²⁸

The trance, therefore, was a stepping stone in the creative process, and mesmerism itself offered new possibilities in the exploration of what lay beyond the trance state. Of the character of the trance, Tatar expands her discussion to elaborate on the themes of light and darkness as they applied to mesmerism: “The venerable theme of blindness and insight (as expressed in the works of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Goethe) and the time honored motif of darkness and illumination in a mystical thought supported the sacred character of such visions.”²⁹

Arnold’s hidden self lay obscured in the darkest layers of identity. Self knowledge was the illumination which brought the hidden self into the light. With his obsession with the hidden self and his belief that illumination of the self could cure his modern disease, it is not surprising that mesmerism in this form may have appealed to Arnold.

He was introduced to the writings of Goethe as an undergraduate at Oxford University. This introduction marked the beginning of an influence that would permeate the rest of Arnold’s life, not simply in the poetic arena, but in areas of philosophy and criticism that are also revealed in Arnold’s works. Josephine Barry discusses the nature of Goethe’s influence on Arnold:

As early as 1843, Goethe seems to have been enshrined in the young Englishman’s literary pantheon, and...Goethe’s presence in Arnold’s poetry of the 1840’s is pervasive. Far from regarding the German poet only as sage and

²⁸ Tatar 80-81.

²⁹ Tatar 71.

spiritual father (as critics have generally believed) Arnold had also looked to Goethe for solutions to those problems of poetic form, style, and subject matter confronting him as an aspiring successor to the great Romantic poets.³⁰

Barry goes on to explain that: “It is not fortuitous that Arnold perceived in Goethe the cultural, spiritual, and poetic wholeness he himself desperately sought. For as Leonard Willoughby puts it, Goethe “stands out” in the “modern age of dissociated and frustrated human fragments” as the nearest approach to a complete man.”³¹ Arnold found in Goethe the solutions to resolving his own sense of displacement, solutions Arnold had not been able to obtain from his Romantic predecessors.

The Romantic poets that preceded Arnold had their own concept of self-knowledge, the sense of which Arnold reacted against because he felt it did nothing to reveal the hidden self. Because it was derived from introspection, Romantic self-knowledge was a subjective loop, an indulgence in obsession out of which it was impossible to escape. In Goethe, Arnold found an alternative and a solution to Romantic subjectivity. Arnold wrote,

For a mind like Goethe’s - a mind profoundly impartial and passionately aspiring after the science, not of men only, but of universal nature - the popular philosophy which explains all things by reference to man, and regards universal nature as existing for the sake of man...was utterly repulsive...such views of nature as this were what Goethe’s whole soul abhorred. Creation, he thought, should be made of sterner stuff.³²

³⁰ Josephine Maillet Barry, “Goethe and Arnold’s 1853 Preface,” Comparative Literature 1980: 151-

2.
³¹ Barry 152.

³² Matthew Arnold, Essays on Criticism (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1903) 364.

Goethe was the ideal Arnold sought to follow. He was a decisive step away from Romantic introspection, but the sense of displacement Arnold shared with other Victorians made Goethe's example difficult to realize. Barry adds that "Arnold turned to Goethe in the belief that he alone of the moderns had overcome romantic subjectivism to forge an objective poetry...acceptable to the skeptical modern temperament."³³ Goethe was indeed the most dominant influence on Arnold's mind. The extent of Goethe's influence can be seen in Arnold's suggestion to "resolve to be thyself." Helen White notes that "The very words in which he expressed the ideal...are an almost literal translation of one of Goethe's so called maxims: 'The truly wise ask what the thing is in itself'."³⁴ Because Arnold was so influenced by Goethe, it is not a stretch to assume that Goethe's involvement with mesmerism would also influence Arnold.

Goethe's involvement with mesmerism, however, was not direct. Goethe actually despised the mystical trappings that Mesmer incorporated into his theories and, therefore, did not consider Mesmer a man to be admired. The science behind mesmerism, on the other hand, did appeal to Goethe as he was very interested in medicine, even earning an honorary degree in the field. Goethe conducted his own experiments in magnetism and was knowledgeable on the subject of mesmerism. Goethe was particularly interested in the trance, as he, along with other German Romantics, believed the trance was tied to revelation, and that "subtle fluids," such as animal magnetism, "[were] responsible for second sight."³⁵ Arnold avidly read all of Goethe's writings and would have been aware of Goethe's interest and investigations into mesmerism.³⁶ Eventually, when mesmerism

³³ Barry 152.

³⁴ Helen White, "Matthew Arnold and Goethe," MLA 1921: 438.

³⁵ Tatar 79.

³⁶ Irmgard Wagner, Goethe (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999).

made the move from the continent to England, Arnold would have had further exposure to the popular movement.

The impact this scientific model of mesmerism had on Victorian society can be seen through the instances where it appears in literature even today. Much popular fiction, such as the work of Charles Dickens, however, incorporates the more mystical aspects of mesmerism such as the fashionable but much caricatured figures of mediums and their séances. These aspects did not interest Arnold, and he found them rather ridiculous. Likewise, though Thomas Arnold's interest in mesmerism lay in the religious and spiritual realms, it did not extend to the mystical aspects. The scientific and rational interest of Goethe and Thomas Arnold leads to the possibility that through them, Arnold was not only made aware of mesmerism, but would have seen how mesmerism applied to his own search for the true self. While the exact extent of mesmerism's influence on Arnold is unknown, its nature, and that of the mesmeric trance, made it highly applicable to Arnold's search for identity.

Arnold's sense that he was afflicted with his modern disease comes through in his poetry. He felt out of place in his era and as author Greenough White explains, "the ideals of former days were dissolving away and those of the new era were not clearly defined; in the interim he felt like an alien [author's word]..."³⁷ Arnold was caught in an era of flux in which he struggled to find his own identity, his own hidden self, and in advocating self-knowledge he attempted to cure himself of his own depression and melancholy. These attempts are expressed in his poems "Self Dependence" (1852), "The Buried Life" (1852), and "The Scholar Gipsy" (1853).

³⁷ Greenough White, "Arnold's Character as Revealed in His Poems," Matthew Arnold and the Spirit of the Age (Folcroft Library Edition, 1972) 17.

In “Self Dependence,” a poem modeled after Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality,” the speaker converses with nature, relating his desire to relive the connection he felt with nature as a child. Building on the Romantics’ focus on introspection and self-reflection, the narrator of the poem seeks a method related to introspection and self-reflection, yet stronger than either. His goal is self-knowledge, and he seeks answers to the questions of “What I am, and what I ought to be” (2). Lack of self-knowledge has brought about a crisis of identity. In desperation, the narrator turns to nature, which has provided solace in the past, to once again help him obtain a tranquil state of mind (5-8). More than simply reconnecting with nature, however, this time the narrator wishes to emulate it:

“Ah, once more,” I cried, “ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew,
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you!” (9-12).

Like the mesmeric trance the soul becoming vast as the universe is a breaking away from physical limitations and from the boundaries of the conscious mind. The self knowledge Arnold searches for through the expansion of soul is, as he describes, too “obscure and changing”³⁸ to be described with mere words. It is because of these characteristics that psychology and introspection are insufficient to provide the answers he seeks.

The expanse of soul to which the speaker aspires requires a metaphysical as well as physical space which the crowded city could not offer. The connection to nature is vital to Arnold’s identity. Without the connection to nature, he cannot know himself, but

³⁸ Arnold, Passages 309.

without some understanding of his identity, he also cannot fully understand Nature. The answer offered is Arnold's cure. It is by emulating the self-sufficiency of Nature that self-knowledge can be obtained:

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,

Over the lit sea's unquiet way,

In the rustling night-air came the answer:

“Wouldst thou *be* as these are? *Live* as they” (13-16).

The voice is not given a specific source, and while it may be easy to assume the voice is Nature itself, the voice refers to the sea and stars as “they,” it does not say “Live as I.” Rather, Nature, according to qualities Arnold describes later in the poem, should not answer, as it is the internal focus of Nature that attracts him. In stanza 5, Nature is described as not being affected by external pressures: it is not frightened by silence or distracted by what it sees, it does not concern itself with the goings on of man, and, most importantly, does not demand “love, amusement, sympathy” (17-20). Nature, although aware of sight and sound, does not react, and because it demands no sympathy, man, too, cannot demand sympathy of Nature. Nature's self-dependent actions, such as the stars shining or the waves rolling, bring Nature happiness and contentment (21-24).

Nor does Nature compare itself to others, as men do each other. Nature worries only about Nature, and this self-dependence is what makes Nature so vast and attractive to the speaker:

“Bounded by themselves, and unregardful

In what state God's other works may be,

In their own tasks all their powers pouring,

These attain the mighty life you see” (24-28).

Children have a similar self-focus, and they also have a connection to Nature that is lost as they grow. It is the loss of this connection Wordsworth grieves in “Intimations of Immortality” when he says:

There was a time when meadow, grave, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem.
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (1-9)

External pressures eventually disrupt the adult connection to nature. Adults are aware this connection dies away. Both Wordsworth and Arnold understand that something of the self is lost along with this connection which cannot be entirely regained. Still, resuming even a vague connection is better than no connection at all.

In the final stanza, the speaker hears the message of the voice echoed in his own heart:

O air-born voice! long since, severely clear,
A cry like thine in my own heart I hear:
“Resolve to be thyself, and know that he,
Who finds himself, loses misery!” (25-32).

This resolution to know thyself required more than Romantic introspection. Mesmerism offered an organic knowledge of the self that maintained the integrity of that knowledge otherwise lost through psychology and introspection. What psychology and introspection offered was articulation.

“The Buried Life” is a poem spoken by a man to his lover wherein he describes how love can reveal a glimpse of the buried life. Early in the poem, the speaker questions whether love can truly reveal what is so deeply hidden:

Alas, is even Love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel? (12-15)

The poem continues with a discussion of the possibility of self-knowledge and discovery of the buried life.³⁹ More than the possibility of discovery, however, the poem argues for its necessity:

How frivolous a baby man would be,
By what distractions he would be possess'd,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity;
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite, his being's law,
Bade, through the deep recesses of our breast
The unregarded river of our life

³⁹ Faas 128.

Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying about in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally. (31-44)

In this passage, it is man who has buried his true self by not examining his life. Now, man is cut off from his true self and without recovering the true self, he is doomed to “blind uncertainty.” The following section further illustrates Arnold’s belief that we have two identities: one, which is false, we show to the world; the other, we keep hidden for fear it will be judged, but this hidden self is the true self.⁴⁰ However, the paradox of Arnold’s quest is that this true self cannot be articulated.

The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpressed.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well - but ‘tis not true: (62-66)

We attempt to express the hidden self on the surface, in our everyday interactions with other people, but these attempts always fail. Love, however, has the potential to bring one closer to the true self. It is through the eyes that Arnold believes one can see the buried life of another: “turn those limpid eyes on mine,/And let me read there, love, thy inmost soul” (10-11). He describes the gaze in terms very similar to the gaze used by the mesmerist to place his subject in a trance, as well as what he hopes will occur when the trance is induced:

⁴⁰ Paul F. Baum, Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1958) 105.

Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd,
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again:
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow (81-8).

The trance created between lovers allows for a glimpse of the buried life, “but this is rare” (line 77), and does not last. It is a momentary respite, “a lull in the hot race/Wherein he doth for ever chase/That flying and elusive shadow, Rest” (91-3). The trance is a space where the false self disappears and the lover has access to his buried life. While in the trance the lover can experience a momentary inner peace. Love, while providing a temporary solution, is neither a wide-spread nor individual solution just as the trance requires two people; alone it is not possible to completely reveal the hidden self because no matter how far we dig, “deep enough, alas, none ever mines” (56). Herein lies the irony of Arnold’s search for identity. The hidden self exists but is so deeply buried, it can never be found by man alone.

Mesmerism does dig deeper than introspection, but its dependency upon a mesmerist requires at least two people. In this case, Arnold places two lovers in the roles of mesmerist and subject with the lover's gaze substituting for the mesmerist's and the lover acting as an inadvertent mesmerist. The mesmerist controls and directs the trance, and the subject must rely on the mesmerist to induce the trance. While in the trance, the

subject is open to the suggestions of the mesmerist meaning the subject is not entirely free to conduct his own explorations. The mesmerist cannot know the buried self of another person and is therefore an imperfect guide. Mesmerism offers a closer proximity to the buried life than any previous means, but still falls tantalizingly short.

Arnold continues the theme of answers lying just beyond reach in a third poem called "The Scholar Gipsy." This poem had several titles before Arnold settled on "The Scholar Gipsy," among which were "The First Mesmerist" and "The Wandering Mesmerist."⁴¹ The poem recounts the tale of a man who left his academic world to travel with the roving gypsies because they "had arts to rule as they desir'd/The workings of men's brains;/And they can bind them to what thoughts they will" (45-7). The binding of thoughts is very similar to the control a mesmerist exerts over his subject. In a trance, the subject is susceptible to suggestions made by the mesmerist which can affect the subject's behavior and memories. Michael Bugeja states that the gypsy magic of "The Scholar Gipsy" is akin to mesmerism "which was practiced in a setting more appropriate for a gypsy than of a typical eighteenth-century physician."⁴² The mystique surrounding mesmerism, the trances and the amazing stories of healing, gave mesmerism that occult sense to which so many scientists objected.

As Arnold's quest for his true identity progressed, his ideas about mesmerism evolved. This evolution is most apparent when comparing "The Scholar Gipsy" to "The Buried Life." Arnold moved from a rather vague experience in "The Buried Life" to a more concrete knowledge in "The Scholar Gipsy." Whereas the lover in "The Buried Life" stumbles upon the trance while gazing into his lover's eyes, the Scholar Gipsy

⁴¹ Michael J. Bugeja, "Mesmer as Catalyst in 'The Scholar Gipsy'," *Forum* 27.3(1986): 38-42.
⁴² Bugeja 39.

purposefully sets out to learn a particular skill. It is through the character of this wandering scholar that Arnold introduced an additional component which he believed was necessary for discovering the true self. The first component, established in "Self-Dependence," is the connection to nature. In "The Buried Life" Arnold added the presence of a second component, the mesmerist. In "The Scholar Gipsy," the final component is "the spark from Heaven." This spark is the key the Scholar Gipsy awaits as he wanders the countryside, but he has no control over whether or not it will ever come. What separates the Scholar Gipsy from modern man is an eternal hope that the spark will arrive. Modern man, suffering from Arnold's "modern disease," cannot sustain hope.

In this poem, mesmerism is an elusive secret, but one which can supposedly be learned and used to unlock the mysteries of the mind. The Scholar Gipsy vows to return when he has learned this secret. The narrator of the poem, a student himself, stumbles across the story of the Scholar Gipsy and begins to imagine seeing him roaming about the countryside, even passing him on a snowy evening. But these encounters are impossible as the story is centuries old and the Scholar Gipsy long dead. The narrator holds out, however, because the Scholar Gipsy was

...born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads overtaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife" (201-5)

Free from the modern disease, the narrator imagines the Scholar Gypsy as immortal. Yet the secrets he may have learned he never returns to share. The narrator approves the Scholar Gypsy's solitary ways, his retreat from civilization, and his flight into the forest, back to the protection of nature:

Fly hence, our contact fear!

Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!

Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern

From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,

Wave us away, and keep thy solitude. (206-10)

The secrets of mesmerism, and the answers which lay enticingly in the hands of the gypsies, remain elusive, as does Arnold's buried life. The Scholar Gypsy becomes a myth, a wandering spirit who haunts the envious narrator. In Arnold's world, mesmerism was likewise insufficient to provide answers. Although the Scholar Gypsy has learned the mysteries of mesmerism, it is impossible for him to pass this knowledge along. Contact with Arnold's diseased modern world would eventually destroy the Scholar Gypsy:

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!

For strong the infection of our mental strife,

Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;

And we should win thee from thy own fair life,

Like us distracted, and like us unblest.

Soon, soon thy cheer would die,

Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,

And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made:

And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,

Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours. (221-30)

Mesmerism, unlike anything that had come before, had the potential to unlock the vast mysteries of human identity and calm the upheaval of modern life. But the deeper Arnold went, the further he felt he had yet to go, and eventually he concluded that true knowledge of oneself was impossible.

The degree to which Arnold may have been involved in mesmerism is unclear. Mesmerism, through the trance, offered Arnold the chance to access that which he believed was buried in the mind, but the degree to which he may have utilized this tool is questionable. Certainly mesmerism did offer a far better chance than other methods available at the time for exploring the unconscious. However, whatever impact mesmerism did have on Arnold's concept of the self, ultimately, he did not succeed in his own search for his true self. He said that, in the end, he was too overwhelmed by the rigors of attempting to uncover his buried life. He likened his experience to being torn apart and cited obligations to career and family that superseded his quest. His belief that even mesmerism could not fully uncover the deepest recesses of the mind led to his "abandoning his quest for the 'central stream of what we feel indeed,' and instead dabbling in 'the surface-stream, shallow and light' of what contemporary mental science...gave out to be man's inner world."⁴³ Arnold relinquished his search to other poets, such as Tennyson and Browning, although he felt they lacked an understanding of themselves that precluded their ability to fulfill the quest.⁴⁴

⁴³ Faas 134.

⁴⁴ Faas 133.

CHAPTER III

LORD TENNYSON AND IDENTITY'S ELIXIR

Tennyson, like Harriet Martineau, was a lay practitioner of mesmerism. While Elizabeth Barrett Browning was drawn to mesmerism for its spiritual implications, Martineau for its medical practices, and Matthew Arnold to its applications in the search for identity, for Tennyson, mesmerism had spiritual, medical, and psychological pertinence. Tennyson's spiritual interest is important to note in any discussion of mesmerism – his son, Hallam, for example, wrote that Tennyson believed “there might be a more intimate communication than we could dream of between the living and the dead”⁴⁵ and even attempted to contact his father's ghost after his death.⁴⁶ His brother, Frederick, was also an avid spiritualist and friend of the Brownings. But it is how Tennyson connected the medical aspects of mesmerism to its psychological ones that concerns this discussion of identity. Tennyson's faith in the powers of mesmerism to heal the body led him to apply those powers to heal the mind. Specifically, Tennyson felt mesmerism had the ability to cure “diseases of the will”⁴⁷ which stemmed from unformed or ill-formed identities. These diseased wills prevented individuals from assuming their

⁴⁵ Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: a memoir by his son, Volume 1 (New York: MacMillan Co, 1897) 320.

⁴⁶ Alison Chapman, “A poet never sees a ghost”: Photography and Trance in Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* and Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography,” Victorian Poetry 2003: 48.

⁴⁷ James E. Sait, “Tennyson, Mesmerism and the Prince's 'Weird Seizures',” The Yearbook of English Studies 1974: 207.

proper places in society, from integrating as mentally healthy, functional adults. Similar to Arnold, Tennyson felt that through the trance, mesmerism offered the individual the necessary knowledge to form a complete identity.

Tennyson became familiar with mesmerism by attending the public and private demonstrations of Dr. Elliotson and was soon practicing mesmerism himself. Hallam includes an entry from his mother's journal in the *Memoir* of his father recounting an incident in which a doctor asked Tennyson to mesmerize a patient:

About Mrs. Marsden A[lfred] recalled how through his mesmerism before her marriage she had recovered her health: - "We were staying at Malvern. Dr. Marsden was attending my wife and said to me, 'Instead of paying me my fee, I wish you would grant me a favour. Come and mesmerize a young lady who is very ill.' I said, 'I can't mesmerize, I never mesmerized anyone in my life.' But the doctor would take no refusal and said, 'Pooh! Look at your powerful frame!' So I mesmerized her according to the doctor's instructions. The first day it took me about an hour to send her to sleep; afterwards only a few seconds. Once she had a pain over her eye, and the doctor said, 'Breathe upon her eye!' I did so, then begged her pardon, saying that I had forgotten I had been smoking. Dr. Marsden said, 'She cannot hear you, that one breath has sent her off into the deepest of slumbers.' In a little while the lady grew better, and we moved to Cheltenham. A week or two afterwards I returned to Malvern for a few hours, but I had not thought of telling anyone that I was coming. I met Dr. Marsden in the street, who at once went and told the lady. Before the doctor had said more to her

than ‘I have good news for you,’ the lady said, ‘I know what you have come to tell me, I have felt Mr. Tennyson here for half and hour.’”⁴⁸

A second reference to mesmerism in the *Memoir* comes in a letter from Tennyson to photographer Julia Margaret Cameron after the birth of his son, Lionel. In the letter, Tennyson reveals that his wife is ill but that “I have been mesmerizing her, which, she says, has done her a great deal of good.”⁴⁹ These two incidents suggest that Tennyson had great faith in mesmerism’s healing power.

Tennyson also had a great interest in mental illness due to his family history, one plagued by insanity, epilepsy, and addiction. His father, George Clayton Tennyson, suffered from mental breakdowns, epilepsy, and alcoholism, which led to his death in 1831. Tennyson's brother, Edward, was housed in a mental institute for fifty-eight years, and his brother, Charles, was an opium addict. Tennyson himself may have inherited his father's epilepsy and from a very young age he experienced “waking trances.” His description of these trance states resembles Arnold's notion that the trance offered access to the true self.

All at once, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if it were so) seeming no extinction but the only true self.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ H. Tennyson, *Memoir* Vol. II, 21-2.

⁴⁹ H. Tennyson, *Memoir* Vol. I, 372.

⁵⁰ H. Tennyson 320.

Just as Arnold attached immortality to his Scholar Gipsy, Tennyson attaches immortality to his trance state. Also like Arnold, Tennyson expostulates on the idea of two selves: the personality (Arnold's surface self), which disappears under the trance, and the true life (Arnold's true self), which is only accessible through the trance. Tennyson's description of the trance as "the weirdest of the weird" reappears in his poem "The Princess" (1851) as the Prince's "weird seizures" which, like Tennyson's "waking trances" offer sometimes frightening insight.

In this poem, Tennyson explores the healing effects of mesmerism on identity. The poem centers around a Prince who, as the result of a sorcerer's curse, suffers from seizures which prevent him from being able to distinguish reality from façade. The story of the poem tells of the Prince's attempt to win the hand of the Princess Ida. Ida feels that women can only become the intellectual equals of men if they live apart from them and sets up an Academy where men are forbidden to enter.

Ida's withdrawal from society has prompted her to refuse to honor the betrothal to the Prince arranged by their fathers. Upon hearing of this refusal, the Prince wishes to go to her and reason with her. The Prince's father, however, wishes to "crush her pretty maiden fancies dead/In iron gauntlets" (Part I, 87-8) and dismisses the Prince's attempts to resolve issues with Ida peaceably:

And roughly spake

My father: 'Tut, you know them not, the girls.

Boy, when I hear you prate I almost think

That idiot legend credible. (Part V, 144-47)

With this statement, the king denies the Prince an identity separate from his father by denying the Prince an opinion separate from his father's. The king also undermines the Prince by denying the existence of the seizures and the knowledge that comes with them. The king emphasizes a connotation of weakness associated with the seizures by using them as an insult. Instead of standing up to his father, the Prince wanders outside to think and there receives a mysterious prompting:

while I meditated
A wind arose and rush'd upon the South,
And shook the songs, the whispers, and the shrieks
Of the wild woods together, and a Voice
Went with it, 'Follow, follow, thou shalt win.' (Part 1, 95-9)

The disembodied voice is similar to the voice from Arnold's "Self-Dependence." The origin of the voice is unknown, and while it accompanies Nature, coming with the wind, like the voice in "Self-Dependence," it is not the voice of Nature itself. The Prince heeds the voice, and, with his friends, journeys to Ida's Academy.

During the expedition, the Prince undergoes a series of seizures. The seizures act as a medical regimen designed to cure the Prince of his malformed identity. The Prince suffers from a combination of a lack of masculinity, manifested in his inability to assert himself, either against his father or Princess Ida, and a lack of sympathy or understanding for Ida's cause. The king views the seizures as an effeminate affliction that weakens the Prince and chastises him to "make [him]self a man."⁵¹ The king's definition of a man centers around using physical strength to force obedience, but this physicality does not correspond to the Prince's instinct, or to the true way to resolve the situation as revealed

⁵¹ (Part V, 34).

by the seizures. The Prince begins the story with a brief physical description of himself which establishes the effeminate characteristics his father so despises:

A Prince I was, blue-eyed, and fair in face,
Of temper amorous as the first of May,
With lengths of yellow ringlet, like a girl,
For on my cradle shone the Northern star. (Part I, 1-4)

Blond, handsome, blue-eyed, and with a romantic nature, the Prince is so effeminate that he is “like a girl.” The physical similarity to a girl extends to the Prince's personality which leads to his problem of identity.

The Prince's struggle against his father's notion of manhood highlights the gender ambiguity and inversion that permeate the poem. The extreme masculinity of the Prince's father is countered by Ida's feminist extreme which takes on masculine qualities itself. Knowledge and will, traditionally male traits, belong to Ida, while nostalgia and sentiment, traditionally female traits, belong to the Prince.⁵² By dressing as a woman to infiltrate the Academy, the Prince physically crosses and blurs the boundary between male and female. This blurring can be related back to the shadow image the Prince uses to refer to himself. The shadow represents the ambiguity in gender roles the Prince strives to reconcile. It is during the seizures, when the Prince is in the trance state, that the shadow is dispelled and the true self is revealed.

⁵² For more on gender inversion in “The Princess,” see Winston Collins's “‘The Princess’: The Education of the Prince,” *Victorian Poetry* 11.4(1973): 285-94. For a discussion on how gender inversion relates to genre subversion see Marjorie Stone's “Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: ‘The Princess’ and ‘Aurora Leigh,’” *Victorian Poetry* 25.2(1987): 101-27.

The second stanza launches into the story of the sorcerer's curse which was added for the first time to the 1851 edition of the poem and becomes the most significant aspect of the Prince's identity:

There lived an ancient legend in our house.
Some sorcerer, whom a far-off grandsire burnt
Because he cast no shadow, had foretold,
Dying, that none of all our blood should know
The shadow from the substance, and that one
Should come to fight with shadows and to fall;
For so, my mother said, the story ran. (Part I, 5-11)

The history of the curse among the Prince's family receives four times the amount of attention as the description of the Prince that opens Part I, suggesting that the curse is a more significant aspect of the Prince's identity than his "temper amorous." The seizures receive extended treatment because they are central both to the Prince's problem of identity and his remedy: "And, truly, waking dreams were, more or less,/ An old and strange affection of the house./ Myself too had weird seizures, Heavens knows what!" (Part I, 12-14). The Prince explains that the seizures came upon him suddenly, and while his behavior does not change, "[he] seem'd to move among a world of ghosts,/And feel [himself] the shadow of a dream" (Part I, 17-18). What seems like a curse, however, can be turned to the Prince's advantage. The seizures are Tennyson's poetic interpretation of the trance state and have similarities to the mesmeric trance that could give the Prince insight into the world, although, initially, the Prince garners little wisdom from them.

The Prince's episodes are termed “catalepsy” by the court physician (Part I, 20), but his diagnosis is inaccurate. Catalepsy involves a loss of movement from which the Prince does not suffer. The Prince's seizures share a similarity to the mesmeric trance in that he enters a different state of comprehension to his normal waking state. An entranced subject is also able to move, but only at the behest of the mesmerist. The Prince's ability to move may reflect a similarity to Tennyson's “waking trances” or may be an artistic difference from the mesmeric trance.

The accuracy of the Prince's altered state is noted by John D. Rosenberg who explains that the descriptions of the Prince's “weird seizures” bear a striking similarity to Tennyson's own waking trances:

proximity and distance often seem to change place, so that *near* and *far*, *light* or *dark*, are displaced by their opposites... It is as if, while one were staring at a photograph, the print suddenly reversed itself back into the negative, only to reverse itself once again. The contrast of light and dark, the relation of large to small and near to far, remain exactly the same, but the picture – in reality our *interpretation* of the picture radically changes. These instants of awareness when an object or emotion begins to fade into its opposite most strongly compelled Tennyson's imagination. One begins to understand his lifelong preoccupation with dreams and trances, for in such states the conventionally “real” becomes unreal, the remote in time or place becomes immediate, the intangible becomes palpable.⁵³

⁵³ John D. Rosenberg, “Tennyson and the Landscape of Consciousness,” Victorian Poetry 12.4(1974): 308.

The Prince experiences these same reversals during his seizures as he enters his “shadow world.” It is the new interpretations of scenes that bring the Prince new knowledge of the world around him.

The use of the trance as a mechanism of self-knowledge is not isolated to “The Princess.” Tennyson uses trances in other poems such as *Idylls of the King* and “The Ancient Sage” to perform a similar function of insight and discovery. In “The Holy Grail” (1869) from *Idylls*, King Arthur describes visions in which substances such as light and air both are and are not what they seem to be:

Let visions of the night or of the day
Come as they will; and many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
This air that smites his forehead is not air,
But vision – yea, his very hand and foot –
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself, (906-13)

This double-state is similar to the state in the Prince's “weird seizures” where “things were and were not” (Part III, 173). The function of King Arthur's visions is to act as a source of self-knowledge.⁵⁴ By seeing the world as it is and the reality behind that appearance, Arthur has a greater understanding of himself and the universe. In a similar way, the Prince has access to this source of knowledge through his “weird seizures.”

⁵⁴ Timothy Peltason, “Learning How to See: ‘The Holy Grail,’” *Victorian Poetry* 30.3/4(1992): 463-82.

However, the Prince, young and unwise, does not realize the significance of the seizures while the more mature and enlightened Arthur does.

In a second poem, “The Ancient Sage” (1885), Tennyson once again uses the trance state as a means of gaining self-knowledge. For the Ancient Sage, the trance is a state in which the self is freed of all limitations and it is in this freed state that the self can be understood:⁵⁵

more than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself
The word that is the symbol of myself,
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
And past into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange not mine – and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were Sun to spark – unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world. (234-39)

Here Tennyson uses shadows almost exactly the same way he uses them in “The Princess.” The “shadows of a shadow-world” that infuse the Sage's trance state reflect that shadows that seem to haunt the Prince during his seizures where he himself is but the “shadow of a dream.”

⁵⁵ Howard W. Fulweiler, “The Argument of ‘The Ancient Sage’: Tennyson and the Christian Intellectual Tradition,” *Victorian Poetry* 21.3(1983): 203-16.

Most convincing is Tennyson's use of personal experience to depict the vast knowledge accessible through the trance. Verse 95 of *In Memoriam* (1850) describes a self-induced trance Tennyson experienced. During the trance, Tennyson felt the presence of another soul which ascribed to be that of his deceased friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. Also during the trance, his mind climbed to “empyrean heights of thought” (95, 38) which in the aftermath of the trance his mind could not reclaim:

word by word, line by line⁵⁶

The dead man touch'd me from the past,

And all at once it seem'd at last

The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in this

About empyreal heights of thought

And came on that which is, and caught

The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out

The steps of Time – the shocks of Chance –

The blows of Death. At length my trance

Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt. (95, 33-44)

The experience of Tennyson's own trance, his “empyrean heights of thought,” are found again and again throughout his poetry as a mechanism for self-knowledge. The similarity between the visions of King Arthur, the trances of the Ancient Sage, and the “weird seizures” of the Prince all find their origin in Tennyson's own history.

⁵⁶ This line refers to letters written by A.H.H.

“The Princess” differs from other trance poems such as “The Holy Grail” and “The Ancient Sage” by incorporating a medical element into its trance state. This incorporation links the “weird seizures” to the curative powers of mesmerism, combining Tennyson's own experience with the mesmeric trance. The seizures act in the same manner as a course of treatment for an illness.⁵⁷ While the first treatment may seem to have very little effect, each successive treatment has a stronger and stronger effect until the patient is cured. In the same manner, each seizure progresses beyond the previous seizure, bringing not only insight, but ultimately solidifying the Prince's identity and strengthening his will. By melding insight and healing within the trance, Tennyson elevates its power and creates a compelling argument for the potential of mesmerism.

The first of the “weird seizures” affects the Prince shortly after the three men enter the college under their assumed identities:

On a sudden my strange seizure came
Upon me, the weird vision of our house.
The Princess Ida seem'd a hollow show,
Her gay-furr'd cats a painted fantasy,
Her college and her maidens empty masks,
And I myself the shadow of a dream,
For all things were and were not. (Part III, 167-73)

The seizure allows the Prince to see that Ida's Academy is not the solution to Ida's fight for equality. Ida and her Academy appear to be “a hollow show.” She and her companions play the parts of teachers and students, but they are only “empty masks,” visages with no substance. Tennyson's argument is that men and women cannot live

⁵⁷ Sait 207.

separately; they are not meant to live separately but should act as parts that make up a whole. Without the knowledge of the male world, Ida's knowledge is incomplete.

Tennyson uses the word “fantasy” because, despite Ida's intentions, her vision cannot be realized.

Like the Prince, Ida also suffers from a diseased will, but her condition is the reverse of the Prince's; her will is too inflexible.⁵⁸ She is too convinced that separation from the male realm is the answer. Her disadvantage is the lack of seizures. Ida is only cured after (and because) the Prince is cured.

The Prince refers to himself with a phrase that recurs throughout the poem. He is but “the shadow of a dream,” and in this state he is doubly insubstantial. That he is able to perceive himself as altered in this trance state reinforces the idea that like the Princess, he is also putting on a show. Yet, in the second half of the passage, we see the Prince seem to react to the “hollow” Ida of the vision:

Yet I felt

My heart beat thick with passion and with awe;

Then from my breast the involuntary sigh

Broke, as she smote me with the light of eyes

That lent my knee desire to kneel, and shook

My pulses (Part III, 173-78)

Like the inadvertent mesmerist in Arnold's “The Buried Life,” Ida exerts a mesmerizing force over the Prince. Passion and awe correspond more appropriately to the Ida who is “All beauty compass'd in a female form” (Part II, line 20) with “so much grace and

⁵⁸

Sait 207.

power” (Part II, 24) that the men encounter upon first entering the Academy. An explanation as to how the response to Ida’s dream form can be reconciled to this passion comes in the middle of the passage. The Prince states that “all things were and were not,” (Part III, 173) a phrase which mediates the idea that the extremes of character present throughout the poem are not mutually exclusive. The academy is both a show and the real thing. The Prince does not have to become entirely the man his father is in order to cure his disease of will, nor does Ida, in finding her true self, have completely to relinquish her vision of feminist potential.

The second seizure is both more intense and darker in nature than the first. It occurs after the Princess discovers that the Prince and his friends are men and ejects them from the Academy. Defeated in his attempt to win the Princess’s affection, the Prince and Florian make their way to the war camp of the kings. The sounds of the camp provide a vivid contrast between a world dominated by men and the female dominated world of the Academy. As the Prince listens to the sounds of the camp, he experiences a second seizure:

While I listen’d, came
On a sudden the weird seizure and the doubt.
I seem’d to move among a world of ghosts;
The Princess with her monstrous woman-guard,
The jest and earnest working side by side,
The cataract and the tumult and the kings
Were shadows; and the long fantastic night
With all its doings had and had not been,

And all things were and were not.

This went by

As strangely as it came, and on my spirits

Settled a gentle cloud of melancholy-

Not long; I shook it off; for spite of doubts

And sudden ghostly shadowing I was one

To whom the touch of all mischance but came

As night to him that sitting on a hill

Sees the midsummer, midnight, Norway sun

Set into sunrise; then we moved away. (Part IV, 537-53)

The carnival feel of the first seizure is replaced by the underworld setting of the second. Here, ghosts replace the “empty masks” and monsters the “painted fantasy.” Following James Sait’s suggestion that the seizures are the cure to the Prince’s disease of will, the second seizure can be seen as more intense because the Prince has begun to heal. The second seizure is more violently cathartic, revealing a more conflicted mind, but a mind that has changed from the passionate reaction to Ida of the first seizure to one that is more worldly. Oddly, while the seizure is more intense than the first, the Prince’s reaction to this second seizure is less so. He quickly disperses his “gentle cloud of melancholy” explaining that he is not one who is greatly bothered by misgivings. This rather juvenile attitude reflects an incomplete healing process. The Prince has further to go before he is cured.

The final seizure appears just before the battle scene in which the Prince confronts Ida’s brother and defender. This seizure is significant because it demonstrates an almost

prescient ability on the Prince's part to bring on the seizure. Just after the Prince remembers the sorcerer's curse, the final seizure descends, almost as if the act of remembering triggers the seizure. This suggests a more active connection between the Prince's awareness and the trance state. This scene is also infused with ghosts but returns to the "show" theme of the first seizure. The Prince envisions the upcoming battle as a play recreating archaic battles rather than fighting for a new cause:

Then I remember'd that burnt sorcerer's curse
That one should fight with shadows and should fall;
And like a flash the weird affections came.
King, camp, and college turn'd to hollow shows;
I seem'd to move in old memorial tilts,
And doing battle with forgotten ghosts,
To dream myself the shadow of a dream;
And ere I woke it was the point of noon,
The lists were ready. (Part V, 464-71)

The Prince goes to the battle not wanting to fight. As his final seizure revealed, fighting is an archaic and hollow means of resolving the conflict, and a means more suited to his father and Ida's brother than to himself. Yet he has resolved to fight for Ida on her terms. He does so knowing that the curse warns that he will fall, but his will, finally strengthened and appropriately masculine, is to fight anyway. Ida's brother, far more physically powerful than the Prince, easily defeats him. The Prince suffers a terrible wound which takes him to the brink of death. He is so close to death that his friends and father believe he is dead: "dream and truth/ Flow'd from me; and darkness closed me

and I fell” (Part V, 530-31). Here, the Prince fulfills the sorcerer's prophecy “that one/ Should come to fight with shadows and to fall” (Part I, 9-10). The Prince is eventually rescued by Ida, who, guilt ridden, cares for the Prince herself. He spends his recovery in a state between life and death, and, significantly, this state resembles a mesmeric trance: “My dream had never died or lived again;/ As in some mystic middle state I lay./ Seeing I saw not, hearing not I heard;” (Part VI, 1-3). When he eventually awakens, he is still caught in his “mystic middle state” and recognizes neither his surroundings nor Ida, who sits by his bed. Ida’s tears drip onto his face and he “on her/Fixt [his] faint eyes” (Part VII, 128-9). The gaze again appears as an important component of the mesmeric experience, but while the gaze in Arnold's “The Buried Life” initiates the trance, here the gaze brings the Prince out of the trance. Seeing Ida begins to bring him out of his shadow world. Uncertain whether she is real or part of his curse, the Prince asks for a kiss, and when granted, he realizes Ida loves him and the cure is complete. The identities of both the Prince and the Princess are resolved and the seizures end.

The seizures are an important point in character development, but they are also the reason the Prince’s friends use to justify accompanying him. These friends represent two aspects of the Prince: Florian, the caring, compassionate side, and Cyril, the darker side.⁵⁹ The two friends also find female counterparts among the women of the Princess’s Academy. Cyril falls in love with Florian’s widowed sister, Lady Psyche, and Florian falls in love with Lady Blanche’s daughter, Melissa. Cyril is thereby cured of his shallow personality and Melissa redeems her mother’s hypocritical, selfish, and wicked behavior towards her daughter, the Prince and his friends, Ida, and Psyche. James Sait suggests that Tennyson’s view of mesmerism encompassed the idea that it had the capability to

⁵⁹ Eileen Johnston, “‘This Were a Medley’: Tennyson's 'The Princess',” *ELH* 1984: 552.

regenerate mankind. While mesmerism does not directly affect anyone other than the Prince, the outcome of the Prince's seizures does affect most of the other characters in some way. Cyril uses the seizures as the excuse to accompany the Prince on his quest to win the Princess:

And Cyril whispered: 'Take me with you too.'

Then laughing, 'What if these weird seizures come

Upon you in those lands, and no one near

To point you out the shadow from the truth!' (Part I, 80-83)

Cyril's references to the seizures serve to underscore the differences in character between Cyril, who is not affected, and the Prince. Cyril, claiming he has been struck by Cupid and is in love with Lady Psyche, declares:

[Cupid] cleft me thro' the stomacher. And now

What think you of it, Florian? do I chase

The substance or the shadow? will it hold?

I have no sorcerer's malison on me,

No ghostly hauntings like his Highness. I

Flatter myself that always everywhere

I know the substance when I see it. Well,

Are castles shadows? Three of them? Is she

The sweet proprietress a shadow? (Part II, 385-93)

Here Cyril claims that his lack of seizures means he is justified in his practical attraction to Lady Psyche. Cyril, unlike the Prince, does not have difficulty discerning what is real. His attraction differs from that of the Prince's for Ida because the Prince does not really

know how he feels about her. She has only existed as an idea, and now that the men have infiltrated the castle, the Prince has been exposed to the disparity between his idealized Ida and the Ida that heads the Academy. The conflict now centers around the fact that Ida is not fulfilling her traditional role as a woman; she has taken the role that traditionally belongs to the Prince and turned it against him. She exists as two possibilities - the Ida who leads the Academy and is the true Ida, and she that is not the true Ida, but someone who is robed in the Academic identity. Because the truth of her identity is not known, the Prince cannot know how he feels about her. Cyril's argument is that he can and does know how he feels about Psyche, and this certainty, he argues, validates his motives.

However, it is not until Cyril is confronted with a Psyche torn apart with guilt for leaving her daughter behind that Cyril understands how he truly feels about Psyche. The Prince cannot tell the difference between shadow and substance in the external world, but Cyril cannot judge which emotions are real. Cyril and the Prince now both suffer from an affliction that prevents them from knowing shadow from substance, but the Prince's originates from an external source, the curse, and affects his perception of the external world, whereas Cyril's affliction originates internally and affects his perception of himself. Cyril's frequent references to the Prince's condition indicate the irony of a similar affliction in his own character.

While Cyril does not understand his own character, the Prince, with his great capacity for understanding, sees Cyril's true character. Although Cyril seems to act selfishly when he runs off with Lady Psyche, the Prince consoles Florian with the declaration that:

These flashes on the surface are not he.

He has a solid base of temperament;
But as the water-lily starts and slides
Upon the level in little puffs of wind,
Tho' anchor'd to the bottom, such is he. (Part IV, 234-38)

This idea that the Cyril that Florian sees is not the true Cyril closely parallels Matthew Arnold's concept of double identities, one which interacts with the external world, and the other which lies buried below the surface. Here, the true self is described as lying at the bottom of a pool of water while above, the water-lily, or false self, floats on the surface. Tennyson here expresses the idea that these identities are connected: the water-lily has a hidden root that attaches to the bottom. The two selves were more tenuously connected for Arnold; there was no direct link between the river of "The Buried Life" and the surface self. Tennyson continued to incorporate mesmeric themes in his poetry, including "Maud" and "In Memoriam," as well as exploring mental turmoil in volumes such as *Enoch Arden*.

Tennyson uses the mesmeric trance in "The Princess" to correct problems of identity which prevent the Prince from assuming his place in society. The Prince's weakness of will and blurred sense of gender are, through the progression of the seizures, strengthened on the one hand and clarified on the other. The Prince himself acts as an example as to how Tennyson felt society, and the individuals that constitute society, could benefit from the trance.

CHAPTER IV

ROBERT BROWNING AND THE LOSS OF IDENTITY

Unlike both Tennyson and Arnold, Robert Browning had a less enthusiastic response to mesmerism. He objected to the idea of abdicating control of one's self to another and felt that this abdication risked the fate of the individual's identity. Not only did Browning dislike mesmerism, he also disagreed with his wife who was a strong supporter of mesmerism. This difference of opinion was the one area of serious contention between the two, and the extent to which his wife's beliefs troubled Browning is reflected in his poems "Mesmerism" (1855) and "Mr. Sludge, the Medium" (1864).

As mesmerism extended beyond the bounds of physical medicine, people in counseling roles such as preachers and spiritualists took on mesmerism as a tool in therapy. These mesmerists believed that the trance allowed them to empathize with the emotions of their patients to the point where the trance became "an intimate moment of spiritual or psychological binding."⁶⁰ The trance, the mesmerists believed, offered a way into the soul, providing access to the patient and allowing the mesmerist not only to understand what troubled the patient, but also how to remedy those troubles. But where the mesmerists saw potential, Robert Browning saw danger.

⁶⁰

Winter, Mesmerized 247.

Browning did believe in the power of mesmerism, and it was due to the strength of his belief that he feared its power. For Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the medicinal and spiritual potential of mesmerism outweighed the dangers, although she shared her husband's aversion to the implications of its power. She was a friend and correspondent of Harriet Martineau, and at one point considered undergoing mesmeric treatments herself before Martineau dissuaded her. Barrett suffered from a chronic lung condition as well as from a spinal injury incurred when she was a teenager. In addition, the loss of Barrett's brother, Edward, in 1840 broke her emotionally, exacerbated her already fragile health, and turned her into an invalid and recluse. However, Martineau did not believe that Barrett's particular ailments would benefit from mesmerism and Barrett never received treatments.⁶¹ Barrett's insights into mesmerism exist only in her correspondence, having never been made the subject of her poetry.

For Robert Browning, the dangerous aspects of mesmerism came from the nature of the trance itself. The power structure of the trance, the control the mesmerist has over his subject, also set up a gender dynamic of male power and female submission that Browning abhorred. As the first exercises in mesmerism were medical in nature, doctors were the natural mesmerists. Thus, the first mesmerists were all male. While all patients were not female, the social preference for weak females, females prone to hysteria and physical ailments, meant that a larger proportion of women were patients. A baseline was established that male doctors treated female patients. This partnership fed nicely into the patriarchal power structure that existed in the Victorian era. As more and more lay mesmerists practiced mesmerism, they continued to be male practitioners, such as Tennyson and Dickens, with female patients such as Tennyson's wife.

⁶¹ Deborah Logan, "Harriet Martineau letters," email to Jennifer Tenbrink, 23 Mar. 2008.

Elizabeth Barrett's attraction to mesmerism included this gender dynamic. After meeting Browning for the first time, Barrett described his power over her in mesmeric terms: "I felt as if you had a power over me and meant to use it, and that I could not breathe or speak very differently from what you chose to make me. As to my thoughts, I had it in my head somehow that you read *them* as you read the newspaper--examined them, and fastened them down writhing under your long entomological pins."⁶² Browning would later eerily echo Barrett's words in his poem "Mesmerism." The poem, which was Browning's ultimate warning against mesmerism, focuses on the disturbing gender relationship Barrett described as the story unfolds of a man mesmerizing his beloved.

There are, however, some exceptions to the gender dynamic. Harriet Martineau's maid, Jane, began to mesmerize Martineau after her first mesmerist, Dr. Spencer T. Hall, fell ill, and a lay mesmerist, Mrs. Montague Wynward, followed Jane. To an independently-minded Martineau, a female mesmerist was natural, and other women would likely not have objected to having a female mesmerist. Men, on the other hand, may have objected to the inversion of power between men and women. Two works of literature, Tennyson's "The Princess" and Dickens "The Mystery Of Edwin Drood," both feature male characters as mesmeric subjects. It is the Prince and Edwin Drood who are under the influence of evil mesmerists rather than female characters such as the woman in Browning's "Mesmerism." Yet, in both these instances, the mesmerists are still male.

Browning emphasizes the typical gender dichotomy in "Mesmerism" by having a man secretly mesmerize the object of his desire. The furtive nature of the man's actions

⁶² Frederick G. Kenyon, ed, The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning Vol. I (New York: MacMillan, 1897): 488-9.

heightens the vulnerability of the woman; his subject, unaware of what is happening, has no defense against the mesmeric trance. From the confines of his own home, the narrator imagines putting the woman into a trance – he concentrates, envisioning her coming under the influence of his trance, obeying his command to leave the safety of her house, and making her way through the forest to where he waits. The narrator compels the woman to act against her own will by imposing his own.

In the poem, the subject becomes a victim of mesmerism, subjected to the trance and an unwilling participant. In Browning's portrayal of a man obsessed with a young woman, it is clear that he dislikes the loss of identity. The person being mesmerized gives up, or, in this case, loses, her identity to the mesmerist who then has complete control over the subject. This loss of identity, where the trance erases individual desires and choices and supplants the external and sometimes contradictory ones of the mesmerist, turns the subject into an extension of the mesmerist and was perhaps more distasteful when voluntarily given. It also clashed against the individualism emerging in the culture during the time – individualism that moved away from the Burkean tradition of defining oneself through society.

Tennyson and Arnold both followed the Burkean definition of an individual. Both felt that individualism was achieved through contact with society. The individual was a component of a greater whole with a specific role and function. Once this role and function were understood, the individual could take his place in society. Mesmerism was a means through which an individual would be able to join society. For example, in Tennyson's "The Princess," the Prince's seizures set him apart from society. As the poem progresses and the Prince suffers more seizures, he begins to gain greater understanding

of himself and how he must relate to those around him. His final conclusion – that men and women are both vital components to a healthy society – culminates when Ida agrees to marry him. It is through mesmerism that the Prince goes from being an outsider to a functioning and integrated individual within a society. Browning's idea of individualism, on the other hand, saw the individual as apart from society. Where the Burkean tradition believed that the needs of society outweighed the needs of the individual, Browning believed the opposite. Mesmerism, with its intimate connection to another, a subjection of will to another, represented the worst result of a social connection. The mesmeric trance was not only a loss of identity, but a loss of the individual.

Browning saw mesmerism as a dangerous, negative force, both in spite and because of his wife's strong beliefs in mesmerism. Barrett's delicate health and restricted visitations made Browning reluctant to voice his opinion of mesmerism. The invalidism and reclusiveness brought on by the death of Barrett's brother was fully supported and even encouraged by Barrett's family, especially her father. Edward Moulton Barrett was a domineering man, refusing to allow any of his children, including the males, to marry, and monitoring and controlling all of his children's visitors and activities.⁶³ Barrett's own reclusive tendencies, coupled with her father's constrictive manner, made acquaintance difficult. Browning imagined "Mesmerism" before he met Barrett, but did not publish it until after they were married for fear the subject, and his treatment of the subject, would cause her to refuse marriage.⁶⁴ His main period of

⁶³ Speculation abounds as to why Moulton Barrett refused to allow even his sons to marry, but Julia Markus offers the interesting explanation that it was his fear that the family had racially mixed blood. The Moulton Barrett clan owned extensive sugar plantations in Jamaica, where the family resided for generations before Edward Moulton Barrett moved his family back to England. It is possible that his genetic paranoia left him wanting to purposefully end his family line.

⁶⁴ Winter, *Mesmerized* 240-1.

composition occurred during a time when their differing views on mesmerism were causing some difficulties in their marriage.⁶⁵

Although Barrett herself was always uncomfortable with the intimate and controlling nature of the relationship between the mesmerist and his patient, she believed in its utility and defended her friend after Martineau received harsh criticism and personal attacks when *Letters on Mesmerism* was published in 1844. The *Letters*, which related accounts of clairvoyance by an acquaintance of Martineau's, were accepted for publication by the editor of the *Athenaeum*, Sir Charles Dilke. After publishing the *Letters*, Dilke turned on Martineau in his review: "We earnestly hope that Miss Martineau will give fair play to her better judgement, and act ingenuously and fearlessly in a matter which so intimately concerns her honour...and acknowledge openly and honestly that she has been imposed on."⁶⁶ Many members of the scientific community agreed with Dilke, citing the lack of evidence and subjective nature of Martineau's account as irresponsible. On April 28, 1845, Barrett responded to a similar critique by her friend, Mr. Chorley, writing:

she is at liberty as a thinking being (in my mind) to hold an opinion, the grounds of which she cannot yet justify to the world. Do you not think she may be? Have you not opinions yourself beyond what you can prove to others? Have we not all? And because some of the links of the outer chain of a logical argument fail, or seem to fail, are we therefore to have our 'honours' questioned, because we do not yield what is suspended to an inner uninjured chain of at once subtler and stronger formation? For what

⁶⁵ Kirk Beetz, "Three Themes in Browning's Gothic Satire 'Mesmerism'," *Gothic* 2(1987): 6.

⁶⁶ Qtd in Caroline Roberts, *The Woman and the Hour* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002) 122.

I venture to object to in the argument of the 'Athenaeum' is the making of a *moral obligation* of an *intellectual act*, which is the first step and gesture (is it not?) in all persecution for opinion; and the involving of the 'honour' of an opponent in the motion of recantation she is invited to.⁶⁷

The controlling aspect of mesmerism, the subjugation of one identity to another, which bothered both the Brownings, may have hit close to home due to Barrett's controlling father. Barrett was always a favorite of her father and therefore enjoyed a less restrictive relationship with her father than her other siblings, but as an invalid, Barrett rarely had the need or opportunity to challenge her father's rules. Barrett did finally commit an act of rebellion when she married Browning without her father's consent and was subsequently disinherited. For Browning, who met Barrett in 1845, it must have been frustrating to see his future wife giving credence to a phenomenon that bore a resemblance to her relationship with her father.

Browning infuses "Mesmerism" with themes of possession, power, corruption, control, destruction, creation, and the idea that through the trance one soul can contact another. For the narrator of the poem, the mesmerist's ability to reach his lover on the level of the soul is the ultimate goal of his attempts to mesmerize her since this level of access grants complete and ultimate control. The poem can be confusing as Browning sets it up as the narrator's imaginings only to reveal in the final stanzas that the imaginings are real and every act the narrator envisions has actually occurred. The poem consists of twenty-seven five-line stanzas and begins with an enthusiastic response by the narrator to the idea of the mesmeric trance coupled with a warning about the dangers inherent in the trance. The narrator is excited at the prospect of obtaining "All I want" (in

⁶⁷ Kenyon 256.

this case the woman he desires), but at the same time hesitates at the idea of granting someone else similar power over himself. Browning's conclusion actually comes in the first stanza of the poem. The narrator is reflecting on the opportunity mesmerism offers for him to obtain all he desires:

All I believed is true!

I am able yet

All I want, to get

By a method as strange as new;

Dare I trust the same to you? (1-5)

The stanza ends with a question that summarizes Browning's feelings on the danger of mesmerism. The narrator asks of his wondrous abilities, "Dare I trust the same to you?" He is willing to employ mesmerism to possess his lover, but hesitates at the thought of giving "you" the same power. It is one thing to impose yourself on others' identities, but quite another to allow them to impose theirs on you. This hesitation emphasizes Browning's point, that the narrator would not want done to him what he is about to do. The identity of "you" is vague; the narrator could be addressing the woman he is about to mesmerize or the audience itself. This vagueness underscores the loss of the subject's individuality while at the same time strengthening the mesmerist's autonomy. Since the identity of "you" is vague, it is not important, the end result, loss of identity, is the same regardless of the identity of the mesmerist. With his question, the narrator also acknowledges that there is an immoral element to mesmerism. It is a power which can be abused, and this makes the narrator uncomfortable, although not uncomfortable enough to stop himself from mesmerizing the woman.

Despite the potential immorality, the narrator engages in what at first appears to be a fantasy scenario in which he imagines, “If at night, when doors are shut” (6) he were to mesmerize his lover. Use of the word “If” indicates a hypothetical situation which contradicts the certainty expressed in the first stanza that “All I believed is true!” by suggesting that what follows might happen rather than is happening. The tone of the second stanza is dark; drawing on Gothic imagery, the scene is set at night and focuses on details in which a tiny insect “picks” (7) in the walls, the “death-watch ticks” (8) ominously, there is filth on the bar, and a cat, possibly drowned, in the rain barrel (7-10). These dark details reflect Browning's distaste for mesmerism; mesmerism itself is dark, disturbing, and morbid. The details also suggest a hypersensitivity in the penetrating sense of the mesmerist. He is not just aware of the woman in her house, but of the tiny creaks and creatures that surround her. That he could be so hypersensitive indicates both a refinedness and strength to his mesmeric power.

The third stanza continues to describe the dark setting and focus on disturbing details: “And the socket floats and flares,/ And the house-beams groan,” (11-12). This is as well an unsettling sense of invasion to the scene: “And a foot unknown/Is surmised on the garret-stairs,/ And the lock slips unawares--” (13-15). The narrator imagines invading the woman's home through the mechanism of the trance, entering without permission and without her knowledge. Such an act of intrusion also emphasizes the vulnerability of the woman; she is defenseless against the narrator's powers in part because she has no way of protecting herself against the trance and because she is unaware of the narrator's actions. The object of the narrator's intent becomes the oblivious victim, unaware of the narrator's mesmeric presence and therefore entirely at his mercy.

In the fourth stanza, Browning introduces imagery that sets the narrator up as a predator, a spider, “to serve his ends” (16), with the trance acting as the spider's web. The spider descends to the middle of the table with “arms and legs outspread” (18) and there “Comes to find, God knows what friends!” (20). The final line serves as a warning and foreshadows the fate of the narrator's soul. The spider descends physically, the narrator spiritually, to find himself in unnamed, yet sinister, company with the spider's descent acting as a metaphor for a descent into Hell. This descent implies that the narrator's actions in mesmerizing the woman are corrupting his soul.

Stanza five repeats the use of the word “If” to remind the reader that the situation remains an imagined one and describes the act of mesmerizing the woman over a distance. He has “sat and brought/(So to speak) my thought/To bear on the woman away” (22-24) although the act involves a great effort on the narrator's part. He is willing to invest the time and energy “Till I felt my hair turn grey” (25) because the reward is so great. The parenthetical phrase “(So to speak)” comments on the mental affecting the physical. Since thought is not physical, it cannot be brought to bear, and yet, it does cause a physical reaction in the woman; she is entranced: “Breathing and mute,/Passive and yet aware,/In the grasp of my steady stare--“(33-35).

Stanzas six through nine concentrate on the words “have and hold,” a phrase repeated in all four. The trance, now effected over a distance, means the narrator has caught his prey and she cannot escape. The stanzas also stress that the trance captures the woman entirely, physically and mentally. In the space between the wall and the narrator, he imagines a shadow, a dim shape he wishes the woman to fill and which will be filled

by the end of the poem (26-30). The repetition of the words “have and hold” reveals the narrator's obsession with possessing the woman mind and body:

Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare-- (31-35)

She is alive, but unable to speak, aware of what is happening, but powerless to stop it. She is trapped, like an insect in a web, and the narrator becomes a terrifying character in that he does not empathize with her position; his only concern is possession. It is in this stanza that Browning's own terror of mesmerism comes through. These lines illustrate the strength of the bond that is formed between the mesmerist and his subject. It is this strength that concerns Browning, and it is why he sets the dramatic connection between souls in a creepy and discomfiting setting of picking wood-worms and ticking death-watches. Browning empathizes with the woman and sees all those under the mesmeric trance in the same situation. The gaze itself takes on a physical danger. The stare played a fundamental part in the process of mesmerizing a subject. The mesmerist would gaze into the subject's eyes until she fell into a trance. The word “grasp” indicates a physical possession, an ability to possess a person through the gaze.

The power of the gaze can be traced back to ancient cultures such as the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews. Traditionally, the power of the gaze took the form of the evil eye, in which a person possessing the powers of the evil eye could curse people simply by looking at them. The folklore of the evil eye diffused into European culture

and was a wide-spread phenomenon by the time Mesmer formulated the process of his trance in the late eighteenth century, and he certainly would have been aware of the idea that the gaze had power.⁶⁸ Taking the next step, turning the gaze from an instrument of evil to one of medicinal power, would not have required much of a leap. Jacques Lacan suggested that the gaze was a necessary step in the evolution of the individual, and that gazing in the mirror at one's self was to recognize, or see, the individual for the first time as a whole rather than in fragments.⁶⁹ Michel Foucault brought the discussion of the evil eye into the more secular realms of the power of the gaze by stating that the gaze gives the observer power to control the behavior of the observed.⁷⁰ The focus of the subject being mesmerized on the gaze of the mesmerist also contributed to the trance, although we now know it was more the concentrated focus on the part of the subject rather than a special power on the part of the mesmerist that effected the trance. However, the belief that the gaze held power was an important component to the mesmeric process. With the mesmeric trance, the mesmerist had to believe in the process, and in most cases the subjects would have had to believe in the power of mesmerism in order to claim mesmerism had been successful. Mesmerists had power over their subjects even before a trance was conducted because of the belief of both parties. With mediums, however, their power was in the belief of others, not in their belief in the ability to contact spirits from the other side. The power of mediums, as shown through “Mr. Sludge, the Medium,” can therefore be seen as a different, although still sinister, power.

⁶⁸ Frederick Thomas Elworthy, The Evil Eye (Forgotton Books, 2008).

⁶⁹ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981) 67-78.

⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 146-65.

The power of the mesmerist, however, dominates “Mesmerism” much more so than the power of the medium does “Mr. Sludge.” Stanza eight of “Mesmerism” reiterates the entirety in which the trance grants the narrator possession of the woman:

Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken-- (36-40)

Again, the gender dichotomy of male and female surfaces. The narrator is absorbing the woman into his own self, to complete his whole, whereas her whole is not only subordinated to his, but lost in the process. This stanza also reiterates the power of the gaze and again uses a physical word, “clutch,” to describe it. Use of the adjective “steady” in front of “stare” in stanza seven and here again in front of “ken” sets up the link between the gaze and knowing; the gaze provides knowledge about the subject. The stanza also implies a sexual knowledge and possession.

The word “imprint” in the ninth stanza has two interpretations. The next step after capturing the woman in a trance is to replace her free will with his desires, an imprint of his will where her will used to be. The mesmerist essentially creates a palimpsest out of his subject upon which he can inscribe what he wants. The woman’s identity is disregarded in favor of the desires of the mesmerist, and she becomes his creation. Additionally, he imagines a physical imprint of her, what the narrator refers to later in the poem as the shape or shadow:

Having and holding, till

I imprint her fast

On the void at last

As the sun does whom he will

By the calotypist's skill-- (41-45)

Just as the sun transfers a negative image of the original object onto another surface in a calotype, this imprint is not the object herself, but the narrator's idea of her. The reference to calotype also parallels the idea that the woman is an object rather than a free-willed individual; she is nothing more than an image he can place in a frame. It also re-introduces the trap imagery of the web; the sun traps an image onto a surface, similar to the folk belief that the camera steals the soul.

The narrator moves on to a description of the difficulty of reaching the woman's soul saying that if his "heart's strength" (45) is great enough, if he maintains an "iron nerve" (50) and never loses focus (49), he will reach the woman's soul. The "heart's strength" could refer either to the physical strength required to mesmerize her over a distance or the strength of will to continue an action he knows has immoral consequences. In either case, it will take an effort to reach her soul. The narrator must pass through "veils" (47) or layers to reach her soul. As to what the layers constitute, Browning never answers, but they parallel Arnold's buried depths. The veils serve as obstacles and suggest that the process, the submission of a will through the mesmeric trance, is difficult because it is not a natural process, and one that is not supposed to happen. Even after breaching the layers to her soul, controlling her takes effort, and he must:

Command her soul to advance

And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance-- (51-55)

The use of the power word “command” indicates that although he has control of her soul, she has not acquiesced and still resists him. The shape which he requires her soul to inform is his idealization of her. He is, in effect, stealing her soul and reshaping it to his desires. The exchange of glances implies equality, but this parity is false. Her glance reflects his thoughts rather than conveying her own thoughts, and it is as though he gazes into a mirror.

The narrator reiterates the power of mesmerism by explaining the source of that power. The power stems from the soul and flows into the hands where “with a gesture fit” (55) they release the mesmeric force. The narrator uses his hands to direct mesmeric power in the same way doctors, lay mesmerists, and Mesmer himself used their hands to conduct healing procedures. Here, however, the narrator has twisted the healing power of mesmerism into a weapon and now “the hands give vent/ To my ardour and my aim/ And break into very flame” (63-65). The power of the narrator's feelings is so intense that he likens it to the destructive power of fire. Again we have the image of a blank slate. A fire burning through a forest leaves a cleared swath of land where new growth begins. The flame directed through the narrator's hands burns the woman's soul and the narrator's will may now grow in its place. At the same time, there is a contradiction. While the flame destroys the soul, the soul is also alive “and past retrieve/ Is wound in the toils I weave”

(69-70). Under his influence, the woman can never regain her independence; her identity is irretrievable and lost in the machinations of his will. Thus caught, she has no choice

And must follow as I require,

As befits a thrall,

Bringing flesh and all,

Essence and earth attire,

To the source of the tractile fire: (71-75)

The narrator reduces his lover to nothing more than a mindless slave. This abuse of power, and the subsequent inequality that results, illustrates Browning's misgivings regarding mesmerism in terms of gender.

From this point, the poem enters into a vivid description of how the narrator manipulates the woman into coming to him. The manipulation is complex; she has no choice but to obey his commands, and at the same time, he implants ideas which are not her own, but which she reacts to as if they were. He overwhelms her with his force:

Till the house called hers, not mine,

With a growing weight

Seems to suffocate

If she break not its leaden line

And escape from its close confine. (76-80)

He makes her feel her house is a cage from which she must flee, despite the dangers that lie without, and flee she does “Out of doors into the night!/ On to the maze/ Of the wild wood-ways” (81-83). She is an automaton, oblivious to any danger, walking a straight path through the wilderness, not even turning her head. She is “blind with sight” (85);

the sight is his, not hers. The Gothic atmosphere intensifies as her journey through the forest becomes more physically difficult. She battles a perilous terrain of “broken shrubs” (87) in the middle of a storm “with a still, composed, strong mind” (89). The “still, composed, strong mind” is her mind under the narrator's influence. He has replaced her natural behavior with his will so much so that she leaves the safety of her home and family without a second thought and is unperturbed by the danger of a woman crossing the wilderness at night.

As the force of his mesmeric power maintains its grip on the woman, she goes from a mere automaton to a woman fashioned by his ideals. She begins to experience the emotions he wishes her to experience and rushes to be at his side (91-95). The woman experiences a “crowding peace” (92) which “doth to joy increase” (93), but the peace is forced and crowds out her true emotions to leave space for a false joy.

As the woman draws closer, the narrator pours more of himself into the “shape” (96) of his idealized version of the woman. He feels his “soul dilate/Nor a whit abate” (97-98) remaining intact and powerful while hers diminishes under his influence. And now the question of whether he is imagining these events starts to resolve as he sees his “belief come true” (100). Gazing at the shape that stands between himself and the wall, the narrator sees more details come into being with fire now turned from an instrument of destruction to one of creation. The narrator's “fingers dip/ In a flame” (103-4) which “they throw/ On the cheek that breaks aglow” (104-5). The narrator takes credit for creating a new version of the woman who is newly alive claiming to have “drawn.../ Life to that lip” (101-2).

But more than just a new version of the woman, the narrator feels he has created a superior version whose hair is “unfilleted,/ Made alive,” (107-8) and “Chestnut gold-interspersed” (110). “Ha!” he says triumphantly, “was the hair so first?” (106). And with this superior version comes absolute complicity. This version completely accepts submission to the narrator. She throws open her arms to him in a gesture that says, “Take me, for I am thine!” (115). The narrator's desire, total possession of the woman's body and soul, seems to happen. But the possession and triumph are false because none of the actions or emotions expressed by the woman are of her doing; they are all the result of the narrator's erasing and reconstructing the woman's identity. Finally, imagination and reality merge as “She enters without a word” (120). The woman and the shape now stand before the narrator. She has only to merge with the shape for the narrator's quest to be complete:

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape;
It is, past escape,
Herself, now; the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one. (121-25)

The narrator has combined his fantasy version of the woman with the physical one. Her true identity is lost, and she is now the fantasy realized “past escape.” The woman is now utterly vulnerable to the whims of the narrator; she is defenseless to anything he desires of her. Yet, at the moment of his victory, the narrator realizes the power he wields and asks God to “restrain me now!” (130). He asks for restraint against the temptation to completely possess the woman physically and mentally. The narrator acknowledges that

God is the true owner of the woman's soul and that the mesmeric trance is only a temporary loan (126-29). The narrator has a choice: act on his desires or release the woman. The narrator chooses not to act on his desires, not because he cares for the welfare of the woman, but because the price God will exact is too great:

I admonish me while I may,

Not to squander guilt,

Since require Thou wilt

At my hand its price one day!

What the price is, who can say? (131-35)

Browning leaves it to the reader to imagine what price God could put on stealing someone else's identity, but the warning is ominously clear. For Browning, to whom the individual was so precious, mesmerism, with all its potential, all the mysteries it could unlock, was simply too dangerous.

The loss of identity that came with the mesmeric trance was one reason Browning disapproved of mesmerism. The other reason arose as the popular nature of mesmerism changed. During the mid-nineteenth century, mesmerism became widely accepted among the public, and as a result, began to move further from its scientific roots in Mesmer's animal-magnetism. As mesmerism became more pervasive in Victorian society, its mystical aspects became more popular. While one branch did continue in its scientific vein and is now the area known as hypnotism, the second branch is marked by a trend of spiritualism and mysticism. Hypnotism was solidly grounded in medicine and psychology used as it was by scientists such as James Braid who exposed the hypnotic process to the strict terms of the scientific process and investigation. Mesmerism,

however, moved from the medical arena to the supernatural realm of ghosts and psychics. Séances and theatrics soon overshadowed the more practical applications of mesmerism, turning its once scientific and psychological potential into a means of entertainment. Confidence artists disguised as mediums took full advantage of anyone willing to pay for their performances: from party hosts looking for a night's entertainment to grief-stricken family members clinging to the hope of connecting with lost loved ones.

Mediums differed from mesmerists in that mediums concentrated more on the spiritual aspects of the trance. Mediums used the trance as a means of traversing the boundaries between the living and the dead, or so they claimed, whereas mesmerists used the trance for its medical applications. Mesmerists and mediums also differed in that mesmerists placed someone else into a trance while mediums placed themselves into a trance. The self-induced trance, however, was a highly questionable act as it could not be empirically proven. Indeed, many mediums deliberately faked the trance and contact with the dead. Mediums were motivated by money, quick to take advantage of a wealthy, grieving family member.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one such grieving family member, “had a conviction that the souls of the dead were separated from her by but a thin veil and that she might through a medium encounter the unseen world.”⁷¹ She blamed herself for the loss of her beloved brother, Edward, who drowned while on holiday with his sister. He accompanied her at her request, and she therefore felt responsible for his death. During the winter of 1852-53, while the Brownings resided in Rome, Barrett became friends with a group of people interested in spiritualism. This group, which included such

⁷¹ Linda Lewis, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1998) 136.

figures as Frederick Tennyson (Alfred Tennyson's brother), Robert Lytton (Bulwar Lytton's son), and American sculptor Hiram Powers, practiced séances, much to Robert Browning's disapproval. His outright skepticism of the séance comes across in his unflattering depiction of a medium in the poem "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." The name, Sludge, itself reveals Browning's feelings regarding mediums. Sludge is slime and ooze, the lowest of the low. The poem is funny and calculating, mercilessly exposing the selfish motives that drove mediums to take advantage of people so callously and the gullibility of people so easily taken in. Browning uses Sludge to illustrate the degradation of society brought about through mesmerism. The séance is the result of the spiritualist influence of mesmerism, and while Browning acknowledged the power of the mesmeric trance, he did not give credence to the idea that spirits could be contacted beyond the world of the living. It is important to note that Browning did not publish "Mr. Sludge" until 1864, three years after his wife, who participated in séances, died.

The poem is based on a personal encounter Browning had with the American medium Daniel Home. Browning believed from the start Home was a fraud, but attended one of Home's séances in London. When the medium turned to Browning in order to communicate with one of Browning's dead relatives, Browning threatened to expel him.⁷² The poem recounts an incident where a group of people taken in by a medium, Mr. Sludge, discover that he is a fraud. Setting the poem in Boston is a swipe at Americans; the spiritual bend of mesmerism originated in the United States before crossing to England. When confronted by his benefactor, Hiram H. Horsefall, Sludge attempts to mitigate his punishment by claiming this was the only time he has ever cheated. He begs Horsefall not to ruin him. Sludge blames the wine, hoping to flatter his host with its

⁷² John Vincent Fleming, "Browning's Yankee Medium," American Speech 39.1(1964).

quality. Sludge continues his attempts to convince his victim that he is a genuine medium as he exhorts the man to show mercy “for Her dear sake,/ The sainted spirit’s, whose soft breath even/ now/ Blows on my cheek - (don’t you feel something,/ sir?)” (17-21). Here Browning mocks the transparent attempts by the medium to convince the others a spirit is present. He displays a contempt for both mediums and those deceived by them, showing how the tricks a medium employs are so obvious: “might it be Tom/ Paine?.../ Thumping the table close by where I crouched” (52-54). It is Sludge, of course, doing the thumping. Sludge also points out the hypocrisy of the wealthier classes who are supposedly educated and yet are taken in by frauds like Sludge:

You see, sir, it’s your own fault more than mine;
It’s all your fault, you curious gentlefolk!
You ’re prigs,—excuse me,—like to look so spry,
So clever, while you cling by half a claw
To the perch whereon you puff yourselves at roost,
Such piece of self-conceit as serves for perch
Because you chose it, so it must be safe.
Oh, otherwise you ’re sharp enough! (91-9)

Browning, through Sludge, makes a scathing critique of the “cleverness” of those swept up in the fad.

Sludge uses the loss of Horsefall's mother as a means of winning his trust:

I little thought, sir, yesterday,
When your departed mother spoke those words
Of peace through me, and moved you, sir, so

much (30-33)

By using the loss of loved ones as a means to manipulate, mediums had a similar, though to a weaker extent, power over their victims as mesmerists did over subjects placed in a trance.

Horsefall remains unmoved and Sludge begins a digressive monologue designed to persuade and overwhelm Horsefall by wearing him down with words. In this monologue, Sludge blames society for the creation of mediums, insisting that it is the upper class's fascination with all things supernatural that has forced a little white lie to grow into a thriving trade in deception. An innocent “Sir, *I* saw a ghost!” (147) incites a barrage of eager inquiry:

“Tell it out!

“Don’t fear us! Take your time and recollect!

“Sit down first: try a glass of wine, my boy!

“And, David, (is not that your Christian name?)

“Of all things, should this happen twice—it may—

“Be sure, while fresh in mind, you let us know!”

Does the boy blunder, blurt out this, blab that,

Break down in the other, as beginners will?

All ’s candour, all ’s considerateness—“No haste!

“Pause and collect yourself! We understand!

“That’s the bad memory, or the natural shock,

Or the unexplained *phenomena*!” (149-60)

How, Sludge wonders, are even the best people to resist such attention? Eventually, through no fault of the medium, what began as a boy telling a simple ghost story becomes a medium who “holds the circle, rules the roast,/ Narrates the vision, peeps in the glass ball/Sets-to the spirit-writing, hears the raps,/ As the case may be” (191-94).

When this argument, too, seems to fail, Sludge switches tactics and tries to convince Horsefall that lying is a necessary and even beneficial aspect of society. He cites the artistic license of writers as an example and places mediums in the same category:

You pay and praise for putting life in stones,
Fire into fog, making the past your world.
There’s plenty of “How did you contrive to grasp
“The thread which led you through this labyrinth?
“How build such solid fabric out of air?
“How on so slight foundation found this tale?
“Biography, narrative?” or, in other words,
“How many lies did it require to make
“The portly truth you here present us with?”
“Oh,” quoth the penman, purring at your praise,
“’T is fancy all; no particle of fact:
“I was poor and threadbare when I wrote that book
“‘Bliss in the Golden City.’ I, at Thebes?
“We writers paint out of our heads, you see!”

“—Ah, the more wonderful the gift in you,

“The more creativeness and godlike craft!” (1562-77)

Mediums are no different than writers concocting fiction and yet they are judged criminals. Sludge bemoans the fact that mediums have a poor reputation and at once satirizes mediums and criticizes inconsistent Victorian attitudes toward creativity. This inconsistency results in mediums becoming outcasts in the very society that made them popular. The criticism is of both criminal charlatans and those who perpetuate their existence by being swept up in a fad and not applying a healthy dose of skepticism to their experiences with mediums.

The artistic argument fails and Horsefall sends Sludge on his way with a bit of pity money. Out of earshot of Horsefall, Sludge treats the reader to the only honest moment of the poem – he plots revenge on Horsefall, and revenge in such a way as will save his reputation. No longer needing to placate the master of the house, Sludge is free to vent his feelings. He devises a story in which he confronts Horsefall for the murder of his mother:

I said he poisoned her,

And hoped he'd have grace given him to repent,

Whereon he picked this quarrel, bullied me

And called me cheat: I thrashed him, -who

could help?

He howled for mercy, prayed me on his knees

To cut and run and save him from disgrace:

I do so and once off, he slanders me. (1625-31)

This story will explain to Sludge's future victims why Horsefall has declared him a fraud. Sludge is confident that his reputation will not be damaged because “Boston’s a hold, the herring-pond is wide,/ V-notes are something, liberty still more. Beside, is he the only fool in the world?” (1633-35). Sludge makes Browning's point – there are other fools.

In the final stanza of the poem, Sludge reveals that everything which occurred during the séance was planned in advance and bemoans what he should have done to secure his reputation: “Where was my head? I ought to have prophesied/ He’ll die in a year and join [his mother]: that ’s the way” (1622-23). The fact that Sludge makes this revelation emphasizes the fraudulent nature of mediums.

“Mr. Sludge, the Medium” represents the worst of mesmerism. Once it reached this point, fashionable mesmerism began to lose its appeal and, replaced by the more psychologically and scientifically-oriented hypnotism, it became a fad lost to history.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The extent of mesmerism's influence on Victorian culture is apparent in the broad range of literature which addresses it. From medical journals to poetry, the literature of the era was flush with the subject of mesmerism, its virtues, and dangers. The varied applications of mesmerism made it a significant force, whether in healing the body or opening the inner recesses of the mind, and its controversial nature instigated a new debate on the parameters of science and scientific evidence which blurred the line between science and the supernatural. For Matthew Arnold, Lord Tennyson, and Robert Browning, mesmerism's importance lay in the connection between identity and mental health. Mesmerism provided a new means of exploring and expressing this connection; it seemed to offer unprecedented access to the mind, and that access was key to its significance to the three poets.

Arnold and Tennyson felt that it was only through knowing oneself, knowing one's place in society, that a person's mind could be truly healthy. Arnold's "modern disease" and the seizures of Tennyson's Prince illustrates their belief that identity and mental health were inseparable. The appearance of mesmerism provided Arnold and Tennyson a way to achieve mental health through the revelation of identity. The access to the inner reaches of the mind that mesmerism promised was the unprecedented cure for Arnold's and Tennyson's issues of identity.

Arnold's quest for identity is mapped by his three poems "Self-Dependence," "The Buried Life," and "The Scholar Gipsy." He discusses the disconnection between humans and nature, which he felt was caused by the increasing shift from rural to urban living, in "Self-Dependence" and argues that the way to resolve this disconnection was to emulate the self-dependency of nature. Self-dependency meant becoming independent of external influences such as societal pressures to behave in certain ways. Emulating this self-dependency would allow one to "know thyself," Arnold's ultimate goal. However, as Arnold began his quest, he learned that the process was far more complicated than he originally believed. "The Buried Life" depicts the complexity of the human mind and the difficulty in delving into the layers of the mind to find true identity. Identity is so deeply buried that mere introspection or self-reflection alone is not enough, and Arnold's quest expanded to include mesmerism as a method of uncovering this very life. What he found was the mysterious knowledge of "The Scholar Gipsy." The Scholar Gipsy possesses the secrets of mesmerism which has the power to unlock the mind. But these secrets are closely guarded by the Scholar Gipsy, and he spends the rest of his days wandering the countryside and avoiding human contact. Just as the Scholar Gipsy remained elusive, so did the knowledge mesmerism had the potential to unlock. "The Buried Life" proved to be too deeply buried, and Arnold's abandonment of his quest demonstrated just how inaccessible his true identity was.

Tennyson's interest in mesmerism focused more on how it could be applied to healing the body and mind than on abstract knowledge of the mind. Like Arnold, he viewed mesmerism as a key to identity. Although both Arnold and Tennyson followed the Burkean definition of individualism, Arnold focused on personal identity, whereas

Tennyson was interested in identity in terms of the individual's relationship to society. He explores in "The Princess" how mesmerism could be used to resolve internal issues of identity and how determining a true identity allows an individual to join society. The seizures of the Prince act as a series of mesmeric trances, induced by a mysterious and long dead sorcerer, which provide the Prince with pieces of knowledge about himself as they progress. The culmination of the seizures results in the Prince's understanding of his place in society. It was through mesmerism that Tennyson felt people could benefit as had his Prince. The confusion caused by urbanization and industrialization which precipitated the crisis of identity among Victorians had a solution in mesmerism, and Tennyson himself became a lay mesmerist.

Browning also believed mesmerism was tied to identity, but he disagreed with Arnold and Tennyson that it could solve problems of identity. The same access to the mind that attracted Arnold and Tennyson was also the catalyst to Browning's fear of mesmerism. Opening the inner reaches of the mind to an outside control, the ultimate consequence of which he described in "Mesmerism," was, to Browning, the antithesis of individualism. Browning disagreed with Arnold and Tennyson's view of society and individualism, believing the individual needed to maintain a distance from society in order to maintain a personal identity. Like his fellow poets, however, he linked identity to mental health, agreeing with Arnold and Tennyson that problems with identity led to problems of mental health. His consequences, however, were more dramatic. Preserving an identity was the key to mental health, and for Browning, the loss of identity was akin to the obliteration of mind.

Browning's disgust for the latter phases of mesmerism, in which it became the arena of conniving mediums and fraudulent séances, is portrayed in his scathing "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." He attacks the mediums who prey upon vulnerable people, such as Browning's own wife, but also criticizes a society that throws aside skepticism and embraces blind acceptance. His poem, "Mesmerism," is his most sustained attack on mesmerism. The story of a man who gives in to temptation and casts aside morality to steal the soul of the woman he purports to love conveys Browning's warning. The power of mesmerism to influence and control another person puts that person's very identity at risk, as we see in the manipulation of the woman as the strength of another identity destroys her own. To Browning, mesmerism was not the answer Arnold and Tennyson believed it to be.

The difference of opinion among the poets was carried out to a larger extent by Victorian society. Everyone from the royal family to common house maids had their own ideas about the validity of mesmerism. The ability of mesmerism to answer questions of identity was passionately argued on both sides and the controversy was never resolved. Arnold brought himself to the brink of mental exhaustion in his quest for identity and in the end gave up, discovering, as Browning already knew, that answering the question of "Who am I?" was not worth the price. Only Tennyson, whose interests had always been more focused on finding ways to solve problems of identity than on defining it, could reap any satisfaction as he saw the efforts of early mesmerists evolve into the sophistication of hypnotism.

The work of these three poets on the subject of mesmerism shaped, in part, the discussion of identity taking place within Victorian society. The social issues of the time,

primarily the changing nature of the British Empire as it dealt with urbanization and industrialization, created a need for solutions to problems of identity. The poetry of Arnold, Tennyson, and Browning reveals a shared anxiety over the crisis of identity the nation was undergoing as a result of the Enclosure Acts, Corn Laws, urbanization, and industrialization. Although Arnold, Tennyson, and Browning did not agree on the virtues or mesmerism or its place in society, they all believed in the reality of its power. They all saw in mesmerism a potential for change, and all recognized that, whether for good or evil, it answered the desire for solutions to the question of identity.

Their poetry and other literature played a significant role in the rise and success of mesmerism in Victorian society. Without the works of authors such as Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, and the poetry of Arnold, Tennyson, and Browning, mesmerism would not have had the impact it did on science, medicine, religion, and philosophy. While scientists and doctors argued over the validity of mesmerism in their journals and forums, authors and poets carried on their own debate through their novels, essays, and poetry. Through this literature, mesmerism entered popular culture, and there it stayed.

The domination of mesmerism on Victorian thought, however, resulted from nothing more than timing. Mesmer only happened to develop his theories in the years before the Victorians experienced their crisis of identity. The combination of industrialization, urbanization, and psychology provided an environment ripe for mesmerism to take hold. As other solutions to the exploration of the mind presented themselves and as the population adapted to the demands of urban living and the growth

of industry, the tenuousness of mesmerism's hold became obvious. As quickly as it had risen, mesmerism faded.

Although it faded, however, it did not disappear. The continuing influence of mesmerism can be seen through its pervasive presence in television and film. Shows such as Medium and Ghost Whisperer dominate the airwaves. Films such as Mesmer (1994), The Mesmerist (2002), and The Illusionist (2006) respond to a demand from audiences for the mystique and wonder of mesmerism's mysterious allure. Even more telling is the integration of the terms mesmerism and animal magnetism into the English language: a person or object who spellbinds or entralls is said to mesmerize, and animal magnetism has become synonymous with the ability to attract others through physical presence alone. The roots of these words have faded out of common knowledge, but it is due to their compelling origins that they endure. Finally, and perhaps most telling, the metamorphosis of mesmerism into hypnotism has rendered hypnotism a mainstream psychological and medical aid.

Mesmerism, whether for good or evil, was an important component of Victorian society. It appeared at a time when the Victorians needed a way to answer questions about themselves, as individuals and as a culture, and although it was controversial, this very controversy inspired discussions and debates about science, philosophy, religion, nature, and the human mind which are born-out in the literature of the period. The poetry of Matthew Arnold, Lord Tennyson, and Robert Browning reveal underlying concerns about identity and its connection to mental health and the extent of the relationship between mesmerism and identity. Mesmerism's continued presence in popular culture underscores the fact that the Victorian attraction to mesmerism was based on something

very real. For over two hundred years mesmerism has fascinated us, and for all its controversy, all its theatrics and pseudo-science, mesmerism persists because it has tapped into one of the fundamental elements of being human – the impetus to answer the question of who we are.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, Matthew. "The Buried Life." Dover Beach and Other Poems. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1944.
- , Essays on Criticism. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1903.
- , Passages from the Prose Writings of Matthew Arnold. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1880.
- , "The Scholar Gipsy." Dover Beach and Other Poems. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1944.
- , "Self-Dependence." Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1898.
- Barry, Josephine Maillet. "Goethe and Arnold's 1853 Preface." Comparative Literature 1980: 151-52.
- Baum, Paul F. Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1958.
- Beetz, Kirk. "Three Themes in Browning's Gothic Satire 'Mesmerism'." Gothic 2(1987): 6-15.
- Browning, Robert. "Mesmerism." Robert Browning's Poetry. Eds. James F. Loucks and Andrew M. Stauffer. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.
- , "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning. New York: MacMillan, 1915.

- Bugeja, Michael J. "Mesmer as Catalyst in 'The Scholar Gypsy'." Forum 27.3(1986): 38-42.
- Carpenter, William B. Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Etc.: Historically and Scientifically Considered. New York: Appleton, 1897.
- Chapman, Alison. "A poet never sees a ghost": Photography and Trance in Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* and Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography." Victorian Poetry 42.1(2003): 47-71.
- Collins, Winston. "'The Princess': The Education of the Prince." Victorian Poetry 11.4(1973): 285-94.
- Elworthy, Frederick Thomas. The Evil Eye: An Account of this Ancient and Widespread Superstition. Forgotten Books, 2008.
- Faas, Ekbert. Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.
- Fleming, John Vincent. "Browning's Yankee Medium." American Speech 39.1(1964): 26-32.
- Foucault, Michel. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, et al. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- Fulweiler, Howard W. "The Argument of 'The Ancient Sage': Tennyson and the Christian Intellectual Tradition." Victorian Poetry 21.3(1983): 203-16.
- Gregory, William. Animal Magnetism or Mesmerism and Its Phenomena. New York: Arno Press, 1975.
- Haddock, Joseph W. Somnolism and Psycheism. New York: Arno, 1975.

- Hamilton, Sir William. Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic Part I Volume I. Eds. H.L. Mansel and John Veitch. London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872.
- Johnston, Eileen. "‘This Were a Medley’: Tennyson's ‘The Princess’." ELH 51.3(1984): 549-74.
- Kenyon, Frederick G., ed. The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning Volumes I & II. New York: MacMillan, 1897.
- Lacan, Jacques. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981.
- Lewis, Linda. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1998.
- Logan, Deborah (deborah.logan@wku.edu). "Harriet Martineau Letters." Email to Jennifer Tenbrink (jennytenbrink@yahoo.com). 23 Mar. 2008.
- Logenbach, James, "Matthew Arnold and the Modern Apocalypse." PMLA, 104.5 (Oct, 1989), pp 844-55. Jstor. Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater. 9 Oct, 2004 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Murray, Nicholas. The Life of Matthew Arnold. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Pattie, Frank. Mesmer and Animal Magnetism: A Chapter in the History of Medicine. Hamilton, NY: Edmonston, 1994.
- Peltason, Timothy. "Learning How to See: ‘The Holy Grail.’" Victorian Poetry 30.3/4(1992): 463-82.
- Porter, Roy. "‘Under the Influence’: Mesmerism in England." History Today (1985): 22-29.

- Reid, Thomas. Philosophical Works: with notes and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton 1764-1790. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1983.
- Roberts, Caroline. The Woman and the Hour. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002.
- Rosenberg, John D. "Tennyson and the Landscape of Consciousness." Victorian Poetry 12.4(1974): 303-10.
- Sait, James E. "Tennyson, Mesmerism, and the Prince's 'Weird Seizures'." The Yearbook of English Studies 4(1974): 203-11.
- Stone, Marjorie. "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh'." Victorian Poetry 25.2(1987): 101-27.
- Sutton, Geoffrey. "Electric Medicine and Mesmerism," Isis 1981: 375-92.
- Tatar, Maria M. Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "The Ancient Sage." Tennyson's Poetry. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999.
- , "The Holy Grail." Tennyson's Poetry. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999.
- , "In Memoriam." Tennyson's Poetry. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999.
- , "The Princess." Tennyson's Poetry. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999.
- Tennyson, Hallam. Alfred Lord Tennyson; A Memoir by His Son, Vols. 1 and 2. New York: MacMillan Co., 1897.
- Wagner, Irmgard. Goethe. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999.
- White, Greenough. "Arnold's Character as Revealed in His Poems." Matthew Arnold and the Spirit of the Age. Folcroft Library Edition, 1972. 17-30.
- White, Helen. "Matthew Arnold and Goethe." PMLA 36.3(1921): 436-53.

Winter, Alison. "Mesmerism and Popular Culture in Early Victorian England." History of Science 32(1994): 317-43.

---, Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Wordsworth, William. "Intimations of Immortality." The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2. 8th ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.

---, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2. 8th ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.

Wymer, Norman. Dr. Arnold of Rugby. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1954.

VITA

Jennifer Lynn Tenbrink

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: AMONG THE SHADOWS: THE INFLUENCE OF MESMERISM ON
IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD, LORD
TENNYSON, AND ROBERT BROWNING

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Biology at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM in May, 2001.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2009.

Experience:

Served as a teaching assistant for the Composition Program in the English Department at Oklahoma State University, 2004-2008

National Writing Project Summer Institute, 2007

OSU EGSA Spring Colloquium, "There's Something in the Mountains," 2006

Professional Memberships:

Golden Key Society

Name: Jennifer Lynn Tenbrink

Date of Degree: May, 2009

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: AMONG THE SHADOWS: THE INFLUENCE OF MESMERISM ON
IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD, LORD
TENNYSON, AND ROBERT BROWNING

Pages in Study: 93

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: English

Scope and Method of Study:

This study examines the phenomenon of mesmerism as an influence on the Victorian poets Matthew Arnold, Lord Tennyson, and Robert Browning. It covers the period from 1851 to 1864 during which time these poets composed and published several works of poetry containing mesmeric themes. Primary sources, Victorian scholarship, and modern criticism were used to support analysis of the poems. Comparative analyses were also conducted using poems by the same author as well as with the poems by the other authors in the study.

Findings and Conclusions:

Analysis revealed that the poets used mesmerism as a mechanism of discussing issues of identity within their poetry. The mesmeric trance, specifically, received extensive treatment as the arena in which concepts such as the true self, self-knowledge, and individualism were explored. Each poet had a particular focus in regards to identity which also manifested in the poetry. Arnold was attracted to the search for the hidden self and with connecting that self to the conscious mind. Tennyson was interested in mending defects of personality or character through insight. And, finally, Browning was concerned with a new definition of individualism and its ability to survive what he considered to be the destructive power of mesmerism. The extent of the presence of mesmerism in their poetry indicates mesmerism had a greater impact on shaping concepts of identity than previously acknowledged.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Linda Austin
