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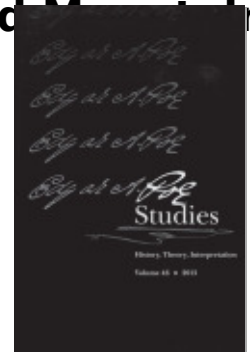
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Vigorous Currents, Painful Archives:
The Production of Affect and History
 in Poe's "Tale of the Ragged Mountains"

CHRISTINA ZWARG

The vigorous current that infused these stories ran through the body itself, carrying morbid symptoms away with it like so much detritus. Pain . . . only initially withstood the narration but . . . later, as the narration gained strength, was undermined and swept into the sea of oblivion.

—Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*

As we turn to the question of pain in Poe, we might return to Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*, which describes how effectively his mother's stories drained away all of his morbid symptoms.¹ Given the relief attributed to the "vigorous current" of those tales, we could ask if the current coursing through Poe's work also targets some feverish pain abroad in the land of his upbringing. Many scholars now find Poe's engagement with painful issues of his day undeniable, particularly as they relate to traumas of slavery and the racism driving imperialism at home and abroad. Yet those same scholars continue to debate how to interpret that engagement, particularly when it takes the indirect, ghoulish, and splenetic form so characteristic of his work. If some still question whether Poe was a racist, most assume that some degree or kind of racism was unavoidable for a man of his time. While initially useful, efforts to pinpoint Poe's position on the spectrum of racist ideologies of his day have been superseded by recognition that his writing constitutes an archive with broad implications for an anatomy of racism's conflicted and contested operations.² Poe exposes slavery's impact well beyond the experience of its most immediate victims and perpetrators, and this extended traumatic environment generates a range of response whose effects are worth studying with care. This last is particularly the case when we discover how often the vigorous currents of Poe's work invite us to consider the broader traumatic relays alive in their very production.

Thus if we consider the deeper resonances of Benjamin's association between storytelling and pain, we may find another way to approach some of the

questions productively engaging contemporary Poe scholarship. Benjamin's "vigorous currents" relate to trauma theory, as we shall see, and they do so through the hypnotic power of storytelling. As Poe was writing, of course, this rapport was more commonly associated with the mesmeric trance, part of the science Poe embraced in a number of his provocative tales. We now know from studies of the brain that hypnosis can actually separate the sensation of pain from the feeling of pain, an insight already reflected in Poe's day in the use of mesmerism for surgery.³ One might say that Poe's stories generally work hypnotically, allowing his readers to endure without discomfort what normally would produce unacceptable feelings. While we cannot know why Poe chose to work this way, we can learn from his canny deployment of mesmeric relays, especially when they expose the tendency of collective histories to circulate and obscure new archives of feeling.

For example, if we take seriously the palliative quality of Poe's stories, we can imagine him as a surgeon deploying the emerging science of hypnosis to better probe the body politic. While repair of cultural wounds often seems beside the point in Poe's writing, recent trends in trauma theory may help us to rethink his avid interest in the production and management of psychological investments. As I hope to show, in fact, Poe's immersion in the traumatic mimesis of the mesmeric crisis can be enlisted to analyze certain unevenly shared experiences of history. And these experiences can be said to include the production of silences associated with the central slave insurrection of Poe's century, the Haitian Revolution.⁴ While not concerned directly with the aftermath of that revolution in Poe's work, this essay follows Poe's lead in exploring the production of archives informing the aura of insurrection so much a part of his world. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us, to produce an archive is to shape the terrain of what is thinkable.⁵ In turn, Poe helps us to see how archives also shape what is affectively possible as a mode of response. In his uptake of the mesmeric trance, Poe affords an opportunity to consider the forces forming and distorting history, both at the level of understanding and at the level of experience itself. This is another way of saying that the production and transmission of affect can be as significant as the production of archive for historical understanding.

While not central to Benjamin's famous essay on the storyteller, Poe is summoned later by Benjamin to assist in his strong misreading of Freud's trauma theory.⁶ Like Freud, Benjamin turns to a consideration of trauma after World War I. Unlike Freud, he often includes the war's "commingling with the cosmic powers" in that consideration. A modern Prospero, Benjamin observes how "aerial space and oceans depths thundered with propellers" as "high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape."⁷ The traumatic

currents Benjamin repeatedly evokes are influenced by Charles Fourier, whose elaboration of mesmeric principles dominated the apprehension of cosmic powers during Poe's lifetime.⁸ Poe openly derided Fourier, while he enjoyed experimenting with mesmerism. The reverse can be said of Benjamin, who delighted in the work of Fourier while avoiding the theories of Mesmer. Fourier's appeal had to do with a utopian rejection of isolated experiences generally; his fantasy of universal harmony based itself on the premise that it took an entire phalanstery to liberate the vital passions of each individual. Significantly, Fourier's optimism about the human interaction with inert properties of the environment draws directly from Mesmer's theory about the electromagnetic waves permeating the universe. Yet Benjamin shunned this genealogy, no doubt hoping to deflect Mesmer's troubled association with the legacy of spiritualism, an association Poe certainly helped to advance.

In a sense, Poe's aversion to the "crowd" made him resistant to Fourier's theory, while his penchant for the grotesque pulled him toward the mesmeric encounter as it began to summon the dead. Had Poe lived a little longer, the changing receptions of Fourier in the U.S., especially in the South, might have tempted him to take another look at what was at stake in Fourier's notion of the phalanstery. But we cannot call Poe back from the dead, nor should we: as Adorno reminds us, nobody so summoned ever said anything worth hearing.⁹ That is, of course, unless that person were *in* a Poe story. We might therefore consider the currents flowing through a Poe character thought to be called back from the dead by mesmeric trance. I'm thinking particularly of Oldeb in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," where the usual morbid focus on this process, so typical of Poe, gives way to a broader historical revelation about painful transmissions and traumatic relays closer to Benjamin's use of Fourier. So doing can help us revise our sense of Poe and Benjamin. The vigorous currents of Poe's tale open to our view the "homogenous, empty time" that Benjamin mysteriously hopes to "explode" through his traumatic reading of history.¹⁰ Luckily Benjamin's resistance to mesmerism, which kept him from making still more productive use of Poe, need not be our own.

To understand the traumatic relays of history in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," however, we first need to consider three things: 1) Benjamin's investment in Charles Fourier, particularly as it relates to (and often occludes) the mesmerism informing Poe's fascination with the overlap of technology and feeling; 2) the British imperial archive concerning the eighteenth-century insurrection in Benares, India, that was also being recirculated through print culture as Poe wrote and that he deftly folded into his tale; and 3) the global reach of mesmerism itself, especially as it created its own diasporic relationship to shifting political terrains and insurrections. Here, with an assist

from Michael Taussig, the mimetic properties of the early mesmeric encounter can explain the zones of “First Contact” proliferating throughout Poe’s tale, opening trauma theory to new historical meaning.¹¹

I’ll begin with Benjamin’s fascination with Fourier.



Crisis and Pain in Mesmer and Fourier

Dismissive of contemporary spiritualists who had contaminated not only the legacy of Mesmer but also the legacy of “aura,” Benjamin placed Fourier at the center of his famous *Arcades* project, devoting one “convolute” to his work.¹² Modeled on the architectural forms of Paris passages with their innovative “inner boulevards,” the *Arcades* project reflected Benjamin’s effort to archive the collective dream of the nineteenth century. Fourier’s fantastic architectural focus proved especially compelling: Benjamin was fascinated by Fourier’s deployment of “explosion” in the generation of his utopian structure, the phalanstery.¹³ Though Benjamin did not acknowledge it, this “explosive” aspect of Fourier derived from Mesmer’s Enlightenment use of gravitational pull, particularly his understanding of a type of embodied atmospheric crisis. Mesmer’s notorious magnetic passes, designed to realign the animal magnetism in the bodies of his patients, modeled the catalytic process in Fourier’s utopia: the “crisis” state induced in the mesmeric medium became the condition to which all of civilization needed to be transported for an “explosion” of phalanstery living to occur. And for Benjamin, like Mesmer, the dynamite at the center of such a process could only be set off by deploying a traumatic mimesis whereby the conditions forming the problem were recast as part of the solution.

As it pertained to technological innovations in particular, this traumatic mimesis fascinated Benjamin. Fourier’s dreamscape fast-forwarded a missed opportunity, one to be found in a revolutionary “innervation of the technical organs of the collective.”¹⁴ Benjamin goes so far as to compare the fantastic utopian vision of Fourier to the mimetic authority of Mickey Mouse. In fact, much of Benjamin’s focus on “the dynamite of the split second” so pertinent to his film theory appears to borrow from the shifting modes of production integrated into Fourier’s utopian fantasy.¹⁵

Mickey Mouse is a tempting figure to summon as we explore the vexing question of pain in Poe; one can imagine the pain flatly depicted and averted in the cartoon as somehow cognate with the aura of hoax permeating Poe’s work. (Mickey’s first cartoon, *Plane Crazy*, depicted a plane crash, after all.) But the mesmeric crisis, often used by Poe, can more easily bring us back to some

telling aspects of trauma theory even before Freud, which Benjamin's broader focus on the vigorous currents of the cosmos also reflects.

All recent theories of trauma tend to take their departure from Freud, since trauma theory is the operator of difference in Freud's science, haunting all of his work.¹⁶ Most accounts of the prehistory of psychoanalysis take us back to Mesmer, and these readings often direct themselves at the emergence of the hypnotic attachment that formulated one part of Mesmer's science. The mesmeric trance is seen as a precursor to hypnosis, an important early part of Freud's theory before he turned to transference as his primary tool of analysis.¹⁷ But, as I will argue, the psychoanalytic turn from some mesmeric practices, notably certain aspects of their mimetic properties, was also a turn from complex social relations infusing the traffic of nations from Mesmer to Freud. Poe's tale will help us to see how this works.

Poe uses the word "pain" sparingly; he much prefers the words "horror" and "terror." Nonetheless, pain does appear consistently in his mesmeric tales, where he summons the popular practice to *manage* pain. In so doing, he uses what must have seemed a remarkable innovation: after all, in experimental surgeries people were applying mesmerism to this end. But pain more often seems to function as a kind of alibi, as it initially does in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains"; and when pain fades away we invariably find a gradual transformation of Mesmer's science into what Benjamin described as a world he did not "wish to enter," or Poe's "world of grotesquerie."¹⁸ Ironically, Mesmer would have strongly resisted this focus on mortality and its filmy afterworld, not to mention its messy physical threshold—particularly as we see it played out in Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," where a character at death's door collapses into a putrid mass of flesh. In a sense, Poe borrows from Fourier more than Mesmer in such transitional moments, for it was Fourier who dwelled on the transition beyond death in his utopian adaptations of the science.¹⁹

In fact, thinking about pain in these tales might help us to see how Poe unwittingly depends upon certain elements of Fourier's adaptation of Mesmer's theory, a dependence made possible by the promiscuous mix of their theories already alive in the public domain.²⁰ Adam Frank's excellent essay on Poe's mesmeric tales already hints at these linkages when it shows that Poe calls on mesmerism's affiliation with electromagnetism to explore the emerging medium of telegraphy.²¹ For Frank, the preoccupations central to each mesmeric tale belie a developing fascination with the dangerous potential that new media held for personal affective relations. His essay particularly underscores how the vigorous currents in Poe's mesmeric encounters relate to such emergent technologies as photography and telegraphy, as well as the

ever-adapting forms of print culture. Those associations, made most forcefully in Frank's reading of "Valdemar," also depend on the elaboration of certain principles in Poe's "Mesmeric Revelation," as Frank makes clear. Indeed, the mesmerized Mr. Vankirk engages the narrator in a discussion of the "unparticled matter" of the universe (*Works*, 3:1034) in a manner that closely resembles Fourier's borrowing and elaboration of Mesmer. While Mesmer, again, cared little for the transition from life to death, it was Fourier who argued that death is rather a "metamorphosis" toward another existence (*Works*, 3:1037)—the same possibility that Poe's tales often embellish with macabre relish.²²

Though Frank does not dwell on it, the interaction between Vankirk and the narrator of "Mesmeric Revelation" ends with talk of pain. In that conversation, pain becomes synonymous with all of organic life and serves as the necessary impediment making utopian pleasure possible. More than recasting the fortunate fall, the discussion at the close of "Mesmeric Revelation" makes the high impedance of pain the vehicle for a certain view of the universe more closely associated with Fourier's "explosion" than anything Mesmer would have proposed. Pain, one might say, becomes the medium that is the message. How then might we comprehend pain as it serves the crisis point of Poe's story about the ragged mountains of Virginia? As might be expected, Frank also finds Poe's fascination with new media at work in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," and I would agree, since the story depends for its effect on a series of fascinating relays across space and time. However, a familiar focus on Poe's investment in the excesses of control (rather than pain's function as the vehicle for that control) keeps Frank from exploring the broader social currents of the tale. If pain is initially an alibi in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," it begins to assume a crucial mediating role in our understanding of the story, as we will see. The recognition, moreover, of the mesmeric diaspora implicit in that tale's notorious borrowing from Macaulay's India proves more than a hoax, distracter, or simple sign of what John Carlos Rowe has called Poe's "imperialist unconscious."²³ For in this story, Poe provides a fascinating anatomy of the traumatic relays of tertiary experience, showing how global relays were producing self-consuming histories.



Imperial Archives and Their Transmission

One of the many 1844 stories wherein Poe finally uses the familiar landscape of the United States, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" has been read as an homage to (or parody of) the work of Charles Brockden Brown, whose somnambulant characters often encounter alterity

in the mountains.²⁴ Yet, in this instance, the mesmeric trance of Bedloe, the central character, takes him beyond the ragged hills of Charlottesville to Benares, India. The story includes reference to what by 1840 had become the primal scene of eighteenth-century British imperialism, the 1781 insurrection of the supporters of the raja Chait Singh, crushed by Warren Hastings in Benares. Poe wrote his tale at the very moment England was rewriting its own history concerning India. And, as a flurry of publications in the 1840s makes clear, that revision involved a self-conscious return to the impeachment trials of Hastings.²⁵ The trial ran from 1788 through 1795 and included as one of its central charges Hastings's hounding of Chait Singh. The Benares insurrection gave ample opportunity for Richard Sheridan and Edmund Burke to dramatize the reign of "terror" that Hastings and the East India Company imposed.²⁶ Yet historians today recognize that these "scandals of empire" were later perversely "forgotten or subsumed within the larger and more compelling imperial narrative of an exhausted land that virtually invited the British to conquer it."²⁷ Perhaps the most damning aspect of the trend in British imperialism in the 1840s was its attempt to forget its scandals through a type of mimetic process, aspiring for example to turn the "primitive" natives into little copies of British nationals through various state institutions. More radically, the British began to project their own aggressive behavior onto the Indians themselves. That is, as Nicholas Dirks reminds us, the earlier focus on scandals of empire later enabled an inverted focus on scandals of the colonized; certain Indian atrocities, amplified and distorted by their likeness to British crimes, "both explained and justified European rule."²⁸

Chief among the architects of this British transformation was Thomas Macaulay, whose time in India from 1834 through 1837 made him a rather magnetic and complicated liberal in this mimetic archive. As we know, Poe derived considerable color for his story from several publications emerging in the 1840s, including Sheridan's dramatic speeches, G. R. Gleig's *Memoirs of the Life of Warren Hastings*, and Macaulay's famous review of the same. Not surprisingly, critics concerned with U.S. imperialism have found Poe complicit with these broader imperial trends. Yet the temporal delay between Sheridan and Macaulay should give us pause, particularly when that delay forms an important aspect of Poe's story. Poe's fascination with mesmerism coupled with his attraction to Macaulay's vivid orientalism draws him into a presentation of the affective registers of history and their uncanny repetitions. We get, in a sense, the presentation of the belated authority of events, especially when enhanced by mesmeric contacts and reproductions. The Macaulay and Sheridan texts in particular supply an extraordinary if distended archive, the sensationalism of Sheridan later matched by Macaulay's striking orientalism.

Both blend the affective and visual melodrama very much on display in the courtroom and, perhaps more importantly, in the newspapers of the day, notably in their political cartoons. Indeed, together they rehearse the “magic lantern” effect of the long-extended trial as it played out in the public sphere.²⁹ Thus Poe’s use of mesmerism in this tale helps us to see how treacherous mimetic relays can be, particularly when enabled by various reproductions of print culture itself. Inversions of traumatic memory on local and global scales become central to this process.

The plot of “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” redolent of Poe’s fascination with the new popularity of mesmerism, is simple enough as his impressionable narrator tells it. Speaking in 1845, the narrative voice introduces the main character, Bedloe, and goes on to transcribe Bedloe’s 1827 account of his entranced walk in the hills of Virginia. Through a series of electromagnetic jolts Bedloe had found himself first there, among an alien race of men, only then to be transported back in time and across global space to the scene of the famous Benares incident. Aware that he had somehow lost his volition, Bedloe experienced a gathering anxiety about an equally alien crowd of people around him and unwittingly acted out the part of a British soldier killed when defending against their revolt. This soldier turns out to have been a friend of Bedloe’s mesmeric doctor, Mr. Templeton, also witness to Bedloe’s account. Taken aback by that account, Templeton admits that he has that same day been writing down the events that Bedloe described, including the death of his friend Oldeb. Unlike Oldeb, Templeton lived through the famous Benares insurrection as a young member of Hastings’s party. The narrator laughs at Bedloe’s strange insistence that his experience had not been a dream. Yet Templeton reinforces Bedloe’s position by revealing the “miraculous similarity” between Bedloe and a 1780 miniature portrait of Oldeb constantly in his possession (*Works*, 3:949). Bedloe swoons at the sight of the image, and the narrative suddenly shifts to an account of his death from the doctor’s administration of a poisonous leech to his temple. Discovering Bedloe’s name misspelled without the final *e* in the newspaper, the narrator assumes that this is less an error than a sign that Bedloe was Templeton’s Oldeb come back from the dead through the vigorous currents of his mesmeric powers.

In the eighteenth century, Richard Sheridan made the Benares insurrection central to the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings. And in 1842, as the British were deepening their colonial hold over India, Sheridan’s flamboyant speeches were published among the cluster of materials returning to this key if traumatic moment. If readers have sometimes dismissed Poe’s orientalist setting as a hoax, others more recently have viewed it as a warning against, or casual complicity with, U.S. imperialism.³⁰ The detailed vista of the city of

Benares that Bedloe relays in the story comes, sometimes verbatim, from material in Macaulay's 1841 review of G. R. Gleig's *Memoirs of the Life of Warren Hastings*, leaving Poe vulnerable to charges of plagiarism.³¹ But all of these readings reduce the complicated mimetic properties of the story, particularly as they pertain to the mesmeric trance central to the story's traumatic relays. Certainly, those arguing that Poe intended only to distract his reader with his use of India would do well to consider the global reach of mesmerism itself, particularly its relevance to the prehistory of trauma theory as we have come to think of it today.³²



The Mesmeric Diaspora and Zones of First Contact

Mesmeric communities spread rapidly after Paris, following routes both east and west, extending throughout Europe, the continental America, and the expanding British Empire, especially India.³³ The particular relationship between material and psychic properties that Mesmer tapped made his science amenable to a medley of activities, crossing national and cultural boundaries in unpredictable ways, as did the growing traffic of people and things as commodities themselves. Mesmer participated in the Enlightenment interest in “the phenomenon of action at a distance,” applying theories of gravity and magnetic attraction to the social realm, a focus that would lead to the late nineteenth-century interest in mental telepathy.³⁴ Moreover, mesmerism first arrived in the Western Hemisphere in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (1784), and its implication in the Haitian Revolution (both in fantasy and in reality) had an oddly deferred impact on the history of emancipation in the United States. The threat of slave revolt holds a vital part in the consideration of this history: it is no accident that “mesmerism” and “terrorism” entered our vocabulary around the same moment. Mesmer himself boasted that his science was responsible for the Haitian Revolution.³⁵

Mesmer's therapeutic setting often involved as many as 200 people, whether sitting around one of his *baquets* or touching ropes dangling from magnetized trees.³⁶ Such odd and often spectacular technologies were deployed by Mesmer to distance himself from public exorcism, notably the popular performances of Johann Joseph Gassner, who drew crowds across religious denominations. With his theory of animal magnetism, Mesmer cleverly displaced the emphasis Gassner put on spirit possession: the tubs, trees, and glass instruments of Mesmer's practice lent a scientific gloss, or so he thought.³⁷ Yet because the dynamic process that Mesmer began to channel depended so much on hallucinatory registers of experience, it would never break free of residual and often significant associations with things occult.

Moreover, like the practices surrounding the emerging concept of the fetish, those at work in the mesmeric cure are best considered through a collision of cultural and political forces in a globalizing world.³⁸

Stefan Zweig argued that Mesmer lived both too early and too late, burdened as he was with a discovery he could not fully describe; for Zweig, Mesmer was the “Columbus” of psychoanalysis—looking for India but finding America instead.³⁹ Insofar as that discovery relates to hypnosis and the tie we now call transference, however, considerable confusion about the true nature of this “discovery” persists. No one has done more to outline the relationship of hypnosis to contradictions in trauma theory than Ruth Leys.⁴⁰ According to Leys, the analogy between hypnotic suggestion and traumatic experience set in motion two contradictory tendencies still informing trauma theory today. While both approaches initially recognized the odd resemblance between hypnotized patients and trauma victims, they did not agree on the efficacy of that resemblance. Advocates of what Leys calls the “mimetic” theory first supported the use of hypnotic treatment as a type of homeopathic cure. Such men as Jean Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Sigmund Freud himself initially endorsed this method. Yet hypnosis quickly presented a problem, as it appeared to take away “individual autonomy and responsibility.”⁴¹ Hypnosis, after all, depended upon the active will of the doctor, making the patient subject to suggestion and manipulation. And the amnesia that followed such treatment added to these worries. As Leys shows, the mimetic and anti-mimetic approaches could rarely be separated in practice. Dependent as it was on a simulated emotional tie, Freud’s preferred transference neurosis smuggled in many of the problems he was hoping to avoid.

Leys’s study of this dynamic, particularly in the twentieth century, is first rate, though, like the science she studies, it sometimes reduces significant social dimensions alive in the mimetic process itself—which is why it is useful to return to Mesmer. It is true that the earliest complaints against his method appear to represent the anti-mimetic strain Leys later identifies. The Royal Commission, of which Ben Franklin was a part (though not always a witness), found the fits and trances Mesmer’s technique induced to be the product of three different elements: the imagination of the patients, their ready imitation of one other, and the calming, if sometimes seductive, effect of the human contact that was also part of the process.

Yet as someone like anthropologist Michael Taussig has argued in *Mimesis and Alterity*, such disparate elements should not be collapsed too quickly into one. Taussig hopes instead to “reinstate” the “sensuousness” and other mimetic properties essential to “thought that moves and moves us.”⁴² Taussig’s approach forms a critique of the Enlightenment tendency toward abstraction,

which made contact with alien cultures both violent and traumatic. A product of the Enlightenment, Mesmer hoped to avoid the associations between his new science and exorcism or witchcraft, yet the mimetic phenomenon into which he tapped invariably served to translate such practices into modern enclaves of the same. Thus George Frazer's famous double classification of sympathetic magic into the Laws of Similarity and Contact, summoned deftly by Taussig, helps to explain how people associated Mesmer's mimetic method with occult practices.⁴³ Mesmer effectively combined both laws while deploying new gravitational theories to generate a controlled reproduction. Created through the alignment of the environment's sensuous networks, and dependent as such upon chains of contact, Mesmer's crisis state was a tonic one and thus similar to, *but not identical with*, its cause.

Taussig turns to Walter Benjamin instead of Mesmer to elaborate his argument about mimesis and alterity, noting throughout his work aspects of mimesis also at play in the essay where Benjamin includes Poe's "Man of the Crowd" to set up his discussion of trauma theory.⁴⁴ In Benjamin's reading of Freud, shock becomes comparable to a tonic state. Significantly, this condition of self-alienation in the theory of both Mesmer and Benjamin is analogous to but not synonymous with the debilitating shocks of trauma; rather, these states form the mimetic point of contact between the two modes, also marking a separation through reproduction. That is, for both Mesmer and Benjamin, reproduction through contact has the potential to make all the difference, since it registers in space and time a swerving from the original condition and, as such, a new social potential. Even though Benjamin includes Poe in his analysis, he finds no reparative point of contact in "The Man of the Crowd" and has to turn to the poetry of Baudelaire to make his case. But as I will argue, a new social potential for modernity flickers in the mimetic shock of "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains." This is the moment when Bedloe sees the portrait of Oldeb for the first time and swoons at this reproduction through contact.

Taussig applies Benjamin's sensuous notion of mimesis to the alterity at work in the strange zone of First Contact. For Taussig, the activity of mimesis in such contact is a much more complicated process than Westerners have allowed, one opening upon "bewildering reciprocities" much like those Mesmer discovered, often jumbled with "sentience, with pleasures, with *pain*, and with the 'ludicrous' and 'odd mixture of surprise and imitation.'"⁴⁵

It is perhaps a contingency of history that mesmerism began to reach its second and belated popularity in this country in the 1830s, as the abolitionist movement began to take root in the North. However, as the growing popularity of blackface performances at the same time makes clear, a type of First Contact between free black and white populations was already being tested

in the world of the working class. In England during the same decade, this association became painfully evident when John Elliotson at University College Hospital publicly mesmerized Elizabeth O'Key in an attempt to demonstrate the scientific authority of animal magnetism. A working-class woman with exposure to blackface performers in nearby Sadler's Wells Theatre, O'Key surprised her attentive audience when she ended her trance with a performance of "Jim Crow."⁴⁶ This sort of embarrassment led James Braid to coin the word "hypnotism" to describe and separate his own experiments from the crisis state of mesmerism. Yet Braid's move was typical of a series of endeavors redirecting attention away from social aspects that had always been implicit in Mesmer's focus on the environment. With the shift in nomenclature, Braid began the slow narrowing of the mesmeric crisis that the medical community would endorse in an effort to control its more unruly aspects.

In "Thinking about Feeling Historical," Lauren Berlant distinguishes between "the structure of an affect and the experience we associate with a typical emotional event," warning that describing something as traumatic, or "endowed with the capacity to produce trauma," does not provide an obvious way to interpret the response it generates.⁴⁷ In fact, those studying reactions to events considered traumatic have consistently narrowed the penumbra of response to which Berlant calls our attention, and they have done so in an attempt to map certain painful and disabling patterns of behavior. Here the fascinating history of mesmerism helps us to see how channeling the popular and unruly aspects of mesmerism into a proper scientific endeavor necessarily reduced broader social and environmental implications of its practice. In a way, Freud's inevitable focus on certain narrow channels and mechanisms of repression (a reduction he came to regret) enacted a pattern already set much earlier when the very word "hypnosis" was coined.



Bedloe's Mesmeric Crisis

Freud spent a lot of time thinking about hypnosis, even after he eschewed it as a technique. In musing about group psychology, for example, he described "the hypnotic relation" as a "group formation with two members."⁴⁸ In this Freud said more than he intended, and his locution perhaps reveals something about Poe's interest in the mesmeric rapport, or magnetic sleep. Despite Poe's tendency to return to the wound and "tarry" there, as Jonathan Elmer has so aptly put it, Poe's creative energy sometimes draws him a bit beyond, following the vigorous current running through the body of the story itself.⁴⁹ Thus, in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," certain group formations come oozing out from the seemingly constricted if ultimately

bloody contact of patient and doctor.⁵⁰ I refer of course to the global social canvas that gets revealed in the little walk that Bedloe takes and recounts to the narrator and Dr. Templeton. In effect, Bedloe walks into what Toni Morrison would call a rememory, and his encounter in the ragged and, dare I say, over-deturbaned mountains is not a simple or narrow one. Indeed, the continuous reproduction of the Benares insurrection (including its iteration in Sheridan's famous speeches) not only contributed to the impeachment of Warren Hastings by the House of Commons in 1787, but also reflected the mimetic drive of imperial relations between India and England in the nineteenth century.

With varying effects, such critics as Michael Williams and Mukhtar Ali Isani have shown how the bizarre orientalism interrupting the Virginia narrative is the result of Poe's borrowing from the publications concerning Hastings in the 1840s.⁵¹ And such earlier critics as Sidney Lind and Doris Falk have debated the meaning of Poe's attraction to different attributes of the mesmeric legacy.⁵² Yet no one has shown how Poe's retrospective and proleptic display of the mesmeric diaspora can effectively connect these two critical concerns. Templeton is old enough to be a disciple of Mesmer in Paris, even as the narrator writing from a fictive 1845 (the story was published in 1844) conjures an image of India at the moment the mesmeric experiments of James Esdaile were supported by Britain's imperial reach.⁵³

From the instant he likens Bedloe's eyes to those of a "long-interred corpse" (*Works*, 3:940)—and it is 1845 after all—the narrator's ghoulish focus has distracted readers from the promising play of mimesis throughout the story. Poe's characteristic fascination with doubles and palindromes gets ginned up through the looking glass of the mesmeric diaspora; as a result, we discover a kaleidoscopic proliferation in zones of First Contact. Most striking perhaps is the way in which the narrative produces the mirage of "miraculous similarity" as if moments of identity could be turned to profit, like the circulating sameness of the money form, even as the central shock of the tale allows for a crisis in this economy. Alas, that shock, the product of a mesmeric reproduction through contact, passes by in a flash like the strike of the match John Walker invented in 1827, the year of Poe's tale. But if we slow down the tale's conveyor belt, or to jump metaphors, start tracking it in slow motion, we can look again at the key moment of crisis when that shock occurs.

I refer to the moment when Bedloe sees the 1780 watercolor miniature that Templeton displays after giving Bedloe's story a full hearing. As if on trial himself, Templeton exhibits Oldeb's portrait as further evidence of what he calls the "minutest accuracy" of the mental telepathy that has just occurred (*Works*, 3:349). This transaction condenses a great deal—much more than

Templeton, the narrator, and even the reader can take in all at once, though Bedloe's swoon suggests that he has begun to understand the overdetermined nature of the dangerous mimetic process into which he has been drawn.

In the story, the portrait detracts from the realization that Templeton, some forty-five years later, is still compulsively writing down the details of the Benares event. In so doing, of course, he shadows the publications about India emerging at the time Poe (and his narrator) scribble their story, exposing how long certain events can continue to exert their influence through a type of intrusive return. That is, inhabiting the same pages of Templeton's telepathic writing, Bedloe relives an event important to the eighteenth-century impeachment trials of Warren Hastings, of which Macaulay makes account in his review of the nineteenth-century book by Gleig. It is also from Macaulay that Poe (and his narrator) borrows most heavily, particularly in the visual description of Benares.

Writing from 1845, our narrator looks back to 1827, embedding his tale in the "*interregnum* of the seasons," an "*Indian Summer*" (*Works*, 3:942). As critics have noticed, the word "Indian" foreshadows the affair telecast by Templeton's magnetic power while conjuring the primal cultural and global misrecognition animating the word's local use.⁵⁴ Yet the word "*interregnum*" also proves telling. A period of discontinuity in a government, organization, or social order, an interregnum's function as a gloss for weather anticipates Fourier's application of mesmeric principles to the social environment. In "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," our horizon as readers now stretches to include Indians from the ragged hills of Virginia to the turbaned world of Benares, *reorienting* our temporal bearings with it.

Like the image of the city of Benares itself, the notion of the interregnum comes from Poe's reading of Macaulay. That is, the memory of Oldeb's death, as written by Templeton and lived by Bedloe, can only appear for the reader through the narrator's 1845 redaction. And in the larger frame of the tale, the narrator's account is a result of Poe's 1844 soft plagiarism of Macaulay's account, already taken from Gleig and the impeachment speeches of Sheridan. As Macaulay tells us, the event beading this mimetic chain, the famous Benares affair, occurred because of a strangely transitional moment in India where power had entered its own Indian summer and the rules of the game in imperial relations had shifted onto a plane of uncertainty.⁵⁵ In this climate, Hastings demanded of the raja an excessive financial offering. The insurrection staged by the offended raja, which in Poe's version of the story resulted in the death of Oldeb, appears to have been the triggering motive for Templeton's compulsive behavior, particularly when we learn that his historic double may have been Nathaniel Middleton, "the second self of Mr. Hastings"—ironically dubbed

“Memory Middleton” by Sheridan for his convenient lapses in memory during the impeachment trial.⁵⁶

Ah, Memory Middleton! Now we’re getting somewhere. By his own late testimony in the trial he imagines himself to be enduring, Templeton explains that his motives for “accost[ing]” Bedloe at Saratoga had to do with the “miraculous similarity” existing between Bedloe and Oldeb. Templeton admits, however, that an “unaccountable” sentiment of “horror” kept him from sharing this particular likeness (*Works*, 3:948). But these truly “unaccountable” sentiments more likely relate to Templeton’s drive to *discover* a resemblance between two men in order to freeze his own perceptive field in 1780. Given his compulsive attachment to the event, Templeton appears to want to stop the forward progression of time altogether, keeping at bay all potential flashbacks relating to the Benares incident and with it the whole chain of insurrections that followed around the changing empires of Britain and France.

This last idea undergirds the mystery of Templeton, who seems to appear on the world map at key historical moments. Thus, after his part in the Benares event (and presumably the Hastings trial) he seems to have landed in Paris. The timing of his stay there remains hazy, however: to have been a direct disciple of Mesmer, Templeton would had to have been in Paris in the 1780s, the decade when he was either in India or on trial in England; Mesmer himself left Paris in 1785. Yet, as Robert Darton makes clear, mesmerism continued to infuse the political environment in Paris, making it possible for Templeton to be a disciple without ever meeting the man. Given its revolutionary application both there and in the Americas, especially Haiti, it is somewhat surprising that Templeton should have adopted this scientific breakthrough, though it is also true that those convinced of mesmerism’s promise assumed a wide variety of political positions.⁵⁷ His use of leeches for bloodletting suggests the conservative nature of his medical practice, as even Ben Franklin thought mesmerism would be an improvement over that technique.⁵⁸ If anything, Templeton deploys the mesmeric pass as a stay against the Indian, French, and Haitian revolutions, marking an uneven and perhaps unwelcome modernity for him. As readers we do not know how and when Templeton comes to America. His motive for going to Saratoga, where he meets Bedloe, is equally unclear, though it seems likely he sought to practice his profession on people vacationing there.

One certainly wonders if a doctor-patient contract such as the one set up in Saratoga between the wealthy young Bedloe and the aging Templeton would have been possible if Templeton’s infatuation with discovering a resemblance between Oldeb and Bedloe had been accepted as a primary motivation for the mesmeric experiments that follow. Templeton does finally say that he harbors a “regretful memory of the deceased,” though the reasons for his regret never

surface. Confessing that he did all he “could to prevent the rash and fatal sally of the officer who fell” (*Works*, 3:949) seems less a “regretful memory” than a story designed to distract us from his larger activity as a member of the British party.

Moreover, were Templeton’s miniature a watercolor of the city of Benares, Bedloe might not swoon so completely. We need to remember that Bedloe’s experience as he walks in the Ragged Hills is telepathically transmitted to him by Dr. Templeton. Critics who see Bedloe’s racist perceptions as vital to understanding the political valence of the story often overlook this mimetic relay. When Bedloe first finds himself in a gorge “entirely new” to him, he is saturated with the belief that he is “the very first and sole adventurer who ha[s] even penetrated its recesses” (*Works*, 3:942–43), though he makes it clear that the source of this sensation remains vague. When a “dusky-visaged and half naked” man interrupts that conviction of solitude, the contradiction quickly gets resolved by his sudden and biased memory of stories about “the uncouth and fierce races of men” inhabiting the Ragged Hills (*Works*, 3:943). Such critics as Kennedy and Williams note how Bedloe’s prejudice against the people he encounters on the American landscape resembles his equally demeaning description of the people he finds himself among in Benares. In such readings, Bedloe’s fearful response to native populations establishes a working parallel between British imperialism and “American efforts to subjugate dark-skinned” populations, indigenous or otherwise.⁵⁹ These two responses do bear a relationship to one another, yet Templeton’s part in generating that relationship too often goes overlooked. In seeking such “miraculous similarities” of our own, we miss a crucial aspect of the story. Thus a watercolor of the exotic Benares vista first presented by Bedloe as a page out of “Arabian Tales” would not be surprising (*Works*, 3:945), since it would reflect what he has already seen through his reading as well as Templeton’s mesmeric transmission. But when Bedloe finally sees how the doctor looks at him through Oldeb’s portrait, his trust in the doctor shifts suddenly and dramatically, and we need to consider why.

Unprepared for Oldeb’s miniature, the reader is one step behind Bedloe and has a moment to imagine what the “water-colour drawing” might actually expose. That moment extends when we are distracted and ultimately barred from seeing the portrait by the narrator’s intrusive claim that he sees in it nothing “of an extraordinary character.” This is notable since we soon learn that the “effect upon Bedloe [is] prodigious”: “He nearly fainted as he gazed.” It is equally hard to square the narrator’s first disclaimer with his belief that the miniature is a “miraculously accurate” portrait of Bedloe’s “very remarkable features,” until we realize that the word “remarkable” forms the operative pun

for his presentation of Bedloe all along (*Works*, 3:948). With his own opening portrait, the narrator inaugurates Bedloe's dangerous circulation through a series of mimetic reproductions not his own. In this sense, Bedloe becomes a type of affective money form, important as currency for the narrator, the doctor, and the reader seduced by the claim.

Here we need to pause for a moment over the colorful portrait of Benares, for it emerges ultimately through the narrator's retelling of the story. Bedloe's panoramic description, which the narrator reproduces, shimmers a fraction beyond our perceptual abilities as the image Templeton may disclose in his watercolor. But of course this does not happen:

The streets seemed innumerable, and crossed each other irregularly in all directions, but were rather long winding alleys than streets, and absolutely swarmed with inhabitants. The houses were wildly picturesque. On every hand was a wilderness of balconies, of verandahs, of minarets, of shrines, and fantastically carved oriels. Bazaars abounded; and in these were displayed rich wares in infinite variety and profusion—silks, muslins, the most dazzling cutlery, the most magnificent jewels and gems. Besides these things, were seen, on all sides, banners and palanquins, litters with stately dames close veiled, elephants gorgeously caparisoned, idols grotesquely hewn, drums, banners and gongs, spears, silver and gilded maces. And amid the crowd, and the clamor, and the general intricacy and confusion—amid the million of black and yellow men, turbaned and robed, and of flowing beard, there roamed a countless multitude of holy filleted bulls, while vast legions of the filthy but sacred ape clambered, chattering and shrieking, about the cornices of the mosques, or clung to the minarets and oriels. (*Works*, 3:945)

Poe's own reproduction of the image of Benares that he takes from Macaulay has been the source of shock for several readers, such as Burton Pollin and David Ketterer, who picked up on a critical tradition begun in the pages of the 1899 *Literary Era*.⁶⁰ Yet upon inspection by later critics, the initial shock of Poe's purported plagiarism becomes a newer shock associated with his failure to copy correctly, or perhaps surprise over his emendations, whereby the raja is called "effeminate" (*Works*, 3:947) and the "sacred apes" are now also described as "filthy."⁶¹ But Poe's sly reproduction itself gets embedded in the radically circulating properties of the story. The demand that these pages be either different or the same pushes against the original authority of this event. Who, after all, is writing? Inside the frame of Poe's story, it is not Macaulay but Templeton, though only as relayed telepathically to Bedloe—and after him,

the narrator—and this rapidly shifting authorial function reveals the range of response the rolling stone of this traumatic kernel demands. The evaporating authority of the Benares vista signals a need to return to the shock induced by the portrait after all.

This image is not shocking to the narrator, for we recall that he sees “a miraculously accurate” resemblance between Oldeb and the “very remarkable” features of Bedloe (*Works*, 3:948). But the narrator also tells us early on that Bedloe is sensitive to his appearance, claiming that “a long series of neuralgic attacks ha[ve] reduced him from a condition of more than usual personal beauty” (*Works*, 3:940). Thus, for Bedloe, this mirroring produces a double take, as he now sees again the image of himself that he has continually, and apologetically, tried to disavow as his own. These earlier apologies were once painful for our narrator, but he apparently has gotten over that, since his attraction to Bedloe has to do more with the characteristics retrospectively lining him up with Oldeb than with the pains such ghoulish changes were inflicting on him incrementally.

If we think again about the emphasis Bedloe places on his radically changed appearance, it would seem unlikely that the “miraculous similarity” existed when Templeton first met him at Saratoga. Indeed, this assertion appears to be something of a cover-up; judging by the swoon of Bedloe when he finally sees this image, it is more likely that Templeton’s ambition has been to make over the “more than usual personal beauty” of the young Bedloe so as to produce once more the man for whom he harbors a fixation, however abstractly.

Bedloe’s pain results from the fact that he has been living with an image of himself not his own. Rather than eliminating pain, Templeton’s mesmeric practices appear to have been inducing it; after all, Bedloe still resorts to morphine every morning. Hence, the 1780 image now affords him an explanation for his own sad transformation, exposing the relationship between himself and the doctor as the corrupt fruit of the doctor’s mimetic ambitions.

Bedloe’s mimetic crisis returns us to Benjamin’s interest in the tonic state of shock while connecting more directly with the vigorous currents of racism underwriting so much of modernity. Like “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe’s “Tale of the Ragged Mountains” exhibits a character with a strong aversion to an urban population. Benjamin uses the first of these stories in his Baudelaire essay to focus less on that aversion (which depends on a consideration of its narrative frame) than on Poe’s depiction of the isolation evident in the movement of bodies in Western cities like London, which Benjamin likens to the trained motions of alienated labor.⁶² However, as we noted before, “The Man of the Crowd” lacks a mimetic crisis, and Benjamin shifts his attention

back to Baudelaire to develop the mimetic potential of shock. No doubt Benjamin's aversion to Mesmer kept him from using Poe's tale about Benares. Yet "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" extends the mimetic potential across a far more global stretch of time and space and includes affective disruptions in emergent networks of all kinds. The "deep sentiment of animosity" against "the crowd which environ[s]" Bedloe (*Works*, 3:946) proves to be a mimetic affect belonging to Oldeb and, through him, Dr. Templeton. In this sense, the character summoned back from the dead in Poe's story does give his reader something of interest to consider, for the mesmeric crisis generating the specter of Oldeb's reappearance exposes alienated social relations on both local and global scales while favoring the shock of recognition that results in Bedloe's swoon. Templeton remains locked in the moment when his own imperial gaze went unquestioned, while Bedloe discovers through this peculiar transference of another's affect alternative possibilities. In so doing, of course, he makes himself vulnerable to Templeton's murderous application of leeches.

Bedloe's belief that he has not been in a dream but in some sort of hallucinatory reality is the initial basis for cure. Ironically, he can only separate himself from Oldeb by first admitting that the "deep sentiment of animosity" (*Works*, 3:946) was real and not imagined. Only then can he begin to distinguish his own feelings from those of the men whose world he has suddenly inhabited. It is impossible to know how far back Bedloe's prejudices against other people might go. Mentioned as the meeting place of Templeton and Bedloe, Saratoga no doubt held appeal because of its curing waters. But as one historian tells us, places like Saratoga contrived to provide sanitized little urban experiences where dirt and race riots in particular were not an issue.⁶³ The young Bedloe, likely an "average racist" from Virginia, was perhaps already sensitized to the impending racial violence of his state when he went to Saratoga.⁶⁴ He doubtless found fellowship with Templeton in such feelings. But this does not mean that Bedloe could not wish to have such feelings altered when he sees them retrofitted to match those of Oldeb (or Templeton) in India and has to act them out.

Bedloe's emphatic claim that his virtual experience of death was not a dream is perhaps the idea most disturbing to Templeton, since the occluded social relations of the insurrection could also be exposed by Bedloe's sudden recognition of the vigorous current oddly generating the alienating nature of his own experience.

According to Antonio Damasio, pain is not, properly speaking, an emotion, though it can lead to a realm of emotion he situates in the body, and that painful emotion can in turn produce mental feelings that are understood as painful. By showing the complex relay between brain and body, Damasio hopes

to raise our competence in dealing with emotional events, though he admits that “some feelings optimize learning and recall” while others do not. Not surprisingly, “extremely painful feelings in particular, perturb learning and protectively suppress recall.”⁶⁵ Freud could not have said it better. Templeton is clearly fixated on a traumatic kernel, though here we can thank Poe’s playful invocation of the mesmeric process for exposing its relation to complex social relations that also involve zones of First Contact. Templeton’s telepathic relay of the story of Benares, and the mimetic reproductions it entails, ironically begin to awaken Bedloe to a sense of his own differentiation from the feelings he has experienced (disgust at the crowd, for example). But this shock of recognition is precisely what Templeton has had to foreclose, or else his own relationship to the painful memory might have to be addressed and worked through. And we should not let the narrator off lightly here, as he is himself something of a leech, and not a healthy one at that. In his rather clumsy attempt to expose the treacheries of Templeton’s new science, the narrator fails to see his own mimetic role. In a sense, he sucks the blood out of Bedloe’s story by allowing painful recognitions of Bedloe’s gradual transformation to fade away. We might say that in telling his story, the narrator’s feverish pain abates in a hypnotic way.

Rather compellingly, the newspaper column on which the narrator focuses, with its misspelling of Bedloe’s name (dropping the final *e*), could have been a page out of Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. The narrator’s belief that such errors are really symptoms forms a spooky (and oddly cybernetic) precursor to Freud’s later theory about mistakes.⁶⁶ But it also tells us something about the narrator’s final assessment of the story, for it rehearses the gullible readings of Poe’s mesmeric tales more generally. Still, the play on the mirror image of Oldeb’s name teases us into thinking about the “conversed” readings we can apply (*Works*, 3:950), and Poe no doubt enjoyed inviting these alternatives without worrying their reception. As readers, we can be seduced by the sensation-seeking narrator who believes that Templeton somehow channeled Oldeb back from the dead. Or, we can turn the story around to consider how each narrative frame serves to impose a type of “homogenous, empty time” on discrete and unique moments in history.⁶⁷

Benjamin did not find this second reading of Poe’s story, yet his own interest in Fourier has helped us to discover it. In the end, the traumatic mimesis of “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” enables a rather cunning anatomy of the historicism deplored by Benjamin. Bedloe’s contemporary prejudices become enlisted in Templeton’s effort to suspend a transforming political landscape by mimetically reproducing Oldeb. The mimetic crisis that brings about the shocking and painful revelation of Templeton’s ambition forms the

moment when “time” has the potential to “take a stand” and “blast open” the imperial frame into which Bedloe has been drawn.⁶⁸ For a brief moment, history does not have to spread out to repeat itself in a false universal and timeless image: the racism authorizing the renewal of British imperialism need not be acted out by Bedloe at home. But of course, this corrective historicism, based on recognition of material differences, can only flicker for a brief utopian moment as Poe’s swooning character quickly succumbs to Templeton’s lethal ministrations.

Still, Damasio tells us what the alibi of Poe’s story already seems to acknowledge: hypnosis is known for its ability to separate the sensation of pain, having to do with tissue damage, from the “pain affect,” involving higher levels of body/mind interchange.⁶⁹ Like many of Poe’s stories, “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” keeps the sensation of pain available while removing its affect: the tissues of the body politic are everywhere shown to be damaged even as the mesmeric flow of the tale carries morbid symptoms away.

Moreover, in its broad use of mesmerism’s complex genealogy, Poe’s tale becomes a type of cultural screen memory, where collective traumas are magnetically exposed and revealed to be interrelated on a local-global scale. This simultaneous exposure and disruption of pain might give us pause today when we consider the magnetic exposures fostered by our own global networks. In the end, of course, the possibility of repair is not so much Poe’s concern as our own.

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Notes

¹Walter Benjamin, “Fever,” in *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 74. Special thanks to Jana Argersinger and Scott Peeples for their invitation to present an earlier version of this paper in the “Pain, Trauma, and Terror” panel at the Bicentennial International Poe Conference in Philadelphia, and especially for their editing guidance, along with an anonymous reader, as the paper transformed into essay form.

²For an excellent account of this critical history, see Scott Peeples, “The Man of the Crowd: The Socio-Historical Poe,” in *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 93–123.

³Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harvest Books, Harcourt, 1999), 74–77.

⁴Though suspicious of certain trends in trauma theory, Sibylle Fischer opens the door for rethinking the Haitian Revolution through Freud’s notion of “disavowal,” a term he developed as he struggled with the limits of his own theoretical approach to trauma. See *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).

⁵Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 22–30.

⁶Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 2003), 311–55.

⁷See the final section of Walter Benjamin, “One-Way Street” (1928), trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1996), 486–87.

⁸I write about Fourier throughout *Feminist Conversations: Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995). For an excellent review of the relationship between Fourier and mesmerism, see Robert Darton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968).

⁹Theodor Adorno, “Theses against Occultism,” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 241. Writes Adorno: “Since the early days of spiritualism the Beyond has communicated nothing more significant than the dead grandmother’s greetings and the prophecy of an imminent journey.”

¹⁰Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 4*, 389–400. Fourier’s appearance in this essay (394) is often overlooked.

¹¹Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.

¹²For a discussion of spiritualism’s problematic association with “aura,” see Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura,” *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Winter 2008): 336–75. See also her “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999): 306–43.

¹³Benjamin appears particularly fascinated by Fourier’s notion of “explosion,” writing: “The propagation of the phalanstery takes place through an ‘explosion.’ Fourier speaks of an ‘explosion du phalanstère’” (*Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1999], 625).

¹⁴Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 631. See “Translator’s Foreword” for more on the project.

¹⁵For Benjamin on Fourier and Mickey Mouse, see *Arcades Project*, 635. For more on Mickey Mouse in Benjamin, see Mark Hansen, “On Some Motifs in Benjamin: (Re)Embodying Technology as *Erlebnis*, or the Postlinguistic Afterlife of Mimesis,” in *Embodying Technis: Technology beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press), 200, 231–63. Benjamin writes about the “dynamite” in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” whereby he describes the transformation brought about through the explosive deployment of space between images to make the dynamic effects of film (see *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Michael W.

Jennings with Marcus Bullock, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 2002], 117).

¹⁶For an interesting recent account of the ascendance of trauma theory in the twentieth century, see Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007). I've written elsewhere on trauma theory; see "Du Bois on Trauma: Psychoanalysis and the Would-Be Black Savant," *Cultural Critique* 51 (Spring 2002): 1–39.

¹⁷See n. 38 for a list of books describing this association. Most people note that it was Mesmer's pupil the Marquis de Puységur who first put emphasis on the "magnetic sleep" of his patients, though Mesmer did also later pay attention to the attribute.

¹⁸Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 2006), 20. For earlier readings of Poe's mesmerism in this story, see Sidney E. Lind, "Poe and Mesmerism," *PMLA* 62 (1947): 1077–94; and Doris V. Falk, "Poe and the Power of Animal Magnetism," *PMLA* 84 (1969): 563–46. For a recent inquiry into mesmerism as one key to understanding Poe's sally into the "post-human," see Matthew A. Taylor, "Edgar Allan Poe's (Meta)physics: A Pre-History of the Post-Human," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 62, no. 2 (2007): 193.

¹⁹For more on Fourier, see Carol J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991); and Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvendu, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1983). See also Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson, eds., *Charles Fourier: The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Univ. of Cambridge Press, 1996); and Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1986).

²⁰Poe's own reading about Mesmer was guided by sources already blending some of the ideas of Fourier and Mesmer in their uptake of both. See Bruce Mills, "The Psychology of the Single Effect: Poe and the Short Story Genre," in *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2006).

²¹Adam Frank, "Valdemar's Tongue, Poe's Telegraphy," *ELH* 72, no. 3 (2005): 635–62. Writes Frank: "I turn to Poe's writings on mesmerism to articulate the relations between the new technology's acoustic and graphic nature and accompanying fantasies of emotional manipulation. Mesmerism offered Poe and his contemporaries a medium at once spiritual and material in which an individual's sensations or feelings could be imagined to be connected to those of others and to larger social networks. Electromagnetic telegraphy literalized these social networks of feeling, elaborating a physiologized social body comprised of wires and electricity, keys and armatures. Poe's writings on mesmerism theorize this physiologized field as it offers access to potentially shared sensations, especially via a (male) reader's body and its potential for being de-differentiated from the body of the writer. His tales of mesmerism stage scene after scene of writing, each more unlikely, controlling, and dangerous for both writer and reader than the last; they depict not scenes of individualizing

mastery but scenes of control's excess or loss of control for everyone involved" (639).

²²See Darton's description of Fourier's indebtedness in *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment*, 143–46.

²³John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 69.

²⁴See J. Gerald Kennedy, "'A Mania for Composition': Poe's *Annus Mirabilis* and the Violence of Nation-Building," *American Literary History* 17, no.1 (2005): 1–35. See also G. R. Thompson, "Is Poe's 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains' a Hoax?" *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1968–69): 454–60.

²⁵For an excellent analysis of these publications and Poe's use of them, see Mukhtar Ali Isani, "Some Sources for Poe's 'Tale of the Ragged Mountains,'" *Poe Studies* 5 (December 1972): 38–40.

²⁶For a fine essay on Burke's part in this trial, see Siraj Ahmed, "The Theater of the Civilized Self: Edmund Burke and the East India Company," *Representations* 78 (Spring 2002): 28–55.

²⁷Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 2006), xii. See also Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004).

²⁸Dirks, *Scandal of Empire*, 34.

²⁹David E. Musselwhite describes the tactics of both sides as lampooned by political cartoons of the day in "The Trial of Warren Hastings," in *Literature, Politics, and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976–84*, ed. Francis Barker (London, New York: Methuen, 1986), 83.

³⁰See especially Rowe in *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism*. For an excellent reading of the various approaches to the imperialism this tale represents, see Michael J. S. Williams "Poe's Ugly American: 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,'" *Poe Studies* 34 (1999): 51–61.

³¹See Andrew Horn, "Poe and the Tory Tradition: The Fear of *Jacquerie* in 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 29 (1983): 25–30. For a good accounting of the various people concerned with Poe's plagiarism in this case, see the second footnote in Isani's essay, "Some Sources." See also Williams, "Poe's Ugly American" 53–54.

³²The idea of hoax in Poe is a commonplace, and Isani adopts it in specific relation to "Tale of the Ragged Mountains ("Some Sources").

³³For a compelling history of mesmerism's spread, see Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1902). See also Jean Vichon, *Mesmer et son secret* (Paris: A. Legrand, 1936), 86.

³⁴John F. Kihlstrom, "Mesmer, the Franklin Commission, and Hypnosis: A Counterfactual Essay," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 50, no. 4 (2002): 408.

³⁵Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1970), 73. See also Kieran Murphy,

“Magic and Mesmerism in Saint Domingue,” *Paroles Gelées* 24 (Spring 2008): 31–48; and James E. McClellan, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992).

³⁶A description of the *baquet* can be found in “Catechisme du Magnetisme Animal,” translated as “Catechism on Animal Magnetism” in *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Medical and Scientific Writings of F. A. Mesmer, M.D.*, compiled and translated by George J. Bloch, introduction by Ernest R. Hilgard (Los Angeles: William Kaumann, Inc., 1980), 83. See note on same page.

³⁷See Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993); Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Leon Chertok and Raymond de Saussure, *The Therapeutic Revolution: From Mesmer to Freud*, trans. Dr. R. H. Ahrenfeldt (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979); Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn Press, 1982); Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001); Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992); Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998); and James E. McClellan, *Colonialism and Science*. For Poe and Mesmer, see Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts*.

³⁸See especially Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds., *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993); and Patricia Spyer, ed., *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Places* (New York: Routledge, 1998). See also Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study of Terror and Healing* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁹Stefan Zweig, *Mental Healers: Franz Anton Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Viking Press, 1932), 4–8.

⁴⁰Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴¹Leys, *Trauma*, 9.

⁴²Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, esp. 2.

⁴³Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 47–58.

⁴⁴Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 19–32, 70–87; Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Selected Writings*, 4:313–55. I’m indebted to Mark Hansen’s deft reading of these associations; see “On Some Motifs in Benjamin,” 231–63.

⁴⁵Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 79, 72; emphasis added.

⁴⁶Winter, *Mesmerized*, 88.

⁴⁷Lauren Berlant, “Thinking about Feeling Historical,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 1 (2008): 4.

⁴⁸Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” in vol. 18 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 115.

⁴⁹Jonathan Elmer, “Poe, Sensationalism, and the Sentimental Tradition,” in *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe* (Stanford: Stanford

Univ. Press, 1995), 93–125. Elmer situates Poe on the sensational side of the social limit where the “hole” that is death is faced by “tarrying at the wound” rather than being recuperated by sentimental identifications and detachments of mourning.

⁵⁰In Poe’s use of Mesmer, he always seems inclined to collapse the collective possibilities by keeping at the wound, in a type of glorification of its oozing excess, as Elmer reminds us. Yet the very concept of the wound resonates with Cathy Caruth’s more benign reading of it as a potential source of our shared histories. See “Introduction: The Wound and the Voice,” in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), 1–9.

⁵¹Williams, “Poe’s Ugly American,” 53–54; Isani, “Some Sources,” 38–40.

⁵²Lind, “Poe and Mesmerism,” 1077–94; Falk, “Poe and the Power of Animal Magnetism,” 536–46.

⁵³Winter, *Mesmerized*, 187–212.

⁵⁴See especially Williams, “Poe’s Ugly American,” 54, 58; and J. Gerald Kennedy, “Mania for Composition,” 19.

⁵⁵*Macaulay’s Essay on Warren Hastings*, ed. Joseph Villiers Denney (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1907), 105–7.

⁵⁶*The Speeches of the Right Honourable Richard Brinsley Sheridan . . . Edited by a Constitutional Friend* (London: Henry Bohn, 1842), 1:422. The reference to “Memory Middleton” is found in Musselwhite, “Trial of Warren Hastings,” 83; and Isani, “Some Sources,” 39–40. One finds it hard to imagine how Poe’s story could be seen as a clear endorsement of Hastings, as John Carlos Rowe would have it (“Poe clearly represents Hastings as a heroic figure, victimized by the ‘insurrection’ of the raja of Benares” [“Edgar Allan Poe’s Imperial Fantasy and the American Frontier,” in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 93]); even when Macaulay himself tries to be evenhanded in his description of the man, he does not find in this event room for revision in the impeachment proceedings. In Macaulay, we hear about the reign of terror brought on by the imposition of the British legal system, and we see how brutally pragmatic Hastings was in his negotiations with Singh. There is no question that Singh had been bullied by the British. At the same time, Poe’s position is invariably quite complex.

⁵⁷Darton has amplified the revolutionary use of mesmerism in Paris, complicated as it is (*Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment*). Here I am describing perceptions of that use, though there were those involved in each revolution that had faith in the new science and actively promoted it—notably Lafayette when he came to the U.S. See Helmut Hirsch, “Mesmerism and Revolutionary America,” *American-German Review* 10 (October 1943): 11–14. The onset of mesmerism in this country has not been adequately documented, particularly as it came to us by way of refugees (and sometimes their slaves) from the Haitian Revolution. For an interesting discussion of mesmerism in Philadelphia and its impact on Charles Brockden Brown, see the “Historical Essay” by Sydney J. Krause, part of the bicentennial edition of *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1974), 350–57.

⁵⁸See the account of Franklin in Paris by Claude-Anne Lopez in *Mon Cher Papa: Franklin and the Ladies of Paris* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990, 1966), 172.

⁵⁹Kennedy, "Mania for Composition," 19. See also Williams, "Poe's Ugly American," 57.

⁶⁰Poe borrowed from a variety of passages. For example, one of the quotes from Macaulay's review reads: "[Hastings's] first design was on Benares, a city which in wealth, population, dignity, and sanctity, was among the foremost of Asia. It was commonly believed that half a million of human beings was crowded into that labyrinth of lofty alleys, rich with shrines, and minarets, and balconies, and carved oriels, to which the sacred apes clung by hundreds. The traveller could scarcely make his way through the press of holy mendicants and not less holy bulls. . . . All along the shores of the venerable [Ganges] lay great fleets of vessels laden with rich merchandise. From the looms of Benares went forth the most delicate silks that adorned the balls of St. James's and of Versailles; and in the bazaars the muslins of Bengal and the sabers of Oude were mingled with the jewels of Golconda and the shawls of Cashmere" (*Macaulay's Essay on Warren Hastings*, 102–3).

⁶¹See Horn, "Poe and the Tory Tradition," 25–30. Williams describes reasons for these conflicting responses well: "This 'India' appropriated by Poe is . . . already an intertextual construction; his theft foregrounds the self-confirming interrelationships of colonial historical texts that, while they may differ on matters of interpretation, still leave the fundamental imperial will to power over the colonized other undisturbed" ("Poe's Ugly American," 54).

⁶²Writes Benjamin, "The shock experience [*Chockerlebnis*] which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to the isolated 'experiences' of the worker at his machine" ("Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings*, 4:329). Benjamin uses Poe in much the same way in his earlier text "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," *Selected Writings*, 4:3–94. There he compares this motion to that of a clown, in whose movement "there is an obvious reference to economic mechanisms": "With his abrupt movements, he imitates both the machines which push the material and the economic boom which pushes the merchandise" (30).

⁶³Jon Sterngrass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasures at Saratoga Springs, Newport and Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 35–36.

⁶⁴I take this phrase from Terence Whalen's reading of Poe, though he has a specific editorial posture in mind. See *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), 111.

⁶⁵Antonio Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harvest Books, Harcourt, 2003), 178.

⁶⁶For an excellent summary of psychoanalytic readings of Poe, see Scott Peeples, "Poe and Psychoanalysis," in *Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe*, 29–61.

⁶⁷Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 395.

⁶⁸Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 396.

⁶⁹Damasio, *Feeling of What Happens*, 75.