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Strange Science

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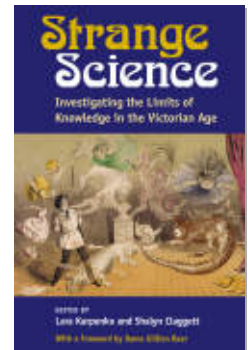
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CHAPTER 7

“So Extraordinary a Bond”

*Mesmerism and Sympathetic Identification in
Charles Adams’s Notting Hill Mystery*

Lara Karpenko

In the lead article for the October 1854 issue of the *Zoist*, a relatively short-lived journal dedicated to studying “cerebral physiology and mesmerism,” the Reverend R. A. F. Barrett published an account of “A,” a “Lady” who was apparently cured by mesmerism after “being twelve years in the horizontal position with extreme suffering.”¹ Barrett’s account, at once lowbrow entertainment and sober scientific study, casts mesmerism as a legitimate, though extraordinary, medical cure. In the narrative’s apparent climax, Barrett details how he managed to keep his starving patient nourished:

The retching had come on the preceding night as she had predicted. I kept her asleep two hours, and had dinner for her . . . for thirteen days after that she tasted nothing solid. . . . Not only when asleep but when awake also, she seemed to derive real benefit from my eating by her side when she was in mesmeric sleep, and when she awoke could always tell by her own feeling whether I had eaten or not.²

As he describes A’s ability to receive sustenance from the food that passes his lips, Barrett suggests that mesmerism’s effectiveness rests in its abil-

ity to form profound, if not titillating, sympathetic bonds. Though Barrett's account may seem fantastic, its focus on sympathy would not have surprised Victorian readers. By the 1850s, discussions of mesmerism consistently intertwined the controversial science with the concept of sympathetic knowledge and identification.

Though the *Zoist* ceased publication in 1856, Barrett's article curiously resurfaced seven years later as a crucial plot device in Charles Adams's *Notting Hill Mystery* (1862–63).³ Generally overlooked today, *The Notting Hill Mystery* is perhaps best known for Julian Symons's declaration that it (and not Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* [1868]) should be classified as the first English detective novel.⁴ Though Adams may have beaten Collins to the narrative punch, his novel, a polyphonic page turner, clearly seems inspired by *The Woman in White* (1859) and other early sensation novels. Told from the perspective of Ralph Henderson, a life insurance agent assigned to investigate three untimely deaths and Baron R——'s resulting inheritance, *The Notting Hill Mystery* weaves together diary entries, newspaper clippings, personal letters, various affidavits, and Henderson's increasingly horrified commentary. Ultimately Henderson discovers that the diabolical Baron R callously murdered three people in order to come into his inheritance: his wife, Madame Rosalie; her estranged twin sister, Gertrude Anderton; and Gertrude's husband, William Anderton. A chillingly effective villain, the Baron is remarkably evasive and commits none of the murders directly. Inspired by Barrett's article in the *Zoist* (which Adams reproduces almost in its entirety as part of the novel), the Baron first murders Mrs. Anderton through the sympathetic poisoning of her mesmerized twin sister; he then manipulates Mr. Anderton into committing suicide and finally murders his own wife by throwing Rosalie into a mesmeric sleep and causing her to swallow a deadly poison. Though Henderson is able to piece together the entire crime, his incredulity at the Baron's first murder in particular, and his realization that such a crime, even if possible, could never be prosecuted in court, causes the intrepid insurance agent to abandon the case. In a sharp departure from the sensation novels that defined the midcentury, in *The Notting Hill Mystery*, the criminal seems to get away with murder.

To some extent, however, stating that the Baron "gets away" suggests more closure than the novel actually provides. While the reader never experiences the satisfaction of seeing the Baron brought to justice, the reader also does not see the Baron effectively evade justice. With an ending that almost seems to anticipate "The Lady or the Tiger" in its inconclusivity, *The Notting Hill Mystery* resists the formula that typifies

most—if not all—sensation novels. While sensation novels repeatedly end with images of domestic stability—the criminals safely removed and the detective heroes blissfully married—*The Notting Hill Mystery* presents a world in which order seems forever lost.⁵ At once conforming to and resisting the formulas that had come to define sensation fiction, *The Notting Hill Mystery* thus defies easy classification.⁶ Perhaps because of this, the novel seems to have dropped off our contemporary radar. But when placed within the frame of mesmeric science, Adams’s novel showcases a surprising moment in the Victorian history of reading and warrants further critical attention. In some ways, mesmerism’s prominence in the novel is unexpected if not anachronistic. By the novel’s 1862 publication date, mesmerism, though still a subject of discussion and interest, hardly arrested public attention as it did during the 1840s and 1850s—the decades in which the “mesmeric mania” gripped the public imagination.⁷ Despite its mesmerism’s fading popularity, Adams casts it as dangerous and deeply disruptive. Indeed, it is the Baron’s ability to commit a mesmeric murder that so confounds Henderson and that enables the crimes to remain unprosecuted. Within the novel, then, it is mesmerism and the extraordinary sympathy it represents, and not necessarily the murders themselves, that destabilize the Andertons’ domestic world and ultimately the coherence and form of the novel itself.

It is important to keep in mind that for a Victorian audience, the concepts of sympathy, sympathetic identification, and sympathetic bonding were all extraordinarily complex and multifaceted. In her study of sympathetic identification, Rae Greiner aptly argues that for many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics, sympathy was a “form of *thinking* geared towards others” and goes on to suggest that “[emotional] feeling played no . . . necessary part” in the sympathetic experience; in a similar vein, Rachel Ablow suggests that she is “less interested in sympathy as a feeling . . . than in sympathy as *psychic* structure through which the subject is produced, consolidated, or redefined.”⁸ Though Greiner and Ablow certainly have different points of focus, both notably seek to disentangle sympathy from feeling. By contrast, while I acknowledge that sympathy and emotional feeling were not necessarily connected during the nineteenth century, I suggest that sympathy was often connected with physical feeling. Sympathy was not only a “psychic phenomen[on],” as Ablow suggests, but a physiological phenomenon—one that could erase physical boundaries, destroy bodily integrity, and infect populations.⁹ Sympathy, in other words, is a physical experience of connection and community. In defining sympathy in such a way, I intentionally follow

Adams's own use of the term. For instance, near the opening of *The Notting Hill Mystery*, one of the many narrators remarks on the "wonderful sympathy that existed between the twins" (Mrs. Anderton and Madam Rosalie as children). "This sympathy," the narrator states, "seems even more physical than mental . . . every little ailment that affects the one is immediately felt by the other."¹⁰ Building off of Victorian understandings of mesmerism, Adams conceives of the sympathetic experience as dangerously grounded in the body, and as frighteningly communal.

By focusing on the physiological dimensions of the sympathetic relationship, I connect the "mesmeric mania" of the 1840s with the rise of sensation fiction in the 1860s and suggest that sensation fiction promised a sanitized version of the enticing sympathy that mesmerism once offered to its participants.¹¹ I then turn to *The Notting Hill Mystery* in order to provide a case study in which an author deliberately critiques this Victorian tendency to transform texts into physiological experience. I argue that Adams makes fictional use of the fading strange science in order to warn against the seductive powers of sympathetic identification and, by extension, against the embodied pleasure and sympathetically engaged reading style that sensation fiction explicitly encouraged. Adams's strident critique of sympathetic identification ultimately reveals that for a Victorian audience, reading itself often constituted a strange form of physiological inquiry.

*Mesmerism, Sympathetic Knowledge,
and the Reader of Sensation Fiction*

Before moving on to discuss Adams's critique of sympathetically engaged reading, I begin with an overview of the mesmeric construction of sympathetic identification. Though practitioners and critics of mesmerism agreed on very little (a point beautifully documented by Alison Winter), both camps acknowledged that mesmerism facilitated intense physiological bonds.¹² Certainly the very structure of the mesmeric séance, which generally featured a male mesmerist and a female subject, assumed that sympathetic (i.e., physical) bonding was inseparable from the experience. In order to describe the dynamic between mesmerist and mesmerized, I turn to a report from the *Lancet* that describes one of the most well-known mesmeric demonstrations of the era—Dr. John Elliotson's first public experiment on Elizabeth O'Key. Though Elliotson's experiments on the O'Key sisters were eventually discredited by the scientific

community in general and (vociferously) by the *Lancet* in particular, Elliotson, whom Fred Kaplan decrees “most responsible for the spread of mesmerism in England,” nonetheless helped establish the protocols for the mesmeric séance:¹³

She was here put to sleep (this was always done by a pass of the hand) . . . the Doctor drew his hand, pointed towards hers, upwards and outwards in the air. In a few seconds her hand and arm began to move up in the same direction. While ceasing, for a short time, in order to talk to someone near, he produced a motion with his fingers, which those of the girl immediately imitated. “See,” said the Doctor, “my fingers were moved involuntarily; I did not mean to influence hers.”¹⁴

It is this “pass”—or the slow gliding of the hands over, but not necessarily touching, the body of the subject—that became the hallmark of the mesmeric experience. A gesture at once intimate and public, the pass signaled that bodily boundaries were permeable and that doctor and patient had enticingly become one. As Elliotson demonstrates mesmerism’s validity by encouraging O’Key’s movements to mirror his own and as the *Lancet* reporter seems particularly impressed when O’Key mirrors even Elliotson’s unconscious movements, it becomes clear that the very goal of the mesmeric séance was embodied experience and sympathetic communion.

In perhaps an even more direct conflation of mesmeric practice with sympathetic bonding, Thomas Buckland offers the following piece of advice in his *Handbook of Mesmerism* (1850): “In order that one individual may [mesmerize] . . . another,” he writes, “there must exist between them a moral and physical sympathy.”¹⁵ Explicitly suggesting that mesmerism requires a *physically* sympathetic connection, Buckland’s manual, a simple “how-to” guide aimed at the mesmeric layman, suggests just how necessary this conception of the permeable body was to the mesmeric experience. Notably, it was not only mesmerists who encouraged sympathetic bonding. Mesmerized subjects also defined such bonding as one of the preconditions and as one of the benefits of the mesmeric séance. For instance, in her controversial *Letters on Mesmerism* (1845), Harriet Martineau, reflecting on her own experiences as a mesmerized subject, insists that mesmerism forges bonds so intense that the “sympathy induced by two or more persons resemble[s] no other relation known.”¹⁶ In a time when, as Ablow points out, sympathetic bonding “came to func-

tion . . . as a pleasurable characteristic of the domestic sphere” and to some extent defined the companionate marriage, Martineau casts mesmeric sympathy, a sympathy that was realized in the body, as capable of supplanting even domestic or marital bonds.¹⁷

Perhaps because Martineau understood mesmerism sympathetically, or perhaps because she foresaw that her account would inspire critique, she actually changed mesmerists twice before 1845: Martineau began her sessions with the itinerant male mesmerist Spencer Hall, switched to her personal maid, and finally chose “a lady, the widow of a clergyman . . . [with] high qualities of mind and heart” to perform her regular mesmeric treatments.¹⁸ Despite the care that Martineau took in selecting her mesmerist, her account inspired widespread critique—much of it centering on the very issue of sympathetic melding. In a particularly scathing review, a critic who only called himself “Veritas” suggests that Martineau, one of the most celebrated public intellectuals of her decade, is a dupe whose “judgment is perverted [and] mental faculties obscured,” and, not surprisingly, he accuses her mesmerist of obscuring Martineau’s mental faculties.¹⁹ “Miss M.,” Veritas suggests, “appears to be imposed upon, and is unconsciously lending herself to impose upon others.”²⁰ Though Veritas proudly defines himself as an opponent of mesmerism, he nonetheless casts mesmerism as dangerously sympathetic; to some extent, Veritas seems to suggest that mesmerism has sympathetic potential *because* it is invalid. As the very term “impose” suggests, embedded in Veritas’s critique is the fear that the charlatanical mesmerist’s desires will multiply and ripple throughout the British public.²¹

Though Martineau’s account was indeed controversial, the enthusiasm for mesmerism continued throughout the 1840s, and by 1851, John Bennett anxiously proclaimed that a “mesmeric mania” had overtaken Great Britain and casts mesmerism as both a physiological experience and as frighteningly sympathetic:

I have been told that in some educational establishments, girls and boys throw themselves in to states of trance and ecstasy, or show their fixed eyeballs and rigid limbs, for the amusement of their companions. Sensitive ladies do not object to indulge in the emotions so occasioned, and to exhibit themselves in a like way for the entertainment of evening parties. . . . The disorder has not been confined to Edinburgh. . . . [Dr. Darling] has produced the greatest excitement in his course toward London, where according to the papers, there are at present repeated the same public scenes, and the same phenomena,

as were produced among us . . . so that, I think, we are warranted in calling it—“The Mesmeric Mania of 1851.”²²

Embedded in Bennett’s critique of mesmerism is his awareness that its adherents seem to experience the phenomena in their bodies. Indeed, as he describes the “girls and boys” who display their ecstatic bodies and the “sensitive ladies” who forgo modesty in their eagerness to exhibit themselves, Bennett seems to define mesmerism as not just embodied but as excessively embodied. Comparing mesmerism to a contagion, Bennett acknowledges the sympathetic powers of mesmerism; within Bennett’s description, mesmerism almost seems to leap from person to person, from doctor to patient from city to city and even from country to country. In some ways, however, Bennett’s description of the “Mesmeric Mania of 1851” signifies the end—rather than the height—of serious interest in mesmerism. The very public critiques of Martineau did perhaps suggest that the science, with its promises of sympathetic identification and of an intensely embodied experience, was not fit for the middle and upper classes. Mesmerism’s fading appeal was revealed most prominently by Elliotson’s decision to cease publication of the *Zoist* in January 1856. Though Elliotson claimed that he was ending publication because “the object for which *The Zoist* was undertaken is attained” and though some interest in mesmerism certainly continued throughout the nineteenth century and continues even into the twenty-first century, it was clear that mesmerism was no longer the subject of fervid public fascination.²³ However, by 1859, with Wilkie Collins’s landmark publication of the *Woman in White*, mesmeric language resurfaced once again in reviews and responses to the sensation novel. The interest in mesmerism, as Winter and Garrison also relate, did not fade so much as it become rerouted. Mesmerism became textual.²⁴

Sensation fiction thus took up the “strange” cultural work once performed by mesmerism by providing the intriguing possibility of a stimulated body. The sensational author becomes a sort of “textual mesmerist”—diffusing his (and less frequently her) desires in order to bind readers to the novel’s characters and to one another. In a facetious though telling example, *Punch* announced in 1863 that a new journal would begin publication: *The Sensation Times and Chronicle of Excitement*. Beginning by suggesting that sensation novels had become “one of the necessities of the age,” the “advertisement” wryly caricatures the objectives of sensation fiction. “This Journal,” spoofs *Punch*, “will be devoted chiefly to the following objects: namely, Harrowing the Mind, Making

the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shock to the Nervous System, Destroying Conventional Moralities, and generally Unfitting the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life.”²⁵ As the anonymous author jokingly points to the nervous system, the flesh, and the hair, he both echoes the public discourse surrounding mesmerism and describes the reading experience itself as requiring physiological diagnosis. Whereas previous subgenres of fiction certainly engaged the body (sentimental fiction elicited tears for instance), that readerly experience was, as Winter points out, “mediated by . . . judgment and imagination”; by contrast, with sensation fiction, as Winter argues, “The route from page to nerve was direct.”²⁶

Perhaps no other Victorian literary form addresses the physiological aspects of textual mesmerism more directly than literary reviews, and I close this section by briefly examining Margaret Oliphant’s oft-cited essay “Sensation Fiction.” While both Garrison and Winter point out that critical reviews of early sensation novels generally feature language that mirrors mesmeric discourse, neither focuses directly on how these reviews construct and participate in the construction of physiological sympathy. Taking Oliphant’s review as representative of Victorian literary reviews more largely, I build off of Nicholas Dames’s astute observation that critics consciously sought to reveal the “effect of reading.”²⁷ Appearing in 1862, almost three years after the *Woman in White* began its serial run, Oliphant’s piece functions more as a retrospective on sensation fiction’s rapid development than as a review. Beginning with Collins’s *Woman in White* and readily admitting that “we need not discuss over again so familiar a tale,” Oliphant indicates that her purpose is to alert readers not to a new novel but to a new reading practice.²⁸

Extensively quoting from the *Woman in White*, Oliphant goes on to explain not *what* the novel means but *how* the novel means.²⁹ Though readers today might find the Victorian convention of the prolonged quotation tedious, Dames suggests that the practice was integral to nineteenth-century critical protocols and was meant to provide “a reading experience in miniature . . . [to invite] the review’s reader to partake in a reading experience with the critic.”³⁰ In particular, the prolonged excerpt allows Oliphant to record the physiological effects of the novel. After quoting nearly the entire passage of Walter Hartright’s initial encounter with the eponymous “woman in white” (arguably the scene that inaugurated the entire subgenre of sensation fiction), Oliphant immediately turns her attention to readerly reaction. “Few readers,” she suggests, “will be able to resist the mysterious thrill of this sudden touch.

The sensation is distinct and indisputable. The silent woman lays her hand upon our shoulder as well as upon that of Mr. Walter Hartright.”³¹ By explicitly conflating the reader with Hartright, Oliphant suggests that one of the thrills of the novel is that of sympathetic identification; within Oliphant’s formulation, the reader not only identifies with Walter Hartright, but in some senses becomes him, enticingly and perhaps troublingly erasing the boundary between self and character. Further, Oliphant notably uses the plural form “our” to speak of the readerly experience—a word that at once suggests plurality and unity. The *Woman in White*’s many readers, Oliphant thus seems to hint, experience the novel in only one uniform way. Just as mesmerizer and mesmerized excitingly meld into one enervated entity, the community of sensation readers fuse and blend into one another, feeling one another’s sensations, and speaking, as Oliphant does, for one another’s reading experiences. While Oliphant may warn against “a kind of literature which must . . . more or less, make the criminal its hero,” she also acknowledges that a sympathetic reaction to the texts in which the “reader’s nerves are affected like the hero’s” is the only “normal” reaction—that is, the reaction experienced by herself and the audience, a reaction that “few readers can resist.”³² Oliphant’s insistence on the universality of her physiological reading experience thus obliges readers either to join her or to acknowledge their own physiological differences. In a sense, Oliphant casts the experience of reading sensation fiction as a medical diagnostic instrument: reading becomes a method by which readers can judge whether they have a normal body and whether their physiological reaction is reflected in the population at large.

Though Oliphant does indicate some level of discomfort with the genre, reading sensation fiction was ultimately an acceptable activity, as middle- and upper-class Victorian readers repeatedly recounted their intense reactions to sensation novels. Perhaps one of the *Woman in White*’s greatest fans, Edward Fitzgerald (who even considered naming his boat “Marian Halcombe”) suggested that the novel “exerts a sort of magnetism in drawing me toward the corner of a dark Cupboard, or Closet, in which . . . she lies.”³³ Casting the novel as a mesmerist who exerts a mysterious influence, Fitzgerald’s letter, like Oliphant’s review, focuses on the affective dimensions of the novel. While Martineau’s published account of inhabiting a mesmerized body was viciously punished, readers like Fitzgerald delightedly, and almost obsessively, detailed their profound, if not intimate, bodily experiences in reaction to sensation novels. Indeed, as respectable journals like Dickens’s *All the Year Round* published them,

reputable men like Edward Fitzgerald read them, and middle-class families regularly bought them, it appears that sensation novels, despite the seemingly salacious pleasures they offered, were embraced by a large segment of the Victorian reading population. Responding to this popularity of sympathetic and embodied reading practices, Adams draws on the strange science of mesmerism in order to recall and resist sensation novels. In a decade when readers eagerly sought out fictional experiences that would inspire them to mimic the nervous, excited, and panting bodies represented in the pages of a novel, mesmeric science and the backlash it inspired provided Adams with a convenient frame to cast sympathy as a physically destructive and invasive force.

*The Notting Hill Mystery, the Mesmerizing Villain,
and the Dangers of Sympathy*

Originally serialized in eight parts in *Once a Week* (published as a single volume in 1863) and featuring illustrations by George du Maurier, *The Notting Hill Mystery* appears to contain all the elements of a sensation novel: a peaceful middle-class home destroyed by crime, mistaken identity, poison, and an intricate plot. Most particularly, in what seems to recall Collins's depiction of Walter Hartright and Frederick Fairlie, or Ellen Wood's depiction of Isabel Vane, Adams highlights the physical and mental weakness of his victim heroes, Gertrude and William Anderson. For instance, Henderson, who serves as the novel's primary narrator, describes "William's constitutional nervousness, mental as well as physical" (38), while various characters refer to Gertrude's "delicate" constitution (34, 37, 41, 264). By contrast, the villainous Baron, though "a little stout squab man" (67), is undeniably debonair and magnetic—almost effortlessly fooling those he comes in to contact with. "Everybody liked him," comments Mrs. Brown, his ever-admiring landlady. "He was so good natured" (142). Though Gertrude initially worries that the Baron "would [not] have much compunction in killing anyone who offended him, or who stood in his way," she quickly becomes fascinated by his "wonderful green eyes" and agrees to his mesmeric trials (69). Though *The Notting Hill Mystery* predated *The Moonstone*, Adams notably published his novel after *The Woman in White* and *East Lynne* had mesmerized the Victorian public and primed an entire readership to associate enervated characters and charming villains with the genre of sensation fiction. Certainly, as Henderson begins his account with the proclamation that

he is “laying before [the reader] . . . extraordinary revelations” (1) and promises to reveal an “unfathomable mystery” (10), the novel seems to be almost in lockstep with other sensation narratives.

In its representation of sympathetic community however, *The Notting Hill Mystery* differs sharply from the trajectory of other sensation novels. While sympathetic communion generally facilitates detection (i.e., Marian Halcombe’s and Water Hartright’s sympathetic understanding of Laura Fairlie propels them to uncover Fosco’s crimes), in *The Notting Hill Mystery*, almost all forms of connection or communal bonding facilitate the Baron’s murderous plans. From large-scale popular events, like the Crystal Palace exhibition, that force the Andertons to interact with the Baron, to Rosalie and Gertrude’s intimate, “extraordinary,” and ultimately deadly twinship bond (31), Adams links all communal experiences with tragic consequences. Even the simple act of human touch, as shown most particularly in du Maurier’s dark and moody illustrations for the novel, only seems to bring pain. In perhaps the most arresting of these illustrations, du Maurier portrays one of the Baron’s initial attempts to fuse Gertrude, Rosalie, and himself during a séance. At the foreground of the picture lie the mesmeric trio, while Mr. Anderton and his friend, Frederick Morton, observe in the background. Ominously standing over his wife, the Baron makes a mesmeric pass with his right hand while firmly holding Rosalie with his left, while Rosalie, in turn, holds Gertrude. As they lie back passively, Gertrude and Rosalie clearly accept the Baron’s touch (even if only—as in Gertrude’s case—by proxy) and thus signal their willingness to accept his mental and physiological imprint. In contrast to the vibrantly fused trio in the foreground, William and Frederick appear completely passive and almost indistinguishable from the background, signaling that the husband-wife bond has been symbolically broken. The Baron, the illustration suggests, uses touch to create an alternate, parodic family structure. Harkening back to the iconic moment when Anne Catherick laid her ghostly hand on Walter’s shoulder, and recalling Martineau’s suggestion that mesmeric bonds could supplant domestic ones, sensation, in its most literal form, dissolves mental, physical, and familial integrity.

Of course, as du Maurier’s illustration indicates, mesmerism represents the form of bonding that is most dangerous in the novel. After the naive Andertons begin their mesmeric practices, the novel quickly begins to splinter in terms of both narrative coherence and structure. In a significant departure from the plot conventions of sensation fiction, all the characters who could be termed the novel’s heroes (Ger-



Fig. 7.1. Illustration by George du Maurier, from *The Notting Hill Mystery* by Charles Warren Adams, *Once a Week: An Illustrated Miscellany of Literature, Art, Science, and Popular Information* 7 (1862): 645. (Courtesy of University of Michigan and Carroll Libraries.)

trude Anderton, William Anderton, Madame Rosalie) are murdered by the Baron and, notably, the two female characters are murdered through mesmeric means. Peculiar susceptible to the Baron's powers, Gertrude belies her extreme capacity for physical sympathy with his very first mesmeric experiment. "He certainly is powerful," she writes in her diary, "for he had scarcely made a pass over me before I felt a glow though my whole frame."³⁴ Though Gertrude seems anxious about the Baron's power, she quickly responds to the pass and allows herself to sympathetically meld with the Baron—unwittingly (and self-destructively) yielding to his desires and accomplishing his pecuniary goals. It is worth noting that early in the novel, the Baron, though aware of Gertrude's inheritance and that Gertrude and Rosalie are estranged identical twins (a fact that curiously eludes every other character in the novel), is unable to figure out how to secure Gertrude's money for

himself. It is only after William reads aloud the *Zoist* article, discussed earlier, that the Baron hits on the scheme of mesmerically linking the twins and of sympathetically poisoning Gertrude through the actual poisoning of her physically stronger twin sister (52–53). It is, then, the presence of the *Zoist* in the Anderton home and their willingness to consult a mesmerist at all that facilitates not only Gertrude’s tragic death but the Baron’s ability to evade detection.

While untimely deaths may have been a feature of the genre (e.g., Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*), rarely (if ever) do the main characters suffer the prolonged and horrific deaths experienced by Gertrude, William, or Rosalie. Perhaps most haunting is Gertrude’s slow and painful poisoning, which Adams depicts in scenes that last for pages. In the first of such scenes, the character of Dr. Watson describes the patient:

Mrs. Anderton was on the couch in her dressing-room, partially undressed. . . . Almost immediately on my arrival this disturbance recommenced, though there appeared to be now hardly anything left in the stomach. The sickness continued with unabated violence for more than an hour after the stomach had been completely emptied, and was accompanied with other internal derangement and severe cramps both in the stomach and extremities. (82)

As Adams describes Gertrude’s partially unclothed body, her violent vomiting, eventually even referring to her “diarrhea” (172), his account is considerably more graphic than even Collins’s and Wood’s most sensational moments and seems gratuitous in its sharp departures from standards of conventional Victorian taste. Appearing in stark contrast to the typical communal Victorian death- or sickbed scene, Adams’s portrayal of Mrs. Anderton’s death instead emphasizes fragmentation, discontinuity, and a world in which the domestic order is forever lost.

In another departure from the sensation genre, the three heroes “stay dead” (there is no Laura Fairlie-style return from the brink of the grave here) and their untimely deaths are never avenged by the justice system. Instead of ending with a comforting declarative sentence assuring the readers that stability has resumed, the novel ends with a jarring interrogative. “Are crimes thus committed susceptible of proof,” asks Henderson, “or, even if proved, are they of a kind for which the criminal can be brought to punishment?” (284). As Henderson’s final question echoes hollowly at the novel’s close, the novel’s intricately woven plot does not conclude as much as stop. There is no afterword, no indication of what happens to the Baron, and no hint that the Andertons are

mourned or missed by anyone. Instead, all plot points and characters seem to evaporate as Henderson hastily undermines the outcomes of his own investigation.

To some extent, the structural irregularities of the novel are even more surprising than its content departures. For the first six parts, the novel is characterized by rapid—almost staccato—shifts in character perspective: twenty-four discrete characters contribute independent narratives in only about two hundred pages. Because even the main characters pass through the narrative so quickly, the sort of readerly identification that Oliphant highlights in her review of *The Woman in White* is rendered almost impossible. Further, by the novel's seventh part, the narrative becomes so splintered as to be nearly experimental. Under the guise of building his case, Henderson increasingly recedes as narrator as he provides ever-more disconnected pieces of textual evidence. It is with Henderson's tenth piece of evidence—a short fragment of a letter found in the French-speaking Madame Rosalie's room—that any narratorial voice seems completely absent. Comprising over three pages of the text, this fictional letter is displayed in four distinct ways: as a pictorial representation of the letter fragment, as an incomplete French version, as a reconstructed French version, and finally as a complete English translation (239–42). Of these four versions, both the pictorial representation and the fragmented French version are incomprehensible to any reader, while the complete French translation would be comprehensible only to a portion of Adam's readers; so, to some extent, Adams offers three pages of text that are undecipherable. Though there is perhaps a puzzle-like element in this section, the fragmentation, repetition, and incomprehensibility of the text forces the reader out of the narrative. Adams never provides a structure to unify, connect, or comment upon these pieces of evidence; instead, in a move that serves to further sever readerly identification and resist mesmeric absorption, the novel moves abruptly to the next piece of evidence.

It is this next piece of evidence—the reproduction of almost the entirety of Barrett's *Zoist* article—that is most jarring to the narrative (242–44). Notably, as varied and wide-ranging as the novel's polyphonic accounts may be, they are all the fictional creations of Adams himself. By contrast, the extensive quotation from the *Zoist* remains the only section of the novel penned by an outside party. Nearly three pages in length, the quotation disrupts not only the narrative structure of the novel but supplants Adams's authorial voice. Though the inclusion of the quotation is loosely justified by Henderson as forming “the concluding por-

tion of the evidence” against the Baron, Henderson also admits that “the bearing of the [*Zoist* document] on the case will perhaps be less clear” (210). While the lengthy extract may clinch the Baron’s guilt, it appears at a point at which it is clear that the Baron committed the murders and so adds little to the narrative progression of the novel. As with the letter fragments just before, the extract abruptly ends the chapter and garners no further commentary from Henderson. By this point in the novel, Henderson and all the characters (even the villainous Baron) seem to fade from the narrative altogether, leaving only this article that is external to the novel. In this sense the text’s narrative structure mirrors the plot: just as the Andertons’ lives never recover after mesmerism enters their household, the narrative splinters after mesmerism enters the text.

Taken together, Rosalie’s letter and the *Zoist* extract form a block of text that is disorienting—an effect that is all the more profound because they compose the entirety of two adjacent chapters. Rather than brushing these textual anomalies off as poor writing, I suggest that they are purposeful and serve to reorient Victorian reading practices. Sensation fiction, as Oliphant notes with some anxiety, relies on a rapid, almost frenzied reading style and on enervated, compelling characters that demand a sympathetic response from the reader: the ideal sensation reader, as Edward Fitzgerald indicates, was fully absorbed. By contrast, Adams offers a novel that forces breaks in the reading pace, prevents readers from actively identifying with any one character, and ultimately resists this sort of deep absorption. A novel that appeals to the reasoning mind rather than the sympathizing body, *The Notting Hill Mystery* intervenes in dominant Victorian understandings of reading and anticipates what Dames suggests is a post-Jamesian theory of the novel—or the notion that the novel should function “as an engine for the production of knowledge” rather than as a “machine for the production of affect.”³⁵ Indeed, as Paul Collins comments in his *New York Times* book review, *The Notting Hill Mystery* “is both utterly of its time and utterly ahead of it.”³⁶

Certainly, contemporary reviews of the novel, though generally positive, attest to the difficulty Victorian readers had in connecting or responding to Adams’s anomalous text. For instance, a critic for the *London Review* compliments Adams for offering a “carefully-prepared chaos” but then critiques the novel for failing to provide “the magnetic influence of life-like character.” “We are,” the critic goes on to complain, “not interested in the victims of this foreign scamp” (178), in effect critiquing the novel for preventing readerly sympathetic identification.³⁷ In a more positive review for the *London Standard*, the critic opens with a somewhat

unexpected opening line, “The best fish sauce ever invented is said to be a combination of all other known condiments.”³⁸ Though this analogy is surely meant as a compliment attesting to Adams’s “consummate skill” in crafting a complex story from disparate elements, the very strangeness of the comparison suggests the extent to which the novel remained fundamentally incomprehensible to Victorian readers.³⁹ While comparisons between novels and food were not unheard of (Wilkie Collins’s readers frequently would describe the experience of devouring his novels),⁴⁰ the *Standard* reviewer’s comparison of *The Notting Hill Mystery* to fish sauce nonetheless remain atypical; unlike the passionate conflation of reading and eating in other reviews, this particular comparison reveals nothing about the novel’s readability but only about its undefinability. “It is not a mere sensation novel,” declares the critic, “nor an extract from the ‘Newgate Calendar’ venerated with a . . . Braddon varnish, not a Wilkie Collins romance . . . nor a story founded on some overpowering and inscrutably mysterious plot.”⁴¹ Though the reviewer ultimately suggests that *The Notting Hill Mystery* “has an aroma of all these different ingredients” and thus seems to hint that the novel is both like and unlike the sensation novels the reviewer subtly mentions, he or she is, as these apophatic definitions suggest, almost spectacularly unable to define or explain the novel in any comprehensible way. Significantly, in a departure from Victorian convention, neither of the above reviewers provided extended quotations from Adams. While the critic for the *London Review* provides no quotations at all, the critic from the *Standard* only quotes Barrett’s *Zoist* article. The rather surprising choice to quote from something that the novelist did not write (and the *Standard*’s critic is quite clear that the extract is from the *Zoist*) suggests not only that the *Zoist* extract is jarring, but that Adams’s novel was strange to Victorian readers. If the prolonged excerpt signaled how a text “feels,” as Dames argues, the lack of quotation may perhaps indicate that critics (and even readers more largely) did not know how to feel when encountering *The Notting Hill Mystery*.

In creating a text that contains the expected elements of sensation novels and yet also a text in which touch, popular spectacles, genetic kinship, and (most powerfully) mesmerism all signal a dangerous loss of volition, Adams thus comments on the dangers of sensation reading. Focusing particularly on the dangers of sympathetic, communal identification, Adams simultaneously recalls and critiques sensation fiction’s biggest lure. If, as Dames so persuasively argues, all reading at mid-century was understood to be embodied (and if reading sensation fiction was *particularly* embodied), *The Notting Hill Mystery* seems to acknowledge

this Victorian physiological understanding of reading even as Adams tries to reinvent reading practices.⁴² Today mesmerism has been largely relegated to the category of the pseudoscientific, or sometimes as a mirror into the wackiness that often characterized the Victorian era; by contrast, my study underscores the interdependencies between the sciences and the arts during this period, suggesting that many of these strange sciences had cultural impacts far beyond the brief moments in which they were embraced as legitimate.

Notes

1. R. A. F. Barrett, “Mesmeric Cure of a Lady Who Had Been Twelve Years in the Horizontal Position with Extreme Suffering,” *Zoist: A Journal of Cerebral Physiology & Mesmerism, and Their Applications to Human Welfare* 12, no. 47 (1854): 213. Hereafter referenced only as *Zoist*.

2. *Ibid.*, 235–37.

3. Charles Warren Adams, *The Notting Hill Mystery*, ed. Mike Ashley (London: British Library, 2012). The text was originally published under the pseudonym “Charles Felix,” and it wasn’t until 2011 that Adams was identified as the author. Mike Ashley, introduction to *The Notting Hill Mystery*, xiv.

4. Julian Symons, *Moral Consequences: A History from the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 47.

5. For instance, *The Woman in White* closes with Laura and Walter’s marriage and Marian’s firm relegation to the status of the “angel of [the couple’s] lives.” Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 643. Similarly, Mrs. Henry Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861) depicts the tender embraces of Archibald and Barbara as they both swear to forget the adulterous Isabel Vane. Ellen Wood (Mrs. Henry Wood), *East Lynne*, ed. Elizabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

6. This is not to suggest that sensation fiction is a necessarily conservative genre. As I have argued elsewhere, sensation fiction often reimagined traditional Victorian subjectivities. Lara Karpenko, “‘A Nasty Thumping at the Top of Your Head’: Muscularity, Masculinity, and Physical Reading in *The Moonstone*,” *Victorian Review* 38, no. 1 (2012): 133–54.

7. Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 284.

8. Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 1, 2–3; emphasis added; Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Mind: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2; emphasis added. Of course Greiner and Ablow are not the only two critics to discuss sympathy. For more on the nineteenth-century construction of sympathy, please see Anne Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Jim Endersby, “Sympathetic Science: Charles Darwin, Joseph Hooker, and the Passions of Victorian Naturalists,” *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 2

(2009): 299–320; Anna L. Kornbluh, “The Economic Problem of Sympathy: Parabasis, Interest, and Realist Form in *Middlemarch*,” *ELH* 77, no. 4 (2010): 941–67; Christopher Lane, “Bulwer’s Misanthropes and the Limits of Victorian Sympathy,” *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2002): 597–624. Please note that the preceding list is not exhaustive. In my discussion, I also draw upon the insights of Cvetkovich, Winter, and Nicholas Dames in suggesting that sympathetic reading was a physically engaging practice. Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

9. Ablow, *Marriage of Minds*, 7.

10. Adams, *The Notting Hill Mystery*, 26. Page numbers for subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

11. By suggesting that sensation fiction functioned as an extension of the mesmerism movement, I extend the work of Winter, who provocatively ends her landmark study of mesmerism by turning to *The Woman in White*. “The link of sensation fiction,” suggests Winter, “between reader and character recalled the mesmeric ‘community of sensation’ that removed boundaries between people.” Winter, *Mesmerized*, 326. In a similar vein, Laurie Garrison more recently argued that “like sensation novels, mesmerism . . . [was] centrally concerned with senses, bodies, and pleasures, which were usually theorized as elements of the trance state.” Laurie Garrison, *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xiv. Both Garrison and Winter aptly suggest that mesmerism and sensation fiction allowed (if not forced) its participants to imagine a world in which interpersonal boundaries are erased. Though I do not dispute Winter’s or Garrison’s claims in this piece, neither critic examines any novels that disputed or resisted sensation fiction’s connection to the mesmeric séance.

12. Winter, *Mesmerized*.

13. Fred Kaplan, “‘The Mesmeric Mania’: The Early Victorians and Animal Magnetism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 4 (1974): 696.

14. “University College Hospital: Animal Magnetism,” *Lancet* 2 (1837–38): 284–85.

15. Thomas Buckland, *The Handbook of Mesmerism: For the Guidance and Instruction of All Persons Who Desire to Practise Mesmerism for the Cure of Diseases, and to Alleviate the Sufferings of Their Fellow Creatures* (London: H. Bailliere, 1850), 9.

16. Harriet Martineau, *Letters on Mesmerism* (London: Edward Moxon, 1845), 39.

17. Ablow, *Marriage of Minds*, 4.

18. Martineau, *Letters on Mesmerism*, 12.

19. Veritas, “Miss Martineau and Mesmerism,” *London Medical Gazette* 1 (1837–38): 426.

20. *Ibid.*

21. As Winter so well documents, Martineau’s mesmeric experiments ultimately incurred intense ridicule; most humiliating for Martineau was her brother-in-law Thomas Greenhow’s publicly circulated report to the Royal College of Surgeons, “The Case of Miss H—— M——.” Winter, *Mesmerized*, 213–30. Asserting that Martineau’s mesmeric cure “acted[ed] though the imagination and the will,” Greenhow graphically describes Martineau’s uterine tumor, effectively suggesting that only the medical community, not Martineau or her mesmerist, can claim knowledge of Martineau’s body. Though his study may represent what Frawley describes as a typical Victorian “example of the ‘case study’ model of medical diagnosis,” Greenhow, with his laughable nod to anonymity (any reader would have known that the initials H.M.

referred to Harriet Martineau) and his gratuitous description of her various gynecological exams seems to maliciously punish Martineau for her frank embrace of mesmerism. T. M. Greenhow, “Medical Report of The Case of Miss H—— M——,” in *Life in the Sick-Room* by Harriet Martineau, ed. Maria H. Frawley (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), 188, 187.

22. John Hughes Bennett, *The Mesmeric Mania of 1851, with a Physiological Explanation of the Phenomena Produced* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1851), 5–6.

23. John Elliotson, “Conclusion of the *Zoist*,” *Zoist* 13, no. 49 (1856): 411.

24. Laurie Garrison, *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

25. “Prospectus of a New Journal,” *Punch or the London Charivari* 44 (1863): 193.

26. Winter, *Mesmerized*, 324.

27. Nicholas Dames, “On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol,” in *The Feeling of Reading*, ed. Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 17.

28. Margaret Oliphant, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 102 (1867): 569.

29. In summarizing Nicholas Dames’s article on the Victorian practice of prolonged excerpts, Rachel Ablow suggests the following: “Rather than offering the ‘see, it works this way’ epistemology of close reading, excerpt functions in Victorian reviewing and novel theory as ‘see, it feels this way’”; Rachel Ablow, introduction to *The Feeling of Reading*, 5.

30. Dames, “On Not Close Reading,” 13.

31. Oliphant, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 571. Also see Dames for a longer analysis of Oliphant’s critical strategies. “What Oliphant intends to evoke,” suggests Dames, “is the sheer feeling of Collins’s novel.” Dames, “On Not Close Reading,” 18.

32. Oliphant, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 568, 572.

33. Edward Fitzgerald, “Letter to E.F. Pollock, December 1851,” in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 125.

34. Adams, *The Notting Hill Mystery*, 67–68. Page numbers for subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

35. Nicholas Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories,” *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004): 210.

36. Paul Collins, “The Case of the First Mystery Novelist,” *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, January 7, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/09/books/review/Collins-t.html?_r=0.

37. “Novelettes,” *London Review* 11 (1865): 178.

38. “New Novels,” *London Standard* 25 (May 1865): 3.

39. *Ibid.*

40. For instance, in reviewing *The Moonstone*, Geraldine Jewsbury writes, “Those readers who have followed the fortunes of the mysterious *Moonstone* for many weeks, as it has appeared in tantalizing portions, will of course throw themselves headlong upon the latter portion [of the novel] now that the end is really come, and devour it without rest or pause.” Geraldine Jewsbury, *Athenaeum* 2126 (July 25, 1868): 106.

41. “New Novels,” 3.

42. I refer to Dames’s formulation of what he describes as “physiological novel theory,” or a Victorian approach to novel reading that theorized it as “a performance—a performance enacted in and by the nerves.” Dames, *Physiology of the Novel*, 11.