

## Essay Review

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ALAN GAULD, *A history of hypnotism*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. xvii, 738, illus., £75.00 (0-521-30675-2).

ADAM CRABTREE, *From Mesmer to Freud: magnetic sleep and the roots of psychological healing*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 472, £30.00 (0-300-05-58-89).

For generations, the history of mesmerism and animal magnetism has been trivialized in inaccurate, anecdotal, sensationalistic accounts. However, with these two massive, intricately detailed, and admirably comprehensive studies, this has changed. Practitioners generally require a present-day context for studying a medical-historical figure or movement; the inspirations for these two volumes are the contemporary revival of interest in hypnotherapeutics and the rapid growth of the diagnostic category multiple personality. Alan Gauld is senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Nottingham and has written widely on hypnosis and parapsychology; Adam Crabtree is an English-Canadian clinical psychologist in private practice, who in 1988 published the most complete bibliography available of writings on animal magnetism and early hypnotism. With overlapping interests and backgrounds, Gauld and Crabtree have co-ordinated enormous quantities of primary source material to produce what are likely to remain the best informed and most authoritative accounts of their subject for a long time to come.

The two volumes, which complement one another beautifully, brim with interesting historical and clinical material. Both books start with the life and work of the Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the late eighteenth century and then trace their stories up to the early twentieth century. A sequence of ideas and events first set out in 1970 by the Swiss psychiatric historian Henri Ellenberger is here reconstructed in great narrative and textual detail: the formulation of Mesmer's ideas of animal magnetism in Vienna during the 1770s and 1780s; Mesmer's fashionable, therapeutic salons in Paris during the late Enlightenment; the censorship of his ideas and practices by an eminent royal commission in 1784; the Marquis de Puységur's psychologization of Mesmer's ideas; the spread of mesmerism to other French cities and countries; its post-Napoleonic reappearance in France in popularized, bastardized forms; the mid-century revival of interest in Britain with John Elliotson, James Braid, and James Esdaile; Jean-Martin Charcot's academic legitimation of hypnotic phenomena in the early 1880s; the controversy between the schools of the Salpêtrière and Nancy; and the role of hypnotic research in the origins of twentieth-century dynamic psychiatries. Gauld concludes with a historical sketch of twentieth-century developments and his own compact theory of hypnosis, while Crabtree reflects on the current preoccupation with multiple personality and dissociative disorders.

Not the least striking aspect of this historical subject is the vast quantity of writing—virtually thousands of books, pamphlets, lectures, case reports, and autobiographies across 125 years—that it generated. A serious interest in mesmerism and hypnosis was clearly a substantial part of the nineteenth-century intellectual landscape. Nor is it possible to dismiss this writing as silly or pre-scientific. To be sure, the psychological ideas in this literature are typically descriptive, unsystematized, and non-theoretical. But Gauld and Crabtree establish that the cumulative knowledge produced by several generations of mesmerists, magnetizers, and hypnotists represents a full-fledged system of psychology and psychiatry. The writings of Mesmer, Puységur, and their followers document a dual model of the mind, the existence of conscious and unconscious mental states, and a belief in the psychogenesis of many emotional and physical conditions. They also explore the “magnetic rapport” between doctor and patient and utilize the unconscious for psychotherapeutic purposes. A remarkable number of ideas, observations, theories, and insights associated today with twentieth-century psychological medicine were in fact made in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing on mesmerism, hypnotic consciousness, psychological healing, and “double consciousness”.

Gauld and Crabtree appear to be universally informed in their subjects. Throughout, they effectively integrate biographical information with the narrative presentation of textual ideas. Gauld's intensive 150-page reconstruction of the range of *fin-de-siècle* theories and practices of

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hypnosis across Europe and North America is a *tour-de-force*, while Crabtree's final chapters on Pierre Janet, Frederic Myers, William James, Josef Breuer, and Sigmund Freud are superb. From my reading, both succeeded completely in their goal of establishing the elaborate mesmeric roots of twentieth-century depth-psychological systems. Also, both studies include quantities of historical information about individual case histories—the semi-legendary personalities, such as Victor Race, Mary Reynolds, Estelle, and Félicité, as well as many lesser known but no less interesting cases. Both also devote excellent and detailed chapters to Janetian psychology, yet another indication that a full-scale revival of interest in that subject is under way.

Gauld's *A history of hypnotism* and Crabtree's *From Mesmer to Freud* also include a number of noteworthy interpretive features. They insist on the great diversity of mesmeric theories, therapeutics, and clinical practices in the past. They reconstruct the histories of the movement way beyond the celebrated, over-described centres of Paris and Vienna—in French provincial towns and cities, the German-speaking lands, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Britain, and the United States. I found particularly interesting the comparative national formulations of mesmeric ideology as absorbed variously by native traditions of science, culture, philosophy, and religion. It is also striking to learn of mesmerism's continual, complex interactions with many other scientific and cultural trends of the 1800s, including Newtonian physics, German *Naturphilosophie*, Christian Science, romanticism, physiognomy, spiritism, and the like. In a related point, these studies undermine completely the traditional division of the history of science and medicine into professional theory, enlightened lay opinion, and popular, superstitious beliefs. While the opposition between orthodox science and mesmerism was often real and widespread, in other times and settings distinguished academic scientists, research institutes and universities, and even entire governments subsidized studies on the subject. Popular, itinerant demonstrators—like the Dane Carl Hansen—often sparked the research interests of eminent university professors. The distinction between speculative, mystical mesmerism and organic psychological medicine here dissolves too: hence the syntheses of mesmerism and phrenology and publications like *The Journal of Mesmerism and Cerebral Physiology* in the 1840s.

Inevitably, with such ambitious projects, there are a few weaknesses in these works. Gauld and Crabtree are clinicians rather than historians, with the strengths and weaknesses this often entails. Inexplicably, Gauld includes no chapter on, or even discussion of, Freud's historic encounter with hypnosis in the 1880s and 1890s. Methodologically, Crabtree explicates hundreds of texts but with little attention to their defining social and cultural contexts. Neither author was able to resist the impulse to comprehensiveness, which may invite readers to use the books mainly as reference works. *L'art d'ennuyer c'est de tout dire*.

These are minor complaints, however. For generations, a subject deemed superficial, sensationalistic, and charlatanish gave rise to histories with these same features. With these two treatments, however, historians of psychiatry and psychology are now equipped with weighty, reliable, intelligent, and comprehensive histories of mesmerism and its allied movements. Psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and clinical psychologists will be enlightened to learn that what Crabtree calls "the alternative consciousness paradigm" boasts a dramatic, century-long tradition antedating Janet and Freud. And cultural and intellectual historians can discover that mesmerism and neo-mesmerism, far from being freakish and marginal, were major currents in nineteenth-century European and American thought and culture. The bibliographies alone at the end of both works make these volumes invaluable.

Mark S. Micale, Yale University