CHAPTER 10

"A Doll, a Dummy, a Nothing!" The Criminal Mesmerist, His Automaton-Subject, and Debates on Criminal Responsibility in Richard Marsh

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> [O]ne would have preferred to think that the invertebrate figure which had been subjected to such novel treatment had been that of an automaton. It was not nice to think it was the body of a living woman.
> Richard Marsh, *The House of Mystery*

With a grim sense of impending doom, the narrator echoes the reader's mind as Lazarus mesmerizes Maud into automatized submission in this ghastly scene, parading her by the arm, and compelling her to kiss him as her future husband. Tracing the complexity of such representations, I study Richard Marsh's unexplored fiction on criminal mesmerism – focusing on *The House of Mystery* (1898), and briefly examining "A Psychological Experiment" (1900), "How He Passed" (1900), "The Woman with One Hand" (1899) – and referring to the widely discussed novel, *The Beetle*. I analyze the way these works portray the mesmerized subjects as automatons, seemingly devoid of agency and power. Drawing both on the long and complex material history of automaton-objects and nineteenth-century psychological theories of automatized human behavior, the figure of the mesmerized automaton in these texts complicates the usual association of the automaton with technophobic anxiety – a direction significant in my own previous study of the nineteenth-century automaton-idol.[1] Furthermore, these works also complicate the already fraught issue of criminal responsibility, given the difficult questions of volition and power that inhabit the crimes/injustices committed or enabled through an automaton. Instead, in these texts the mesmerized automaton-like humans fracture the established nineteenth-century connection between mesmerism and painlessness, underscoring the inner (moral) agony of the mesmerized automatons – usually class or gender

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outsiders who writhe in torment under the imposition of the mesmerist's cruel power – and projecting this pain as both the automatized subjects' expression of suffering *and* their protest against socioeconomic injustices. As such, Marsh's texts on criminal mesmerism frequently stage an ethical intervention by portraying the automaton's internal pain and its societal implications.

Tales of Mesmeric Horror

In this section I will summarize the plots of the tales under study, given that they are relatively unknown. In *The House of Mystery*, we meet Madeleine Orme, a penniless orphan who is barely able to support herself with her typing skills and is tormented by her employers, and her look-alike, Maud Dorrincourt, a wealthy, talented, and capricious woman set to inherit the fortunes of her grandmother, the Countess of Staines, if she were to agree to marry the countess's grandnephew (Conrad, the Earl of Staines). Uninterested in this matrimonial proposition, when Maud goes into hiding within her sprawling mansion – the eponymous "house of mystery" that is a maze of grand rooms, endless halls, and unexpected hiding places – Mr. and Mrs. Singleton (the house help) appoint Madeleine from the streets, despite Madeleine's earnest protest, to playact as Maud in order to preserve the alliance proposed by the countess. Madeleine and Conrad fall in love with each other and get engaged, even as Madeleine remains in a constant state of irreparable doubt and guilt and doubt. Meanwhile Maud stays in hiding in her secret room in the mansion. Thrilled to finally be independent of her family's pressures and secretly in love with Bianchi, the house musician, Maud happily confides in Madeleine and blesses her matrimonial union. The plot turns grim when Bianchi, passionately in love with Maud and outraged at her apparent engagement to Conrad, recruits Lazarus, a mesmerist, to hypnotically compel Maud into stabbing Conrad, without realizing the full implication of this arrangement. This deadly plan unfolds with the gruesome scene in which the mesmerized Maud mechanically stabs Conrad through the ribs, an attack he fortunately survives. Soon after, through confidences between Maud and Madeleine, the latter uncovers Lazarus's evil plot. With the help of Bianchi, Lazarus is tracked down to the room where he has imprisoned the hypnotized Maud with the intention of marrying her and exhibiting her as a mesmerized subject in his freak shows. While Lazarus dies in the ambush, Maud is left seriously injured as a result of the hypnotic trances to which Lazarus has subjected her and the last fatal stroke in which he has sucked the life out

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of her. She dies soon after, urging Madeleine and Conrad to begin their lifelong journey of happy matrimony.

"A Psychological Experiment" is the story of Andrew Rolt's punishment for his attempted murder of his partner, Douglas Colston. We watch how Rolt (using the alias Howitt) is exposed through the gradual and terrifying mind games of an apparent stranger who is later revealed to be Colston. Colston appears on the scene as a gigantic bearded man and strips his layers of padding in phases, unleashing "creeping things" (reptiles like "efts, and newts, and snakes, and lizards") across the room while a petrified Rolt huddles up in fear on a chair to get away from the abhorrent creatures.[2] Having reduced Rolt to a frozen lump, Colston executes a "psychological experiment" in which he uses fear to control Rolt, compelling him to walk toward and open an ominous package placed in the center of the room after informing him that it contains that which will kill him. Colston announces that he will put an end to Rolt's life in a way that leaves no incriminatory traces, and increases Rolt's level of panic by striking the package from time to time so that it produces a "discord of sounds, cries, yelpings, screams, snarls," the "tumult dying away in what seem[s] to be an intermittent, sullen roaring" that "serve[s] to rouse the snakes, and efts, and lizards to renewed activity."[3] Colston finally gets to exact vengeance when Rolt dies through paralyzing fear as he follows Colston's orders without choice – marching toward and opening the deadly package in question, dropping dead even before a harmless squid-shaped "toy" falls out of the package clasping his face in its tentacles.[4]

"How He Passed" is the story of how two schoolmasters, Tyrrel (the narrator) and Martin, confront Stanbrough, a rich heir, to find out how he has been able to pass his university exams. Stanbrough declares that he dreamt about the questions on the papers even before taking the exam. The truth is revealed later when Lansberg, a mesmerist, visits Tyrrel and discloses the secret that he had procured the list of questions and answers for Stanbrough by hypnotizing the proofreader at the press that printed the question papers. To prove his claim to Tyrrel, Lansberg hypnotizes Stanbrough and instructs him to write a truthful account of the earlier episode, sticking a knife into his thigh to demonstrate to Tyrrel the effectiveness of the mesmeric spell. Tyrrel is baffled by the episode he witnesses. He is informed by Stanbrough soon after this incident that Lansberg is dead, although the veracity of this claim remains shrouded in mystery.

"The Woman with One Hand" tells the story of James Southam, who is caught in a strange predicament when a mysterious letter informs him of advantages he will receive if he meets a man named Duncan Rothwell

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at an inn. While at the inn, the innkeeper (Mrs. Barnes) complains to Southam about her mesmerist husband (Mr. Barnes) who had hypnotically forced her into marrying him, and describes one of his sleepwalking incidents during which she had found a decorative box in which her husband had hidden away a woman's chopped-up hand and fingers. Rothwell is found murdered at the inn, and Mrs. Lascelles-Trevor appears on the scene, offering Southam the prospect of secretarial employment. The mystery is unraveled at the end when it is revealed that Mr. Barnes is a mesmerist who has violently chopped off the hand of Amelia Martin (disguised as Mrs. Lascelles-Trevor) while holding her captive in a mesmeric spell. It also becomes clear that Amelia's partner-in-crime Jonas Hartopp (disguised as Duncan Rothwell) had conspired with Amelia against Mr. Barnes, and that later Amelia murdered Hartopp/Rothwell and tried to transfer blame to Southam.

Structured around nineteenth-century British–Egyptian imperial tensions, *The Beetle* tells the tale of Britain's invasion by a shape-shifting, gender-ambiguous invader – a priestess of the Egyptian goddess Isis – that seeks vengeance upon Paul Lessingham, a member of the House of Commons, whom it had held under captivity in Egypt before Lessingham managed to attack the creature and escape. The hybrid colonial figure mesmerizes and arguably rapes the homeless and destitute Robert Holt in order to use him as a pawn in its mission of vengeance against Paul. It also attempts to mesmerize, control, and violate Paul's fiancée Marjorie Lindon. Ultimately, however, the Beetle is (seemingly) overcome by the combined efforts of the British protagonists, including Paul, Marjorie, Marjorie's friend Sydney Atherton, and the private detective Augustus Champ Nell.

In the next section, I trace the long and complex history of the automaton as a cultural object that informs the characterization of pain and justice in the texts.

The Emerging Automaton and Mesmerism

Historians of culture and technology such as Minsoo Kang, John Tresch, Adelheid Voskuhl, Jessica Riskin, and Fiona Roisin Coll trace the history of the automaton as an object and a concept through history. Kang explains how the automaton went from being seen as a "wondrous object of natural magic in a pantheistic world" to being understood as "the very image of the well-ordered universe" and "the central emblem of the mechanistic cosmos" in the "rationalistic" seventeenth century, to acquiring pejorative

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connotations from the 1740s (when the "automaton-man idea [began to be] … used in a negative fashion … [as] denoting a person who lacks the principle of freedom").[5] Subsequently, in the Romantic period the "literary icon of the uncanny automaton appears" as "anxiety-inducing" and "tinged with the supernatural."[6] Examining the state of automatons in pre-1848 France and discussing these shifts, which were common to Western Europe, Tresch notes that in the early nineteenth century a "new generation of fantastic automatons"[7] came to be associated "with the physics of ethers, conversions, steam, … electricity, … animal magnetism" and also frequently with the "magical and religious"[8] – emerging as "symbols and tools for the realization of mind, soul, or spirit in the world"[9] – representing "contrasting strands of mechanical romanticism,"[10] which involved reacting against mechanized industry and "the soulless mechanism of the eighteenth century" while not "rejecting mechanical science or technology outright."[11] According to Tresch, these automatons of the early nineteenth century that represented the "fantastic merger of mind and machine"[12] – "embody[ing] technological control and reduction, as well as channeling supernatural powers that defied clockwork rationality"[13] – came to figure both in scientific discourses and in fantastic literature (crucial examples include works by J. J. Grandville and E. T. A. Hoffmann) – the latter being a genre closely associated with Marsh's texts. Kang explains that in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, with "cultural responses to the Industrial Revolution" and the "rapid transformation of social and economic life in Europe" that accompanied the rise of modernity and new technology, "automatons began to be seen as not only uncanny but as possessing "a life of their own … – living, superhuman beings driven by irrational will."[14] Marsh's texts draw on this set of complex connotations that the *fin-de-siècle* inherited, signifying technophobic anxiety, affective charge, supernatural force, self-activated volition, and expansive socioeconomic shifts.[15]

Additionally, as remarked on by various scholars such as Jessica Riskin, Laura Otis, Richard Menke, Linda Austin, and others, the second half of the nineteenth century was marked by the rise of the "physiological and often experimental 'new psychology,'" represented in the work of scientists such as T. H. Huxley, Alexander Bain, William James, William Benjamin Carpenter, Henry Maudsley, and Théodule Ribot, which "concentrated on … automatic actions and, in doing so, acknowledged life in human beings, not just lower animals, without significant or any cerebral involvement."[16] Austin notes that from 1870 to 1911 the "idea of animating mechanisms as the fundamental, generating force of living organic beings"

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was not just "confined to scientific and philosophic circles" but had "infiltrated almost every aspect of literary and artistic culture."[17] Austin does not contest the technophobia that is generally associated with the age in scholarly conversations but tries to "recapture the conversations among artists and scientists when living being and moving machine were still nominally oppositional but functionally collapsing," just as my earlier exploration of automaton-like colonial idols in Marsh suggests both a fear of and fascination for automatons, with idol-automatons distinct from but gradually blending into humanity.[18] The automaton-like mesmerized characters in Marsh evoke both the material history of the automaton with its clockwork mechanism – the Hindu idol in *The Goddess* is "set in motion by clockwork machinery"[19] and Maud follows Lazarus's instructions "like some clockwork figure" in *The House of Mystery* – as well as the contemporary psychological theories of automatized human behavior, combining the element of visual display characteristic of the physical automaton-as-collectible and the ethical fears surrounding ambiguous volition in new theories of automatized behaviors.[20] As such, the characters function as automatons on display, staging the larger ethical quandaries and anxieties of the age.

The complex portrayal of the woman as an automaton, such as in the case of Maud Dorrincourt or Amelia Martin, has also received scholarly attention in the work of Julie Wosk, Gaby Wood, Adelheid Voskuhl, Minsoo Kang and Marisa Knox.[21] M. Norton Wise explores the implications of Darwinian evolution for Victorian ideas about women, as instantiated in the proliferation of female automata, and further explains how nineteenth-century discourse associated machines with progressive action and masculinity while connecting automatons with mere repetition and femininity.[22] As an example, Katherine Inglis focuses on the figure of the mother as a "ghastly automaton" in James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), and studies "the conjunction of maternity, madness and mechanization" in a text in which "the maternal body is represented as a defective machine."[23] In cases such as Hoffmann's "The Sandman," "Hogg's machinic maternal body," or E. E. Kellett's "The Lady Automaton," we encounter the "association of femininity with artificiality" and the "negative suggestion that woman is an inherently unnatural form."[24] This conventional association between femininity on the one hand and artificiality/mechanicality on the other becomes critical in the charged use of this connection in discourses of mesmerism that portray hypnotized women as mechanical and inert.

The overlap between mesmerism and automatism was well established in nineteenth-century psychological and scientific discourses and discussions of mesmerism, and has also been studied in modern scholarship

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on mesmerism. Digging into the history of representations of mesmeric situations, Tresch notes that the "inheritors of Mesmer contributed to automaton imagery through their frequent superimposition of humans and machines" such as when "commissioners observed scenes in which patients became immobile, and then awoke, with their actions placed under the control of the magnetizer; their gestures and speech were said to be 'mechanical.'"[25] Martin Willis, studying Hoffmann's stories, notes how the automaton-like mesmerized subject, Olympia, in "The Sandman" (1817), and the mechanical "Talking Turk" in "Automata" (1814), emerge as crucial figures at this time.[26] The character of Olympia, who, as Willis notes, is described as "some kind of clockwork" that demonstrates how "[t]he mastery of the mesmerizer over the mesmeric subject turns the young woman into an unthinking machine, entirely at the mercy of the experimenter" – easily manipulable and unable "to resist his orders or even to register any opposition" exactly as if she were "a clockwork doll"[27] – anticipates nineteenth-century mesmerized heroines, including Marsh's Maud Dorrincourt, Amelia Martin, and Marjorie Lindon, who are shown as similarly entrapped in their mesmerizer's spell. What this literature on mesmeric automatism does not sufficiently emphasize is the way the mesmeric situation opens up a space for moral contemplation. As I will demonstrate, critics have ruminated at length about the interface of mesmeric automatism and morality in their analyses of nineteenth-century criminal mesmerism, examining the perils such villainy sets loose. However, this scholarship has not dealt with the morally *recuperative* possibilities of the mesmeric state that become available through Marsh's recognition of inner pain – an aspect I will demonstrate at length in the following sections. I will finally argue how, by foregrounding the violent hypnotic control of the mesmerizer on the one hand and the diminution of the mesmeric subject to automaton-like inertness on the other, mesmeric automatism in Marsh's texts becomes a site where the illegitimate authority and indefensible power of sociopolitical structures is discussed as a starting point for ethically charged introspection.

Anxieties of Mesmeric Play, Criminal Responsibility, and the Automaton

Marsh's texts stage the spectacular power play of criminal mesmerism – itself associated in nineteenth-century discourse with sexual violence – foregrounding its underlying threats of structural violence and averted responsibility.[28] As I show in an earlier article, this aspect has been

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discussed at length in the context of *The Beetle* by critics such as Julian Wolfreys, Roger Luckhurst, and Natasha Rebry. However, Marsh's other texts that I discuss have been relatively unexplored.[29] In "A Psychological Experiment," although the mind-control exercise is not explicitly labeled as mesmerism, the description of it is suggestive of ominous hypnotic control. As Rolt is instructed by Colston to walk toward and open the box, he freezes "like some lunatic deaf mute" who "[i]t seemed … could not move, save at the bidding of his master" – while the "master [Colston] was careful not to loosen, by so much as a hair's-breadth, the hold he had of him."[30] In "How He Passed," we learn that Leonard Stanbrough surrenders to Lansberg's suggestive criminal spell that "exercised the proverbial fascination of the snake" over him.[31] Helpless in the face of this power, Stanbrough enters a state of "complete unconsciousness,"[32] his "muscles seemed fixed and rigid," "[a]ll expression had disappeared" from his face, and "the eyes were staring wide open."[33] In "The Woman with One Hand," Mr. Barnes is not only discovered to have put Amelia Martin in a mesmeric sleep and chopped off her hand with which she was going to stab him to free herself, he is also reported to have similarly overpowered Mrs. Barnes. It is alleged, the narrator (James Southam) tells us, that he played "mesmeric tricks" with women, "throw[ing] … [Amelia] into a mesmeric sleep" for whole weeks, causing her to "los[e] large slices out of her life."[34] In *The House of Mystery*, we see Lazarus meticulously exercise an evil mesmeric spell over Maud. He uses "his long, tentacle-like arm"[35] till she was left "look[ing] half-stupefied, half imbecile, a phlegmatic fool," while "the colour … faded" from her cheeks, "the light from her eyes, the merry curves from about the corners of her mouth."[36] Soon after, with his "eyes … opened at their widest" and the "tips of his fingers rest[ing] lightly on her shoulders," he "twirled her unceremoniously round" and his "concentrated glare … seemed as if it threatened to devour her by its sheer intensity." Eventually she becomes "motionless, even breathless" till "[b]y degrees … [t]he muscles of her face became rigid, her jaw dropped a little open, her eyeballs turned convulsively round in their sockets." Assured of her entrancement, "he pushed her from him as if she were some senseless thing," and dispatched her to stab Conrad in the chest.[37]

Mesmerized by criminal agents, these individuals in Marsh's texts are stunted into unthinking machines, automatized in the service of their operators' evil schemes. In *The Beetle*, Robert Holt remarks that he was "invertebrate" while under the mesmeric control of the creature, obeying its commands "mechanically, like an automaton."[38] In "How He Passed," after having completed the assigned task of writing a brief account of the

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crime, Stanbrough reports to his hypnotist (Lansberg) "very much as we might imagine that an automaton would."[39] In *The House of Mystery*, the narrator observes that after being mesmerized by Lazarus, Maud "stood up with *automatic* suddenness," and answered with "*automatic* clearness"[40] in "dull, mechanical fashion,"[41] and when instructed by him to sing three times as loudly as she can, she "held her head straight, opened her lips, and went thrice up and down the scale … [and] then, like some clockwork figure, her lips reclosed, her head sank forward, she became all limp again."[42] Bianchi explains to Madeleine and the other members of the family that Lazarus has "cast on her [Maud] the evil eye," leaving her with no "free will" so that she is "in his hands like a doll, a dummy, a nothing!"[43] Lazarus boasts: "You will be like an automaton which will only work in response to the movements of a key. And the key – I shall be the key."[44] In "A Psychological Experiment," when instructed by Colston to get off the chair on which he is cowering for fear of the creeping reptiles, Rolt "did as he was told" just "[l]ike some trembling automaton,"[45] "moving with a curious, stiff gait, such as one might expect from an automaton," not heeding the "creatures writhing on the floor" even while he "trod" on them.[46] Furthermore, the story literalizes the presence and fear of the automaton through the box that is unpacked – a device that is "hideously [painted in] alternating stripes of blue and green and yellow,"[47] reverberates with "strange tumult of discordant sounds,"[48] and falls to pieces "like a conjurer's trick" while "some dreadful thing" springs from it into Rolt's face "enfold[ing] his head in its hideous embraces."[49] Offering a terrifying parallel to Marsh's *The Goddess* where the idol-automaton is discovered to be a hideous and unfamiliar toy that leaves Lawrence's corpse mutilated with multiple stabs, the "toy" in this story turns out to be "[a] development of the old-fashioned jack-in-the-box," "[a] dreadful development, and a dreadful toy" made "in the image of some creature of the squid class, painted in livid hues, provided with a dozen long, quivering tentacles, each actuated by a spring of its own," which clasped Rolt's "head in their embraces."[50]

With this repeated evocation of the two-pronged lineage – that of the mechanical automaton as well as automatized human psychology – in the mesmeric situations of reduced volition and brutal crime, what emerges are complex questions of criminal responsibility. The issue of criminal responsibility in relation to hypnotism became central to nineteenth-century discussions, with the most complex ones in the fields of psychiatry/psychology and the law. Several critics study this nineteenth-century interface. Stefan Andriopoulos, for example, examines nineteenth-century and

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modernist connections between legal, medical, and literary discourses of hypnotism, and the birth of cinema. Mary Elizabeth Leighton notes that the cultural authority of literary narratives that showed the male mesmerist as exploiter of the helpless hypnotic subject committing criminal acts made it impossible to recuperate mesmerism's authority as a therapeutic technique within the medical community – a position it had gained by the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Roger Smith and Joel Eigen are of particular significance as they focus on insanity, mesmeric automatism, and culpability. Smith examines nineteenth-century medicolegal history, studying how criminal responsibility worked at the interface of psychiatry and law in insanity defenses. Eigen researches medicolegal defenses in the mid- to late nineteenth-century courtroom, discussing the complexity of criminal responsibility in the case of automaton-like mesmerized defendants – those caught in situations of altered consciousness or "double consciousness" in any of the multiple sites that characterized the era (mesmerism, hypnotism, dreaming, somnambulism) – and how this differed from other kinds of insanity pleas in that here the defendant was found to be completely missing from the scene of crime psychologically. Eigen notes how these criminal cases where the defendant completely disavowed authorship of their acts presented not just a challenge to Western rationality but to the conventional Western legal conception of the person – "a sentient being capable of maintaining a continuous awareness of who he was."[51] These cases necessitated conversations between medicine and the law, requiring the fields to grapple with the notion of the "unconscious criminal," and led to a discursive shift for future insanity defenses.

Other scholars show how the assignation of criminal responsibility is always founded on societal hierarchies of race, gender, or class. Paul Johnson discusses how the "class bias in both the criminal and civil law" of eighteenth-century England "included discrimination in the definition of crimes and misdemeanors, in the prosecution of defendants from different socio-economic backgrounds, and in the corrective treatments of offenders."[52] Lucia Zedner examines the way nineteenth-century British jurisprudence and women's prisons attempted to punish and redress what they considered to be female criminals' serious breach of their "natural femininity," arguing that Victorian ideas of criminality and organization of punitive/reformatory institutions can only be completely understood through a gendered lens. Discussing female miscreants who tended to be classified as "feeble-minded" or "dangerous female defectives"[53] – their crime being understood more as female deviance/insanity than as legal offence – Zedner also notes the gendered construction of criminality and the discursive

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effects of changing gendered social control practices. Focusing on race, Catherine L. Evans examines detailed accounts of nineteenth-century homicide cases across three continents under the British Empire and highlights the way the British debated whether the mentally ill or allegedly "uncivilized" people could be held criminally liable. Preeti Nijhar demonstrates how the creation of nineteenth-century notions of criminal responsibility was mediated through British race- and class-based prejudices that manifested in the rule of law – the criminal stereotyping of "lower" classes as a collective instead of individuals based on their associations of morality and pathology, the racialized categorization of colonial races through census surveys, and British partisan crime control.

Located against this nineteenth-century backdrop, the mesmerized automatized subject becomes the site where the complexity of criminal responsibility is acknowledged. Marsh references these contemporary assumptions and debates when, in "The Woman with One Hand," during the trial of Amelia Martin for the murder of Jonas Hartopp, "medical evidence" is produced "to show that she suffered from periodical attacks of mania" probably as a result of "Mr. Barnes's mesmeric experiments," due to which, acting in an automaton-like manner, "she could not justly be held responsible for her actions" and was "sentenced to be confined as a criminal lunatic."[54] In *The House of Mystery*, Lazarus trumpets Maud's absence of volition and his enveloping control over her: "I will soak you in the ocean of my will; I will impregnate you with my own personality; absorb you in myself. There will be left to you no individuality, no separate existence, no instincts of your own. You will be like an automaton."[55] When Madeleine worries over Maud's condition in Lazarus's captivity, panicking and saying that they "dare not think of what she must be suffering each second she stay[s] … in his hands,"[56] Bianchi explains that she does not suffer, implying, her complete lack of knowledge of the crime and therefore culpability: "She does not suffer – she knows nothing."[57] Projecting confusion about criminal intent, will, agency, autonomy, culpability, and responsibility, Lazarus and Bianchi have an extended conversation about the former's evil plan for Maud. Lazarus promises to "[m]ake her kill him [Conrad],"[58] elaborating thus:

> I will use this force I have – it is called odic force;[59] and, by the use of it, I will try to bend her to my will. I will say nothing, not a word, but when I have brought her to a state in which she will do just as I choose, in my own thoughts I will think to myself, "I would like you, my girl, to go and look for Milord Staines, and when you have found him, to take a knife … and drive it to the hilt deep into his heart."[60]

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Clarifying the full dereliction of criminal responsibility and the planned transference of blame, Lazarus reassures Bianchi that after he would "make her kill him," "she would be hung … without any trouble to … [Bianchi], or any risk."[61] Distilling the serious ethical anxiety about this shifting of blame to the blameless, Bianchi asks: "Will she know what it is that she is doing?" To this, Lazarus responds by confessing his villainous pleasure in the entrapment of the other through the implication of their criminal responsibility: "No, she will know nothing at all. That is where the joke will be." Appalled at this, Bianchi exclaims that a jury could "hang her for having done a thing when she did not know what it was that she was doing."[62]

Building on these complexities of criminal knowledge and responsibility, and expressing indignance at its inherent hierarchical injustices, Marsh's mesmerically automatized characters offer a deeper ethical commentary by displaying their own awareness of and pain at the exploitative criminal manipulation to which they are subjected.

Automaton, Agony, and Affect

Having outlined the issues underlying criminal responsibility, Marsh's texts transition to their larger role when they stage ethical introspection through the mesmeric scenes of human automatization. The usual mechanized representation of the automaton-criminal (the mesmerized Holt, Maud, Stanbrough, and Rolt) – that seems to partly dismiss the seriousness of crime by suggesting that crime itself is mechanical and partly dilutes moral implications by suggesting the unconscious mesmerized subjects' immunity to pain – is problematized when Marsh's texts reveal the tortured consciousness of the subject that stays alert to pain and injustice beneath the automatized exterior. Marsh achieves this effect through an interesting narrative maneuver. While mesmerism was primarily associated in the popular perception and in medical practice with the alleviation of pain during surgeries or therapy, Marsh often portrays his mesmeric automatized subjects in states of inner turmoil and conscientious pain. Thus, in opposition to the insensibility that was associated with mesmerized automatons – immunity to physical pain and by extension, numbness to ethical qualms – Marsh offers a foil in his subjects, who suffer internal pain and torment despite their automaton-like exterior/actions because of the criminal injustices to which they become witness and subject. The automaton emerges not as a site of mechanized violence but as the ambivalent symbol of moral consciousness that is characterized by both pain and guilt – the pain of the mesmerized subject and the guilt of criminal complicity.

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The intensity of pain that is concentrated in the automaton becomes apparent in "A Psychological Experiment" when the automatized Rolt proceeds to open the box and "his distorted visage" begins to reflect "an agony of supplication which it was terrible to witness."[63] The undetectable but very real nature of this pain is evident in Tyrrel in "How He Passed," when he watches horrified as Lansberg stabs Stanbrough in the thigh to demonstrate Stanbrough's automaton-like inertness to physical sensation when under a mesmeric spell. Tyrrel, however, declines the offer when Lansberg proposes to prove further the effectiveness of his mesmeric powers by pinning Stanbrough's hand to the table using a knife. Shocked at the viscerality of Stanbrough's pain and his oozing blood, Tyrrel introduces doubt about the subject's complete immunity to pain when he declares skeptically that he does not approve of such experiments "[w]hether the unconsciousness was real or fictitious."[64]

The two longer texts, however, offer the most extended demonstration both of the internal pain of the mesmerized automaton-like subjects as well as the systemic nature of the oppression that elicits this agonized awareness – as a form of both suffering and protest. In *The House of Mystery*, Lazarus expresses the full extent of his treacherous plans to reduce people to automatized obedience: "All my life I have been looking for a man or woman … into whom I can project my own personality so completely that he or she shall become the reflection of myself, the creature of my will, the slave of my desire."[65] His dark desires – a combination of the invasive and mercenary – become evident when he muses that, as "the greatest mesmerist that ever lived," he would finally be able to demonstrate the best exhibit in his freak shows – "[t]he mesmerised lady – the only genuine article that has ever been exhibited!"[66] That his devious exploitative project is a reflection of the oppressive societal structures becomes obvious when Lazarus connects his mesmeric spell and the marriage he would extract from it to a misogynist disciplinary exercise. He declares to Maud that "[t]here must be discipline, especially must there be discipline where a woman is concerned," and instructs her:[67]

> In all things be obedient; do not spare yourself in anything; make of yourself a willing slave, as becomes a wife.… [F]rom you I shall expect everything; from me you have to expect nothing.… You will be like the dutiful dog to whom, sometimes, is thrown a crumb from the table.[68]

Lazarus's rapacious relish of his control over Maud and her choiceless, automaton-like surrender – a common fear surrounding criminal mesmerism in nineteenth-century writings – becomes evident when Lazarus

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hypnotizes Maud the second time in order to elicit information from her, saying: "You will deliver yourself into my hands before I have done with you, body, soul and spirit, to do with as I please.… To bring such a lovely creature into subjection is always amusing, and the more she rebels the more it is amusing."[69]

However, as Lazarus continues to humiliate Maud – "pull[ing] her hair close to the skin, twist[ing] her ears, fillip[ing] his fingers against her nose, pinch[ing] her neck and arms" – intensely "amuse[d]" at her "lifeless[ness]" and "inanimation" as he "flung at her his flaming matches," and while "she seemed to be indifferent whether they did or did not strike her; continuing motionless even when the burning missiles were flirted against her face,"[70] and "evince[ed] not the slightest consciousness of either the pain or the indignity to which he was subjecting her,"[71] her agony is revealed to be *internal*. As mentioned, mesmerism was predominantly associated in popular and medical discourse with claims of alleviating pain – a central tenet of the practice voiced by mesmerists and implemented by practitioners like John Elliotson and James Esdaile, who introduced the use of mesmerism during medical surgery as a way of rendering the patient insensible to pain and demonstrated the success of this technique in the University College Hospital (London) and Hooghly Native Hospital (Calcutta) respectively before it lost credence and favor due to the rise of chemical anesthetics like ether. Alison Winter discusses the centrality of pain alleviation to the history of mesmerism, noting how mesmerists practically tortured their patients in trying to prove to an unbelieving audience the effectiveness of the mesmeric trance by demonstrating the absence of pain in the mesmerized individual. She also explains mesmerism's role in unsettling surgical authority in mid-nineteenth century by ameliorating surgical pain – an experience on which conventional medical surgical authority rested in many ways at this time. In fact, as Winter observes, mesmerists opened up new surgical possibilities by offering mesmerism as a procedure for medical anesthetization and thus encouraging research in chemical anesthesia.[72] Examining this history, Elizabeth Todd notes how the claim of mesmerism as anodyne was greeted with considerable disbelief from both the medical and lay communities, and how despite this and even after the arrival of inhalation anesthetics like ether or chloroform, mesmerism's use in surgery for pain alleviation continued in the mid-nineteenth century.[73] It is in this regard that Marsh's mesmerically automatized subjects offer a crucial departure and commentary. Though physically inert to the pain inflicted by the hypnotist, some of the most crucial subjects in Marsh writhe in internal pain, agonizingly aware and conscious as they

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are automatized and instrumentalized. Thus, as Lazarus robs the hypnotized Maud of her jewelry, delineates his horrifying plan of marrying her, explains his intention of exploiting her musical talent, and asks her for her formal consent to these plans, the personal torment underneath her monosyllabic and mechanical "[y]es" is obvious – "the very dulness [*sic*] seemed to suggest an intensity of pain."[74] The narrator remarks that "[f]rom her look of agony it seemed as if she were making a violent effort to free herself from the unseen bonds which held her as in a vice, and striving in vain." This is followed by her going into a "convulsive fit of shuddering" when Lazarus grins, maliciously refusing to release her from his hold; and as he "pace[d] backwards and forwards … eyeing her continually, sideways, as a cat might a mouse," she "quivered, as with a twinge of pain" each time he passed her.[75] Clearly aware of the injustices of this infliction and the horror that Lazarus is also likely to unleash on others, Maud's hidden agony and ethical protest becomes evident.

Staging a similar ethical protest in *The Beetle*, the subject (Robert Holt) explains his reduction to a mesmerized automaton also as a form of hierarchical oppression, materializable as a result of his class position. As the novel commences, Holt describes his poverty-ridden struggles, noting that not only had he "tramped about all day looking for work; … beg[ging] even for a job which would give … money enough to buy a little food … in vain" but he had to endure much worse – "sick at heart, depressed in mind and in body, exhausted by hunger and fatigue, … [he had] been compelled to pocket any little pride … [he had] left, … to solicit … in vain!"[76] And then "penniless, hopeless, hungry, out in the cold and the rain," as he enters the house and the mesmeric trap of the beetle that awaits him, inexplicably, succumbing to the call of "the inviting window, the tempting window, the convenient window"[77] that lays open for him – a path that leads him toward a "sudden paralysis" of his "mental organisation"[78] and incarceration as a mesmerized "automaton"[79] – he confesses in despair:

> Ordinarily I believe that I have as high a spirit as the average man, and as solid a resolution; but when one has been dragged through the Valley of Humiliation, and plunged, again and again, into the Waters of Bitterness and Privation, a man can be constrained to a course of action of which, in his happier moments, he would have deemed himself incapable.[80]

Holt, however, rebels against his choiceless mechanical complicity in societal inequities by expressing conscientious and painful psychological awareness of the wrongs at play even while his body remained trapped in

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the grip of mesmeric automatism. While he lies under the thumb of the mesmerizer throughout the night with, as he says, "my brain awake, my body dead," he attests that "to the best of [his] … knowledge and belief, [he] … never once lost consciousness during the long hours which followed."[81] Revealingly, Holt confesses to the agonies of countenancing such structural violence, and announces his own knowledge of his suffering as a form of ethical protest: "I did know it, and the knowledge of my impotence was terrible."[82]

In addition, characters like Marjorie Lindon or Maud Dorrincourt even draw on the full spectrum of fraught and rich connotations available through the figure of the automaton, cited for instance in Tresch or Kang at the start of the chapter, when they cross the limits of inert mechanicality and express the cry of a soul within. Marjorie, gradually in the throes of mesmeric control, "struggled to ask help of God, … [as she] was wrestling with something evil, … but could not" because she "was helpless – overmastered."[83] As such, the automaton consolidates its ethical claim in this climactic gesture, not only speaking as a conscience in indignance and pain but as a soul in distress and yearning. This becomes evident when the automatized Maud sings in agonized and anguished desperation. We learn that "in the midst of her state of complete subordination to this demoniac will, she was conscious of her overwhelming need of help."[84]

What emanates from this mesmeric subject is the "wailing of a soul in agony, th[e] heartrending flight of song beating against the bars of Heaven," and she "crie[s] straight from her heart to God":

> Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly,
> While the gathering waters roll,
> While the tempest still is high.
> …
> All my trust on Thee is stayed,
> All my help from Thee I bring,
> Cover my defenceless head
> With the shadow of Thy wing.[85]

Deflecting attention from the narrative's focus on mesmeric trickery and its attribution of blame onto others that is sometimes crafted to entertaining purpose by Charles Dickens, Bram Stoker, George Eliot, George du Maurier, or Wilkie Collins[86] – where the spectacle is often suspense-ridden, thrilling, and entertaining – Marsh's narratives stage the automatized subjects' rebellion against and conscientious awareness of societal injustices and cruel power through their painful awareness of their own powerlessness.

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The readers themselves are led down the path of ethical introspection culminating in relief when the plots end with what is to all appearances a narratorial reassurance of restorative justice. At the end of *The House of Mystery*, the ethical equilibrium is restored when Madeleine Orme is installed as the Countess of Staines and the reigning lady of the household for she is, as the final passage declares, "a true great lady, whose riches … [were] as notorious as her benevolence; a leader in all good works, who … [was] held in high honour, for sufficient, righteous and valid reasons, the whole world over."[87] At the end of *The Beetle*, assurance of stability, justice, and righteousness is provided as Marjorie Lindon's return to sanity after her travails is described. Furthermore, silence and discretion is assured to the reader as if to suggest that the reign of evil forces is at an end and need not ever be evoked again, in reality or in speech, except in the form of the current version that Lindon has penned as a form of honest purge after her suffering as a mesmerized automaton: "Miss Lindon's contribution towards the elucidation of the mystery was written with her own hand.… She told, and re-told, and re-told again, the story of her love, and of her tribulation so far as it is contained in the present volume. Her MSS … have all … been destroyed, with one exception. That exception is herein placed before the reader."[88] The reader feels tasked with the upkeep of this just order and is called upon to rejoice with a sense of relief as the automatized subject is released into full personhood and restful sleep in death, as in *The House of Mystery*: "Maud was dead; asleep in the Eternal Arms…. It seemed as if she had stood up to sing, holding out her hands, perhaps, to meet the advancing angel.… She seemed a tired, happy child at rest."[89] Portraying mesmerism as a metaphor for social exploitation, whether along class or gender lines, Marsh's texts draw on the mesmerically automatized subjects as vehicles for ethical commentary, revealing how they challenge contemporary understandings of mesmeric insensibility and their implication for wrongful criminal responsibility by expressing inner moral pain, and offering the reader the onus and respite of ethical accountability as justice is conditionally restored with the freeing of entranced subjects.

Notes

1 Shuhita Bhattacharjee, "The Insurgent Invasion of Anti-Colonial Idols in Late-Victorian Literature: Richard Marsh and F. Anstey," *English Literature in Transition*, 61, no. 1 (2018): 66–90.

2 Richard Marsh, "A Psychological Experiment," in *The Seen and the Unseen* (London: Methuen & Co., 1900), 1–17, p. 12.

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3 Ibid., 14.
4 Ibid., 17.
5 Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [2022] 2011), 6.
6 Ibid., 10.
7 John Tresch, "The Machine Awakens: The Science and Politics of the Fantastic Automaton," *French Historical Studies*, 34, no. 1 (2011): 87–123, p. 87.
8 Ibid., 87.
9 Ibid., 91.
10 Ibid., 91.
11 Ibid., 90.
12 Ibid., 92.
13 Ibid., 91.
14 Kang, *Sublime Dreams*, 10.
15 Fiona Roisin Coll, "The Victorian Automaton: Technology, Agency, and Fiction," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Toronto, 2014), 14–15, https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/74768/3/Coll_Fiona_201411_PhD_thesis.pdf.
16 Linda M. Austin, *Automatism and Creative Acts in the Age of New Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.
17 Ibid., 1.
18 Ibid., 6.
19 Richard Marsh, *The Goddess: A Demon* (London: F. V. White & Co., 1900), 293.
20 Richard Marsh, *The House of Mystery* (London: F.V, White & Co., 1898), 280.
21 See Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and other Artificial Eves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Anchor, 2003); Adelaide Voskuhl, *Androids in the Enlightenment: Mechanics, Artisans, and Cultures of the Self* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); Kang, *Sublime Dreams*; Marisa Palacios Knox, *Victorian Women and Wayward Reading: Crises of Identification* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
22 M. Norton Wise, "The Gender of Automata in Victorian Britain," in *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, ed. Jessica Riskin (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 163–95.
23 Deirdre Coleman and Hillary Fraser, "Introduction," in *Minds, Bodies, Machines 1770–1930*, ed. D. Coleman and H. Fraser (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–18, p. 7. According to Inglis, this refers back to the "representation of the maternal body as a machine in eighteenth-century midwifery literature and medical illustration, and the use of androids/automata in medical instruction" that, as Coleman and Fraser put it, "reduced childbirth to mechanical principles and the mother to an engine of reproduction" (8). See Katherine Inglis, "Maternity, Madness and Mechanization: The Ghastly Automaton in James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman*," in *Minds, Bodies, Machines 1770–1930*, 61–82.

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24 Deirdre Coleman and Hillary Fraser, "Introduction," in *Minds, Bodies, Machines 1770–1930*, 15.

25 Tresch, "The Machine Awakens," 99. Tresch explains how contemporary discourse theorized the "mechanical" action of magnetized patients. Mesmerism, or animal magnetism, was founded on the mesmerists' (magnetizers') claims about subjects being put to "magnetic sleep" through "an invisible fluid that interacted with other forms of matter." Marquis Chastenet de Puységur "likened the action of the magnetizer's will on a patient to the effects of heat, electricity, light, and magnetism on wires and compasses" and noted that the subject of mesmerism/somnambulism (the sleepwalker) obeyed the directions of the magnetizer "just as the needle obeys the bar that makes it move" (100). Tresch concludes that "[i]f magnetized patients acted like machines, it was because they were directly analogous to the instruments set into motion in the study of imponderable fluids" (100).

26 Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, and Machines: Science Fiction and the Cultures of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 38.

27 Ibid., 55.

28 As I note at length in my earlier essay – Shuhita Bhattacharjee, "'Not a muscle at my command': Mesmeric Trance, Consent, and #MeToo in Richard Marsh," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 16, no. 2 (Summer 2020), www.ncgsjournal.com/issue162/bhattacharjee.html – beginning in the late eighteenth century and leading up to the late nineteenth century, mesmerism came to be associated with fears and anxieties surrounding the mesmerist's undue and potentially sexual control over the entranced subject. The ambivalence surrounding criminal mesmerism is discussed by scholars like Martin Willis, Catherine Wynne, Maurizio Ascari, and Mary Elizabeth Leighton. Outlining how the three waves of production of gothic fiction are "bound up with the cyclical history of trance-states," Roger Luckhurst ("Trance Gothic, 1882–97," in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys [New York: Macmillan, 2000], 148–67), observes that from the "first accounts of Mesmer's treatments it was the risk to women at the hands of male charlatans that was the key anxiety" (148, 156). Julian Wolfreys ("Introduction," in *The Beetle: A Mystery*, ed., Richard Marsh [Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004], 9–34) notes that for nineteenth-century texts, "mesmerism is readable as an act analogous with sexual penetration" (13). With respect to Marsh's texts, Julian Wolfreys discusses the sexual implication of the mesmeric undertones in Marsh's *The Beetle*, and I demonstrate how criminal mesmerism in *The Goddess* and *The Beetle* offers a commentary on the contemporary #MeToo movement.

29 Bhattacharjee, "Mesmeric Trance."

30 Marsh, "A Psychological Experiment," 15.

31 Richard Marsh, "How He Passed," in *Marvels and Mysteries* (London: Methuen & Co., [1905] 1900), 276–312, p. 303.

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32 Ibid., 304.
33 Ibid., 305.
34 Richard Marsh, "The Woman with One Hand," in *The Woman with One Hand and Mr. Ely's Engagement*, 2nd ed. (London: James Bowden, [1899]1900), 9–147, p. 141.
35 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 160.
36 Ibid., 161.
37 Ibid., 164.
38 Marsh, *The Beetle*, 17.
39 Marsh, "How He Passed," 306.
40 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 280, 285, emphases added.
41 Ibid., 286.
42 Ibid., 280, 285 (emphases added).
43 Ibid., 273.
44 Ibid., 244.
45 Marsh, "A Psychological Experiment," 15.
46 Ibid., 16.
47 Ibid., 14.
48 Ibid., 16.
49 Ibid., 16.
50 Ibid., 17.
51 Joel Peter Eigen, *Unconscious Crime: Mental Absence and Criminal Responsibility in Victorian London* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 14.
52 Paul Johnson, "Class Law in Victorian England," *Past & Present*, 141, no. 1(1993): 147–69, p. 149, https://doi.org/10.1093/past/141.1.147.
53 Lucia Helen Zedner, *Women, Crime, and Custody in Victorian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002 [1991]), 185, 295.
54 Marsh, "The Woman with One Hand," 146.
55 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 244.
56 Ibid., 276.
57 Ibid., 276.
58 Ibid., 148.
59 This concept was defined at length by Baron Charles von Reichenbach in 1851 as a hypothetical vital energy – a life force allied to electricity, magnetism, and heat – that was radiated by most substances and to which different people were sensitive to various degrees. The Odic force also began to be connected to explanations of hypnotism, all the way back to the eighteenth-century theories of Franz Anton Mesmer or Emanuel Swedenborg.
60 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 149.
61 Ibid., 148.
62 Ibid., 149.
63 Marsh, "A Psychological Experiment," 16.
64 Marsh, "How He Passed," 305.
65 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 279.
66 Ibid., 280.

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67 Ibid., 281.
68 Ibid., 286.
69 Ibid., 239.
70 Ibid., 279.
71 Ibid., 279.
72 Alison Winter, *Mesmerized* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 163–86.
73 Elizabeth Todd, "Mesmerism in the Nineteenth Century," in *Making Sense of Pain: Critical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Jane Fernandez (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), 31–41.
74 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 287.
75 Ibid., 243.
76 Marsh, *The Beetle*, 3.
77 Ibid., 11.
78 Ibid., 12.
79 Ibid., 17.
80 Ibid., 14.
81 Ibid., 22.
82 Ibid., 30.
83 Ibid., 206–7.
84 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 241.
85 Ibid., 241.
86 Some of the most important texts that scholars discuss in the context of criminal mesmerism include Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Bram Stoker's *Lair of the White Worm* (1911), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" (1859), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1914), and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1858) and *The Woman in White* (1868).
87 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 312.
88 Marsh, *The Beetle*, 351.
89 Marsh, *The House of Mystery*, 309.

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