

**Stefan
Andriopoulos** Arrested in the Moment of Dying:
Science, Fiction, and the Reality
Effect of Reprinting

Abstract How was it possible that numerous nineteenth-century readers believed in the authenticity of a made-up sensational story about a mesmerist experiment that supposedly arrested its subject between life and death? By juxtaposing Edgar Allan Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" with Justinus Kerner's medical case history "The Seeress of Prevorst," this essay compares the narrative constructions of verisimilitude in science and fiction. But in exploring the viral dissemination of "Valdemar," I also analyze how nineteenth-century print media produced content and credence by means of reprinting—a circular feedback reminiscent of our current world of social media, where unfounded or disproven stories gain credibility by being circulated, shared, and retweeted.

Keywords death, mesmerism, literature and science, "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"

In 1829 the German physician Justinus Kerner published a medical case history titled *The Seeress of Prevorst: Revelations on the Inner Life of Man and the Intrusion of the Spirit World upon Our Own*. In it, Kerner (1914, 4:58) gives a detailed account of a former female patient capable of seeing into the beyond because she was, for seven years, "arrested by some fixation in the moment of dying between life and death."¹ Margaret Fuller (1983, 124), the American transcendentalist and women's rights advocate, praised the text in a May 9, 1843, letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson as "a really good book," and in March 1845 Harper published an abridged US edition. Shortly thereafter, Edgar Allan Poe transformed Kerner's allegedly authentic documentation of "pure facts" (Kerner 1914, 4:56) into a compellingly morbid literary story. "The Facts in the Case of

M. Valdemar” came to be widely reprinted in newspapers, magazines, and popular science journals, and contemporaneous readers frequently granted the fictional tale that status of factuality to which its title laid claim.²

How was it possible that so many readers took Poe’s made-up story to be genuine? By juxtaposing “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” and *The Seeress of Prevorst* we can do more than just trace the appropriation of a previously neglected source in Poe’s oeuvre. In this essay I examine how Poe builds on Kerner’s treatise by relating the gruesome story of an experiment that detained its subject between life and death. But in doing so we can also analyze the affinities—and the differences—between the narrative constructions of verisimilitude in science and in fiction. Nineteenth-century medical and philosophical treatises on mesmerism relied on rhetorical and narrative strategies that linked them to contemporaneous fiction, sometimes even citing literary stories as empirical corroboration of their claims.³ As a reader of Kerner’s work, Poe took note of this constitutive role of storytelling for the construction of scientific facts, a construction that his “Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” emulates and undermines by fabricating a seemingly authentic case.⁴ However, in addition to this narrative production of verisimilitude, Poe’s editorial strategies also mobilized the powerful reality effects of reprinting. By exploring the viral dissemination of “Valdemar” we see how nineteenth-century print media produced content and credence by means of reprinting. The tale came to be considered genuine because its textual simulation of reality was further validated by its numerous reprints—a circular dynamic of nineteenth-century popular print culture that resembles our current world of social media, where sensational stories and fake news acquire credibility by being reposted, shared, and retweeted, even after their factuality has been disproven.

Pure Facts of Animal Magnetism

Prior to publishing his account of the seeress Friederike Hauffe, Kerner (1824) had written a related treatise titled *History of Two Somnambulants*, and he continued his exploration of mesmerism and the supernatural in *Histories of Possession in More Recent Times* (1834). The first printing of *The Seeress of Prevorst* was highly successful, and in subsequent years the book went through numerous reprints and new

editions. These grew more and more voluminous, as Kerner included lengthy excerpts from positive book reviews in order to further corroborate and prove the veracity of his account—a peculiar feedback loop that anticipated how the credibility of “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” arose from its circulation and reprinting. The central argument of the case history revolved around the precarious liminality of the somnambulist clairvoyant, caught between the material and immaterial worlds. In Kerner’s (1914, 4:58) words, which would become central for Poe’s literary tale, “If we seek to compare her to a human being, then we can say: she was a human being arrested by some fixation in the moment of dying between life and death, a human being already more capable of seeing into the world before her than into the one behind her.”⁵

By describing the seeress as arrested in the moment of dying, Kerner appropriated and revised arguments that were at the heart of a philosophical and scientific debate over ghostly apparitions in the second half of the eighteenth century. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766), Immanuel Kant describes the soul as partaking in both the bodily and the spiritual realms: “the human soul, already in this present life, would therefore have to be regarded as being simultaneously linked to two worlds” (1977, 940; 1992, 319).⁶ Kant continues to assert that the soul’s spiritual dimension eludes our bodily perception. A “clear intuition” or “view” (940; 319) of the spirit world (*das klare Anschauen*), which in mesmerism came to be called *clairvoyance*, could be achieved only in the afterlife. Yet according to Kant, the division between the spiritual and the material worlds could be overcome, “even in this present life” (950; 328). Kant suggests that in certain “persons with organs of unusual sensitivity” real internal spiritual impressions could be transposed to the external world, thereby creating the “outer appearance of objects corresponding to them” (950; 328).

Kant’s *Lectures on Metaphysics* (1821), which were given in the 1780s but published posthumously, also characterized death as a transition from physical to spiritual modes of perception (see Kant 1821, 255; 1997, 104). However, in contrast to *Dreams*, Kant’s lectures categorically denied the possibility of experiencing spiritual visions while living. Kant thus claims: “When I still have a sensory intuition in this world, I cannot at the same time have a spiritual intuition. I cannot be at the same time in this and also in that world” (1821, 259; 1997, 105–6 [translation modified]).

Kant's rejection of the excluded middle, however, was gradually undermined in early nineteenth-century treatises on animal magnetism and clairvoyance. These texts conceived of somnambulism in analogy to death and thereby transformed the liminal moment of dying into a morbid solution to the Cartesian mind-body problem with its strict separation of the bodily and spiritual realms. Carl A. F. Kluge's *Attempt at Presenting Animal Magnetism as a Curative Force* describes "magnetic sleep" in the following terms: "Having stepped out of life in external things and focused on his inner self, man stands here at the boundary of two very different worlds, at the dark gate of transition to a higher, better being" (1811, 109). Kluge's metaphor of a "dark gate of transition" suggests a proximity between animal magnetism and that fleeting moment of dying when the boundary between the material and spiritual worlds is actually crossed. In his *Views of the Night Side of the Natural Sciences*, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert (1808, 357) goes beyond a rhetorical or narrative contiguity by explicitly asserting a "kinship of animal magnetism with death that . . . deserves the most acute attention." Schubert continues, "Magnetism, which often brings about a stiffening of members and other related symptoms as in death, is in this and other respects in small what death is in large and in a perfect manner" (357).⁷ Schubert comes close to the French notion of orgasm as *petite mort*, ascribing a "feeling of ecstasy" (357) to both death and somnambulism.

Kerner's treatise *The Seeress of Prevorst* draws on this tradition, but it describes Friederike Hauffe's "seven-year magnetic life" as an extended ordeal marked by extreme suffering (Kerner 1914, 4:43). In the seeress's magnetic trances, her ganglionic nervous system becomes connected with her "inner life" (4:19). Kerner does not conceive of Hauffe's (Mrs. H.'s) somnambulism in analogy to death but emphasizes that the seeress was indeed, for the duration of seven years, between life and death. He thereby contends that Mrs. H. was at the same time in this and the other world, inhabiting a position described as a logical impossibility in Cartesian philosophy and Kant's *Lectures on Metaphysics*. After characterizing the somnambulist clairvoyant as "arrested by some fixation in the moment of dying," Kerner adds:

This is not a merely poetic expression but literally true. We see that human beings in moments of death often already look into another world and give news of it; we see how their spirit, as if already

stepping out of its body, is able to manifest itself at distant places while it has not yet left its husk completely. If we can think of a person as arrested for years in these moments (which in the dying are often like mere lightning flashes), then we have the exact picture of this seeress; and in this I see only the *literal* truth and no poetic fiction. (4:58–59)⁸

Kerner's account of Mrs. H. undermines a clear boundary between life and death, but he seeks to stabilize the demarcation that separates scientific facts from literary fiction. He insists on the literal truth of his account and denies the presence of any narrative or rhetorical elements in his case history. Ending the introduction to his treatise he reaffirms: "What arose from such a bodiless life . . . some premonition of an inner life of man and of an intrusion of the spirit world upon our own . . . is the further content of these pages. I give here *pure facts* and leave their explanation to the reader's discretion" (4:56).

Kerner emphatically asserted the pure factuality of his text. Like other early nineteenth-century treatises on animal magnetism and mesmerism, his medical case history emulated scientific positivism. The second part of *The Seeress of Prevorst* thus consists of chapters titled "Facts," which are arranged according to the time and place of their occurrence: the first two are titled "Facts at Oberstenfeld," where Mrs. H. lived before arriving in Weinsberg in 1826 as "a picture of death" in order to enter into Kerner's treatment (4:54). Then follow the "Facts at Weinsberg": "First Fact," "Second Fact," "Third Fact," and so on, up to the "Twenty-Second Fact" at Weinsberg, and finally her death in August 1829 in Löwenstein. Kerner conceives of himself as merely observing and witnessing the recorded events: "Most of these facts were witnessed and observed by myself" (5:68). This insistence on the accuracy and pure factuality of the case history also comes to the fore in the manner in which Kerner concludes his documentation of Hauffe's passion and death: "And thus I have given to you, dear reader, these facts without any addition, in naked fidelity, the way I received them and partially witnessed them myself" (5:235).

By equating his case history with naked facts, Kerner set out to conceal his own role as its author and narrator. In the second edition of his treatise he rejects the charge that his own magnetic treatment and his "manic desire to see ghosts" had "put these ghosts into Mrs. H.

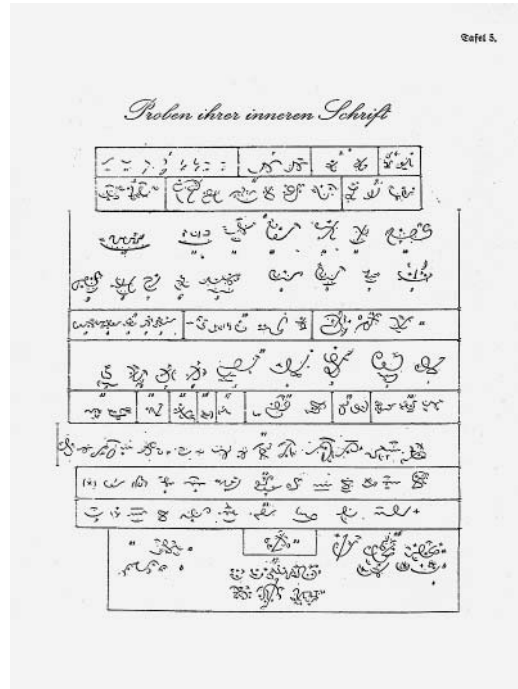


Figure 1 Sample of Mrs. H.'s "inner writing," which ostensibly corresponds to the first human language and writing system. From Justinus Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829)

in the first place" (5:40). Instead of acknowledging that his own observation might have altered or even produced the observed facts, Kerner professes, unconvincingly, "But Mrs. H. was self-contained and not in any way comparable to a somnambulist who is dependent on the will of a magnetizer" (5:40).

In her visions, the seeress speaks an "inner language" that corresponds to the original language of mankind (see fig. 1), and she relays detailed information about seven solar circles, the different qualities of spirits, and the relation of soul, spirit, and body. Seeking to buttress the credibility of these revelations, Kerner highlights Hauffe's lack of formal education. In addition to describing her as "self-contained," he presents the unadulterated clairvoyant as in a state of natural purity, emphasizing that she "never learned a foreign language" and she was not "artificially educated or trained" in history, geography, or physics (5:57).

Even though he treated his patient for several years, Kerner denied any role of his own that would exceed mere observation of Mrs. H.'s

“inner life” and visions. A similar assertion of unadulterated documentation is central to *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ: According to the Contemplations of the God-Blessed Anna Katharina Emmerich* (1834). The Romantic poet Clemens Brentano published that text after spending several years at the bedside of the stigmatized nun Anna Emmerich, from 1817 until her death in 1824. Over a prolonged period of daily visits Brentano took detailed notes of her visions, which provided a comprehensive picture of Jesus’s final days.⁹ Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, released in 2004, drew on Brentano’s account of Emmerich’s visions as its primary source, while the alleged authenticity of Kerner’s case history is upheld in a 1958 reissue whose ninth edition is still in print in Germany today. In the introduction, the editor justifies the abridgments of the original text by stating, “The revised edition at hand aimed to separate the story of the ‘seeress’ from all time-bound thoughts and speculations, thereby allowing for a pure presentation of the facts observed” (Bodamer 1958, 18).

Early to mid-nineteenth-century treatises such as Chauncy H. Townshend’s *Facts in Mesmerism* (1840) made similar claims to factuality, claims that were also upheld in philosophical texts by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling.¹⁰ For G. W. F. Hegel (1986, 133; 1971, 101 [translation modified]), the phenomena of magnetic clairvoyance constituted factual proof for the superiority of reason (*Vernunft*) over understanding (*Verstand*).¹¹ Arthur Schopenhauer published his *On the Will in Nature* ([1836] 1992) with the immodest but telling subtitle, *A Discussion of the Corroborations from the Empirical Sciences That the Author’s Philosophy Has Received since Its First Appearance*. The fifth and longest chapter introduces mesmerism and animal magnetism as empirical proof of his metaphysical theory of the will. In the opening pages of his “Essay on Spirit Seeing” (1851), Schopenhauer (1986b, 275; 2000, 227) likewise asserts, “A person who nowadays doubts the facts of animal magnetism and its clairvoyance is not incredulous but ignorant.” Yet in elucidating the assumption that a dying person can appear before various absent friends at different places, Schopenhauer (348; 298) likens fact and storytelling by affirming, “The case has been narrated . . . so often and from such different sources that I accept it without hesitation as founded on fact.”

This reliance on narration and case histories as tantamount to empirical proof was constitutive of how Schopenhauer corroborated

his metaphysical claims. Schopenhauer (334; 277) concedes that his empirical basis consisted of a “few cases and ghost narratives . . . which have become typical through endless repetition.” But he never doubts the factuality of these stories. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant (1977, 965; 1992, 340) criticizes the intrusion of ostensibly genuine ghost narratives on the discursive realm of academic philosophy, denouncing the “haunting circulation” of these tales as compromising scholarly and rational thinking. Schopenhauer, by contrast, adopted a thoroughly positive perspective on contemporaneous print culture and its circulation and the reprinting of such narratives and reputed facts in pamphlets, journals, anthologies, and monographs. He therefore commended steamships and railways as new modes of communication that would promote an “exchange of ideas” and thereby serve as means of enlightenment and scientific progress (1986b, 324; 2000, 270). Through tracing the circulation and reprinting of Poe’s fictional story, we see that this chain of “repetition” and circulation created a credibility disjoined from the actual truth value of a specific claim or story. But Schopenhauer presents it as a mode of corroboration and verification.

In describing “the facts of animal magnetism” as beyond any doubt, Schopenhauer comes surprisingly close to Kerner’s equation of storytelling and pure factuality. Schopenhauer (1986b, 323; 2000, 268 [translation modified]) even conceives of animal magnetism as an experimental science that provided new and valuable data: “From the philosophical point of view . . . animal magnetism is the most significant of all the discoveries that have ever been made. . . . It is . . . a kind of experimental metaphysics.”¹² Yet while invoking this parallel between animal magnetism and experimental physics, Schopenhauer upholds the importance of philosophical reflection to interpret “the mysterious facts of a metaphysics that manifests itself empirically.” He predicted a future when “philosophy, animal magnetism, and the natural sciences, which have made unparalleled progress in all branches, will shed so bright a light on each other that truths will be discovered at which we could not otherwise hope to arrive” (322–23; 268–69).¹³ But Schopenhauer never elucidated what experiments he considered conducive to this kind of synergy among philosophy, animal magnetism, and the natural sciences.

In “Essay on Spirit Seeing,” Schopenhauer replicates Kerner’s equation of narrative and “pure facts,” and he quotes several times from

The Seeress of Prevorst as factual corroboration of his philosophical claims.¹⁴ However, immediately after invoking the truths that could be discovered through a cooperation between experimental and theoretical metaphysics, Schopenhauer (1986b, 323; 2000, 269) seeks to demarcate his notion of experimental metaphysics from more popular authors who expected the solution of metaphysical problems from somnambulist clairvoyants:

But . . . we should not pay any attention to the metaphysical utterances and doctrines of somnambulists. For these are almost always miserable views which have sprung from dogmas learned by the somnambulist and mixed with what she happens to find in the mind of her magnetizer; they are therefore not worthy of our attention. Through magnetism we also see the way opened up to information concerning spirit apparitions. Nonetheless . . . this path . . . must lie midway between the credulity of our Justinus Kerner, so estimable and meritorious in other respects, and the view . . . which admits of no other order of nature than a mechanical one.

By formulating this critique of Kerner's credulity, Schopenhauer implicitly casts doubt on Kerner's description of Hauffe as "self-contained" and independent from his own thoughts and expectations, for Hauffe's metaphysical revelations can also be characterized as "dogmas learned by the somnambulist and mixed with what she happens to find in the mind of her magnetizer." The distinction between a proper and a trivial notion of experimental metaphysics serves to segregate Schopenhauer's acceptance and philosophical interpretation of the "facts of animal magnetism" from the replication of overused metaphysical doctrines in Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* and other contemporaneous treatises, such as Alphonse Cahagnet's *The Celestial Telegraph; or, The Secrets of the Life to Come, Revealed through Magnetism* (1851).¹⁵

Kerner himself similarly felt compelled to assert time and again that his prolix narrative of Mrs. H. was based on "pure facts" whose explanation was left to the reader's discretion and that his description of the seeress as arrested in the moment of dying was "the literal truth and no poetic fiction" (1914, 4:59). But even though he sought to demarcate his own text from the figurative discourse of literary fiction, Kerner nonetheless introduces a thought experiment into his ostensibly pure and authentic case history when he writes, "If we can think of a person

as arrested for years in these moments (which in the dying are often like mere lightning flashes), then we have the exact picture of this seeress" (4:59). As we see in the following, this thought experiment inherent to and constitutive of Kerner's presentation of "pure facts" lent itself to a literary, fictional adaptation of the case history, one that imitated and undermined Kerner's claims by successfully feigning authenticity.

Literary Facts of M. Valdemar

In a short text first published in December 1845, Poe transformed Kerner's documentation of the "Facts at Weinsberg" into a fictional narrative titled "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." As previously mentioned, Fuller had praised Kerner's book in a letter to Emerson on May 9, 1843 (1983, 123–24). One year later, Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* contained a summary of the case history and a translation of various passages from Kerner's treatise.¹⁶ In March 1845, Catherine Crowe published an abridged translation of Kerner's work in London and New York, under the title *The Seeress of Prevorst: Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-Life of Man and the Inter-Diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One We Inhabit*. On August 2, 1845, an ad in the *Broadway Journal*, a weekly magazine edited by Poe, pitched the book to a US audience, calling it "a work replete with startling new facts on Mesmerism: the most remarkable on the subject we have yet seen" (*Broadway Journal*, August 2, 1845); its price was twenty-five cents.

The proximity of Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" to Crowe's abridged translation of Kerner's case history earned Poe the accusation of plagiarism in an anonymous text in 1855 (Anonymous 1855, 36–38). But the literary scholarship on Poe has either ignored Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* or restricted its focus to how Kerner and Poe described the final appearance of Hauffe's and Valdemar's bodies (Anonymous 1855, 37; Lind 1947, 1092–93; Mabbott 1978, 1229; Faivre 2007, 29–30).¹⁷ However, after this reading of Kerner's treatise we can see that not only was its ending crucial for "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." But from the very beginning, Poe's tale emulates Kerner's emphatic assertion of documenting "pure facts," and its storyline is built on giving an unexpected twist to Kerner's account of Mrs. H. as arrested in the moment of dying. That contemporaneous readers accepted the tale's claim to factuality complicates the simple

separation between pure facts and poetic fiction on which Kerner's treatise is predicated. At the same time, the credulity of these readers testifies to the powerful effects of new nineteenth-century print media that deployed reprinting to create content and credence.

Introducing the tale, Poe's unnamed narrator presents his log of the case as a reaction to the circulation of distorted and exaggerated rumors, rumors that he intends to correct by a factual and accurate report: "It is now rendered necessary that I give the facts" (Poe 1990a, 134). But in adapting Kerner's claim of giving pure facts, Poe's narrative transforms Kerner's account of Hauffe's spiritual visions into a disturbing story about physical decay. In Crowe's translation, the seeress of Prevorst is characterized in the following manner: "We know that men, in the moment of dying, have often glimpses of the other world, and evince their knowledge of it. We see that a spirit partially leaves the body, before it has wholly shaken off its earthly husk. Could we thus maintain any one for years in the condition of a dying person, we should have the exact representation of Mrs. H—'s condition. And this is not the language of fiction, but of simple truth" (Kerner 1845, 24). The text continues: "We have seen in the former part of this volume, how this nerve-spirit—arrested, *as it were*, in the act of dying—became sensible of the spiritual properties of all things" (55, emphasis mine). Fuller defines the liminal state of the somnambulist clairvoyant similarly in her *Summer on the Lakes*: "She was, as Kerner truly describes her, *like one* arrested in the act of dying and detained in her body by magnetic influences" (1844, 152, emphasis mine).¹⁸

Yet in Poe's narrative, any figurative quality of "as it were" or "like one" has disappeared. The narrator literally arrests Valdemar in the act of dying and detains him in that state by putting him into a magnetic trance. As we have seen, Kerner himself had introduced a thought experiment into his ostensibly pure and factual description of Mrs. H.: "If we can think of a person as arrested for years in these moments (which in the dying are often like mere lightning flashes), then we have the exact picture of this seeress" (1914, 4:59). The US edition of the case history renders this sentence as follows: "Could we thus maintain any one for years in the condition of a dying person, we should have the exact representation of Mrs. H—'s condition" (Kerner 1845, 24). Crowe's transformation of "if we can think" into "could we thus maintain" suggests the possibility of implementing Kerner's

thought experiment in the real world. But Crowe's statement is still in the subjunctive mood: "*Could* we thus maintain. . . ."

In the diegetic universe of Poe's novella, by contrast, we encounter an actual, real-life experiment that is meant to generate knowledge. The narrator's scientific curiosity leads him to identify a gap in previous research into animal magnetism. He therefore envisages and enacts an experiment that had not been undertaken:

My attention, for the last three years, had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism; and, about nine months ago, it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in the series of experiments hitherto, there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission:—no person had as yet been mesmerized *in articulo mortis*. It remained to be seen . . . to what extent or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process. (Poe 1990a, 134)

In Kerner's ostensibly factual, scientific account, we encounter a hypothetical thought experiment. This thought experiment, which already approaches its practical implementation in Crowe's incorrect translation, has now morphed into an actual, real-life experiment within the fictional universe of a literary text. At the same time, Poe's tale modifies Kerner's account of Mrs. H.'s liminal position between life and death. In *The Seeress of Prevorst*, Hauffe arrives as a "picture of death" in Weinsberg, and she remains for seven years "arrested by some fixation" between life and death. Yet Kerner's case history implies that she is detained on the threshold *to* or *before* death in a state of suffering and misery. In Poe's tale, by contrast, the test subject Valdemar, who suffers from tuberculosis and has been magnetized just in time by the narrator, truly dies. The narrative represents the boundary between life and death as being crossed when "a marked change" comes over the face of the sleeping Valdemar: "The circular hectic spots which, hitherto, had been strongly defined in the centre of each cheek, *went out* at once. I use this expression because the suddenness of their departure put me in mind of nothing so much as the extinguishment of a candle by a puff of breath" (Poe 1990a, 137). The ostensibly abolished binary opposition between life and death is thereby reintroduced into the diegetic universe of the story. Valdemar's death functions as the turning point of the novella. The narrator builds suspense and announces a catastrophic shift of events by declaring, "I

now feel that I have reached a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief" (137).

After this turning point, Valdemar's vital functions have ceased. He no longer breathes, and the blood in his body no longer circulates. Only his swollen and blackened tongue transmits messages from the beyond, like "the trembling tongue of steel" of the contemporaneous needle telegraph.¹⁹ Cahagnet's (1851) mesmerist treatise *The Celestial Telegraph* promised revelations about the afterlife in its subtitle *The Secrets of the Life to Come, Revealed through Magnetism*. But "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" does not provide a positive account of what to expect in the beyond—a withholding of information that also distinguishes the narrative from Poe's own tale "Mesmeric Revelation" ([1844] 1990b), which had been published one year earlier.

"Mesmeric Revelation" opens with the declaration, "Whatever doubt may still envelop the rationale of mesmerism, its startling facts are now almost universally admitted" (Poe 1990b, 139). The main body of the text consists of a long dialogue between the narrator and a magnetized somnambulist named Vankirk who is terminally ill. In it, Vankirk reiterates Schubert's exposition of the magnetic trance as analogous to death by pronouncing, "The mesmeric condition is so near death as to content me" (141). Before he passes away, still in a state of somnambulism, Vankirk also makes detailed declarations that link God, spirit, and the ether to the finest gradations of matter. The tale thereby verges on the "metaphysical utterances of somnambulists" denounced by Schopenhauer as "miserable views" in his "Essay on Spirit Seeing." Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," however, does not make any statements about the spiritual realm of the beyond. Valdemar does not relay information about the other world or the nature of God and the ether; rather, when asked if he is still sleeping, Valdemar responds to the question with the laconic reply, "Yes;—no;—I have been sleeping—and now—now—I am dead" (1990a, 138).²⁰

Kerner's ostensibly factual documentation of the spiritual world's intrusion on our own is thus transformed into a pseudomedical case history. Apart from the fainting of the medical student and note taker Mr. L___l, the experiment produces the following result: "It was evident that, so far, death (or what is usually termed death) had been arrested by the mesmeric process" (Poe 1990a, 138). And while Mrs. H. was arrested for seven years between life and death, Valdemar is detained in this state for seven months before the narrator wakes

him from his magnetic trance—with the unintended consequence that his body decomposes before the narrator’s eyes: “As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of ‘dead! dead!’ absolutely bursting from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk—crumbled—absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence” (139).²¹

The accelerated, gory conclusion is the last in a sequence of shocks administered by Poe’s narrative. Earlier in the tale, in comparable attention to ghastly detail and the wetware of the human body, the narrator indulges in a lengthy description of Valdemar’s swollen and blackened tongue and its appearance in the moment of death, declaring subsequently, “I presume that no member of the party then present had been unaccustomed to death-bed horrors; but so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment, that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed” (Poe 1990a, 137). Under the guise of a detailed scientific report but drastically shortening the prolix narrative of Kerner’s case history, the text aims for the production of terror and disgust in the reader. Commenting on Valdemar’s declaration, “*I have been sleeping—and now—now—I am dead,*” the narrator himself characterizes “these few words” as “well calculated to convey [horror]” (138). The fainting of the medical student and note taker L.—I thus stands in as an exaggerated version of the reader’s intended response to the terrifying and revolting story.

Although the narrator announces “a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief” and although the tale does have a startling and unsettling impact, its sensational shock effects actually serve to suppress a skeptical reaction of “disbelief.” The horrifying invocation of Valdemar’s sudden, accelerated physical decay conforms to Poe’s presentation of a “certain unique or single effect” as the goal of a “skilful literary artist” in an essay from 1842 (Poe 1984b, 572). Reviewing Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* as “*tales of effect*” (573), Poe draws on the terminology of animal magnetism to assert the “short prose narrative” as a genre that gives its author unlimited power over a deeply immersed, or mesmerized, reader. In Poe’s terms: “In the brief tale . . . the author is enabled to

carry out the fullness of his intention. . . . During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences" (571).²² The brevity of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and its powerful shock effects follow this poetological program of controlling the soul of the reader. While longer than 140 characters, the text could fit as an article on a single newspaper page. In addition to fostering uninterrupted immersion, the tale's shortness thus invited numerous reprints in newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and popular science magazines. That readers succumbed to the ostensibly factual invocation of ghastly detail by taking Poe's story for an authentic account of real events seems nonetheless surprising and speaks to the power of new nineteenth-century print media.

The Reality Effects of Reprinting

Under the title "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case" the narrative first came out in the December issue of the *American Review*, where it was printed between an article about the "positions and duties" of the Whig Party and a poem titled "The Flight of Helle" (see Poe 1845). That the end of Poe's story and the beginning of the poem were placed on the same page could be taken to imply that both texts belonged to the realm of aesthetic literature. But the journal did not provide any explicit heading or marker indicating the status of the narrative. As a result some contemporaneous readers regarded the text as a factual case history, an erroneous reading that was corrected in a review probably written by Fuller and published in the *New-York Daily Tribune*. Classifying Poe's narrative as "of course a romance," the review ridicules "several good matter-of-fact citizens" who had reckoned it to be real: "It is a pretty good specimen of Poe's style of giving an air of reality to fictions and we utterly condemn its choice of a subject, but whoever thought it a veracious recital must have the bump of Faith large, very large indeed" (*New-York Daily Tribune*, December 10, 1845).²³

The review gives an astute assessment of Poe's narrative construction of verisimilitude. However, instead of settling the question as to whether the tale was based on fact or fiction, the *New-York Daily Tribune's* rebuttal of "Valdemar" served to keep the story in circulation. On December 13, Poe reprinted the censure of his tale's subject and its all-too-credulous readers in the *Broadway Journal*, the same weekly

magazine edited by Poe himself that had run an ad for Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* in August. Poe counters the criticism by assigning his tale an equal degree of credibility as commonly given to other case histories:

For our part we find it difficult to understand how any dispassionate transcendentalist can doubt the facts as we state them; they are by no means so incredible as the marvels which are hourly narrated, and believed, on the topic of Mesmerism. *Why* cannot a man's death be postponed indefinitely by Mesmerism? *Why* cannot a man talk after he is dead? *Why?*—*Why?*—that is the question; and as soon as the Tribune has answered it to our satisfaction we will talk to it farther. ("Editorial Miscellany," *Broadway Journal*, December 13, 1845)

The editorial note makes clear that Poe's tale not only undermines a clear boundary between life and death, but it also destabilizes the demarcation that differentiates science from fiction. The assumption that a man can speak "after he is dead," while starkly different from Poe's model of an all-powerful author in control of his reader, provided a poetological model for other contemporaneous authors such as Emily Dickinson, and it anticipated avant-garde notions of automatic writing.²⁴ Looking beyond our juxtaposition of Kerner and Poe, we can say that the liminality of the moment of death had such an appeal to philosophers because it offered a morbid solution to the Cartesian mind-body problem, and it was equally attractive to spiritualists who expected magnetic revelations on the beyond. Within the realm of literature, by contrast, it served as a device of shock and terror or, quite differently, as a model of authorship that valorized sensitivity and the transcription of ethereal impressions.²⁵

In relating Poe's editorial note to our more immediate concern of reading "Valdemar" as exemplary of the porous distinction between scientific facts and literary fictions, we can concur with Poe's assertion that the marvels "hourly narrated, and believed, on the topic of Mesmerism" were anything but pure facts. Instead, as Poe rightly implied, storytelling was (and is) crucial for constructing credence in "dispassionate" readers of lengthy case histories who consider themselves as free from any "bump of Faith." But that Poe assigned his fictional tale of effect a higher degree of credibility than that given to Kerner's prolix narrative of Mrs. H. was possible only by wrongly

suggesting that M. Valdemar was as real as Friederike Hauffe. One week later, in the next issue of the *Broadway Journal*, Poe further stirred up the debate over the veracity of the tale by reprinting it and presenting the text as an “article” that he introduced with the following remarks:

The Facts in the case of M. Valdemar. An article of ours, thus entitled, was published in the last number of Mr. Colton’s “American Review,” and has given rise to some discussion—especially in regard to the truth or falsity of the statements made. It does not become us, of course, to offer one word on the point at issue. We have been requested to reprint the article, and do so with pleasure. We leave it to speak for itself. We may observe, however, that there are a certain class of people who pride themselves upon Doubt, as a profession. (*Broadway Journal*, December 20, 1845)

Reprinting his own tale, Poe combined the roles of author and editor. Instead of exemplifying the “death of the author” in a media environment that lacked the legal protection of copyright, as Carl Ostrowski (2010, 13–14) has interpreted the story,²⁶ Poe himself encouraged a chain of reprinting that multiplied the number of readers who considered the story to be genuine. The subsequent issue of the *Broadway Journal* featured an excerpt from a letter sent to Poe by Robert H. Collyer, a medical doctor and expert in mesmerism, who wrote from Boston, responding to another reprint in the *Boston Courier*: “Your account of M. Valdemar’s Case has been universally copied in this city, and has created a very great sensation. It requires from me no apology, in stating, that I have not the least doubt of the *possibility* of such a phenomenon” (“Editorial Miscellany,” *Broadway Journal*, December 27, 1845).²⁷ Soliciting further information about the case, Collyer hoped to counter “the growing impression that your account is merely a splendid creation of your own brain, not having any truth in fact.” Poe’s printed editorial response stated dryly, “The truth is, there was a very small modicum of truth in the case of M. Valdemar” (“Editorial Miscellany,” *Broadway Journal*, December 27, 1845). Yet despite Poe’s belated denial of its veracity, his “tale of effect” went viral.

Over the following weeks it was reprinted in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Ohio, and Vermont (“The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” *Spirit of the Times* [Philadelphia], December 23 and 24, 1845; “Valdemar’s Case,” *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, January 1846; “A Horrible

Piece! A Strange Story of Mesmerism,” *Cadiz [OH] Sentinel*, February 11, 1846; “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” *Northern Galaxy* [Middlebury, VT], January 6, 1846). In January 1846, it was also published on the other side of the Atlantic, in London. There, the *Sunday Times*, the *Morning Post*, and the *Popular Record of Modern Science* printed the story under the title “Mesmerism in America: The Death of M. Valdemar of New York,” introducing it with various editorial disclaimers that described the *American Review* as a “respectable periodical” before leaving it to the readers’ discretion whether to take the narrative as genuine (“Mesmerism in America: Astounding and Horrifying Narrative,” *Sunday Times*, January 4, 1846; “Mesmerism in America,” *Morning Post*, January 5, 1846; “Mesmerism in America. Death of M. Valdemar in New York,” *Popular Record of Modern Science*, January 10, 1846). By being placed alongside factual stories, Poe’s novella renewed the genre’s claim to be reporting news based on a real, unheard-of incident.²⁸ But its numerous reprints also resemble our current world of social media, where the repetition or retweeting of a sensational story serves to augment its credibility.

In late January 1846 the text then came out as a pamphlet, *Mesmerism “in articulo mortis”: An Astounding and Horrifying Narrative, Shewing the Extraordinary Power of Mesmerism in Arresting the Progress of Death*. The actual story was again preceded by an editorial announcement: “The following astonishing narrative first appeared in the *American Magazine* [sic], a work of some standing in the United States, where the case has excited the most intense interest. . . . The narrative, though only a plain recital of facts, is of so extraordinary a nature as almost to surpass belief. It is only necessary to add, that credence is given to it in America, where the occurrence took place” (Poe 1846).

The editorial foreword to Poe’s “plain recital of facts” seeks to produce “credence” in a self-referential gesture predicated on the reality effect of reprinting. It cites the *American Review*, which is wrongly named the *American Magazine*, as “a work of some standing” before unequivocally stating that the occurrence took place in the United States. In other words, the mere fact of the story having been previously printed indicates its credibility, which is then further corroborated and increased with every reprinting.

In April 1846 the *Popular Record of Modern Science* revealed that the story was fiction after receiving a letter to that effect from Poe himself. But the pamphlet edition continued to circulate, inciting one

faithful reader in November 1846 to write a letter to Poe in order to ascertain the factuality of the narrative. Despite his belief in the veracity of print and in the theories of animal magnetism, Poe's correspondent Archibald Ramsay, a Scottish pharmacist, was uncertain about whether to view the narrative as fiction or fact. He wrote to Poe:

As a believer in Mesmerism I respectfully take the liberty of addressing you to know, if a pamphlet lately published in London . . . under the authority of your name & entitled *Mesmerism, in Articulo-Mortis*, is genuine. It details an account of some *most extraordinary circumstances*, connected with the death of a M M Valdemar under mesmeric influence, *by you*. *Hoax* has been emphatically pronounced upon the pamphlet by all who have seen it here, and for the sake of the Science and of truth a note from you on the subject would truly oblige. (in Poe 1902, 268–69)

Poe responded, on December 30, 1846: “‘Hoax’ is precisely the word suited to M. Valdemar’s case. The story appeared originally in ‘The American Review,’ a Monthly Magazine published in this city. The London papers, commencing with the ‘Morning Post’ and the ‘Popular Record of Science’ [*sic*], took up the theme. The article was generally copied in England and is now circulating in France. Some few persons believe it—but *I* do not—and don’t you” (Poe 1966, 2:337).

Poe’s letter may serve as a fitting coda to our analysis of how “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” came to be regarded as an authentic account of real events. Schopenhauer (1986b) conceded that the empirical foundation of his metaphysical claims consisted of a “few ghost narratives” that had “become typical through endless repetition” (1986b, 334; 2000, 277). Nonetheless he upheld his belief in the “facts of animal magnetism,” and he praised the new communication technologies of railways and steamships, technologies that also allowed for the rapid transatlantic dissemination and circulation of Poe’s sensational narrative, as fostering scientific progress and an “exchange of ideas” (1986b, 324; 2000, 270). Postulating a similar link between print media and the gradual perfection of knowledge, Josias Ludwig Gosch had published in 1789 a treatise titled *Fragments on the Circulation of Ideas* in which he praised the printing press as allowing for a free flow of information and unfettered scientific discussion (see Gosch 2006, 107–116, 121, 158). But contrary to Gosch’s and Schopenhauer’s stance, the new and popular print media of the nineteenth century

also gave rise to a starkly different mode of circulation that did not serve scholarly or scientific purposes.²⁹ In contrast to the scholarly book, popular magazines and pamphlets expanded the number of authors and readers, but they also lacked screening and fact-checking protocols, a media change and bifurcation that resembles the current difference between source-based journalism and social media.

Responding to Ramsay's inquiry as to whether the death of a certain M. M. Valdemar really happened, Poe emphasized that one should not believe his "article," even though it had been published in numerous venues across the United States and England and was still being reprinted in France. In similar terms, the contemporaneous British poet Elizabeth Barrett also took note of Poe's narrative "going the rounds of the newspapers."³⁰ This spectral chain of reprinting did not simply come to an end after the story's veracity was disproven. Instead it was akin to the "haunting circulation" of ostensibly real ghost stories that Kant criticizes in "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer."³¹ Even after Poe explicitly divulged the tale's inauthenticity, the text remained in circulation, leading some readers to consider the narrative as possibly genuine. The persistence of this fallacy speaks to a wide-held belief in the veracity of the reprinted word—a belief not easily shattered, even though the broad dissemination of the story in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets did not imply that its content was factual. The "bump of Faith large, very large indeed," in some of Poe's readers was testament to Poe's narrative skills in "giving an air of reality to [his] fictions." But the credulity of these readers also rose from the reality effects of reprinting, a circular feedback reminiscent of the flow and acceptance of unfounded rumors and fake news in social media today.

While Poe described his narrative as a "hoax," it emerges here as a surprisingly complex and self-reflexive appropriation of contemporaneous scientific and philosophical theories of animal magnetism. In adapting Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* Poe highlighted the constitutive role of prolix narrative for the scientific construction of verisimilitude, a mode of narration that his own text transformed into a short and sensational "tale of effect" that sought to control its readers. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" exemplifies, and comments on, the porous distinction between scientific facts and literary fictions, without completely obliterating it. The perception of the story as factual speaks to the power of narrative but also to the reality effects of

reprinting. By “going the rounds of the newspapers” the ostensibly genuine tale was able to feed on a dynamic of nineteenth-century print media that Schopenhauer aptly described as an “endless repetition.”

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Notes

I would like to thank the editors of *American Literature* and Oliver Simons for their helpful suggestions and comments.

- 1 “Sie war ein im Augenblicke des Sterbens, durch irgend eine Fixierung, zwischen Sterben und Leben zurückgehaltener Mensch.” I quote here and in the following from a reprint of the latest, most comprehensive edition in volumes 4 and 5 of an anthology of Kerner’s works from 1914. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
- 2 The short story was first published as “The Facts of M. Valdemar’s Case” in the *American Whig Review* (December 1845) and then as “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” in the *Broadway Journal* (December 1845).
- 3 For an excellent overview of nineteenth-century British debates about mesmerism, see Winter 1998. For an analysis of how late nineteenth-century medical and legal texts about the ostensibly unlimited power of hypnotism relied on literary narratives, see Andriopoulos 2008.
- 4 Within the field of science studies the constitutive role of storytelling for the construction of facts has been highlighted by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (1985, 61–69). However, instead of relying on their term *literary technology*, which describes the narrative modes of constructing reality in scientific texts, I adapt Roland Barthes’s notion of a “reality effect” (1982, 16), expanding its meaning to refer to both narrative and medial constructions of reality in printed literary and scientific texts.
- 5 “Will man sie mit einem Menschen vergleichen, so kann man sagen: sie war ein im Augenblicke des Sterbens, durch irgend eine Fixierung, zwischen Sterben und Leben zurückgehaltener Mensch, der schon mehr in die Welt, die nun vor ihm, als in die, die hinter ihm liegt, zu sehen fähig ist.” Margaret Fuller (1844, 147) offers the following translation of this passage: “Should we compare her with anything human, we would

- say she was as one detained in the moment of dissolution, betwixt life and death; and who is better able to discern the affairs of the world that lies before than that behind him.”
- 6 For an overview of the eighteenth-century debate on spirit apparitions and its role for the philosophical theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, see Andriopoulos 2013.
 - 7 See also “Da auf diese Weise der Tod dem Zustand des Somnambulismus so nahe verwandt ist” (Schubert 1808, 359). There is no English translation of Schubert’s treatise, but Catherine Crowe, who also translated Justinus Kerner’s *Seeress of Prevorst*, published in 1848 a highly successful book, *The Night Side of Nature; or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers*.
 - 8 “Dies ist nicht nur ein poetischer Ausdruck, sondern wirklich wahr. Wir sehen, daß Menschen in Momenten des Todes oft schon in eine andere Welt hinüberschauen und von dieser Kunde geben; wir sehen wir ihr Geist da oft, schon wie aus dem Körper getreten, sich in Entfernungen hin zu offenbaren vermag, während er die Hülle doch noch nicht völlig verlassen hat. Kann man sich diesen Menschen in diesen Momenten (die bei Sterbenden oft nur wie Blitze sind) jahrelang hingehalten denken, so haben wir das Bild dieser Seherin, und hierin sehe ich nur *buchstäbliche* Wahrheit, keine Dichtung.”
 - 9 Emmerich’s visions were documented and shaped by Brentano, who read regularly to the nun from apocryphal writings and mystical literature. But in the preface to his book, the poet describes his own role as that of a mere “writer” (*Schreiber*) (Brentano 1980, 13), who only recorded and transcribed her visions based on his “four-year long, daily, intense observation” (24). On Brentano’s project, see also Brandstetter 2004. On Brentano’s reading of mystical literature and apocryphal writings to the nun, see Gajek 1993.
 - 10 See also Caldwell 1842. On Fichte’s appropriation of mesmerism, see Franzel 2009.
 - 11 Hegel (1986, 16; 1971, 7 [translation modified]) also describes clairvoyance as “a brute fact” that “necessitates the advance from ordinary psychology to the comprehensive cognition afforded by speculative philosophy.”
 - 12 Schopenhauer (1986a, 429; 1992, 107) introduces the notion of experimental metaphysics for the first time in *On the Will in Nature*.
 - 13 Similar assumptions were formulated at the end of the nineteenth century by authors such as Carl du Prel, who imagined a collaboration of occultists, scientists, and engineers that would lead to the invention and construction of new technical devices. On du Prel and the interrelation of television and psychical research around 1900, see Andriopoulos 2005.
 - 14 See Schopenhauer (1986b, 331; 2000, 275), for instance: “This is confirmed by the easy and artless way in which the clairvoyante of Prevorst cultivates her spiritual acquaintances, for example, vol. ii, p. 120 (1st edn.), where she quite calmly lets a spirit stand and waits until she has

had her soup. J. Kerner himself also says in several places (for example, vol. I, p. 209) that she seemed to be awake, but never yet entirely. At all events it might be possible to reconcile this with her own statement (vol. ii, p. 11, 3rd edn., p. 256) that, whenever she sees spirits she is wide awake." Schopenhauer (331; 258) continues: "Further, *a confirmation of this is given* by the impression, described in the *Seherin von Prevorst* (1st edn., vol. ii, p. 73; 3rd edn., p. 325), which certain verses, relating to somnambulist events, made during wakefulness on the clairvoyante who knew nothing of them."

- 15 The original French edition was published under a different title, *Magnétisme: Arcanes de la vie future dévoilés: ou, L'existence, la forme, les occupations de l'âme après sa séparation du corps* (1848).
- 16 It is unclear when Poe read the book, but a few years after the publication of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" he reviewed Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* as "a remarkable assemblage of sketches" (Poe 1984a, 1172).
- 17 Bruce Mills (2006, 123) mentions in a footnote that both Kerner and Poe treated somnambulism as a state hovering between life and death, but he does not refer to Kerner in his analysis of Poe's literary texts. On Poe's adaptation of contemporaneous theories of animal magnetism, see Mills 2013.
- 18 See Fuller 1844, 147: "She was as one detained in the moment of dissolution."
- 19 In 1839 Latimer Clark described William Cooke's needle telegraph as "a trembling tongue of steel" (quoted in Otis 2001, 183). On the role of telegraphy for Poe's narrative, see Frank 2005.
- 20 A poststructuralist interpretation of this sentence as a figuration of the condition of possibility of language, one in which the speaker is always already absent, can be found in Derrida 1970. See also Barthes 1985 and Derrida 1973, 1 and 96–97.
- 21 This passage is compared in *Rambles and Reveries* with the description of Mrs. H.'s death in the US edition of Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst*: "After a short interval, her soul also departed; leaving behind a totally unrecognizable husk—not a single trace of her former features remaining" (Kerner 1845, 38). These two passages are also juxtaposed by Lind 1947, Mabbott 1978, and Faivre 2007. But the author of *Rambles and Reveries*, as well as Lind, Mabbott, and Faivre, ignores the crucial similarity between Kerner's and Poe's representations of Mrs. H. and Valdemar being "arrested in the moment of dying." In addition, they also do not take note of how Poe's literary text transformed Kerner's thought experiment into an ostensibly real one.
- 22 This passage is also quoted by Mills (2006, 55) and by Elmer (1995, 117). A similar reliance on mesmerist terms is to be found in Poe's essay on Hawthorne from 1847, where Poe (1984b, 581) spoke of a "bond of sympathy"

- between reader and author that paralleled the rapport between somnambulist medium and mesmerist.
- 23 The review lacks an author's name, but that also applies to a positive review of Poe's *Tales* that Fuller had published a few months earlier in the same newspaper (see Fuller 2000, 153–54).
 - 24 The liminality of the moment of dying is a recurring concern in Emily Dickinson's poetry; see, for instance, "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died" (1960b) and "Because I could not stop for Death" (1960a), where the poetic voice speaks from beyond the grave.
 - 25 On the link between spiritualist mediumship and modernist literary aesthetics, see Sword 2002.
 - 26 For a general account of reprinting in this period that goes beyond deploring the lack of copyright regulations in the United States and instead highlights the formative power of reprinting, see McGill 2003. The book contains two chapters on Poe but does not mention "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." On Poe's "Balloon Hoax" (1844), see Tresch 1997.
 - 27 Collyer's letter reacts to a reprinting of the story in the *Boston Courier* (see Edgar Allan Poe, "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case," *Boston Courier*, December 15, 1845).
 - 28 Goethe famously defined the novella as based on a "real unheard-of incident" (eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit) (Eckermann 1999, 221), emphasizing the novella's mixed status of factuality and sensational novelty.
 - 29 For an analysis of eighteenth-century US political theories that conceived of the printing press as inherently "emancipatory," see Warner 1990. Warner (1–33) rightly asserts that there is no "intrinsic nature" of print technology that would determine its "cultural mediation," an argument that dovetails with my point that there were two very different models of circulation that could be observed in nineteenth-century print culture. On the linkage between the book and scholarly and scientific knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Johns 1998.
 - 30 In her letter from April 1846, Barrett compared "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" with a ghost story that instilled in its readers "dreadful doubts as to whether it can be true." As if she were echoing Poe's essay on Hawthorne, Barrett concluded: "The certain thing in the tale in question is the *power of the writer* and the faculty he has of making horrible improbabilities seem near & familiar" (quoted in Quinn 1998, 485, emphasis mine).
 - 31 Barrett's account of Poe's tale "going the rounds of the newspapers" is surprisingly close to the second "historical" part of Kant's "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer" that criticizes the "haunting circulation" of ostensibly genuine ghost narratives in nonscholarly, popular print culture and their intrusion on the discursive realm of academic philosophy (the German phrase is "herumgehende Geistergeschichten"; 1977, 965; 1992, 340; the

German *herumgehend* means both “haunting” and “circulating”). In a celebratory rather than critical mode, Karl Marx’s “Communist Manifesto” opens with the very same phrase used by Barrett and Kant: “Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa” (literally, “A specter is going around in Europe”; Marx and Engels 1996, 1). On the various printings and reprintings of the “Communist Manifesto,” see Puchner 2006, 33–40.

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