Donald K. Hartman (ed.), ***The Female Hypnotist: Stories from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras***, Buffalo, NY: Themes and Settings in Fiction Press, 2025, 315 pp. Hb £25.21. ISBN 9780960082346

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The Female Hypnotist: Stories from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras, edited by Donald K. Hartman, collects fourteen stories in a rather niche subgenre: stories about women with hypnotic powers. This is part of a broader new series, *Hypnotism in Victorian and Edwardian Era Fiction* series (of which this is the fourth book). This makes the volume almost by default of interest to many readers of *Victorian Popular Fictions,* as stories of psychic powers and mind control were certainly the kind of popular fiction that appeared in newspapers and periodicals aimed at a wide readership.

The book begins with a short introduction which acknowledges the minority status of the female hypnotist (as opposed to female subject or male hypnotist) in fiction, stating that "out of the 1,000 or so fictional works published in the period 1840-1910, less than 16 percent had a female hypnotist" (v), and observing that this is unsurprising because of the Victorian assumption that, as women were "the weaker sex," this must include their being "weaker when it came to willpower," and so a "female hypnotist upended societal norms" (v). The introduction is followed by a brief foreword by Amy Ellingham, a professional hypnotherapist and expert in "the history of hypnosis" (vi), who shares her enthusiasm for the stories and the intriguing character of the female hypnotist. It is not a scholarly piece, as the references are light (Alison Winter's foundational *Mesmerized* is footnoted, but so is the Wikipedia page for Trilbyana), and it lacks bibliographical detail. There is also little about the actual history of hypnotism, and Ellingham slips between the use of "mesmerist" and "hypnotist" without any acknowledgement of the distinction or connection between the two (which would require reference to Franz Mesmer, James Braid, and the indistinct boundaries between science, pseudoscience and the supernatural in the Victorian era). Nevertheless, Ellingham picks out some recurring strands and central themes for readers to look out for, including that the message "[t]hat women must be protected, policed, and prohibited from harnessing the powers of hypnosis underscores all the stories," (xi) and that a "recurring theme is that 'good' men must act as gatekeepers to protect society against 'magic' women" (xii). While Ellingham has offered

some opening thoughts, there is still much to be said about, and connections to be drawn between, these generally understudied works (the most famous is Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Parasite* (1894)).

The back cover states that the book is intended "to be of value to modern readers and researchers." The latter will find this useful mainly for its role in bringing together stories on a particular theme. The stories themselves are not listed in any obvious order, which means a reader needs to work a little harder to see what connections there may be in terms of publishing contexts (such as chronological development). Moreover, there are other useful materials in the volume, including notes on the authors, who are mainly British and American, but include the French Erckmann-Chatrian (a collaboration of Émile Erckmann and Alexandrew Chatrian) and the Indian-born Emeric Hulme-Beaman. It is notable that Victorian and Edwardian are implicitly inclusive of American publishers here. The "Note on the Texts" is particularly welcome as it lists the original publication information for each story, which is an interesting range in itself, from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, to the *New York Clipper*, to the *Weekly Irish Times*, to *American Jewess*. Of greatest use for future research is the annotated bibliography at the end of the volume, which has nearly fifty pages of sources and plot summaries, ranging from the shocking ("Suggestion" (1891): "A woman with a suicide wish hypnotizes a man to behead her" (269)) to the humorous and topical ("The New Hypnotism" (1897), playing on the New Woman, in which a woman gets money for a new bonnet from her hypnotised husband (269)). Original publication information is provided alongside the archive and URL where the story can be found.

It is an attractive volume, with images between each story. Some of these are photos which are fascinating in themselves, such as the 'Woman attempting to hypnotize a friend' which precedes the introduction, and which shows one young woman (with the familiar tight waist and puffed sleeves of the era, in a straw boater) holding a watch on a chain in front of the gaze of another. While the source archive (Minnesota Historical Society Collection) is noted, there is no information about the picture's date or circumstances, which could be frustrating for a researcher. Other images have no information attached; some appear to be wood engravings or illustrations, while others are stock images or perhaps AI-generated to give a sense of atmosphere.

The book would certainly make an excellent gift for someone with an interest in Victorian popular fiction, science and the supernatural. While the purpose of this review is to comment on the quality and usefulness of the volume itself, it seems pertinent to offer a word about the stories. A more general reader moving through the book from cover to cover may find that the stories of women exerting their will over men, often for love and/or revenge, get a little repetitive, but there are instances of women pursuing hypnotism out of scientific curiosity, enjoyment and for financial gain, as well as women working with men rather than against them. For a researcher, this gives a good indication (as Ellingham notes) of how Victorian society fantasised about and worried over female power and domination. It is interesting to note that many of the stories are narrated by men, and that this does not always correspond to the gender of the author. It would be a useful text for teaching, in that students would have access to a number of not readily available texts which invite detailed analytical comparison and touch on perennially popular themes such as gender. However, while the volume is relatively cheap compared to some scholarly collections, individual students may baulk at the price for a week's study.[1] In all, there is much to appeal to readers, whether they are students, researchers, or simply reading for interest and pleasure.

[1] This review used the hardback, but a paperback is available at around £15 and a Kindle edition around £8.