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## Passing Current: Electricity, Magnetism, and Historical Transmission in *The Linwoods*

JEFFREY INSKO

In 1834, a year before Catharine Maria Sedgwick published *The Linwoods*, her historical romance of the American Revolution, Albert Gorton Greene ran an item titled “Ethan Allen in England” in his short-lived magazine, the *Literary Journal, and Weekly Register of Science and the Arts*. Drawing on an intriguing gift of apocrypha apparently passed on to Greene by “a friend of [his] earlier life who was well acquainted with this part of the history of this singular man,” the article offers several anecdotes demonstrating Allen’s “shrewdness and wit.”<sup>1</sup> In one of them, Greene recounts an interview between Allen and King George at Windsor castle involving the means of communication among the colonists. In response to the king’s query as to how grievances are transmitted to “the common people,” Allen replies, “I can tell your Majesty, that amongst a people who have felt the spirit of liberty, the news of oppression is carried by the birds of the air, and the breeze of heaven.” The king finds Allen’s reply “too figurative” and reminds him of his reputation as a “matter of fact man.” Yet Allen’s ensuing “plain” answer turns out to be no less figurative: “Well to be plain,” Allen responds, in America, “the tale of wrong is carried from man to man, and from neighborhood to neighborhood, with the speed of electricity” (“EA,” 297).

The exchange surprisingly upends conventional revolutionary tropes that align liberty with the factual and monarchy with



Frontispiece from *C. F. Durant's Exposition, or A New Theory of Animal Magnetism . . .* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1837).

the artificial. It is, after all, a set of “facts” that the Declaration of Independence “submit[s] to a candid world,” even as it is the “decent drapery of life” that Edmund Burke seeks to defend in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in *The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine takes Burke to task precisely for producing an argument that is too figurative, or as Paine puts it, for advancing an argument “calculated for theatrical representation, where facts are manufactured for the sake of show, and accommodated to produce, through the weakness of sympathy, a weeping effect.”<sup>3</sup> But for Ethan Allen (at least in Greene’s telling), sympathy is not weakness. Quite the contrary: because his countrymen collectively *feel* the spirit of liberty, Allen asserts, they “cannot be put down with the sword” (“EA,” 297).

Which is to say that, for Allen—and, as we’ll see, for Catharine Sedgwick in *The Linwoods*—sympathy or feeling is power, and power of a very particular sort: the power of electricity. The importance of electrical transmission in this little tale becomes more apparent as it continues. After quoting Allen’s declaration that the rebels are more than equal to the sword, “The King ma[kes] a long pause, as if strongly impressed with the truth of his remarks.” Then, “changing the subject,” he asks what Allen knows of Benjamin Franklin’s experiments with electricity and “expresse[s] a curiosity to experience an electric shock” for himself. Allen, he insists, must “visit . . . with his countryman, Dr. Franklin, at his palace in London” (“EA,” 297).

Here, Greene’s anecdote takes a curious turn—curious because it is, in fact, no turn at all. After all, the king’s sudden interest in electricity, which Greene describes as “changing the subject,” is easily explained as a kind of free association, obviously deriving from Allen’s use of electricity as a figure for the spread of the spirit of liberty. Nor is it much of a leap to think that the king’s interest runs even deeper: his “curiosity to experience an electric shock” suggests, metaphorically, his desire to experience for himself the animating spirit of the American rebels. Accordingly, a demonstration is arranged. Franklin devises an appropriate electrical apparatus, the royal family gathers, and just as the king is about to receive his jolt, Allen whispers in Franklin’s ear, “remember . . . he ha[s] shocked us across the waters . . . give him a double charge” (“EA,” 297).

In addition to the persistent American appetite for retellings, like Sedgwick's and many others', of revolutionary history, two factors might account for the appearance of this odd item in Greene's magazine some forty years after Allen's death. First, the same year saw the publication of two biographies of the hero of Ticonderoga: Jared Sparks's *Life of Ethan Allen*, published as part of Sparks's *Library of American Biography* series; and Hugh Moore's *Memoir of Colonel Ethan Allen*. Perhaps Greene sought merely to capitalize on this renewed interest. Second, the specific content of Greene's anecdote draws on the public discourse of another revolution: not just the American War for Independence but the French Revolution of July 1830, which quickly spread to Brussels and led, a month later, to an independent Belgium. Just as they had in 1789, Americans in the 1830s looked upon events in Europe as both a vindication of and an occasion to remember their own nation's fight for liberty. In 1831, for instance, the *American Monthly Magazine* commemorated the events of 1830 in verse. The poem, "Spirit of Liberty . . . 1830," describes the effects of the July Revolution:

In three short days that glorious deed was done—  
 Three mornings dawned—and sunny France was free;  
 But ne'er shall cease a work so well begun  
 Till Europe joins in Freedom's jubilee.  
 E'en now has Belgium caught th' electric spark,  
 War's thunder peals upon her dike-bound shore.<sup>4</sup>

Milford Bard sees the overthrow of Charles X in similar terms, noting that "the brilliant luminary of liberty has risen again in all the unclouded grandeur of American glory." "So sudden was the electric flash," Bard continues, "that all France was wrapped in the conflagration ere the eye of dispassionate reason could look upon it undazzled."<sup>5</sup> The Marquis de Lafayette employs the trope as well, writing in 1831 of his hope "to send over the face of Europe the explosion of July, the electric shock of which has already opened craters in other lands."<sup>6</sup> The "electric spark" or "electric shock" that here, as in Allen's description to King George, transmits the spirit of liberty to and across Europe, seems to fulfill the dream expressed by Daniel Webster six years

earlier in his oration commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill. "Heaven saw fit to ordain," Webster tells his auditors, "that the electric spark of liberty should be conducted, through you, from the New World to the old; and we, who are now here to perform this duty of patriotism, have all of us long ago received it in charge from our fathers to cherish your name and your virtues."<sup>7</sup>

Both Lafayette and Catharine Maria Sedgwick attended the Bunker Hill dedication at Webster's invitation, and Lafayette makes a brief, though important, appearance in *The Linwoods*.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the novel provides an extended narrative elaboration on the trope I have been describing, in which the spirit of liberty is "conducted," like an electric spark, across both space and time, linking the Old and New Worlds as well as past and present generations. The latter of these—linking generations—is the explicit aim of *The Linwoods*. As Sedgwick states in her preface, echoing Webster, she hopes to "deepen" her readers' "gratitude to their patriot-fathers," which "will tend to increase their fidelity to the free institutions transmitted to them" (5, emphasis added). In the service of this goal—performing the cultural work of historical transmission—a rhetoric of electricity informs *The Linwoods* on both the thematic and the formal levels. That is to say, thematically, the rejection of *hereditary* transmission motivates both the rebel cause and the novel's central conflict: early in the novel, George Washington asserts, "we are contending against hereditary claims" (73), and espousing that same rebel cause, Herbert Linwood faces dispossession by his Tory father. Consequently, this rejection of British-style *hereditary* transmission necessitates the transmission of republican virtue and the love of freedom by means *other than* inheritance—which is why, in *The Linwoods*, to transmit is not to pass on or pass down; rather, it is to pass *through*, to conduct.

At the same time, electricity in *The Linwoods* serves as more than just a metaphor for the spread of the spirit of liberty. It situates the novel discursively in the two historical periods—the revolutionary past and the 1830s present—that Sedgwick's historical romance sets out to connect.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, during the revolutionary period, the new science of electricity, taken up in the political arena, provided a useful language with

which to describe the revolutionary impulse and the spirit of republicanism. On the other hand, the 1830s, during which a similar set of figures flourished in newly revolutionary Europe, also marked a revival of interest in the eighteenth-century pseudoscience variously known as galvanism, mesmerism, or animal magnetism—a phenomenon that understood electricity as a vital fluid, a kind of animating life force capable of being passed between sympathetic bodies.

In this essay, I map an early U.S. cultural nexus of revolution, sympathy, and electricity and situate *The Linwoods* within it—joining previous readers in considering Sedgwick’s participation in literary conceptions of the American nation.<sup>10</sup> The text itself, I argue, attempts to hypostatize the kind of transmission that it describes. Beyond that, my reading contributes to the “reconceptualization of American literary history” that Carolyn L. Karcher argues the “recovery” of Sedgwick’s literary output necessarily entails.<sup>11</sup> As Karcher notes, Sedgwick pioneered such fictional forms as the novel of manners, realism, short fiction, and the urban novel. Sedgwick also, as I demonstrate, was one of the first American writers to engage extensively the popular phenomena of mesmerism and animal magnetism, which, along with other occult practices and pseudosciences in the 1840s and 1850s, captured the imaginations of prominent figures in American romanticism, including Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Poe, Douglass, and Margaret Fuller. Sedgwick’s incorporation of the language and the tropes of animal magnetism in her fiction of the 1830s, then, prefigures what Martin Willis and Paul Gilmore have termed “romantic electricity.”<sup>12</sup>



### “ELECTRICAL POLITICS”

In Sedgwick’s revolutionary America, liberty and equality pass like fire or currents of electricity from one body to another, linking together those who receive, conduct, and transmit into what Sedgwick calls an “electric chain.” A recurring figure in Sedgwick’s writing specifically and in antebellum print culture generally, the “electric chain” suggests, among other things, a

bond of sympathetic human connection as well as the invisible link between the material and spiritual spheres. But the meanings ascribed to the chain in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s also have roots in the eighteenth century—especially in the period of the American and French revolutions—and the political valences then attributed to the power of electricity.<sup>13</sup>

The revolutionary years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw significant advances in the science of electricity, from Luigi Galvani's discovery of electricity as an animating force, to Alessandro Volta's development of the first electric cell, to Michael Faraday's groundbreaking experiments in electromagnetism. In his fine recent book *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders*, James Delbourgo explores the foreground of these discoveries and, in particular, the intersection of politics and electricity that characterized the science in British North America. By the 1750s, Delbourgo shows, public exhibitions and demonstrations of electricity had become a popular form of recreation in the American colonies, in part because they "fully engaged the senses of participants through direct physical experience": "It was common, for example, for ladies and gentlemen in the audience to be invited to hold hands and take simultaneous electric shocks in a human circuit." The experience of such actual human chains contributed to what Delbourgo calls "the rhetorical career of electricity during the American Revolution." In this rhetoric, which Delbourgo terms "electrical politics," electricity provided commentators with a useful set of political metaphors for describing the republican impulse, "a language of power through which to articulate the meaning of revolution."<sup>14</sup>

Like Ethan Allen and Daniel Webster, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and other leaders of the American War for Independence turned electrical metaphor to these ends. Adams, for instance, believed that news of the establishment of independent governments in South Carolina and Virginia would "spread through the rest of the colonies like electric fire."<sup>15</sup> Across the Atlantic, Samuel Johnson observed that the rebel leaders "ha[d] been taught, by some master of mischief, how to put in motion the engine of political electricity," how to "attract by the sounds of liberty and property," and how to "repel by those of Popery



and slavery."<sup>16</sup> And in 1805, one commentator, looking back on the revolutionary movements in America and France at the end of the previous century, wrote: "The spirit of liberty, as illy defined or understood by most nations, as the electric fluid, and, without perfect conductors, as fatal in the social world, as ever that is to the natural, has been furiously excited in a large portion of the world. In Europe instead of correcting, it has annihilated old governments; and for one Bastile [*sic*] laid in ruins has erected a thousand scaffolds."<sup>17</sup> Striking a less anxious note, Jared Sparks in his 1832 *Life of Gouverneur Morris* sought "to trace the growth of the spirit of independence" on the eve of the revolution and could only say that, while the actions of the British government certainly "raised this spirit . . . the electric chain of sympathy soon conducted it to all the members of the general body."<sup>18</sup>

As Sparks illustrates, the figuration of revolutionary fervor in terms of electricity that first emerged during the period of the American revolution persisted well into the 1830s, undergoing renewal in response to political events in Europe. One writer in 1825, responding to the recent political turmoil in Greece and Turkey, insists, "The blessings of liberty have reached the ears of our brethren held in bondage, by kings and emperors, like an electric shock they have had their influence and a desperate effort will be made to obtain their free enjoyment."<sup>19</sup> An 1831 report of a Paris celebration of the anniversary of the July 1830 revolution describes the reaction of the revelers upon hearing of Polish resistance to Russian despotism: "The announcement had an electric effect; the national guards and the people embraced each other in transports of joy, and the air was rent by shouts of defiance to the power of the despot, and vows of devotion to the cause of the patriots."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, an 1835 article in the *Southern Literary Messenger* titled "Influence of Free Governments on the Mind" argues that "free governments, by their very nature, encourage . . . mutual action of mind on mind." "A superior thought," the essay continues, "spreads with electric rapidity through every nerve of the social frame."<sup>21</sup>

The "electrical politics" that attended both the American War for Independence and the American discourse of European

revolution in the 1820s and 1830s helps to contextualize the preoccupation with transmission in *The Linwoods*. Electricity, as figured both in nineteenth-century political discourse and in the novel, traverses historical and national boundaries and, in doing so, links generations. For instance: Near the beginning of the novel, as Eliot Lee prepares to leave home to join Washington's rebel army, his family and friends gather to see him off. His well-wishers include the local Congregational minister, whose appearance leads Sedgwick's narrator into a digression on the disappearance of such "reverend divines": "Ill would they have brooked these days of unquestioned equality of rights . . . of free publishing and freer thinking . . . but peace be with them! . . . They preached equality in Heaven, but little thought it was the kingdom to come on earth. They were the electric chain, unconscious of the celestial fire they transmitted" (55). Eliot himself, we have learned earlier, is a "lineal descendant from one of the renowned *pilgrim fathers*, whose nobility . . . will be transmitted by their sons on the Missouri and the Oregon, when the stars and garters of Europe have perished and are forgotten" (25). Later, in a letter to his mother, Eliot wonders why England does "not respect in her children the transmitted character of their fathers!" And in the same letter, Eliot describes the rebel leaders as "bold with the transmitted spirit of freedom, sown at broadcast by our Pilgrim fathers" (61–62).

This transmission of "celestial fire" effectively captures what Delbourgo describes as "the use of the electrified body as a metaphor for the power of republicanism, and as a way of imagining a new national community."<sup>22</sup> Looking back to America's Puritan origins and forward to its Western future, Sedgwick nationalizes the "Pilgrim fathers" just as she proleptically imagines the nation sustained by the "sons on the Missouri and the Oregon." Electrical transmission connects the incipient nation that was yet to be with the nation yet to come. The Revolution—the moment of the novel's setting—thus forms the middle term, the connecting or conducting link, in this (trans)national chain because it represents the historical moment when the national body becomes electrified en masse. Eliot expresses as much, when, in a letter to his mother, he

meditates on the “New-England character.” While “to a cursory observer,” Eliot writes, our society “appears tame,” it nevertheless possesses “a strong under-current”:

Let the individual or the people be roused by a motive that approves itself to the reasoning and religious mind, a fervid-energy, an all-subduing enthusiasm bursts forth, not like an accidental and transient conflagration, but operating, like the elements, to great effects, and irresistibly. This enthusiasm, this central fire is now at its height. It not only inflames the eloquence of the orator, kindles the heart of the soldier, the beacon-lights and strong defences of our land; but it lights the temple of God, and burns on the family altar. (62)

Here, through Eliot, Sedgwick brings together two kinds of “enthusiasm”: the political, rooted in the Enlightenment’s “reasoning . . . mind,” and the religious. Eliot describes the spirit of liberty in the language of evangelical excitement—in which people are “roused,” possessed by “fervid-energy” and “enthusiasm,” “inflame[d].” At the same time, this brand of enthusiasm appears to be a function of some natural law insofar as it “operate[s] like the elements” and is “irresistibl[e].” In its blending of the religious and the political, Eliot’s depiction of “New-England character” presents a nineteenth-century variation on Delbourgo’s description of eighteenth-century electrical politics as “a discourse on the cusp between Enlightenment and Romanticism.”<sup>23</sup> The enthusiasm of which Eliot (and behind him Sedgwick) approves here, although couched in the language of religious enthusiasm or, perhaps, romantic revelation, is in fact political republicanism, the result of a “central fire” lit, it would seem, by nature itself.

Hence it’s no accident that the text’s figures of transmission and electrification tend to cluster around Eliot Lee. As a member of “nature’s aristocracy” (25, 157), he functions as the novel’s primary conductor of the spirit of liberty. Early on, for instance, in a letter to Herbert Linwood, the aristocratic

Jasper Meredith notes that Eliot “might pass current anywhere” (32), a common figure of speech that Sedgwick exploits for its dual meanings. Conventionally, to “pass current” is, of course, simply to be received as genuine, as good coin. But where Jasper sees people only in terms of their pecuniary value, Sedgwick would have us see them in terms of their conductivity. Which is to say that to “pass current” also means to convey—or serve as the medium for—the flow of electricity. Eliot’s real value is his ability to conduct, to transmit to others the spirit of republicanism. In this regard, it is altogether fitting that he should be described in the novel as “true metal” (75) and the very “personation of celestial energy” (180).

Indeed, Eliot has an electrifying effect on those with whom he comes into contact. Late in the novel, as Eliot’s devoted companion, the simpleton Kisel, faces execution, he finds himself within a few feet of Eliot, when suddenly “a ray of consciousness seem[s] to shoot athwart his mind”—and upon recognizing the other man, he becomes “electrified, his joints . . . reset, his nerves re-strung” (282). Eliot affects Isabella Linwood even more powerfully. Early in the narrative, Isabella remains loyal to her father’s Tory position. In the presence of Eliot, however—most notably at Sir Henry Clinton’s dinner—she experiences new sensations, a gradual independence that appears to be the result of an electrical current pulsing its way through her body. Upon hearing Sir Henry express what Sedgwick calls his natural “antipathy” toward the rebels “for the first time,” “an American feeling [shoots] athwart her mind.” It is as if “a new light ha[s] broken upon her, and she beg[ins] to see old subjects in a fresh aspect” (127).

Isabella’s response to Eliot is only possible because she does not share Sir Henry’s ingrained “antipathy,” which is to say that she, too, is capable of both receiving and transmitting the electrical current of republicanism. Isabella’s responsiveness to conductivity is demonstrated early in the novel when, in a letter to Bessie Lee, she recounts her brother Herbert’s declaration of rebel sympathies to their father. As Mr. Linwood commended Herbert for his integrity—choose what side he may—Isabella writes, “I ventured to look up—their eyes met—I saw a beam of pleasure flashing from them, and passing like

an electric spark from one heart to another" (37). In a similar encounter later in the novel, after Isabella has herself caught the electric spark from Eliot, she not only perceives but transmits it. As Herbert's political loyalties waver in response to a potential reunion with his father, Isabella, merely by speaking Herbert's name, restores him to his resolve. "Her voice thrilled through his soul," Sedgwick writes, "[and he] started as if he were electrified; his eye met hers, and the evil spirits of doubt and irresolution were overcome" (148).

Sedgwick's version of electrical politics thus seems to inscribe a kind of republican instrumentalism, in which the value of the novel's heroes and heroines depends less on their actions or even their virtues than it does on their role as conduits for the spread of republican sentiment. After all, to pass current, to conduct, is a strangely passive activity. The effect that, say, Eliot Lee has on others has less to do with what he does than simply with who (or what) he is. Similarly, Isabella doesn't so much choose to turn rebel as she simply begins to obey the "American feelings" that shoot "athwart her mind." On this view, republicanism renders subjects (or citizens-to-be) oddly passive, as if they are determined, in the novel at least, by a kind of political predestination in which one either involuntarily conducts and transmits—passes current—or doesn't. Needless to say, such a view of the republican individual is potentially dangerous—insofar as passivity and obedience are easily manipulable—which is why the novel also evinces more than a little anxiety about its promotion of republican instrumentalism—an anxiety over just the kind of "passive citizenship" that Russ Castronovo argues was produced by the "occult public sphere" of the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>24</sup> In order to understand and make sense of this anxiety over passivity and obedience in *The Linwoods*, it will help to consider that which facilitates the passing of current in the novel: sympathy.



#### THE (ELECTRIC) POWER OF SYMPATHY

Sympathy is the novel's term for those who, like Eliot Lee and Isabella Linwood, can receive and transmit the revolution-

ary spirit. Of course, the central importance of sympathy in Sedgwick's work will likely come as no surprise to anyone familiar with critical discussions of either Sedgwick or the tradition of antebellum fiction written by women.<sup>25</sup> But here I want to distinguish the meanings of sympathy in *The Linwoods* from its meanings in the sentimental tradition more broadly, the latter often associated Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous injunction to readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "to feel right."<sup>26</sup> By contrast, there were two alternative, though related, concepts of sympathy with roots in scientific discourses of electricity and magnetism and in medical discourses of the body and healing. Robert S. Cox, for instance, distinguishes social sympathy, derived, most notably, from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and aligned with sentimental sympathy, from what he calls "occult" and "physiological" conceptions of sympathy. The province of natural philosophy and a host of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sciences and pseudosciences, the occult and the physiological understandings of sympathy posited the existence in the universe of invisible forces of attraction, forces that provide unseen links between parts of the body, body and soul, matter and mind, the physical and spiritual realms. The occult view saw sympathy as "a powerful, primal force of nature, a mutual attraction between bodies," while "physiological sympathy referred to the transmission of sensation through the nervous system." Indeed, Cox notes that, by the 1820s, inquiry into the workings of sympathy had become central to medical science.<sup>27</sup>

Just as importantly, these discourses of sympathy—and antipathy—provided a way to understand and explain social relations in medical and scientific, rather than just emotional, terms. An 1834 article called "Sympathies and Prejudices," for instance, begins by distinguishing between "compassion—that 'sympathy with others' woe,' one of the most exquisite feelings of our nature," and the "metaphysical meaning" of sympathy, "the secret and involuntary spell which draws us towards objects, in the same proportion and with the same force that antipathy turns us from them." The article argues further that, contrary to commonly held views about the desirability of cultivating sympathy as compassion, "metaphysical" sympathy (like occult

sympathy) is potentially harmful, as it “lead[s] to absolute and positive ill when injurious at all.” That is, unlike the person who has a “natural aversion” to, say, “spinach [or] parsnips,” or even “Jews [or] Frenchmen,” “he or she whose sympathies lead him or her to favourite viands, liqueurs, or *persons*, runs risks—which I need not enlarge on.” Such sympathies and antipathies are likewise observable in the natural world: “Among minerals and metals, gold and mercury unite together with an ardor equal to human friendships; while others oppose and fly off from their associates in the crucible, with as much sputtering and asperity as might be found among the whist-players of the most romantic unsophisticated village.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in Sedgwick’s fiction, sympathy often signifies a principle of social cohesion that is more than just fellow feeling, but is closer to understandings of sympathy as a kind of magnetic attraction, an involuntary drawing together of distinct bodies by some unseen force. In her novel *Home*, published in 1835, the same year as *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick writes: “In the country the tie of human brotherhood is felt through the circle, the social electric chain is bound so closely that the vibration of every touch is felt. We not only sympathize with the great joys and sorrows of our neighbors, but in all the little circumstances that make up life.” In a short story, “The Eldest Sister,” also published in 1835 in *Tales and Sketches*, Sedgwick’s narrator says that “sympathy is the electric touch.” And in another tale, “The Unpresuming Mr. Hudson,” Sedgwick refers to “sympathy” as “the electric chain of social being.”<sup>29</sup>

Sedgwick’s equation of sympathy and electricity as a means of expressing the invisible bonds, or chains, that link individuals together—whether romantically, socially, or politically—serves the electrical politics that, I have been arguing, are central to the portrayal of the Revolution in *The Linwoods*. But in the 1830s, both the notion of sympathy as a universal principle of attraction and the understanding of electricity as a fluid that passes between bodies found their most powerful expression in the discourse of mesmerism or animal magnetism. First popularized at the end of the eighteenth century by the German scientist Franz Anton Mesmer, animal magnetism underwent a significant revival in the U.S. beginning in the early 1830s.

In American studies, the popularization of mesmerism and animal magnetism has more commonly been associated with the 1840s and 1850s, part of the more general cultural fascination with spiritualist phenomena that, as a number of studies have shown, informs the literary works of such writers as Poe and Hawthorne. Robert Fuller credits the Frenchman Charles Poyen's lecture tour in 1836 with first introducing Americans to animal magnetism. But an extensive interest in the subject existed earlier in the decade. For instance, while English-language editions of important works by European proponents of magnetism, such as the Marquis de Puységur, J. P. F. Deleuze, and Jules Dupotet did not appear in the U.S. until the end of the 1830s and the early 1840s, American journals reviewed those works in translation as early as 1828. And in 1833, a number of American journals took great, if somewhat astonished, interest in an 1831 report from the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris, translated into English by J. C. Colquhoun, apparently giving credence to the previously discredited science of animal magnetism.<sup>30</sup>

Drawing on seventeenth-century medical practices that, as Bruce Mills has shown, applied the principle of sympathy as a technique for healing, proponents of animal magnetism understood sympathy and antipathy as synonyms for electromagnetic attraction and repulsion—a kind of organizing principle of both the universe and human physiology. As an 1837 article on animal magnetism from the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* puts it, "An extensive variety of facts, linked together under the terms of sympathy, of fascination, of antipathy, or irritation and counter-irritation . . . point to the nervous system as the source of some unrevealed mode of affection." And according to the *American Quarterly Review* of 1828, "To the effects of magnetism were also referred all those sympathies and antipathies so generally observable in nature; and as this fluid was the bond of union and harmony between different bodies, it was also believed to exist in full force between their parts, should these be ever separated."<sup>31</sup> Mesmer and his nineteenth-century disciples believed that all celestial and animated bodies were linked by this universal fluid diffused throughout nature.<sup>32</sup> This "electrical fluid," which Mesmer termed animal magnetism, could be



controlled and passed from one body to another by the skilled magnetizer. Thus harnessed, the magnetic fluid could produce remarkable effects and aid in healing. One account describes a mesmerist session as follows:

Magnetism is transmitted by certain movements, called passes,—sometimes by the mere will of the magnetizer, by fixing his eyes on the party—and even without the consciousness or suspicion of those who are magnetized: that Magnetism produces evidently slight convulsive moments, resembling electric shocks, a lethargy more or less profound—sighing—somnia—somnia—and in a small number of cases, what the magnetizers call somnambulism—a state which gives rise to the development of some new faculties, known by the name of clairvoyance, intuition, prevision.<sup>33</sup>

By the time she wrote *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick was clearly aware of scientific theories proposing both the existence of a universal fluid diffused throughout nature and, more particularly, the principles of and claims for animal magnetism. In her second novel, *Redwood* (1824), Sedgwick had asserted that “all the works of nature are linked together by an invisible, an ‘electric chain.’” And in a journal entry of 1833, Sedgwick describes attending a religious revival led by a “coarse and revolting” fanatic named Foote. “The power of these people,” Sedgwick writes, “like that of the animal magnetizer is neutralized if a sceptic is present.” Indeed, Sedgwick maintained an interest in animal magnetism throughout her career. In a sketch entitled “A Vision,” first published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in 1842, Sedgwick describes a nature walk, where, sitting down to rest, she finds herself falling into a “drowsy reverie,” “but not sleep of an ordinary kind”: “My senses preserved their power unshackled by gross mortal elements and unlimited in their action by time or space. I seemed suddenly endowed with the clairvoyance of the Mesmerites.”<sup>34</sup>

Another sketch, “Magnetism among the Shakers” (1849),

recounts a remarkable incident in which an old Shaker man named Wilcox is asked by a “young brother” of the sect to deliver to a “young sister” a mysterious white pear—a pear that, in Wilcox’s account, is entirely invisible. Registering the appropriate incredulity, Sedgwick’s narrator can only speculate that “Wilcox [is] merely made the medium of a fact or sentiment, symbolized by the white pear.” But “whatever the case,” she concludes, “animal magnetism has penetrated into the cold and dark recesses of the Shakers.”<sup>35</sup> Both the Foote anecdote and the Shaker sketch suggest that Sedgwick met the powers attributed to animal magnetism with skepticism. Yet, like Hawthorne, as Samuel Coale has shown, she nevertheless found in it a language with which to explain the remarkable or transformative power of human sympathy and connection.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in an autobiography written much later in her career, she describes her early education to her niece Alice, recalling that her father read to her from Hume, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. “Certainly, I did not understand them,” Sedgwick writes, “but some glances of celestial light reached my soul, and I caught from his magnetic sympathy some elevation of feeling.”<sup>37</sup>

Of all her written work, *The Linwoods* represents Sedgwick’s most extensive use of the discourses of sympathy and magnetism. For one thing, Tories and Whigs, loyalists and rebels, are typically marked in the novel by their natural sympathies and antipathies. Sir Henry Clinton, the British general, remarks that “antipathies are stubborn” and describes his own as a “natural aversion to an American,” by which he means, “of course, a rebel American” (127). Similarly, the aristocratic Helen Ruthven, as Herbert remarks, “makes no secret of her antipathy to a rebel—*per se* a rebel” (83). Even Isabella, prior to being electrified by her acquaintance with Eliot, tells Bessie that she has “an *antipathy* to the New-Englanders” (39). As for the Tory Jasper Meredith, we learn early on that “his tastes [are] aristocratic and feudal—his sympathies with the monarch, not the people,” a sure sign he is not to be trusted. Mr. Linwood, however, presents a more complicated case (42). Pulled in two directions by his loyalty to the king and his love for his son, Mr. Linwood’s sympathies are out of sorts. As a result of this “conflict of . . . political and natural affections,”

he finds himself stricken with gout (183). The implication is clear: Mr. Linwood's illness issues from his decision to break the familial "bond of union and harmony," to turn away from his "natural" affections; his disease thus seems a manifestation of divided sympathies.<sup>38</sup>

That Sedgwick draws explicitly on the discourse of animal magnetism in these instances is made clear from the start, in the novel's opening chapter, where Isabella, Herbert, Bessie Lee, and Jasper Meredith visit the fortune-teller Effie. The scene, Phillip Gould rightly notes, "gently debunks Dame Effie's reputed powers," but "it also establishes the relative positions from which virtuous characters like Isabella Linwood and Eliot Lee will develop."<sup>39</sup> I would add that such development turns on the characters' sympathies—not just their feelings for one another but their susceptibility to and gravitation toward various unseen forces. For instance, Isabella is at first reluctant to have her fortune told. When her turn comes, she finds herself "exactly at that point of credulity where much depends on the sympathy of others." At which point Sedgwick's narrator interjects, "It is said to be essential to the success of animal magnetism, that not only the operator and the subject, but the spectators, should believe" (13). The statement seems a bit jarring. Effie, after all, is no mesmerist. It might be argued, of course, that the skeptic Sedgwick simply substitutes one superstition for another. But in fact the reference is perfectly appropriate here: what's at stake is not Isabella's belief or unbelief in Effie's powers but Isabella's (and the other characters') sympathetic connections to others. In this regard, Isabella's doubts in the novel's opening anticipate her political doubts later. Just as she is converted to the rebel cause by Eliot's electrification, so in the fortune-telling scene is she converted into a skeptic by Herbert, who, as Isabella nervously awaits her fortune, stands "charged" and then proceeds to ridicule Effie's supernatural powers. The effect of Herbert's "charge" upon Isabella becomes immediately apparent when Jasper Meredith, in response to his own fortune says, "I bow to destiny," to which Isabella responds, "I do not" (15).

These respective attitudes toward destiny and chance turn out to be crucially important both to the novel's interest in transmission and to its engagement with the discourses of animal magnetism and mesmerism. That is, insofar as hereditary transmission is simply a matter of certain traits and possessions passed down from one's forebears, then one is utterly subject to the past; one's destiny is already determined. Electrical transmission, by contrast, "charges" individuals to act. This is why, in the novel, the English submit to destiny, while the American rebels refuse to do so and instead attempt to shape their own futures. To submit to destiny and remain "at the mercy of chance" is, in effect, to be mesmerized, to be left to the mercy of the power of the mesmerist. Consider Bessie Lee, who also has her fortune told. Bessie is even more reluctant than Isabella to face Effie and when she does becomes visibly "excited," so much so that her "heart throb[s] audibly," causing Herbert to step in "to stop the current that [is] becoming too strong" for her (14). Unlike Herbert and Isabella, Bessie shows no signs of skepticism, remarking only, with tears in her eyes, that Effie "is right—right in all" (15). Sedgwick registers her disapproval of credulity like Bessie's soon after, when she has her narrator remark that Bessie's "destiny" appears to be "passive obedience" (18).

But what distinguishes Bessie's "passive obedience" from the passivity implied by the kind of republican instrumentalism we have already seen? The answer lies in what Bessie herself refers to as her own "over-credulous fancy" (299). That is, Sedgwick differentiates *kinds* of sympathetic or magnetic influence, just as she differentiates, in Eliot's description of the electrification of New England character, kinds of "enthusiasm." The distinction lies not between true and false sympathies but between currents that are as passively transmitted as they are received (as in electrical politics) and those that are artificially—or willfully—imposed (as in animal magnetism). On the former side lie familial affection, republican selflessness, the spirit of liberty, and—crucially, as we'll see—writing; on the latter lie hereditary ties, political submission, religious fanaticism, and as we'll also see, romantic blandishments.



## MAGNETISM'S PASSIVE SUBJECTS

The “passive obedience” of the patient, or more precisely, the submission of his or her volition to the mesmerist, was probably the single greatest source of worry about the practice of animal magnetism. As an account from the *Family Magazine* in 1835 puts it, animal magnetism “refers to a power which a stronger person is supposed to be able to exert over a weaker person, or a healthy over a diseased, whereby, through a mere exertion of the will in some cases . . . the former throws the latter into a state of sleep, during which there are experienced certain peculiar sensations, arising from nervous excitement, and which may have the best effects upon the health of the patient.”<sup>40</sup> Both Emerson and Hawthorne, like many of their contemporaries, recognized the potential for abuse in such a relation, expressing concern in their journals and letters for the magnetized patient’s subordination of his or her will to the mesmerist. Indeed, in its most extreme form, the mesmerist’s reputed power could lead unscrupulous operators to prey upon the weakness of impressionable young women. As Robert Fuller has shown, this gender imbalance—and its attendant potential for abuse—typified popular exhibitions of animal magnetism in the 1840s and 1850s, which almost always featured a male mesmerist and a young female subject.<sup>41</sup> An 1845 pamphlet titled *Confessions of a Magnetizer*, for example, tells of the mesmerist-author’s inability to resist taking advantage of the young women who came under his spell.<sup>42</sup> A number of critics have shown how Hawthorne drew upon this erotics of power in *The Blithedale Romance*, where, as Castronovo notes, “each suggestion of spiritual phenomena and magnetic influence is laden with malignant sympathy.”<sup>43</sup>

All of which is simply to say that Effie’s is not the only current too strong for Bessie Lee. One of the first things the reader learns about Bessie is that she has “a general susceptibility to external impressions—one might easily . . . fanc[y] she ha[s] an extra set of nerves” (8). Her passivity, her “fragility of constitution” (71), leaves her vulnerable to the magnetic influence of the coxcomb Jasper Meredith, who functions as

the novel's most conspicuous mesmerist, eventually holding Bessie Lee in thrall—"he enjoyed," the narrator says, "his power over her" (43)—and inducing in her, just as animal magnetism was believed to do, a kind of somnambulistic state that leads to her dangerous journey from New England to New York. J. C. Colquhoun remarks in the introduction to his translation of the 1831 French Academy report that "in general, strong and healthy persons exhibit little susceptibility" to magnetic treatment, while "with regard to physical constitution, experience seems to have demonstrated that the magnetizer ought to possess a preponderance of energy over his patient."<sup>44</sup> Yet as vulnerable as Bessie's "susceptibility of heart" leaves her, Isabella is nearly as susceptible to Meredith's magnetism as Bessie is (Isabella does, after all, fall in love with him) (71). Indeed, Sedgwick often describes the exchanges between Isabella and Meredith in the language of animal magnetism. For example, volunteering to help Isabella save Herbert from imprisonment, Meredith at one point in their conversation "fixe[s] his piercing eyes on Isabella" (188). The effect of this gaze parallels the galvanizing effect Eliot had on Isabella earlier: once again, "it seem[s] that something new ha[s] been infused into her mind" (188). And sure enough, the stratagem seems to work, as Isabella, soon after, ceases to resist: "her hand, which he had taken, was no longer cold and passive, but returned the grasp of his" (192). But just as "doubt and resolution" are "vanishing together," Mrs. Linwood interrupts the almost-lovers, presumably rescuing Isabella from a terrible mistake.

Of course, Meredith's animal magnetism is clearly "imposture," artificially produced (16). His method is to exert his own will by pretending to be under the control of others': "My hope, my wish, my purpose, Isabella," he says to her, "is to be in all things moulded and governed by your will" (189). And moments later, confessing his love: "You have it in your power . . . to infuse what opinions you will into my mind" (192). Ultimately, Isabella appears to resist Meredith's artful manipulations, in no small part because, as we learn later, she "ha[s] learned to master herself"—or as she tells Mrs. Archer, thinking of her love for Eliot Lee: "From my childhood I have been in thralldom—groping in mist. Now I stand in a clear light—I see

objects in their true colours—I am mistress of myself” (302). Yet at the end of the novel, Sedgwick’s narrator all but subverts Isabella’s sense of her own mastery: “How much of Isabella’s enthusiasms in the American cause was to be attributed to her intercourse with Eliot Lee,” the narrator notes wryly, “we leave to be determined by her peers” (345).

One point here, again, is that Isabella turns out to be no less susceptible than Bessie. A second point, however, is that the primary difference between the two women is that Isabella avoids Bessie’s fate not just because she is of stronger mettle/metal but because she has an alternative: the equally galvanizing effect produced on her by Eliot Lee. Strangely enough, Helen Ruthven expresses this argument almost precisely. As she says to Meredith: “Suppose I am interested, in love if you please, with a particular individual—I see another who is to him Hyperion to a satyr, and by a fixed law of nature one attraction must be overcome by the other. It is not a deliberate or a voluntary change—it certainly is not caprice: I am but the passive subject of an irresistible power” (123). Universal forces of attraction—sympathies—Helen asserts, render everyone powerless. Or as she says a moment later, “sympathy—a queer name, is it not?—is always alive and susceptible, a portion of the soul, a part of life; a part! life itself!” (123). Stranger still, in this, Helen and Isabella, villainess and heroine, turn out to be in perfect agreement. As Isabella tells Bessie, “I know that we have no power whatever over our affections” (39). Even Eliot Lee understands “that it is not a matter of volition to love or not to love” (152).

Sedgwick’s abiding interest in “the ramifications of passivity, along both political and gender lines,” according to Susan K. Harris, produces a recurring motif in Sedgwick’s fiction: the pairing of active and passive female characters.<sup>45</sup> But in *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick departs from this stark “dialectic” (277), contrasting instead two kinds of passivity: Isabella’s conductivity as opposed to Bessie’s receptivity. The trouble with Bessie never involves her sympathies—at least not her political ones. Unlike Isabella, she is a rebel from the start. It’s just that Bessie’s current isn’t strong enough to shock Meredith into turning Whig. In other words, Bessie can receive but cannot transmit the spirit

of liberty. As Colquhoun notes, “every individual does not possess the capability of operating magnetically upon others”; the ability appears to be “a gift of nature.”<sup>46</sup> This makes Bessie’s relationship to Meredith, unlike Isabella’s, rather more unbalanced in terms of “energy” and power. As a result, Bessie winds up in just the sort of mesmeric relation that figures like Emerson and Hawthorne—and presumably Sedgwick as well—most feared: one in which the magnetizer gains control over the will of his (or her) subject.



#### HEALING AND THE MAGNETIC SLEEP

At the same time—and this helps both to explain why Sedgwick undercuts Isabella’s self-mastery and to reveal the novel’s ambivalence toward animal magnetism—it turns out that “thralldom” has its advantages. In the 1830s and later, by far the most extraordinary effect attributed to magnetism—and that to which the French Academy devoted much of its attention—was the magnetic sleep or somnambulistic trance the magnetizer induced in the patient. According to Colquhoun, “the acts of the somnambulist are almost always performed with a degree of freedom, boldness, and precision superior to what he manifests when awake; and . . . he generally succeeds in every thing he attempts.” The somnambulist seems to be “guided by other senses or instincts”: “he is protected from injury by other means and guarantee of security, than those by which his conduct is regulated in his ordinary waking state.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the magnetic sleep, as Sedgwick’s “A Vision” illustrates, was believed to grant the subject remarkable powers of perception and even clairvoyance. An 1833 article from the *Literary Journal* asserts that, while in the magnetic sleep, “the patient obtains a luminous knowledge of the inward state of his body and mind, calculates the diagnostics which will arise as a natural consequence, and determines the most effective remedies for their removal.” Even more remarkable than the curative potential of somnambulism was the access the magnetized subject purportedly gained to the spiritual realm, the entry “into a more sublime contemplation of universal nature”: “his



sight penetrates the hidden things of time past, and he sees the distant and unknown as the present, and the fruit of the future while it is still slumbering in the germ."<sup>48</sup>

Reports of the extraordinary acts performed by somnambulists—displaying unusual strength and agility, reading with eyes closed, identifying objects in adjacent rooms—quickly became staples in American newspapers and journals. Sedgwick likely would have known, for instance, about the case of Jane C. Rider, the “Springfield Somnambulist.”<sup>49</sup> The servant of a wealthy family living in Springfield, Massachusetts, Rider began sleepwalking—performing such normal household duties as preparing meals in the middle of the night with her eyes closed—in June of 1833. Rider was treated by a Boston physician, L. W. Belden, who published an extensive account in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1834. News of Rider’s feats were also published widely in local newspapers, capturing the attention of both the public and the local medical establishment. And while her somnambulism was not induced by a magnetist, her case did appear to many to lend support to the theory. Belden himself conceded that, “amid much that [was] false and deceptive in the observations and experiments . . . offered to prove the existence” of animal magnetism, it was possible that “the increased activity of some of the intellectual or perceptive faculties” in Rider were the result of a similar influence. “That this state of the cerebral organs will not account for all that is *alleged* to be true in animal magnetism, I am aware,” Belden concludes, “but it *may* be the *nucleus* which supports the errors which cluster around it.”<sup>50</sup>

Bessie’s “mental alienation” possesses much of the character of somnambulism, including both its negative and its positive effects (248). On the one hand, prior to her journey to New York, she writes to her brother Eliot that she has been “riveted by certain charms,” which she must return to Meredith, “who has so long been the lord of [her] affections and the master of [her] mind” (212). On the other, Bessie seems to have achieved what the magnetizers referred to as the “lucid vision” state that attends the magnetic sleep: “The days are all clear,” she tells Eliot, “and the nights so beautiful, that I would not sleep if I could.”<sup>51</sup> What’s more, Bessie seems to have achieved a state of

perception that grants her access to and knowledge of the spirit world: "Oh, Eliot! I have heard the music 'of the young eyed cherubims;' and I have learned secrets—wonderful secrets of the offices and relations of spirits" (211). Embarking on her journey to New York with uncharacteristic boldness, Bessie relies upon supernatural protection—"They do guard me—the blessed angels"—certain that she is "attended by that 'strong siding champion, conscience,'" and she assures Lafayette that "there is not the slightest danger in [her] going to New York." Pointedly, she sets off at night traveling as if she were "a disembodied spirit," a "wanderer from the celestial sphere," "mingling with her celestial meditations one earthly purpose" (212, 253, 231, 254).

But above all, Bessie's trip is a journey of healing, undertaken to cure herself of Meredith and his powerful hold on her mind. What's more, her diagnostic abilities extend to others, as she seems to have been granted a privileged insight into the sympathies of her friends—in particular, the bond between Isabella and Eliot. Fittingly, then, Sedgwick stages the novel's emotional climax as a kind of curative ritual in which Bessie gathers together Isabella, Eliot, and Herbert, exposing both Meredith's imposture (by returning to him, as she says, "those charms and spells by which [her] soul was bound") and the true state of affections between Isabella and her rival suitors, Meredith and Eliot (297).

Among the effects Bessie produces during the ritual is a gold charm Meredith has given her inside an envelope upon which he has written a snatch of verse:

Can she who weaves electric chains to bind the heart,  
 Refuse the golden links that boast no mystic art?  
 (299)

Meredith's couplet recalls his attempt to exert his will upon Isabella by pretending to submit to hers. It casts Bessie in the role of mesmerist, "she who weaves electric chains," and himself as the passive subject, the one who "boast[s] no mystic art." But of course just the opposite is the case: the guileless Bessie has woven no electric chains (in fact, as the novel's numerous

instances of conductivity suggest, electric chains can't be woven, since one passes current involuntarily), while Meredith's blandishments are nothing *but* art.<sup>52</sup>

The centerpiece of the scene, however, is a pencil, the symbol through which Sedgwick links Bessie's remarkable powers of perception directly to writing and, I want to suggest, to the power of literature to transmit and transform. "How many thoughts has this little instrument unlocked," Bessie exclaims, "—what feelings has it touched—what affections have hovered over its point, and gone thrilling back through the heart! You must certainly take this, Isabella; for there is yet a wonderful power in this magical little pencil—it can make such revelations!" Here Sedgwick engages in a bit of narrative self-consciousness about the function of her own text within the processes of passing current that also forms its subject. The very instrument that symbolizes Meredith's artfulness—it is, as Bessie says, the pencil with which they "copied and scribbled poetry together" (299)—also symbolizes the thrills of the heart that so many believed motivated and spread the spirit of the American revolution and that, potentially, could "make such revelations" in the present and future. For Isabella, that simply means (potentially) confessing her love for Eliot and (certainly) writing what Robert Daly drolly calls a "truly eviscerating Dear John letter" to Meredith.<sup>53</sup>

But the more important point here is that, through the metonymy of the pencil, Sedgwick implicates her own work of historical fiction in the making of revelations, chief among them the revelation made "'sixty years since' in America": "Our revolutionary contest," Sedgwick's narrator editorializes early in the novel, "by placing men in new relations, often exhibited in new force and beauty the ties that bind together the human family. Sometimes, it is true, they were lightly snapped asunder, but oftener they manifested an all-resisting force, and a union that, as in some chemical combinations, no test could dissolve" (101). The language of science here once again recalls the invisible and irresistible workings of sympathy and electromagnetic attraction, ideas that appeal to the romantic imagination, in part, because they seem to provide material access to the spiritual realm. "Revelations"—communications of things unknown

by way of the divine—cross those same boundaries; they are, we might say, celestial transmissions. And while Sedgwick surely doesn't mean to suggest, as Stowe did of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that her novel was divinely inspired, Sedgwick does mean, as she explicitly states in the preface, to "exhibit" (7)—a term that marks the uneasy tensions between artful manipulation and passive transmission. That is, to exhibit means not only *to represent* but also *to manifest*, to reveal a presence, and even *to administer*.

*The Linwoods* strives for presence, the presence of the American past. The novel seeks not so much to represent the history of the Revolution as simply to function as the medium for the transmission of its spirit to readers in the present and the future. This conception of the function or effect of literature anticipates the epistemological shift in which, as Bruce Mills compellingly argues, the science of animal magnetism participates: a move toward "a creative and critical practice," typical of the American Renaissance, "that shifts the emphasis from constructing a national literature responsive to historical and geographical realities . . . to developing literary forms alert to the fluidity and dynamic qualities of inward perception." Writers like Poe and Fuller—not to mention Emerson and Whitman—"could not help but see similarities between the emphasis on attention and intention in the healing arts," like animal magnetism, "and in the artful production of specific effects in a 'sympathetic' readership."<sup>54</sup> As we've seen, Sedgwick betrays more than a little anxiety over "the artful production of . . . effects," which is why, finally, she appears far more comfortable with electric politics than with animal magnetism. For that reason, I don't mean to suggest that Sedgwick quite made the later romantics' "inward turn" entirely. What I do mean to suggest, however, is that her early literary engagement with electrical sciences and animal magnetism—and, what's more, her apparent desire *to administer* to readers of *The Linwoods* the kind of "electric shock" that so charged the revolutionary generation—prefigures in striking ways the work of Poe, Hawthorne, and others, thereby placing the novel near the beginning of the cultural transformation Mills describes. That is to say, however much we may view *The Linwoods* as a product of an older literary paradigm devoted merely to excavating the

materials for a national literature, the novel also participates in the movement toward what Emerson famously called “a poetry of insight, not of tradition.”<sup>55</sup> Thus *The Linwoods* provides yet another opportunity to reconsider Sedgwick’s substantial contributions to U.S. literary history—in particular, her involvement in some of the main currents in the development of American literary romanticism.

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#### NOTES

1. Albert Gorton Greene, “Ethan Allen in England,” *Literary Journal, and Weekly Register of Science and the Arts*, 22 February 1834, 297; hereafter cited parenthetically as “EA.”
2. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clarke (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 239.
3. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 49–50.
4. “Spirit of Liberty . . . 1830,” *American Monthly Magazine*, March 1831, 840.
5. Milford Bard, “The French Revolution,” *Atkinson’s Casket*, January 1831, 18.
6. Marquis de Lafayette, from Bernard Sarrans, *Memoirs of Lafayette and the French Revolution of 1830* (London: Richard Bentley, 1832), 258. Sarrans was Lafayette’s secretary. The book was widely reviewed in U.S. periodicals in 1832–33.
7. Daniel Webster, *An Address Delivered at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Bunker Hill Monument* (Boston: Daniel Cummings, Hilliard, 1825), 23.
8. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *The Linwoods; or, “Sixty Years Since” in America*, ed. Maria Karafilis (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 2002), 261–65; hereafter cited parenthetically. On 17 June 1825, the day of Webster’s address, Sedgwick writes to her brother Charles: “It is expected that a hundred thousand people will be present. Mr. Webster expects to make 15,000 people hear him. He and his wife sent me an invitation to go in their party, so that I think I shall be sure to be among the hearers—the select few.” The following Saturday, Sedgwick writes

- that the address “was in Mr. Webster’s best style of manly eloquence.” See *Life and Letters of Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, ed. Mary Dewey (New York: Harper Bros., 1871), 175. On Sedgwick’s admiration for the Marquis de Lafayette and his importance in *The Linwoods*, see Phillip Gould, “Catharine Sedgwick’s Cosmopolitan Nation,” *New England Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2005): 232–58.
9. Citing Gilles Deleuze and Wai Chee Dimock, Robert Daly discusses Sedgwick’s interest in “bringing together different times” in terms of Dimock’s notion of “temporal hybridity.” See “Mischief, Insanity, Memetics, and Agency in *The Linwoods*; Or ‘Sixty Years Since’ in America,” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda L. Damon-Bach and Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2003), 152.
  10. Much of the commentary on *The Linwoods* reads it as a domestic-political allegory, viewing its depiction of the Linwood family as a story about the nation. For variations on this reading, see Maria Karafilis, introduction to *The Linwoods*; or, “Sixty Years Since” in America (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 2002), xxiv–xxix; Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996); and Emily VanDette, “‘It should be a Family Thing’: Family, Nation, and Republicanism in Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *A New-England Tale* and *The Linwoods*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 19 (2005): 51–74. Karafilis usefully contextualizes the novel in light of the Nullification crisis of the early 1830s. Samuels argues that Sedgwick treats the family as “an instrument for relaying the practices and beliefs of the state” (63). VanDette explores “familial and national governance” in *A New-England Tale* and *The Linwoods* by drawing on antebellum treatises on childrearing (51). For Gould, the novel’s domestic allegory is secondary to its “cosmopolitan” conception of ideal national identity (“Cosmopolitan Nation”), a view that complements Daly’s reading of the novel’s “multiplicity of cultural memes” (“Mischief,” 151).
  11. Carolyn L. Karcher, “Catharine Maria Sedgwick in Literary History,” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*. ed. Lucinda L. Damon-Bach and Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2003), 5.
  12. See Martin Willis, *Mesmerism, Monsters, and Machines: Science Fiction and the Cultures of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press, 2006), 70; and Paul Gilmore, “Romantic Electricity, Or the

- Materiality of Aesthetics," *American Literature* 76 (2004): 467–94. My reading of *The Linwoods* is most influenced by Samuel Chase Coale's *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1998); and Bruce Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2006). In addition, there is a significant body of scholarship dealing with electrical science and, especially, animal magnetism in most of the major writers in the American romantic tradition. However, in Sedgwick studies, only Shelley R. Block and Etta M. Madden have considered Sedgwick in relation to nineteenth-century scientific discourses. Their reading focuses upon "phrenology, physiology, and the medical arts" as depicted in Sedgwick's earlier novel *Hope Leslie*. See "Science in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*," *Legacy* 20 (2003): 24.
13. The figure of the "electric chain" mostly likely derives from Byron, who writes in Canto 4 of *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, "A flower, the wind, the ocean, which shall wound, / Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound" (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1877), 122. The same lines are quoted directly in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*, and they serve as the epigraph to chapter 35 of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Of course, the most famous "electric chain" in nineteenth-century American literature is surely the one formed by Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl on the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* (in *Collected Novels*, ed. Millicent Bell [New York: Library of America, 1983], 250).
  14. James Delbourgo, *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 88, 131.
  15. John Adams, quoted in Delbourgo, *Most Amazing Scene*, 135.
  16. Samuel Johnson, "Taxation, No Tyranny: An Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress," in *Political Writings*, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), 444.
  17. "Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century," *Literary Miscellany*, January 1805, 213.
  18. Jared Sparks, *The Life of Gouverneur Morris* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832), 1:91.
  19. "Greece," *Masonic Mirror, and Mechanics' Intelligencer*, 5 March 1825, 2.
  20. "Political," *Western Recorder*, 13 September 1831, 147.
  21. G. H. J., "Influence of Free Governments on the Mind," *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1835, 391.
  22. Delbourgo, *Most Amazing Scene*, 134.

23. Delbourgo, *Most Amazing Scene*, 141.
24. Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), 114.
25. Most obviously, Mary Kelley titled her 1993 edited volume *The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1993). For important readings that explore the centrality of the concept of sympathy in Sedgwick's writing, see Dana D. Nelson, "Sympathy as Strategy in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*," in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Culture, and Sentimentality in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford, 1992); and Sarah Robbins, "Periodizing Authorship, Characterizing Genre: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Benevolent Literacy Narratives," *American Literature* 76 (2004): 1–29. For an excellent discussion of alternative meanings of sympathy as they relate to Hawthorne, see Roy R. Male Jr., "Hawthorne and the Concept of Sympathy," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 138–49.
26. The politics of sympathy, particularly in the tradition of sentimental fiction, has received a great deal of critical attention over the past two decades. See Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997); Cindy Weinstein, *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004); Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997); Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Charlotte: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Kristin Boudreau, *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2002).
27. Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2003), 26, 33, 32.
28. "Sympathies and Prejudices," *Literary Journal, and Weekly Register*, 29 March 1834, 337.
29. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Home* (Boston: James Munroe, 1835), 117–18; "The Eldest Sister," in *Tales and Sketches* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1835), 189; "The Unpresuming Mr. Hudson," *Lady's Book*, November 1835, 221.
30. Robert C. Fuller writes that "America's first full dose of animal magnetism came from the tongue of a Frenchman named Charles Poyen" (*Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982], 17). Taylor Stoehr claims that "magnetism was still



- generally unknown to the American public in 1836" ("Hawthorne and Mesmerism," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 33 [1969]: 37). Mills, however, notes a series of lectures delivered by Joseph Du Commun in New York as early as 1829 and published the following year (*Poe, Fuller*, 38). Notices and lengthy extracts from the French Academy's report appeared in many U.S. periodicals as early as 1828. An earlier commission of the French Academy of Sciences, headed in 1784 by none other than Benjamin Franklin, had relegated animal magnetism to the realm of superstition or quackery, a judgment that prevailed for most of the next forty years until its revival in the 1820s and 1830s.
31. H. D., "Animal Magnetism," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 20 September 1837, 108; "Animal Magnetism," *American Quarterly Review*, December 1828, 430.
  32. For a useful overview of the relations between electrical science and animal magnetism, see Eric G. Wilson, "Matter and Spirit in the Age of Animal Magnetism," *Philosophy and Literature* 30 (2006): 329–45. Robert Darnton and Tim Fulford both consider the politics of mesmerism in Britain and France; Fulford argues that "animal magnetism was inextricably linked in most British minds with France and its revolution." See Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968); and Fulford, "Conducting the Vital Fluid: The Politics and Poetics of Mesmerism in the 1790s," *Studies in Romanticism* 43 (2004): 57–58.
  33. "Animal Magnetism," *New-Yorker*, 21 October 1837, 483.
  34. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Redwood* (London: John Miller; Edinburgh, William Blackwood, 1824), 97; Sedgwick, 1833 journal entry, in Kelley, *Power of Her Sympathy*, 139, 141; and Sedgwick, "A Vision," *Godey's Lady's Book, and Ladies' American Magazine*, August 1842, 97. I am grateful to Lucinda Damon-Bach for directing my attention to "A Vision," which was reprinted in Sedgwick's second collection of tales and sketches in 1844.
  35. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Magnetism among the Shakers," *Sartain's Magazine*, May 1849, 338.
  36. Coale argues that, while Hawthorne "despised the pseudosciences of mesmerism and spiritualism that erupted in American culture in the 1840s and 1850s," he "found it as psychologically accurate as it was morally repellent" (*Mesmerism and Hawthorne*, 3).
  37. Kelley, *Power of Her Sympathy*, 74.
  38. Gould argues that, in the case of Bessie Lee, Sedgwick's narrator "subtly

suggests [a] relation between psychological and political disorders, one commonplace since the eighteenth century, whereby the 'constitution' of individuals and the state are intimately related ("Cosmopolitan Nation," 254). Karafilis makes similar claims about Bessie's constitution (introduction, xxviii). I read Bessie somewhat differently. Mr. Linwood's illness, I would suggest, provides a somewhat better example of the conflation of illness and political conflict.

39. Gould, "Cosmopolitan Nation," 239.
40. "Animal Magnetism," *Family Magazine; or, Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge* (1835–36): 138.
41. See Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 33–35. On Hawthorne's reservations, also see Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*; and Stoehr, "Hawthorne and Mesmerism."
42. See Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 33.
43. Castronovo, *Necro-Citizenship*, 113.
44. J. C. Colquhoun, *Report of the Experiments Made on Animal Magnetism, Made by a Committee of the Medical Section of the French Royal Academy of Sciences; Read at the 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1831 . . .* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1833), 78, 79.
45. Susan K. Harris, "The Limits of Authority: Catharine Maria Sedgwick and the Politics of Resistance," in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda L. Damon-Bach, Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2003), 277. Harris's reading of Bessie and Isabella rests, to an extent, on her claim that Isabella, unlike Bessie, "trusts her own judgment and makes her own decisions" (278). I'm less sanguine about Isabella's self-determination; indeed, Sedgwick has her narrator unsettle the question, as I note below. Relatedly, where Harris sees Bessie and Isabella as a contrasting pair, Gould sees a "curious parallel" between Bessie and Jasper Meredith ("Cosmopolitan Nation," 254). I am suggesting, in contrast to both Harris and Gould, that there are surprising parallels between Isabella and the ostensibly weaker Bessie.
46. Colquhoun, *Report of the Experiments*, 78.
47. Colquhoun, *Report of the Experiments*, 98.
48. "Animal Magnetism," *Literary Journal, and Weekly Register*, 14 December 1833, 218. The same article recounts the story of one woman who, while in the "magnetic sleep," could "read writings at a distance, when the sense of her eyes was shut; yea, even while another person, with the book in another room, covered the page with the flat of one hand, and with the other touched one of the people present, who by reciprocally

- joining hands with several, formed, as it were, an electrical chain to the patient" (218).
49. Cox provides an especially insightful account of Rider's case; see *Body and Soul*, esp. 37–44. See also Mills, *Poe, Fuller*, 97–99.
  50. L. W. Belden, "An Account of Jane C. Rider, The Springfield Somnambulist," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 10 September 1834, 32.
  51. See Colquhoun, *Report of the Experiments*, 89.
  52. By the end of the novel, Meredith finds himself beaten at his own game by Helen Ruthven. The novel leaves him feeling that he is "in a labyrinth of which Helen Ruthven [holds] the clew," and that he is "in the process of preparation to follow withersoever she will[s] to lead him" (314).
  53. Daly, "Mischief," 148.
  54. Mills, *Poe, Fuller*, xi, 39, xiv, 24.
  55. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1971), 7.