

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: VOICE SYNTHESIS, SIMULATION, AND MEDIATION IN
VICTORIAN POETRY

Aaron Bartlett, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024

Dissertation directed by: Professor Jason Rudy
Department of English

This dissertation considers poetry as a print medium for the voice, one participating in the complex media environment ushered in by the nineteenth-century development of communications technology like the telegraph, phonograph, and telephone, and paralleled by the development of voice synthesis technology today. Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence have enabled machines to synthesize and simulate voices—both acoustically and in print—with startling fidelity. I situate voice synthesis as a media practice with origins in the nineteenth century and read Victorian poetry into this media history. Generative AI raises questions about subjectivity, materiality, fidelity, and truth in relation to the voice, and I bring these questions to bear on Victorian poetry.

My work examines Robert Browning, William Morris, Amy Levy, and Toru Dutt. These authors demonstrate the way a mediated voice can interrogate, embrace, or problematize the materiality or textuality of their chosen medium: print. The sound of Browning's poetry, described since the nineteenth century as stuttering or unpronounceable, foregrounds the way his signature genre—the dramatic monologue—synthesizes voice as a formal effect. William Morris embraced a thoroughlygoingly simulative aesthetics, down to the level of the page, creating art out of the mediated condition of history. The work and reception of both Amy Levy and Toru Dutt, demonstrate the way the imagination of an author's body can impact how readers hear their voice in print, mediated by the material text.

I contextualize the work of these writers within a long history of voice synthesis, which I trace from the speaking automata of the late eighteenth-century, through Herrman von Helmholtz's nineteenth-century synthesizer, Bell Lab's "Voder" in the twentieth century, and contemporary technology like Neural Text-to-Speech, AI chatbots, and the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection. The development of voice synthesis technology traces changing conceptions of voice and mediation, as scientific interest moved from producing the voice by simulating its source in the vocal organs to simulating its effects on the ear. Likewise, voice synthesis technologies have long looked to achieve a kind of machinic immediacy by abstracting the voice away from the body in order to conceal the involvement of humans in the production of the machine voice. Examining Victorian poetry in this light helps to situate the challenges we confront today, within a longer legacy of media that transformed how we understand and value history, fidelity, authenticity, and truth.

VOICE SYNTHESIS AND MEDIATION IN VICTORIAN POETRY

by

Aaron Michael Bartlett

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2024

Advisory Committee:

Professor Jason Rudy, Chair
Dean William A. Cohen
Professor Elizabeth Honig
Associate Professor Kari Kraus
Professor emerita Tricia Lootens
Professor Martha Nell Smith

©Copyright
Aaron Michael Bartlett
2024

To Justin, who helped me begin this journey. And to Liam, who helped me complete it.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jason Rudy, without whose stewardship and mentorship this project could not exist. Thank you to the members of my committee: Martha Nell Smith, Kari Kraus, William Cohen, and Tricia Lootens, each of whom have left an indelible stamp on my thinking. Thank you as well to Elizabeth Honig. Numerous people have enriched this project with their support; thank you to Matthew Kirschenbaum, to my colleagues at BookLab, and especially to Nat McGartland, who served as a sounding board at a key moment in this project's reinvention. Thank you to Justin Mueller who first sparked my interest in sound studies, and whose expertise was key to guiding this research. Thank you to my colleagues Grace Dahye Kwon and Da Som Lee for getting me through it. Thank you to Liam Daley for his support and earnest interest in every one of my half-baked ideas. And finally, thank you to my parents for their love and support.

Table of Contents

Introduction - Two Voices	1
Terminology and Methodology	5
Voice and Media	13
I. “In Sham Voice”: Voice Synthesis, Mediation, and the Dramatic Monologue.....	19
Talking Machines.....	22
Victorian Poetry and Voice Synthesis	37
Mr. Sludge as Medium.....	49
II. William Morris and the Embodied Voice of Textuality	59
The Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection.....	62
The Book that (Never) Was	71
Beholding Me, Beholding You	76
The Epic in the Material	80
Gudrun and the Embodied Voice.....	84
Framing Voice	89
III. Marked Texts and Synthetic Speakers: Amy Levy’s Minor Poetics	103
Marked Texts	110
Cameos.....	117
“A charmingly printed little volume”	122
“A Minor Poet”	127
Xantippe’s “weary searching in the flesh”	135
Voice and Genre	139
IV. Synthesizing the Posthumous Voice of Toru Dutt	145
Toru Dutt, Alive.....	148
Toru Dutt, Dead	152
A Hybrid Voice on a Hybrid Wire.....	159
An Ancient Voice	170
Afterwords	176
In Translation	180
Works Cited	189

Introduction - Two Voices

Grainy, keening, and muffled, yes, but pregnant with the unmistakable cadence of verse: this is the voice of Tennyson inscribed in wax, recorded in 1890 on an Edison phonograph. “Half a league, half a league, half a league onward”—the voice struggles to be born over and through the noise of the imperfect material that has preserved it.

Consider another voice: placid, clear, friendly, ‘neutral’; it fumbles the rhythm and inflection of the language at times, but its reading is smooth, without error, if blithely unaware that it reads poetry at all.¹ This is a voice generated—not recorded—by a group of researchers from Microsoft, MIT, and Google. Collaborating with the free digital library, Project Gutenberg, the researchers (Walsh, et al.) announced the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection in September 2023. A brief paper titled “Large-Scale Automatic Audiobook Creation” describes how the authors “created over five thousand open-license audiobooks and an interactive demo that allows users to quickly create their own customized audiobooks.” The books were made immediately available on the audio streaming service Spotify, as well as Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and the Internet Archive, heralding the momentous, and not just a little ominous, arrival of AI-interpreters in the audiobook market.

In the AI era, the Phonograph era has been hailed as the genesis of media itself as a concept;² a time when text and the newly ascendant image vied (and sometimes collaborated) for attention in print, when it came to be understood that news cycles could set national agenda, when the human sensorium was extended electrically across telegraph networks, and when the phonograph and photograph reconfigured the human relationship with our own eyes, ears, and

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1th3mP8L2sKbWuFQipCCSCNZZMZhmJE-k/view?usp=drive_link

² See, for a paradigmatic example, Colligan and Linley. See also John Guillory “Genesis of the Media Concept” (2010) and Amy R. Wong “Victorian Media Studies, History, and Theory” (2018).

voices. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) seems poised to effect a similar reconfiguration, marking a substantive technological break akin to the media revolutions of the nineteenth century.³ My two voices, then, are in sympathy.

If the medium is the message, what are these two voices saying? In the wake of Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the message of the first voice has often been heard as the separation of voice from writing. Supplanted by superior inscription technology, the voice becomes the lost horizon to which literature aspires. Such a sense of loss motivates, at the end of the century, Yeats's attempt to return to "the living voice." In less deterministic accounts, the phonographic voice was merely "symptomatic" of an ongoing negotiation of what it meant to speak in writing (*Always Already* 29).⁴ Among these, Yopie Prins's influential essay "Voice Inverse," has argued that the nineteenth century understood verse as mediating voice in a way that anticipated the mediated voice of the wax cylinder.⁵ Describing an 1889 recording of Robert Browning reciting "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix" Prins writes:

What we hear in this recording is not the immediacy of Browning's voice, but its mechanical mediation. It is difficult to decipher Browning's words, as they are broken up by the very technology that seeks to preserve them: the revolving of the wax cylinder creates a whooshing sound, and the volume of the recording fades in and out of audibility. ("Voice Inverse" 48)

Prins suggests that voice in verse is voice disembodied, made strange, prosthetic, and artificial. It is a voice that, like the recording, can hardly be heard for the grain of the material. But to echo a critique that Prins herself makes of Eric Griffith's *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, she

³ Richard Menke's *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies, 1880-1900* makes a similar comparison between the two media ages: "The late nineteenth century was also a period in which developments in media and culture drove widespread discussion of technologies of communication and inscription – about how they aligned with one another and about how they mediated human experience" ("Introduction" n.p.)

⁴ I cite here Lisa Gitelman's *Always Already New*, although I will survey several other critics writing in this vein in the course of this introduction.

⁵ Prins is among a body of scholars who have looked to nineteenth-century literature as an antecedent for the way the invention of the phonograph was received, rather than the other way around. Among other scholars who have written in this vein are Ivan Kreilkamp, Brett Brehm, Lisa Gitelman, Veronica Alfano, and Kate Lacey.

could stand to be more specific about Victorian print culture; the voice in nineteenth-century poetry is mediated as well by type and paper, and by the hand of numerous tradesmen and machines.⁶ What voice inverse—a voice marked by its mediation—might equally suggest is the voice’s re-embodiment in the materiality of the text and in the text’s capacity to produce voice.

Questions of the voice’s presence, absence, relationship to a speaker, and historical validity have animated considerable debate. In poetry, these debates have localized around voice as a possibly ahistoric readerly imposition of a subjective lyric speaker, as a present but disembodied Derridean absence, or as an expressive and essentially lyric trope. Among Victorianists, Eric Griffiths has argued that the printed voice marks both the presence and absence of the author (61). Responding in part to Griffiths, Linley reads the poetic voice in print phonographically—as an extension or technological prosthesis of the voice. Prins follows Linley in naming this extension voice inverse, characterizing it effectively as the mark of an absent subjectivity, as part of a wider aim for a more historically specific account of the printed voice. Prins attempts in particular to resist identifying the poetic voice as the manifestation of a subjective lyric speaker, of the sort posited in new critical models in the twentieth century.⁷ Veronica Alfano has built on the notion of poetic voice as an absent subjectivity, against this normative model.⁸ Her attention to poetry as a tool for remembering what is dead, gone or absent echoes Ivan Kreilkamp’s more media-oriented account of the voice as both what is missing from and what might redeem Victorian literature.⁹ Prins helped invigorate “new lyric studies,” and

⁶ Although not specific to poetry, Ivan Kreilkamp’s *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* goes a long way toward offering this kind of specificity in a related argument.

⁷ The origin of the much maligned new critical ‘speaker’ is hard to pin down and emerged more from pedagogical practices than theory. Jonathan Culler fingers Wimsatt and Brooks, Helen Vendler’s textbook *Poems, Poets, Poetry* (though not her criticism), and Barbara Herrnstein Smith (*Theory of the Lyric* 110-111). Brooks and Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* is another likely culprit.

⁸ The assumed normative position, that the poetic voice is the present voice of a subjective speaker, is rarely if ever argued for.

⁹ Kreilkamp’s account primarily concerns novels but considers Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* as well.

writers like Jonathan Culler and David Nowell Smith have contributed important transhistorical accounts of the voice. Culler, whose focus is specific to the lyric genre, realigns lyric voice as “effects of voicing” “on which the distinctive voice of a speaker is sometimes imposed” (35). Smith, whose subject is poetic voice in general, has challenged Culler by noting that the text is “irreducible to any single voicing” and the poetic voice is a “plurality of voicings” arising from its written character (104). Smith, in this respect, lines up with Griffiths, whose argument hinged on the absence in text of prosodic vocal features. Smith also anticipated the more recent work of Ashley Miller, who has argued that nineteenth-century poetry could be understood as a technology for reproducing the voice in the body. Voice remains an unsettled topic, capable of enlivening complex debate and wrapped up in the history of form, genre, technology.

Against this backdrop I want to ask: what does it mean to think about printed voice, today, in an era when voice—whether literal or metaphorical—can be wholly simulated? What is the message of the medium of AI, and how might this message revise our understanding of the mediated voice of the nineteenth century? By thinking with the interpretive possibilities of our own media age in comparison to the nineteenth century, I argue that voice synthesis and simulation offers a valuable paradigm for considering the functioning of poetic voice in the nineteenth century. And in turn, thinking with the long history of mediated voice helps to illuminate the origins, dangers, and significance of technology that promises to realign our relationship with our voices, in print and out of it.

When polymath poet and book artist, William Morris ends his medievalist tome *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) by personifying his book, looking it “for the last time face to face,” and bidding it “speed/Upon thy perilous journey,” he is participating in a trope at least as old as Chaucer, whose envoy to *Troilus and Criseyde* Morris was self-consciously evoking. I am

interrogating what might happen if we take more seriously the ubiquitous metaphor of books as bodily proxies for their authors—books that, like *The Earthly Paradise*, suppose a “listener” as much as a reader, books that talk. While it is hard to imagine the phonograph now outside the logic of sound reproduction, the phonograph was once (at least partly) a “talking machine.” It was not a given that it would be understood as a container for actual sound; the phonograph was as much a technology of inscription (writing voice) and simulation (imitating human voices).¹⁰ If electronic media learned to inscribe sound from literature, then literature too participates in the negotiation of what it means to mediate the voice. The text might simulate or synthesize virtual presence through the textual material as much as it transmits it or records an absence.

AI voice and synthetic media are powerful tools, both computationally and metaphorically. Harnessing their metaphorical power helps to unwind some of the complexities of mediation, subjectivity, and genre that tangle discussions of voice in Victorian poetry. And likewise, by placing synthetic media within a longer history of artistic and cultural practice I illuminate the possibilities and pitfalls of technology that seems poised to separate us from our own faculties and creative capacities.

Terminology and Methodology

It is necessary to define at the outset precisely what I mean by “voice.” There are many contexts in which we might talk about voice in literature; it may be a metaphor for the idiosyncrasies of an author’s style, it may be a poetic figure, or in the wake of twentieth-century theory it may be the ultimate seal of subjectivity, whose self-presence underwrites western

¹⁰ Sound writing is of course figured in the name “phonograph,” and this remains a persuasive metaphor for thinking about the technology. Gitelman offers the most compelling examination of sound writing’s nineteenth-century pre-phonographic antecedents. James Lastra’s account of the phonograph as a simulation technology in *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* is key to my thinking on the medium as simulation.

metaphysics. This instability is heightened in poetry, a type of literature that has a special relationship with sound.¹¹ Meter, rhyme, alliteration—these effects resound in a voice, or require at least an imagined revoicing to be intelligible as effects. David Nowell Smith’s attempt to define voice in poetry takes voice as a figure:

My suggestion ...will be that speechsound and metaphor are but two *figures* for voice. By this I do not mean that voice is ‘figurative’; rather, this is figure-as-*configuration*: the ways in which voice becomes thinkable in a singular manner. In this I will distinguish between figuring *as* and figuring *through*. Voice is figured *as* speechsound, as persona, as subjectivity, but also, making greater use of metaphorical/metonymic palette, as an authentic self, or as an individual or collective identity (hence phrases such as ‘to find one’s voice’). But it is also figured *through* the prosodic and rhetorical repertoires available to poetry: ‘figures of sound’ such as alliteration and assonance; figures of speech such as interjection, prosopopoeia...; more indeterminate figural uses of sound, as in glossolalia... Such figuring-through can also extend to the energies and syncopations generated by metre and other prosodic patterns, to the construction of deictic utterance – the rhetorical and prosodic deployments of voice, I will argue, can never be grasped in isolation from one another. (Smith 3)

Smith cuts to the heart of what is difficult about discussing voice in poetry, articulating that the way voice is figured cannot be separated from what it figures. While Smith’s project is a wider examination of the philosophy of sound and meaning in poetry, his suggestion that “individual poems demand specific listenings, and voicings” (7), helps sort through the contradictions of a voice that is simultaneously figured, figural, and figurative. Poetry has a voice. What is less clear is who or what that voice belongs to. A text that engages with voice must negotiate this question, operating within a theory that underwrites its presence (or presence in absence).

Studies of voice in writing that are more grounded in philosophy than my own tend to implicitly take on the project of recovering the voice in its definition—redeeming it from historical misprisions and constructing its true ontological, epistemological, or phenomenological condition, even if that condition is, as for Derrida, one of linguistic

¹¹ Do not mistake this for a definition of poetry, although it might not be an altogether bad one.

incertitude.¹² My interest instead is in how texts figure voice. By paying attention to this I mean to illuminate an ever present the negotiation between the material text and what the voice figures: variously sound, self-expression, subjectivity or any number of other things. The voice in this conception charts a relation between the human and the medium. Indeed, this project can to some extent be considered an argument for the proposition that poetry is, has been, or can be considered a technology of the voice.

Eric Griffiths's *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* is an important antecedent in this regard. I share a number of assumptions with Griffiths, but diverge in key ways. For Griffiths, Victorian poetry lives in the space between voice and voicing. The prosodic features of voice—tone, stress, rhythm—are significant to the interpretation of meaning. Writing cannot completely replicate such prosodic features, leaving meaning open. Because of poetry's special relationship with sound, "the absence of clearly indicated sound from the silence of the written word creates a double nature in printed poetry, making it both itself and something other—a text of hints at voicing, whose centre in utterance lies outside itself, and also an achieved pattern on the page, salvaged from the evanescence of the voice in air" (57). Griffiths is so invested in the inability of any written sign to fully reproduce the prosodic features of voice that he tends to underemphasize the degree to which poetry in fact does this quite well. To be sure, nineteenth-century poets exploit intonational ambiguities in meter (perhaps none more so than Robert Browning, as I explore in chapter one), but meter can equally guide and inform intonation, encoding sonic data beyond what the technology of prose is capable of.¹³ Indeed, a data analogy here seems clarifying. We might consider verse a higher fidelity technology than prose with

¹² I am thinking here of Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* or Stephen Connor's *Dumbstruck* (although Connor protests that the book is not a theory of the voice.)

¹³ See Michael Rizq, "Fact, Rhythm, and Resistance in *The Ring and the Book* for a recent treatment of this quality of Browning's verse.

respect to the voice, or a storage medium with higher bit density. This is not however to err in the opposite direction and say that meter's only or primary function is in a representational logic of voice, only that poetry, in myriad ways, can and does encode information about its own voicing. Consider that a handful of (now) off-rhymes make it possible to partly reconstruct Shakespeare's accent. This resonance between poetic sound and the very literal voice is available for thinking with, just as the non-identity between the two is. Griffiths articulates an important logic of the voice's mediation in print in the nineteenth century; one that foregrounds the limitations of the medium to transmit or reproduce the voice. But his analysis, and work by Linley and Prins after him, take the nature of that mediation for granted. Reproduction and transmission do not operate in an exactly equivalent media logic, and each has a conceptual history of their own worth attending to.

Print moreover, has its own affordances, and the printed page its own sort of prosodic features. Griffiths's conviction that reading depends on reconstructing intention leads him to a version of textual criticism that only looks for signs of an absent voice—authorial intention. His theory fails to account for the specificity of the medium voice finds itself in, in print. Yopie Prins's "voice inverse" has come closer to articulating the ways that a mediated voice might call attention to its medium. I take issue with Griffiths's notion that the printed voice's "centre in utterance lies outside itself," intelligible only with reference to the intentionality of a self-present originating speaker. Prins, in contrast, articulates the way that the formal features of meter constitute divergences from 'natural' speech, highlighting the mediation of the voice, or, really, the failure of the medium to transmit an unmarked voice. For Prins, it might be fair to say that the printed voice's center in un-utterance lies inside itself. But Prins's was ultimately an attempt to banish an ahistoric conception of voice from Victorian studies, which she associates with the

notion of a specifically lyric speaker. Prins's account does not leave much room for conceptions of voice in print other than as the record of a speaker. As a wide range of media and sound studies scholarship demonstrates, the logic of a mediated voice was very much under construction before the phonograph.¹⁴ It is not quite so simple a logic as *verse either mediates the voice of a speaker or it does not mediate voice at all*. These problems are encapsulated by Prins's pointed question: "Why," she asks, "do we insist on reading literally what the Victorians understood to be metaphor?" (44). David Nowell Smith's incisive counterpoint is worth considering: "Prins neglects to say either exactly what 'literally' means, or what 'the Victorians' took voice to be a metaphor of" (163 n. 6).

What indeed would it mean for printed poetry to "literally" have a voice? Surely, we do not literally hear anyone speaking in a poem. But do we literally hear someone speaking in an audio recording? We may feel less certain about the answer to this question. Mechanically, the answer must be no; we may literally hear sound, but the soundwaves emit not from a mouth and throat but from a diaphragm mechanically vibrated by a stylus running over an inscribed groove. Do we hear someone speaking literally over the telephone? When James Knowles, in an 1878 editorial in *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review*, described the telephone's "wonderful" capacity to "transmit articulate speech" ("Recent Science" 1133), the implied answer is 'yes.' The same can be said for the editors of *Chamber's Journal*, who, reporting on the new science in 1877, described the technology as "talking by electricity conveying the actual sounds of the voice for many miles" ("Singing and Talking by Telegraph" 554). We might today feel similarly that we literally hear a voice when we pick up the phone. But again, mechanically, this cannot be

¹⁴ See Jonathan Sterne, Lisa Gitelman, James Lastra, Kate Lacey, Ivan Kreilkamp, John Durham Peters.

any truer than it is for a recording. We hear again, the vibration of a diaphragm, this time mechanically excited by an electrical signal converted into motion.

Neither does it seem quite right to imagine that the voice we hear on the telephone is in any sense metaphorical, though this may seem closer to true in the case of a recording. But both technologies take vibrations and transduce them into another form before rendering them again as sound. Where in the process of transduction does a voice cease to be literally itself and become a metaphor? Is it where the stylus meets the wax? Or are we asking the wrong question? In these technologies it seems apparent that the register of literal vs metaphorical is unmeet to the purpose of comprehending their ontology. But if we consider these technologies instead as mediating voice, we may approach the question itself as one about how, for whom, and in what circumstances their capacity to “literally” carry voice has been true, and interrogate how such a truth revises and influences the relations people construct with what the technologies mediate: the literal, apparent self-presence that seems in the case of poetry so quick to dissolve into metaphor. In considering poetry as a medium for voice, then, my aim is the same.

As should be clear, “media” and “mediation” are animating terms for this study. My approach to media as a concept is shaped by my argument’s points of contact with textual studies, media studies, and sound studies. Jonathan Sterne offers a definition that is helpful in its precision. “A medium is a recurring set of contingent social relations and social practices, and contingency is the key here. As the larger fields of economic and cultural relations around a technology or technique extend, repeat, and mutate, they become recognizable to users as a medium,” (182). I find this definition useful for its characterization of media as neither a beginning nor end point, but an ongoing cultural negotiation of what a technology is for. As Bolter and Grusin wrote, “media technologies constitute networks or hybrids that can be

expressed in physical, social, aesthetic, and economic terms. Introducing a new media technology does not mean simply inventing new hardware and software, but rather fashioning (or refashioning) such a network” (19). If we still believe the vatic wisdom of Marshall McLuhan, “the content of any medium is always another medium,” guaranteeing that media are in mutually remediative relationships with each other. Old media shape new media and are re-shaped by them in turn, as the social practice of mediation changes. My approach is particularly shaped by the logic of Lisa Gitelman who, in *Always Already New* sought to challenge an approach to contemporary new media that, as she saw it in 2006, tended to position them “as what might be called the end of media history” (3). My aim, in part, is to place synthetic voice and generative AI in a wider historic context than we are typically asked to consider them, understanding them as part of an ongoing negotiation of how we relate to literature and media.

Bolter and Grusin do not offer a definition of “mediation” in their classic text *Remediation*.¹⁵ Indeed, mediation can sometimes feel like the absent conceptual middle of many classic discussions of media.¹⁶ One reason for this may be, as John Guillory suggests, mediation is in fact necessarily *a posteriori* to remediation. “It is much easier to see what a medium does—the possibilities inherent in the material form of an art—when the same expressive or communicative contents are transposed from one medium into another. Remediation makes the medium as such visible” (Guillory 324). It is not my intention to historicize mediation as a concept (Guillory does a fine job of that already). Instead, my interest is in historicizing the particularity of how and what a medium is thought to mediate. I am looking for a cultural logic

¹⁵ Grusin has more recently theorized “radical mediation,” but I find it unhelpful in the interpretive frame I have constructed for this project.

¹⁶ Raymond Williams is one media theorist who does offer a robust theory of mediation. This project however does not employ Marxism as a significant interpretive lens, and Williams takes a much more expansive cultural and historical view of the problem than I am ready, willing, or able to consider in this project.

that underlies what we imagine communication technology, particularly writing, to do: the way it comes between voices, people, ideas, or indeed other media. It may be argued that this is representation by another name, but representation is merely one possible way of mediating.

Here, the limits of considering poetry as a media technology become apparent. To reduce all poetry to a model of communication misses a great deal of its essential excellence as an artform. Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* succinctly makes this point in arguing against new critical modes of reading lyric poetry as mimetic, fictional utterances. Among other problems, such an approach implicitly denies "...the materiality of lyric language that makes itself felt as something other than signs of..." a speaker (119).¹⁷ But it is precisely this materiality of language that I find animating about the comparison to media technology, in spite of the difficulty. Prins's "voice inverse" conceptually points to how the materiality of poetic language may be itself a mediating bridge to other sorts of materiality, particularly textual materiality. To the extent that the printed voice is a concern of Victorian poetry, that concern tracks how poets attempt to reconcile making a voice heard in a material format that increasingly seemed inimical to it; a culture of print that looked, in Ivan Kreilkamp's words, "mechanized, disenchanted, and bureaucratized. In an age of novels and journalism, the very mechanisms of print and publication could appear hostile to poetic expression" (155). But it was an age, too, of new ways of mediating the voice, ways that seemed to offer enhanced immediacy, perfect fidelity, and competing artistic possibilities.

In invoking materiality, I am speaking in a heritage of textual and digital scholars for whom materiality and the material affordances of media and technology are animating modes of

¹⁷ I am in fact slightly misquoting Culler to simplify the point. He continues, "...other than the signs of character and plot" (119).

inquiry.¹⁸ The printed voice represents an encounter with the textual condition. There is no ideal form of a text prior to and outside of the material reality of print, although some logics of textual mediation position the voice as just such an ideal.¹⁹ This study in part tracks desires to transcend the textual condition alongside nineteenth-century desires to transcend an increasingly material and mediated world. But it equally observes efforts to discover an expressive interiority in a voice accessible only through embodied materiality.²⁰ It has been a truism since McLuhan first designated media “extensions of man,” that media expand the reach of our body and senses. But more than this, as Collete Colligan and Margaret Linley write in their tour de force introduction to *Media Technology and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*:

The eye, ear, and skin were not just imagined as extended by media devices but were also understood to be incorporated within them... This incorporation of the body into the period’s mediating structures reveals not only the expansion of the human sensorium, but also shows how the two were enmeshed, creating the possibility for understanding the seeing, hearing, and touching body as a multi-media machine. (4)

Correspondingly, I speak in this study not just of a textual, and material condition, but also an embodied condition. I take the printed voice as a true middle term, a hinge that mediates between and as multiple material forms, texts, and bodies; a figure and a configuration.

Voice and Media

Voice synthesis is not new media, although the technology’s new realism, ease of production, and intersection with generative AI are rapidly reconfiguring the cultural and economic relations that constitute it as a medium. I open this study by charting the origins of

¹⁸ The intellectual debt for my conception of materiality is too large to reproduce, but I will begin with: Jerome McGann, Johanna Drucker, Katherine Hayles, Matthew Kirschenbaum, and—more obliquely—Leah Price.

¹⁹ I am thinking, here, of Griffith’s “ideal bodies” (57), which he argues readers construct for authors in order to interpret a text.

²⁰ This observation echoes William A. Cohen’s account of the body as a point of contact between the external world and an inner essence in the nineteenth century. See: *Embodied* (2009). “Mediation” is not, however, conceptually significant to Cohen’s study, which allies itself more with the cultural phenomenology of Steven Connor and Stephen Clucas than with my haphazard collection of textual, media, sound, and new lyric studies scholars.

voice synthesis in the speaking automata of the late eighteenth century, and exploring whether we can consider the dramatic monologue—as practiced by Robert Browning—to be a technology in this lineage. The development of voice synthesis technology traced changing conceptions of voice and mediation, as scientific interest moved from producing the voice by simulating its source in the vocal organs to simulating its effects on the ear. Likewise, voice synthesis technologies have long looked to achieve a kind of machinic immediacy by abstracting the voice away from the body in order to conceal the involvement of humans in the production of the machine voice. In the historic logic of voice synthesis, signs of mediation signal that we are getting an authentic fake, that the simulation is working; this is a hypermedial version of audio fidelity.

The Browning dramatic monologue, I show, features a similar concern with producing the voice as an effect and with producing a simulative authenticity or realism by foregrounding formal and linguistic mediation. I consider Browning's 'corporeal language' as itself a textual voice mediating between the voice of the author and the simulated voice of the speaker. Browning's language is the machinic guarantor of voice synthesis. Reading Browning's "Mr. Sludge 'the Medium,'" (1864) I demonstrate Browning's concern with mediation itself, and especially the problems inherent with coming to know truth through mediated means; the constructedness of immediacy as an effect makes it difficult to distinguish between representational and simulative media. The first chapter introduces several themes—truth, immediacy, authenticity, and materiality—that will recur throughout the study, and places them within a wider historical media context.

In chapter two I return to where I opened this introduction—the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection (PGOAC)—and I turn to William Morris. This begins a more specifically

textual examination of the voice. I read William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) alongside today's voice synthesis technology, which is empowered by generative AI. Drawing on recent criticism of large language models, I build a more robust conception of simulated voice. The PGOAC, I observe, produces a voice without a material referent and without subjectivity. Underlying the simulated voice of AI is a fantasy of the machine voice itself as a pure medium for the text, free of material mediation. In this respect, it continues the tradition of earlier voice synthesis technology. But AI voice goes even further by abstracting its own materiality into probabilistic and speculative processes that are difficult or impossible to account for in material terms. AI generates a seemingly unmediated and immaterial voice, yet one that is neither subjective nor objective. The simulated voice of AI highlights a fraught relationship between voice, subjectivity, materiality, and history. These are precisely Morris's concerns, I argue, in *The Earthly Paradise*, where he develops a transformative and speculative aesthetics of simulation. Where AI abstracts voice beyond materiality, Morris affirms textual materiality and embodied voice as limiting conditions that enable creative transformation into the future, through the process of retelling. For Morris, a pure lyric voice in the tradition of the meditative Romantic lyric—premised on the reproduction of subjectivity across time—is impossible or undesirable. Morris simulates rather transmits the voice of the past in order to transform the future.

Chapter three is a transition point in this project as I move both forward in time to the 1880s (from the pre-phonographic to the phonographic era) and consider less canonical authors. I begin by observing that although AI abstracts voice away from the body, it nevertheless depends on the imagination of racialized or gendered bodies. The “neutral voice” of the PGOAC and AI chatbots alike is by default white and male. Similarly, for “unmarked” authors like Browning or Morris, disappearing into disembodied or abstracted textual voices is facilitated by the easy

slippage between an unmarked body and no body at all. An unmarked voice is understood as more self-present and immediate, because less material; it possesses authority. Marked bodies, I argue, produce marked voices and marked texts, requiring a more elaborate formal and material textual apparatus to make the voice seem present and authentic in the absence of authority. The textual voice is thus more fraught for the authors I consider in the second half of this project, and I am particularly attuned to the reception and publishing history of these authors, as such history demonstrates the way marked texts are heard to produce (or reproduce) voice differently. My account is in conversation with the idea of lyricization as conceived by Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson: the developing, ongoing, and historical tendency to read all poetry as lyric. Lyrical reading transforms a model of lyric in which the text mediates the subjective voice of the author into a model in which the text produces the voice of the author as a quasi-simulation. I suggest that this is like the program of audio fidelity or disembodiment in voice synthesis, reflecting a desire for immediate transcendent expressivity by means of bodily abstraction that paradoxically happens through the medium.

In the case of Amy Levy, whom I examine in chapter three, her volume of poetry *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* became textually marked by the addition of her photograph as frontispiece in its republication in Fisher Unwin's publisher's series. This addition incorporated her gendered body into the text. The placement of the photograph suggests that readers should understand Levy herself as the subject of her poetry, and reviewers were keen to read *A Minor Poet* as confessional verse—even and especially its dramatic monologues. Readers thus transform the simulated voice of dramatic monologue into the representational voice (of Levy). But counterintuitively, that representation is really only the simulative voice of the text. The text, as Levy's last trace, lends her 'minor' voice an authentic presence in absence that readers were

otherwise unwilling or unable to perceive. Levy's own poetry demonstrates careful attention to the way the voice's connections with the body might mark it and render voices and texts alike unheard. She affirms the possibility of the voice sounding in text against the potential to mishear it.

I close in chapter four with literary critic Edmund Gosse's introduction to Bengali poet Toru Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Gosse marks Dutt's voice by highlighting its posthumous character, enabling him to pass his own simulation of her voice off as a lyric representation, a move that significantly impacted her reception prior to her more recent critical resurgence. Gosse's posthumous and material figuration of Dutt's voice plays on a racist and gendered understanding of her body. Gosse's intervention is paratextual. He effectively revises the paratexts Dutt constructed for herself in her earlier volume *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Gosse's framing constitutes a lyrical reading of Dutt, one that attempts to produce marked vocal authenticity where her own poetry and paratexts reached contrastingly for authority in hybridity.

We confront a world in which any voice can be cloned and machine and human voices are becoming difficult to distinguish. Old practices of mediation may be inadequate to conceptualize this new media environment. Metaphors of prosthesis, extension, transmission, and reproduction seem inadequate to understand AI voice, which has no clear relationship with a bodily referent. It remains to be seen what new practices of mediation may emerge in the AI age, as social and economic practices solidify and constitute this technology as media. But the history of voice synthesis shows that such practices of mediation have a mutually constitutive relationship with literature. Old media shape new media and are reshaped by them in turn. If voices in the twentieth century seemed increasingly disembodied by media technology, it only

served to foreground the importance of voice in how we understand our technologies and ourselves. As we enter the age of voices that never had a body to begin with, the poetic voice will doubtlessly find new ways to make itself heard in print, asserting a human presence in writing that seems more precious than ever.

I. “In Sham Voice”: Voice Synthesis, Mediation, and the Dramatic Monologue

The phonograph looms large in accounts of voice with an eye (and an ear) toward print culture and media history. This is true even in works like Ivan Kreilkamp’s *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* or Yopie Prins’s “Voice Inverse” that frame literary developments as antecedent to the phonograph’s reconfiguration of voice inscription. Friedrich Kittler’s *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* in large part set the terms of the conversation. His argument was audacious; our media technology had subsumed the imaginative tasks of writing itself. “Since 1865...writing has no longer been the ink or pencil trace of a body whose optical and acoustic signals were irretrievably lost, only to reappear (in reader’s minds) in the surrogate sensuality of handwriting” (Kittler 13). Writing ceases to function conceptually as a sound storage device the moment a higher fidelity technology comes on the scene. Once real, the mediation of sound in print was now at best a metaphor. Once alive, writing was now just so many dead letters. Walter Ong’s dream of a “primary orality,” which print had separated from literature, was born with the phonographic perception that print no longer had a voice.

Lisa Gitelman’s less deterministic examination of the phonograph as an inscription machine enabled an evaluation of sound technology as a theory of language and textuality: She “[began] with the idea that inventing new ways to write or new kinds of writing presupposes a model of what writing and reading are and can be. If the model is too eccentric, then the invention may not work, or the model might suit some relevant social groups and not others” (*Scripts* 4). In contrast to Kittler, Gitelman’s approach demonstrates that a new technology does not emerge from a vacuum, dictating its own use and meaning; rather it is shaped by a cultural logic that it in turn shapes. Shared assumptions undergird accounts like Kreilkamp’s *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, which posits that “the phonograph should be understood[...]not only

within a technological history including such devices as the telephone and radio, but within a cultural and literary history including such institutions and practices as phonographic shorthand, the authorial reading, and the Victorian novel, all of which took on the task of capturing or representing voice prior to Edison's invention" (Kreilkamp 181-2). Some scholars have taken "phonography" as a term to describe sound writing writ large, following especially Douglas Kahn,²¹ and expanding on Gitelman's conception of media history. In the logic of the "phonographic imagination," as Kate Lacey has termed it, the phonograph's invention in 1877 is (as in Kreilkamp) anticipated by earlier efforts to write sound, including, in the 1830s, Isaac Pitman's 'phonography.' As Brett Brehm memorably quips in a recent volume: "the idea of mechanical sound reproducibility was decidedly in the air" before 1877 (3).

Recorded sound has shaped the logic of our media thinking for one hundred and fifty years. Even in the computer era, the metaphors of recording, rewinding, and playing back hold considerable sway. In some ways the quintessential new media *avant la lettre* (it's no accident that Gitelman begins *Always Already New* with the phonograph), the sheen of newness might finally be wearing off: we have new toys to play with—and what dangerous toys they are. Generative AI is penetrating every field of creative production, threatening to price out human creativity from the labor market. If the content of any medium is always another medium, then the neural network might look like the medium to end all media. Neural nets can remediate seemingly anything—from art, to music, to poetry, and, yes, voices. We have entered the age of art in its mechanical producibility, and AI is coming for your voice. OpenAI, the creators of ChatGPT, have lately threatened the world with the Voice Engine, a technology that can clone a voice based on as little as fifteen seconds of audio. Speech synthesis technology made a

²¹ *Noise, Water, Meat: a history of Sound in the Arts* (1999), see page 70.

significant leap toward realism in 2016 with the creation of WaveNet by Google DeepMind and advances have continued to ride the AI wave generated by Google's development of transformer architecture in 2017.²²

Synthetic media, a catch-all term describing the textual or audiovisual product of AI tools, have already done considerable damage. So-called “deepfakes”—audiovisual content altered to realistically depict an event that never took place—have been used to produce non-consensual pornography and for purposes of disinformation.²³ But setting aside the abject horrors of internet violence, the last twenty-five years of media scholarship (at least) have proceeded with the conviction that media are tools to think with. The ascendancy of the synthetic voice might offer us an opportunity to slip the bonds of phonograph-centrism, or if it proves impossible to shake off, at least to recontextualize the printed voice within a less-deterministic and more complex negotiation of the meaning and function of mediated sound in the nineteenth century.

I would like to begin with a claim far too audacious to be true: The dramatic monologue, especially as practiced by Browning, is a form of synthetic media—a Victorian deepfake. Rather than proving this claim as such, my gambit is that in exploring the contours of the comparison, I can discover the shape of Victorian poetry's complex negotiation of a voice mediated by print, a negotiation that I chart alongside shifting theories of voice, the birth of audio fidelity, media disembodiment, and in later chapters of this project, the lyric speaker. The dramatic monologue emerges alongside a shift from scientific attempts to synthesize the voice at its source to synthesizing it as an acoustic effect. This abstraction from speaker to hearer parallels Browning's

²² Vaswani et al.'s “Attention is All You Need” has justly acquired a level of fame few technical papers aspire to, much less achieve.

²³ Rini and Cohen “marshal a parade of horrors” in itemizing the new types of violence the technology has unleashed (143).

distinction between objective and subjective poetics. The dramatic monologue similarly stages speech at the site of its audition. This represents an abstraction away from the body that is paralleled in the history of voice synthesis and media writ large; awareness of mediation demands the cultural construction of forms of immediacy, seeking to transcend the strictures of a medium in its very perfection. On the road to these lofty ambitions, I begin with a short history of voice synthesis technology, one that manifests several themes that can be productively mapped onto the dramatic monologue. Following that I will turn to Browning's "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium'" a text that explores the logic of the voice's mediation and immediacy.

Talking Machines

In the late eighteenth century, the inventor, naturalist, and poet Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) built a machine that could talk:

I contrived a wooden mouth with lips of soft leather, and with a valve over the back part of it for nostrils, both which could be quickly opened or closed by the pressure of the fingers, the vocality was given by a silk ribbon about an inch long and a quarter of an inch wide stretched between two bits of smooth wood a little hollowed; so that when a gentle current of air from bellows was blown on the edge of the ribbon, it gave an agreeable tone, as it vibrated between the wooden sides, much like a human voice. This head pronounced the p, b, m, and the vowel a, with so great nicety as to deceive all who heard it unseen, when it pronounced the words mama, papa, map, and pam; and had a most plaintive tone, when the lips were gradually closed. (*The Temple of Nature* 138)

Darwin's machine modeled lips as leather, nostrils as valves, and vocal cords as silk ribbon. It had come about in a study of voice and language that led him to an anatomized interrogation of the "production of sounds" (Darwin 125) in the very anatomy of the lungs, glottis, tongue, mouth, lips and nose. Darwin's proximate goal was not to synthesize or imitate speech as such, but to understand and regularize it "for the purpose of improving shorthand" (Darwin 138). His study of the voice took him straight into the depths of his own mouth: "I rolled up some tin foil

into cylinders about the size of my finger;” he reports, “and speaking the vowels separately through them, found by the impressions made on them, in what part of the mouth each of the vowels was formed with somewhat greater accuracy” (Darwin 138).

Darwin’s journey into the body to perfect the production of voice was by no means unique. The late eighteenth century saw at least four attempts to construct speaking automata as a way to understand and model voice at its source in the vocal anatomy.²⁴ As Stephen Connor suggests “speech represented the ultimate challenge for the makers of automata, because speech was the most plausible proof that the automaton was truly self-moving, or even, as we might nowadays say, self-organizing” (*Dumbstruck* 340).²⁵ Wolfgang von Kempelen, renowned creator of the chess playing Mechanical Turk, explained his own creation of a speaking automaton in a 1791 book focused primarily on phonetics.²⁶ Hankins and Silverman characterize Kempelen’s work in this way: “Kempelen conceived the speaking machine as the mechanical embodiment of all the organs of speech with an ivory reed for the larynx and special tubes for the nostrils. Consequently, he concluded that the *configurations* of the throat and mouth defined the sounds of speech.” (194). But it was Kempelen’s Mechanical Turk that was echoed in the nineteenth-century’s most famous speaking automaton, Joseph Faber’s Euphonia.²⁷ Exhibited beginning in the 1840s, the Euphonia used a piano-like keyboard to control the mouth and tongue of an

²⁴ Hankins and Silverman’s *Instruments and the Imagination* remains the most comprehensive discussion of this topic through the nineteenth-century, and my research takes their work as a starting point. In addition to Darwin and Kempelen, they discuss the similar work of the abbé Mical and Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein.

²⁵ Although I will briefly consider ventriloquy at the end of this section, it is worth here highlighting that my account of talking machines diverges from Connor’s sharply by emphasizing them not as attempts “to take the voice out of one body...and put it (back) into another” (342), but instead as attempts to synthesize a voice with analogy to its bodily production, perception, or transmission. As should by now be clear, my study largely avoids phenomenological explanations of the voice, although the historical logics of voice I detail certainly suggest specific phenomenologies of the voice.

²⁶ Kempelen’s mechanical Turk was a chess-playing automaton, capable of playing in real time against human opponents. The device was exhibited at courts across Europe. It was, however, an illusion; a man inside the machine operated it.

²⁷ I say echoed because Faber appears not to have had the original Mechanical Turk in mind, see Hankins and Silverman p. 283 n. 158.

automaton Turk as air from a bellows vibrated its ivory reed vocal chords (Hankins and Silverman 214). The effect was apparently unsettling. Wrote contemporary observer John Hollingshead:

One keyboard, touched by the Professor, produced words which, slowly and deliberately in a hoarse sepulchral voice came from the mouth of the figure, as if from the depths of a tomb. It wanted little imagination to make the very few visitors believe that the figure contained an imprisoned human—or half human—being, bound to speak slowly when tormented by the unseen power outside. No one thought for a moment that they were being fooled by a second edition of the “Invisible Girl” fraud [an effect of ventriloquy]. (68-9)

The euphonia was accomplished enough at simulating a voice that audiences could not help imagining (as with Kempelen’s Mechanical Turk) that there might be a man inside. But such a man was no animating force; he was imagined rather imprisoned in service to the machine, his life drained to make the “sepulchral” Turk speak. Hollingshead could not quite imagine a voice without a body, or with the virtual body of the Turk.

As Josephine Hoegaerts has suggested, “the Victorian period presents a brief but notable interval in which the voice was understood as a material entity, anchored in the body” (17), a time when the laryngoscope promised to unveil the secrets of the voice at its bodily source. Creators of shorthand and practitioners of the new science of phonetics alike looked to the throat to ‘fix’ the sound of voice, either fixing the voice accurately in writing or ‘fixing’ the pathologized speech of stutterers and the deaf.²⁸ It was, however, by means of a different bodily analogy that the lineage of voice synthesis technology would propagate into the future.

Jonathan Sterne’s now classic account of *The Audible Past*, centers the story on the ear phonautograph, developed by Alexander Graham Bell and Clarence Blake in 1874 from the earlier work of Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville. Bell and Blake attached the dissected middle

²⁸ These topics have been covered amply in relation to the culture of the nineteenth century. See Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*; Sterne *The Audible Past*; and Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*.

ear from a corpse to a wood and metal apparatus that wrote sound on paper with the vibration of a needle attached to the tympanum of the ear. For Sterne, the sound reproduction technology of the nineteenth century—from phonautograph to telephone and phonograph—was enabled by “contemplating and constructing sound as a kind of *effect* in the world” (33). Parallel to nineteenth-century efforts to synthesize voice from its simulated source (which continued after Faber) were efforts to produce its simulated effects on the ear, from the perspective of the science of acoustics.

Along these lines, in 1830 Robert Willis published “On the Vowel Sounds, and on Reed Organ-Pipes” in which he posited a theory of vowel sounds as a matter of vibrational frequency. He observed that previous writers had “contented themselves with ...considering vowels in fact more in the light of the physiological functions of the human body than as a branch of acoustics” (Willis 231). A further significant technical and theoretical breakthrough came with Hermann von Helmholtz’s *Sensations of Tone*, published in German in 1863 and first translated into English by Alexander J. Ellis in 1875. Helmholtz correctly identified that musical tones were composed of a fundamental frequency that defines the pitch and upper partial frequencies that define the quality of the sound. Timbre and vowel sound alike were matters of varying the partials. Importantly, Helmholtz’s understanding was built on a theory of hearing. If sound was composed of multiple frequencies, then its sensation in the ear was a matter of the ear vibrating in sympathy.²⁹ Just so had Helmholtz heard the strings of his Piano sympathetically vibrate with vowel sounds he shouted at them. Helmholtz posited that the ear functioned with thousands of pitched strings each tuned to vibrate in sympathy with a specific frequency and exciting a corresponding nerve:

²⁹ See Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, particularly chapter 3, on the resonances of this theory for George Eliot.

Now suppose we were able to connect every string of a piano with a nervous fibre in such a manner that this fibre would be excited and experience a sensation every time the string vibrated. Then every musical tone which impinged on the instrument would excite, as we know to be really the case in the ear, a series of sensations exactly corresponding to the pendular vibrations into which the original motion of the air had to be resolved. By this means, then, the existence of each partial tone would be exactly so perceived, as it really is perceived by the ear...Now, as a matter of fact, later microscopic discoveries respecting the internal construction of the ear, lead to the hypothesis, that arrangements exist in the ear similar to those which we have imagined. The end of every fibre of the auditory nerve is connected with small elastic parts, which we cannot but assume to be set in sympathetic vibration by the waves of sound. (129)

On this basis Helmholtz built a device capable of producing vowel sounds, not as they were spoken by the throat but as they were perceived by the ear. In Helmholtz's synthesizer, tuning forks replicated the partial frequencies of vowel sounds, vibrating in resonance with the ear.³⁰

As Sterne argues, it was the Helmholtzian reorientation toward the voice as an effect that led to the revolutionary sound technologies of the nineteenth century. Both the telephone and the gramophone are what Sterne calls tympanic technologies; they rely on a vibrating membrane to transduce sound into an electric signal or an inscription, much like the tympanum of the middle ear. It was Edison pricking his finger on the vibrating stylus of a phonautograph that gave him the notion that it might carve grooves into foil.³¹ And before that, Alexander Graham Bell's work on the telephone was begun when he misread Helmholtz in the original German and understood him to be describing the transduction of sympathetic vibrations into electrical waves. Sterne's point, one made frequently in media studies scholarship, is not that these technologies were the cause "of a proliferation of a particular set of practices and practical understandings concerning sound in the ear," but the result of it (35). Likewise, Hankins and Silverman emphasize that voice synthesis technologies "reflected not only the particular contexts in which

³⁰ Helmholtz also produced vowel sounds with inferior results using organ pipes. See p. 128

³¹ Not, however, an ear phonautograph.

the devices were created, but also alterations in the theory of the origin of vocal sounds and in the criteria for what constituted such a theory” (178).³²

At the Chicago World’s Fair in 1939, Bell Labs demonstrated the Voder, short for Voice Operation DEMonstratoR. It was the demonstration version of the vocoder (VOICE enCODER), which had been developed by Homer Dudley over the preceding ten years. Both the vocoder and Voder were premised on a different theory of voice than the synthesis technologies of the nineteenth century. Dudley proposed “the carrier nature of speech” as a model. He analogized vowel sounds, sibilants, and fricatives to continuous waves, modulated by the vocal cords, mouth, tongue, and nose to encode a message. As Dudley wrote,

The speaker is pictured as a sort of radio broadcast transmitter with the message to be sent out originating in the studio of the talker’s brain and manifesting itself in muscular wave motions in the vocal tract. Although these motions contain the message, they are inaudible because they occur at syllabic rates. An audible sound is needed to pass the message into the listener’s ear. This is provided by the carrier in the form of a group of higher frequency waves in the audible range set up by oscillatory action at the vocal cords or elsewhere in the vocal tract. These carrier waves either in their generation or their transmission are modulated by the message waves to form the speech waves. As the speech waves contain the message information on an audible carrier they are adapted to broadcast reception by receiving sets in the form of listeners’ ears. The message is then recovered by the listeners’ minds. (495)

The human body itself here becomes a medium for voice; a broadcast transmitter sending out waves for mind-to-mind messaging. Indeed, Dudley’s diagrams of speech circuits included neatly labeled brains as the source of the signal. Dudley makes the direct analogy with broadcast technology like the radio, which was “an apparatus that possessed the power to atomize and

³² In my approach, I have in mind here as well Lisa Gitelman’s work, particularly *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines*: “I begin with the idea that inventing new ways to write or new kinds of writing presupposes a model of what writing and reading are and can be. If the model is too eccentric, then the invention may not work, or the model might suit some relevant social groups and not others. If the model is negotiable within or against existing models, then the invention has a chance of appropriation and dissemination. In this way, shorthand alphabets, phonographs, typewriters, and other nineteenth-century innovations in the area of inscriptive practice are so many theories of language and textuality” (4).

disperse both body and consciousness across the vast expanses of the universe” (14) as Jeffery Sconce writes in an account of the historic pursuit of media “presence.” This is neither the body as source nor as receiver, but body as part of the medium. The analogy enabled Dudley and Bell Labs to encode and transmit speech over the waves, “remaking” it mechanically. And importantly, by analyzing the voice as discrete bands of data, Dudley’s theory enabled him to transform the signal while preserving the voice. This permitted both encryption and compression. By analyzing and discarding redundant (or semantically irrelevant) data in the signal, the message could be made smaller and easier to carry (Dudley 513). This technique became fundamental to modern telecommunications and is the same effective principle that underlies “lossy” modern computer compression algorithms.

But encoding speech was the vocoder’s job, the voder did not transduce sound into data and back again, it synthesized a voice that had never been spoken.

In the Fair demonstration, repeated continuously at intervals of about five minutes, the male announcer gives a simple running discussion of the circuit with the girl operator replying to his questions by forming sounds on the voder and connecting them into words and sentences. She does this by manipulating fourteen keys with her fingers, a bar with her left wrist and a pedal with her right foot. This requires considerable skill by the operators. (Dudley 505)

As Bell’s own quarterly magazine described it: “the manipulative skill of the operator’s fingers make the Voder’s voice almost too good to be true” (Williams and Roberts 65). Twenty-four “Voderettes” had trained for a year in order to stroke the machine with a subtle enough touch that it could be persuaded to emit not just words, but whole sentences (Mills 109). They were women selected from Bell’s pool of telephone operators (Mills 109) and represented the sort of bodily infrastructure enmeshed in telecommunications since nineteenth-century telegraph

operators first became nodes in a vast communication network.³³ As Jill Galvan has argued, women were conceptualized as ideal conduits for such tasks, more sensitive or sympathetic and more able to work automatically than male operators (17).

It is striking how much the voder resembles Faber's Euphonia almost one hundred years earlier. Both are effectively instruments, resembling an organ, that needed to be performed to make them speak. The reactions to the two, however, could not have been more different. Faber's machine was something of a dud, and Hollingshead's account spends as much time focusing on the machine's morbid operator as its voice: "The Professor was not too clean, and his hair and beard sadly wanted the attention of a barber. I have no doubt that he slept in the same room as his figure—his scientific *Frankenstein* monster—and I felt the secret influence of an idea that the two were destined to live and die together" (68). Hollingshead's reminiscence ends with the Professor's apocryphal suicide: "The end came at last, and not the unexpected end. One day, in a dull matter-of-fact town—a town that could understand nothing but a Circus or a Jack Pudding—he destroyed himself and his figure" (69). In contrast, the attendees at the World's Fair were happier to politely ignore the operator and hear the machine talking.

If a visitor entered the Voder room and joined the listeners, he saw the Voder being operated and heard what could be done with it. But if he stood at a point from which he could hear it and at the same time look into the faces of the listeners, he saw impressively the effect it had upon them. That they were hearing something of startling scientific import and profound human interest was obvious from the expressions on their faces, for uniformly they listened in rapt and appreciative attention. (Williams and Roberts 62-3)³⁴

³³ For the telegraph in relation to the body and literature see Jason Rudy, *Electric Meters*; Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*; Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*; and Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century*, to cite just a few examples of a robust critical discussion.

³⁴ To be sure the Voderettes were hardly behind a curtain. One attendee is quoted as saying "The Voder is just marvelous and so is the girl who is operating it" (64). Nevertheless the Bell Lab framing of the event here clearly asks audiences to mind the effect and not the cause.

By Bell's account (the commercial entity—not the inventor), listeners were as likely to notice the “skill of telephone engineers” (Williams and Roberts 63) as of the operator: “Is [it] true that there really is no phonograph record? My it's amazing!” (Ibid 63) asks one, “The miracles, as the Bible describes them, are really true, for here in this room we are witnessing a modern miracle. The wonders of God transmitted through man's mind are truly being demonstrated here” (Ibid 63) declares another. One spectator, Vannevar Bush (much vaunted in digital studies for his conception of the Memex), described the event in these terms: “A girl stroked its keys and it emitted recognizable speech. No human vocal chords entered into the procedure at any point; the keys simply combined some electrically produced vibrations and passed these on to a loudspeaker” (qtd. in Mills 109-110).³⁵ The operator dissolves into the keys as the machine itself is understood to speak. Just so had Dudley's carrier theory of speech dissolved the body into the medium of language.

The difference between the reception of the Euphonia and the Voder was the audience's willful participation in the fantasy of disembodiment. For the Euphonia's audience, such a fantasy found a much more popular form in ventriloquy. In fact, given that the Euphonia was largely exhibited as popular entertainment, the comparison was likely inevitable for Victorian spectators. If as Steven Connor has shown, if the appeal of ventriloquy was the voice's power in constructing a virtual body (a vocalic body or voice-body as he variously terms it), the android body of the Euphonia seemed more like the voice's death.³⁶ “If the invisible girl [the ventriloqual illusion to which Hollingshead compared the Euphonia] depended upon the viewer's acts of fantasy and projection, Euphonia was characterized by its grotesque visibility” (Connor 354).

³⁵ Originally published in “As We May Think.” *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945.

³⁶ By the same token Connor does observe that ventriloquists themselves “found it hard to live up to the exorbitant expectations” of audiences (306). Ventriloquists indeed always “fall short” of a “powerful” ventriloqual “ideal” (307).

But by 1939, audiences were conditioned less by the formal conventions of stage illusion than by the modern trickery of the gramophone, telephone, and radio, which similarly made the voice appear to emerge, acousmatically, from places other than its origin. The Voder presaged a media future that World's Fair attendees were eager to embrace, one in which the voice's disembodiment signaled the power of the machine. From the beginning that disembodiment was always partly an illusion.³⁷ From the era of the automaton, speech synthesis had always involved the body as a model or an operator. The story of speech synthesis is the story of removing or appearing to remove the body from the process of voice mediation, to varying success.

After the voder, the name of the game was hiding the operator. Text-to-speech (TTS) systems require robust analysis of language and voice to automate the process of pairing printed words with sounds; the computer replaces the Voderette, whose complex job it had been to parse audience-suggested words into constituent sounds and instruct the synthesizer to produce them. Synthesized sound, vastly refined, but effectively on the same principle as Dudley's, continued to be pursued through the twentieth century. But by the late nineties, enough computing power was available to effect a much neater trick: concatenated voice. Sit a voice actor in a studio, record an extensive script designed to elicit the full range of possible vocal sounds, then break the recorded audio into phonemes. A computer can reassemble the recorded sounds into new words instead of synthesizing them outright (Condliffe, Anderson). The result sounds much more human than the machine sound of the synthesizer. Such systems were highly effective at obscuring the sound's source from an actual person. In 2013 the mere existence of voice actress Susan Bennett, who gave the original voice to Apple's virtual assistant Siri, generated headlines.

³⁷ On this point I depart significantly from Connor, who takes it for granted that media disembody voice, albeit within his conception a voice necessarily implies a body. I take media disembodiment to be closer to a program or social practice rather than a function of the technology.

“Behind this groundbreaking technology there is a real woman,” wrote CNN, somewhat breathlessly (Ravitz).

Voice Synthesis techniques underwent the biggest shift since the Voder in 2016, when Google DeepMind developed WaveNet, applying developments in artificial intelligence (not for the first time) to the problem of synthesizing natural speech (Condliffe). Rather than approaching voice synthesis as a problem of modeling the infinitely complex ways speakers give voice to words or phonemes, DeepMind trained a neural net on raw audio waveforms. The result was a system that takes the logic of Helmholtz’s synthesizer to the extreme, abstracting the voice to its limit as pure sound. WaveNet can generate voices, but it is equally good at generating music. Indeed, the researchers found that “the model also picked up on other characteristics in the audio [data set] apart from the voice itself. For instance, it mimicked the acoustics and recording quality, as well as the breathing and mouth movements of the speakers” (Oord et al. 5).

Looked at within the long arc of technology since the late nineteenth century, AI voice represents the latest move in a series of successively abstract theories of the voice in pursuit of a wholly disembodied speaker. But no technology succeeded at so thoroughly disembodimenting the voice as WaveNet; whether constructed in imitation of human physiology or literally involving the bodily work of operators, the history of voice synthesis can be best considered as a project of concealing the embodied production of sound. Sometimes, as with the Voder, this required thinking that was conditioned by technology in the first place—a theory of the voice that dissolved the body into the medium, or the polite ignorance of the way the very real bodies of workers enabled communication infrastructure. Though I have called WaveNet the most successful disembodiment to date, I would be remiss to not observe that much AI infrastructure depends on invisible labor. For example, in early April 2024 it was widely reported that Amazon

was winding down its AI-enabled cashierless checkout system at its Amazon Fresh grocery stores. As it turned out, that involved laying off some 1000 workers in India, on whom the system relied to review “transactions and label footage to help train the AI models that make it work” (Palmer).

Now that I have worked so scrupulously to exorcize the phonograph, it becomes regrettably necessary to resummon it. I think the aspiration toward disembodiment I am describing can be read productively alongside the development of audio fidelity as a program for sound technology. Sterne’s analysis of the early advertising apparatus for the gramophone unseats a number of assumptions about sound reproduction. That the gramophone “reproduced” a sound that was self-identical with an original was hardly a given for audiences skeptical that it even worked, much less so for audiences of the phonograph. The same is true for the transmission technology of the telephone.³⁸ Although the Edison phonograph could record as well as play back sound (the former feature was lost with the gramophone), it was ill-suited to capturing spontaneous, unperformed audio. High fidelity audio is hardly naturalistic and required (and requires) “crafting a particular kind of listening experience” (Sterne 242), capturing natural sounding music or speech required specialized conditions of performance. Sterne in fact postulates that “the media of sound reproduction are the material conditions for contemplation of the original/copy distinction” (233). The original, he suggests, only comes to exist in distinction with the copy. Kate Lacey observes thus that a “nostalgia for the real” motivates the quest for fidelity, a quest to recover “authenticity and the simulation of presence” (59) lost in mechanical reproduction.

³⁸ Sterne describes both the gramophone and telephone with respect to fidelity in detail in chapter 5 of *The Audible Past* (2003).

But the original/copy distinction was and was not born with sound reproduction. “Copy” is a term relevant to print long before the invention of audio reproduction—indeed, Benjamin’s famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” begins with a whole catalogue of historical reproduction technologies prior to the phonograph. And Kreilkamp observes a similar quest to recover authenticity and presence in pre-phonographic Victorian novels, which he attributes to the sense that authors were participating in a corrupt, commercialized, and mechanized print market.

In the case of voice synthesis technology, the aspiration to make a better sounding voice introduces several contradictions. Producing a more realistic voice requires the technology to be both more and less human. It sounds real by becoming more artificial. This creates a perhaps surprising situation for the early talking machine, where authenticity is guaranteed by seeing the gears turn. The pursuit of “perfect fidelity” as the gramophone promised, is a pursuit of Bolter and Grusin’s transparent immediacy, of studiously contriving to formally dissolve the intervening medium and close the gap between the listener and the self-present voice that originated the recording. Audiences for the Voder seemed to be seeking a machinic self-presence, voice unmediated even by human bodies.

But this version of immediacy is not so strange as at first it might seem. Immediacy in general, and audio fidelity specifically, are both formal contrivances. “The imagined correspondence between live and reproduced had to be invented along with the sound media...Through the conventions of realism and the rhetoric of fidelity, listeners could collapse the difference between live and reproduced into a single continuum of likeness and difference” (Sterne 285). For representational media, their very materiality might offer paradoxical proof of

the authenticity of what they mediate; in this light, the recorded voice is closer to the simulated voice than we would assume.

James Lastra in fact highlights that inscription and simulation are the “master tropes” which “set the boundaries for describing, understanding, and deploying new representational technologies” (Lastra 21). As keen as Edison was to frame the phonograph as “capturing fugitive sound,” the technology was also considered in inscriptive and simulative terms (Feaster 144). Lastra observes that the phonograph was understood as “a talking machine” it “stood emblematically for the fact that speaking, singing, and music-making no longer required the presence of a human performer” (22). “Perhaps alarmingly, human intervention in the process of representation became, in a manner of speaking, literally unnecessary.” (Lastra 22) Just as light was sometimes imagined to write itself on photographic film without mediation, sound itself was imagined to inscribe the cylinder directly (Lastra 22). The possibility of light or sound being able to write itself makes the materiality of the inscription the confirmation of its own archival reality. In this paradigm, immediacy and hypermediacy might become difficult to distinguish. But of course, in Bolter and Grusin’s original conception, these are both strategies of remediation; “immediacy depends on hypermediacy” (6), that is to say: it is a formally composed effect. Materiality might be the formalist sign by which we know the machine is working, much as the whine and hiss of a PA system lets us know, “is this thing on?”

Perhaps this explains the curious scene that unfolded in 1890 on the first anniversary of Robert Browning’s death. The Browning Society convened to listen to a recording of the poet made on April 7, 1889 by Edison’s agent in Britain, Colonel George E. Gouraud (Picker 122). The recording is famously bad. Browning forgets “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” trailing off into inaudibility under the rushing sound of the recording medium

itself. Prins pays special attention to the way this recording makes audible and visible the mechanical mediation of Browning's voice by meter and technology alike. But while she reads the fascinating publicization of the event in *Black and White*, she does not consider the actual scene of listening to Browning that day in 1890. The grainy mechanical mediation of Browning's voice did not much trouble the crowd that gathered to hear a snatch of "the Master's Voice," as one illustration of the scene put it.³⁹ Here is twenty-first-century critic John Picker's characterization of the scene in *Victorian Soundscapes*: "Faithful listeners gave disproportionate validity to what was after all, a false start. The recording preserves not the transcendence of poetic genius but the humanity of memory's imperfection. Benjamin, for one, might have been surprised with the "aura" created by such a copy of an original voice" (Picker 123). Picker's account attends to the strangeness of the technology for its initial listeners, the way that it simultaneously made the voice "immortal and disembodied" while "preserv[ing] in the distinct tones, accents, and breath of that voice a fragile mortality, the very *corporeality* that words on a page or sentiments in a poem lacked" (Picker 116). In this "indecent séance," as Browning's sister Sarianna called it, Browning's fans found something transcendent through, not despite, the medium. Browning's fumbled reading and the mediated sound itself betoken an authentic encounter with the "master's voice."

And really, that sound is a fair bit closer to the master's voice as we encounter it on the page than Picker acknowledges or Prins accounts for. As Gregory Brophy has observed, the recording "captures indexically the fabled 'splutter' of Browning's speech" (15). Brophy is citing Isobel Armstrong in turn, who reminds us that Browning's poetic "shifts and lurches" "[draw] attention to the nature of words as a medium of representation" (*Victorian Poetry* 12).

³⁹ The phrase anticipates the Francis Barraud painting that would famously become the trademark for the Victor Talking Machine Company.

Browning's recording certainly preserves the *corporeality* of his voice, as Picker put it, but his printed voice was no less corporeal.

Reading the Browning dramatic monologue alongside the history of voice synthesis and mediation I have outlined here reveals the way the genre navigates complex relations of immediacy and hypermediacy that depend on the corporeality of that voice. The dramatic monologue locates authenticity in simulation, a process that appears to disembody the author even as it depends on his distinctive voice machinery. The dramatic monologue is a synthetic form that attempts to simulate the condition of archival media, albeit as an artistic effect. Browning's perennial search for truth is partly a concern with the limits between simulation and representation, the way one can appear like the other, and how the desire for immediacy might obscure rather than reveal that truth.

Victorian Poetry and Voice Synthesis

In 1833, three years after Robert Willis reoriented the voice as an acoustic effect on the ear, John Stuart Mill reoriented poetry along similar lines: "Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling: but, if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience. The peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener" (95). Mill's definition is of course paradoxical, an "absurd reduction" as Herbert Tucker terms it in a classic article ("Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric" 145). Unless Mill meant that a poet should never publish (and he is clear that he does not), he sets a condition for poetry at an unachievable limit. In print, a poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener can only ever be an effect (or affect), not a condition of speaking. In fact, whether heard or overheard, Mill's definition imagines poetry as something that is indeed *heard*. Poetry as "feeling confessing itself to itself" abstracts

and reorients feeling from its source to its perception, much as the synthesized voice moved from the throat to the ear. Mill wanted his ear to vibrate in sympathy, without apparent contrivance or intervention.

But one of Mill's most memorable metaphors, we should note, necessitates considerable contrivance: "That song has always seemed to us like the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell, ourselves listening, unseen, in the next." The irony of this romantic image of confinement is that, as Janice Schroeder notes, in Victorian prisons the voice was "a banned substance" (9). Drawing on reports from the 1830s produced by prison inspectors William Crawford and Whitworth Russell, she highlights that merely talking could result in punishments as severe as the solitary confinement Mill imagines here (10). Thus, prisoners found "alternative forms of communication to replace vocal utterance" (Schroeder 10). It seems appropriate in this light that Mill imagines a practically impossible circumstance of hearing, one which requires some other medium for speech.

Perhaps Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1845 letter to Robert makes a fitting counterpoint to Mill: "It would be strange and contradictory if I were not always delighted both to hear from *you* and to write to *you*, this talking upon paper being as good a social pleasure as another, when our means are somewhat straitened. As for me, I have done most of my talking by post of late years—as people shut up in dungeons take up with scrawling mottoes on the walls" (*Letters* Feb. 3, 1845 p. 23). Shut up in a dungeon, one talks and is heard upon paper if at all. In this self-figuration Barrett almost resembles the imprisoned human that Hollingshead imagined was inside Faber's Euphonia, sending out sepulchral notes. Or indeed she resembles the "Invisible Girl" that no one mistook the Euphonia for, a trick in which spectators heard an apparently

absent girl's voice "conducted through a speaking tube" from an adjacent room (Hankins and Silverman 283 n. 157).

Barrett's partial confinement evidently made her quite good at "this talking upon paper," at least in Robert Browning's evaluation. As he wrote her in 1845, "your poetry must be, cannot but be, infinitely more to me than mine to you—for you *do* what I always wanted, hoped to do, and only seem now likely to do for the first time. You speak out, *you*, —I only make men and women speak—give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me" (*Letters* Jan 13, 1845 p. 14) Barrett compliments Browning in turn: "you have in your vision two worlds, or to use the language of the schools of the day, you are both subjective and objective in the habits of your mind. You can deal both with abstract thought and with human passion in the most passionate sense" (*Letters* Jan 15, 1845, p. 18). This note—and Barret's reply—set or anticipated the terms for a great deal of twentieth-century scholarly debate on Victorian poetry. Figured here is Langbaum's dramatic monologue, a relativist genre that follows the Romantic "poetry of experience" in making the subjective objective. Or here is Herbert Tucker's dramatic monologue, irrupting lyric subjectivity by recontextualizing it as a historical process in which "readers find themselves unsettlingly historicized and contextualized as well" ("Overhearing" 145). Here, even, is Isobel Armstrong's "double poem" in which the poet "explores expressive psychological forms simultaneously as psychological conditions *and* as constructs" (*Victorian Poetry* 13).

But in this subjective and objective divide here is also a pair of poets caught in an ongoing retheorization of the voice from its source to its effect, from the mouth to the ear, from speaking out the self to making men and women seem to speak. Somewhere between the Brownings' speaking and Mill's hearing is a history of the voice's mediation. If the Brownings

were engaged in “talking upon paper,” I am asking how and to what extent can we be said to hear them? And to be a touch impertinent, what about the paper? This study is not, however, about EBB’s letters, however ideal a metaphor they furnish. My proposal here is that we consider Robert Browning’s dramatic monologues in the heritage of synthetic voice media, that “this talking upon paper” is, to some degree, talking paper.

Raphaël Millière has offered a useful taxonomy of synthetic media that allows me to be slightly more precise in my comparison. “Synthetic audiovisual media do not merely record real objects and events; instead, their mode of production intrinsically involves a generative component” (230). Synthetic media may be further categorized as totally or partially synthetic. Many of the most pernicious and earliest forms of deepfakes fall into the latter category, using generative techniques to alter preexisting media, making it appear as though a different person is depicted. If the dramatic monologue is to be considered as synthetic media, the vast majority of examples are, according to Millière’s taxonomy, totally synthetic. The monologues of *The Ring and the Book* are a notable exception, as they to some degree transform and remediate preexisting media in the form of the old yellow book. Millière distinguishes synthetic media from archival media: “Archival media are supposed to be brought about by real objects and events in a mechanical matter” (230), they are effectively representational, existing with a real-world referent assumed to have at one time produced them. It is significant to my study to note that contra Millière’s definition, the archival function is a socially conditioned use for such technology, not an objective function. Millière exhibits the problem inherent in describing media as inherently archival when he attempts to define the term: archival media “can be said to ‘record’ reality in so far as they capture it through a process that is not directly mediated by the

producer's desires and beliefs" (230). Pictures do not in fact take themselves, although, as we have seen, they may indeed be thought to.⁴⁰

It will require little argument to suggest that the dramatic monologue is a simulative genre. It is implicit in Browning's description of his *Dramatic Lyrics* as "so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine" (*Complete Works* Vol. 3 p. 197 n. 1). Of course, a dramatic monologue does not write itself; and in this respect, as Jill Galvan has observed, the dramatic speaker is himself a kind of medium for the author's voice (Galvan 164). But the text does nevertheless simultaneously synthesize a voice apparently other to the author's.

Deconstructive critiques of the dramatic monologue have covered this ground well: "The self of a dramatic monologue, after all, is the most elaborate illusion of the text, the product of a speech act and not its producer" (Tucker "Monomania" 131 f.n. 10).⁴¹ The artistic aim of this voice tends toward a kind of realism or immediacy, a drive toward making voice apprehensible as it is heard, in context and as an effect—thus the presence of an auditor, the tendency to open *in medias res*, and the conversational tics and leavings off. Part of the effect the reader buys into, if only provisionally, is the illusion that the text is an archival record of speech (archival in Millière's sense); what the dramatic monologue simulates in part is the condition of representation. It most closely resembles the contemporary deepfake in this respect, though not

⁴⁰ Defining archival media as the opposite term also introduces the problem that synthetic media can equally simulate media that we do not generally consider as having an archival function—one recent use for AI voice cloning has reportedly been in telephone scams which attempt to deceive a target into believing they are communicating in real time with a loved one. See: Bethea, Charles. "The Terrifying A.I. Scam That Uses Your Loved One's Voice." *The New Yorker*, Online Edition, 7 March 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/science/annals-of-artificial-intelligence/the-terrifying-ai-scam-that-uses-your-loved-ones-voice>.

⁴¹ I wish to acknowledge Britta Martens' *The Poetry of Robert Browning* (2016), without which I would have missed this clear, direct, and succinct statement of Tucker's views, which he hid in a footnote. For deconstructive accounts of the dramatic monologue, see also Warwick Slinn's "Browning and the Fictions of Identity," and Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry*.

with the intent to deceive.⁴² The voice in the dramatic monologue undergoes multiple mediations and remediations: the voice represents the author's voice, simulates a dramatic voice, and represents the dramatic voice. This is voice as hypermedia—layers of simulation and representation remediate each other. By my count, in fact, there are three voices in the dramatic monologue—the authorial voice, the dramatic voice, and the textual voice mediating between the two. It is to this third voice that I attribute the effects of immediacy in the dramatic monologue.⁴³ It is the voice of the simulation, the grind of the gears, the guarantor of authenticity, the virtual reality of the dramatic monologue. I am proposing this in part to account for Browning's ability to slip out of hearing and into the text even against what Picker described as the "corporeality" of his voice. If the dream of voice synthesis is the dream of immediacy through the machine, of slipping bodily into the medium, we can measure the success of this, I think, in F. J. Furnivall's prefatory comment on the Browning society's republication of Browning's "Essay on Shelley"

The interest [in the essay] lay in the fact, that Browning's 'utterances' here are *his*, and not those of any one of the 'so many imaginary persons' behind whom he insists on so often hiding himself, and whose necks I, for one should continually like to wring, whose bodies I would fain kick out of the way, in order to get face to face with the poet himself, and hear his own voice speaking his own thoughts, man to man, soul to soul. ("Foretalk" 3)

Positing a textual voice helps to explain the way Browning's monologues create immediacy through a thick formalism, through material language that becomes the guarantor of the synthetic voice's authenticity, even as it obscures the representational reality of the genre. To be clear,

⁴² The same could be said for various novelistic voices, but the dramatic monologue strikes me as a unique circumstance at least among poetic genres. Among novels, the epistolary novel in particular aims for the real by means of the hypermedial reproduction of textual representation. I tend to be unpersuaded by accounts (Kreilkamp's for instance) that position the dramatic monologue as poetry attempting to compete with the success of the novel on its own ground, but it's clear that the two forms have a relation in the production of vocal immediacy that merits further study.

⁴³ The key distinction between what I am proposing and Griffiths's "printed voice," is that Griffiths's printed voice mediates between the author and their audience. I am speaking of a materially present voice, one that facilitates rather than marks a kind of disembodiment in the abstraction of voice into the medium.

Browning's monologues are in fact Browning's utterances. Of course, Furnivall knows this, but the desire to meet the poet "man to man, soul to soul" is a desire for a voice unbodied, an ideal "that communication happens best when bodies and language are transcended," as John Durham Peters puts it (63). It is an ideal of immediacy that the distorting remediations of the dramatic monologue exists in uneasy relation with. Browning's utterances, with all their formal machinery, are paradoxically an obstacle to hearing Browning's utterances. The text produces a third voice, a textual voice. Browning is but a Voderette not so much speaking through the Voder as dissolving into its vocal productions.

A Third Voice

Although we might agree with Furnivall that Browning's voice is hard to hear, it certainly makes a sharp contrast to note how often Browning has been, well, over-heard, heard a bit too much.⁴⁴ Browning's corporeal language—his linguistic materiality—has long attracted the attention of critics. Recent work by Kristin Hanson and Nigel Fabb, Michael Rizq, Daniel Martin, Gal Manor, and Simon Jarvis (if I may be excused for calling 2016 recent) have offered important new insights on this topic. But I wish to begin with a slightly less critical entry-point. Browning's fabled obscurity begs the question: How do you read Robert Browning? I recently gave a giddy account of *The Ring and the Book* to a friend and colleague, an expert on early modern British literature. My description of the poem's *Rashomon*-like search for truth through multiple conflicting perspectives was intriguing enough that my friend thought to give it a go. He meant, however, to my shock, to read it in the form of an audiobook. *Good lord*, I thought, *I can*

⁴⁴ Most directly, Furnivall's comment reflects the overwhelming lack of clear prose statements from Browning about his own poetry, and in that respect his voice certainly is absent. I use "over-heard" with a passing nod to Tucker's "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," albeit in a much more literal sense than he imagined.

barely tell Browning's shine from his shade when I'm looking at the thing, how could he ever hope to understand it out loud? I was thinking alongside some one hundred and fifty years of critical interest in Browning's highly irregular prosody. His contemporaries were famously not circumspect in their evaluations. "Was there ever such a stuttering collocation of syllables to confound the reader and utterly destroy a sweet little lyric?" asked Walter Besant and James Rice of *Pippa Passes* (119).⁴⁵ Oscar Wilde complained: "what right has a man to the title of poet who has so little sense of his duty to his fellow men as to indulge in the composition of word puzzles and ear-torturing sentences when a whole people needs the assistance of every man and woman who is capable of sensibly thinking and acting?" (qtd. in Dunstan 66).⁴⁶ The challenges of Browning's verse are not just metrical. His sometimes strange, elliptical, or circumferential turns of phrase were baffling enough, even to fans, that the Browning Society (unique among nineteenth-century literary societies for its devotion to a living author) had occasional recourse to consulting Browning himself for clarity.⁴⁷ The society's party line was a bit different, however:

The Browning student will seek the shortcoming in himself rather than in his master. He will wish, by conference with other students, by recourse to older scholars, to learn more of the meanings of the poet's utterances; and then having gladly learnt, "gladly wol he teche", and bring others under the same influence that has benefited himself. To this end *The Browning Society* has been founded. (Furnivall 1)

The Browning Society stages reading Browning as something demanding close private study, even if public performance was part of their activities.

⁴⁵ Oddly this bit of criticism is in Besant and Rice's novel *With Harp and Crown*

⁴⁶ Originally from "The Poets and the People. By one of the Latter," *Pall Mall Gazette*, no. 4, 17 February 1887. Like many famous Wilde quotations, the provenance here is slightly suspect. I quote Dunstan: "Published anonymously, the extract was attributed to Wilde by bibliographer Stuart Mason [pseud. Christopher Sclater Millard] in his *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), 146–8" (p. 78 n. 70).

⁴⁷ As Angela Dunston details, in 1889 the society roped Browning in to settling a critical dispute about "Numpholeptos." And if founder Frederick James Furnivall is to be believed, Browning personally settled the matter of whether "Childe Roland" was allegorical (Dunston 69).

With this, and my personal experience of Browning's famous obscurity in mind, I advised my friend against reading *The Ring and the Book* aloud. *Browning is a poet for the page*, I thought, *his appeal to the ear is beyond the voice*. Indeed in some accounts this was precisely what Victorian prosody was aiming at; Robert Vaughn wrote in his review of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*:

Art has many modes of expression, and the music of language may some day be perfected, until it act on our finer sense with as powerful an influence as a sonata of Beethoven's or an air of Mozart's—more powerful than either if it be mated to noble thoughts. Somewhat of the same attempt at a new expression of art is evident in many modern versifiers, though none are so successful as is Mr. Tennyson. We have all felt the charm of Edgar Poe's strange airs, and Mr. Browning is almost rash in his use of sound to heighten effect. (Vaughan *British Quarterly Review* Oct 1864 p. 487)

Browning's "almost rash" use of sound threatens here to transcend language itself. In fact, in the early twentieth century, father of American linguistics, Edward Sapir described Browning's "spirit [moving] largely in the non-linguistic layer" (239).⁴⁸

But despite the protestations of critics that Browning's verse was stutteringly unpronounceable, it seems Browning's obscurity did not remove him from the scene of social reading-aloud in which texts were often consumed by Victorians. The Queen herself apparently read *The Ring and the Book* in just this way. Contemporary biographer Sarah Tooley reported that Queen Victoria

appreciated the fine thought in the works of Mr. Browning, and frequently had his poems read aloud to her. In connection with this I recall a story... Sir Theodore Martin had been requested by Her Majesty to read aloud from 'The Ring and the Book.' Sir Theodore was courtier enough to make a cautious study beforehand of the poem, and he placed marginal notes as danger signals against passages of doubtful propriety. (474)

⁴⁸ This specific claim was recently put to the test by Hanson and Fabb, as part of a masterful and highly technical prosodic analysis of Browning's "Pietro of Abano."

Other celebrity readers included William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose readings of Browning to friends at Oxford was, as Maurice Browning Cramer argues, instrumental in cultivating an early readership for Browning. According to William Holman Hunt, D. G. Rossetti “would give” *Sordello* and *Paracelsus* “by forty and fifty pages at a time” (*Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870* p. 120).⁴⁹ Browning’s poetry was voiced as often as any other poetry of the period.

Across the Atlantic, Mark Twain practically made reciting Browning a hobby. “I can read Browning so Browning himself can understand it,” he boasted. (Gribben 93) Twain lead a Browning reading group out of his home in 1886 and 1887. One auditor, Mary Bushnell Cheney described the scene of one the meetings:

By her own admission, she was then a ‘doubter of his [Browning’s] comprehensibility, even to the point of wondering whether Browning himself knew or cared very much what he meant.’ That morning Cheney heard [Twain] read from *The Ring and the Book*, *Strafford*, and *Sordello*. Once he entered “the flowing tide” of *The Ring and the Book*, “all else was forgotten in its strong thoughts and brilliant sentences.” As [Twain] progressed, he succeeded in diminishing his listeners’ awareness of a speaker physically present. “The reading was not oratorical and aimed at no effects of cadence. Free from self-consciousness, attempting only to let those sentences speak for themselves as the author meant them, mastering in the easiest way the parenthetical style so habitual with Browning, sentence within sentence conveying the thought, Mr. [Twain]...let him interpret himself with no intrusion of his own personality. (Gribben 93)⁵⁰

Although listeners thought Twain invested the text with a perfect clarity of knowledge, he was less sure himself: “They say the poetry never gets obscure till I begin to explain it. So, I’ve stopped being expounder, and thrown my heft on the reading. Don’t explain your author, read

⁴⁹ This quotation is not from a letter but a personal interview with the book’s editor, George Birkbeck Hill.

⁵⁰ This passage comes from Alan Gribben’s article “‘A Splendor of Stars & Suns’: Twain as a Reader of Browning’s Poems” (1978). Gribben in turn is quoting from “Mark Twain as a Reader,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 55 (7 Jan. 1911), 6.

him right and he explains himself'.⁵¹ Cheney and Twain seemed to share a sense that if the reader could just get out of the way, Browning's sentences could "speak for themselves as the author meant them." This account is somewhat paradoxical. Cheney confesses to not understanding Browning in his own idiom. But she feels that Twain could dissolve the very difficulty of the language by dissolving *into* it—not interpreting, but letting Browning interpret himself. The vexing language she could not previously understand now somehow speaks itself. Twain makes Browning's voice heard in the process of becoming a medium for it.

It is of course the paradox of all poetry that it lives between the ear and the page. But the long insistence on the literal un-pronounceability of Browning's poetry would seem to argue strongly that Browning's is a poetry for the page. Yet, not only was Browning's poetry widely read aloud, it seems indeed to come alive in the mouth. Spoken aloud, the opening of book four of *The Ring and the Book*, for example, is livened with intonation that is difficult to hear on the page:

True, Excellency – as his Highness says,
Though she's not dead yet, she's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two;
Though he's not judged yet, he's the same as judged,
And nothing hinders, now we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome. (IV.1-9)

Though this is a subjective judgment, by my money, reading it aloud papers over some of Browning's obscurity. Voicing the poetry highlights the conversational quality of Browning's

⁵¹ Gribben's article is as far back as I can trace the source for this quotation, p. 90. Gribben indicates his source is a letter to Mary Hallock Foote, 2 Dec. 1887, published in *When Huck Finn Went Highbrow* (1934) edited by Benjamin de Casseres. *Highbrow* was an extremely limited edition and the letter in question has not been reproduced elsewhere.

verse, a quality that emerges from the sound more than the sense.⁵² An impersonal fragment like “and nothing hinders” makes sense grammatically only by squinting at it, but it makes a great deal of sense out loud as the vocal leaving-off of a speaker rushing toward his sentence’s finale, where he is eager to pronounce himself the man qualified to untangle the knot of Guido’s legal troubles and ingratiate himself to his high-ranked auditors.

It seems Browning had something of this sense of his poetry himself. In William Michael Rossetti’s commemorative “Portraits of Robert Browning”, published in the *Magazine of art* in 1890, the critic recollected an 1855 evening in which both Tennyson and Browning read from their work. This was his impression of the poet:

Browning’s voice, which was at once rich and peculiar, took much less account of the poem as a rhythmical whole; his delivery had more affinity to that of an actor, laying stress on all the light and shade of the composition—its touches of character, its conversational points, its dramatic give-and-take. In those qualities of elocution in which Tennyson was strong, and aimed to be strong, Browning was contentedly weak; and *vice versa*. (“Portraits of Robert Browning—I.” by W. M. Rossetti 182)

In contrast to Tennyson’s measured delivery, Browning gave a more dramatic performance, one rather through than in the meter of his lines.

The special trouble for Browning is that his language is not just pushing at the limits between mouth and page, it pushes at the limits of the genre. Poetic form gives the lie to the pretext of the dramatic monologue as a fictional utterance. As Ralph Rader wrote of “My Last Duchess,” “If we ask ourselves whether in reading the poem we imaginatively hear the words of the poem as spoken by the Duke, we discover of course that we do. If we then ask if we hear the rhymes in the poem as part of the Duke’s speech, we discover that we do not” (136). For Eric

⁵² Eric Griffiths would suggest that the fundamental “intonational ambiguity of a written text” (63) is resolved in voicing it, though I do not think that accounts entirely for this phenomenon, since Griffiths tends to conflate silent reading and reading aloud. Sub-voicing (the silent voice we hear when reading) does not resolve the ambiguities, to my mind. The strength with which one sub-voices a text, however, is likely variable.

Griffiths this is a kind vocal self-consciousness (69-70); the pretext of natural language spoken by a character runs against the measure and form they seem completely unconscious of. Whoever is speaking a Browning monologue, we can be certain in advance that they will be fluent in Browningese. This is somewhat ironic given Browning's lament to EBB: "You speak out, *you*, —I only make men and women speak." We hear Browning's voice despite his somewhat ambivalent efforts to hide it. I do not mean to suggest that all of Browning's speakers speak in the same voice—he employs a range of strategies for differentiating his characters—but each is nevertheless stamped with Browning's stuttering seal. Jarvis describes that stamp as Browning's "superversive poetics," a linguistic surplus; his "verse repertoire [is] too intellectually and rhythmically complex merely to serve the purpose of characterization, even though that, too, is one of the myriad things it can do" (128-9). Browning's "metrical difficulty" "constitutes a potlatch incitement" to read it aloud (Jarvis 137). In deconstructive accounts like that of Armstrong, Warwick Slinn's "Browning and the Fictions of Identity," or Herbert Tucker's "From Monomania to Monologue," such a surplus serves to illustrate the way the 'self' of the dramatic monologue is produced by language.⁵³ Browning's language is the acoustic medium of simulation itself. It is the formal machinic hiss that lets readers know the textual apparatus is working. It is voice inverse, but no less distinctly voice: Browning's voice, and somehow, strangely, not Browning's voice. This superversive quality is the formal voice of the text itself, a hypermediated remediation not referable wholly to either Browning himself or the dramatic speaker, a vocal excess that marks the simulative apparatus of the monologue.

Mr. Sludge as Medium

⁵³ Armstrong equally refers Browning's aesthetics to a manifestation of the grotesque, a point somewhat other than my purposes here.

I turn now to a poem in which Browning tackles the mediation and remediation of voice quite directly. Whether or not his dramatic monologues are talking media, Mr. Sludge certainly is. In “Mr. Sludge, ‘the Medium’”, a psychic medium, caught in the act of cheating, attempts to persuade his auditor, Hiram H. Horsefall, to let him off the hook. Mr. Sludge, a barely disguised caricature of the spiritualist Daniel Dunglas Home (whose séance had failed to impress Browning in 1855), is one of Browning’s most odious characters. As he scrambles for some rhetorical grounds to justify his dishonesty, he exposes his utter contempt for the people he deceives. “Mr. Sludge, ‘the Medium’” is self-obviously a critique of psychic mediumship, but it is also a close examination of mediation itself.

Of course, the linkages between the development of spiritualism and communication media have been fertile territory for scholars. As Steven Connor writes in *Dumbstruck*, “the progress in spiritualism...through the nineteenth century into the twentieth, can be seen in terms of its twinning or ghosting of the development of communications technology” (363). Nineteenth-century spiritualism is generally regarded as beginning “as an organized practice” with the Fox sisters of New York in 1848 (Peters 94). Their system of communicating with the dead through phantom rapping sounds “explicitly modeled itself on the telegraph’s ability to receive remote messages (Peters 94).⁵⁴ Successive developments of psychic phenomenon throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century paralleled and incorporated communications technology from the telephone to the phonograph and wireless. Connor’s account of the relation between media and mediumship stands out for the attention he gives to

⁵⁴ I wish to observe here that most mediums were in fact women. As Jill Galvan shows, women were “exemplary go-betweens because they potentially combined the right kind of presence with the right kind of absence” (12). Spiritualism and the telegraph together as Jeffrey Sconce argues made “new forms of political expression” possible for women (14). Galvan highlights Sludge’s complaint that his mediumship has feminized him to the point that women will not consider him as a sexual or romantic object. Gender as a factor in mediation will be subject to closer scrutiny in chapters three and four.

the way the proof of psychic manifestation moved from “somatic to telematic processes of relay” (364). Early phenomena were “effects and manifestations that took place in or through the physical person of the medium—the easiest of these to produce being the production of the voice of spirits by the medium’s own vocal organs;” these “were replace[d] by manifestations separated from the medium’s body” (Connor 364), such as “direct voice,” a manifestation in which a spirit voice seems to speak itself outside the body of the medium, usually through the bell of an acoustic device. The medium becomes merely a relay point in this process, like a telephone operator or the Voderette. The development of mediumship thus parallels the development of synthetic voice I described earlier in this chapter, the desire to make the body disappear in order to produce a voice that speaks itself. Indeed, this is a search for “media presence” as Jeffrey Sconce terms it, or as Peters writes in his history of communication, a desire “to move beyond, behind, or above sign-bodies to the immediate purity of meaning-minds” (64). If Browning has a specific communications technology in mind in Mr. Sludge, however, it is the dramatic monologue. Through the mediumship of Mr. Sludge, Browning interrogates the problem of mediation itself: the desire to transcend the medium through the medium; the desire for an immediacy whose proof is in the process of mediation.

Mr. Sludge’s practice of deception seems at times too close to Browning’s artistic practice for comfort. What separates Browning’s “utterances of so many imaginary persons” from Mr. Sludge’s making the dead seem to speak? In Mr. Sludge’s own characterization, not much at all. Although to the reader the moral distinction is self-obvious: Mr. Sludge aims to deceive. He purports to be a representational medium but is in fact a synthetic one. In this respect he resembles a modern day deepfake, which attempts to pass off partially or totally synthetic media as archival. J. Hillis Miller has persuasively argued, indeed, that “Mr. Sludge” “exposes

what most angered and frightened Browning about Sludge's mediumship. Home, the poem tells us, was doing just what Browning was doing [...] as mouthpiece or medium through which some other speaks" (246). Browning uses Mr. Sludge to examine the condition of mediation and the functioning of immediacy as a formal effect. His concern is how and whether truth can survive mediation, how we can make sense of the distortions mediation entails, and whether we can sort truth from sludge in a formal, mediated apparatus. Indeed, an early article by Isobel Armstrong positions "Mr. Sludge" as a poem about "the nature of truth, knowledge and the imagination" and "the strategy of the medium's defense" gives Browning a way to explore "questions which recur in his poetry" (1).

Mr. Sludge is an inveterately, disgustingly material figure. He seeks rhetorically to bring everyone to his level, down "i' the thick o' the filth, / making dirt-pies" (397). "Mr. Sludge" is a difficult poem to discuss because Sludge himself is a professed and professional liar. His examples and hypotheticals are twisted to support a flawed, deceptive logic. To read "Mr Sludge" is to wade through the muck and mire of Sludge's language. The act of reading the poem actually reinscribes the problematic that the poem interrogates. How come we to feel that some truth might underlie anything Sludge says? To undertake to read the poem is to sift through the record of a man lying for some 1500 lines, and to hope nonetheless to discover truth amid the sludge. The reader becomes like the "literary man," whom Sludge accuses of being a "picker-out of pearl / From dung-heaps" (746-7), laundering Sludge's lies for his own purposes. And yet the poem somehow dangles the possibility that we might still be able to discover some truth in fiction, even as we are inundated by a horsefall of bullshit. We feel like Sludge's public: "In so many tales / Must be some truth, truth though a pin-point big, / Yet, some" (718-20). Of course, as literature, the promise that the poem will do more than merely lie to us is implicit, but "Mr.

Sludge” heightens the fundamental problem of the dramatic monologue, that truth can only emerge in oblique, triangulated, and mediated ways. The poem asks how we come to recognize the truth for truth when it passes through the lens of subjectively inflected language, poetic form, or material media.

There is thus a basic anxiety in “Mr. Sludge” that there might not be much distance between Sludge and Browning. Like Browning, Sludge can make the dead speak. Sludge’s defenses certainly imply the comparison. He insists his deceptions are,

...not so very false, as falsehood goes,
The spinning out and drawing fine, you know,—
Really mere novel-writing of a sort,
Acting, or improvising, make-believe,
Surely not downright cheater... (425-9)

Sludge interweaves truth into his lies, snatching facts “out of the drift of facts” (504) in conversation and gossip, to trot them out later as “a thing he ‘could not’ know” (516). He claims to offer a creative version of the truth akin to the realist version of reality in a novel or on stage: reality “[drawn] fine” (426). And if he does wholly fabulate, he claims to resemble nothing so much as a poet:

Why, he’s at worst your poet who sings how Greeks
That never were, in Troy which never was,
Did this or the other impossible great thing!
He’s Lowell—it’s a world (you smile applause),
Of his own invention—wondrous Longfellow,
Surprising Hawthorne! Sludge does more than they,
And acts the books they write: the more his praise! (1436-42)

Here the specific comparison to Browning is made clearer; the dramatic monologue itself acts out the narrative and lyric forms of the other poets. Sludge’s account implies that his career began indeed merely as “fancying, fable-making, nonsense-work— / What never meant to be so very bad—” (190-1). He simply possessed, “The knack of story-telling, brightening up / Each

dull old bit of fact that drops its shine...” (192-3) This “dull old bit of fact” seems to anticipate “the pure crude fact” of *The Ring and the Book* (which Browning had begun planning in fall of 1862, two years before *Dramatis Personae*’s publication). Indeed, Mr. Sludge’s treatment of the fact makes an interesting contrast with the ring metaphor Browning outlines at the opening of *The Ring and the Book*. Sludge asserts, absurdly, “my fault is that I tell too plain a truth” (1195) about the spiritual world that skeptics refuse to accept.

Why, which of those who say they disbelieve,
Your clever people, but has dreamed his dream,
Caught his coincidence, stumbled on his fact
He can’t explain, (he’ll tell you smilingly)
Which he’s too much of a philosopher
To count as supernatural, indeed,
So calls a puzzle and problem, proud of it
Bidding you still be on your guard, you know,
Because one fact don’t make a system stand,
Nor prove this an occasional escape
Of spirit beneath the matter: that’s the way!
Just so wild Indians picked up, piece by piece,
The fact in California, the fine gold
That underlay the gravel—hoarded these,
But never made a system stand, nor dug!
So wise men hold out in each hollowed palm
A handful of experience, sparkling fact
They can’t explain; and since their rest of life
Is all explainable, what proof in this?
Whereas I take the fact, the grain of gold,
And fling away the dirty rest of life,
And add this grain to the grain each fool has found
O’ the million other such philosophers,—
Till I see gold, all gold and only gold,
Truth questionless though unexplainable,
And the miraculous proved the commonplace! (1196-1221)

Sludge here moves beyond his initial notion of polishing up facts. His lies have become grains of quasi-fact that hint at an entire vein of unexplainable spiritual life. Sludge makes himself into an alchemist, rhetorically transfiguring gravel into gold. Contrast this with *The Ring and the Book*, where Browning works the ore of “pure crude fact” into a delicate shape by adding malleable

fiction, mingling “gold / with gold’s alloy, and, duly tempering both” (1.20). Sludge’s metaphor is a dishonest one from the start, his fact is no fact at all, but though Browning’s methodology is more honest, the relative opacity of his metaphor leaves unclear how to apply the acid that will unalloy the gold, and leave only truth: “Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore” (28).

Sludge’s psychic mediation is like modern deepfakery, utterances attributed to a person who never said them at all. But to his audience, he is the medium by which the dead communicate.

What would you have? Just speak and, there, you see!
[...]
Bacon advises, Shakespeare writes you songs,
And Mary Queen of Scot’s embraces you.
Thus it goes on, not quite like life perhaps,
But so near, that the very difference piques. (1406, 1408-11)

What seems to either vex or fascinate Browning is the way that difference piques. This is a paradox of immediacy and hypermediacy: the very materiality that should serve as a sign of Sludge’s deception tends to reinforce the reality of the effect. When the nervous novice medium “...blunder[s], blurt[s] out this, blab[s] that, / Break[s] down in the other, as beginners will” (147-8) his listeners readily take it as a sign of the truth of his encounter with the afterlife; Sludge imagines their reaction: “[...]‘No haste! / Pause and collect yourself! We understand! / That’s the bad memory, or the natural shock, / Or the unexplained *phenomena*!’” (149-152). Sludge’s vocal failings are reinscribed as lending an authenticity to his claims. As Daniel Martin writes “Sludge’s claim that vocal mistakes and embodied blunders are paradoxically all the evidence a well-to-do audience of hungry listeners needs to recognize ‘authentic’ communication with the dead” (163).

When the medium lacks the knowledge or the skill to adequately simulate the dead, that is rationalized too. If the purported voice of Francis Bacon mixes up details of his biography “It

was not Bacon, after all, you see!” (316). The audience is quick to ascribe it to a logic of mediation between here and hereafter:

Such spirits’ individuality
Is hard to put in evidence: they incline
To gibe and jeer, these undeveloped sorts.
You see, their world ’s much like a jail broke loose,
While this of ours remains shut, bolted, barred,
With a single window to it. Sludge, our friend,
Serves as this window, whether thin or thick,
Or stained or stainless; he’s the medium-pane
Through which, to see us and be seen, they peep:
They crowd each other, hustle for a chance (318-327)

Sludge is like a pane of glass or a lens whose distortions are imagined to focus what passes through it. Elsewhere he is “smoked glass / Useful to spy the sun through, spare [the] eyes” (634-5). The mediating qualities of glass appear several times in the poem. For instance, Sludge describes useful rubes willing to turn a blind eye to obvious “knavery” (689) in furtherance of the illusion; he compares them to the original of the ‘blind eye’ idiom: “...don’t you praise / Nelson for setting spy-glass to blind eye / Any saying...what was it—that he could not see / the signal he was bothered with? Ay, indeed!” (690-3). Later Sludge describes scientific discovery as though,

Somebody turns our spyglass round, or else
Puts a new lens in it: grass, worm, fly grow big:
We find great things are made of little things,
And little things go lessening till at last
Comes God behind them... (1110-14)

Sludge tends to paint the world in his own filth, and just so here. Rather than clarifying the world, science is like Sludge himself, a backwards lens, inverting the natural order. At the beginning of the monologue Sludge casts even Horsefall’s just anger as being filtered “...through a glass too much / Of his own champagne...” (25-6). In the logic of mediation,

Sludge's muckish materiality comes to stand as a sign for his ability to mediate rather than his inability.

...I may rave
Like an epileptic dervish in the books,
Foam, fling myself flat, rend my clothes to shreds;
No matter: lovers, friends and countrymen
Will lay down spiritual laws, read wrong things right
By the rule o' reverse. (304-9)

The paradox here is that for Sludge's victims the medium is its own working proof. The signs of mediation are in fact what produces the effect.

For more recent psychic mediums, as Peters suggests, "machines offer a more objective way to register messages from the other side. Specifically, any source of white noise can both hide and reveal the whisperings of departed spirits. One tapes the noise, then sorts and sifts—at high speed, low speed, running forward and backward, in what must be a process of astronomical tedium—for utterances from the dead" (100). That white noise is the material out of and through which the voice emerges. It is corollary to the third voice of the dramatic monologue, the corporeal linguistic excess in which we discover a simulated voice. If part of what signs the authenticity of Sludge's dead voices is his stumbling and stuttering, much the same is true for Browning's verse. Daniel Martin before me has productively connected Sludge's stuttering to the popular depiction of Browning's verse as a form of dysfluency, which he reads in a wider context of the history of theories of vocal dysfluency. As he notes, such "criticism of Browning reflected widespread assumptions that good poetry is *recitable*" (169). "Mr. Sludge" suggests precisely "that dysfluencies speak" (Martin 172); they are the corporeal voice of the medium itself, the guarantor of mediation.

Where Mr. Sludge and Mr. Browning differ marks precisely the limits of my comparison to synthetic voice technology. As Armstrong writes, "the implicit object of [Sludge's] confession

is to destroy confidence in the possibility of discovering truth empirically” (3). In this respect, Mr. Sludge most resembles a deepfake. The threat of Mr. Sludge and deepfakes alike is that, as philosopher Regina Rini writes, they might make “increasingly savvy information consumers [...] reflexively distrust *all* recordings” (7), impacting our basic ability “to *show* one another things” (Hyska 3). Indeed, sludge might be a fitting name for what generative AI more broadly produces—the “grey goo” of the coming “textpocalypse” as Kirschenbaum terms it, imagining a flood of AI writing that makes it “functionally impossible to reliably communicate in *any* digital setting” (“Prepare for the Textpocalypse”). What is so very viscerally disgusting about Mr. Sludge, to Browning, is the way he destroys the authenticity of the mediated truth with a simulation difficult or impossible to differentiate from reality, because it simulates the condition of mediation by which we know truth itself. Browning nevertheless looks for the possibility that truth can survive the distortions of material mediation, that we can still occasionally find a glimmering fact amid the sludge. Sludge himself becomes the medium for Browning’s message, in spite of the charlatan’s best efforts to make a mess of things. The dramatic monologue is not after all a Victorian deepfake; instead, it suggests the hopeful possibility that truth can survive the media age. This is a possibility that sadly seems more precious day by day.

II. William Morris and the Embodied Voice of Textuality

If Browning's voice was corporeal, the AI voice of modern synthesis technology is decidedly less so. In the introduction, I invoked the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection (PGOAC) as a particularly visceral intersection of AI voice and literature. In September 2023 this collaboration between Microsoft, MIT, and Google made it possible to listen to over five thousand public domain (and thus mostly pre-twentieth-century) audiobooks read entirely by a naturalistic machine voice.⁵⁵ I return to this subject now to think more concretely about this most recent manifestation of synthetic voice and simulation. In many respects the possibility of generating human-like voices might seem like the voice technology to end voice technology. As we have seen, however, its antecedents are quite old, and the transformative voice technology of the nineteenth century offers one way to think about how this technology is reshaping or may reshape our relationship with the voice.

Since Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the gramophone has often been seen as the key technology that separated voice from writing. Critics like Ivan Kreilkamp and Veronica Alfano detect a persistent figuration of the voice with a sense of loss; the voice for many writers was what was missing from literature, what needed to be recovered. This was certainly increasingly true by the end of the century. Yeats, for instance sought to restore "The Living Voice" to literature with an infusion of Gaelic populism ("Literature and the Living Voice").⁵⁶ "All the old writers, the masculine writers of the world," says Yeats, "wrote to be spoken or to be

⁵⁵ Such a feat, in point of fact, was already possible prior to the PGOAC through the use of screen readers, commonly used by people with low vision. Screen reading a Project Gutenberg e-book would, however, be cumbersome and meet many of the same challenges the PGOAC collaborators had to surmount to develop their process. The difference between a screen reader and an audiobook in this case is entirely social and commercial. What distinguishes the PGOAC is its packaging as an audiobook, which suggests a particular way of engaging with the text as well as a particular economic role. Indeed, much of the buzz around the announcement was in the potential market effect of AI-read audiobooks even though the PGOAC was released for free into the public domain.

⁵⁶ Compare the voice of Walter Ong's primary orality.

sung, and in a later age to be read aloud” (14); not so for a dissolute modern English born in print for the pleasure of a wealthy few.⁵⁷ As Kittler himself is at pains to show, however, print created the very conditions for this transformation. Latent in Yeats’s claim that literature’s “three great forms, narrative, lyrical and dramatic,” once “found their way to men’s minds without the mediation of print and paper” (8), is the notion that print and paper indeed mediate the voice Yeats cannot hear.

Yeats’s struggle to hear voice in print is perhaps why he concludes the same essay with a critique of William Morris, whom he otherwise much admired:

William Morris, who did more than any modern to recover medieval art, did not in his *Earthly Paradise* copy from Chaucer, from who he copied so much that was naïve and beautiful, what seems to me essential in Chaucer’s art. He thought of himself as writing for the reader, who could return to him again and again when the chosen mood had come, and became monotonous, melancholy, too continuously lyrical in his understanding of emotion and of life. (13)

Setting aside what precisely Yeats might have meant by “lyrical” (a difficult question to answer even of our contemporary writers), his claim that Morris was writing for the reader suggests that Morris bookishly cuts himself off from the living voice. Such a critique dovetails with Jerome McGann’s view of Morris’s self-referential textuality aiming toward an Edenic language.⁵⁸ Morris, in both readings, never makes it off the page. Yeats’s is a curious critique of *The Earthly Paradise*—a text that addresses its reader as “listener” and in which voices and telling run rampant. That neither Yeats nor McGann hears a voice for the page is, perhaps, no accident, Morris himself is at pains to highlight the material mediation of voice in bodies and in books as well as the corresponding material difficulty of transmitting voice in verse.

⁵⁷ Yeats’s essay is not often reprinted but was originally published in *Samhain*, a Dublin theater annual, in 1906.

⁵⁸ See *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernity*.

As Yopie Prins argues, voice in verse is voice made other in the process of mediation. Much like Browning, Morris demonstrates a concern with how we hear a mediated voice and indeed whether voice can be mediated at all. Voice in verse might just get ground up in the gears of the metrical machinery. Prins wonders why we continue to insist on reading nineteenth-century poetic voice as the utterance of a subjective speaker. One answer to this (decidedly rhetorical) question might be: because the poets themselves were considering the possibilities and possible failures of the mediated voice to operate in just this way. By thinking with the interpretive possibilities of our own media age in comparison to the nineteenth century, I want to propose what I will identify as William Morris's simulated voice as an example of an author negotiating just this.

In *The Earthly Paradise* Morris revels in the textual materiality of poetic voice, depicting acts of speaking as verbal-visual acts of articulation, uniting hand, eye, lip, and page. In this way Morris offers the text of *The Earthly Paradise* as a material embodiment of voice, even while acknowledging the resistance that prevents the voice's neutral mediation. Morris's material voice is simultaneously personal and communal, relying on a universalizing truth of the body that is neither wholly subjective nor objective. In this respect, it offers a rejoinder to the generated voice of AI, whose disembodied character rests on a notional objectivity. My gambit here is two-fold. I wish to demonstrate both that William Morris offers ways to think about how AI is already extending and simulating the human voice and that this technology offers new ways to think about how Morris himself was engaging with voice in his poetry.

The PGOAC literalizes the role of voice in AI, foreshadowing a possible shift in a term that has become foundational to how we understand poetry since at least the twentieth century.

Morris was writing at a comparable moment of revolution in the voice's mediation. It seems fitting to begin where European print culture began—with Gutenberg.

The Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection

In September 2023, when the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection was announced, the Screen Actors Guild was striking for, among other things, protections from having their labor replaced by AI. Columnist Julia Malleck described the situation in Quartz magazine on September 20th in quite frank terms: “The oldest digital library in the world, Project Gutenberg, has [transformed thousands](#) of ebooks into audiobooks using AI—bypassing the longer (and more expensive) process of hiring a human reader to do the job. It’s exactly the kind of AI application that actors, who are [currently on strike](#) in the US for the first time in four decades, fear may endanger their careers.”

While the specter of AI job replacement is certainly the message many people see in the medium, the PGOAC doesn’t represent much immediate threat to professional audiobook readers. This is true for multiple reasons. First, the Project Gutenberg library consists almost entirely of public domain texts; this means that works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represent an outsized proportion of the library. The selection criteria for the PGOAC prioritized machine-readable form over content. Thus, the works in the PGOAC at cursory inspection appear to be a random assortment of textual refuse: from *The Magnificent Ambersons* to *The Monkey That Would Not Kill*. For every canonical text in the corpus there are 50 each of early-twentieth century boys’ adventure novels, forgotten Victorian essays, and dated didactic texts. While a public-domain work like *Northanger Abbey* can feed the likes of Emma Thompson, Douglas Booth, Eleanor Tomlinson, Ella Purnell, Jeremy Irvine, and Lily Cole (as a

2017 Audible edition did), there is little paying demand for an Emma Thompson reading of Carlyle's *On Heroes* and even less for one of the 1912 self-help pamphlet *The Fun of Getting Thin*.⁵⁹

If the PGOAC represents any threat to human-performed audiobooks, it is in speed, scale, and textual fidelity. Audiobook production is a time and resource-intensive process, involving not only performance but audio production and editing. *Middlemarch* as narrated by Juliet Stevenson (a personal favorite) clocks in at 35 hours and 38 minutes, but that runtime belies a recording process involving multiple takes and the labor of many hands. In contrast, Walsh's et al. production method promises "automatic audiobook creation [that] is orders of magnitude faster, cheaper, and more consistent" (Walsh et al.)

All this is of course meaningless if the automated process does not produce a result people would actually want to listen to. Although not the team's own innovation, what largely caught the attention of journalists is their deployment of neural networks in text-to-speech to create a naturalistic "emotive reading of the text" (Walsh et al.) Relying on techniques previously developed by some of the authors, the system uses "an automatic speaker and emotion inference system to dynamically change the reading voice and tone based on context" (Walsh et al.) But does it sound good? Emphatically yes, compared with the older generation of synthesized speech. In comparison with a human reader, however, they are mostly just alright. Not yet a replacement for Emma Thompson, but not bad.

⁵⁹ It seems unlikely that even the comparatively few in-demand texts included in the PGOAC (Northanger Abbey among them) represent a significant new incursion into the audiobook market; this is not Project Gutenberg's first foray into audiobooks. The website already hosted 662 human-read titles and an earlier initiative produced 386 audiobooks "using text-to speech automation" in 2003. Moreover, most public domain works of enduring popularity are already represented in the LibriVox audiobook library, which has produced over 18,000 public domain audiobooks through volunteer labor.

Nevertheless, the project's aspirations are lofty. A live demonstration version of the technology aims beyond just a naturalistic experience, allowing users to customize the voice of the text, selecting between a "neutral" or "emotion-aware" voice, and even cloning a pre-existing human voice. For demonstration purposes the authors imagine only that this will be used to have an audiobook read in the user's own voice. This is a disturbing enough feature on its own, but neural text to speech—the name for the computer learning techniques that underlie this capability—has already been widely used in the creation of deepfakes, which can range from socially and politically corrosive to anodyne and amusing.⁶⁰ It is easy to imagine how full integration of this feature would tempt the internet's baser instincts—"Hillary Clinton reads the Project Gutenberg edition of *Mein Kampf*" seems inevitable. What I wish to make clear here is that this more-than-lifelike technology promises to do far more than automate labor.

If what we so overwhelmingly hear in the early phonograph recordings of Browning and Tennyson is the voice's mechanical mediation (as discussed in my introduction and first chapter), what then, I ask, do we hear in the Project Gutenberg Audiobook Collection's comparable recording? This is not a disembodied voice, but a voice with no bodily origin at all. It is a voice evidently far more disembodied than a phonograph recording, which at least has its origin in words spoken at one time by a person. Do we hear in its subtle divergences from naturalistic reading the mechanical mediation of the text it reads? What exactly might that mean for an AI voice?

⁶⁰ In the latter category I would put the work of internet music parodist @thereiruinedit, who has used voice-cloning to produce, for example, Hank Williams singing a Dr. Dre rap and Judy Garland performing Smash Mouth. Music record labels, would not, however, agree with my appraisal, as at writing, coordinated copyright strikes from Universal Music Group have led @thereiruinedit to temporarily de-list his videos in an effort to avoid a ban from YouTube.

The question of what AI means for literature has focused largely on authorship—the philosophical, theoretical, moral, and legal questions raised by the rapid rise of literature written by machines since the public release of OpenAI’s ChatGPT in November 2022. Literary critics should take notice and take heart that “the death of the author” has very suddenly become a locus of discussion in legal scholarship.⁶¹ The authorship question addresses AI as literature; in highlighting voice and deemphasizing (at least so far) ChatGPT, I am coming at the relationship between AI and literature in a somewhat more oblique way. I am attempting to think through and with AI’s impact on what has become a privileged term of analysis in poetry. I use the example of the PGOAC because it offers a clear intersection between voice (figurative and literal), AI, and literature.

As I’ve already indicated, the PGOAC utilizes AI in the process of voice cloning. But AI is also used in what Walsh et al. describe as “an automatic speaker and emotion inference system” that “dynamically [changes] the reading voice and tone based on context.” The PGOAC authors employed a variety of deep learning techniques, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) and Transformers across multiple steps of this process. While there are meaningful distinctions between these techniques, it is enough for my purposes to note that these are all artificial neural networks.⁶² At their heart, neural networks intuit probabilistic indexical relationships within datasets and make predictions on the basis of those intuited relationships (“Inside the Mind of an AI” 622).

AI writing, as Hayles has observed, “is the literal embodiment” (“AI” 643) of poststructuralist author theory. Programs like Chat-GPT produce texts with “no subjectivity and

⁶¹ See Craig and Kerr for example, who contend that “the death of the romantic author also and equally entails the death of the AI author” (31) in arguing that AI-authored texts are not copyrightable.

⁶² N. Katherine Hayles’s recent article “Inside the Mind of an AI” offers a break-down of machine learning techniques highly accessible to humanities scholars.

no interiority, only codes and inferences about language patterns” (Hayles 644). If AI outputs seem to evidence subjectivity or interiority it is only because their likeness emerges from a system of rules intuited from a vast corpus of human text. There is no voice, either metaphorical or literal, present in such a text, only the simulation of one. I am using simulation here, after Katherine Hayles in *Writing Machines*, to designate a practice of mediation. Simulation contrasts with other practices like recording or transmission, both of which are typically understood as representational in nature—they mediate a material referent that at one time actually existed.⁶³ Like generative AI in general, the PGOAC likewise produces a simulation, recognizably a voice but without a material referent. Where Tennyson on wax cylinder represents Tennyson’s actual voice to the listener, Gutenberg.mp3 simulates a voice with no real-world referent.⁶⁴ Like an object in virtual reality, there is no thing there.

For the literal machine voices of Project Gutenberg, the key change that enabled the current wave of computer voice synthesis was to have the computer produce speech wholly as sound instead of attempting to produce phrases, words, or phonemes (Wang et al.). If we hear a voice, it is almost incidental from the machine’s perspective; its output is not words, but sound. It literalizes the absence of voice in print technology that has been almost doctrinaire in media studies since Kittler, even as it produces what we apprehend as voice. For Matthew Kirschenbaum, elsewhere a champion of the materiality of the digital, the constitutive basis of a

⁶³ Hayles modifies the term “simulation” from Baudrillard, and uses it in a much more technical sense than he generally meant. Her vision of mutually remediating media grounded in materiality offers an intellectual path away from Baudrillard’s descent into the hyperreal.

⁶⁴ This is true even in the case of a cloned voice, which still lacks a sonic referent in words really spoken by the voice it imitates. We can consider a cloned voice a species of simulation that seeks to additionally simulate the condition of referentiality itself. In this respect it is clearly one of Kirschenbaum’s “spec acts,” demonstrating a forward-looking speculative epistemology, an answer to the question: “what if someone said this?” This question, I wish to note, is effectively what Andrew Hodgson, a modern lyrical reader, proposes students “might imagine reading” (10) at the beginning of every poem. This is from *the Cambridge Guide to Reading Poetry*, an excellent contemporary textbook on close reading. The connections between voice cloning, the lyric speaker, and lyricization merit further exploration.

neural net is functionally immaterial; the output of a neural net derives from complex relations within datasets that would be almost impossible to account for as the emergent property of the material that produces it (“Spec Acts”).

But if AI is non-subjective and almost immaterial, it is worth remembering that it certainly is not objective either, replicating the ideology and bias implicit in the dataset it was trained on.⁶⁵ The simulated voice of AI is simultaneously non-subjective and non-objective, a paradox made apparent in its production of a voice that is apparently neither mediated nor embodied. It is neither the subjective voice of a specific speaker nor a wholly absent, disembodied, and immaterial entity, although its material basis is vexed, occluded, and of dubious interpretive value. A fantasy seems to underlie the creation of the PGOAC, a fantasy of the machine voice itself as a pure medium for the text. Such a fantasy inverts the relationship between voice and text articulated by Prins. Where verse, in her view, mediates voice in its breakage and erasure, AI generates a seemingly unmediated and immaterial voice. I mean to suggest here, in part, that what the PGOAC produces literally, and what ChatGPT produces as a written metaphor (though no less realistic) is voice. But my more specific aim is to observe that the contradictions raised by AI voice in its subjectivity and its materiality are also precisely what are at issue when discussing a poetic voice in print in the nineteenth century. How might we reconsider the one in light of the other?

It is with a perverse pleasure that I aim to localize this discussion around William Morris. He (and *The Earthly Paradise*) is, in one sense, a fitting subject. Other than William Blake,

⁶⁵ Safiya Noble in *Algorithms of Oppression* and Cathy O’Neil in *Weapons of Math Destruction* both articulate forms of algorithmic bias, which generative AI both replicates and complicates. The models developed in the training of a neural net are neither wholly accountable to their designers nor explicable by them, and only recently has a push for so-called “explainable AI” sought to mitigate bias by offering an intelligible approximation of what’s happening under the hood, with (as far as I can tell based on a cursory review of publications in the field of HCI) mixed results.

probably no nineteenth-century English writer was more acutely attuned to the materiality of books. And *the Earthly Paradise*, as I have suggested already, is intensely concerned with voices, retelling, materiality, and the body. But in another sense, it is utterly ironic to discuss Morris in the context of AI. A popular conception of Morris is as a luddite (in the revolutionary sense), a man whose aesthetic tendencies looked backward and who abhorred the replacement of craft by machine. Morris, to be sure, would have hated the idea of generative AI performance or writing, on the basis that it alienates us from what he called “pleasurable” or “useful work” (“The Aims of Art,” “Useful Work and Useless Toil”).

But, while the extent of Morris’s anti-technologist bent was somewhat overstated even during his life, Morris’s particular medievalism—grounded in a robust materiality—is what in fact makes him a fitting subject for this discussion.⁶⁶ Following Ruskin, he intuited the free condition of the medieval craftsman’s labor as essential to the quality of that age’s art. As Morris wrote in his lecture “The Woodcuts of Gothic Books,” “it is the actual touches of the hand that give the speciality, the final finish to a work of art” (Ideal Book 38). Emphasizing the significance of the material conditions of an artwork’s production to its aesthetics, Morris sought to transform society by and in order to restore art to the realm of the everyday, against the backdrop of a market flooded with “makeshifts” and in which the laborer had become “the slave

⁶⁶ Morris was not opposed to technological aid when it promised no loss in quality. Indeed, his interest in typography had been ignited by Emery Walker’s photographically enlarged lantern slide examples of historic type in his November 1888 Arts & Crafts Society lecture (“Art of the Book” 76; Peterson 77). Morris and Walker made similar use of photography to shrink down Morris’s drawings of the Golden type for punchcutting (“Art of the Book” 78; Peterson 82). Likewise, as Peterson observes, Morris had also used photography to enlarge Burne-Jones’s designs for Morris and Co. stained glass (Peterson 82). Peterson additionally notes that the pre-Raphaelite artists, Rossetti included, had been among the first painters to use photography “for making studies” (82)—a boon no doubt to their Ruskinian determination to draw from life. When it came time to cast the type for the Kelmscott Press, Morris permitted the use of mechanical processes (“Art of the Book” 79). Similarly, after some persuasion by Walker, Morris allowed the use of electrotpe for the Kelmscott Press ornaments (Peterson 77).

to machinery” (“Aims of Art” 86, 88).⁶⁷ But Morris also sought in his medievalism a connection with the past—a connection bridgeable only through its material remainder: the books, churches, tapestries, and other works of craft in which he perceived the actual touches of the hand of a bygone era.

If materiality for Morris offers a means of bridging a gap between the present and the past, what is remarkable is how cognizant *The Earthly Paradise* is of the breakdowns and failures of transmission inherent to any material medium. This figures precisely in *The Earthly Paradise*’s presentation of voice as always embodied—alike in books as in human form; voice in *The Earthly Paradise* is more than Prins’s “voice inverse”: it is voice in text and in body. And its mediation results in more than merely a felt absence or failure of voice, it is the precondition for art in the first place: a form of what Morris famously once called the “resistance in the materials.” Materiality resists the transmission of voice, but Morris nevertheless speaks a voice into the resulting silence, one that materially resembles the voice of the past but does not replicate it. Like the voice of AI, this is a simulation, but one that foregrounds and reflects on the material basis of its abstraction. And like the voice of AI, it resists lyric reading. *The Earthly Paradise* offers an alternative possibility for reading voice as embodied but non-subjective, a voice that resists the imposition of a subjective speaker and complicates received wisdom about the historical relationship between genre, technology, and voice. Re-telling in *The Earthly Paradise* is a transformational act, it makes anew by simulating past conditions and past voices, not representing (or, in Morris’s parlance, copying) them. And *The Earthly Paradise* is a thoroughgoing simulation, one that originated from the impulse to simulate not just the voice, but the textual and material conditions of the medieval as well.

⁶⁷ See *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life* (ed. Wendy Parkins), for a wide-ranging exploration of Morris’s embrace of the everyday.

The epistemology of generative AI is, as Kirschenbaum argues, fundamentally anti-historicist and “anti-causal. It is, instead, ruthlessly and exclusively iterative, always only ever falling forward” (“Spec Acts” 365). Machine learning’s basis in probability results in a forward-looking speculative epistemology, its productions an answer to the question: “what if someone said this?” In this light, Morris, at the forefront of Victorian medievalism, might seem necessarily antithetical to the simulative logic of AI. But, in fact, Morris’s medievalism was always forward looking; he sought to adapt the past to transform the present and imagine the future. In this way his medievalist productions are fundamentally speculative. Simulation, I want to suggest, is Morris’s most fundamental artistic and political practice; he did not seek to move society regressively backward to the Middle Ages by copying (which he regarded as a fool’s errand) but sought to look forward by transformatively simulating that past as a way of reshaping material relations between humanity, labor, nature, and technology. Within this paradigm, the voice emerges as a powerful tool to transform personal and global history into narrative art, reshaping the arc of history into the future. The voice in *The Earthly Paradise* is materially grounded, articulable only through the material means that occlude it.

I turn now to the text and context of *The Earthly Paradise*, considering in turn its development from Morris and Edward Burne-Jones’s attempt to simulate medieval bibliographic codes as an ornamental object, its deployment of voice as materially embodied in both bodies and texts, its emphasis on the problem of materiality in relation to history and subjectivity, and its ultimate edition as a simulative Kelmscott Press production whose ornamental/textual features reflect Morris’s embrace of the resistance in the material. The voice in *The Earthly Paradise* is materially grounded, articulable only through the material means that produce it. The robust materiality of Morris’s aesthetic concern for text and typography is paralleled in the text’s

emphasis on the material embodiment of voice in bodies and books. I locate Morris's simulated voice as a transformative and speculative practice of retelling that is nevertheless grounded in history and materiality.

The Book that (Never) Was

The most direct and obvious manifestation of simulation in *The Earthly Paradise* is in Morris's embrace of a textual material aesthetics directly inspired by the medieval. In this regard the book is effectively and practically a simulation. *The Earthly Paradise* began its life in 1865 as a collaboration between William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. The original scope of the project was massive: a single volume of 25 narrative poems written by Morris together with wood-engraving illustrations by Burne-Jones. Joseph Dunlap's *The Book that Never Was* represents the most thorough reconstruction of this plan in print. His review of the archival materials suggests that the men may have considered as many as three hundred and twenty separate illustrations for the text (Dunlap 13), with Morris having personally engraved 35 woodblocks from Burne-Jones designs (Boos *Design* 32). The finished product would likely have necessarily been akin in size to the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. At some point in 1868, the idea of including Burne-Jones's illustrations was discarded or put off and the first volume of *The Earthly Paradise* was published in April of that year by F. S. Ellis.

The reasons for moving away from the illustrations are unclear. Morris's biographer, John William Mackail, recounts that trial sheets got up for the volume were "disappointing": "The page, while not without a certain quality of distinction, suffers from technical defects, in both typography and wood-cuts, which are all the more emphasized by the high mark aimed at"

(qtd. in Dunlap 28). May Morris wrote in her introduction to *The Earthly Paradise* in *The Collected Works* that “in the experimental sheets the woodcuts looked all wrong with the best type then obtainable, and the attempt had to be abandoned” (Vol. 3 xxiv). Dunlap follows May in reporting that there was an imbalance in weight between Burne-Jones’s ink-heavy illustrations and the typefaces tested (Caslon and Basle Roman—both revivals of sixteenth century models).⁶⁸ He concludes that “Morris apparently sensed the incongruity inherent in his attempts and postponed for a few years any more efforts in this direction” (43). It seems likely, however, that time and expense were also factors in Morris’s decision to proceed without the illustrations. By 1868, two years of work had produced a mountain of text that already outpaced Burne-Jones’s output. Meanwhile, Ned’s ongoing affair with Maria Zambaco had been increasingly absorbing his time and leading to erratic behavior by late 1867 (Flanders 120). All in all, there were likely multiple factors in the decision to publish without illustration in addition to the failure of the trial pages.

Nevertheless, *The Earthly Paradise* represents Morris’s first major attempt at book design. And it was from the beginning grounded in the aesthetics of medieval manuscript and early print books. Inspired by the rich illustrations in the medieval and renaissance books Morris was purchasing from Ellis (Dunlap 8, 9) he sought to make a book that integrated text and image into a beautiful whole—that would, in anticipation of the design principles Morris wrote out later in life,

be a harmonious work of art. The type, the spacing of the type, the position of the pages of print on the paper, should be considered from the artistic point of view. The illustrations should not have a mere accidental connection with the other ornament and the type, but an essential and artistic connection. They should be designed as part of the whole, so that they would seem obviously imperfect without their surroundings. (*Ideal Book* 40)

⁶⁸ Dunlap identifies the typeface as simply “Basel,” I follow Peterson’s more recent work in naming it Basle Roman.

Morris's pursuit of a fitting typeface was both necessitated by and appropriate to the ambition of simulating for the modern era a medieval book, attempting to achieve the full integration of text, ornament, and image that Morris came to value from his study of the best early books. Though Dunlap's title, "the book that never was," has stuck around as a critical shorthand for the project, it bears stating that Morris was laboring not on an abortive dream, an "ideal book" that would never be, but on *The Earthly Paradise*.⁶⁹ As such, his aspirations can hardly be considered abandoned.

The initial publication history of *The Earthly Paradise* is somewhat confusing;⁷⁰ the principle bibliographic challenges are twofold. First, as is usual for nineteenth-century publishers, Ellis frequently uses the word "edition" to mean "impression." Second, he released volumes of the text simultaneously in both single and larger two-volume formats. Thus, readers could have purchased a complete first edition of the text in 3, 4, 5, or 6 volumes. I will presume in my ensuing description the least number of volumes (unless the distinction bears relevance), with the understanding that any single volume may have been read as a pair of volumes. The first volume—comprising the spring and summer tales—was released in April 1868, the second volume—featuring the autumn tales—was published in November 1869, and the final volume—winter tales—followed in autumn of 1870.⁷¹

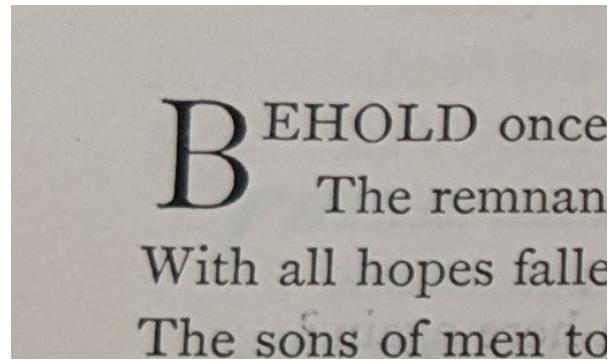
⁶⁹ *The Life and Death of Jason* is arguably equally an inheritor to "the book that never was," being an outgrowth of that project whose length early precluded its inclusion. However, Morris's letter to *The Athenaeum* of April 25, 1868, indicates that he had no intention of republishing *Jason* with illustrations, even though by that time he still intended to do so with a future edition of *The Earthly Paradise* (qtd. in Dunlap 39). This suggests that Morris considered the text at that point separate from the overall project for reasons beyond its impracticable length. Authorial intention aside, it would still be valid to analyze *Jason* in this context, although for the present study *The Earthly Paradise* alone seems ample material to contend with, being one of the longest poems in the English language.

⁷⁰ Clarifying this has been among Florence Boos's many invaluable contributions to scholarship on this text, and my account summarizes the work of her edited edition of *The Earthly Paradise*.

⁷¹ Even Boos was unable to ascertain an exact date for this final volume; she relies on Forman and I follow.

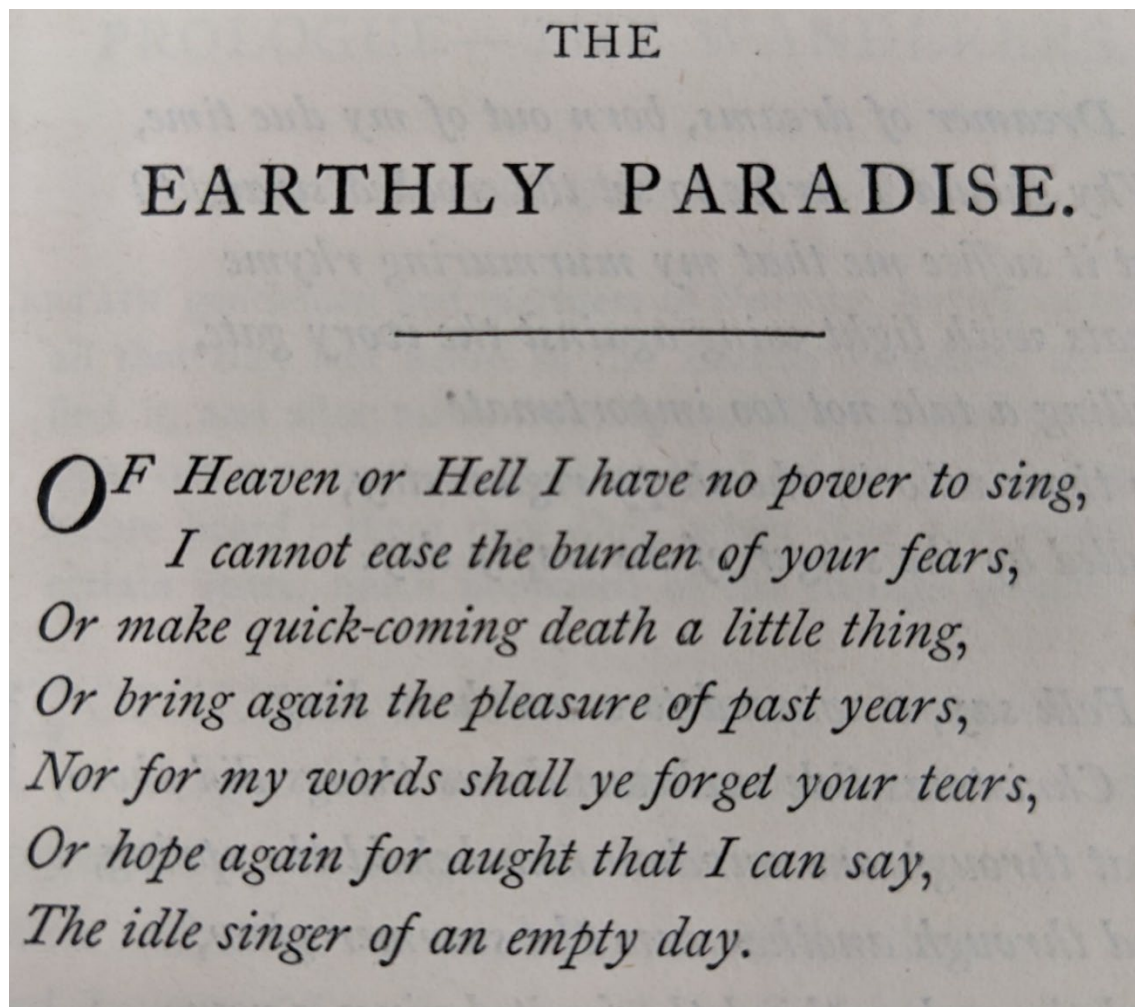
The Ellis edition is certainly far from the luxe illustrated project Morris and Ned had dreamed up. And its text—lines spaced with ample leading—does not conform to Morris’s later ideas about typography. Nevertheless, it reflects some consideration for the page on Morris’s part. The Caslon-inspired typeface certainly demonstrates Morris’s desire for a return to bolder and more readable letterforms than “the preposterous thicks and thins” (*Ideal Book* 65) of the modern faces popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. And the edition’s profusion of large (but un-ornamented) initial capitals anticipates the explicitly medieval-styled ornamental initials that would be one of the hallmarks of the Kelmscott Press. Their placement and number in this first edition would be replicated in the Kelmscott edition. But even in the Ellis edition the initials are a clear, albeit diminished, textual citation of the form of the medieval book.⁷² In this respect, they gesture toward a specific historical material form while failing to bring it wholly into material presence. That this is a failure is highlighted by the unfortunate occurrence that Ellis’s printer did not have italic capitals large enough for the text. As a result, the “apology” opens with an “O” almost half the size needed.

⁷² I will grant that the significance of these initials in the first edition may be subject to debate. Their use was certainly not out of the ordinary in nineteenth-century books, if not exactly standard: *The Ring and the Book*, published the same year, uses them, but Tennyson’s own medievalist production *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* (1870) did not. All the same, *The Earthly Paradise* uses many more initials than is usual, sometimes several in a single tale. In contrast, *The Ring and the Book* uses just one per poetic book. Morris, however, was surely aware that the practice was a diminished print echo of the ornamented manuscripts he was collecting and reading.



BEHOLD once
The remnan
With all hopes falle
The sons of men to

Fig. 1 A non-italic capital from the first edition of *The Earthly Paradise*



THE
EARTHLY PARADISE.

*O*F Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.

Fig. 2 An italic capital, demonstrating the smaller font size used and the resulting white space.

“Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing, / I cannot ease the burden of your fears” is marred in the middle by a visually awkward wash of white space. A happy, though ugly, coincidence, this space literalizes not only the gap between Morris’s aspirations and capability, but between the medieval and the modern.⁷³ They foreshadow, in essence, what takes shape in *The Earthly Paradise* as a concern with the material mediation of history, the impossibility of exactly reproducing the voices and material conditions of the past. I will return to this latter point in time, but for now I wish to consider other ways the text evidences Morris’s vision of a harmonious work of art in homage to medieval aesthetics—where text and illustration are integrated, which impulse is centered around a thoroughgoing embodied materiality.

Beholding Me, Beholding You

In one sense, Morris’s plan for an illustrated volume that echoed medieval book design was sublimated into the text itself as an abundance of visual details. Such details are partially the textual manifestation of Morris’s simulative aesthetics. From its first publication, critics have noted the intense visuality of *The Earthly Paradise*. As one unsigned review in the *New Englander* put it: “Mr. Morris has the painter’s eye. To him things are as parts of pictures and made to be painted” (qtd. in Faulkner 67). This echoes May Morris’s recollection that her father “always had a yearning for illustrations to his poems; he saw the stories in brilliantly-defined pictures, and desired that other people should do so, too” (Qtd. in Dunlap 10). The tales of *The Earthly Paradise* are suffused with sensory details that do not, strictly speaking, have much bearing on their plot or theme. “The Love of Alcestis,” for instance, opens:

⁷³ This point makes an echo of McGann’s reading of Hugh Selwyn Mauberly’s italic “T”s in *The Textual Condition*. I hope my suppositions fare better than his did.

Midst sunny grass-clad meads that slope adown
To lake Boebeis stands an ancient town,
Where dwelt of old a lord of Thessaly,
The son of Pheres and fair Clymene,
Who had to name Admetus... (481).

This painterly emphasis on the “sunny grass-clad meads” has little relation to the story except that they will be home to Apollo in his guise as shepherd. But the placidity of this image belies the heart-wrenching climax of what is one of the text’s most poignant stories.⁷⁴ Morris’s painterly tendencies had also been on full display in *The Defence of Guenevere*. That text had been widely (though not universally) received as the literary manifestation of Pre-Raphaelite visual art (Faulkner 59-60), with an unsigned review in the *Literary Gazette* commenting that the text “seems to conduct us through a long gallery of Mr. Rossetti’s works, with all their richness of colouring, depth of pathos, poetical but eccentric conception, and loving elaboration of every minute detail” (“*The Defence of Guenevere, and other Poems*” 226).⁷⁵

Modern critics have noted much the same of both books. Elizabeth Helsinger for instance has highlighted the way that “display and visual discovery feed the desire that is both the thematic focus of [*The Earthly Paradise*] and the motive that sustains reader and hearer” (225). But more than just visuality, what Morris often demonstrates is a fixation on materiality— aesthetic pleasures and the bodies that experience them. Analyzing “The Story of Cupid and Psyche” alongside Burne-Jones’s engravings intended for the tale, Helsinger finds that both conduct us through a long gallery not just of painterly images but sensuous objects and sensing bodies.⁷⁶ Psyche, for example, beholds the pleasures of Cupid’s palace:

And by the Palace porch she stood at last,

⁷⁴ The story deals with Admetus, King of Pherae, who, with Apollo’s help, woos and wins Princess Alcestis to wife. The crux of the tale, however, is Alcestis’s loving act of self-sacrifice to save Admetus’s life.

⁷⁵ Faulkner attributes this review to Richard Garnett.

⁷⁶ Several of Burne-Jones designs for *The Earthly Paradise* have survived. Burne-Jones and Morris had completed more illustrations for “Cupid and Psyche” than any other tale.

And saw how wonderfully the wall was wrought,
With curious stones from far-off countries brought,
And many an image and fair history
Of what the world has been and yet shall be
And all set round with golden craftsmanship,
Well-wrought as some renowned cup's royal lip... (402-3)

There is something both luxuriant and strangely leveling here. The golden frieze is elevated to a level of craftsmanship resembling Milton's heaven or the Shield of Achilles, even as the simile reduces its splendor in scale to a "renowned cup," and even just the lip thereof. Though surely Morris had in mind an elaborate chalice, the comparison is still somewhat deflating. His appreciation for craftsmanship of all varieties leads to a blurry equivalency between well-wrought objects in what is sometimes a suffusion of splendor in the poem.

There is a similar equivalency even between the objects and the bodies of Psyche and Cupid themselves; both are on display. We behold not just Psyche beholding Cupid's palace but the lovers beholding each other in turn (Helsing 210). This act of looking at looking is a thoroughly embodied experience. Psyche approaches Cupid with

Closed eyes and quivering lips, she threw
Her lovely head, and strove to think of it,
While images of fearful things did flit
Before her eyes; thus raising up the hand
That bore the lamp, one moment did she stand
As man's time tells it, and then suddenly
Opened her eyes, but scarce kept back a cry
At what she saw; for there before her lay
The very Love brighter than dawn of day;
And as he lay there smiling, her own name
His gentle lips in sleep began to frame,
And as to touch her face his hand did move;
O then, indeed, her faint heart swelled for love. (293)

The bodily details here focalize around eye, hand, and lip in parallel between the two figures: from her quivering lips to his gentle lips. As Psyche looks at Cupid, his lips and hand serve as material representations of the love he feels (and which he, himself, as the god of desire

embodies). This is confirmation in excess of the vision that Psyche, tricked by her jealous sisters, expected to find: a horrible monster waiting only to consume her. The body itself, in its capacity to look, act, and speak is rendered materially visible.

What *The Earthly Paradise* owes to its inception as a simulative medievalist production is not only a latent emphasis on visual detail, but a material richness. Morris's conception of an illustrated text aimed toward that "harmonious work of art" he would describe in "The Ideal Book." More than an illustrated book, like the work of the Kelmscott Press, it was to be a well-crafted ornamental art object. A large, beautiful object more fit for reading on a table than held in the hands (as Helsinger similarly surmises [208])—in scale close to the kind of medieval folio that would have once crowned an ornate lectern in a choir. To this end, *The Earthly Paradise's* visual materiality reflects, in part, a fascination with the book considered as a material object. The text certainly features numerous book objects—as set dressing, as key plot elements, and as sources for its tales.⁷⁷ But more than just the materiality of the book in hand, medieval itself in form, *The Earthly Paradise's* material details shape a kind of bridge with the past. As Yuri Cowan has observed, the plots of individual tales also "make the artefacts of medieval everyday life—ornaments, tools, instruments, weapons, and especially books—into actors in the narrative in their own right" (Cowan 43). *The Earthly Paradise* is a text keen to make its reader aware of a kind of temporally transcendent materiality in multiple forms.

Importantly this materiality is apprehended in part through ornament. Morris's late lectures on the book arts clarify his conception that the best medieval books, and the best art in general, have both an "epic" and "ornamental" character.

All organic art, all art that is genuinely growing, opposed to rhetorical, retrospective, or academical art, art which has no real growth in it, has two

⁷⁷ See Helsinger 209

qualities in common: the epical and the ornamental; its two functions are the telling of a story and the adornment of a space or tangible object. (*Ideal Book* 26)

Note that these are not (or should not be) separable elements. The book is not quite body (form) and soul (text). “Not only is all its special art obviously and simply beautiful as ornament, but its ornament also is vivified with forcible meaning, so that neither in one nor the other does the life ever flag, or the sensuous pleasure of the eye ever lack” (26). The material, too, has its epic qualities. Morris’s aesthetic emphases in *The Earthly Paradise* reach back toward the past by partaking in the materiality of that past.

The Epic in the Material

The Earthly Paradise is about telling stories, and in this respect, it is certainly, by Morris’s definition, epical.⁷⁸ One function of the emphasis on telling and re-telling in the text is to foreground voice in its material mediation. Morris cultivates multiple strategies for foregrounding this mediation, reflecting the multiple mediations of voice in body, verse, print, and page and expressed through the kind of robust materiality I have been charting.

As I turn to the text itself, I will begin with a brief outline: after an apology spoken by “the idle singer of an empty day,” a prologue introduces “The Wanderers”: a group of thirteenth-century refugees of the plague from Norway. Inspired by stories of various adventurers who find paradise on Earth—lands that grant immortal life—the wanderers set out on a journey to find such a place. They find, however, only hardship, death, and what seems to be South America.

⁷⁸ This is foundational to Florence Boos’s important reading of the poem in the *Design of William Morris’ the Earthly Paradise*, though she would never state it in such pat terms. In Boos’s evaluation, the poem searches for some hopeful talisman against despair which “its various narrators find...in human kinship itself, and convey this hope in the narrative tales” (21). The poem offers a defense of “narrative art” (*Design* 25) in the very process of telling stories, while showing the impact of that process on the community of tellers and listeners it depicts. Carole Silver, Clive Wilmer, Herbert Tucker, and Amanda Hodgson have likewise written on the social importance of re-telling in the text.

After years of journeying and numerous deaths, they embark on one final expedition that lands them on the shore of an island inhabited by a Hellenic culture that has survived in isolation since the classical period. Repenting their folly, the remaining Wanderers find respite, though not peace of mind, on the island; the latter will be more hard won. The Elders of the island welcome them and suggest an exchange of stories to enrich the isolated country, while the men resign themselves to retirement. As the prologue ends, they resolve to swap one tale, drawn from legend and literature, from each group each month. After a “To the Reader,” the poem proceeds. The prologue functions as a frame tale, continued between the stories themselves which are the bulk of the text, introduced by the frame and organized by month. Twenty-four stories in all, each introduced by a new teller. The frame, as Florence Boos observes, serves to emphasize the act of telling while highlighting the reaction of the Wanderers, the Elders, and eventually some of the Island’s youths as they process the tales in terms of their own experiences and move toward recovering hope, or rather discover a reason to hope even in the face of hope’s apparent futility.

Amid all this Morissian “epic” it is perhaps curious to note the often starkly material terms in which the author presents acts of telling and the voice itself. Telling is almost always presented as mediated at multiple simultaneous levels through embodied forms with material qualities that are sometimes as important as what is being told. At the start of the prologue for example, the Wanderer who will tell the tale of the group’s exodus, Rolf, is described speaking in “a hollow voice” twenty-six lines before he ever opens his mouth (72). This space between description and action makes speaking perceptible first as a material action before it ever reports it.

Once Rolf does speak, his repetition of different forms of “tell” introduces the poem’s major theme with the arresting linguistic thickness of polyptoton (the repetition of words derived

from a shared root): “I have to tell a tale of woe, / a tale of folly and of wasted life,” and “So if I tell the story of the past, / let it be worth some little rest, I pray” (73). But before he can get on with it, he first explains how mutual communication is possible between the Greek Elders and the (primarily) Norwegian Wanderers at all: “No wonder if the Grecian tongue I know, / since at Byzantium many a year ago / my father bore the twibil valiantly” (73). “Tongue” is a common metaphor, but in invoking it, Morris’s verse almost immediately trips the tongue: first in the halting metrical inversion of “many,” which suggests a caesura in the second line, and then in the poem’s first of many archaisms: “Twibil,” a two-sided axe, is not merely a linguistic archaism but a material one; one of Cowan’s “artefacts of medieval everyday life” (43). Fascinatingly, the word “twibil” survived in Morris’s day (as the OED attests), in Kentish and Devonshire dialect, as a reaping-hook and mattock, respectively. Living at the Red House in Bexleyheath (then part of Kent) between 1859 and 1865, it is possible Morris heard the word in its surviving Kentish usage. For readers in the know, the word forms a connection between the material of Morris’s medieval setting and the present, even as it highlights the gulf between them: Rolf’s twibil is a weapon, not a farming tool. But as an unusual archaism (even by Morris’s standards) it is also another tongue tripper, one that compels the reader to reach for a dictionary. In their tripping nature, these three lines serve to highlight a kind of linguistic materiality at multiple levels: the tongue by which Rolf speaks, the language with which he communicates, the verse that (after Prins) metrically mediates his voice to the reader, and the linguistic description of material culture.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ While I wish to connect this quality to Prins’s voice inverse, it could equally be discussed in terms of Jeffrey Skoblow’s important *Paradise Dislocated*, where he identifies Morris’s verse as evincing an “aesthetics of immersion” that points to itself in order to point to the material existence of the body of the reader holding the book. Though there are resonances between my study and Skoblow’s, his concept of embodiment runs against mine for its grounding in Marxist critique.

Rolf's imagination is fired by the Breton squire Nicholas, whose tales inspire his pursuit of an Earthly Paradise.

Much lore of many lands this Breton knew;
And for one tale I told, he told me two.
He, counting Asagard a new-told thing,
Yet spoke of gardens ever blossoming
Across the western seat where none grew old
E'en as the books at Micklegarth had told,
And said moreover that an English knight
Had had the Earthly Paradise in sight,
And heard the songs of those that dwelt therein,
But entered not, being hindered by his sin. (75-6)

Tales proliferate through persons and books as both prove capable of telling. But here a textual feature, the capitalization of "the Earthly Paradise," alludes to the text itself, and the "songs of those that [dwell] therein." Textual materiality and bodily materiality again blur together in their mutual capacity to embody the tale. The tale is in the telling, whether mediated by the body of the teller or the text.

Indeed, the Elder of the City embraces the Wanderers, who bring with them a wealth of cultural memory from which the islanders have been cut, in just these terms.

And for the rest, no little thing shall be
(Since ye through all yet keep your memory)
The gentle music of the bygone years,
Long past to us with all their hopes and fears.
Think, if the gods, who mayhap love us well,
Sent to our gates some ancient chronicle.
Of that sweet unforgotten land long left,
Of all the lands wherefrom we now are reft—
—Think, with what joyous hearts, what reverence,
What songs, what sweet flowers we should bring it thence,
What images would guard it, what a shrine
Above its well-loved black and white should shine!
How should it pay our labour day by day
To look upon the fair place where it lay;
With what rejoicings even should we take
Each well-writ copy that the scribes might make,
And bear them forth to hear the people's shout

The wanderers are implored to find comfort in the transformation of their lives into tales. Moreover, what is emphasized here is the material mobility and textual proliferation of the tale across time, as the living chronicle becomes a multiplicity of well-writ copies. “Well-writ” here is meant in unusually material terms. The re-production of the tale will involve the hand of a craftsman (scribe) who will work the transformation of the tale into an object seemingly fated to be as much entombed as read. Importantly, the scribe’s work will not be merely ornamental, but epical as well. Both beautifying the tale and participating in its retelling.

The individual tales are equally invested in embodying telling and speaking in material terms, not just in books but even in the body. My account of “Cupid and Psyche” earlier in this chapter represents just one instance of a tendency that is absolutely rampant in *The Earthly Paradise*. While Morris’s emphasis on the body in his poetry has been widely noted (even in his own day),⁸⁰ it has been missed that *The Earthly Paradise* fixates again and again on specific bodily details in a kind of erotic litany. Eye and lip are in constant proximity to each other. The voice is ever described in relation to its sonic, material properties. To demonstrate this, I turn to one tale in closer detail, the “Lovers of Gudrun.”

Gudrun and the Embodied Voice

“The Lovers of Gudrun” is the Wanderers’ tale for November, originally published in the third volume of the first edition in November 1869. It is by far the most appealing tale for contemporary readers, featuring a depth of character that Morris does not match elsewhere in the text. Morris’s depiction in this tale of voice focalized around lips and apprehended in material terms demonstrates a concern for materiality as a kind of basis or substrate for voice. Moreover,

⁸⁰ It is not for no reason that Morris is named among Robert Buchanan’s “Fleshly School of Poetry.”

the tale also reflects on that materiality as an interpretative problem, one that prohibits the easy apprehension of voice.

Adapted from the Laxdaela Saga, a 13th century Icelandic text, “The Lovers of Gudrun” centers on a love triangle involving Gudrun, daughter of Oswif of Herdholt.⁸¹ Neighboring Bathstead is home to Olaf the Peacock, his heroic son Kiartan, and his somewhat less heroic foster-son and nephew Bodli. After two rapid-fire marriages, Gudrun finds herself once divorced, once widowed, and on the market. She cozies up to best friends Kiartan and Bodli, but even as she pledges herself to Kiartan, his heroic aspirations take him and Bodli off to Norway. There, Kiartan forges an alliance with King Olaf Tryggvason that, despite Kiartan’s protestations, threatens to develop into a marriage to the King’s sister. Homesick and somewhat disaffected by events in Norway, Bodli returns home and courts Gudrun himself, beginning a feud with Kiartan and Bathstead that will take the life of both men.

In “Gudrun,” the body, but especially the eyes, lips, mouth, and tongue emerge as a kind of site for reading. When Gudrun is publicly struck by her first husband Thorvald, the guests in his hall “turned them round to see / What thing Gudrun would do, who for a while / sat pale and silent, with a deadly smile / upon her lips.” (308). The lips both belie and convey her intentions, as she calmly plots her escape and divorce. Later, Gudrun reconnects with Bathstead. Greeting her, Olaf the Peacock looks on Gudrun with “eyes compassionate” and comforts her, fixating on *her* eyes: “...O Gudrun, ill has been thy fate, / but surely better days shall soon be thine, / for not for nought do eyes like thine eyes shine / upon the hard world” (311). The comparison reads Gudrun’s eyes not as themselves, exactly, but in relation to other eyes. Morris’s strange expansion of a conventional figure of speech (“eyes like yours”), creates a simile that,

⁸¹ A distinct character from the Gudrun of the Old Norse *Volsunga Saga*, which Morris was translating with Eiríkr Magnússon and which he would later adapt into *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*.

ouroboros-like, eats its own tail: Her eyes are like other eyes that are like her shining eyes. It obscures rather than clarifies description. The futility of the comparison is replicated in the stumbling sonic repetition of “for not for nought” at the beginning of the third line. Sense runs up against sound here, as the former breaks down into a wash of assonance on the “I”-sound that conveys the vexed comparison. One word to each syllable of the meter, the line is more chewed than spoken. The verse makes its material presence felt just Olaf’s figure of speech leaves us with little beyond the fact of Gudrun’s eyes having an interpretable material quality we cannot quite see.

What is foregrounded here and throughout “Gudrun,” is the strangeness of an embodied material voice. The heft of the verse and the self-referential emptiness of the attempt to read Gudrun’s fate in her body anticipate her response, which first echoes Olaf’s ‘not/naught’: “She answered nought, but drew her hand away, / and heavier yet the weight upon her lay / that thus men spake of her...” (311). Gudrun feels Olaf’s speech as a material weight (upon her own poetic lay?). In the next moment she sees Kiartan “gazing upon her with wide hungry eyes and parted lips” (311). Thirteen lines of trembling hands and quivering lips mark the interval before Kiartan speaks. Indeed, here Gudrun’s lips “yearned for words they had not learned, and might not know” (312). When Kiartan does break the silence there is “good hap and might...in his voice” (312). When Gudrun responds “she [wonders] at the sound of her own voice” which reveals to her an apprehension she did not perceive internally (312). The passage is a ballet of embodied signs, and the voice figures an equally embodied and material role.

This is of particular import in “Gudrun” because in this tale words are singularly powerful. “Gudrun” turns not on heroic action, but on acts of promising and vowing. Speech is both efficacious and potentially deceptive. The “word” is mightier than the “sword.” Fantasizing

about going off to meet their heroic fate, Kiartan tells Bodli: “sheathe thy sword / fair foster-brother, till I say the word / that draws it forth” (316). Action will depend on speech. And the sword/word rhyme here is no accident. In his next breath Kiartan makes a promise that he will fail to live up to, precipitating the brothers’ deaths: “Gudrun, never fear that thou a word or twain of me shalt hear, / E’en if the birds must bear them o’er the sea” (316). This begets more reading of eye, hand, and mouth: “Her eyes were fixed upon him lovingly / As this he spake, and Bodli smiling saw / Her hand to Kiartan’s ever nigher draw” (316). Kiartan’s failure to send word—and thus to live up to his own—directly leads to Bodli’s courtship of Gudrun.

When Bodli returns from Norway and visits Gudrun, the word he brings (the first and only Gudrun receives) is almost comically deflating:

...“Fear not, Gudrun. I bring
Fair news of his well-doing—he is well.”
“Speak out,” she said, “what more there is to tell.
Is he at Herdholt? Will he come to-day?” (340)

Again, the narrator offers bodily signs in excess of Gudrun’s speech: “And with that word she turned her face away, / shamed with the bitter-sweet of yearning pain, / and to her lips the red blood came again” (340). The trouble with Bodli’s subsequent message from Kiartan is not that he lies to Gudrun. Instead he faithfully reports Kiartan’s message: “He bade me tell thee that his life was fair / and full of hope—and that he looked to see / thy face again.—So god be good to me, / these were the words he spake!” The problem comes in Gudrun’s failure to correctly interpret the mediation of the message:

...For now she turned
Tearless upon him, and great anger burned
Within her eyes: “O trusty messenger,
No doubt through thee his very voice I hear!
Sure but light thought and stammering voice he had
To waste on one, who used to make him glad!” (341)

It is not so simple an equation as ‘words conceal and the body reveals.’ The body may equally lie or be misread. Though Gudrun takes Bodli’s tone at first as a betrayal of Kiartan, it introduces enough doubt that she presses him for more information. She cannot entirely avoid the notion that she might be hearing Kiartan’s “very voice” and not Bodli’s in the message. Bodli makes the situation worse by offering further biased, but not untrue, readings of Kiartan’s eyes:

O, hearken, Gudrun—he doth sit
By Ingibjorg’s side ever; day by day,
Sadder his eyes grow when she goes away—
What! Know I not the eyes of lovers then? (342)

When Gudrun takes this as truth, the result is tragedy.

Even as the tale labors to demonstrate the perhaps vexing significance of the voice’s embodiment, it continues to invest speech with the power of action. The plot proceeds mainly through vows, prophecies, promises, oaths, threats, and persuasion. “Words” (308) dissolve Gudrun’s first marriage contract. Kiartan’s initial conflict with King Olaf comes close to spilling over into violence but is resolved likewise through words. Key events involving action, like the theft of Kiartan’s sword by Gudrun’s brothers, are reported but not depicted by the narrator. And at the tale’s climax, when the narrative can defer action no longer, it doubles down. The narrator declines to describe Kiartan being cut down, instead deferring to the report of two common folk that witnessed the roadside ambush:

Now, as I find it written in my tale,
there went that morn a goodman of the dale,
about those bents his mares and foals to see,
his herdsman with him; these saw presently
Up from the east the men of Bathstead ride,
And take their stand along a streamlet’s side. (402)

The reader is plunged into an unstable world of materially mediated retellings. Instead of directly reported action, the narrator discloses a chain of retellings from the herdsman to the book to the

Wanderer narrating the tale, and at a wider scale to Morris himself and the reader. Note however, that Morris is replicating an actual textual feature of the Laexdala saga here. He is highlighting—not concocting—a textual condition. This moment foregrounds that it is only through the material mediation of voice that we access the tale at all, while reminding us that nearly one hundred pages earlier it began with a Wanderer advising his listeners: “know withal that we / have ever deemed this tale / As true to be as though those very dwellers in Laxdale, / Risen from the dead had told us their own tale” (275).

Framing Voice

The device of the frame itself serves to make voice materially present in *The Earthly Paradise*. Each tale is told explicitly by a different teller, either Wanderer or Elder. Karen Herbert has described the effect of this as a “polyphonic” (146) “chorus of voices” (152). Amanda Hodgson argues that the frame makes the reader aware of a plurality of voices in its moments of transition as the narrative is passed from frame to character, and sometimes passed to further descending layers of characters and textual citations (344). The frame-in-frame effect is nakedly hypermedial, and what is mediated is voice. The hypermediation of the frame is heightened by the intervening presence of the monthly lyrics between every two tales. These lyrics feature a voice that is distinct from the narrative voice. Their content relates to the frame only temporally and thematically, charting the cyclical progression of the seasons in relation to human life and love. References to the Thames (“June”) localize the lyrics to England, not the island home of the Elders. But if the verdure described in the lyrics is English, it does not seem to be quite Morris’s England:

Across the gap made by our English hinds,

Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold
Far off the long-roofed church; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdles of his fold;
Down in the foss the river fed of old,
That through long lapse of time has grown to be
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear
The barley mowers on the trenchéd hill,
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,
All little sounds made musical and clear
Beneath the sky that burning August gives.
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives. (603)

This is not too removed from the English countryside of Morris's day, but the relentless procession of idyllic imagery, from shepherd to valley to bee to barley, resembles nothing so much as the Arcadian locale of *The Shepherd's Calendar*. What is described in these lyrics is certainly not the "six counties overhung with smoke" that the prologue opens by exhorting the reader to "forget" (69). We are instead in that "dream of London, small, and white, and clean, / the clear Thames bordered by its gardens green" that the idle singer conjures in its place (69). This is reinforced in a remarkable moment in the November lyric when the poem asks the reader "Art thou so weary that no world there seems / beyond these four walls, hung with pain and dreams?" (224). The text is compared to a room hung with pictures, and the reader exhorted to look beyond any of the framed dreams, beyond the frame and the text itself: "Look out upon the real world, where the moon, / Half-way 'twixt root and crown of these high trees, / Turns the dead midnight into dreamy noon." The poem points beyond itself to the "real world," but this "real world" is, too, a world of the poem's own imaginative construction. What is pointed to here is not the real world, but a kind of lyric simulation, one with no actual referent beyond the page. It might seem, indeed, that there is no room beyond the four walls of the book.

The lyrics have often been read as confessional or meditative (along the model of the “Romantic” lyric), or in other words with Morris himself (in the guise of “the idle singer”) as a speaker. In such a reading, the lyrics articulate Morris’s grief over his troubled marriage. Jane Morris’s ongoing infidelity with Dante Gabriel Rossetti becomes the primary motivating force for *The Earthly Paradise*’s morbid fixation on death, failure, and romance. Clive Wilmer is signal here in arguing on the one hand that Morris in his totality “was reacting against...a bourgeois notion of art as self-expression” (478) but on the other writing that the lyrics are “Romantic lyrics in the voice of the ‘idle singer’” which “appear to supply the primary motives for the poem, in Morris’s personal life” (484). In contrast, I would emphasize the degree to which *The Earthly Paradise* resists positing such a lyric speaker. The lyrics themselves are at best, impersonal. Of the frame overall, I concur with Amanda Hodgson, who has observed that if the shifting verse forms and multiple tellers “[remind] the reader that a tale must be told by someone” the frame also resists giving the narrator a specific identity (Hodgson 345). The lyrics do not construct a speaker with a meaningful subjectivity any more than the frame does for the narrators of the individual tales. Although the *Canterbury Tales* was an explicitly stated influence on *The Earthly Paradise*, it is instructive to consider here how different the two are. Where Chaucer’s pilgrims are often fully drawn characters whose personality and motives inform the telling of their tales, Morris’s Wanderers and Elders lack distinction, identity, and aside from Rolf, even names.⁸² The Wife of Bath has more personality in her pinky than the whole lot of them put together. If Morris’s narrators fell, like a drawer of type, out of sorts, no compositor could ever right them again. The lyrics may be spoken in the same voice as the “Idle Singer” whose apology opens the poem, but this is far from clear. Nor is it clear that the lyrics

⁸² There of course other named wanderers, but only Rolf survives to tell a tale.

taken together chart a stable speaker at all. Instead, their address to nature, time, death, love, and the reader charts a universalizing iterability;⁸³ the lyrics aim for constants in human life that emerge, like the seasons, in cyclical patterns: a cycle of hope and failure, love and loss that is apparent when considering human lives historically or in the iterable form of the tale. Failure and despair are transformed into something more. As Hodgson argues, this circularity is in tension throughout the text with the linear and finite condition of human lives considered at the individual level.

My understanding of voice here, as I approach Morris's engagement with lyric, straddles the work of Yopie Prins on the one hand and Eric Griffiths on the other. Morris's emphasis on the material mediation of voice offers a clear example of Prins's voice inverse, but also what I have characterized as voice in text and in body. For Prins, as I observed early in this chapter, the metrical mediation of voice in nineteenth-century poetry anticipates the technological mediation of voice later in the century. The printed voice is marked, made strange, other, and disembodied. In an oblique way, I share Prins's wider concern for recovering a way of reading Victorian poetry that is "not limited to the expression of a speaking subject" (54). Indeed, what I am suggesting is precisely that Morris's deployment of a material voice is different than the speaking subject we have come to presume in many (even non-lyric) poems. But I have also throughout this chapter emphasized the ways Morris conceives of the voice as necessarily embodied, which is much closer to Griffiths' analysis. Where my own analysis departs from Griffiths it converges with Prins. For Morris, if printed poetry is a vocal medium, its "centre in

⁸³ Such iterability is at the center of Jonathan Culler's 2017 *Theory of the Lyric*, a consciously post-Prins text that sought to argue for the historical continuity of the lyric genre while moving past much of the twentieth-century dogma around the lyric speaker. I suspect that, to the extent Morris had a theory of the lyric, its origin may have been grounded in a reading of middle English lyrics and song, leading him toward a similar view of lyric as a kind of re-iterable event without a specific speaker or with only an impersonal one. For Morris, however, this event-like quality appears to be instantiated in the text, with the text itself in the role of singer. Closer study of *The Defence of Guenevere* in relation to lyric and the dramatic monologue might help clarify Morris's conception of voice.

utterance” does not, as Griffith argues, “lie outside itself” (57). I am having my cake and eating it too in suggesting that the printed voice for Morris is embodied in the text. *The Earthly Paradise* both emphasizes the embodied and material condition of voice while studiously avoiding the kind of subjective speaker present-day lyric readers expect. To this extent, voice in Morris resembles the simulated voice of AI, neither wholly subjective nor objective. The voice of a lyric speaker exists as representation with at least a nominal referent. In naming Morris’s voice as simulation, I am observing the grain of a voice with no referent. Unlike AI, Morris’s simulated voice is marked by its material inability to represent voice, an inability literalized eight years after its conception by the referential technology of the phonograph. If voice in Morris has a Barthesian grain, it is the grain of its material substrate, or one that cannot be recovered through representative or duplicative strategies. “Simulation” as a term of description is valuable here for its ability to describe the paradox of a voice that is both mediated and absent—the capacity of verse to simultaneously transmit and fail to transmit voice. Morris’s text has a voice, embodies that voice in fact, but it should not be mistaken for the voice of a lyric speaker or any specific historical subject, medieval or contemporary. It is instead a simulation, one that operates through the gaps, breakdowns, and failures of transmission of a mediated voice in verse and in print.

At the level of history, Morris’s simulated voice reflects, in part, the developing nineteenth-century notion of a lost orality—what Yeats perceives as the “living voice” missing from *The Earthly Paradise*. Ivan Kreilkamp has made much of this point, arguing that voice and the figure of the storyteller in the Victorian novel reflect a mythic absence that is singularly modern: charting the story of the supplanting of voice by print and its possible reintegration in

print (9).⁸⁴ Morris certainly has the goal of redeeming a culture addled by commercialized and mechanized production,⁸⁵ but he does not posit quite the kind of restoration of voice to print that Kreilkamp identifies. Morris's medieval past is not primarily an oral culture; voice, whether in-body or in-verse, is much the same.⁸⁶ Voice is not quite a lost horizon. What has been lost and what requires restoration are material conditions, relations between man and art that might redeem societal and personal suffering.

To take another historical view, Morris's concern with voice and mediation resembles Robert Browning's similar concern with the epistemological problem of materiality and truth. Morris evinces a characteristically Victorian awareness of history as a textually mediated production.⁸⁷ This awareness is inflected on the one hand by the century's long crisis of faith with the ascendancy of historical criticism of the Bible, epitomized by the publication in 1860 of the controversial *Essays and Reviews*. In one essay, Benjamin Jowett, while arguing for a simpler interpretation of the Bible as any other book, nevertheless articulates the difficulties of textual transmission, difficulties notably compounded in poetry with reference to the embodied voice:

Let it be considered, then, that this extreme variety of interpretation is found to exist in the case of no other book, but of the Scriptures only. Other writings are preserved to us in dead languages Greek, Latin, Oriental, some of them in fragments, all of them originally in manuscript. It is true that difficulties arise in

⁸⁴ Morris's focus on storytelling in *The Earthly Paradise* aligns it quite obviously with Kreilkamp's argument; his wistful longing for a culture of craftsmanship and creative liberty resonates with Kreilkamp's account of Benjamin's "The Storyteller":

Writing subsumes the manual labor of folk culture. It appropriates that labor for itself in the figure of an author whose speech is productive work. If writing has come to seem a means of participating in a wholly disenchanted and abstract modern economy, storytelling offers the promise of transforming intellectual work, and specifically the transmission of narratives, into a satisfying form of labor. (11)

⁸⁵ Helsinger's argument about *The Earthly Paradise* hinges on a similar claim that Morris sought to "restore what one might call a kinesthetic knowledge that [he]...saw as damaged or warped by the demands of contemporary life and labor" (199).

⁸⁶ A sharp dissertation by Emily Doucet observes essentially this same point in relation to Kreilkamp on the way to a very different argument about Morris's reception.

⁸⁷ Ingrid Hanson makes a similar point, although I find she perhaps overvalues a religious view of this tendency in suggesting that Morris reconfigures "the theological idea of incarnation" (350).

the explanation of these writings, especially in the most ancient, from our imperfect acquaintance with the meaning of words, or the defectiveness of copies, or the want of some historical or geographical information which is required to present an event or character in its true bearing. In comparison with the wealth and light of modern literature, our knowledge of Greek classical authors, for example, may be called imperfect and shadowy. Some of them have another sort of difficulty arising from the subtlety or abruptness in the use of language; in lyric poetry especially, some of the earlier prose, the greatness of the thought struggles with the stammering lips. (404)

Meanwhile, as Amanda Hodgson has observed, much scholarship in the 1860s was concerned with “the need to define what constituted historical evidence and what were the indicators of myth” (348).⁸⁸ Historical problems were increasingly philological problems, and Morris was more attuned to this than most. From 1868 Morris worked with Icelandic scholar Eiríkr Magnússon on translations of Old Icelandic texts. One of the fruits of this collaboration was *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, a poem that as Clive Wilmer persuasively argues “can be read as alluding to the [original] narrative’s survival as a structure of accretions built up over several centuries and oftentimes conflicting with one another” (488).

Indeed, understanding the past precisely in such accretive terms seems to have offered Morris the creative and interpretative liberty to simulate the past against the futility of its representation. While *The Earthly Paradise*’s emphasis on embodied and textual voices reflects the problem of recovering the past through its material record, for Morris this problem is more productive than obstructive. Hanson’s analysis of *The Defence of Guenevere* is here illustrative.

[In the “Defence”] the material is all that is available as a basis for judgement and yet at the same time is unreliably related to abstract codes of truth. The body, however, represents a different kind of knowing: it registers the uncertainties of the world in blushes, in tears, and in ‘passionate twisting’...the poem demands an engagement with the body as the locus of interpretation. (355)

⁸⁸ Hodgson also connects her discussion of anthropological scholarship to *Essays and Reviews*, in service of demonstrating a wider cultural concern with the distinction between myth and history.

Much the same might be said of “Gudrun” where voices speak always through bodies and where interpretation of the body is so significant to the message. Morris affirms a kind of truth of the body, a way of knowing or thinking through an embodied materiality. In this paradigm “reality is located in the realm of interpretation and perception rather than of fact” (Hanson 365). This is perhaps as well to say that Morris effects a transformation of history into romance through its material condition. But more than a bodily truth, this is a material truth—one that applies as well to bodies as books, or any ornamental art object. There is a parallel here in the Ruskinian aesthetics that so influenced Morris. The truth of the body is the work of the hand, what Morris perceived was being supplanted by industrial machinery, what may be further supplanted in our own time by generative AI. Like a medieval craftsman, art emerges from an interpretation of nature that is partly subjective and animated in the body. For Hanson, the dramatic monologues of *The Defence* posit the primacy of subjective reality in the face of the failure or absence of a transcendent truth. But if Morris recognizes this, it does not follow for him that materiality permits us to reconstruct or represent the subjectivity that produces art. It is not the subjectivity we recover; it is the art. Through simulation, Morris seeks to recover the material condition as a proxy for the voice of the past, and more than that to reshape his present reality into the future.

The Earthly Paradise is fundamentally a project of retelling medieval and classical stories for a contemporary audience. The sublimated early print aesthetics of the text—from Morris’s attempt at integrating text and image, to archaisms of language and style—tend to obscure the point that *The Earthly Paradise* was indeed for contemporary audiences and not a poetically regressive experiment. The poem was, in point of fact, extremely popular, ensuring Morris would be known first and foremost as a poet in the nineteenth century. In a lecture

delivered near the end of his life (and only surviving in summary form) Morris helps to clarify his relationship with the past:

[He] warned those of his audience who were engaged in art work in any way to guard against the folly of imitating this early art. [Morris was exhibiting lantern slides of early printed books.] It was a hard thing to say in one respect, because it was very beautiful. But that time had clean passed away, and however real the continuity of history, *they must recognize the enormous gulf between that period and the present*. They were living under changed ways of life, and how on earth could they expect people to do the same sort of work now as was done then? (*Ideal Book* 22-23 emphasis mine)

To simply represent the work of past ages, for Morris, was as impossible as it was undesirable. His tactic instead is simulation, remaking from the past for the present. Despite his cautioning, this enormous gulf was clearly less an unbridgeable chasm than a wash of white space—a canvas. This gulf is the historical corollary to those gaps, breakdowns, and failures of transmission of the voice in verse. In *The Earthly Paradise* the textual condition itself signals a fraught relationship with voice, a hyperawareness of mediation, and the difficulty or impossibility of representing it in print.

This enormous gulf between past and present is visible in the white space around the too-small italic initial “O” that begins *The Earthly Paradise*. But it is no less present in the ornamental initials of Morris’s 1896 Kelmscott edition of the text, even if they more closely resemble medieval forms.

Consider that these initial capitals in *The Earthly Paradise*, as in all Kelmscott editions, often function in place of what would normally be rendered as white space on the page. Such white space bibliographically signals temporal, spatial, or logical transitions in the text. Although somewhat inconsistently applied between volumes and dependent on what was at hand, the general practice in Kelmscott books is to use varying sizes and style of initials to signal structural levels of the text. In general, in *The Earthly Paradise* the largest capitals are used at the

beginning tales and months. A smaller size marks large transitional gaps within the tales, and the smallest size marks what in the first edition had been line breaks. Morris's initials transform space—gaps on the page—into artistic ornament.

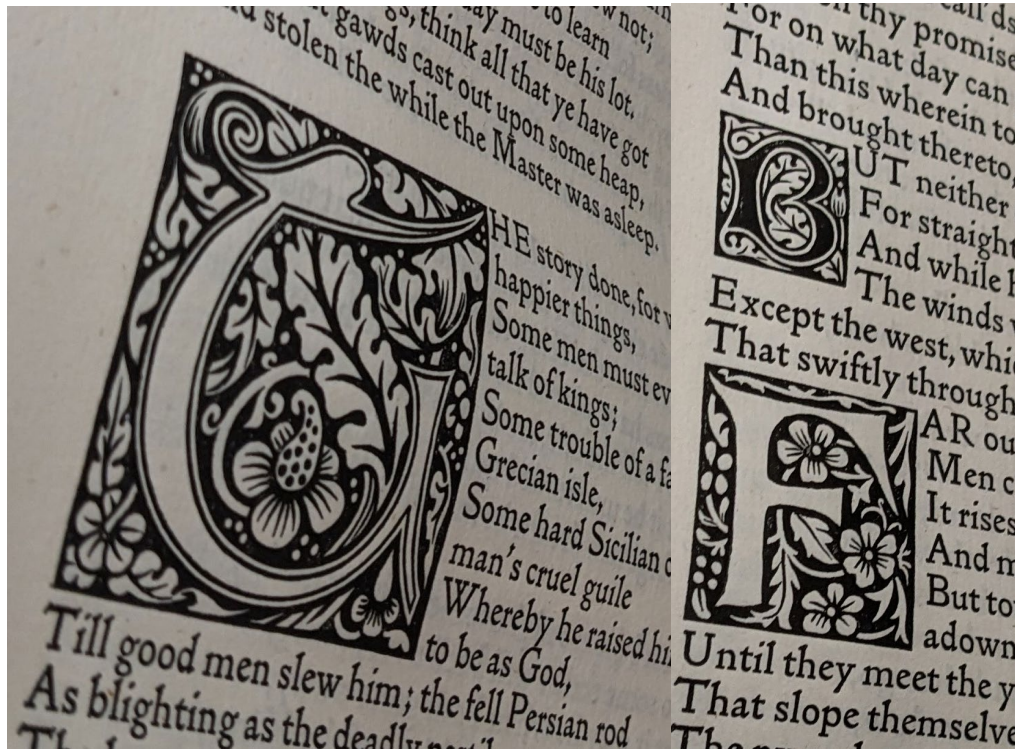


Fig. 3 – The three sizes of Kelmscott press ornamental initials used in *The Earthly Paradise*. The largest (at left) usually opens major structural parts the text. The medium size (lower right) signals a large section break within parts. The smallest size (upper right) signals a less important division, though generally stronger than a paragraph break which is usually indicated by a small in-line leaf (not pictured).

Though Morris was only involved in the “getting up” of at most the first three volumes of *The Earthly Paradise* before his death, the second volume evinces a particularly suggestive use of his capitals. In “the Doom of King Acrisius,” Perseus’s “joyance” with Andromeda is marked with just such a capital. “So there of all love’s feasting were they fain, / words fail to tell the

joyance that they had, / and with what words they made each other glad” (282). In both editions this leaving off of words suggestively lines up with a page break. In the first edition, a large capital further highlights the gap of time between the lover’s tryst and their return to the city. But in the Kelmscott edition where words fail, ornament tells. The following word “So” is given the largest sort of ornamental capital, the kind that typically marks the space between tales.⁸⁹ The ornament here marks a materiality that signifies in excess of the language, it transforms a temporal gap (albeit much shorter than the gap between medieval and modern) into a telling ornamental significance.

⁸⁹ The same occurs twice more in “Acrisius,” the first time follows the scene of Jove’s rape of Danae, the second marks yet another implied sex scene between Perseus and Andromeda.

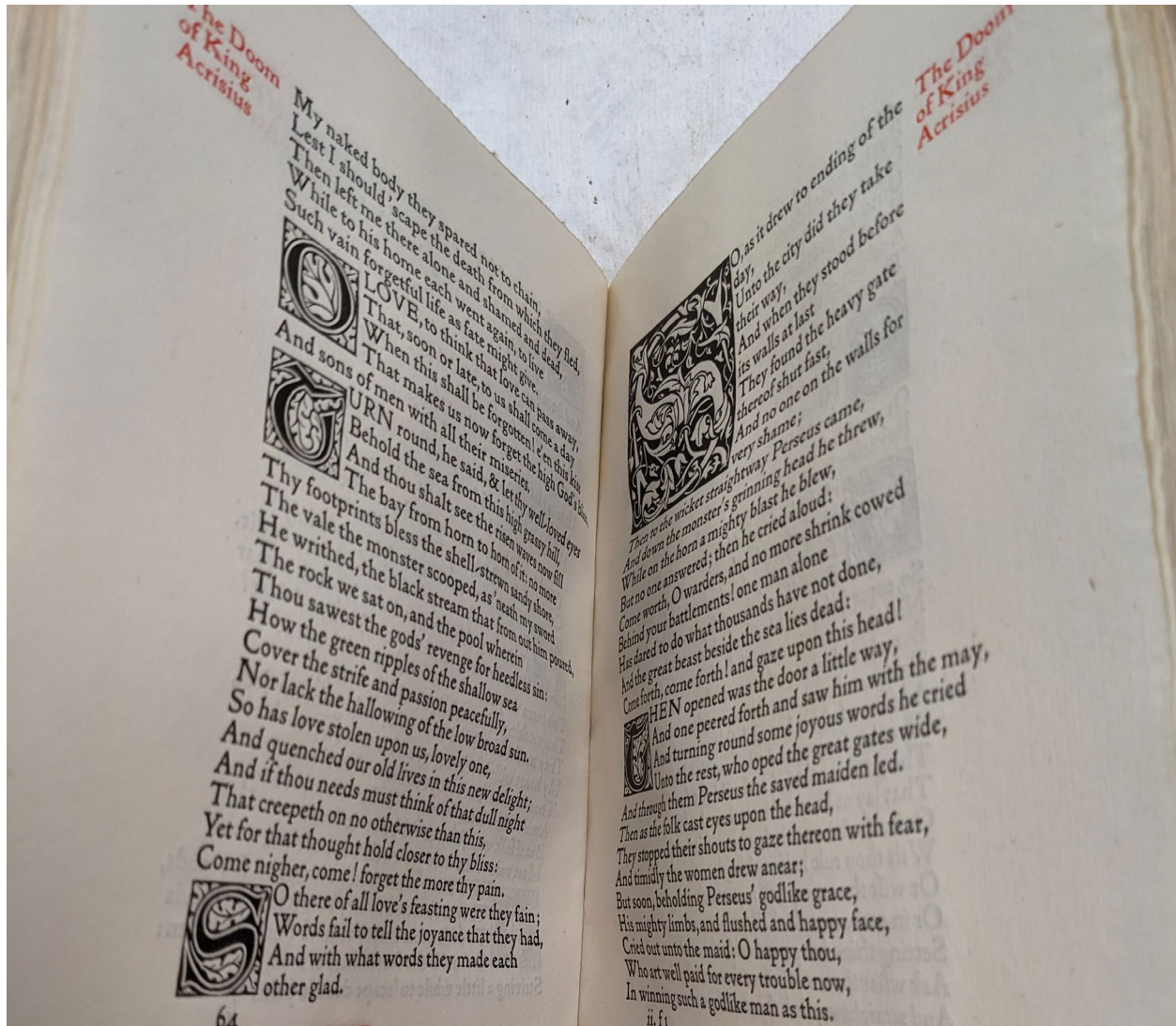


Fig. 4 – The large capital “S” in “So” at right paraleptically marks Andromeda’s and Perseus’s lovemaking.

This same ornament elsewhere marks the discontinuities of voice in each transition from lyric to frame to tale. My point here is not just that *The Earthly Paradise* makes textually visible the discontinuities between past and present or the absence and limits of voice. My point is instead that those very gaps, the necessary condition of materiality and of history, are the enabling stuff

of ornament for Morris. They are the “resistance in the materials” without which there can be no art.

When Morris chooses a clear text edition for the Kelmscott Chaucer, he is not, as Charles Laporte once suggested, constructing a quasi-religious monument to “Chaucerian textual authority” (216). Morris understood the accretive variances of the text to be part of the text. The book, like the buildings that Anti-Scrape sought to protect, is a living record of tellings and retellings. As Boos has written in response to Laporte, “literary palimpsests...had an intrinsic value for Morris and he understood more than most that what reader-response theorists now call ‘misreadings’ and ‘misprisions’ can have worthy lives of their own” (69).

In *The Earthly Paradise* the act of retelling itself is revealed as an artistic endeavor with the power to marshal this resistance into a transformative art that embraces the condition of materiality as it seeks to remake the world. By retelling tales, the wanderers not only remake their source texts; they remake their lives along narrative lines, generating (if only fleetingly) hope from despair, meaning from chaos. History emerges here as a process of revision necessitated and empowered by the condition of the voice in text and the production of a simulative voice that exists in relation to the material of the past without representing it. And in the Kelmscott *Earthly Paradise* the materiality of voice—embodied in verse, in print, and in the body—is always quite literally at hand.

In a playful and engaging recent article, Lorraine Jansen Kooistra has argued that the design practices of the Kelmscott Press anticipate digital media (9). Digital technology and the late century printing revival both “depend on the cooperative development of work, activity and craft in an ongoing design process that is inseparable from execution” (10). Strange to say, but designing the interface is as integral a consideration for Morris as it is for a contemporary app

developer; what Morris valued in book design was as much aesthetic as it was functional: wide bottom margins accommodate page turning; smaller leading reduces eye movement between lines (and cuts down paper costs).

But there are other ways that Morris seems to anticipate the digital. In 2002, writing on the cutting edge of the field electronic literature, Katherine Hayles posed this question: “what would it mean to talk about materiality in an era in which simulations are everywhere around us?” If the ontology of AI is functionally immaterial, Morris stands to remind us “there is no art without resistance in the materials.”

III. Marked Texts and Synthetic Speakers: Amy Levy's Minor Poetics

ChatGPT (and by extension the Large Language Models that underly the current glut of other chatbots) I have written, produces a simulation of voice. Perhaps this is not so easy to hear in output that is often flat, generic, uninspired, and occasionally (to borrow an adjective from J. L. Austen) infelicitous. But if we are to admit that voice is something writing has at all, it cannot be solely a property of good writing, however much we may prize stylish and distinctive over workmanlike and predictable voices. As bad as ChatGPT currently is at most writing tasks without significant user oversight, it is in fact impossible to distinguish its output from human writing with complete certainty. Who, I wonder, would be willing to stake their professional reputation on deciding which of these excerpts is an authentic, but obscure Victorian periodical poem and which Chat-GPT's response to a request to "write a Victorian-style poem about a shipwreck"?

Far on the deep mid-ocean tossed,
Leagues away from the friendly shore,
In the watery wilderness lost,
Driven and deafened by rush and roar

The mast, once tall, now splintered in the gale,
The sails, torn ragged by the savage wind,
The ship, a ghost upon the ocean's pale,
With naught but darkness and despair to find.

When AI writing does fail to simulate voice convincingly, as it often does, our perception of its divergences from human fluency (whether dysfluent or indeed superfluent) is deeply uncanny.⁹⁰ It is the textual corollary of the too-glossy skin and hands with extra fingers of people rendered in AI "art" by programs like Midjourney. Likewise, it is the corollary of the awkward tones and rhythm of the literal AI voice of the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection. By drawing a comparison with wax cylinder recordings in the previous chapter I

⁹⁰ The text on the right is synthetic.

meant to highlight the way the stutters of fluency on one hand and of recording quality on the other mark a mediated voice. Similarly, voice in print and in verse, I have argued, may be marked by an awareness of a mediated voice, manifest for some nineteenth-century authors in their engagement with a kind of textual materiality.

In the previous chapter I posed the question: “If what we so overwhelmingly hear in the early phonograph recordings of Browning and Tennyson is the voice’s mechanical mediation, what do we hear in the Project Gutenberg Open Audiobook Collection’s comparable recording?” I return now to that question, to explore another possible answer. In my attention previously to what we hear in the PGOAC, I have paid little attention to what it says. The voice reading the poem is not co-extensive with the voice mediated by the poem. This is equally true for a simulated voice as for the wax cylinder recording that represents Tennyson’s voice reading the poem. Both offer voicings of the text. Such a voicing is by its nature interpretive, investing the text with cadence, intonation, and other prosodic features beyond what the text itself can suggest.⁹¹ If we hear a voice in the text of “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” Tennyson’s own voicing of the poem may in fact run up against that voice. David Nowell Smith’s careful study of poetic voice stops to pose this question: “Is there a ‘literal voice’ in an *oral* poem? For it is far from clear what a ‘literal’ voice would be. It is true that the rhapsode is present at the moment of performance, and that the rhapsode’s voice is an acoustic phenomenon, but this leaves unexplained the relationship between the rhapsode’s voice and the voice of the poem” (3-4). This question becomes vastly more complex for a project Gutenberg audiobook. If a voicing is, by its nature, interpretive, who or what has interpreted the text?

⁹¹ Such prosodic features are at the heart of Eric Griffiths’s analysis. The inability of writing to completely capture these leads Griffiths to a focus on readerly interpretability that emerges in disjunctions between an author’s intended meaning and what the form of written poetry can convey.

The PGOAC relies primarily on pre-existing technology for voice synthesis. The major technical challenge the creators needed to overcome was in fact a textual one. The Project Gutenberg e-books that are the source texts for the audiobooks represent an “extremely heterogeneous and diverse collection” (Walsh et al. 3.1). With no standard format for the HTML, long paratextual headers, and files that attempt to replicate the full variety of textual features in their sources, the e-books require considerable parsing to decide what should and should not be read. Such parsing is simple for one book, but it becomes challenging at scale.⁹² While logical and to some degree standard for audiobooks, the decision to exclude such elements as “pre-ambles, tables of contents, tables, illustrations, in-text page numbers, footnotes, transcriber notes, and other strange artifacts” (Walsh et al. 3.1), reflects a judgment about what is and is not textual. This judgment is figured in the authors’ (perhaps unintended) description of *all* these textual features as “strange artifacts.” In order to render a product that could be easily machine read, the authors employed statistical analysis to locate clusters of e-books with similar formatting and features. By identifying formal clusters, the authors simplified the task of determining and applying rules to convert the files from html to plain text, because the rules could be tailored to the specific circumstance of each cluster. The effect of this choice is that the five thousand audiobooks created in this initial effort were selected entirely based on uniformity of digital paratext and without regard to content.

Interpretive choices are brought to bear on the text even before the task of voicing it begins. Further, such choices influence the voice itself. As the authors write:

Different audiobooks require different reading styles. Nonfiction works benefit from a clear and neutral voice while fictional works with dialogue can benefit from an emotive reading and some “acting”. For the majority of the books, we use a clear and neutral text-to-speech voice. (Walsh et al. 3.2)

⁹² Actually, to describe parsing a text to make it machine readable as “simple” is a gross oversimplification. Even that task can be complex and tedious.

Despite these observations, genre analysis largely does not enter into the PGOAC process. The prosodic features of the synthesized voice, a product in part of a context-sensitive “emotion inference system” (3.2), appear to have been normed to novels:

We use an automatic speaker and emotion inference system to dynamically change the reading voice and tone based on context. This makes passages with multiple characters and emotional dialogue more life-like and engaging. To this end, we first segment the text into narration and dialogue and identify the speaker for each dialogue section. We then predict the emotion of each dialogue ...Finally, we assign separate voices and emotions to the narrator and the character dialogues... (3.2)⁹³

This in part explains some of the awkward features of the synthesized voicing of “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” Consider the rousing beat of:

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.

Reading with novelistic expectations, the PGOAC voice is deaf to the meter. Even untrained readers readily and implicitly recognize the dactylic structure of the poem, knowing to expect a heavy stressed beat at the beginning of each line.⁹⁴ PGOAC comically takes the first two syllables as an iamb, deflating the power of the poetry. It is not, I think, appropriate to describe this as a “clear and neutral text-to-speech voice.”

But one of the things we might hear in the voice of the PGOAC is just this “neutrality.” The voice is unobjectionably placid. It is restrained even in moments of passion. It is distinctly male. Its accent is Standard American English. It is perhaps even racially white. Stephen Cave and Kanta Kihal have persuasively argued that AI writ large has been consistently racialized as white (“The Whiteness of AI”). PGOAC’s conception of “neutrality” reflects in part the status of

⁹³ None of the audiobooks I have sampled feature any more than one voice, regardless of character.

⁹⁴ The first foot of these lines is, arguably, not a dactyl but the rarely used antibacchius (two stressed syllables followed by an unstressed); this is certainly the case in the Tennyson recording.

white and *male* as a kind of “default.” As Cave and Kihal write: “The whiteness of AI...does not appear as a feature, but is transparent, like the air we breathe” (695). Much the same can be said of its maleness. The aspiration to neutrality is thus already circumscribed and defined by white masculinity as an unmarked form of social presence, an unmarked form of embodiment.⁹⁵ But the specific qualities of the PGOAC voice tend to reinforce an impression of whiteness:

According to the White racial frame, it is the rational, scientific thought of the White Westerner that lays claim to universal validity—or, we might say, true generality. Other races, by contrast, are framed as particular and subjective, constrained by the limits of their non-ideal bodies and cultures to think thoughts that are partial and parochial. To imagine a truly intelligent machine, one with general intelligence is therefore to imagine a White machine. (Cave and Kihal 697)

The PGOAC’s aspiration to vocal neutrality certainly reflects a fantasy of an unbiased (if not immaterial) medium for the text, but it also reflects the kind of privileged rationality Cave and Kihal describe here. Why else do nonfiction works, according to Walsh et al. benefit more than fiction from a “clear and neutral voice?” The voice’s placidity and its restrained emotionality represent a white and male conception of the universal. The voice’s accent too, is functionally white—the most unmarked possible American accent.

What we hear in the awkward AI voicing of Tennyson’s text is effectively the mark of something that was never meant to be marked. The voice offers an encounter with the normally invisible material of a default social body. The encounter is no less uncanny than the failures of voice in AI writing. Both call our attention to an absence.

And large language model chatbots may offer just the same encounter with a “neutral” voice. Mark Marino’s study of the racialization of chatbots (written in 2014—when they were

⁹⁵ Cave and Kihal largely do not address the gender of AI, outside of noting that it may possess either masculine or feminine qualities that are distinctively White. See p. 697.

considerably less intelligent) is instructive. Describing ELIZA, one of the earliest chatbots developed, Marino writes:

If ELIZA presented a bot that tried to imitate language, it was performing standard white middle-class English, without a specific identifying cultural inflection... It is Eliza Doolittle finally speaking properly. ELIZA performed white language, an abstraction of language, language without culture, disembodied, hegemonic, and, in a word, white. To be authentic, ELIZA had to be able to pass. This white language carries further assumptions of middle-class status and heterosexuality, as these identity categories cannot be separated. (5)

If ChatGPT's similar production of an abstracted, essentially white and unmarked voice is not immediately apparent, consider its response to my request to "write a poem in African American Vernacular English":⁹⁶

Down in da hood where da streetlights gleam,
Livin' life ain't always like a dream.
In dis world, we hustle, we grind,
Seekin' peace, tryna leave da pain behind.

The chatbot's easy production of normative Victorian poetics in my earlier example stands in sharp contrast with this hackneyed attempt. Perhaps a request for dialect poetry is a somewhat unfair comparison, but the point here is precisely that there is no way to induce ChatGPT to produce anything but hegemonic language without specifically asking for it, whether by specifying a dialect or a speaker, virtually guaranteeing that the response will give the impression of an awkward racial ventriloquy. We are aware of a mismatch between the language and the kind of body that would seem to authorize and legitimate its use. There is no body to speak it. And as far as it resembles the unmarked body, "no body" is a normative body. A white and male voice would seem to need no body to authorize it. In contrast I will confess to

⁹⁶ The gender of ChatGPT proves a more fraught question. AI has a long history of being depicted as female, particularly when its function is service. Siri and Alexa, for example, default to female voices. I suspect that the cultural understanding of ChatGPT as a "writer" would lead to perceptions of it as male by default, but such a question requires empirical research to answer.

discomfort with ChatGPT writing something like this request for a simulation of a Black American poetic voice:

In the heart of the struggle, where echoes of pain,
Resonate through streets, like a haunting refrain.
We rise, we resist, with spirit unbroken,
Our voices, our stories, forever outspoken.

There is perhaps much to object to here (perhaps among them that I made the request at all), but my discomfort, to engage in self-critique, is at least in part owing to a sensation that the racially marked voice lacks the kind of racially marked body that I implicitly assume would authorize it.

Of course, to be clear, I do not mean to suggest that voices reproduce anything essential about the body that produces them. As Nina Sun Eidsheim argues, the identificatory meaning of vocal timbre is “produc[ed] and reif[ied]” (116) by listeners, including the producing body as a listener of its own voice—in other words anatomy cannot define any relation between specific vocal timbres; there’s no such thing as a white voice. But investment in connecting voices to interiority and essence leads audiences to “project varied physical attributes onto voices,” (Eidsheim 116) even in cases where no physical attributes can exist. Eidsheim’s work on synthetic “Vocaloid” singers shows the way audiences seem unable to help “essentializing, reproducing, redefining, and re-creating the connection between voice and identity” (Eidsheim 146) by ascribing race and gender to software. In one telling episode, users puzzled over the ‘peculiar tonality’ (Eidsheim 148) of a synthetic soul singer voice whose accent did not line up with user’s generic expectations. They explained what they heard as a “Japanese Effect” based purely on the “technology’s association with Yamaha” (148), despite the entirety of the recording and development process for that voice taking place outside of Japan. To the extent that AI simulates normative language by default, the disjunctions in the voice it produces make a

virtual body materially present in its absence. Such disjunctions effectively mark a text, drawing it into a material relationship with the voice.

Marked Texts

Joanna Drucker makes a distinction in *The Visible Word* between the “marked” and the “unmarked text,” one that is grounded especially in the practice of nineteenth-century printing. I would like here to pull in this concept while modifying it somewhat. It will be worth quoting Drucker at length:

The basic distinction between marked and unmarked typography occurred simultaneously with the invention of printing. Gutenberg printed two distinctly different kinds of documents, which embodied the characteristic feature of what evolved into the two traditions. On the one hand he printed bibles, with their perfectly uniform grey pages, their uninterrupted blocks of text, without headings or sub-headings or any distraction beyond the occasional initial letter. These bibles are the archetype of the unmarked text, the text in which the words on the page ‘appear to speak themselves’ without the visible intervention of author or printer. Such a text appears to possess an authority which transcends the mere material presence of words on a page, ink impressions on parchment. By contrast, the Indulgences which he printed displayed the embryonic features of a marked typography. Different sizes of type were used to hierarchize information, to create an order in the text so that different parts of it appear to “speak” differently, to address a reader whose presence was inscribed at the outset by an author in complicity with the graphic tools of a printer who recognized and utilized the capacity of typographic representation to manipulate the semantic value of the text through visual means. (96-7)

Drucker’s unmarked text resembles the condition of AI in its non-subjective, immaterial, and unmediated speech. The conventions of the unmarked text render the text almost invisible or highly immediate, rather in the same way that the simulated voice of AI aims for immediacy by appearing to emerge from nothing at all. The medium disappears into an unmarked formalism. This is of course also the condition of the unmarked language I have been discussing in this chapter, language that authorizes itself without reference (or with a similarly invisible reference) to a material body. In all unmarked cases, the text “appears to speak itself.”

Drucker, of course, never means to make a comparison between marked texts, marked voices, and marked bodies. But I would like to repurpose her concept of what might constitute a marked text in the nineteenth century. Her theory “of the visual forms of written language” (92) is grounded primarily in analysis of modernist typography. The effect of this is a somewhat teleological reading of nineteenth-century textuality that privileges textual forms (the visual rhetoric of advertising) that became the inspiration for early twentieth-century typographical experimentation. This can be seen, for example, in her discussion of William Morris. While she understands Morris correctly as a key predecessor for modernist typography, she is somewhat too credulous of the early twentieth-century reaction to Morris’s (and the wider arts and crafts movement’s) “retrogressive tendencies” (92-3); she describes, in fact, his “*retardataire* stylistics and conservative promotion of anachronistic methods of production” (93). While Morris attuned Victorian readers to the literary page, even the literary page’s “running heads and elaborate title pages” (95) are, to Drucker, in the tradition of the unmarked. “Marked and unmarked” essentially becomes a useful shorthand to distinguish between two traditions in graphic design.

I want to pull the concept back from specific forms, to consider the marked text as encompassing any of those texts which offer a hypermedial encounter with the materiality of the book by form or content. I will retain the basic assumption that, as Drucker details above, the unmarked text has the form and voice of authority, that it is the text that “appears to speak itself.” Indeed, in “speaking itself,” a kind of vocal self-authorization or (at risk of invoking Derrida) self-presence, the unmarked text features an untroubled relation between the unmarked body and “no body”; it effectively has an unmarked voice. This is as much to say that the ideal literary speaker in the nineteenth-century English world was, for the most part, assumed to be a white man. I am building here a concept of the marked text that can on the one hand encompass

Morris, whose formal, linguistic, and material strategies in *The Earthly Paradise* deliberately interrogate and problematize the neutral mediation of the voice in text and in verse. And on the other hand, it can encompass figures like Amy Levy and Toru Dutt, whose work, as I will show in this chapter and the next, is marked differently, but no less in ways that implicate the material text and voice. I mean to observe a means by which even a text with relatively normative form could be marked in the nineteenth century.

What happens when “no body” runs up against a marked body? When the text loses its capacity and authority to speak itself? Does its voice become disjunct or disarticulated? Do its different parts “speak” differently? My earlier citation of Mark Marino’s study of chatbots was, truthfully, somewhat dishonest; actually, he observes that “chatbots which exist primarily in the world of text are assessed rarely with regard to their race or ethnicity” (3). His study is in fact of chatbots with accompanying visual simulations of embodiment.⁹⁷ “Mechanically inscribed text,” he writes, “is language deboned” (4), racialization enters the picture through the simulation of embodiment in the visual interface. As Eidsheim argues, “mismatch between[...]visual representation and[...]timbral expectation” causes audiences to reevaluate who or what is speaking, “essentially asking, ‘which source (visual or auditory) is true?’” (149). And perhaps this is where the parallels I have been productively drawing between the voice of AI and of nineteenth-century poetry begin to break down somewhat, in the logic of representational and simulative embodiment. For where the materiality of generative AI is occluded or substantially

⁹⁷ These are usually described in academic literature on the subject as “embodied conversational agents,” I am deliberately eschewing the term as it tends to run against my general usage of the word “embodiment.” The tension is however resolved if we consider the embodiment in question as a simulation.

in question, the materiality of the book inheres in every turn of the page.⁹⁸ But if slapping a face on a chatbot is enough to mark its voice, is the same true for a book?

Consider Amy Levy, minor poet, novelist, and Newnham College alum. By the time of her death in September 1889, at the age of twenty-eight, she had produced three volumes of poetry, three novels, and numerous periodical essays and short stories. Levy's final volume of poetry, *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*, was published in 1889 by T. Fisher Unwin, as the second volume in his *Cameo Series*. In 1891, the second edition of Levy's *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* followed in the *Cameo Series*.⁹⁹ As I shall discuss in short order, this edition differed in significant ways from the first edition of *A Minor Poet*, also published by Unwin.¹⁰⁰ But the first thing we should note about it (in fact one of the first things any reader would note about it) is its frontispiece. After the series mark, readers were greeted by Levy herself:

⁹⁸ To be clear, materiality is apparent in many components of our engagement with generative AI, including the interface, but the particularities of its voice cannot be explained with regard to a material body.

⁹⁹ The first edition was originally published by Unwin in 1884.

¹⁰⁰ This chapter discusses *A Minor Poet and other Verse*, a book, as well as "A Minor Poet," a poem in the book. I take care to distinguish *A Minor Poet* and "A Minor Poet" by the use of italics and quotation marks. Compounding the potential for confusion is Levy's essay "James Thomson: a Minor Poet," to be discussed later, which I will always refer to with its full title.

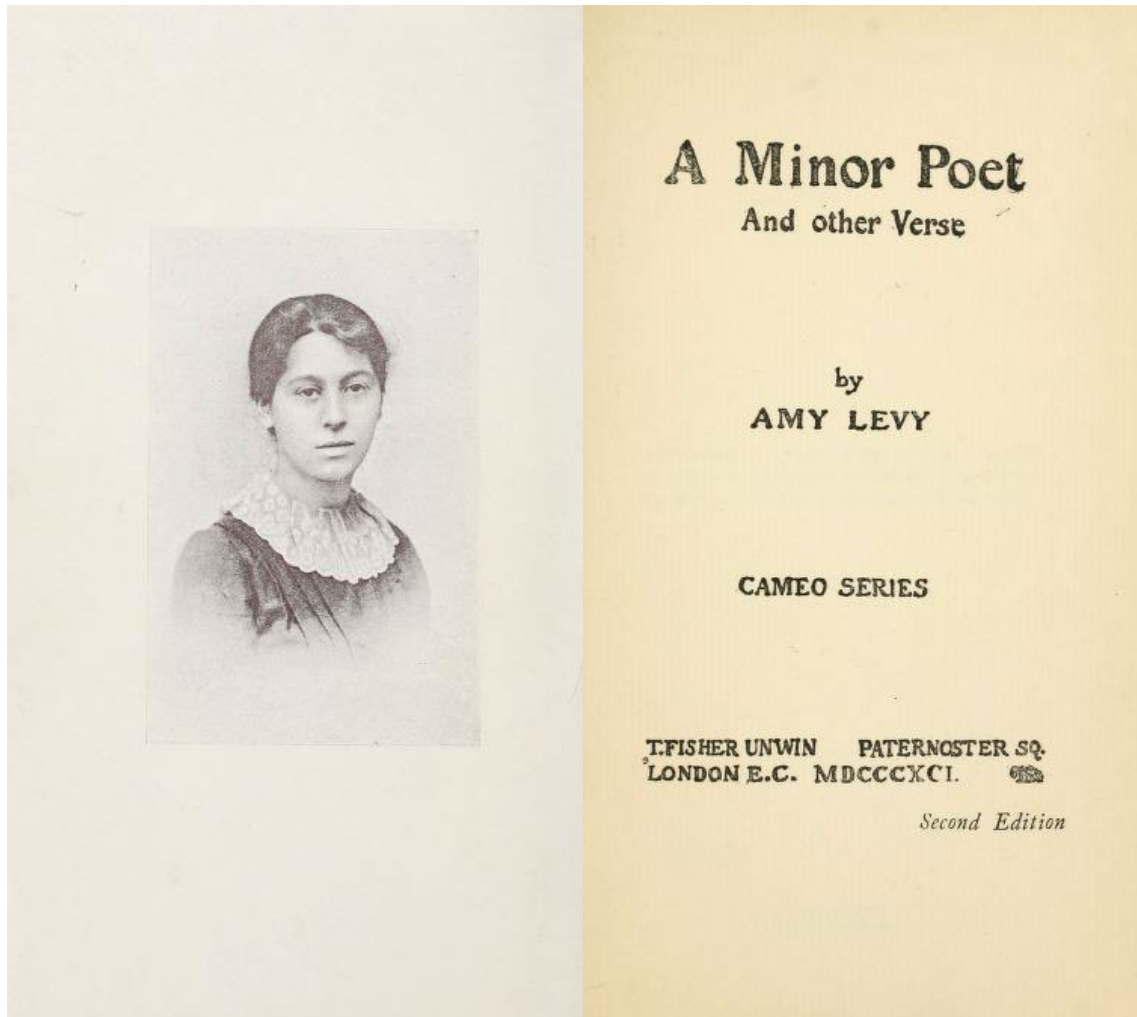


Fig. 1 – The Frontispiece and title page of the *Cameo Series* edition of *A Minor Poet and other Verse*

The *Cameo Series* edition of *A Minor Poet* made Levy's image part of the text, reframing her as not only the subjective "I" speaking the verse, but the subject herself of "A Minor Poet." It offered Levy as a speaker whose subjective experience became the primary context for her poetry. Sarah Parker's excellent article "Reframing Amy Levy" has highlighted the way posthumous reactions to Levy were "consistently mediated by Levy's portrait" (55), inviting autobiographical readings of her poetry. This is significant because *A Minor Poet* is a text that

deals throughout with suicide, failure, and death, and read autobiographically Levy's poetry was read lyrically, transforming generically and contextually diverse poetry into, effectively, a suicide note. Levy's actual suicide was read alongside her image as confirmation of her difference as a type of Jewish woman: intellectual, depressive, waifish, and sickly. The inclusion of Levy's image had transformed the book into a marked text. In doing so, the disjunctions of voice in text and in verse (disjunctions which I will show Levy herself was keen to interrogate and exploit) became signs of a lyric expressivity whose authority derives from the author's body in mutual substitution with the text. As dramatic monologue transforms into lyric, a simulation of voice converges with a representation of Levy's voice; cut off from the ability to "speak itself," the text came suddenly to depend on the marked body for coherence and authority (or, if authority wasn't available, authenticity).

My argument aligns itself here with the concepts of lyrical reading and lyricization as charted by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins. As Virginia Jackson explains in *Dickinson's Misery*, "the poetry that comes to be understood as lyric after the eighteenth century is thought to require as its context only the occasion of its reading" (7). The twentieth-century critical notion of "the poetic speaker" whose subjectivity forms the self-speaking context of the poem, became in fact, the subject of the poem, "suspended, lyrically, in place and time" (Jackson *Misery* 90). Jackson and Prins posit lyricization as the historical and ongoing process of abstracting historically specific poetic genres into one unified genre of "poetry" that is really a lyric concept of poetry.¹⁰¹ The lyrical reading of *A Minor Poet* charts one data point in the development of lyricization. If the lyric poem can be thought of as "speaking itself," the lyricization argument suggests that, historically speaking, what that means has undergone a shift. Understood in New

¹⁰¹ See Jackson and Prins, "Lyrical Studies" (1999); Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (1999); Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery* (2005); Jackson and Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader* (2014); and Jackson, "Specters of the Ballad" (2016).

Critical terms as “a thing in itself” the voice in the poem becomes a guarantor of the poem’s self-coherence.

I see this process as a pursuit of immediacy. As discussed in chapter one, voice technology from the nineteenth into the twentieth century pursued audio fidelity as a program for its development. As Jonathan Sterne writes on the phonograph, “both practiced performance and practiced audition were necessary for perfect reproduction” (256). Users needed to learn how to make sound that the machine could faithfully record and how to listen to the machine with faith that it in fact reproduced a sound that was a copy of an original. The dream of audio fidelity is the dream of “perfect reproduction”—that the medium might transmit a self-present voice without changing or altering it. But a similar program in the realm of voice synthesis sought a kind of machinic immediacy, authenticity through the simulation of presence, absent the involvement of the body. Both efforts moved toward an ideal of communication that as Peters articulates was latent in Western thought since St. Augustine: “the task of communication is to move beyond, behind, or above sign-bodies to the immediate purity of meaning-minds. Spiritual content should be poured from one mind to another” (64). Along these lines Arthur Symons famously framed the decadent movement in the 1890s as essentially the achievement of this goal: “to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul.” The paradox of such an effort is that fidelity depends on formal and material signs of mediation, as I explored in chapter one; we can transcend the medium only through the medium.

The marked voice presents a challenge to fidelity. If voice technology and literature alike were proceeding on a program of abstracting the body into the medium to transcend both, to dissolve into Homer Dudley’s carrier wave, then “no body” is the best body. A self-present authoritative voice might survive mediation, its bodily source slipping out of sight, but a marked

voice requires a hypermediated and marked textual apparatus to guarantee the authentic reality of the reproduction. Where authority is impossible, authenticity will suffice. Much as in a Browning dramatic monologue, such a textual apparatus itself mediates between production and reproduction. The lyric speaker emerges as a textual production in an effort to multiply the signs of authentic reproduction. Thus, Amy Levy's body is abstracted into and reemerges in the book, in what becomes a strenuous effort to listen for the timbre of her voice.

This offers a partial explanation for the way marginalized poets appear to be at the center of the abstraction of poetic genre into lyric. Prins and Jackson initially proposed lyricization after intensive study of nineteenth-century women poets and their often uncomfortable relation with the poetess as a subject position. More recently, Jackson has looked to race as key to the development of lyricization in the American context. She reads, for example, Paul Laurence Dunbar as constructing a speaker in "The Haunted Oak" alienated from political, social, and poetic history, "whose speech cannot be heard and so must be read" (195). Reading voice might emerge as one strategy to make an unhearable voice apprehensible through alternative means, but the ability of print to mediate voice to begin with is increasingly in doubt by the late nineteenth century. The marked text eventually becomes, as Drucker originally showed, an aesthetic language of modernism amid the reconception of art itself as self-present and not representational (49-51). The lyric speaker is the synthetic horizon of a voice that simulates a subjective presence where representation fails.

Cameos

As I turn to Levy in more detail, I want to begin with the book. My argument here is that the lyrical reading of *A Minor Poet* depends in part on its status as a marked text. This emerges

both through the inclusion of Levy's image, which folds her marked body into the text and through T. Fisher Unwin's framing of Levy's work within the context of his *Cameo Series*.

In Joseph Bristow's estimation, the *Cameo Series* "marked a signal shift in the mode of publishing poetry, where the design of each slim volume made it into a beautiful and collectable object" ("All out of tune" 89). While I think Bristow may be overstating the significance of the *Cameo Series* specifically, it is certainly true that Unwin helped pioneer the publisher's series for new fiction, most famously with his 54-volume *Pseudonym Library*, wherein each contributor used pen names.

Setting up his own offices in 1884, Unwin had pursued an aggressive strategy of taking risks on unknown or new authors, prioritizing one-volume novels over the three-volume novels favored by the circulating libraries. Assisted by his reader Edward Garnett (the husband of Levy's close friend Clementina Black and the son of Richard Garnett, who had fostered the intellectual pursuits of a generation of women at the British museum, Levy included) the publisher's series became a savvy marketing strategy for Unwin. The firm put out numerous series of low-cost books, selling them at railway station stalls (Codell 308). Bristow is quite right to observe that these series were collectible. As Bassett argues, they worked as a marketing tactic by creating a product uniform in terms of "quality," "utility," and "continuity" (146-7). They were in short, a set. While affordable, Unwin aimed for a quality product with ample leading and margins (Bassett 145), and ornamental touches. This emphasis on relative luxury led Unwin to release thirty numbered "deluxe edition" impressions of each volume in the *Cameo Series*, printed on japon vellum and with an attractive buff paper cover. Unwin himself retained at least one of each deluxe edition in his personal library.

But if the publisher's series promised a uniform product, what exactly did the *Cameo Series* promise? When the series resumed in 1898 after a three year pause with the publication of Edward Willmore's *The Soul's departure, and other poems*, Unwin included the following publisher's note:

The *Cameo Series*, commenced in 1889, was designed for the bringing together, as opportunity offered, of Volumes of Poetry of an original quality. This programme was carried out, in a modest way, by the inclusion in the Series, among other volumes, of William Watson's Wordsworth Grave, [sic] Amy Levy's London Plane Tree and A Minor Poet, and translations of Ibsen's Lady from the Sea and Brand, and of Echegaray's The Son of Don Juan and Mariana.

The publisher in issuing Mr. Willmore's The Soul's Departure and Other Poems, begs to state that it is the first of several new volumes planned, which it is hoped may further justify the original design of The *Cameo Series*. (N.P.)

This appears to be a somewhat revisionary account, since the first volume published in the *Cameo Series*, a translation of Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* by Eleanor Marx-Aveling, was neither poetry nor original. But clearly as the series wore on Unwin came to regard it as a vehicle for gems of poets he could sign while they were still cheap and unpolished.

A Minor Poet and Other Verse (Levy's second volume of poetry, and the primary focus of the remainder of this chapter) had been an early get for Unwin in 1884 when his business was still new. Levy's final poetry collection, *A London Plane-Tree*, was published as the second volume of the *Cameo Series* in 1889. *A Minor Poet's* second edition was published as part of the *Cameo Series* as well, two years following *A London Plane-Tree*.

This second printing was a second edition in the true bibliographic sense; if Unwin had plates made off the first printing, they were not reused, instead the *Cameo* edition is redesigned to fit the look of the series overall. Thus, the two editions differ markedly in layout and spacing; only the image on the title page—a lithograph credited to “Hooper”—is reused. This depicts a woman huddled up beside a well, weeping for the truth she could not find at its bottom. It would

be moved to face the table of contents in the second edition, to make room for the new frontispiece. The 1884 first edition used ornamental devices composed of flowers and vines. Sinuous flora likewise wrap themselves around the form of the capitals that lead each poem. The 1891 *Cameo* edition trades this ornament for simple and understated single leaves below each title. Although the 1884 volume is more ornamental, the effect is rather tawdry. The amount of white space between header and title is large and highly variable; the page is both cluttered and strangely empty. The *Cameo Series* volumes, in contrast, are much more consciously designed. The *Cameo* edition has a tidy uniform look, losing fully fifteen pages in the redesign (despite the addition of two poems) as the text comes to visually own the tighter page.

At first glance neither volume aspires, in terms purely of visual design, to the status of a marked text. But the new edition's relatively more Aestheticist approach to materials and layout invites attention to the materiality of the text itself, just as, we will see, a proliferation of notes, pages, and scraps do throughout the text of the poetry. Likewise, the name of the *Cameo Series* invites attention to materiality. It suggests a kind of splendid and luxurious collectability, with reference to the beautifully wrought bicolor stone carvings so in vogue among Victorians.

The name likewise suggests an association with the personal; small profile portraits were the favorite subject for Victorian cameos, after all. Placing Levy's portrait at the front of the *Cameo* edition of *A Minor Poet*—the most significant formal change from its first edition—seems intuitive. The photo had been commissioned by Levy nine months prior to her death, and it was published only once before, in her *Woman's World* obituary written by Oscar Wilde (Parker 58). The inclusion of Levy's photo hints at the keepsake collectability of the personal image suggested by the series title. Such an impression could only be reinforced by the status of the publisher's series as a thing to be collected. In fact, despite the name, it was not the general

practice of the *Cameo Series* to include photos of the author as the frontispiece.¹⁰² Rather, the frontispiece most often contained an image that illustrated a poem from the volume. *A London Plane-Tree* had used a drawing by J. Bernard Partridge, depicting a church and some not particularly botanically realistic “plane-trees.”¹⁰³ William Watson’s *Wordsworth’s Grave and Other Poems* (1890) used an image of Grasmere Churchyard, the actual location of Wordsworth’s grave. Indeed, the placement of the photograph in the frontispiece suggests that Levy’s photo is illustrating the poetry. In this light, Levy becomes the subject of the volume herself. If a cameo hints at the personal image as an iconized keepsake, the picture promises that the book will deliver just that; offering not so much “*A Minor Poet* by Amy Levy” as “Amy Levy, a minor poet.” What is remarkable to me here is that the book’s paratextual apparatus is participating in lyrical reading, resituating Levy as the subject of the poem by placing her bodily representation in the text, or indeed as the text. It became thus a marked text, one that does not speak with the universal voice of the poet, but the highly subjective voice of a poetess. This is a voice of bodily difference and, I am suggesting, textual difference. Levy’s readers listened for Levy in the book and as the book, making the book’s production or reproduction of her voice the context for *A Minor Poet*. As I turn to Levy’s contemporary readers, it will be apparent that Unwin’s editions of Levy both respond to a readerly desire to listen for her voice in the text and condition that same desire.

¹⁰² Among the first twenty *Cameo Series* volumes, only works by Ibsen and Echegaray use photos of the authors, but these were internationally famous dramatists, so the situation seems somewhat different. The only other poetic examples of portraits are *The Unpublished and Uncollected Poems of William Cowper* and *Irish Love-Songs* selected by Katharine Tynan. The latter is perhaps the most bizarre example, as the picture is of James Clarence Mangan, drawn from life—or rather death. That is to say: it is a mourning portrait bizarrely rotated ninety degrees as though the poet’s corpse were sleepwalking around. Levy’s picture stands apart from these for being a photograph; she appears more present and alive than either the dead Mangan or the dusty old portrait of Cowper. She stares clear-eyed, awake, and alive out of the page, words ready to fly from her lips.

¹⁰³ Levy quite disliked the frontispiece. Bernstein speculates that Levy felt that the image did a poor job of illustrating the titular poem (110).

“A charmingly printed little volume”

The 1884 edition of *A Minor Poet* was not as widely noted as the *Cameo* edition, but the terms in which it was discussed were notably unlyrical. A review in *The Academy* read the volume for its technical work on the dramatic monologue: describing it as “a noticeable little volume of poems, noticeable especially as one of the few attempts in Mr. Browning’s manner” (Sutherland July 5, 1884 p. 6). If the writer found the book depressing it is but “the luxurious woe of a first book. On the title-page is an allegorical picture of a young lady sitting by a well, in despair at not finding truth there. But the rope in the picture looks scarcely long enough to reach bottom” (ibid). The reviewer aligns Levy’s despair as an artistic naivety akin to her occasional “odd expressions” and her need to consult “the *Dictionary of Antiquities*” (ibid). L. O. Streeter in *To-Day* likewise read “A Minor Poet” as a Browningian monologue, one whose speaker resembles Levy only in a diminished capacity for experience that leads her to write on “worthless” subjects (Aug 1884 p. 158). “A Minor Poet” strikes only a “mock-tragic note” that “runs through all the other poems” (Streeter p. 158) He assumes it to be an annoying and immature artistic affectation. In short, critics initially read Levy’s poetry as depressing, but not necessarily depressive.

This situation changed markedly after Levy’s suicide. When it was published in 1889, *A London Plane Tree* attracted considerably more notice than *A Minor Poet* initially did. This is surely a product of Levy’s increased celebrity with the success of her novels; *Reuben Sachs* (1888) garnered considerable praise (and not just a few detractors) when it was published. But the heightened attention also seems to have been a product of the interest attracted by her death. It was an affair sufficiently scandalous to induce Clementina Black’s writing a letter to *The Athenaeum* to dispel some of the rumors that were circulating, including, to infer from Black’s letter, that Levy had been caught up in a romantic tryst, a victim of “unkind treatment,” outcast

from the Anglo-Jewish community in the wake of *Reuben Sachs*, or otherwise in conflict with her family (“Literary Gossip” Oct. 5 1889, p. 457).

After her death, reviews of *A London Plane Tree* were insistent on reading Levy’s new book as offering a window into the psyche of the vanishing poetess. This is a significant contrast from the reaction to the first edition of *A Minor Poet*. What is striking, moreover, when reviewing the reviews, is the way the book and the posthumous poet collapsed together, in a specifically gendered way. Review after review opens by *commenting on the book’s figure*: in a pair of reviews *The Athenaeum* describes the “daintily bound little [volume],” which “[bared] evidence to the late Miss Levy’s untiring intellectual activity, down to the last days of the short life which so recently ended” (“Novels of the Week.” Dec. 14 1889 p. 817) and separately the book is “a charmingly printed little volume” which “gives to the world the late Miss Levy’s last printed words. She corrected the proofs, we are informed, only about a week before her death.” (“Recent Verse” Dec. 14 1889 p. 818). In the *Saturday Review* it was “a slim volume of ballads, sonnets, and other lyrical poems, the last songs of a singer the promise of whose singing must now remain unfulfilled” (“New Books and Reprints” Jan 4, 1890, p. 26). In *Time* it is “daintily and charmingly ‘got up’” (“Marriage and Heredity” 334). In *The Academy* it is not only “a slim little volume of verse,” it is “so pathetic and often so hopeless in tone” (Sharp Feb 1, 1890, p. 76). These reviewers are reacting to what was, to be sure, a small, well-made, and attractive book. But the materiality of the text clearly converges with the materiality of Levy’s body itself, or, really, how these writers imagine it.

A London Plane Tree was marked in a way that *A Minor Poet* had not been. The book speaks “Miss Levy’s last printed words” (“The New Books and the Blue Books of the Month” *Review of Reviews* Jan 1890 p. 79). This construction highlights, indeed, the conceptual

disjunction between “last words” as an evanescent spoken phenomenon and the printed text as a slow recording medium that would be wholly inadequate to capture them. But this is a circle Unwin was eager to square in advertisements for the book as well as in its paratext. The book’s epigram reads: “The proofs of this volume were corrected by the Author about a week before her death.” Unwin printed *A London Plane Tree* as a self-consciously posthumous volume, and his framing of it seems angled on the one hand to explain the unusual rapidity with which the book was released following Levy’s death and on the other to find a kind of legitimacy in that rapidity. His readers could imagine they had in hand Levy’s last words, captured even in her passing.¹⁰⁴ Unwin was slyly promising insight into a notably scandalous death. And critics were eager to read it along these lines. William Sharp’s review in *The Academy*, for example, insists “the book contains many prophetic notes; signs seen ominously now, in the light of what has happened since the poet revised the sheets but a week before her death” (Feb 1, 1890, p. 73). Critics took the book as a lyrical record of the subjectivity of the dead poetess, and thereby it came to contain or stand for Levy herself. Thus, the personal keepsake promise suggested by the “cameo” in the *Cameo Series* is fulfilled in Ernest Belfort Bax’s comment: “Altogether we shall be glad to possess this little volume, and we may even grow to love it out of all proportion to its actual merit” (“Marriage and Heredity” 334).

I am positing here that *A London Plane Tree* had become a marked text, one that required the evidence of a body to paper over the disjunctions of the voice of a poetess whose gendered body had become a present absence in death, a voice whose transmission was uncertain. Critics wanted to hear a voice that could speak Levy’s type in octavo foolscap.¹⁰⁵ In the context of *A*

¹⁰⁴ Just the same feat promised by contemporaneous advertising for the phonograph. See Sterne Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁵ As a prominent member of the Anglo-Jewish community, it would be logical to expect that Levy’s body is subject as well to racialization, as a racial “type”. While I think Levy’s race plays into this discourse, it is much harder to demonstrate. The tropes and clichés employed by reviewers of her poetry relate most directly to her

London Plane Tree's reception, printing Levy inside her book seemed the next logical step.

Death had given her work a personal interest that apparently rivalled Ibsen, one of the few other authors in the series to receive the honor of photo frontispiece. And Levy's portrait was a selling point.

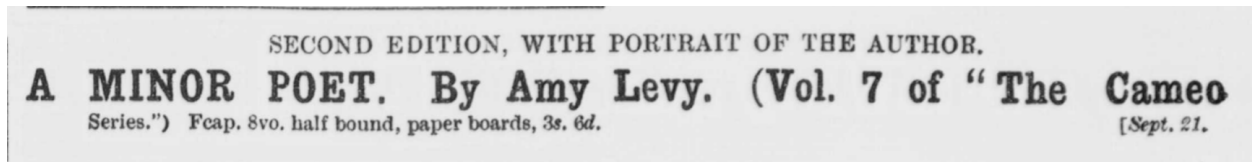


Fig. 2 An ad in *The Athenaeum* prominently advertises the “Second Edition, With Portrait of the Author”

A “literary gossip” section of *The Athenaeum* ran this snippet on July 4, 1891: “The next volume of ‘the *Cameo Series*’ will consist of ‘A Minor Poet’ by the late Miss Amy Levy. The original edition of these poems is out of print, and has become scarce. The new volume will contain some additions that are quite new and a portrait” (39). A review in *The Speaker: a liberal review* commented approvingly: “To the new edition of Miss Amy Levy’s ‘A Minor Poet’ (Unwin), there has been added a sonnet and a translation from a volume published in Cambridge in 1881, and now out of print. An attractive portrait of the sweet, sad poetess, who ‘lived a few short years, then chose to die,’ appears as a frontispiece” (“The Week” 348). The syntax of the latter sentence creates a provocative moment of confusion as it seems at first the writer may be describing the volume itself *as* an attractive portrait of Levy. A month later the new edition met with less approval in an editorial credited to A.T.Q.C. in the same paper. It opens by describing the book as akin to Levy’s grave: “In common pity and common charity a critic might well pass

gender, and they tend not to mention her Judaism at all. Nevertheless, the lyrical reading of Levy’s depressive poetry certainly converges with her slight figure, “dark” features, and general intellectualism—all qualities which might play into Jewish stereotypes.

by the grave of this young poetess, and say no harder word than that ‘she chose to die’ (“A Literary Causerie” 413). The review deplores Levy’s depressive tendencies, which are read symptomatically in her verse: “A Minor Poet” is Levy’s “*apologia pro morte sua*” (“413). From it we learn “that her end came in no blind fit of impatience, but was merely the conclusion, put into practice, of that sad syllogism in which she summed up human existence” (413). “A Minor Poet” specifically is transformed here into, effectively, Levy’s suicide note. While no critic literally mistook “A Minor Poet” as a lyric poem, by reading Levy’s philosophical pessimism as confessional, she was effectively transformed into the speaker of the poem and the volume in an act of lyrical reading.

For purchasers of the *Cameo Series*, *A Minor Poet*’s reprinting invited a kind of backwards reading of Levy’s life, a reading where *A Minor Poet* is preceded by *A London Plane-Tree* and ultimately by Levy’s death—exactly inverted from the actual order of events. The *Cameo Series* thus invited reading both volumes in autobiographical terms as revealing something about Levy, and particularly her death, abstracted from the social and aesthetic context of Levy’s verse.

In order for this to function, Levy’s voice became a textual effect; the book speaks for her in order to make her speak. As Parker shows, so great indeed was the enthusiasm for reading Levy’s image for its personality and racial characteristics (both understood as factors in her suicide) that Levy was often depicted as “a conventionally voiceless image onto which various interpretations [could] be projected” (63). Likewise, the text itself became a site onto which interpretations of Levy could be projected.

In creating a context for Levy’s poetry as confessional and personal the *Cameo Series* refracts Levy’s own concerns in the text, namely her play with voice and silence as well as her

attention to textual materiality. In doing so it fosters the conditions for silencing Levy by enabling the revoicing of her poetry. Many Victorian readers heard a voice made authentic by its confessional and posthumous character. Levy herself, however, is not a silent partner in this endeavor. To the contrary, much like Browning's, her dramatic monologues reflect a concern with whether the voice can survive its mediation, and whether we can distinguish representational from simulated voices. Unlike Browning, however, Levy quite precisely anticipates and contends with the regime of mishearing that marked voices are subject to.

"A Minor Poet"

If the lyrical reading of Amy Levy entailed making the poem produce her as its own subject and context, what we should notice is that critics ignore or misread an important context for *A Minor Poet*. Amy Levy's encomium on "James Thomson: a Minor Poet" (1883), goes a long way toward explaining the aesthetic values that led her to compose what is admittedly sometimes depressing poetry. Thomson was most famous in 1883 (as today) for his long poem "The City of Dreadful Night." Drawing on contemporary critical language that already distinguished between "major" and "minor" authors, Levy accedes that Thomson's perspective as a poet would ensure he remain a minor poet, even as she makes space for the special valuation of that minor perspective.¹⁰⁶ To Levy, the major poet is akin to a "prophet, standing above and outside things, to whom all sides of a truth...are visible" (501) Thomson in contrast is a "passionately subjective being" seeing only one side of truth in great detail. Despite Levy's emphasis on Thomson's subjective being, this is and is not quite a lyrical reading of the poet. Thomson's perspective is valuable to Levy because "he has symbolized, as no poet has done

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Arnold is the obvious touchstone for such a critical discourse of "major" authors, and his essay "Heinrich Heine" particularly seems to have influenced Levy. However, charting Levy's relationship with Arnold and the formation of the canon is outside of the scope of this project. For more on this topic, see Guimarães.

before him, a certain phase of modern feeling” (501). True, Levy understands Thomson’s perspective as emerging from biographical circumstances, but she suggests here that Thomson is offering an aestheticized aspect of human nature, not a solipsistic and self-defeating window into a disordered psyche. As Joseph Bristow observes in an article seminal to Levy’s critical revival, Thomson’s “minor” perspective has “its own distinction. This ‘minor’ distinction was the result of structural exclusions from a literary establishment that esteemed gentile orthodoxies, heterosexual desire, and the male sex during a decade when the privileged value accorded to each sex was to some degree in doubt” (Bristow 80). Levy’s proudly “minor” subsequent volume, with reference to Thomson throughout, articulates a similarly marginal perspective. It is important to note that while “James Thomson: a Minor Poet” has been read as “a strong endorsement” by Levy of Thomson’s philosophical pessimism (Olverson 54), she in fact takes pains to represent Thomson’s *Weltschmerz* as an important, even, in its own way, beautiful aspect of human life but importantly not an all-encompassing one.¹⁰⁷ Levy endorses Thomson’s pessimism as a truth, but not the whole truth; it is an articulation of a form of subjectivity that “most of us at some time or other” (502) have experienced, one moreover contingent on circumstance; this is a far cry from the totalizing pessimism that was attributed to her in contemporary reviews.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Levy’s reception demonstrates what she already knew, that the minor voice would invariably be evaluated in major terms. As Jackson and Prins write in “Lyrical Studies” “the question we would pose...is whether the pathos attributed [the poetry of the poetess] may be traced to their outside position on subjectivity, rather than to their utter absorption to their own particularly abstract selves” (523). For early critics, Levy was only apprehensible as that “slim little volume of verse [that] for the most part is so pathetic and often

¹⁰⁷ While I quote Olverson, she is not alone in this sentiment. See also Guimarães.

¹⁰⁸ See: “Recent Verse.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 3242, Dec. 1889, pp. 817–18.

so hopeless in tone.” I instead trace that pathos to her outside position on subjectivity, an outsideness not just related to her alienation from the subjectivity of the poetess, as Jackson and Prins largely meant, but from a marginal status writ large.

Throughout *A Minor Poet and other Verse* Levy thematizes death, silence, and the voice’s failure to be heard. If Levy’s readers (and publisher) felt confident that, packaging Levy with the text, they could wholly, and perhaps ‘literally,’ hear her subjective voice, Levy seems more skeptical that a material medium could represent that voice completely and neutrally. On this latter point Levy resembles Browning and Morris to a certain degree. But Morris makes a sharp contrast in particular; faced with an unrecoverable historical subjectivity he turns to the logic of a simulated voice. Levy in contrast does not quite break with the logic of a representational medium. She fantasizes about the recovery of voice in the tension between articulation and the inarticulable, while highlighting the way representation and simulation operate in a mutualistic model of hypermediation and immediacy, allowing one media practice to overwrite the other.

Critical discussion of *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* has most often focused on the title poem and “Xantippe;” indeed these are the two most discussed and anthologized poems in Levy’s oeuvre. While I will address each in turn I wish to begin with “Christopher Found” a poem literally at the center of Levy’s project, and one which has received considerably less attention. “Christopher Found” exemplifies Levy’s aesthetic and thematic concerns, exploring the limits of voice by locating vocal authority at the site of its audition. In this respect Levy’s dramatic monologues reflect what I identified in chapter one as the form’s synthesis of voice as an effect on the ear rather than as a source. Scholars including Scheinberg, Weisman, Harrington, and Guimarães have analyzed Levy previously for her specific innovations of the dramatic

monologue. Their work is an important antecedent for the argument that follows. Scheinberg shows how Levy problematizes sympathy and judgment in the dramatic monologue by constructing them as “products of a reader’s particular cultural identity” (183). Harrington considers the specificities of such an innovation with regards to women, finding that Levy offers a “feminist version of the genre” by dramatizing sympathy and dismissal among women in the relationship between dramatic speaker and auditor (192). Both authors point to audition as the key problematic in Levy’s monologues. Although she reads Levy’s monologues in nihilistic terms, Guimarães identifies Levy’s project as being one of “salvaging...marginalized, oppressed or unfit subjects and speakers” (244). Finally, Weisman highlights Levy’s generic intermixing in “A Minor Poet.” She reads dramatic monologue as a version of lyric that “showcases the effort to make oneself understood—not simply to speak with internal clarity, but to make clarification a relational property of speech” (61). These critics reinforce the idea that Levy’s concern is for the way voice is heard as effect. But what Levy further adds to the dramatic monologue is an account of the material conditions by which minor or marked voices are made silent or voiced over. Silence in Levy is produced by the listener (or reader), not the speaker. And, indeed, she problematizes the representational nature of poetic speakers by showing their simulative textual production as a mis-hearable vocal effect.

“Some blotted sheets of paper”

In “Christopher Found” Levy stages the production of a simulated voice by a reader and comes to expose the process by which this is mistaken for reproduction as a textual encounter with voice. Levy effectively makes the masculine writing of dramatic monologue the scene of lyrical reading. “Christopher Found” is composed of five numbered stanzas and an epilogue. The

first five stanzas are in iambic tetrameter with a highly irregular rhyme scheme dictated more by whim than structure. The poem seems at first a typical dramatic monologue: that the speaker addresses an auditor, the eponymous Christopher, is established immediately: “At last ; so this is you, my dear !” The speaker, never identified by her own words, describes a lovelorn life lost in pursuit of one Christopher—who seems to have spurned and abandoned her—and their apparent reunion. Like almost all the dramatic speakers in this volume, she is an outcast, “wan and sad,” who “silent through the revels go[es].” Throughout, Levy’s free rhymes convey an expressive and emotional instability. This sense of instability is reinforced by the speaker’s early recounting of an outside world that regards her as “mad” on account of emotional affect that seems out of sync with that world. What she articulates here is a minor perspective.

Across the first part of the poem, we learn for certain only that the speaker has experienced some kind of separation from Christopher, that she is no longer young, and that she writes verse. The latter admission is prompted by an introduction of and withdrawal from a Shelleyan paraphrase. The speaker echoes a statement from “Epipsychidion” on free love: “True Love in this differs from gold and clay, / That to divide is not to take away” (Shelley). She disclaims any affiliation with such a sentiment by casting both herself and Christopher as non-bards: “We’ll leave those things to the bards, my dear. / For you never wrote a verse, you see; / And I—my verse is not fair nor new.” This disclamation of poetic talent is on the surface the kind of conventional modesty proper to a Victorian woman, but something slyer is also taking place. In identifying herself as a poetaster, the speaker both affiliates herself with verse and disavows any of the bardic legitimacy of Shelley. She positions herself, in other words, as minor.

Outside the speaker’s own logic, this turn in her last lines to poetry functions also to force consideration of the situation of the poem to this point. Is the poem a record of voice or is it

poetry written by the dramatic speaker? Has Christopher returned or is this a flight of fancy? And perhaps most urgently felt of all is what Nina Eidsheim calls the “acousmatic question”: “who is speaking?” (Eidsheim 3). The imputation of the speaker’s madness signals the poem’s affiliation with Browning’s style of dramatic monologue. It creates the expectation that we should read through or against the speaker. But the poem to this point resists an ironic reading; the speaker’s situation remains firmly ambiguous—a truth lost in a subjective haze. The invocation of the speaker’s verse moreover invites consideration of the monologue’s status as poem. This is significant because what follows is an epilogue that dramatically (in both senses) restructures the poem, while pointing to the material condition of textuality. Levy’s epilogue repeats a trick from the title poem by introducing another voice who comments on the preceding monologue. The poem switches to blank verse and to a voice whose syntax and situation echoes Browning:

“Thus ran the words; or rather, thus did run
Their purport. Idly seeking in the chest
(You see it yonder), I had found them there:
Some blotted sheets of papers in a case,
With a woman’s name writ on it: ‘Adelaide.’”

The new speaker’s account troubles a poem that behaved quite generically before this moment. Dramatic speech has been transformed into fragmentary material poetry. In questioning his chatelaine about the former occupant of the rooms in which he discovered the sheets, the speaker of the epilogue (henceforth the epilogist) learns that a woman (her name, he presumes, is Adelaide), who “wrote books, I think, and things for newspapers” dwelled there. The chatelaine’s account claims Adelaide, who had a lover some ten years ago, died three months prior. “Her brother came, a week before she died: Buried her, took her things, threw in the fire / the littered heaps of paper.” Before addressing the nested voices that convey this information to the reader, I want to consider some interpretative possibilities that attempt to make sense of the poem’s background, for what the chatelaine reveals explains everything and nothing. One

possibility is that the mad, lonely Adelaide reached out to her brother in her failing health, and he innocently took the not unusual step of burning some of her personal letters and documents. Another possibility is that this ‘brother’ was Christopher; wanting to keep their past affiliation secret, he assumed the identity of her brother and destroyed any evidence of their affair. Or perhaps Christopher is indeed Adelaide’s brother and took the same step to cover up an incestuous relation. Why did the ‘brother’ arrive a week before her death? The poem offers little indication that she was in ill health, but perhaps he rushed to her bedside. Or did she die in an excess of passion? Or was she killed? The epilogue transforms the situation of the poem’s primary section; at first merely ambiguous, it becomes unknowable.

It is moreover unknowable because of its textual provenance. To wit: the epilogist reports information from the chatelaine (unsure even of the name of the woman she describes) who reports a rumor she heard from “Ann Brown.” The interpretative ground of the poem shifts to the scene of the epilogue, where the reading and interpretation of the first part of the poem is revealed as the actual situation of the poem. What is at stake here is the identity of the poem’s first voice and how that voice has been mediated. As the epilogist immediately confesses, what we have read previously is not even really the words of the woman he calls ‘Adelaide’ but “their purport.” To the extent that the poem has a speaker at all, it is, in fact, the epilogist speaking for the woman he calls Adelaide. Adelaide is revealed as a kind of vocal simulation of the epilogist. And the epilogist is revealed as simultaneously the writer of dramatic monologue and a lyrical reader, transforming discovered fragments into an act of dramatic voicing, or vocal simulation. In many ways, this is the same situation Levy’s text was discovered in by her readers in the wake

of her death. Like the epilogist, Levy's lyrical readers searched the text for a record of voice, and in doing so took as representation what was their own simulation.¹⁰⁹

It is significant that Levy points to the material and fragmentary nature of the first speaker's writing as just "some blotted sheets of paper" leftover from among "littered heaps of paper" that 'Adelaide' left behind. The material itself marks the absence of the body that would seem to make the text intelligible. Indeed, this situation reinscribes the logic of the marked text and body; we lack the formal and textual apparatus that would grant the voice the authentic presence to speak for Adelaide, even as the epilogist attempts to construct it.

In her landmark study of Sappho's nineteenth-century afterlives, *Victorian Sappho*, Yopie Prins outlines the significance of the state of the Sapphic corpus as it was received by Victorians.

"...in the course of time even the pages of the songs of Sappho have been obliterated. Now the remains are fragmentary texts, excerpts quoted by ancient writers, papyrus scraps exhumed in Egypt at the turn of the century, torn into strips and recycled as wrappings for dead bodies. This is the scattered Sapphic corpus, no longer a living voice or even a body of writing, but an assortment of decomposing texts, dead letters." (23)

This fragmented corpus becomes an invitation to lyrical reading, its lacunae and ellipses a pregnant void that impels readers to give voice to Sappho, reanimating her absent or dead voice. The material fragment, then, may gesture both to voice, but also, read lyrically, to the subjectivity readers desire to recover by revoicing and reanimating the fragment. This is precisely the project of Levy's epilogist who takes a lyric fragment and in an act of lyrical

¹⁰⁹ My account here to some degree echoes Eric Griffiths's *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, but to the extent that it does, it might place Griffiths, who frames all reading as recovering a partially absent authorial voice/subjectivity, as the epilogist—a lyric reader who, in "lend[ing]" the text his voice does not "let it sound again" (Griffiths 90), so much as he makes it sound different. Whether and how texts mediate voices is historically situated, and Griffiths's theory makes a totalizing case about the nature of the printed voice that emerges from distinctly twentieth-century practices of mediation in which the acousmatic nature of sound media was invested with profound significance.

reading *par excellence* transforms it generically into dramatic monologue. For Prins the fragment is both a trace of an absent voice, prefiguring lyric subjectivity, and a tantalizing invitation to revoicing. Such a revoicing inherently speaks through and over the original voice, guaranteeing the near impossibility of its reproduction. This is a slightly different formulation than in Griffiths's account of the *Printed Voice*, which assumes that revoicing instead lets the voice of the author sound again. In "Christopher Found" the epilogist is compelled to construct an abstracted simulation of 'Adelaide' from the fragments he finds, precisely because he sees but cannot hear the original voice. Her literary remains are alarmingly tractable to this in his telling, right down to the orthography: "where the words had end was left a space, a dash, a half-writ word" –textual lacunae that can be filled.¹¹⁰ What remains unclear in my reading of "Christopher Found" thus far is whether and to what degree the text can mediate the voice at all. Can the voice be mediated through reproductive or transmissive means, or is there only simulation? And moreover, as we saw Robert Browning asking in chapter one, if it can, how can we know the difference? Levy is far more ambivalent about these questions than Browning, and in other poems in the volume she continues to problematize the mediation of voice while looking for some way that a fragmented textual voice may nevertheless survive its mediation.

Xantippe's "weary searching in the flesh"

Textual fragments proliferate throughout *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*. "Xantippe," for example, is explicitly identified as such in its subtitle. As Linda Hughes has observed, calling "Xantippe" "a fragment" both reflects nineteenth-century generic trends and suggests, like the Sapphic corpus, the state of many classical texts ("Print Culture" 265). Scholars including

¹¹⁰ Though Levy could not have intended the reference, I am reminded strongly of another nineteenth-century poetess whose writings—seeming fragments recovered from a trunk, each awash with suggestive dashes—proved similarly tractable to lyric revoicing by her literary executors.

Weisman and Olverson have noted how Levy's dramatic monologue appears to take up the challenge offered by James Thomson in his essay "A Word for Xantippe," which offers a similar apology for "Mrs. Socrates," unjustly cast as a shrew. As he concludes, "we reverence Socrates... In our age and country, however, Xantippe would be obliged to go to the workhouse, and the parish authorities would prosecute her husband for not supporting her and his family" (226). He closes with an explicit call for George Eliot to take up the cause of redeeming Xantippe, being in his estimation possibly the "one living writer with genius and learning and wisdom and fairness enough to picture truly the conjugal life of Saint Socrates and shrew Xantippe" (227). While George Eliot never heeded this call, Amy Levy did. And Thomson's turn to the platonic dialogues—his application of textual criticism—to uncover the truth of the much-maligned Xantippe appears to have influenced Levy's approach.¹¹¹

Thomson, indeed, opens his discussion of Xantippe by satirizing the exclusion of women from the writing of history which permits sexist Doctors Dryasdust to fill up the record with lies that reflect their own misogynistic reality. In investigating the actual textual record for traces of *Xantippe's* reality, Thomson laments: "would that she had left her own statement of the case!" (223). I find this central to Levy's treatment of Xantippe's legacy and voice. As a speaker of dramatic monologue, in Levy's telling, Xantippe becomes, as Olverson writes, "the teller of her own tale, the voice of authority and linguistic control" (59). What Levy foregrounds with the "fragment" subtitle, however, is that it is "ironically...the profound lack of evidence regarding women's lives in antiquity which allows for imaginative re(constructions) of characters like Xantippe" (Olverson 59). The fragmented corpus is both a problem and an invitation. The

¹¹¹ See Olverson

fragment figures a historical, critical, and textual silence that, similar to Morris in the previous chapter, makes possible Levy's revoicing of Xantippe.

This interplay between voice and silence is figured in the poem as well, which finds Xantippe longing "for a tongue / That should proclaim the stately mysteries / Of this fair world, and of the holy gods" (24-5). Xantippe (ironically, literally) *sees* her longed-for vocal authority in Socrates: "I saw him, all ungainly and uncouth, / Yet many gathered round to hear his words" (25). Where others *hear* Socrates, Xantippe *sees* both his ugliness and the outward sign of his vocal authority in the form of the gathered crowd. The crowd does not perceive Socrates as an embodied speaker, they hear the projection of his voice into an intellectual and almost sublime disembodiment.¹¹² This is the self-authority of the unmarked voice, immediate and self-present, able to exist of itself without reference to Socrates's form. Xantippe's struggle to perceive Socrates with the same immediacy as the crowd marks embodiment as the limit of the voice's power, the thing it must transcend. Xantippe becomes fixated on Socrates' ugliness. She struggles "to listen for the voice's lightest tone—"

Great voice, whose cunning modulations seemed
like to the notes of some sweet instrument.
So did I reach and strain, until at last
I caught the soul athwart the grosser flesh. (26)

By analogy to the soul, Levy gestures toward the problematic of the embodied nature of both. Xantippe's process of struggling, her "weary searching in the flesh" (26) for vocal authority seems partially a product of her uncomfortable and slow recognition that such authority is denied her precisely because of her gendered, marked body. She must "struggle and strain;" the latter word with a slight pun, perhaps, on 'strain' in a musical or poetic sense, hinting that this process

¹¹² Despite Socrates' actual presence, Xantippe appears to think the crowd is experiencing Socrates' voice almost acousmatically. Indeed, Levy may have had in mind the Pythagorean akousmatikoi, pupils who listened to the philosopher from behind a veil, after whom Pierre Schaeffer originally coined the term "acousmatic" to describe sound with no immediately apparent source.

involves trying out herself some of Socrates' "cunning modulations." That her inability to succeed in this endeavor is a problem of embodiment is foregrounded in her later outburst: responding to Socrates' claim that "woman's frail—her body rarely stands the test of soul," Xantippe for the last time attempts to access the vocal authority and self-presence that allows Socrates to project his voice outside and beyond his wretched form. In a masterful and sonorous line that twists the poem's blank verse into pure music, Xantippe recounts: "Lit by the fury and a thought, I spake" (30). The metrical inversion of the first foot and the pyrrhic third foot create a sort of frenzied drumroll before the near-caesura pause of the comma, all dramatically building to the spondaic force of "I spake." What Xantippe contests in her reply is the condition of the gendered body, that women were not made "too fine, too subtly delicate," only "half-completed" and sent "to bleed and quiver, here upon the earth" (30). But while the Victorian or the contemporary reader may perceive Xantippe's vocal power, rendered metrically present by Levy, Socrates' boys' club does not. Met with their derision, Xantippe stands "straight and silent for a breath, / Dumb, crushed with all that weight of cold contempt;" Levy problematizes the voice as embodied with careful attention to the fact that some bodies signify differently; she situates the failure of vocal power, in other words, as a failure to be heard rather than a failure to speak. It is Xantippe's social context that leaves her struggling and straining, constrained by a form that, unlike her husband, she cannot transcend. The same social conditions that construct Xantippe's body as marked, fragmented, and "half-completed," limit her ability to be heard.

The fragment as failure of the printed voice to be heard is the counterpart of Xantippe being rendered "dumb" as a consequence of her gendered body. Read as silent, Xantippe could never be heard. "Xantippe" is not merely framed as a fragment in the subtitle. Throughout, Levy takes pains to typographically evoke the work's fragmentary nature with wide ellipses that recall

the “space...dash...and half-writ word” of “Christopher Found” as well as the typographical condition of, for instance, the Sapphic corpus. Levy produces a marked text for Xantippe to transcend, an imagined projection of vocal authority beyond the material that the poem makes clear she could not enjoy in life.

The textual breaks signal the condition of the dramatic monologue itself as it emerges in “Christopher Found,” a revoicing impelled by an absence and a textual production that simulates a silenced voice. Importantly, while Levy employs typographical ellipsis, at no time in the poem do these appear to represent any actual textual gap. The space of the ellipsis is purely visual, it does not disrupt voice, either with respect to the metrical and sonic features of the poem or to the coherency and fluency of the speaker’s speech. Levy’s monologue thus subtly resists the very problem that constitutes Xantippe’s unhearing, meeting the voice’s embodied failure by reinscribing the possibility of speaking over and through gaps. At the same time those gaps mark the text, highlighting that Xantippe herself is a textual medium for a marked voice.

Voice and Genre

Both “Xantippe” and “Christopher Found,” as I have shown, take the fragment as the sign of a silence that can be revoiced. “Xantippe” no less than “Christopher Found” problematizes this. Levy is able to revoice “Xantippe” only by speaking over those ellipses she typographically foregrounds but semantically and metrically ignores. “Christopher Found” challenges the validity of voice at the site of its (re)production by reader and author. Both these dramatic monologues, then, interrogate the poem as a medium for voice, and the voice as an effect produced in part by the ear of the listener. Helen Luu has explored the significance of the auditor function in the dramatic monologue, hoping to move “beyond the question of whether the empirical auditor’s presence is necessary...to an analysis of the particular conditions of

speaking” (36). Examining Augusta Webster’s monologues with absent auditors, she finds that “the auditor not only functions as sign of the speaker’s linguistic power...but also signals the contingency of that power on each of the genre’s other defining features: the dramatic speaker, his or her speech, and its specific dramatic context” (Luu 33). Cynthia Scheinberg’s treatment of “Xantippe” in part articulates some of these contingencies. Xantippe struggles to make herself understood to the same maids for whom she had become a silencing scold: “ear all keen / For aimless talking[...]tongue to cut /with quick incision, ‘thwart the merry words of /idle maidens” (33). Scheinberg observes that, between the maids and the men, “each group’s judgment is always predicated upon its capacity (and desire) to identify with Xantippe, and these judgments are clearly based upon that reader’s relationship to cultural power” (182). Levy’s dramatic monologues, she suggests, explore the social contingency of sympathy and judgment (183). Another way of saying this might be that they explore the conditions under which one’s voice can be heard, the contingencies of speaker, auditor, and situation: the voice as an effect on the ear. Luu locates a similar interest in Augusta Webster’s dramatic monologues. While it is not my intention to suggest a specifically female version of the dramatic monologue (something Scheinberg was explicitly writing against) it seems obvious that both poets’ interest in exploring such themes with the genre owes in part to their experiences as women, or, in Levy’s case, we might say her minor status with respect to the masculine poetic canon.

The first part of “Christopher Found” is produced as dramatic monologue, as I have argued, by an act of lyrical (mis-)reading that applies a particular set of expectations and assumptions to the unspeaking fragments that the epilogist found in the chest. This exposes the contingencies on which the poem as monologue is structured as being the same contingencies by which a speaker may have hearable vocal authority. As an unintended auditor, it is the epilogist,

himself, whose overhearing of the lyric fragment produces the dramatic monologue at a very literal level—for he revises the found fragment into a dramatic structure and literally interpolates his own voice into the poem with the epilogue.

And this returns us to the situation of “A Minor Poet,” the titular poem that looked like a lyric suicide note to Levy’s critics in the wake of her death. They might be forgiven for thinking so. The “minor poet” is a depressive dramatic speaker “out of tune in this world’s instrument,” whose suicide (and the interpretation of its cause) is the situation of the poem. The minor poet chafes against “the world’s great harmonies” pointed to by his friend, Tom Leigh, in consolation to his failed first suicide attempt. I follow the critical conception of Levy’s minor poetics originated by Joseph Bristow, who quite aptly observed that “minor” exists equally with analogy to the minor of Arnoldian “minor poets” and to something like our contemporary understanding of minority. Indeed, this is significant to Levy, read today as a feminist, queer, and Jewish poet. But Bristow also observes the term’s resonance with minor tonality in music, taking the title of his essay from “A Minor Poet.” Music in a minor key has its own darker beauty, but to play in a minor mode against a major world would cause only discord. The poet describes himself as,

...A creature maimed and marr’d
From very birth. A blot, a blur, a note
All out of tune in this world’s instrument.
A base thing, yet not knowing to fulfil
Base functions. A high thing, yet all unmeet
For work that’s high. A dweller on the earth,
Yet not content to dig with other men
Because of certain sudden sights and sounds
(Bars of broke music; furtive, fleeting glimpse
Of angel faces ’thwart the grating seen)
Perceived in Heaven. Yet when I approach
To catch the sound’s completeness, to absorb
The faces’ full perfection, Heaven’s gate,
Which then had stood ajar, sudden falls to,
And I, a-shiver in the dark and cold,
Scarce hear afar the mocking tones of men. (15-16)

As Guimarães wrote, “This is indeed the description of a misfit, of the dregs of society or even of the remains of a crumbling fin-de-siècle world, with which the woman poet seems to identify herself” (242)—a quintessential minor perspective. While Guimarães aligns Levy with Webster and Mathilda Blind as engaged in a process of “salvaging, salvation, survival, redemption, transformation and emancipation in their...works” (227), she understands Levy’s connection with these themes in terms purely of a nihilistic escape. Not unlike Guimarães, Karen Weisman reads Levy in terms of “self-annihilation.” As she observes, the minor poet, unable to express himself, is not much of a poet at all. But still “he defines his life in the terms of a narrative that in fact exists only as the possibility of lyric effusion” (71), in “terms of a textuality that is all the same denied him” (72). This relation between sound, silence, and text is encapsulated in the line “A blot, a blur, a note / all out of tune in this world’s instrument” which bridges the material remainders that are the sign of the poet’s vocal failure with the tonal metaphor, transitioning from the textual or scribal “blot” and “blur” to the more multivalent “note.” That “note” is both a written note, printed musical notation, and the metaphor of vibratory sound.

I would prefer to discover something more than self-destruction in “A Minor Poet.” Bristow’s attention to minority in relation to music reminds us that Levy saw in James Thomson “a certain phase of modern feeling,” an aesthetic position more than a totalizing lyric subjectivity. Levy’s dramatic speaker is not a neutral medium for her voice. Rather he is a note played in a minor key, a formal apparatus for expressing a mood (or a musical mode) that we do not need to read as essential to Levy herself. “A Minor Poet” closes with an epilogue spoken by Tom Leigh, reminiscent in many ways of “Christopher Found.” Beside the poet’s physical remains, Tom finds the speaker’s textual remains as well, much like the epilogist of “Christopher

Found.” Seeking some explanation for the poet’s self-inflicted death, Tom reports that he found
“little: just a row of books”

Much scrawl’d and noted; sketches on the wall,
Done rough in charcoal; the old instrument
(A violin, no Stradivarius)
He played so ill on; in the table drawer
Large schemes of undone work. Poems half-writ;
Wild drafts of symphonies; big plans of fugues;
Some scraps of writing in a woman’s hand:
No more—the scattered pages of a tale,
A sorry tale that no man cared to read. (21)

This expansive list of findings is hardly “little,” but its fragmentary and musical nature stands, as a sign of the speaker’s voice in its silence. Despairing for an explanation he had been unable to hear on the two previous occasions of the poet’s suicide attempts, Tom has “no word at all to say of this” (22). Here the epilogue again raises questions about the status of the speaking voice in the main body of the poem. How is it we are able to hear this poet who could not be heard in life or in death? The poem itself records experience in excess of voice. If the half-writ poems Tom finds signal the poet’s effective silence, Levy imagines the possibility of his nevertheless being heard correctly, perhaps by an ear attuned to his minor tonality. She imagines that, like the poet himself, we might catch “bars of broke music; furtive, fleeting glimpse / Of angel faces ‘thwart the grating seen” (15).

Whether a minor or marked voice can survive its mediation depends for Levy largely on the presence of an ear sympathetic to hear it. As Ivan Kreilkamp and Eric Griffiths both emphasize, an increasingly democratized reading market across the century troubled an author’s ability to anticipate how a text would be interpreted. Levy seems well aware in fact that she was fairly likely to be misheard by readers attuned to a major key, but writes against it nonetheless. This is an act of hope, not despair.

When *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* was republished in the cameo series, Levy's image—so caught up in making her marked voice sound authentically in the text—was not the only addition. The first edition ended with "Epitaph." Perhaps the bleakest poem in the volume, it positions death as a relief from a truly miserable existence: "This is the end of him, this is best. / He will never lie on his couch awake, / wide-eyed tearless, till dim daybreak" (88). Within the lyrical reading of Levy that the cameo series frames, this poem looks intolerably bleak. Unwin instead ends the volume with two additional poems: "Sonnet" and "Translated from Geibel." Both confront death from a slightly more hopeful posture. Here is the final sestet of "Sonnet":

The dark has faded, and before mine eyes
Have long, grey flats expanded, dim and bare;
And through the changing guises all things wear
Inevitable Law I recognize:
Yet in my heart a hint of feeling lies
which half a hope and half is a despair. (89)

"Half a hope and half...despair" seems like a fitting complement to the lyric abstraction of Levy into the text. Putting her live image in the front of the book had suggested a bleak, personal, and posthumous reading of the text. A lyrical reading of Levy must hear her voice as simultaneously living (present) and dead (absent). The volume thus cannot end with an Epitaph. Levy is recalled, not to life, but perhaps a simulation—half living and half dead, suspended in dying, her despair is simulated over and over again, suspended lyrically in time.

IV. Synthesizing the Posthumous Voice of Toru Dutt

I begin with a proposition: Some poems are more posthumous than others. In conventional use, the designation “posthumous” privileges publication as the act of literary (and for my purposes, particularly, poetic) utterance. A work is posthumous insofar as the author does not see it published in their lifetime. Given that all nineteenth-century poets are utterly dead, our first encounter with Barrett Browning or Whitman is always a posthumous one, yet we often do not see it as such. The assumption (belied by normal usage) that an edited version of “Maud” in the latest Norton anthology is no more posthumous than in the first edition of *Maud, and Other Poems* from 1855, rests on a fantasy that the present text exists in an unbroken chain of publication and editorship that preserves the living energy of Tennyson’s utterance, which was best represented in a version that went to print overseen by the author. The word posthumous itself, with its folk-etymological whiff of humus, of burial, creates a slippage between the material conditions of publication and of the material condition of the author’s body. Living/dead and published/unpublished become difficult to distinguish. What then differentiates a posthumous from a non-posthumous poem? Despite that the author wrote both during their life, a posthumous poem lives an undeath. The voice of the author is posthumous-- beyond us, ephemeral, inaccessible, dying and dead. What is inflected by the designation “posthumous” is not poem so much as author, a reflection of the conditions under which a poem was written and how we hear the voice that speaks through that poem. Poets, too, in certain lights are posthumous.

A second proposition: Some poets are more posthumous than others. Alas, Keats, taken before his time; his frail body overwhelmed as much by genius as by consumption. This story, rehearsed for nearly two hundred years, at times overwhelms what we might encounter on the

page. But Keats himself was not unamenable to it. Consider that most posthumous of all fragments by Britain's most posthumous author:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.

The power of this poem-fragment, manuscript marginalia, plainly lies in Keats own provisional embrace of his coming posthumousness. Keats addresses his reader from beyond the “silence” of the grave even as he still lives. Were this not a posthumous poem, its effect would be lost. Only in manuscript can we understand that “this living hand” is the same that holds the pen writing the poem, and the same that, simultaneous with the event of reading, lies in the grave. Keats speaks from here and beyond—collapsing present and future and creating a condition for the transmission of his own voice that depends on but also transcends the body as well as the text. Keats haunts us because his voice exists through—but in excess of—body and text alike.

Though less widely known than Keats, few poets have been more posthumous than the colonial Indian poet, Toru Dutt. For fifty years after she succumbed to tuberculosis, the first thing a reader was likely to learn about Dutt was the fact of her death, thanks largely to the work of London literary arbiter Edmund Gosse. His introduction to Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), stamps the volume as posthumous even before finishing his first sentence. “If Toru Dutt were alive...” he begins, creating a posthumous author out of a dead poet and, as I will argue, synthesizing a new voice for Dutt by substituting her living body and living text for a dead one. If posthumousness for Keats enables a kind of transcendence of body and

text that reaffirms the power of the latter to transmit voice into futurity, in Dutt's case it did just the opposite.

This chapter is about the posthumous Toru Dutt, a figure created primarily by Edmund Gosse through an act of lyrical reading that marked Dutt's text as racialized and posthumous in order to simulate an authentic Indian voice. Gosse silences Dutt by synthesizing her voice. This is thus the story of how Gosse's reception participated in the generic transformation of Dutt's innovative narrative translations into the abstract mode of lyric. The posthumous Dutt is not Dutt as she lived, or as she lives today in robust critical conversation, where she appears as a complex figure "keenly self-aware, fiercely literary, outspoken, and with a streak of mischief" (Mehrota 115) as Arvind Krishna Mehrota writes.

The problematic effect of my attention to Gosse over Dutt, and Dutt only through Gosse, is to partially reinscribe Gosse's unvoicing of her, to make her seem to disappear. I acknowledge and regret, but lean into this difficulty because examining Gosse's introduction in specific detail is nevertheless valuable. Doing so helps to expose the way the racialization of bodies could circumscribe nineteenth-century authors and mark voices, texts, and bodies alike, limiting the way poetry as a technology mediates voice. In the nineteenth century, even more so than today, the body was the paramount site of difference. The very materiality of that body as it participates in practices of mediation helps to define how and whether the printed voice mediates the voice of the author. I have suggested that lyricization happens amid a drive for disembodied immediacy and fidelity—for a faithful rendering of a present voice as it slips further and further away across and into the telegraph wire or phone line. The materiality of a marked voice is a challenge to self-present immediacy that requires a synthetic textual apparatus to make it sound authentic, where vocal authority seems to fail. Gosse's lyrical reading of Dutt makes a synthetic voice

sound because metropolitan readers were less practiced in listening for the authority and life that Dutt herself was sending across the wire. Marked voices, in other words, sound different, and we should not assume that the printed voice functions the same for all authors in the nineteenth century.

Gosse effectively revises Dutt's own bibliographic codes and paratexts in such a way that not only literally circumscribes the material text but also the ways *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* mediates Dutt's voice. Gosse's strategies rely on well-worn tropes about "the Hindu race" that had grown increasingly reified after the 1857 Rebellion. His hollowing out and voicing over of Dutt is particularly ironic because her manipulation of multiple voices as a translator and poet had marked a hybrid poetic authority that challenges disciplinary and colonial definitions of Victorian poetry. In contrast to Gosse's reading, Dutt confidently claims an authority deriving from her mastery of multiple languages and her broad cosmopolitan life experience, neither as an Oriental authority nor based on her insider knowledge of Hindu customs and Indian history. Dutt's poetry uses the hybrid logic of Empire to articulate vocal authority within an imperial network that conceives of the non-white other in intractably material terms.

Toru Dutt, Alive

Toru Dutt was born on March 4, 1856, the daughter of a well-connected and well-off family.¹¹³ She was the youngest of three children including sister Aru and brother Abju. Her father, Govin Chunder Dutt, was a Bengali *bhadralok*, a member of the new upper class of well-to-do, higher caste families employed by the colonial civil service. He and his brothers attended

¹¹³ Toru Dutt's name would today be anglicized as something like Torulata Datta; throughout this chapter I reproduce Toru and her family's names as they themselves chose to anglicize them. Likewise, I use place names as they would have been encountered by Dutt in English, and as they appear in contemporary writing.

the Hindu Academy under the tutelage of David Lester Richardson, where they grew to love English poetry. The Dutt family were pioneers in the realm of Indo-Anglian poetry. Govin, his brothers Greece and Hur, and nephew Omesh collaborated on *The Dutt Family Album*, a collection of intensely Anglophilic verse that was published in London in 1870. In 1869 when Toru was thirteen, Govin, his brothers, and their respective families converted to Christianity for reasons that are somewhat unclear; we know from personal statements only that they followed the deathbed conversion of their eldest brother. The seriousness of such a decision in this period is attested to by the extreme reluctance with which the brothers' wives followed them. As apostate Hindus, the family's social circle shrank, and Toru and her sister were practically rendered unmarriageable.

Toru's upbringing and education were highly unusual for a Bengali woman of this era. Although Macaulay's famous minute on Indian education and the subsequent English Education Act had made English the language of schooling in India twenty years earlier (formalizing a state of affairs that was already becoming the norm in Calcutta) such education was not offered to women. Nonetheless Toru learned English and was raised on Milton and Wordsworth. By the end of her life, she would be fluent in Bangla, English, and French; had commenced intensive study of Sanskrit; and knew enough German to be dangerous. Four years after the death of his son Abju, Govin moved his family first to France and then to England, perceiving that further promotion in the civil service for an Indian was impossible from India. In Europe he appears to have spared no effort to continue education for his daughters, employing governesses to tutor the girls in French and ingratiating them to upwardly mobile London society. Toru eventually attended the Higher Lectures for Women at Cambridge, making her one of the most highly educated women in Britain at that time, and probably in fact the most highly educated woman in

Calcutta when they returned in 1873. This return was precipitated by sister Aru's failing health. In England the sisters had commenced a translation project, which would eventually be published following Aru's death as *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. This dynamic and ambitious volume consists of translations from French into English of 125 poems by authors such as Gautier and Hugo (the latter a personal favorite of Toru) with copious and authoritative (and rarely inaccurate) endnotes. *A Sheaf* was published in 1876 by B. M. Bose, at the Saptahik Sambad Press in Bhowanipore, by which time Toru's own health was declining. She died on August 30, 1877. Toru's literary reputation consists of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*; a French language novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*; an incomplete English novel, *Bianca, or the Spanish Maiden*; several essays published in the *Bengal Magazine*; and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*.

In the year before her death, Dutt and her close English friend and correspondent Mary Martin had been engaged in a project of promotion for *A Sheaf*, with Toru sending copies to friends and members of the French and British literati, and Martin shopping a notice of the text to various publications.¹¹⁴ In a letter of July 17, 1877 to Martin, Dutt notes with excitement that a notice of *A Sheaf* (though not Martin's) ran in the February edition of *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Das 279). It is likely in this capacity, seeking a review, that a copy of the *Sheaf* was sent to the offices of *The Examiner* in August 1877, where it would be picked up by Edmund Gosse in what has become the primal scene of Dutt's reception. It is one of the cruelties of Dutt's life that Gosse read her work for the first time only as she lay dying. The critic's sincerely enthusiastic (if deeply problematic) championing of Dutt would eventually see *A Sheaf* published in London; had she lived, Gosse doubtlessly would have opened doors for Dutt as he did years later with

¹¹⁴ See letter January 13, 1877.

Sarojini Naidu, who hobnobbed with Arthur Symons and W.B. Yeats. There can be little doubt that the Anglophilic Dutt, struggling for what she saw at least partially as legitimating recognition from the colonial center, would have welcomed Gosse's assistance.

No less than in London or Paris, Dutt had likewise struggled to get the merits of the *Sheaf* recognized at home in Calcutta. As she recounted to Martin, local publishers were reluctant to support the book: "Calcutta publishers are a very timid class of people, not at all enterprising," she complained, "and they are besides more given to the sale of books than publishing new ones" (Das 119).¹¹⁵ It appears that Govin eventually paid a press to print the book at his own expense: "It is to be printed only, not published" (120) she wrote Martin on January 13, 1876. If we were to follow Dutt's own logic here, *A Sheaf* wouldn't be published until 1880 when the London edition was put out under the care of Gosse, making the work posthumous, as the word is usually understood. This distinction Dutt makes between printing and publishing resembles that of another famously 'posthumous' poet—Emily Dickinson. As Martha Nell Smith argues in *Rowing in Eden*, Dickinson's fascicles and letter-poems represent a meaningful form of publication, demanding a return to careful study of Dickinson's manuscripts and especially her "calligraphic orthography." This is reflected in the Dickinson family's careful distinction between the term 'print' and 'publish,' maintaining 'print' exclusively to mean 'put in a print edition.' What are we to make of Dutt's use of these words? Dutt follows a more conventional understanding of the two terms. I read her comment to Martin as expressing embarrassment at the circumstances of the book's first run, financed at her family's expense. We can also glean that Dutt appears to have placed value on the process of publication and everything it entails—including, as I will detail in the next section, the production of the book's extra-textual elements.

¹¹⁵ See letter December 13, 1875

I do not think it is appropriate to conclude that *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* is a posthumous production because during Dutt's life it was "printed only." Nevertheless, the text could be seen in this way by those who, like Gosse, did not credit the work of an Indian press as legitimate publication. Regardless of how the printing was financed, Dutt's *Sheaf* was in fact subjected to the same process as any published work; she records her amusement at some of the compositor's errors when reviewing the proofs. "The printer makes such dreadful mistakes" as transfiguring "Honour's throne" into "Horror's throne" (Das 124).

Whether or not *A Sheaf* is considered posthumous in conventional terms, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* assuredly is. Following Toru's death, Govin began assembling her writings. *Ballads and Legends* pairs nine translations of Hindu and Bengali legends with seven "miscellaneous poems." Two of the legends had previously appeared in local periodicals, as had some of the "miscellaneous poems," but the largest part of the volume had not yet appeared in print at the time of Dutt's death. The book's assemblage and publication mark what was effectively an editorial collaboration between Govin Chunder Dutt and Edmund Gosse, with the assistance as well of Clarisse Bader from France, with whom Toru began correspondence in the months prior to her death. Collaborating across three countries and two continents, they must have corresponded about the book, but no such record remains. Toru Dutt's fame has rested almost entirely on this volume, particularly the "miscellaneous poems" and especially "Our Casuarina Tree" and "Sonnet-Baugmaree," which have entered both the canon of Indian English poetry and a more expansively conceived "undisciplined" Victorian canon.

Toru Dutt, Dead

I have described Gosse's introduction to *Ballads and Legends* as the primal scene of Dutt's reception. Gosse's framing of Dutt would be reproduced or followed well into the

twentieth century. How is it that a preface to an author's work came to be a preface to her life, one that writes her into existence as already dead? As I will demonstrate, Dutt's status as a colonial "native" and a racially marked woman writer allowed Gosse to conscript her voice into a racist understanding of Indian civilization as posthumous. Gosse textually circumscribes Dutt by imposing a misreading of her own carefully managed bibliographic codes and paratexts in the previous volume, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Working through his own paratext in *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, Gosse silences Dutt's voice and effects a series of substitutions—text for body, body for race, race for culture—that enable him to make Dutt's text sound authentic by simulating her voice where it failed to transmit, creating a new racialized body, and causing readers to hear Dutt speaking only through that body.

Gosse's "Introductory Memoir" begins, "If Toru Dutt were alive, she would still be younger than any recognized European writer, and yet her fame, which is already considerable, has been entirely posthumous" (vii). So, the living Dutt is buried and the posthumous Dutt is born. Having established Dutt as dead, Gosse marks "the hour of her death" (vii) as the setting for the drama of bibliographic codes and colonial encounter that is his first meeting with Dutt.

It was while Professor W. Minto was editor of the "Examiner," that one day in August, 1876, in the very heart of the dead season for books, I happened to be in the office of that newspaper, and was upbraiding the whole body of publishers for issuing no books worth reviewing. At that moment the postman brought in a thin and sallow packet with a wonderful Indian postmark on it, and containing a most unattractive orange pamphlet of verse, printed at Bhowanipore, and entitled "A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields, by Toru Dutt." This shabby little book of some two hundred pages, without preface or introduction, seemed specially destined by its particular providence to find its way hastily into the waste-paper basket. I remember that Mr. Minto thrust it into my unwilling hands, and said "There! see whether you can't make something of that." A hopeless volume it seemed, with its queer type, published at Bhowanipore, printed at the Saptahiksambad Press!

Dutt's volume (*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*) may be alluring with its exotic Indian postmark, but the book is "shabby," not a book, really, but an "unattractive...pamphlet." The

failure of its bibliographic codes to signify correctly almost recommends it to the trash: a publisher from Bhowanipore, lacking preface or introduction that might correctly frame the text as an intellectually rigorous orientalist production. A non-book, it was “hopeless” and “queer.” Why this unusually effusive account of bibliographic encounter? Occurring both at the hour of her death and in the very heart of the dead season for books, Gosse begins the conflation of Dutt’s dead or dying body and the text itself. Dutt’s text is marked, in much the same way that Gosse imagines her racially Indian body being. This imagination is in line, as we shall see, with contemporary racist discourse that fixates on the racialized body as the key signifier of difference. Lacking any actual memories of Dutt for this memoir, Gosse can only substitute-in her text. As Chapman has noted, the “physical description of the *Sheaf* reads like an assessment of Dutt herself: foreign, racially other, and yet also curiously interesting and deceptively brilliant” (596). The text comes to stand, in other words, for its author’s dying body: at that hour “sallow” and in Gosse’s imagination “wonderful[ly] Indian.”

In this and the following passage, Gosse makes two key errors about Dutt which are, I think, telling. He recounts his “surprise and almost rapture to open at such verse as this: —

Still barred thy doors! The far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free.
Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee?” (ix)

Here, ironically, Gosse has quoted from one of the poems in the *Sheaf* that was translated (from Victor Hugo) by Aru, not Toru.¹¹⁶ In *A Sheaf*, Aru’s poems are signed with “A.,” Toru’s are unsigned. The only indication of the significance of this initial comes in the text’s very last endnote, which is referenced by the book’s only original poem, it reads: “CLXVI. Concluding

¹¹⁶ This fact has not been subject to close examination in scholarship, but Malashri Lal notes the error in *The Law of the Threshold* (1995), see p. 35

sonnet. The writer of these pages has only to add here, that the pieces signed A are by her dear and only sister Arû, who fell asleep in Jesus on the 23rd July 1874, at the early age of twenty years.” While it would be tempting to write this misattribution off as a careless error, in the *Examiner* review that was the immediate product of Gosse’s encounter with “Sheaf” he explicitly cites the same poem correctly as one by Aru. And he further emphasizes that “it is only after *carefully reading the notes* to the individual poems that we gradually gather that this is a collection of French lyrics translated into English.” (966 emphasis mine).

Gosse’s other error occurs in his characterization of the state in which he found *A Sheaf*. Dutt wrote to Martin on March 24, 1876: “I send along with this letter a copy of my *Sheaf gleaned in French Fields*. I have not had it bound in cloth, but I send it to you in *its original paper cover*, as it is *easier for transmission thus than otherwise*” (Das 138 emphasis mine).¹¹⁷ While I have not been able to view a copy of *Sheaf* in its original binding, I gather from Mitra that it was “bound in pale blue cloth with gold lettering on the side” (34). It seems to have been a modestly attractive volume (issues introduced by lack of skill on the part of the printer notwithstanding). This means of course that Gosse held in his hand not some queer pamphlet, but simply a sewn book block in a provisional paper binding. Such a sewn text block is an intermediary in the processes of casing-in books for the cloth publisher’s bindings that had come to be the dominant form books were sold in by 1877. It somewhat strains credulity that someone like Gosse, who had published his own volume of verse just four years earlier, had not encountered such an object in the course of interacting with the publishing and printing trade. Moreover, it was hardly rare for a book to be bound in paper: yellowbacks (whose paper and board covers could be of variable thickness) were available at any railway bookstall, individual

¹¹⁷ Dipendranath Mitra appears to be the only author who has noticed this fact from Dutt’s letter, or at least the only one who found it worth mentioning, and I am indebted to his observation.

parts of some novels were sold with paper covers, and publishers had been experimenting with true paperback reprints as early as 1866 (Eliot and Nash 423). In this light, Gosse's characterization of the book begins to look like willful ignorance. Either Gosse has deliberately manipulated his account, or the Eastern mystique of Dutt's postmark has rendered a commonplace object at best unintelligible and at worst cheap and tawdry. Even while he performs befuddlement at the book's appearance, Gosse's emphasis on the "orange" color of Dutt's cover perhaps calls to mind the yellowbacks—cheap, lurid, trash. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra has thrown some passing skepticism at Gosse's reaction from another angle in noting the vibrant and sizeable output of Indian presses: "One would have thought that a man of letters like Gosse would be familiar, at the height of the Raj, with the 'blurred type' of the English books coming out of India. Though not all of them were in the English languages, there were according to one estimate about 200,000 books printed in the country from 1868 to 1905" (120).¹¹⁸ The stakes involved in whether Gosse received a published book or merely a queer "pamphlet" from an insignificant printer are whether and to what degree Dutt is a posthumous author. If the *Sheaf* was never really properly published, as Gosse works very hard to imply, than its first publication occurred in London, after the poet's death. *A Sheaf*, and, consequently, all Dutt's work outside of periodicals, is then rendered posthumous.

Taken together, these two errors amount to a serious misreading of the bibliographic codes and paratexts of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. There's some reason to believe that Dutt herself placed a great deal of value on the things Gosse misses here. For one, her explanation to Martin for the book's naked condition demonstrates some anxiety about how the volume would be received without its cloth case. This anxiety may have been heightened by

¹¹⁸ Mehrotra's source for this information is Robert Darnton, "Un-British Activities." *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 48, no. 6, pp. 84–88.

Govin; *The Dutt Family Album*, published just six years prior, reveals careful attention to its presentation. Mary Ellis Gibson describes it thus:

At 210 pages, it is bound in a green cloth cover with the title and cover art embossed in gold. Red and blue ornamental capitals adorn the words *Dutt* and *Album*. In the tendrils entwining the title perch four golden birds, a group of three—representing the brothers Govin, Hur, and Greece—and a single bird on a higher branch of the family tree representing their nephew Omesh. (185)

As Gibson surmises, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* was very much initiated as a family project along the lines of the *Album*, which was a collaboration between Aru and Toru under the guidance of Govin (209). Learning French had itself been “a family project” (Gibson 210). It seems unlikely that Toru, let alone Govin, would have placed less value on these exterior tools in their capacity to shape meaning and perception in this latest Dutt family literary venture.

Likewise, Dutt’s endnotes appear to have been significant to her understanding of the project in the *Sheaf*. The book had been an ambitious undertaking: 165 English translations, nearly three hundred pages overall, and fifty pages just of critical notes. They reveal the daunting extent of her learning, and they authoritatively position her as a kind of master over the subject matter at hand: French and English poetry alike. As an example, her gloss of Eugène Manuel demonstrates knowledge of the poet’s entire oeuvre and makes a bold aesthetic evaluation:

M. Eugène Manuel is a Parisian by birth and the author of three collections of verse, *Pages intimes* (1866). *Poèmes populaires* (1872) and *Pendant al guerre* (1872). He has also written a drama *Les ouvriers* which was acted in 1870 at the *Théâtre Français* with the most brilliant success. His poetry is full of thought. Judging from his style as well as matter he must have read the English poets a good deal. His mind has many of the traits of Longfellow’s. (228)

Toru flaunts her knowledge not only of French poetry, but the goings on of French society, and English poetry at a cosmopolitan scale. Elsewhere she demonstrates facility with French politics

and even contemporary paleontology. The notes are “a riotous carnival of the world’s literatures” (Mehrotra 126).¹¹⁹

Earlier Indian authors of English poetry such as H.L.V. Derozio and Kasiprasad Gosh had often used their paratexts, as Gibson argues, to engage in a kind of self-Orientalizing, legitimating their knowledge of India by making it legible to English readership within a discursive frame largely established by Sir William Jones at the end of the previous century. Toru, in a sense, inverts the relationship between authority, power, and subject. The claims she implicitly makes are not to an authority deriving from special knowledge of Hindu customs or Indian history but instead to a kind of mastery that exists outside her situatedness as a colonial dependent. She stakes out authority through hybridity, authority that exists through and beyond her knowledge of metropole or periphery.¹²⁰

In misidentifying the translator of Hugo’s “Morning Serenade” Gosse displays a willingness to misread or ignore Dutt’s highly performative paratexts in favor of rendering her posthumous through his own. Whether intentional or not, the poem in question seems to have been too tempting to pass up. “Still barred thy doors! The far east glows, / The morning wind blows fresh and free.” Gosse has quite intentionally selected the only excerpt in the volume that mentions “the far east” and has done so without giving any indication that the poem is a

¹¹⁹ Michael Tilby, the first scholar to make a comprehensive study of the sources for Dutt’s notes argues that the “claim traditionally made for Dutt as a surprisingly well-informed and discerning critic of French poetry is, to a certain extent, misplaced” (N.P.). Contra Tilby, I think neither her errors nor her reliance on uncited textual sources detract from the audacity and significance of the undertaking, nor from our identifying the nature of the rhetorical appeal to authority she was attempting to make with her notes. By the same token, Subhendu Mund identifies overpraising Dutt as the appropriative legacy of her reception as a British poet in the wake of Gosse. Indeed, he is in part responding to the long life of Gosse’s framing of Dutt: “she *enjoyed* the same fate as Emily Bronte, Jane Austen and other popular women writers who died a premature death: a Victorian legacy of sentimentalized adoration which would not allow an objective, aesthetic appreciation of her literature” (147). Mund’s essay is a valuable reminder against reinscribing Dutt as some kind of marvel above critique.

¹²⁰ I am far from the first to note Dutt’s engagement with hybridity, whether conceptually or as a literary form. Alison Chapman, Alpana Sharma, and Sanjukta Dasgupta address the idea specifically. Tricia Lootens, Meenakshi Mukherjee, and Mary Ellis Gibson have also made arguments that engage with Dutt’s hybridity conceptually without using the term.

translation of Hugo. Indeed, in Gosse's recontextualization, it would be easy for a careless reader to misunderstand the poem as being about the orient and not the sunrise. Gosse quietly re-colonizes Dutt's work, reframing *her* as the object of inquiry, and eventually alongside India as the object of the poetry. Dutt's racial body as much as the body of the text itself is made visible as part of Gosse's shaping of what will be her mythology. What makes it onto Gosse's page is no more a poem by Toru Dutt than it is one by Aru or Hugo. In two paragraphs, Gosse has reduced Dutt's work to its misread paratexts and substituted a voice that sounds like Toru Dutt where hers might have been. By making the bibliographic codes of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* fail to signify, Gosse transforms it into a marked text even as he marks Dutt's voice and body, thereby making it legible as, we will see, the authentic lyric effusion of a Hindu poetess. It is true, as Gosse claims, that *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* arrived "without preface or introduction." But in highlighting this, Gosse conjures an apparent paratextual vacuum that he can fill, redirecting the reader's attention from Dutt's own extant paratexts. He calls the text's ability to mediate Dutt's voice into question, necessitating its remediation in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the text that will speak authentically for her. The authority of Dutt's notes, her own framing of her hybrid voice, is made to vanish as we dwell on the text's failure as a material object and on the posthumous body (of work and otherwise) he produces.

The audacity of Gosse's subsequent claim that "when poetry is as good as this it does not much matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore," is almost comical.

A Hybrid Voice on a Hybrid Wire

There is reason to think that Gosse was not completely oblivious to Dutt's engagement of hybridity as a site of authority. Another remarkable feature of what I previously called his drama

of bibliographic codes and colonial encounter is his particular attention to the *Sheaf's* provenance. As I have suggested, the “sallow packet” and “Indian postmark” function to metonymically or analogically connect the book with Dutt’s posthumous body while Gosse rewrites the significance of both. But Gosse also seems to attribute an almost magical quality to the fact of the book’s arrival at all: brought suddenly by a postman, his reading it seems a matter of chance—that he “happened to be in the office” that day. Dutt’s text has arrived by means of a wide-reaching imperial network, the mysterious and material character of which, I wish to show, connects both to the racialization of Dutt’s text and body and the hybrid voice she staked out for herself. The imperial post represents a menacing hybridity, and Gosse’s invocation of Dutt’s material movements within that network engages wider racist, imperialist, and anti-Indian discourse.

Racist and imperialist attitudes had exploded into popular and public discourse in the latter third of the nineteenth century. As Patrick Brantlinger demonstrated some thirty years ago in *Rule of Darkness*, although imperialist ideology became explicitly and positively affirmed after 1867 (the Reform bill and the Governor Eyre controversy are twin watersheds), it existed throughout. Brantlinger’s concise outline of imperialist ideology is impressively cogent; its components include “chauvinism based on loyalty to the existing Empire,...advocacy of the use of military force to settle issues of foreign policy,...glorification of the military and of war” (8); belief in “the racial superiority of white Europeans (and of the English over all other Europeans)”; and belief in the civilizing mission of the Empire (civilization being identified as especially English). As Brantlinger argues, the explosion of explicit imperialism (beyond support for its ideological constituents) coincides with the apex of the British Empire and a corresponding anxiety about its decline.

We can note a parallel with the proliferation of racist discourse across the arc of the century. As Vanessa Dickerson outlines in *Dark Victorians*, despite abolitionist impulses or stated antipathy toward American race prejudice, white Victorians encountering black Americans were rarely able to empathize fully with them or regard them as coequals (37). An illustrative example is travel-writer and actress Fanny Kemble, whose *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839* (1863) sought to bolster support for the North in the American Civil War. Kemble’s “moving journalistic testimonial to the meanness of slavery,” however, “does not preclude a racist assessment of the black body” (28). Among other observations of the black body noted by Dickerson, Kemble writes that “the nose and mouth, which are so peculiarly displeasing in their conformation in the face of a negro man or woman, being the features least developed in a baby’s countenance, do not at first present the ugliness which they assume as they become more marked” (Qtd. in Dickerson 28). Kemble demonstrates an attitude—“the new epistemological and political centrality of the human body as a social factor” (Mogilner 8)—key to the intellectual structure of racism. This was, in the words of historian Marina Mogilner, “a vision of the physical body as concealing some “true” essence of individuals and holding the key to deciphering their social, cultural and even civilizational background (8). To the extent that abolitionist and reform-minded Victorians expressed sympathy for enslaved black people, it was commonly a paternalistic sympathy that tended to reaffirm the superior position of the white writer. By late century this early kind of paternalistic sympathy had given way to overt racism as the perceived racial superiority of white people came to be increasingly important to the political logic of imperialism. Ideas about race, as Jennifer Brody writes, “hardened as the nineteenth century ‘progressed’” (132). For Brody, this is key to

the self-definition and construction of the “pure” English Gentleman—a white, masculine subject position—out of its “impure” other, which she argues is a “hybrid, black femininity” (12).

Elsewhere, Catherine Hall, centering her analysis on debates around citizenship and suffrage in the writing and negotiation of the 1867 Reform Act, observes that “the reconstitution of the nation in 1867 was in part focused on the reconfiguration of forms of belonging that were internal to that nation—which men might now vote—but it was also focused on the constitution of the nation’s ‘other’s’” (179). Increasingly bound together with ethnicity and nation, race emerges as a paramount issue in the self-identity of the British nation as it navigates its vast imperial network of affiliations and conflicts. In the parliamentary debates around the expansion of the franchise, Hall perceives that “the metropolis was constituted differently from the colonies, and the colonies themselves were clearly differentiated according to their populations with their distinctive imputed racial characteristics” (Hall 221). The result is a colonial system that can admit or look forward to anticipated self-rule for the white settler colonies of Canada and Australia, but insists as John Stuart Mill famously did that Indians “must be governed as subjects”:

Thus far of the dependencies whose population is in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative government; but there are others which have not attained that state, and which, if held at all, must be governed by the dominant country, or by persons delegated for that purpose by it. This mode of government is as legitimate as any other, if it is the one which in the existing state of civilization of the subject people most facilitates their transition to a higher stage of improvement. There are, as we have already seen, conditions of society in which a vigorous despotism is in itself the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilization. ... Under a native despotism, a good despot is a rare and transitory accident; but when the dominion they are under is that of a more civilized people, that people ought to be able to supply it constantly. The ruling country ought to be able to do for its subjects all that could be done by a succession of absolute monarchs, guaranteed by irresistible force against the precariousness of tenure attendant on barbarous despotisms, and qualified by their genius to anticipate all that experience has taught to the more advanced nation. Such is the ideal rule of a

free people over a barbarous or semi-barbarous one. (Mill *Considerations* Ch. XVIII)

The imperialist logic of race here legitimizes the exercise of power over India as being for the good of a people whose “national character” was inherently barbarous.¹²¹ In doing so, it also defines an almost explicit role for the British as the morally upright civilizing force—a simultaneous articulation of national, ethnic, and racial identity constructed in contrast to the non-white people of its colonial “dependency.”

Just as racist and imperialist ideology came to the fore in the latter part of the century, authors have detected a similar hardening in discourse around India and Indians specifically. The 1857 Sepoy Rebellion, just one year after Dutt’s birth, had profound impact on the British cultural imagination. Surveying white British writing about the Rebellion, Brantlinger demonstrates the way attitudes toward India dovetailed with both the growth of racist and imperialist discourse overall:

British writing about India before 1857 was also racist, but frequently admitted the possibility that Indians might be helped to progress in the scale of civilization. Evangelical or utilitarian reforms would convert Indians, more or less rapidly, from barbarism to western and specifically British ways. After the Mutiny, these hopeful though obviously ethnocentric possibilities are often denied. India is portrayed as mired in changeless patterns of superstition and violence which can be dominated but not necessarily altered for the better. (200)

Superstition, treachery, and savage cruelty mark the Rebellion in British accounts, whether novel or putative history. As Brantlinger notes, key moments and figures become a fixation: the “treachery” of Nana Sahib and the well in Cawnpore stuffed with the dismembered limbs of British women and children. In one telling excerpt from an 1881 novel for boys, G. A. Henty’s *In Times of Peril: A Tale of India*, the youthful protagonists hear of the massacre:

After being introduced to Major Renaud the boys went to the tents allotted to their corps, which were already pitched, and Major Warrener asked the officers, and as

¹²¹ “National character” is a phrase Mill uses elsewhere, when reporting on, for example, the greed of “the Oriental” (Ch. III)

many of the volunteers as his tent would hold, to listen to the account of the massacre of Cawnpore, which was now for the first time authentically told; for hitherto only native reports had come down from the city. Great was the indignation and fury with which the tale of black treachery and foul murder was heard; and when the story was told it had to be repeated to the officers of the other corps in camp. (Ch. XI)

“Authentically told” only by authoritative imperial sources, the massacre arouses fury over Nana Sahib’s “black treachery” (what other color?). Such fury, as Brantlinger notes, rises at times in these accounts to a genocidal zeal. In the context of popular writing about India that obsessed over “black treachery and foul murder,” I wish to note that Gosse’s introduction to Toru Dutt is considerably more sympathetic. Nevertheless, as I shall explore in detail later in this chapter, in foregrounding Dutt’s death and presenting her as an authentic posthumous voice of India, Gosse nevertheless engages with a pessimistic racial-cultural picture of India. That pessimism is characteristic of the post-rebellion period. A moribund India might have the potential to convalesce, not so a dead India.

Hardened attitudes about race, empire, and India reflect a society coming to grips with the meaning of holding and advancing an Empire that brought ever more affiliations between white British society and non-white Europeans. The web of linkages that bound Britain to her non-white colonies, especially India, raised the specter of racial or cultural contamination. These affiliations propagated along an imperial network that was as much metaphorical as literal. As Laura Otis demonstrates, the expansion of information technology and telecommunications in the nineteenth century made available the ‘network’ as a metaphor for understanding the world—a metaphor that conjoined body and machine as it extended the human sensorium (a nerve center) across continents and oceans. The imperial network transmitted telegraphic messages, news, letters, military orders, people, and ideas. As both Aaron Worth and Kate Thomas have written, it could sometimes be conceptualized as well as transmitting blood—

propagating ties of kinship and consanguinity between “Anglo-Saxon” Britain and her white settler-colonies (Worth 14; Thomas n.p.). An imperial network stretching out across the globe and uniting the blood of the white race was challenged, however, by the integration of the Empire’s non-white colonies, particularly when the network was understood as paramount to the work and success of Empire in places like India. Indeed, as Worth details in *Imperial Media*, the Mutinous Indian destroying telegraph lines was a key element in accounts of the Rebellion, right along with the treachery of Nana Sahib and the well at Cawnpore. The imperial network—post, railway, and above all telegraph—was figured as key to the English victory in the Rebellion, with accounts like Colonel Edward Vibart’s “How the Electric Telegraph Saved India” (Worth 18), well-rehearsed stories of heroic telegraph clerks (Worth 19), and news declarations that presented the construction of the Indian telegraph as a “consolidation of England’s power in the East” (“The Electric Telegraph” Qtd. in Worth 17).

Especially in India, the Imperial network was often understood to involve, prosthetically extend, and propagate through bodies. Worth describes the telegraphic network as a kind of “cybernetic subjectivity—a partnership of mind and wire.” This characterization resonates with Jason Rudy’s account of electrical science and technology integrating and extending the logic of the body in the “physiological poetics” of the mid-century. The telegraph, he observes, not only “facilitate[d] nearly instantaneous communication across vast distances, [but] the earliest telegraphic technologies also relied heavily on the human body’s role within the process of electric communication” (Rudy 61). The telegraph then, was understood by poets like Tennyson as not only extending the logic of the body and operating through that logic, but literally involving the bodies of telegraphers, materially “reading by sound” (Rudy 61) at its nodes.

In India, this cybernetic network was often presented in accounts of the rebellion in contrast with “native” communication systems, which were understood to be “disseminated via tongues, bodies, and (other conspicuously material signs)” (Worth 23) and invested with both a dangerous and befuddling speed and a frustrating intractability to interpretation. The paramount example of this is the Chapati Movement; so obsessed were colonial agents with the notion that the unleavened bread being distributed faster than the post, *Pay It Forward*-style, from village to village contained secret communications that the issue entered the parliamentary record as a form of “secret communication...dangerous to the government” (Disraeli Qtd. in Worth 24). The chapatis stood as mysterious material cyphers that carried information through means and power understandable only to the ‘native.’ When the “native” is then “integrated into the imperial information network” (Worth 29), this intractable materiality is carried over. Analyzing Rudyard Kipling’s depiction of Indian telegraphers throughout his work, Worth argues that even when transformed from the more common depiction of the mutinous “telegraph smashing Sepoy,” such Indian characters are still associated with the materiality—“the brute stuff”—of language, mastering the fragmented sounds of the telegraph and of English phonemes but not the semantic content of the language they transmit (Worth 29).

Although Worth’s account, which I have followed closely here at some length, focuses on the telegraph, I wish to observe that the imperial network encompassed information technologies beyond the telegraph—technologies that also engaged the body in similar terms. Indeed, in Kate Thomas’s already cited account it is the postal network that was imagined to extend a co-sanguinous network across the empire. Railway and post were perhaps the two most significant technologies or systems outside the telegraph in the imperial network in India. Notably, the same man, Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, was responsible for initiating the

development or modernization of all three of these network systems. Dalhousie had worked to centralize and standardize the post in India beginning in 1850, just a month after he commissioned an experiment with telegraphy (Das and Das 492). By 1854, a uniform postal rate had been established (Das and Das 495). The Governor-General evidently considered the establishment of a Postal network in India that would “approximate to the English system as closely as the different condition and circumstances of the two countries will allow” (Governor-General’s Minutes, Qtd. in Das and Das 492) to be as important as the development of railway and telegraphy. As the commission on postal reform that Dalhousie established wrote, the India post office would become “the unrestricted means of diffusing knowledge, extending commerce, and promoting in every way the social and intellectual improvement of the people” (Qtd. in Das and Das 493).

The Rebellion had made the body (and bodies) of the network’s various technologies a key to the symbolic drama of the war. In accounts of the Rebellion like G. O. Trevelyan’s popular history of the Siege of Cawnpore, titled just *Cawnpore*, the network integrates and even penetrates bodies as it’s transformed for military purpose. “Lines of rail and lines of wire” run “through the heart of every [Indian] province,” (22). This “running through” is an ambiguous turn that might equally apply to the arteries that channel blood to the heart or the knife that pierces it. The smashed telegraph wire fragments are turned by Indian rebels into ammunition in place of ball-cartridge: “a device whereby, over and above the effect of their fire, they got rid of an article the possession of which came under the chapter of capital offences” (268). When a request (by telegraph) for aid is sent to Lucknow “all the available post-carriages in the station” are sent “rolling along towards Cawnpore, crammed inside and out with English soldiers,” (80) quite literally imbricating the body of the soldiers with the postal system and transforming the

network into a direct imperial and military tool. Trevelyan, indeed, opens his narrative history with an account of the residents of Cawnpore that figures the “station” and its inhabitants squarely as nodes in the imperial network; in pride of place at the end of the list are the “lesser officials attached to the Post-office, the Public Works, and the Opium Departments; the Railway people; the merchants and shopkeepers,—Europeans some, others half-castes, or, as they would fain be called, Eurasians. There, too, (alas!) were the wives and little ones of the men of all these classes and grades, and in no slender proportion” (3-4). It is these people, rendered as members in the imperial system, whose literal dismemberment will, by the end of the narrative, figure as the singular crime against human and network alike.

Whether understood as a body, or as operating through and integrating the body, the imperial network brought white Britons into uncomfortable material and bodily affiliation with the Empire’s native subjects. Such affiliation threatened the clear lines of difference between the white metropole and the racialized “other” at the periphery that (in whole or part) constituted white English identity. As a consanguinary network, one that passes not just cultural knowledge but ties of blood, the Empire threatened a menacing hybridity. As Brody details in a reading of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, “the fate and status of the *English* race itself [was perceived as] in jeopardy of becoming monstrously hybrid, blackened, and feminized.” This fear derived not just from anxiety about maintaining the literal or symbolic borders of England (Brody 131), but also from a racist conception of hybridity as biologically destructive. From the perspective of eugenicists and other racial scientists, hybridization without proper control brought about sickly, infertile, or potentially monstrous creations (Brody 137-139). Moreover, to pair the English with more “primitive” races was to infuse man with a dangerous animalism.

The imperial network in India was itself a hybrid, an artificial importation of British subjectivity into a foreign space. To paraphrase Lord Dalhousie: it was an approximation of the English system adapted to Indian circumstances. The “partnership of mind and wire” that the telegraph represents for Worth “springs from the perception of the British presence in India as an artificial hybrid” (21). The imperial network is then both a sign of hybridity and its means of propagation. This propagation, as we have seen, threatened something that was constitutive of white English identity, even as it signaled the ascendancy of Britain as the world’s largest imperial power.

When Edmund Gosse then receives his “sallow packet” from India through the post, he receives something already understood as dangerously hybrid. Beyond the *Sheaf*’s apparently dramatic postage, the development of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* itself likely would have heightened Dutt’s appearance to Gosse as an embodied, hybrid, network phenomenon. As I previously observed, Gosse was collaborating with Clarisse Bader in France and Govin Dutt in Calcutta; putting together the volume appears to have at least partly, if not entirely, happened through post.¹²² His fixation on the material condition of the text—its misbehaving bibliographic codes—as well as its material circulation in the imperial network, engages a notion of that network operating as a body and through bodies. This notion was explicitly racialized in the imperial context. The almost magical circumstance of its arrival evokes the mysterious material power of native Indian communication systems. Gosse is like a colonial functionary, surprised and proud to have sussed out the meaning of the chapati; or like a Kipling protagonist begrudgingly admitting the competence of a native telegrapher. He describes his “surprise and almost rapture” to discover that the subaltern can speak (*Ancient Ballads* ix).

¹²² I have not located any surviving letters between Gosse and Dutt or Bader. Gosse biographer Evan Charteris’s call to Gosse’s correspondents for letters appears not to have gone wider than Great Britain.

He remarks, “that [the writing of *Sheaf*] should have been performed at all is so extraordinary that we forget to be surprised at its inequality” (xv). Like the figure of the native telegrapher that Worth identifies, Dutt’s supposedly imperfect reproduction of the English language, the “inequality” that does not surprise Gosse, marks her association with the materiality of language itself—its breath and embodied voice. As I will explore in the next section, Gosse’s introduction in fact goes on to foreground just this materiality as a strategy for making Dutt’s voice sound authentic in his own terms. He makes linguistic failure visible as evidence of the Indian sound of Dutt’s voice—making her heard to speak not as a hybrid authority but as an authentically Oriental native informant. If Dutt is writing within or through the imperial network, it simultaneously makes her hybridity articulable and foregrounds the materiality of her hybrid voice. Thus, harnessing a voice that, because it speaks through a racialized body, was already constructed as inherently more material, Gosse attempts to neutralize her hybridity. We are pointed away from her authoritative hybrid voice and toward her “frail and hectic body” (xii), which functions as an authentic representation of India and India alone. The death of that body might then preclude the possibility of contamination of category and identity that so haunted late-century imperialist thought.

An Ancient Voice

Dutt, Gosse writes, “was pure Hindu.”

Full of the typical qualities of her race and blood, and as the present volume shows us for the first time, preserving to the last her appreciation of the poetic side of her ancient religion, though faith itself in Vishnu and Siva had been cast aside with childish things and been replaced by a purer faith. Her mother fed her imagination with the old songs and legends of their people, stories which it was the last labour of her life to weave into English verse. (xi-xii)

Not even the fact of her Christianity seems to impact Dutt’s essentially Hindu character. The use of Hindu here to stand for national, racial, and religious identity is quite commonplace in the

language of British empire. The British version of Indian history, after all, saw India not as pluralistic but as an essentially Hindu society wracked and divided by repeated conquest, most recently by the Islamic Mughals. India *was* Hindu. Making Dutt into “a pure Hindu” is key to Gosse’s remediation of Dutt’s voice. Having substituted a voice through Dutt’s now posthumous text/body, situated in an ‘intransigently material’ imperial network, Gosse makes that voice authentic by manifesting a body that fits appropriately into the Empire’s version/vision of India. *This volume*, Gosse says—*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*—is the real, the authentic voice of Dutt; hear now that voice “chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear.” Where before Toru “attempt[ed] vainly, though heroically, to compete with European literature on its own ground,” now she had “turn[ed] to the legends of her own race and country” (xxiii). Now she was offering us a “strange...insight into the conscience of the Asiatic” (xxiv). From Gosse’s perspective this narrative works precisely because Toru was dead.

As Britain’s objectives in India changed, so too did its legitimation for the colonial presence. India would be cast along orientalist lines as a dying or dead culture, and Indians as a sickly or dying race. Racist ideology in India, as Susie Tharu, puts it “was designed to prove Indians (especially the urban upper castes) as weak and immoral, incapable of just government” (257). As we’ve seen, this view became only more hardened in the wake of the Rebellion. Indian authors, Tharu argues, were forced to deal with this image imposed on them by the West. In this context, Gosse’s fixation on Dutt’s “frail and hectic body succumb[ing] under so excessive a strain” (xiii) as her literary production, not only hints at her sickly hybridity, but perhaps even more forcefully it symbolically legitimates Indians as a “dying race,” and racializes Dutt herself. Writing a biographical sketch of Dutt in Gosse’s mode nine years later, one Mrs. E. F. Chapman

makes this connection even more explicit: “perhaps the modern educated native of India” she speculates, “is peculiarly exposed to the danger” of such a Keatsian death (112).

In order to die, of course, India had to be alive to begin with. And in the Orientalist imagination that had occurred thousands of years ago during the time of the culture that had produced the Vedas, a golden age of Hindu religion and philosophy (Brinks 37). Aligning Dutt with the “legends of her own race and country,” paratextually positions Dutt in relation to this former glory. Through the miracle of her unusual genius, and its mysterious, though materially flawed, transmission to us, we are told, we can access India’s Hindu past in a way that is safely contained, dead like the author and circumscribed like the text.

Why is Gosse so keen on aligning Dutt with a glorious Hindu past and a dying present? He is attempting to create a specifically Indian authenticity that would be legible for British readers. Consider Gosse’s advice to Sarojini Naidu:

I implored her to consider that from a young Indian of extreme sensibility, who had mastered not merely the language but the prosody of the West, what we wished to receive was not a réchauffé of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream it had a soul. (Qtd. in Stafford 45)

What British readers wanted, in other words, was to feel like they were getting not only a peek inside the zenana, but a true dispatch from a peculiarly deathless yet nevertheless dead Orient. Jane Stafford’s study of *Colonial Literature and the Native Author* documents the ways in which native authors, a category in which she includes Dutt, played ball with this sort of ‘dying race’ narrative as a condition of being legible.¹²³ She argues that the native author “concedes the

¹²³ I recognize that “native” may be a contentious term to apply to Dutt, owing to the complicated history of migration and colonization in India. Nevertheless, Stafford’s study offers an important perspective on English literature written by colonized subjects, and I retain the term in my summary of her argument.

elegiac frame” of such a narrative, but “resists in the placement of the native voice within the poem” (11). An elegy, transmitting the living voice of its own putatively dead subject, is beyond what such a frame can comfortably contain. I will return to the question of the degree to which Dutt uses her living voice to resist such an elegiac frame or a narrative of racial and cultural death, but for now it is important to note that such a frame narrative demands at once the inclusion and exclusion of voice for its authenticity. Posthumousness offers one option for threading such a delicate needle. The posthumous voice is heard to speak but does so from an already dead perspective. For a white readership in the metropole, a native voice is perceptible so long as it can be appropriately racialized, mythologized, and rendered posthumous, effectively marked. This form of authenticity is markedly different from an earlier kind of Orientalist authenticity that derived its effect from the rigor of its scholarship and the objective subject position of the Western observer. As Stafford puts it, “by the end of the century, the authenticity and consequent authority of a poetic work was no longer attested to by its scholarly footnotes and the author’s knowledge of the Sanskrit original but rather by the extent to which it was felt to convey the feel of the authentic” (Stafford 47). This mirrors the movement from Orientalist to Ethnographic modes of understanding the East. Both native and Orientalist authenticity contrast directly with what I have already characterized as the authority Dutt establishes on the basis of hybridity.

Gosse’s strategy for making Dutt’s voice perceptible as authentically native and posthumous rests on his account of how he hears (and thus how his readers ought to hear) Dutt’s voice. This begins in his description of the acoustics of Dutt’s verse. While Gosse’s praise for Dutt is at times effusive, he also takes pains to point out her deficiencies. What he hears is the material “inequality” of Dutt’s voice. In pointing out the flaws that failed to surprise him, Gosse

makes acoustic discord a sign of the Hindu authenticity of Toru's voice: "The English verse [of *A Sheaf*] is sometimes exquisite; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear" (xv-xvi). Awkward prosody here reinforces the authenticity of Dutt as a voice for an Orientalized India, "[conferring]...cultural value based on the book's foreignness," as Alison Chapman has written (596). The sound of the voice becomes the guarantor of authenticity. An 1879 notice of *Sheaf* in *The Saturday Review* makes this same point even more clearly than Gosse: "there were occasional mistakes in the English that only served to make the merits of the writing more conspicuous by proving that the work was genuine" ("A Hindoo Poetess" 242). Obviously, this sort of authenticity is not quite the same as audio fidelity, but it required the same practiced strategies of listening for material signs of mediation. Just so does Gosse attune the reader's ear for syllables out of measure, priming us to listen for the material sign as a proof of Dutt's voice. We are back to Browning's corporeal language, the hiss of the PA system. But for the marked voice of Toru Dutt, it is heard beyond her control, read lyrically as producing the reality of her voice rather than as an effect of that voice.

Gosse displays in this moment a curious linguistic slippage as he highlights Dutt's prosodic errors, one that effectively revises Dutt's paratexts into the service of this vocal authenticity. He continues: "the notes are no less curious, and to a stranger no less bewildering. Nothing could be more naïve than the writer's ignorance at some points, or more startling than her learning at others" (xvi). To what does the word "notes" refer? Following the previous sentence about Dutt's discordant music, is Gosse speaking metaphorically about musical notes played in a strange foreign key or does he mean the textual notes of "Sheaf?" While this pun may be *unintentional* on Gosse's part, I do think it is *accidental*. Throughout this paragraph Gosse

characterizes Dutt's paratext largely in light of its errors, allowing her "profundity of research" but highlighting that "she thought that Alexander Smith was still alive, and she was curiously vague about the career of Saint Beuve" (xvi-xvii). That this is "hardly worth recording," does not stop Gosse from doing precisely so (xvi). No point of praise is unmet with a mournful aside that it is marred by the "ignorance," "inexperience," and "inequality" Dutt might have surmounted if she had only lived (xv). These errors—products, in Gosse's view, of her "isolation"—become signifiers of Dutt's "curious" and "bewildering" Hindu voice.

Elsewhere, Gosse's highest praise is for Dutt's ballads based on Hindu texts. In these he hears again Dutt "chanting to herself those songs of her mother's race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure" (xxiv).¹²⁴ These "breathe a Vedic solemnity"—a metaphor that calls to mind, perhaps, Toru's own unbreathing body—and are free from "that littleness and frivolity which seem...to be the bane of modern India" (xxiv). Free from the bane of the *modern* India, Dutt can channel the ancient. Dutt's voice and her poetry is still breathing only to the extent that it connects to a glorious racial past that reveals something perceived as authentic about Dutt herself, which is nothing more than her capacity to stand for India as a whole, from the perspective of white imperial readers. While Dutt certainly engages with the Ancient Vedic past in *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, the relationship she constructs is more complex than Gosse allows for.¹²⁵ Gosse make's Dutt's voice sound from that ancient posthumous past where she, as we will see, was keener to reinterpret it. Dutt's 'impure' hybrid voice is substituted for a purely "Hindu" voice—"a genuine Hindoo product," as he earlier described "Sheaf" in *The Examiner*

¹²⁴ Gosse's image of Dutt weeping is from her own account to Clarisse Bader of listening to her mother's recitations, though the chanting is his own invention. On the meaning of this moment in Dutt's own terms see Brinks (41).

¹²⁵ See Lootens, "Locations and Dislocations of Toru Dutt" (88-89) and Brinks, *Anglophone Indian Women Writers, 1870-1920* (35-42). Brinks argues that Dutt's translations offer a counter-narrative for a modern India that "undercuts the authority of Western Orientalists, as instructors and interpreters of Hindu culture" (47).

(967). Gosse makes speak a voice that sounds like, but is not, Toru Dutt. This voice speaks from her text, made authentic by the racialization of a body rendered manipulable in death. This both acts through and against Dutt's hybridity, confirming its sickly nature while subsuming it into an authentic native identity. This voice is a simulative production of the text, a lyric remediation of Dutt's voice. By making Dutt stand for Vedic India, Gosse causes her to be read as both the subject and object of the nine narrative translations that lead *Ancient Ballads*, collapsing them with the lyric miscellaneous poems. She becomes less narrator than a lyric speaker. This is not to say that the narrative poems become generically lyric in any cognizable sense, but that Gosse guides their lyrical reading. Dutt's subjective voice emerges as an abstraction generated by the text. This was a powerful manipulation of Dutt's voice, one which, as I survey in the following section, was largely unchallenged in English-language publications for the next fifty years.

Afterwords

For a preface to an edition of an author's work, the afterlife of Gosse's memoir has been staggering. I have not yet found any edition of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* that does not feature it. In contrast, readers might perfectly have read the memoir (perhaps fittingly) without any Toru Dutt at all. It appears without Dutt in Gosse's *Critical Kit-Kats*, published in London and New York and in print from 1896 until at least 1913. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* itself went through four editions from Kegan, Paul Trench & Co., with a fifth and, as far as I can determine, final edition printed by William Brendon & Son Ltd. at the Mayflower Press of Plymouth (England) in 1927.¹²⁶ In *Critical Kit-Kats* Gosse had had the foresight to make a consequential parenthetical addition to his first sentence, thus: "If Toru Dutt were alive, she would still (*in 1882*) be younger than any recognized European writer..." (199 my

¹²⁶ Kegan, Paul Trench & Co. had likely sold off the copyright, along with the stereotype plates.

emphasis). No edition of *Ballads and Legends* follows this change. Readers opening the volume into the thirties would find Dutt's life hanging on that conditional without qualification. Dutt was trapped in a kind of half-life—dead, posthumous, yet still perpetually young—even as she was entering what would have been her eighties.

Even in texts beyond Gosse's control, his frame seems too persuasive to have been ignored.¹²⁷ The memoir commonly appeared in other volumes as a general introduction to Dutt's verse. An American Orientalist anthology from 1900, *Hindu Literature* (printed, I must note, by "The Colonial Press"), likewise offers no qualification for Gosse's opening sentence. Gosse's posthumous view of Dutt is here reinforced by her placement as the only contemporary author among appropriately Orientalist translations from the *Hitopadesha*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana*, and *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. Tellingly, editor Epiphanius Wilson saw fit to include not just Dutt's treatment of ancient subjects but the entirety of the miscellaneous poems. It seems clear that Gosse's paratext had successfully made an ancient Indian voice speak even through Dutt's explicitly lyric poetry.

When authors or editors did not see fit to reprint Gosse's memoir, they were still happy to reproduce in their own material the frame he provided. American James Parton's vexed quasi-feminist 1883 enterprise *Eminent Women: A Series of Sketches* (in later editions the supertitle becomes *Daughters of Genius*), freely cribs from Gosse to the point of plagiarism. The scene of bibliographic encounter is reproduced largely verbatim.

¹²⁷ My reading here differs from Subhendu Mund, who reviews some of the same materials I do in this section. Mund sees a Western embrace of Dutt as a British poet, particularly in the admittedly startling inclusion of Dutt in Edmund Clarence Stedman's *A Victorian Anthology, 1837-1895* where she is placed among "Recent Poets of Great Britain." Mund is correct to observe Dutt's partial-naturalization as a British poet, which participated in the same kind of lyric abstraction of Dutt's text I have been describing here. What Mund does not closely evaluate is the degree to which Gosse's original framing makes Dutt seem wonderful because she is able to overcome her unfortunate Indianness (productive of awkward prosody) to participate in English literature. Her presence on the British literary market at all was thus signed with constant reference to her Indianness, which authorizes her readability as British literature by a kind of negation.

A similar production but by an Englishwoman living in India, Mrs. E. F. Chapman's 1891 *Sketches of some Distinguished Indian Women* likewise retells the scene of Gosse and the package. I strongly suspect the author was Georgiana Chapman née Bayley. This would make her wife to Gen. Sir Edward Francis Chapman, an army officer who, if his Wikipedia page is to be believed, so distinguished himself in organizing a system of military-approved venereal-disease-free "native brothels" as Quartermaster-General for India, that he quickly rose to become Director of Military Intelligence.¹²⁸ Her father was civil servant and part-time Orientalist, Edward Clive Bayley, whom the Dictionary of National Biography termed "a true friend of the natives." As previously noted, Mrs. Chapman speculates that literary genius might be peculiarly destructive to Indian physiology. "The danger, no doubt, is increased for those who go to England or America, and the damp cold of these countries has cost us more than one life that seemed destined to play a noble part in the work of regenerating Indian society" (112).¹²⁹ Only the moribund Indian constitution, it seems, inhibits the work of revitalizing a degenerate Indian culture from within. Chapman describes the second edition of *Sheaf* (published in London 1880) as having "good paper, printing, and binding"; "it formed a handsome volume" (105) which was enhanced by its paratexts: a frontispiece photograph of Toru and Aru and biography written by Govin that, as with Amy Levy, put the sisters in the text. "But to many of Toru Dutt's admirers, the little insignificant orange pamphlet has a greater charm" (106). It is doubtful that Chapman ever encountered an unbound edition of *A Sheaf*; born in India and still residing there by the time of Dutt's death, if she encountered the first edition it certainly would have had a cloth cover, as Dutt intended it. It seems rather, that that "insignificant orange pamphlet" exists for Chapman only in Gosse's imagination. And thus Chapman reads the London edition entirely in light of

¹²⁸ One can practically hear the strains of "Rule, Britannia!"

¹²⁹ In contrast, Dutt's own doctor had advised her that a return to England might *improve* her health.

Gosse's effort to make the original volume fail to speak. *A Sheaf* as Gosse found it is charming, perhaps, in its quaint silence—a silence that serves to highlight the new paratextual framing of Dutt wherein she appears to speak through and for her race.

Not until 1921 did English readers receive an account of Dutt's work that differs markedly from Gosse in the form of Harihar Das's *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* (Oxford University Press). While his biography includes direct quotation from Gosse, he declines to retell the scene at the office of *The Examiner*. Nevertheless, his book can no more escape colonial paratextual framing than could Dutt. Das's own paratextual *Author's Preface* is superseded by a *Foreword* from H.A.L. Fisher, then serving as an MP in the newly created seat for the Combined English Universities. Fisher's involvement was, no doubt, meant to lend a respectable name to a volume about a relatively obscure colonial poet by an even more obscure colonial author. Fisher's actual involvement with India, however, was minimal. His wife, Lettice Fisher was daughter of Sir Courtney Ilbert who had worked in India as a lawyer. And Fisher himself served on the Islington commission from 1912-1917, which had sought to clarify the still contentious issue of promotion for native Indians in the colonial civil service (Ryan). It is an interesting coincidence that this same issue had been a major factor in Govin's decision to bring his family to Britain in the first place. Fisher's forward begins much as Gosse's did: "The subject of this volume is an Indian girl who, dying at the age of twenty-one..." And following Gosse, her acoustic errors mark her voice as authentically Indian: "Her ear, indeed, sometimes betrayed her. On points of diction she was not always beyond reproach. Here and there...we come across a word, a phrase, a discord, which remind us that the poet was not of our race or speech" (vii). This is the same signifying discord that Gosse made stand for Dutt's sickly authentically native (or natively authentic?) body forty years prior. His "fragile exotic blossom of song" had virtually

no existence other than pressed between the pages of Gosse's introduction. She lay there like a pressed flower preserved, but dead. Gosse had effectively simulated an authentic voice through the text for an author whose marked voice lacked the self-present authority to speak itself.

In Translation

In closing, I want to close the book on the posthumous Dutt, and look, if only briefly, at Dutt as she lives in scholarship today. Dutt remains a productively challenging figure because of what has been characterized as her hybridity (Chapman), her occupation of a "hyphenated space" (Mukherjee 111) or a "space of transimperial overlaps" (Lootens "Abolition Time" 273)¹³⁰ If there is a consensus it is that Dutt challenges our conception of the economy between metropole and colony, west and non-west, center and periphery. Gibson emphasizes Dutt's comfort operating in a confusing space of competing religious and ideological claims, triangulated through multiple nations and languages. For Sharma, Dutt's "in-between position" enabled resistance to both colonial and Indian patriarchy; "Toru's writings dislodge fixed binaries of sedimented thought and force us into a place where we may consider the productive politics of... [an] in-between position" (Sharma 108). And Chapman has Dutt as an essentially cosmopolitan figure who places herself at the "centre of British Victorian poetry" (605) transformatively exposing the gaps, ambiguities and contradictions of a new hybrid space she seeks to occupy and define.

Dutt's hybridity emerges in part through translation. In many respects, Dutt's approach to translation in *Ancient Ballads* resembles William Morris's approach to retelling. Morris, I argued, did not copy voices of the past but creatively simulated them in an essentially forward

¹³⁰ Lootens uses "transimperial" after Sukanya Bannerjee; the term signals an "analytical framework that places Britain in constant tension and connection with its imperial constituencies (particularly those marked as the "non-West") by continually questioning the discrete solidities of the (British) nation and placing it in an inexhaustible relation of contiguity and interconstitutiveness with the empire 'out there.'" (Bannerjee 925).

looking practice. Dutt's creative retellings were similarly forward-looking, positioned against the regressive orientalist account of India Gosse writes her into. Rather than reproducing the past, Dutt's *Ancient Ballads* make creative use of the material to shape a modern India.

The very fact of the creative nature of Dutt's translations has led to varied characterizations of whether the nine *Ancient Ballads and Legends* are in fact translations.

Meenakshi Mukherjee presents this account of Dutt's career:

She began to write, first hesitantly, translating French poems into English—an attempt that completely erased the dimensions of her local and Bengali existence¹³¹—and then gradually more confidently, her own personal lyrics, followed by the re-telling of stories and songs she had heard in her mother tongue. (Mukherjee 90)

In this story, Dutt moves gradually towards authenticity. From the inauthentic “double-ventriloquism” of French-English that was never quite her own voice or her own language, to lyric poetry (understood Romantically as emanating from an authentic core of the self), and finally to subject matter that draws from a deep ethnic past more authentic even perhaps than Toru's inner self by virtue of prefiguring that self. While I disagree with Mukherjee's account (note, for instance that Dutt continued work on an expanded edition of *Sheaf* simultaneous with the personal lyrics and Indian tales), her view of Dutt as evincing not an Indian nationalism, but a specifically Bengali localism is a valuable insight.¹³² Key to this argument, as the above quoted passage illustrates, is refuting the notion that the nine poems on Indian and Hindu subjects are direct translations; they are instead re-tellings of stories and songs she had heard in her mother tongue. (Mukherjee 90) She observes that what she counts as ten months of study in Sanskrit was

¹³¹ Never mind it was begun during her local existence in Britain.

¹³² It is also worth observing, as Lootens does from Dutt's letters to Martin, that at least some of the work that became *Ancient Ballads* was conceived effectively as a sheaf gleaned from Sanskrit fields. That Dutt thought of her Sanskrit translations as a continuation of the project of her French translations undercuts the effort to position the turn to Sanskrit as a movement away from French and English. See Lootens “Dislocations” pp. 85, 94 n. 26 and Das p. 203.

too short for Toru to have based the works on the original texts in question. Instead, she argues, “these stories were part of the Bengali ethos in which Toru breathed, her westernized upbringing notwithstanding. Oral re-telling by her mother would easily have made these stories an inextricable part of her early childhood memories.” (102) Mukherjee’s account makes some uncomfortable parallels with Gosse, who, while acknowledging that Dutt had studied Sanskrit, wrote that “[her] mother fed her imagination with the old songs and legends of their people, stories which it was the last labour of her life to weave into English verse” (xii). Gosse describes them together with the miscellaneous poems as “original English poems” (xxii), yet he acknowledges that two are stories from the Vishnu Purana.

Sunanda P. Chavan has made the most systematic account of the poems as translation. She identifies three distinct modes of translation among the ballads and Dutt’s career overall. The poems of *A Sheaf*, “Dhruva” and “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” are “faithful” translations; “Lakshman,” “Sindhu,” “Buttoo,” “Pahlad,” and “Savitri” are acts of “transcreation”; and “Jogadhya Uma” and “Sita” are original poems (16). Chavan positions this as a progression across Dutt’s career. There’s some reason to be skeptical of this narrative, but Chavan demonstrates, what I, lacking knowledge of Sanskrit, cannot, that many of the poems in *Ancient Ballads* do have direct textual sources. “Transcreation” is moreover a valuable lens for considering the way Dutt alters and manipulates the original tales.

For Ellen Brinks, Dutt’s translations “are best understood as *versions* of legends” (39). If the orientalist impulse had been to reduce India to its ancient past, Dutt transforms that past by re-authoring it; as Brinks argues “she asks her readers to see the [Vedic] ‘tradition’ as a text that is not only self-contradictory but constantly reassessed by its readers” (42). Such a reading emerges from, for instance, Dutt’s emphasis in “Savitri” on the figure’s freedom, cleverness, and

tenacity instead of her wifely fidelity. Savitri, who is permitted to choose her own husband, “wandered where she pleased / In boyish freedom. Happy time!” (Dutt 3). According to Susie Tharu, this demonstrates a yearning for freedom, albeit one constrained by a Victorian sensibility that has domesticated her imagination (260). For Alpana Sharma the poem transforms “the archetypal self-sacrificing wife” into a “heroic” figure (106), and it was not produced from the site of “‘native’ authenticity.” Instead, the poem attests to Toru’s subject position, her in-betweenness, her hybridity. Dutt’s version of the tale makes legible its resistance to both British colonial and Indian-patriarchal power.

If a poem like “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” has a concrete textual basis, describing it as a faithful translation seems incorrect when it, as Mukherjee puts it, “carries out a running critique of conventional scriptural wisdom” (107). Indeed, her subversiveness in such a mode of translation testifies to what G.J.V. Prasad calls “her individual modern voice” (97). In “The Royal Ascetic” Dutt transforms a tale from the Vishnu Purana. An ascetic prince dwelling alone in the wilderness, Bharata is distracted from his path by his love for a deer. In the Vishnu Purana it is clear that the prince’s error is his failure to recognize the deer as no more significant than anything else. Dutt recasts the story into a Christian mode, emphasizing that his love for the deer was in fact a virtue. Notably, Dutt marks this difference from the text as she found it:

Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of old
By Brahman sage; but we, who happier, live
Under the holiest dispensation, know
That God is Love, and not to be adored
By a devotion born of stoic pride,
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,
But with a love, in character akin
To His unselfish, all-including love.
And therefore little can we sympathize
With what the Brahman sage would fain imply

As the concluding moral of his tale,
That for the hermit-king it was a sin
To love his nursling. What! A sin to love!
A sin to pity! Rather should we deem
Whatever Brahmans wise, or monks may hold,
That he had sinned in *casting off* all love
By his retirement to the forest-shades;
For that was to abandon duties high,
And, like a recreant soldier, leave the post
Where God had placed him as a sentinel. (69-70)

Jane Stafford offers a particularly insightful characterization of this moment, calling the poem “a novel form of translation, where the translator does not just change the fundamental direction of the original, but acknowledges and justifies her changes within the text” (42). “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” is not quite an assertion of sentimental Christian values over Hindu religious ‘folly.’ Rather Dutt has put herself to the project of locating Christian truth in a non-Christian text in a way that values the Puranas as a potential repository for such knowledge. Even while affirming a Christian worldview, there is something about this moment that disturbs the currents of knowledge in the colonial relationship—not reversing their flow exactly, but making it difficult to determine to and from whom knowledge is being transmitted. Who is talking to whom exactly? The imperial network in all its hybrid glory—rather than its individual nodes at the metropole or the colonial periphery—becomes the center of such an exchange. In this hybrid locus, Dutt articulates a hybrid form of translation, perceptible as multiply-voiced. Gosse may hear a pure, posthumous Hindu voice, but Dutt’s contemporaries in Calcutta would hear something altogether different. Moreover, in this moment Dutt places herself, in her capacity to re-tell beyond the textual source, at the center of this distinctly modern reinterpretation of the past. As both Brinks and Lootens similarly observe, “Jogadhya Uma” whose source is not textual, but oral, foregrounds something similar:

Years, centuries, have passed away,
 And still before the temple shrine
 Descendants of the pedlar pay
 Shell bracelets of the old design
 As annual tribute. Much they own
 In lands and gold,—but they confess
 From that eventful day alone
 Dawned on their industry,—success.
 Absurd may be the tale I tell,
 Ill-suited to the marching times,
 I loved the lips from which it fell,
 So let it stand among my rhymes. (63-4)

“Jogadhya Uma” recounts the folk origin for the Bengali custom of selling shell bracelets. Dutt in this moment openly questions the relevance of the ancient past from which this custom emerges. But she reinscribes its importance in personal dimensions. Re-telling here is not about recovering the long Vedic history of India but about forging social and personal connections with the present and living people who mediate that cultural history, just as Dutt in turn sought to translate and remediate India’s past in her own terms.

Gosse’s lyrical reading of Dutt is insidious because it makes this personal dimension of Dutt’s translations vanish in place of a simulation of the personal through the simulation of Dutt’s voice. Gosse collapses the space between personal and national as well as present and past, making one stand for the other. By deemphasizing the value of Dutt’s more explicitly translational prior work in *Sheaf*, he opens up space for a lyrical reading of Dutt’s narrative poems where she is heard “chanting to herself,” rather than speaking out to multiple audiences in India and Europe. By coincidence or by design, the lyric poems that close *Ancient Ballads* serve to reinforce this lyric reading of Dutt by their inclusion. The trick is, as we’ve seen, Gosse inscribes the lyric voice he has created as an embodied, racialized voice of the ancient past. She is “chanting to herself,” after all, “those songs of her mother's race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure” [xxiv]. The essential self that lyric discloses here becomes racial essence.

Dutt's translations, contra Gosse, are not clearly original, originally Hindu, or purely translation; they are themselves a hybrid form, one which Dutt engages as a site of authority. As hybrid translations these poems register the power of the voice—of words as they fall from “the lips” and stand anew among rhymes on the page. For Dutt, that page is capable of mediating the voice across an expansive transimperial network. Both authors are engaged in a contestation of the meaning of voice itself, especially the authenticity and authority of the voice as it moves along embodied and hybrid networks of material transmission.

Gosse brought a kind of discursive racial violence to bear on Dutt's text. His paratext reenacted her creation in death for fifty years or more. But this was ironically possible precisely because of Dutt's hybrid authority. She writes against Gosse's discourse, and through it. Her voice emerges (and re-emerges today) through the same imperial network that would lay out her body as a material node in the administration of empire—another dead native. Ironically then, Dutt's apparent tractability to Gosse's manipulations, the hybridity of her voice as it engages the intellectual life of three countries and five languages, marks the power of an author who understands how voice moves and sounds differently for the racialized colonial subject.

Gosse's introduction is the kind of banally racist thing that modern white readers might grimace through or giggle at, before swiftly moving to the text. Its racism is self-evident, as racism often is. That does not mean it does not need to be addressed or examined. Its self-evidence is not a stopping point. Understanding how paratextual and critical framing like Gosse's circumscribed marginalized authors and made their voices sound different is key to moving beyond such a frame. As we continue to learn and study the work of poets like Dutt, we must revise such constructed legacies as Gosse's to understand the conditions in which authors of color have been received as Victorians and within Victorian studies.

For all marked authors, whether marked by gender, race, sexuality, class, or ability, the relationship between text, body, and voice in all its myriad implications is infinitely more complex than for unmarked authors. This is only the beginning of a wider story that needs telling of how marked authors relate to textuality. While this study has considered race and gender in particular, the capacity of sexuality, class, and ability in particular merit further examination for their capacity to mark the printed poetic voice. William Morris's marked texts problematized the very ability of text to mediate voice. Robert Browning's simulated voices enabled him to disappear into mediation itself. In contrast, for Amy Levy and Toru Dutt the voice's mediation was considerably more fraught. They could not so easily let their texts speak for themselves—not for want of the ability to speak, but for the ability to be heard; their marked voices were subject to textual interventions that ensured that they were heard differently. The voice's material mediation in the nineteenth century became the guarantee of a kind of lyric immediacy that was really an abstract textual simulation of voice. As the voice disappeared into the text, the wire, the network, or the airwaves, the synthetic voice emerged as a hypermediated possibility that could stand in place of a real voice that seemed to be missing.

Today, we confront the challenge of exactly what role synthetic voices will have in our economic, social, and creative lives. In the age of AI, the sound of the voice is no longer a unique quality. It can be produced, not just reproduced by the machine. But the history of that technology stretches much further into the past than its disruptive newness makes it seem. The history of synthetic voice and print demonstrates that we have long been negotiating the reality and immediacy of voices. Neural Text-to-Speech and Large Language Models are just the latest voice media, and we will develop new mediation practices to stabilize and recover the present reality of our voices, as long as they remain significant to how we understand ourselves and our

relation to technology. Indeed, we may be approaching an era of literary innovation prompted as much against synthetic voice as by it.

Works Cited

- “A Hindoo Poetess.” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, vol. 48, no. 1243, Aug. 1879, pp. 241–42.
- “Advertisement.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 3334, Sept. 1891, pp. 373–373.
- Alfano, Veronica. “Technologies of Forgetting: Phonographs, Lyric Voice, and Rossetti’s Woodspurge.” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2017, pp. 127–61.
- . *The Lyric in Victorian Memory: Poetic Remembering and Forgetting from Tennyson to Housman*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Anderson, Lessley. “Machine Language: How Siri Found Its Voice.” *The Verge*, 17 Sept. 2013, <https://www.theverge.com/2013/9/17/4596374/machine-language-how-siri-found-its-voice>.
- Banerjee, Sukanya. “Transimperial.” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 46, no. 3–4, ed 2018, pp. 925–28. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150318001195>.
- Bassett, Troy J. “T. Fisher Unwin’s Pseudonym Library: Literary Marketing and Authorial Identity.” *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2004 2004, pp. 143–60.
- Bax, Ernest Belfort, editor. “Marriage and Heredity.” *Time*, Mar. 1890, pp. 332–36.
- Benjamin, Walter, et al. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Bernstein, Susan David. “Recycling Poetics: Amy Levy’s London Plane Trees.” *Nineteenth Century Studies*, vol. 24, 2010, pp. 101–22.
- Besant, Walter Sir, and James Rice. *With Harp and Crown*. London : Tinsley Bros., 1875. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/withharpcrownnov02besa>.
- Bethea, Charles. “The Terrifying A.I. Scam That Uses Your Loved One’s Voice.” *The New Yorker*, 7 Mar. 2024. [www.newyorker.com, https://www.newyorker.com/science/annals-of-artificial-intelligence/the-terrifying-ai-scam-that-uses-your-loved-ones-voice](https://www.newyorker.com/science/annals-of-artificial-intelligence/the-terrifying-ai-scam-that-uses-your-loved-ones-voice).

Bolter, J. David, and Richard A. Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 1999.

Boos, Florence S. "A Critique of the Empty Page: Morris's 'Lesser Arts' at the Kelmscott Press."

William Morris and the Art of Everyday :Ife, edited by Wendy Parkins, Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2010.

Boos, Florence Saunders. *History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris, 1855-1870*.

The Ohio State University Press, 2015.

---. *The Design of William Morris' The Earthly Paradise*. Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

Brehm, Brett. *Kaleidophonic Modernity: Transatlantic Sound, Technology, and Literature*. First edition, Fordham University Press, 2023.

Brinks, Ellen. *Anglophone Indian Women Writers, 1870–1920*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

ProQuest Ebook Central,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umdcpl/detail.action?docID=1094122>.

Bristow, Joseph. "'All Out of Tune in This World's Instrument': The 'Minor' Poetry of Amy Levy."

Journal of Victorian Culture, vol. 4, no. 1, 1999, pp. 76–103.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13555509909505980>.

Brody, Jennifer DeVere. *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*. Duke University Press, 1998.

Brophy, Gregory. "Master Browning Mastered (So to Speak)." *Victorian Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2020, pp. 13–18. <https://doi.org/10.1353/vcr.2020.0009>.

Browning, Robert, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1845-1846*. Floating Press, 2009.

- Browning, Robert. "Mr. Sludge 'the Medium.'" *The Complete Works of Robert Browning : With Variant Readings & Annotations*, edited by John C. Berkey, et al. Volume VI, Ohio University Press, 1996.
- Browning, Robert. *The Ring and the Book. The Complete Works of Robert Browning : With Variant Readings & Annotations*, edited by John C. Berkey, et al. Volume VII, Ohio University Press, 1985.
- C, A. T. Q. "A Literary Causerie." *The Speaker : The Liberal Review*, vol. 4, Oct. 1891, pp. 413–14.
- Cave, Stephen, and Kanta Dihal. "The Whiteness of AI." *Philosophy & Technology*, vol. 33, no. 4, Dec. 2020, pp. 685–703. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-020-00415-6>.
- Chambers, William, editor. "Singing and Talking by Telegraph." *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, Jan. 1854- Nov. 1897, no. 714, Sept. 1877, pp. 554–56.
- Chapman, Alison. "Internationalising the Sonnet: Toru Dutt's 'Sonnet–Baugmaree.'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 42, no. 3, Sept. 2014, pp. 595–608. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150314000163>.
- Chapman, E. F. *Sketches Of Some Distinguished Indian Women*. 1891. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.94600>.
- Chavan, Sunanda P. *The Fair Voice: A Study of Indian Women Poets in English*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1984. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/fairvoicestudyof0000unse>.
- Clayton, Jay. *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Codell, Julie F. "T. Fisher Unwin." *100362*, edited by Patricia Anderson and Jonathan Rose, Thomson Gale; Gale Cengage; 7Letras, 1991, pp. 304–11.

- Cohen, William A. *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Colligan, Colette, and Margaret Linley. *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*. Ashgate, 2011.
- Condliffe, Jamie. "Face of a Robot, Voice of an Angel?" *MIT Technology Review*, 9 Sept. 2016, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2016/09/09/157635/face-of-a-robot-voice-of-an-angel/>.
- Connor, Steven. *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cotton, James Sutherland, editor. "Book Review." *The Academy, 1869-1902, 0269-333X*, vol. 26, no. 635, July 1884, pp. 6–6.
- Cowan, Yuri. "Everyday Material Culture in the Medieval Tales of The Earthly Paradise." *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life*, edited by Wendy Parkins, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.
- Craig, Carys, and Ian Kerr. "The Death of the AI Author." *Ottawa Law Review*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2021 2020, pp. 31–86.
- Cramer, Maurice Browning. "Browning's Literary Reputation at Oxford 1855–1859." *PMLA*, vol. 57, no. 1, Mar. 1942, pp. 232–40. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.2307/458817>.
- . "What Browning's Literary Reputation Owed to the Pre-Raphaelites 1847-1856." *ELH*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1941, pp. 305–21. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871584>.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Theory of the Lyric*. First Harvard University Press paperback edition., Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Darwin, Erasmus. *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society*. John W. Butler, and Bonsal & Niles, 1804, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t0vq47h0x>. HathiTrust.
- Das, Harihar, editor. *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921.

- Das, M. N., and M. M. Das. "Dalhousie and the Reform of the Postal System." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 21, 1958, pp. 488–95.
- Dasgupta, Sanjukta. "Politics of Language and Post-Independence Indian English Poetry." *Indian Literature*, vol. 42, no. 5 (187), 1998, pp. 207–17.
- Dickerson, Vanessa D. *Dark Victorians*. University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Doucet, Emily Rose. "*Us Poor Singers*": *Victorians and The Earthly Paradise : Audience, Community, and Storytelling in William Morris' First Success*. 2014. University of Edinburgh.
- Drucker, Johanna. *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923*. The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Dudley, Homer. "The Carrier Nature of Speech." *The Bell System Technical Journal*, vol. XIX, no. Number 4, Oct. 1940, pp. 495–515.
- Dunlap, Joseph R. *The Book the Never Was*. Oriole Editions, 1971.
- Dunstan, Angela. "'The Newest Culte': Victorian Poetry and the Literary Societies of the 1880s." *Nineteenth-Century literature in transition: the 1880s*, edited by Penny Fielding and Andrew Taylor, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316855546>.
- Dutt, Toru. *A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields*. 1876. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.41976>.
- . *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1882.
- Eidsheim, Nina Sun. *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Eliot, Simon, and Andrew Nash. "Mass Markets: Literature." *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by David McKitterick, 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 416–42. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521866248.013>.

- Faulkner, Peter. "Morris and Pre-Raphaelitism." *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2012 Summer 2012, pp. 40–62.
- Feaster, Patrick. "Phonography." *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 139–50.
- Furnivall, FJ. "Foretalk." *Papers of the Browning Society*, vol. 1, 1881-84 1966.
- G, E. W. "A Book of Verse from India." *Examiner*, edited by Leigh Hunt, no. 3578, Aug. 1876, pp. 966–67.
- Galvan, Jill Nicole. *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919*. Cornell University Press, 2010.
- George Alfred Henty. *In Times of Peril: A Tale of India*. E.P. Dutton & Co., 1881. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/intimesperilata00hentgoog>.
- Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913: A Critical Anthology*. Ohio University Press, 2011.
- . "INTRODUCTION: ENGLISH IN INDIA, INDIA IN ENGLAND." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2014, pp. 325–33.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. MIT Press, 2008.
- . *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*. Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Gosse, Edmund. *Critical Kit-Kats*. C. Scribner's Sons, 1914. *HathiTrust*, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008616020>.
- Gribben, Alan. "'A Splendor of Stars & Suns': Twain as a Reader of Browning's Poems." *Browning Institute Studies*, vol. 6, 1978, pp. 87–103.

- . “‘It Is Unsatisfactory to Read to One’s Self’: Mark Twain’s Informal Readings.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Feb. 1976. world, www.tandfonline.com, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637609383317>.
- Griffiths, Eric. *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*. Second, Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Grusin, Richard. “Radical Mediation.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2015, pp. 124–48. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/682998>.
- Guillory, John. “Genesis of the Media Concept.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 2, Jan. 2010, pp. 321–62. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/648528>.
- Guimarães, Paula. “Retrieving Fin-de-Siècle Women Poets: The Transformative Myths, Fragments and Voices of Webster, Blind and Levy.” *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2–3, 2017, pp. 225–49. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2017.0237>.
- Hall, Catherine, et al. *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000.
- Hankins, Thomas L., and Robert J. Silverman. *Instruments and the Imagination*. Princeton University Press, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400864119>.
- Hanson, Ingrid. “‘Bring Me That Kiss’: Incarnation and Truth in William Morris’s The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems†.” *English: Journal of the English Association*, vol. 59, no. 227, Dec. 2010, pp. 349–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efq023>.
- Hanson, Kristin, and Nigel Fabb. “‘Non-Linguistic’ Browning: Meter and Music in ‘Pietro of Abano.’” *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, p. 5240.
- Harrington, Emily. “‘A Merciful Fury Sent to Save Me’: Amy Levy’s ‘Xantippe’ and Women’s Conversations.” *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2020, pp. 188–93.

- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- . *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. The University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- . "Inside the Mind of an AI: Materiality and the Crisis of Representation." *New Literary History*, vol. 54, no. 1, Sept. 2022, pp. 635–66. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2022.a898324>.
- . *Writing Machines*. MIT Press, 2002.
- Helmholtz, Hermann L. F. *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*. Translated by Alexander J. Ellis, Third Edition, Longmans, Green, and Co, 1895, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/rby988rq>. The Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/rby988rq>.
- Helsing, Elizabeth K. *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris*. Yale University Press, 2008.
- . *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.
- Herbert, Isolde Karen. "'A Strange Diagonal': Ideology and Enclosure in the Framing Sections of The Princess and The Earthly Paradise." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1991 Summer 1991, pp. 145–59.
- Hodgson, Amanda. "'The Highest Poetry': Epic Narrative in 'The Earthly Paradise' and 'Idylls of the King.'" *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1996, pp. 340–54.
- Hoegaerts, Josephine. "'Discoverers of the Hidden Land': New Images of the Voice in the Late Nineteenth Century." *Victorian Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2020, pp. 18–22.

- Hollingshead, John. *My Lifetime*. London, S. Low, Marston, 1895. *Internet Archive*,
<http://archive.org/details/mylifetime00hollgoog>.
- Hughes, Linda K. "Discoursing of Xantippe: Amy Levy, Classical Scholarship, and Print Culture." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 3, 2009, pp. 259–81.
- . "Visible Sound and Auditory Scenes: Word, Image, and Music in Tennyson, D.G. Rossetti, and Morris." *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, edited by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley, Ashgate, 2011.
- Hyska, Megan. "The Politics of Past and Future: Synthetic Media, Showing, and Telling." *Philosophical Studies*, Nov. 2023. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-023-02062-x>.
- Jackson, Virginia. "Specters of the Ballad." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 71, no. 2, Sept. 2016, pp. 176–96. *online-ucpress-edu.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu*,
<https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2016.71.2.176>.
- Jackson, Virginia, and Yopie Prins. "Lyrical Studies." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 2, Sept. 1999, pp. 521–30. *Cambridge Core*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178>.
- , editors. *The Lyric Theory Reader*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Jackson, Virginia Walker. *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Jarvis, Simon. "Superversive Poetics: Browning's Fifine at the Fair." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 77, no. 1, Mar. 2016, pp. 121–41. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-3331622>.
- Jowett, Benjamin. "On the Interpretation of Scripture." *Essays And Reviews*, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862, pp. 399–527. *Internet Archive*,
<http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.174601>.
- Kahn, Douglas. *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. MIT Press, 1999.

- Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "Prepare for the Textpocalypse." *The Atlantic*, 8 Mar. 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/03/ai-chatgpt-writing-language-models/673318/>.
- . "Spec Acts: Reading Form in Recurrent Neural Networks." *ELH*, vol. 88, no. 2, 2021, pp. 361–86.
- Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. The MIT Press, 2007. *direct-mit-edu.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu*, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/7393.001.0001>.
- Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Knowles, James, editor. "Recent Science." *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, Mar. 1877-Dec. 1900, vol. 3, no. 16, June 1878, pp. 1133–53.
- Kreilkamp, Ivan. *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Lacey, Kate. *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age*. Polity Press, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umdcpl/detail.action?docID=1184212>.
- Laporte, Charles. "Morris's Compromises: On Victorian Editorial Theory and the Kelmscott Chaucer." *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, edited by David Latham, University of Texas Press, 2007.
- Lastra, James. *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity*. Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Latham, David. "Introduction." *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, edited by David Latham, University of Texas Press, 2007.

“Lee Commission.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lee-Commission>.

Accessed 19 Apr. 2024.

Levy, Amy. *A London Plane-Tree, and Other Verse*. London T.F. Unwin, 1889. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/londonplanetreea00levyuoft>.

---. *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*. T. Fisher Unwin, 1884,

---. *A Minor Poet: And Other Verse*. Second edition., T. Fisher Unwin, 1891.

Levy, Amy, and Melvyn New. *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*. University Press of Florida, 1993.

Literary Gazette 1858-03-06: Iss 2146. Open Court Publishing Co, 1858. *Internet Archive*, http://archive.org/details/sim_literary-gazette_1858-03-06_2146.

“Literary Gossip.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 3232, Oct. 1889, pp. 456–57.

“---.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 3323, July 1891, pp. 38–40.

Lootens, Tricia. “Bengal, Britain, France: The Locations and Translations of Toru Dutt.” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2006, pp. 573–90.

---. “Looking Beyond (and Before) Ancient Ballads: Toru Dutt’s Sheaf and the Force of Abolition Time.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2019, pp. 268–77. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.61.2.11>.

---. “The Locations and Dislocations of Toru and Aru Dutt.” *A History of Indian Poetry in English*, edited by Rosinka Chaudhuri, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 82–97. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139940887.006>.

Luu, Helen. “A Matter of Life and Death: The Auditor-Function of the Dramatic Monologue.” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2016, pp. 19-38, 119.

- Mackail, J. W. (John William). *The Life of William Morris*. London ; New York : Longmans, Green, 1901. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/lifeofwilliammor01mack>.
- Malleck, Julia. “Project Gutenberg Has Implemented One of the Worst AI Fears of Striking Actors.” *Quartz*, 20 Sept. 2023, <https://qz.com/project-gutenberg-ai-to-ebooks-audiobooks-1850856297>.
- Marino, Mark. “The Racial Formation of Chatbots.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 16, no. 5, Dec. 2014, <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2560>.
- Martens, Britta. *The Poetry of Robert Browning*. Palgrave, 2016.
- Martin, Daniel. “A Warm and Sympathetic Thing: Voice and Dysfluency in Robert Browning’s ‘Mr Slydge, ‘The Medium.’”” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, Dec. 2020, pp. 163–78.
- Mary Ellis Gibson. *Indian Angles : English Verse in Colonial India From Jones to Tagore*. Ohio University Press, 2011.
- McGann, Jerome. *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton University Press, 1991.
- McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Critical ed, Gingko Press, 2003.
- Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. “Toru Dutt and ‘An Eurasian Poet.’” *A History of Indian Poetry in English*, edited by Rosinka Chaudhuri, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 114–29. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139940887.008>.
- Menke, Richard. *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

- Mill, John Stuart. *Considerations on Representative Government*,. Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861,
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5669/5669-h/5669-h.htm>.
- . "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." *The Crayon*, vol. 7, April 1860, pp. 93-97. JSTOR,
 JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25528049>.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "'Mr. Sludge, C'est Moi': The Conflict of Media." *The Hopkins Review*, vol. 2, no. 2,
 2009, pp. 239–59.
- Millière, Raphaël. "Deep Learning and Synthetic Media." *Synthese : An International Journal for
 Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science*, vol. 200, no. 3, 2022.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03739-2>.
- Mills, Mara. "Media and Prosthesis: The Vocoder, the Artificial Larynx, and the History of Signal
 Processing." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2012, pp. 107–
 49.
- Mitra, Dipendranath. "The Writings of Toru Dutt." *Indian Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1966, pp. 33–38.
- Mogilner, Marina, editor. *A Cultural History of Race - Volume 5. In the Age of Empire and the Nation
 State*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
- Morris, William, editor. "The Aims of Art [1886]." *The Collected Works of William Morris: With
 Introductions by His Daughter May Morris: Volume 23: Signs of Changes; Lectures on
 Socialism*, vol. 23, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 81–97. *Cambridge University Press*,
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139343152.008>.
- . *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Volume I: 1848-1880*. Edited by Norman Kelvin,
 Princeton University Press, 2014.

- . *The Earthly Paradise*. First edition, Presentation copy from William Morris to his mother, F. S. Ellis, 1868. University of Maryland - College Park, Hornbake Library Special Collections, PR 5075.A1 1868.
- . *The Earthly Paradise*. Kelmscott Press, 1896. University of Maryland - College Park, Hornbake Library Special Collections, PR5075 .A1 1896.
- . *The Earthly Paradise*. Edited by Florence Saunders Boos, Routledge, 2002.
- . *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*. Edited by William S. Peterson, University of California Press, 1982.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- “New Books and Reprints.” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, vol. 69, no. 1784, Jan. 1890, pp. 26–27.
- “Novels of the Week.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 3242, Dec. 1889, pp. 816–17.
- Olverson, T. D. (Tracy D.). *Women Writers and the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- O’Neil, Cathy. *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. First paperback edition, Broadway Books, 2017.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, 2002.
- Oord, Aaron van den, et al. *WaveNet: A Generative Model for Raw Audio*. arXiv:1609.03499, arXiv, 19 Sept. 2016. *arXiv.org*, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1609.03499>.
- Otis, Laura. *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

- Palmer, Annie. "Amazon Ditches Cashierless Checkout System at Its Grocery Stores." *CNBC*, 3 Apr. 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/04/03/amazon-ditches-cashierless-checkout-system-at-its-grocery-stores.html>.
- Parker, Sarah. "Reframing Amy Levy: Photography, Celebrity, and Posthumous Representation." *Victoriographies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2022, pp. 52–77. *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/vic.2022.0447>.
- Parkins, Wendy. "Introduction." *William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life*, edited by Wendy Parkins, Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2010.
- Parton, James, and James Parton. *Eminent Women : A Series of Sketches of Women Who Have Won Distinction by Their Genius and Achievements as Authors, Artists, Actors, Rulers, or within the Precincts of Home*. New York : J.B. Alden, 1883. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/eminentwomenseri00part>.
- Patrick Brantlinger. *Rule of Darkness : British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*. Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Pearson, Richard. "William Morris Interrupted Interrupting Chaucer." *Chaucer's Poetry: Words, Authority and Ethics*, edited by Clíodhna Carney and Frances McCormack, Four Courts Press, 2013, pp. 158–84.
- Peters, John Durham. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Peterson, William S. *A Bibliography of The Kelmscott Press*. Oxford University Press, 1984.
- . *Morris & Company: Essays on Fine Printing*. First edition, Oak Knoll Press, 2020.
- . *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Clarendon Press, 1991.

- Picker, John M. *Victorian Soundscapes*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Poole, Stanley. "Bayley, Sir Edward Clive (1821–1884), Administrator in India and Antiquary." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept. 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1749>.
- Prasad, G. J. V. *Writing India, Writing English: Literature, Language, Location*. Routledge, 2011.
- Price, Leah. *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Prins, Yopie. "'Break, Break, Break' into Song." *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Jason David Hall, Ohio University Press, 2011, pp. 105–34.
- . "Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and The Science of English Verse." *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 229–34. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2008.123.1.229>.
- . "Victorian Meters." *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, edited by Joseph Bristow, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 89–113.
- . *Victorian Sappho*. Princeton University Press, 1999.
- . "Voice Inverse." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2004 Spring 2004, pp. 43–60.
- . "'What Is Historical Poetics?'" *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History*, vol. 77, no. 1, Mar. 2016, pp. 13–40. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-3331577>.
- Rader, Ralph W. "The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 1, Oct. 1976, pp. 131–51. *journals.uchicago.edu (Atypon)*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/447877>.
- Ravitz, Jessica. "'I'm the Original Voice of Siri' | CNN Business." *CNN*, 4 Oct. 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/04/tech/mobile/bennett-siri-iphone-voice/index.html>.
- "Recent Verse." *The Athenaeum*, no. 3242, Dec. 1889, pp. 817–18.
- Rini, Regina. "Deepfakes and the Epistemic Backstop." *Philosopher's Imprint*, vol. 20, no. 24, 2020. *quod.lib.umich.edu*, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0020.024>.

- Rini, Regina, and Leah Cohen. "Deepfakes, Deep Harms." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 2, July 2022. www.jesp.org, <https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v22i2.1628>.
- Rizq, Michael. "Fact, Rhythm, and Resistance in The Ring and the Book." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2021, pp. 391–410.
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, et al. *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870*. T.Fisher Unwin, 1897.
- Rossetti, W. M. "Portraits of Robert Browning.-I." *The Magazine of Art*, edited by Marion Harry Spielmann, Jan. 1890, pp. 181–88.
- Rudy, Jason R. *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*. Ohio University Press, 2009.
- Ryan, A. "Fisher, Herbert Albert Laurens (1865–1940)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sept. 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33141>.
- Sapir, Edward. *Language : An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York : Harcourt, Brace, 1921. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/languageintroduc0000unse>.
- Scheinberg, Cynthia. "Canonizing the Jew: Amy Levy's Challenge to Victorian Poetic Identity." *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1996, pp. 173–200.
- . "Recasting 'Sympathy and Judgment': Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1997, pp. 173–91.
- Schroeder, Janice. "Inside Voice: Talk, Silence, and Resistance in the Victorian Prison." *Victorian Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2020, pp. 9–13.
- Sconce, Jeffrey. *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Duke University Press, 2000.

Sharma, Alpana. "In-Between Modernity: Toru Dtt (1856-1877) from a Postcolonial Perspective."

Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945, edited by Leslie W. Lewis and Ann L. Ardis, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Sharma Knippling, Alpana. "'Sharp Contrasts of All Colours': The Legacy of Toru Dutt." *Going*

Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers, edited by Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj, Garland, 2000.

Sharp, William. "A London Plane Tree: And Other Verse." *The Academy, 1869-1902, 0269-333X*, edited by James Sutherland Cotton, no. 926, Feb. 1890, pp. 76–76.

Silver, Carole. *The Romance of William Morris*. Ohio University Press, 1982.

Skoblow, Jeffrey. "Beyond Reading: Kelmscott and the Modern." *The Victorian Illustrated Book*, The University Press of Virginia, 2002, pp. 239–58.

---. *Paradise Dislocated: Morris, Politics, Art*. University of Virginia Press, 1993.

Slinn, E. Warwick. *Browning and the Fictions of Identity*. Barnes & Noble Books, 1982.

Smith, David Nowell. *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Smith, Martha Nell. *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson*. First Edition, U of Texas P, 1992.

Stafford, Jane. *Colonial Literature and the Native Author: Indigeneity and Empire*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Stead, William Thomas, editor. "The New Books and Blue Books of the Month." *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan. 1890, pp. 77–81.

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Streeter, L. O. "Recent Poetry." *To-Day : Monthly Magazine of Scientific Socialism*, vol. 2, no. 8, Aug. 1884, pp. 156–64.

- Tharu, Susie. "Tracing Savitri's Pedigree: Victorian Racism and the Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Literature." *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Thomas, Katie-Louise. *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . "Racial Alliance and Postal Networks in Conan Doyle's 'A Study in Scarlet.'" *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2001.0017>.
- Thompson, E. P. and Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress). *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. First American edition, Pantheon Books, 1977.
- Tilby, Michael. "Baudelaire through Bengali Eyes: Toru Dutt's Translations from Les Fleurs Du Mal in Context." *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, Oct. 2015, pp. 333–55. *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2015.0177>.
- Tooley, Sarah A. "The Favourite Queen's Authors." *Quiver*, no. 615, Jan. 1898, pp. 468–74.
- Toru Dutt. *A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields*. 1880. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.163287>.
- Trevelyan, G. O. *Cawnpore*. Macmillan, London, 1865. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/dli.csl.5118>.
- Tucker, Herbert F. "All for the Tale: The Epic Macropoetics of Morris' 'Sigurd the Volsung.'" *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1996, pp. 372–94.
- . "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric." *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, pp. 144–56.

- . "From Monomania to Monologue: 'St. Simeon Stylites' and the Rise of the Victorian Dramatic Monologue." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1984, pp. 121–37.
- . "Literal Illustration in Victorian Print." *The Victorian Illustrated Book*, The University Press of Virginia, 2002, pp. 163–208.
- . "Story." *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, edited by Matthew Bevis, Oxford University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199576463.013.035>.
- Vaswani, Ashish, et al. *Attention Is All You Need*. arXiv:1706.03762, arXiv, 1 Aug. 2023. *arXiv.org*, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1706.03762>.
- Vaughan, Robert, editor. "Art. VIII.-Enoch Arden, Etc." *The British Quarterly Review*, no. 80, Oct. 1864, pp. 463–90.
- Walsh, Brendan, et al. *Large-Scale Automatic Audiobook Creation*. arXiv:2309.03926, arXiv, 7 Sept. 2023. *arXiv.org*, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2309.03926>.
- Weisman, Karen. "Playing with Figures: Amy Levy and the Forms of Cancellation." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2001, pp. 59–79.
- Weisman, Karen A. *Singing in a Foreign Land: Anglo-Jewish Poetry, 1812-1847*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- Williams, Thomas W., and Laurence N. Roberts. "Our Exhibits at Two Fairs." *Bell Telephone Quarterly*, vol. XIX, no. No. 1, Jan. 1940, pp. 59–82.
- Willis, Robert. "On Vowel Sounds, and on Reed Organ Pipes." *Transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, vol. 3, 1830, pp. 231–68.
- Wilmer, Clive. "Dreaming Reality: The Poetry of William Morris." *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, edited by Matthew Bevis, Oxford University Press, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199576463.013.039>.

Wilson, Epiphanius, editor. *Hindu Literature ...* Limited ed. de luxe, The Colonial Press, 1902.

Worth, Aaron. *Imperial Media: Colonial Networks and Information Technologies in the British Literary Imagination, 1857-1918*. The Ohio State University Press, 2014.

Yeats, William Butler. "The Living Voice of Literature." *Samhain*, no. No. 6, 1906, pp. 4–14.

Modernist Magazines Project.