

**Early Talking Books:  
Spoken Recordings and Recitation Anthologies, 1880-1920**

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*Introduction: The Phonograph and the Rhetoric of Immediacy*

In 1878, when Thomas Edison first speculated in print upon the practical significance of his invention of a sound recording device, or talking machine (in "The Phonograph and its Future"), and then in 1888, when he reported on "The Perfected Phonograph," the phonographic cylinder suggested itself as a material artifact that would bear the voices of a culture into the distant future, not to be read, but simply to be experienced as they had been heard when they were first captured. In the first of these predictive essays Edison posited grand and optimistic claims for the ascendancy of sound over print resulting from a technology that could replicate speech without the "mediating" practice of reading: "The advantages of [talking] books over those printed are too readily seen to need mention. Such books would be listened to where now none are read. They would preserve more than the mental emanations of the brain of the author; and, as a bequest to future generations, they would be unequalled."<sup>1</sup> In the second of the two essays, he likened the markings of a phonographic recording to those found on ancient Assyrian and Babylonian clay cylinders, only to move from the inscriptive analogy to an argument about the phonograph's ultimate eclipse of writing:

It is curious to reflect that the Assyrians and Babylonians, 2,500 years ago, chose baked clay cylinders inscribed with cuneiform characters, as their medium for perpetuating records; while this recent result of modern science, the phonograph, uses cylinders of wax for a similar purpose, but with the great and progressive

difference that our wax cylinders speak for themselves, and will not have to wait dumbly for centuries to be deciphered.<sup>2</sup>

Edison was not alone in identifying his invention as an apparent transcendence of the “technology” of reading (as decipherment), leading to an experience that was even more immediate and intimate than that of the reader with his book. Late Victorian fantasies concerning a book that talks (some of them promotional in their conception) often focused on the author's immediate, individualized presence for the “reader” as a result of the preservation of his voice. According to one journalist of the 1880s, the phonographic book represents the fantasy of “a spoken literature, not a written one” that will allow writers to communicate “with all the living reality of the present moment.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the first article in the inaugural issue of *The Phonoscope: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Scientific and Amusement Inventions Appertaining to Sound and Sight* (1896) tells us: “It is by the voice that men communicate with each other in all the fullness of their individuality. The voice, formerly invisible and irretrievably lost as soon as uttered, can now be caught in its passage and preserved practically forever.”<sup>4</sup> And yet another enthusiast of the period stated that the phonograph is remarkable not only because it preserves literature (after all, print accomplishes that), but because it preserves the voices of the authors “which are the indices of the characters of those originating them.”<sup>5</sup>

Such claims suggest that even before the phonograph materialized as a real artifact, there was already a well developed Victorian yearning for a technology that would make the reading experience more immediate, that would, in a sense, capture the character and subjectivity of an author without the mediation of the printed page. Indeed, one can point to a variety of practices that involve the manipulation or interpretation of written scripts or printed texts and identify them with this desire to move beyond text towards an indexical trace of character. Interpretive techniques like graphology (the analysis of handwriting) looked at signatures for “selfhood epitomized.”<sup>6</sup> The new “science” of stylistics emerging

in the 1880s sought each individual author's identifiable "characteristic curve", "sentence-sense" or "instinct of sentence thought" by counting the number of words in an author's sentences to show patterns.<sup>7</sup> Other fields developing at this time suggest the locus of this index of character to be the human voice itself, and again, can be understood as attempts to capture this essence by the development of new ways of inscribing the shape and patterns of voice. From the development of detailed voice-scripts like Melville Bell's "visible speech", a script which "emphasized the mouth, inscribing its movements onto paper",<sup>8</sup> to devices such as Koenig and Scott's phonautograph which etched a graphic image of vocal wave forms on smoked glass, the nineteenth century introduced an array of inventive attempts to preserve the particularities of the individual voice.<sup>9</sup>

One might add to this list the proliferation in the nineteenth century of systems of phonography or "shorthand" as developed by the likes of Sir Isaac Pitman and Henry Sweet, after whom Henry Higgins of Shaw's *Pygmalion* was modeled. Practitioners of shorthand in the nineteenth century promoted their systems "as reformations of writing through vocalization," as scripts that were not text-based writing systems, so much as a medium by which speech could be reproduced exactly as it had been uttered.<sup>10</sup> The logical consummation of this inscriptive work--and the apparent transcendence of writing as the medium for the communication of identity (here equated with voice)--arguably was realized in Edison's invention of the phonograph, after which writing ceased to be synonymous with the serial storage of human experience. As Friedrich Kittler has put it, rather dramatically: with Edison's invention, "[t]he dream of a real...audible world arising from words has come to an end", and a new "reality" medium emerges in its place.<sup>11</sup>

During the earliest period of this technology, the period of its initial promotion, then, there seems to be an enthusiastic willingness to embrace the phonograph as something of a transparent medium, and to imagine a collection of voice recordings as a kind of archive of authentic characters present to be revived with the turn of a crank, for eternity.

As the quote from Kittler suggests, recent scholarship on this period of the medium has tended to concur with this version of what the phonograph meant to late Victorians. Historians of sound recording, too, have often remarked that the earliest spoken recordings were received as a kind of oral reality. Roland Gelatt notes how those first writings about the phonograph “prated of the ‘absolutely perfect reproduction of the voice,’ just as they were to continue to do regularly for the next eight decades.”<sup>12</sup> However, as Lisa Gitelman has recently shown, contemporaries who attempted to understand what the early phonograph actually was, and what it meant, often demonstrated “a willingness to unify oral and inscriptive action and a desire to produce legibility from orality.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, not only did the inscriptive experiments and inventions as I have just mentioned above represent a desire to move beyond the visual medium of print, but once the phonograph seemed to have accomplished that, people tried to understand its success by describing its accomplishment in terms of the writing technologies that they already knew. While this account of the early phonograph in terms of scripts and writing machines is invaluable as a way of correcting the oft-assumed transparency or naturalness of the medium, and as a most important way to highlight the “preconceptions” that helped “determine [the phonograph’s] early identity as a product,”<sup>14</sup> my own approach to the meaning of early spoken recordings in relation to reading and print books will be to think of the phonograph not just in terms of inscriptive or writerly preconceptions, but in terms of elocutionary ones.

Edison’s image of the phonographic cylinder as an inscribed tablet that no longer needs to be deciphered because it “speaks for itself” is further complicated by the fact that speaking, too, was a mediating factor involving practice and skill. Whatever transparency or naturalness might have been associated with it was informed by the elocutionary art of

concealing the speaker's artfulness. To say that a cylinder "speaks for itself" bypasses the matter of what is spoken. This interesting trope for the phonograph record, suggesting a voice identity devoid of imposed vocal content, was much used in early promotions of the technology, and suggests a representation of this recording medium as no medium at all, but rather as a repository of the pure voice of nature. It is a trope borrowed from romantic rhetoric, and from romantic poetry in particular. By exploring the rhetorical underpinnings of this common trope for the phonograph as a vehicle of natural unmediated expression, and ultimately by approaching early spoken recordings in relation to preexisting recitation anthologies and the social practices of recitation and elocution they assert, I hope to further infuse this sense of the transparency or naturalness of the medium with a more complicated conception of both media and reading. At the core of my argument is the admittedly simple observation that the content of early spoken recordings was already artificial, in the sense that specific cultural norms of performance were alluded to and mimicked or reproduced when familiar texts or genres of texts were selected for recording. The preexisting print anthologies which compiled selections for recitation help to explain the repertory of early recordings, a curious mix of highbrow and lowbrow. They also suggest ways in which listening to texts was not simply a means of passively absorbing an authentic experience of presence (as recorded voice), or of conflating "character" as an index of identity with fictional "characterization", but rather signals an understanding of reading as a practiced form of participation on the part of the late Victorian reader/listener.

While the title of my essay seems to highlight the significance of the concept of "the book" as such—to promise a discussion framed by the idea of the book as a philosophical category<sup>15</sup>--what I will be discussing, for the most part, are some of the formal and cultural affinities that exist between late Victorian, short spoken recordings (testimonials, dialect

monologues, and some literary recitations) and the brief texts meant for speaking aloud that were collected in nineteenth-century recitation compilations. The idea of “the book” as a substantial, full length entity has little to do with the scraps, gems, portions and pieces that were recorded onto phonograph cylinders, and collected in recitation albums and anthologies. The production of an audio record album approaching the late Victorian album of verses and recitations in length and diversity of content was materially impossible in the late nineteenth century. Edison may have dreamed about having a novel in its entirety (*Nicholas Nickleby*) on a compact audio record, but it was not until the 1930s, under the initiative of the Library of Congress Books for the Adult Blind project, that books the length of Victorian novels would actually be transferred into the medium of sound.<sup>16</sup> And even then, when Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* was produced in talking book format on records that played at 33 1/3 rpm—much slower than the then commercial standard of 78 rpm—it still ran to an unwieldy 104 double-faced phonograph disks.<sup>17</sup> What Edison got instead was something closer to the anthology entry, which, to borrow from Leah Price's analysis of the anthology, “marked moments of intensive selected reading,” sometimes excerpted, and often adapted to be made more effective as a text to be read aloud.<sup>18</sup> The cabinet-sized Edison phonograph for home use came with drawers to store the cylinders, as many as eighty-four at a time. For a listener who collected spoken recordings, these drawers of cylinders, each with its own text inside, represented, not a replacement for the print library, but a new media version of the earlier print collection of recitations, which stood as individual texts or fragments, divided and captured for the pleasure and use of a diverse listening and reading public.<sup>19</sup> I say “pleasure *and* use”, “listening *and* reading”, because those aspects of the recitation piece are better understood as connected and interactive, rather than as mutually exclusive phenomena. I intend to pursue the significance of this interaction firstly in contrast to the idea of the phonograph as a “natural” or indexical medium, and secondly to suggest that early spoken recordings had as much to do with inflected rendition as with inscribed reality.

In the broadest sense, then, my essay is concerned not merely with “talking books” as audio books, but especially with the ways in which all books can be said to talk. By approaching the genres of early sound recordings to ask questions about the culture of reading, I find that printed books *and* early spoken recordings talk in ways that are technologically informed, culturally rehearsed, and historically specific. I hope that my discussion here, intended to suggest possibilities for approaching literary recordings in relation to printed literature, will demonstrate how phonograph recordings may hold the answers to some familiar questions about reading practices and specifically about the experience of reception, since they seem to harbor historically specific assumptions about what the sound of the voice means, how reading should be done, and what reading is for. If these reading scripts and recordings are not quite a direct line allowing us to listen in on the voices in readers’ heads, they are, at least, a repository of the scripts and techniques for a reading practice that would have informed those internalized voices.

### *The Natural Voice of the Phonograph*

Looking at the phonograph cylinder or disc as a material artifact, what does one see? An illegible graph of a person's vocal identity? The true voice (of nature) inscribed upon a *tabula rasa*? Theodor Adorno remarked that the phonograph record disc "is covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing."<sup>20</sup> He focused upon the importance of the illegibility of this inscription,<sup>21</sup> finding the likeness of the phonographic disc or cylinder to a tablet bearing the marks of an unreadable language liberating because it suggests the future possibility of recording sound "without it ever having sounded."<sup>22</sup> Or, to put it another way, it allows us to imagine the writing of a sound event which is *not* subject to temporality, is not the trace and preservation of a sound-source that existed in an earlier span of time, and thus, is not necessarily to be understood as an indexical, or inscriptive of reality. In the context of my discussion of the recorded voice, this suggests a technology allowing for the creation of a unique vocal identity that has never been

associated with an actual, living character, a technological language that speaks on its own, and is not the trace of a speaking body (whether dead or alive). Adorno was thinking of the possibility in the 1930s of composing for mechanical pianos by inscribing directly upon scrolls. We might think of the contemporary possibility of the digital synthesis of a previously non-existent audible voice, and of the ‘virtuality’ that seems to come with a digital interface. Both ideas seem to lead us to the *inverse* of the late Victorian correlation between sound recording and personal identity.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1890s the phonographic cylinder was promoted as something superior to any written record bearing the same verbal message because the recorded record captured an *actual* moment lost in time, that could be revived without the necessity of de-coding. It was superior not only to the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling (of being) captured in verse by romantic poets, to the realistic characters and heroes described by the most revivifying of novelists and historians, and to the characteristic scrawls of self preserved in facsimile autographs—each of which, after all, required relative proficiencies in reading and interpretation for their import to be grasped—but superior even to the imprinting technology of the photograph, because it captured a longer moment than a single photo could. John Picker’s recent work on late Victorian representations of the phonograph suggests that “the machine, in its power to record and replay, promised a special kind of communal integrity,”<sup>24</sup> one that might build communal bridges over heretofore unsurpassable barriers of time. Due to this sense of the medium as time-capture device, Edison suggested from the very beginning that his invention could be used to archive the living voices of the dead: “It will henceforth be possible,” he says, “to preserve for future generations the voices as well as the words of our Washingtons, our Lincolns, our Gladstones, etc., and to have them give us their 'greatest effort,' in every town and hamlet in the country upon our holidays,”<sup>25</sup> their utterances “transmitted to posterity, centuries afterwards, as freshly and forcibly as if those later generations heard his living accents.”<sup>26</sup>



Edison's fantasy proposes the use of recordings to celebrate historical events of national importance. If the continuity of a powerful identity depended upon a significant collective memory, then the possibility of replaying the speech of a person whose voice and character were captured on cylinder represented an excellent new means of guaranteeing that continuity, against the forgetting or rewriting of history. The past is not so much remembered as relived by each subsequent generation, according to a recurrent calendar of memorial occasions. One early example of this kind of occasion, a promotional idea that seems to have taken its cue from Edison's grand vision, was an event scheduled in 1890 by "The Light Brigade Relief Fund" to raise money for those soldiers who survived the ill advised charge "into the valley of death" at Balaclava in 1854. Edison's marketing agent in London, Colonel George Gouraud, a military man sympathetic to this cause, arranged to have recordings made of Florence Nightingale (who established her name during the Crimean War), and the trumpeter Martin Lanfried (who had sounded the bugle call at the original battle), both of which were played at the event, along with a recording of Tennyson reciting his poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade", made by Charles Steytler for Gouraud, also in 1890.<sup>27</sup> While the main purpose of this particular "voice demonstration" was supposedly to raise funds for the British soldiers who survived the battle, the ulterior motive was, as always, to display the wonderful potential of this new technology, its ability to capture time and character.

The most typical genre of speech to appear on such early phonograph demonstration recordings was that of the testimonial, praising Edison for his great invention, and the technology for its powers of granting immortality to the speaker. So the scripted, short speech that Florence Nightingale made for the sake of the Light Brigade Relief Fund included the statement, "When I am no longer even a memory, just a name, I hope my voice may perpetuate the great work of my life."<sup>28</sup> This idea of the sound recording as a synecdoche for the entire person, and of the voice as an alternative to bodily presence, was a regular part of the early promotion of the phonograph. To advertise the first promotional

lectures on (and about) the perfected phonograph, Gouraud sent out invitations for an "at home", "To meet Prof. Edison"/Non presentem, sed alloquentem! (Not present but in voice)."<sup>29</sup> Gouraud provided Edison with strict instructions for the script of the recording that would be played before his guests. He told Edison to identify himself clearly by stating his name and home address, to remark, "what a happy escape...from the drudgery of the pen" the phonograph represents, and, most importantly, to open his address with the line from Wordsworth's poem "To the Cuckoo" (words that he had already registered for promotional use): "Shall I call thee bird, or but a wandering voice?"<sup>30</sup> Bird or wandering voice?—this alternative posed as a question provokes a response by the phonograph that denies such a binary altogether. The voice recording as "wandering" artifact speaking without its bodily context is still meant to be understood as an artifact of presence.

A reading of Wordsworth's poem of 1804 in retrospect of the invention of the phonograph, suggests not only all of the enthusiasm and hopeful nostalgia that the new technology seemed to promise for the preservation of self, but, further, the romantic rhetorical assumptions as they were applied to the phonograph. The phonograph, like Wordsworth's cuckoo, promised a natural yet mysterious recurrence of time heard but not seen, the promise of a "blithe newcomer" bringing a happy tale from the past, not merely sounding "the same" as it did in our youth, but actually being "[t]he same whom in my school-boy days/ I listened to" (ll. 17-18). Like Keats's nightingale whose "voice" he hears was heard "in ancient days" (ll. 63-64)<sup>31</sup> and is singing "[p]erhaps the self-same song" (l.65) as was heard by the biblical Ruth, Wordsworth's cuckoo is imagined as a creature that preserves a uniform song and voice simply by its survival as a species. When the bird begets a new generation it performs an act of natural and perfect vocal replication, without having to learn the art of song. But the voice of the bird is not merely immediately present in Wordsworth's scenario, it is also mysteriously invisible, "twofold" (l. 6), as Wordsworth puts it, because "From hill to hill it seems to pass/ At once far off and near" (ll. 7-8). Wordsworth evokes two kinds of aural replication in this poem, one figured as nature's

replication of its own voice (the bird's self-replication, or, the bird's voice echoing in the hills), the second suggesting the replication of sound as an act of human memory reconstructing an experience of a voice heard "far off":

And I can listen to thee yet;  
Can lie upon the plain  
And listen, till I do beget  
That golden time again.<sup>32</sup>

Here it is not the bird that begets itself "the same", but the poet who begets a memory of past encounters with that same voice, through an act of imaginative memory. I raise the distinction merely to point out that in its initial promotion, the phonograph is identified first of all with the voice and begetting of the bird in all its immediate self-sameness. The power of the romantic poem is drawn from the natural sounds and voices it represents even as it sets these natural voices in opposition to the poet's act of begetting, which for all its attentive listening, its seeking and its longing, stands as a mediated and ultimately unnatural procedure. As Mary Jacobus has remarked: "the oral fallacy of Romantic theories of language—the pervasive notion that 'the voice/ Of mountain torrents' (*The Prelude*, V, 408-9) speaks a language more profound than that of books, and is carried further into the heart"<sup>33</sup>--is staged again and again in romantic poetry as a struggle between written poetry as artifice, on the one hand, and poetry as the unmediated expression of nature's sounds and of natural feeling, on the other. In the early conception of the phonograph this binary is refigured in terms of different kinds of reading. The phonograph is portrayed as a most natural reader of the sounds of nature and not as a mediating, "bookish" imitator. It is perceived as a naturalized medium because it does not "read" or "perform" or "mimic", but simply delivers its voices as they had been preinscribed upon itself. Insofar as it can be understood as reciting a text aloud (the needle and not the reader interpreting those illegible

grooves alluded to by Edison and Adorno) it does so only as a means of “speaking itself” and not as an act of elocutionary interpretation. Because it is not performing another’s voice, but always being a self (if not *itself*), the phonograph is deemed a natural medium of conveying presence through voice.

In early promotions of the idea of the phonograph, the loss of “aura”, the failure of a sound recording to convey authentic presence, is rarely identified with the degrading effects of mechanical reproduction (as it is in Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the reproductions of paintings). Even in accounts of early tin-foil phonograph demonstrations, we find claims for the “exasperating fidelity” of the phonograph.<sup>34</sup> If corruption figures into the scenario and *is* attributed to the mechanical medium, the infidelity of replication is interestingly described using terms more commonly applied to vocal rendition, so a recording is said to have “an amusing tendency to burlesque”<sup>35</sup>, or “something irresistibly comic in its absurd imitation.”<sup>36</sup> A distinction between mechanical fidelity (as natural, “reality” capture) and human imitation, or mimicry, arises in these accounts. The problem of mimicry (as opposed to that of unwarranted mechanical duplication or copying) was even addressed by J. Lewis Young in an editorial for his promotional magazine the *Phonogram*, in which he suggests that, “[w]hen the Phonograph comes into general use in this country, a new law will be wanted. We cannot find in any work on the criminal code a punishment for the forgery of voices. There are some excellent mimics, who might do great mischief by imitating one’s voice in the Phonograph.”<sup>37</sup> The machine was presented not as a technology that has perfected the art of mimicry, but as a kind of perfectly natural mimic, written upon by nature, and preserving that natural moment eternally. Compared to the phonograph’s apparently natural means of capturing and replicating sound, the human ability to mimic voices and sound comes off as an act of artfulness (or artifice).

The conflation of the human elocutionary model of “natural” voice with that of the “natural and pure” voice of the phonograph is especially apparent in poems written to be recited from the perspective of the phonograph, the talking machine speaking not just any

self, in this case, but *itself*, and in its own voice. This genre of recited piece harkens back to that most archaic form of poetry, the artifact riddle (like those riddles found in *The Exeter Book*) in which an object articulates its inherent characteristics. In the case of the phonograph poem, the voice in which it speaks (the voice of the phonograph as performed by an actor playing the character of the phonograph) underscores the content of the self-representation, and ultimately, the rhetorical assumptions informing the literary significance of this technology. These recordings are especially suggestive for their representation of the phonograph as the supreme kind of virtuoso elocutionist who functions as medium of perfect transparency and naturalness. For example, the American poet Reverend Horatio Nelson Powers recorded his poem “The Phonograph’s Salutation,” spoken from the perspective of the phonograph, on 16 June 1888. Powers’s cylinder recording was sent to Gouraud from New York to England, along with a prefatory note to Gouraud, which explains that, “[t]he contemplation of [the phonograph’s] wonderful character and performances is overwhelming, and my feelings naturally seek vent in verse. But the phonograph will speak for itself. Now listen to its voice.”<sup>38</sup> In the first verse of the poem, Powers has Edison’s machine say:

I seize the palpitating air. I hoard  
Music and speech. All lips that breathe air are mine.  
I speak, and the inviolable word  
Authenticates its origin and sign.<sup>39</sup>

The poem first of all suggests that the phonograph can voice itself in any imaginable mode of human speech, possessing as it does “[a]ll lips that breathe air”, and further that the words it speaks are “inviolable”, are kept sacredly free from profanation or corruption because they are authenticated by their incarnate origins. Thus, unlike a mimic who may successfully capture the *manner* of another’s speech (or distort it in the process of

mimicking it), the phonograph tells us that it captures both the manner of the speech and the essence of the speaker to whom it is inextricably connected: “In me are souls embalmed. I am an ear/ Flawless as truth: and truth's own tongue am I.” The phonograph captures both the speech *and* the souls of its speakers, and in doing so claims its identity as “truth’s own tongue”, a tongue that cannot speak a lie because it repeats exactly what its perfect ear has heard.

Everything in this description of the phonograph asserts that its identity depends upon its special ability to speak *other* voices. But the conceit of Powers’s poem has it that the phonograph is presently speaking in its own voice. So what are the qualities of the voice of the phonograph? Working from the content of the poem one would say that it possesses no inherent vocal qualities at all, that the voice of the phonograph is clean of preexisting cultural accent and is, for this transparency, the perfect medium by which the voices of others can be captured and conveyed. Another answer to this question might reasonably claim that when the phonograph speaks itself, it sounds like Horatio Nelson Powers, both author and speaker of the poem. Like Wordsworth in nature, Powers was overwhelmed in his “contemplation” of the “wonderful character and performances” of the phonograph, and “naturally” sought vent for his feelings in verse. His poem, already framed as a natural, romantic effusion, is then further naturalized by his decision to assign his own lyric voice to the phonograph, and then to perform that lyric voice in his recitation of the poem for the purpose of making the recording. A trained preacher, and described in an American newspaper as “one of the most brilliant pulpit orators in the West” with a “voice melodious and powerful,”<sup>40</sup> Powers’s recitation of his poem highlights his elocutionary talents by stressing gentle fluidity over amplified emphasis.<sup>41</sup> His consonants are pronounced softly to highlight their liquidity rather than their labial, dental or guttural qualities, and his vowel sounds are held and extended to allow for subtle shifts of intonation in between consonants. His delivery of the poem in a slow, somber tone, results in an overall vocal effect that hovers somewhere between the spoken and the sung, and that

would have evoked what elocutionists referred to as a “pure voice” delivery, that is, a delivery that disguised the artful source of its power.<sup>42</sup>

A similar mode of delivery can be heard in another early promotional recording (“I am the Edison Phonograph”), in which Len Spencer, who recorded a variety of recitations for the Edison label, speaks from the point of view of the phonograph, and claims he can perform all levels of entertainment, all voices, all languages with absolute naturalness. “My voice is the clearest, smoothest and most natural of any talking machine” he says in an elevated but not overly dramatic style, suggesting not only that the Edison phonograph is the superior mechanical elocutionist among all talking machines, but also that the high elocutionary style he uses to perform the true voice of the phonograph (to capture the index of the phonograph’s character) can serve as the transparent medium for the performance of other (say, less pure) voices and characters without losing its own identification with the clear and natural. In Spencer’s recording the voice of the phonograph is both represented and performed in mutually reinforcing ways. The representation of the phonograph’s voice suggests, as it does in Powers’s poem, an unbounded versatility to affect its listener, “no matter what may be your mood,” with an ability to sing “tender songs of love,” to give “merry tales and joyous laughter”, to call one “to join in the rhythmic dance,” “to lull the babe to sweet repose/Or waken in the aged hear soft memories of youthful days.”<sup>43</sup> Spencer’s oral delivery of the poem seems to answer the call made by Canon Fleming in his elocutionary manual, *The Art of Reading and Speaking* (1896) to “[s]peak so naturally that your words may go from the heart to the heart, and that people may forget the messenger while they listen to the message.”<sup>44</sup>

In both poems, the voice of the phonograph is imagined and performed as a natural mode of speech, a kind of speaking that makes people “forget the messenger” while they hear an array of sounds and voices through this new technology. If the phonograph captures time and character for eternity then it is only logical that its voice would be imagined as equally transcendent and unmediated. Things get interesting, though, when we

try to hear what this voice sounded like in the aural imaginary of early phonograph listeners. Although that imagined voice may seem all but inaudible, it can perhaps be heard among the din of voices sounding from early talking books. As we move from cataloguing abstract claims for the immediacy, transparency, and naturalness of the phonograph toward the performance of such immediacy as a particular mode of elocutionary delivery, we find ourselves approaching a new way of thinking about the early reception of the phonograph and talking records. The very idea of the natural voice of the phonograph is saturated in the rhetorical assumptions legible in early commercial spoken recordings, and in the Victorian recitation anthologies that informed the generic parameters of these earliest of talking books. To think about these rhetorical assumptions and generic parameters is to begin to hear the voices in the heads of late Victorian readers.

#### *Early Spoken Recordings and the Recitation Book as Model*

The first commercially sold talking records (as opposed to the promotional recordings I have just discussed, which were not for sale to the public) were brief recitation recordings, mainly comic monologues, and character sketches with stereotyped voices suggesting racial and class identification by accent, sometimes rooted in characters first developed on the vaudeville or musical hall stage. Typical examples would be Joe Hayman's "Cohen on the Telephone" (1913)<sup>45</sup> or "Tom Clare's version of the telephone" (1911) which is described in the HMV catalogue as "an exceedingly clever monologue in which he gives an imitation of a foreign gentleman endeavoring to make himself heard on the telephone."<sup>46</sup> Further examples are: Russell Hunting's Irish Casey recordings ("Casey as Judge" [1896], "Casey as Hotel Clerk" [1895], "Casey as Chairman of the Mugwump Club" [1897])<sup>47</sup>; Frank Kennedy's "Schultz" monologues ("Schultz goes hunting with Grover in Cleveland" and "Schultz's views on Embalmed Beef" [circa 1888])<sup>48</sup>; Cal Stewart's country bumpkin "Uncle Josh" recordings (starting in the 1890s), and the "Colored Preacher" cylinders by George Graham (1890s).<sup>49</sup> These sketches often



dramatized miscommunications resulting from clashing manners of pronunciation and articulation, and seemed to capitalize, by negative example, upon one of the other main uses Edison imagined for his machine, that is, its potential function as an "elocutionary teacher."<sup>50</sup>

Alongside these comic dialect recordings, one found recitations of famous poems and scenes from plays or of novels dramatized for the stage—monologues and speeches by the likes of Harry E. Humphrey, Lewis Waller, Henry Irving, and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree in the stage roles that brought them fame, or of less-famous actors imitating their more successful colleagues. (Notices for these recordings usually advertised that the speaker was “one of the finest elocutionists” of his or her time.<sup>51</sup>) As early as 1893, Columbia Record Coin-Op machines offered imitations of Edwin Booth reciting Othello’s speech before the Venetian senate for public listening. Tyrone Power, Sr.’s recordings of two scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* were solid sellers for the Columbia label,<sup>52</sup> and at least eight different versions of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade”<sup>53</sup> (a couple of them parodies, but most of them serious and hyper-dramatic recitations) were released on various labels between 1894 and 1910.<sup>54</sup> These recordings served as examples of a refined speech culture (sharing the qualities of the true voice of the phonograph as it was performed in those promotional pieces mentioned above), and functioned, in a sense, as the opposite of the foreign-accent, dialect recordings.

Or did they? While many of the comic, dialect recordings obviously indulge in ethnic stereotypes, their seeming function as a debased antithesis to a high “elocutionary” voice culture (as made manifest in proper “literary” recordings) is worth further consideration. For at the heart of the relationship between this new medium by which literature comes to speak for itself, and the medium of print that requires knowledge of a reading praxis, are traces of continuity between printed works and sound recordings as framed within a context of reading, recitation, and elocutionary performance. Quite apart from the more obvious link between these recordings and the popular repertoires of music

hall and vaudeville entertainers, we might begin by asking: To what degree were spoken phonograph recordings only enacting an already existing local, educational and domestic culture of oral performance and recitation? What can they tell us about Victorian recitation? And what are the implications of this preexisting template for the initial cultural products of this new sound medium?

Early commercial spoken recordings employed the generic models that already existed in nineteenth-century recitation book anthologies, and functioned as a logical extension of a substantial Victorian reading and elocutionary culture.<sup>55</sup> There were many hundreds of such books published between 1800 and 1920. Early Victorian recitation books functioned as elocution manuals and public-speaking primers for educated upper- and upper-middle-class males who would be pursuing careers that might involve public speaking. But recitation anthologies of the last two decades of the nineteenth century were aimed at a far broader audience, for the use of men and women and children. The majority these later anthologies contained specimens of both high elocutionary texts (like passages from Shakespeare, and short poems of Tennyson and Poe) *and* comic dialect sketches between the same covers.<sup>56</sup> In addition to or in lieu of these anthologies, some of which were costly luxuries, individuals would sometimes compile their own scrap books of favorite pieces from newspapers, magazines, novels, or stories they had heard recited. Interestingly, mass-market versions of homemade scrap books emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, drawing upon submissions from their own readers, functioning as a dissemination of the model of the parochial reading circle on a national scale. H. M. Soper's *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* (which ran from 1879-1919) combined pieces from various periodicals and other published recitation books, excerpts from published stories, texts adapted for recitation by professional public readers, and portions from actual private recitation scrapbooks sent in from all parts of the United States and Britain.<sup>57</sup> The mass-market recitation scrap book was produced cheaply, with paper covers, and offered no prescriptive order or arrangement of the pieces, not even an alphabetical one. Only a very

cursory editorial voice indicated the sources of some of the selections and stated the purpose of the collection, which was to provide materials with “the greatest possible range of style” for use “on all occasions” by an audience that included “the ten year old school boy” and “the would-be congressman”<sup>58</sup>--in short, a democratic conception of “everyone.”

The title pages of these books tell us that the texts have been “carefully chosen, as being peculiarly well adapted for reciting before select audiences, in refined domestic circles,” as the subtitle of *Prescott’s Drawing Room Recitations* has it. Actually the selections appear rather haphazardly intermixed—if not miscegenated, at least de-segregated, so to speak—and appear thus, without the anxiety about “corruption” that one might suspect, all in the name of providing “fine opportunities to Elocutionists of every style.” But, as with the dialect sound recordings, we are led to ask whether these comic dialect recitation texts did not simply function as the elocutionary rubes to the serious texts that demanded a more “lofty impassioned declamation.”<sup>59</sup> In light of remarks made by Henry James in his 1905 lecture to the young ladies of Bryn Mawr College, “On the Question of Our Speech,” one would certainly think that they did play a role of negative example. Here James argues that, “[o]f the degree in which a society is civilized the vocal form, the vocal tone, the personal, social accent and sound of its intercourse, have always been held to give a direct reflection” (11).<sup>60</sup> James sees the degree to which American society is civilized challenged not only by the slovenly “national use of vocal sound” (25) characterized by a “limp, slack, passive tone” (31), but by the impact upon the “*vox Americana*” (as he calls it) of the common school, the newspaper, and especially, of “the vast contingent of aliens whom we make welcome, and whose main contention...is that, from the moment of their arrival, they have just as much property in our speech as we have, and just as good a right to do what they choose with it...” (44-45). However, James’s anxiety that “all the while we sleep” these “innumerable aliens are sitting up” at night “to work their will on our inheritance” (45) is not necessarily indicative of the general or common school approach to the development of voice culture.

Most recitation anthologies presented high literary works and dialect pieces as both necessary for the expansion of one's range as a cultured elocutionist. The goal of recitation is often figured in these books (as in James's lecture) as the act of removing "bad, artificial habits, and supplanting them by better,"<sup>61</sup> but contrary to James's anxiety about the "alien" influence upon "our speech," the average recitation book sees an ethnic corruption of standard speech (in the form of a challenging dialect recitation) as a useful means by which to "render the vocal organs flexible," and thus, to accomplish this goal. Specimens are chosen for these anthologies because they provide "elocutionary possibilities" for the reader to demonstrate his vocal range and virtuoso skills in reading. As one can imagine, the alliterative poems of Edgar Allen Poe were especially common in recitation books. "The Bells" in particular was heavily anthologized, for the reason that, as one periodical recitation series explains, "[n]o other poem of the language affords so wide and varied a scope for vocal culture, as it sounds the whole gamut of pitch, covers every shade of force, and admits of every variety of time."<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Poe's poem, in its repetition of words across entire lines, seems to offer itself up as an empty bell jar whose pitch, shade of force and tempo are wholly dependent upon the how the poem is sounded by its reader, especially in those sections where the same word scans most of a line (as in "tinkle" and "time" below), and sometimes even more than a single line (as with "bells"):

Hear the sledges with the bells-  
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!  
While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the heavens, seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;

Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells-  
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to poetry heavy in alliteration, assonance, consonance, and inviting onomatopoeic infusions from the reader, dialect pieces with their uncommon syllable and vowel combinations also were approached as usefully challenging in their varied demands of pitch, force and time.

The actual content of the material collected in these kinds of anthologies often seemed less important than the opportunity to expand one's vocal scope, and to learn to read effectively in a variety of different registers (e.g., the dramatic, the comic) with a versatility akin to the that of the phonograph which (as advertised) could change from opera to vaudeville according the listener's pleasure. For example, the elocutionist and recitation anthologist J. E. Frobisher took "the tintinnabulation that so musically wells" from Poe's silver sledge bells and transformed them into the comical (yet orally challenging) "clanging/ Whanging./Clang-ee-tee-bang, tee-bang[ing]" of a hotel's morning bells, this parody showing that the tone of the "high" culture elocutionist can be a mode of dialect reading in its own right.<sup>64</sup> A medley of dialect versions of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" is presented in the first number of Soper's *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* (1879), the Chinese version describing Mary's fleece as "all samee white snow", the Irish version saying that "the wool was white intoirly."<sup>65</sup> Such ethnic performances were justified not only for the sake of drollery but also as a means of exercising the voice in new and challenging ways. Consequently, a "[h]umerous Dutch dialect" piece entitled "Main Katrine's Brudder Hans" could be advertised as being "[s]uitable for gentlemen."<sup>66</sup>

In the instructions that accompany the more expensive editions of these recitation books we find that the primary lesson to learn in one's development as an elocutionist is that of naturalization. As J. E. Frobisher suggests in the appendix to his recitation anthology, "The best orators are the most natural," meaning that they deliver their readings in a manner that conceals the fact of reading, no matter how inane or scripted the reading may seem.<sup>67</sup> The call for naturalization in recitation is in a sense a call for what seems to have been assumed about the earliest non-commercial recordings, that the voice functions as a natural index of character. But here, the artfulness of naturalization comes into play, raising a complication of the pure and transparent identification of voice with character, suggesting instead that character is created by the trained voice. Frobisher gives this advice to his readers who might practice on the selections he provides, whether it be Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "Sister Helen," yet another Dutch dialect piece entitled "The Dutchman's Shmall Pox,"<sup>68</sup> or the parody of "The Bells" mentioned above:

Go into you room and read to the chairs without the effort of trying to read *well*, but simply *naturally*. Think how you would tell it to the family circle. The perfection of such reading would be so to read that the eyes only of your audience, and not their ears, could tell them that you *are* reading. The practice may be slow but sure. Have no other care than how to read *naturally*.<sup>69</sup>

The spoken records of monologists like Cal Stewart and Russell Hunting are, in one sense, professional manifestations of this mode of reading naturally, of "doing" Uncle Josh or Casey or Cohen in an unstudied manner that does not reveal the source of the speech to be letters on a page. The "Cohen on the Telephone" piece was performed by various artists over the years, but always verbatim from the same script. The same is true for many of the Casey sketches, and obviously for the recitations of canonical poems. Such causeries certainly seem to be delivered in a manner that suggests the reciter's conception of his

audience as a kind of “family circle,” Uncle Josh telling you slowly, and with the interruptions of his own giggles, what new silliness had resulted from his engagement with the increasingly technological and savvy world (so many of his sentences opening with, “Well, I’ll tell ya”). The Cohen recordings give you the same sense, but often positioning the listener as eavesdropper (familial or not?—it’s an interesting question) upon his one-sided conversations with people he does not understand (and, of course, who do not understand him.) The continuity between recitation practice in the home and recitations that one could play in the home were underscored by the fact that many of the early records and cylinders came with printed transcripts of the recorded monologue--transcripts for following along or for “reading along,” but perhaps also for replication by the listener in his turn after the record had ended.<sup>70</sup> Early talking records thus worked as an extension of the recitation piece, providing both a text to recite and a recorded example of how to recite it.

Mark Morrison has argued that insofar as the recitation anthology figured itself at the center of a family circle of reading, it represented a form of performance that was “safe from the shadowy and disreputable theaters” usually associated with “deception and duplicity,” transforming public theater into a private drama of enculturation. His description of the popular recitation book as domesticated theater is equally applicable to the early talking record which brought the voices of the stage into the drawing room.<sup>71</sup> Cal Stewart’s works represent a most explicit example of the relationship among stage performance, recitation recordings and home elocution, as his stories were published as *Uncle Josh’s Punkin’ Center Stories* (all of them transcripts of the records he had made) even as he continued to write and record new ones, and perform them on the stage before live audiences. Many of the pieces themselves depict the continuities between the anthology (recitation or almanac) at the heart of home performances and professional recitation performance on the stage. Stewart’s “Old Yaller Almanac, Hangin’ on the Kitchen Wall” leads to friendly arguments with his mother at the kitchen table (“family

circle” reading), and yet is also the sourcebook for a minstrel troop that Josh goes to see in town:

Wall I went down to see 'em, but their jokes, I knowed 'em all,  
Read 'em in My Old Yaller Almanac, Hangin' on the Kitchen Wall.<sup>72</sup>

The sound-recorded monologue occupies a space somewhere between the vaudeville or music hall stage and the domestic fireside or parlor. It in effect complicates the audience’s position in relation to dialect, for in this in-between space the monologue is both objectified and received from a position of distance, and yet also potentially something performed by the audience itself. It is interesting to speculate about the audiences for these recordings: whether they laughed at the ethnic characters or, in a more familiar (if not familial) way, laughed with them—or both.<sup>73</sup> A Monroe Silver recording, “Cohen on his Honeymoon,” provides an audible and occasionally responsive “American” audience within the sketch suggesting how we are supposed to laugh in a friendly way at Cohen, who is depicted as one who is *aware* of the comic errors in his speech (and so is ultimately not really a Jew, but someone playing a Jew with self-conscious comic effect). The presence of a “standard” American friend, laughing *with* Cohen at Cohen’s errors in speech, suggests that it is fine to laugh at an American “playing” the Jew with a shrewd, punning sense of the English language. However, the corruption worked by the Jew upon standard English is otherwise not so funny, but rather, in the Jamesian sense, disquieting.<sup>74</sup> In other Cohen recordings, the miscomprehensions due to accent (“*tenant Cohen*/lieutenant cohen/goin’”; “*de vind*/devil”; “*shutter*/shut up”; “*to mend* the shutter/tremendous/two men”; “the *demege* shutter/ [heard as] “*damned* shutter”) are clearly spelled out for the listener in a manner that suggests the need for a general translation or explanation of the corruption that is being performed. And yet, through the (none too subtle) *double entendres*, a lesson about what can be done to words by a speaker also seems to come through<sup>75</sup>--and done not simply by a



Jew or Irishman, but by a man who is able to perform effectively the accents of these ethnic categories. The performance ultimately reveals a complete awareness of vocal performance as an enculturating practice and, at the same time, a sense of imperviousness to the corrupting effects of the ethnic transfiguration of language. In relation to the Cohen recordings, I think of a comment made by Sander Gilman about the Yiddishization of certain English words (saying *vindas* instead of *fensters*) as comprehensible only to people in the Diaspora, and as functioning “in defining oneself both in a society and in transition into a society.”<sup>76</sup> The assumption of these recitation books, and of the early spoken recordings seems to be that the speaker who can confidently perform the “transition into a society” does so from his already firmly established position within that society. As with T. S. Eliot’s performance of the various voices in *The Wasteland*, the cultured voice *does* other voices, and underscores the purity or impersonality of his own voice in doing so.<sup>77</sup>

Thus the performances of early spoken recording artists suggest that they were not identified simply as specialists in the ethnic personae that they performed (i.e., Russell Hunting as Casey) but rather as versatile elocutionists capable of inhabiting different voices at will. Thus Len Spencer, who recorded much “Negro” material (*and* that Edison promotion piece “I am the Edison Phonograph” discussed above), also read serious historical materials like “Lincoln’s Speech at Gettysburg” (1902).<sup>78</sup> John Terrell performed deadpan comic routines in a straight “American” voice, but also made Casey recordings (such as “A Few Words in Regard to Drinking” and “Casey’s Address to the G.A. R.,” both n.d.).<sup>79</sup> George Graham’s “Colored Preacher,” a sing-song delivery of a mock sermon infused with content that would have been insulting to a congregation, appeared in the same series as his “Auctioneer” recording (1900), both performances demonstrating Graham’s virtuosity in fast, rhythmic reading, but within very different voice-culture contexts.<sup>80</sup> Another recording by Graham, his “Drama in One Act” (1896) in which he does a girl’s voice, an old man’s voice, a murderer’s voice, switching between them seamlessly, displays what may have been the key selling point for these early talking records, that is, the display

of the reader's ability to perform multiple voices and sounds in one monologue.<sup>81</sup> Russell Hunting was another important innovator in this regard. By December 1891 he had acquired a reputation for recording "highly dramatic representations...with the addition of imitations of railway whistles, bells, galloping of horses, and other sounds, brought to a wonderful degree of perfection."<sup>82</sup>

To replicate the sounds of animals and machines with the human voice brings us back to the key issue of transparency as regards sound recording media and spoken recordings. In one sense, these vocal imitations of bells and whistles represent a human's attempt to replicate sounds with a fidelity equaling the phonograph's innate indexical power. The speaker who can mimic a range of sounds and voices convincingly may then underscore the underlying transparency of his own voice, just as the phonograph's voice was inherently clean. In another sense, though, the distinction between mechanical replication and human mimicry is further underscored by such recordings. For example, Len Spencer announced at the opening of a 1918 recording made by performers John Orren and Lillian Drew, "I take pleasure in introducing to you, Orren and Drew, vaudeville's favorite mimics. The imitations produced in this record are made by the human voice alone, without the aid of any mechanical device whatsoever."<sup>83</sup> In so prefacing this recording, titled "A Study in Mimicry—Vaudeville," Spencer not only proclaimed the power and versatility of the human voice with a salesman's "you won't believe your ears" pitch, but also raised a significant point about verisimilitude and absorption that applies to spoken recordings in general. Implicit in Spencer's statement that the sounds of train whistles, wood saws, barnyard animals and bird songs appearing on Orren and Drew's recording are produced "by the human voice alone" is the sense that even in such a sound-effects recording, the spoken recording's status as interpretive performance is preserved.

### *Reading versus Listening: Agency and Vocalization*

I have stressed in this essay the continuum that I believe existed between early spoken recordings and the reader/listener's own practice of recitation, in part to counter the common argument that the early phonograph was received basically as immediate and definitive of reality. My account has attributed to the listener a far greater degree of interactive agency than is commonly granted the audio book consumer today. Most recent accounts of the talking book suggest that the mode of absorption resulting from reading as listening, as opposed to reading as deciphering symbols printed on a page, may entail a serious loss of agency on the part of the book reader. The danger of the talking book as it is often described by its critics today is that it lulls one out of a true, thoughtful and empowering literary culture that is identified with print; that it lulls us out of controlling what we absorb, and keeps us from stopping, thinking, and especially of *vocalizing* for ourselves.<sup>84</sup>

The question of vocalization during the reading process is often, in the case of the audio book, inseparable from the fact of dramatic interpretation. This precedent was already in place in the earliest spoken recordings of narrative fiction, which were almost always made by actors who had built reputations for themselves performing stage dramatizations of popular novels (for instance, Len Spencer performing selections from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Herbert Beerbohm Tree performing selections from *Trilby*).<sup>85</sup> The talking book necessarily entails a concrete "envoicing" narrator, where a print book demands the reader to perform the vocalization of the text for himself. This is significant, for the process of constructing the author's voice is one of the primary values attributed to the act of reading literature; it is sometimes identified as "the main event of literature itself."<sup>86</sup> As Denis Donoghue remarks in *The Practice of Reading*: "I believe that the purpose of reading literature is to exercise or incite one's imagination; specifically, one's ability to imagine being different."<sup>87</sup> In the most skeptical accounts of the talking book, this exercise of imagination is eliminated. Like Trilby unconsciously performing the

musical mind of the mesmerist Svengali, the sound of the audio book inhibits our own imagination by performing our potential imagining of the text's voice for us. Rather than incite the empathetic imagination into action, the performance of a character by the narrator's voice may even reinforce a sense of the difference between ourselves and the character voices we are listening to.

In print-based criticism, the voice we conjure for the text within our internal auditorium, so to speak, is a crucial aspect of the interpretation itself; it forms a significant part of the meaning we find in the text. But in criticizing an aural text—especially if we have experienced it first in print—it is the disparity between our own voice and that of the recording that may come to the fore. One recent manual for audio book production suggests that the narrator must try to make himself "into a panel of glass" through which the reader can see the book as if holding it in his own hands, and lists as common deficiencies in narration "errors that change the meaning of the printed text" and that impose "personal bias in presenting the printed text."<sup>88</sup> Quite apart from the impossibility of such transparency, I feel it is precisely this disparity between different manifestations of literature—so powerfully dramatized for us by early spoken recordings—that we should bring to the fore and value as a means of speculating upon the vital effects of a literary work's materiality.<sup>89</sup> As Charles Bernstein has remarked in the introduction to his anthology, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*: "the [literary] work is not identical to any one graphical or performative realization of it, nor can it be equated with a totalized unity of these versions or manifestations."<sup>90</sup> This, I think, is a crucial attitude to take in relation to literary recordings of all kinds. Because their apparent proximity to print books coincide with so many material or "performative" differences from them, literary recordings can reveal much about the modes of aesthetic experience produced by particular performative manifestations of literature, and can serve to remind us that reading a book is never a simple or quiet activity, but always a technologically informed and culturally rehearsed practice.

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Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," *North American Review* 126 (May 1878): 534.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. Edison, "The Perfected Phonograph," *North American Review* 379 (June 1888): 645.

<sup>3</sup> "Julian Hawthorne in 'America,'" *The Phonograph and Phonograph-Graphophone* (New York: Russell Bros., 1888; reprint, London : London Phonograph and Gramophone Society, 1973), 24; J. Mount Bleyer, "Living Autograms," *Phonogram* 1 (1893): 16.

<sup>4</sup> "Voices of the Dead," *Phonoscope* 1 (November 1896): 1.

<sup>5</sup>Bleyer, "Living Autograms," 16.

<sup>6</sup> Samantha Matthews, "Psychological Crystal Palace? Late Victorian Confession Albums," *Book History* 3 (2000): 127.

<sup>7</sup> T. C. Mendenhall, "The Characteristic Curves of Composition," *Science* 9 (1887): 238; Lucius Sherman, "Some Observations upon the Sentence-Length in English Prose," *University Studies* 1 (1888): 119, 127. This kind of computational stylistic analysis which followed "style" patterns (without any concern for semantic content) for the purpose of tracing authorial character, represented a scientific means of authenticating an author's presence beyond the semantic, expressive aspects of his writing. Other essays from the period in this vein include T. C. Mendenhall's "A Mechanical Solution to a Literary Problem," *Popular Science Monthly* 60 (1901): 97-105; Lucius Sherman's "On Certain Facts and Principles in the Development of Form in Literature," *University Studies* 1

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(1892): 337-366; and G. W. Gerwig's "On the Decrease of Predication and of Sentence Weight in English Prose," *University Studies* 2 (1894):17-44.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>9</sup> John G. M'Kendrick, *Waves of Sound and Speech* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1897), 12-15.

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Kreilkamp, "Speech on Paper: Victorian Phonography and the Reform of Writing" (paper delivered at the Scenes of Writing Conference, Gregynog, Wales, 22 July 1998), 7. Cited with permission of the author. For an extended discussion of the historical confluences between shorthand and the Edison phonograph, see Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves*, 21-96.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph: From Tin Foil to High Fidelity* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1954), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>15</sup> In the sense that the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot argued, in *Le Livre à Venir*, that "[o]nly the book matters, as it stands, far from genres, apart from the labels—prose, poetry, novel, reportage—by which it refuses to be categorized and to which it denies the power to assign its place and determine its form." Cited in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 8.

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- <sup>16</sup> John Cookson et al., *Digital Talking Books: Planning for the Future* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1998), 3-4.
- <sup>17</sup> Leroy Hughbanks, *Talking Wax* (N.p.: Hobson, 1945), 106.
- <sup>18</sup> Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "The Form of the Phonograph Record," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (1990): 57.
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas Y. Levin, "For the Record: Adorno on Music," *October* 55 (1990): 31-32.
- <sup>22</sup> Adorno, "Phonograph Record," 60.
- <sup>23</sup> They represent the inverse of a late nineteenth-century phonographic imaginary, in part because that imaginary was informed by two powerful literary models of mimesis, the model of the romantic poem as repository of nature's sounds, and the model of the realist novel as transcript of social reality and especially of character.
- <sup>24</sup> John Picker, "The Victorian Aura of the Recorded Voice," *New Literary History* 32 (2001): 770.
- <sup>25</sup> Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," 534.
- <sup>26</sup> Edison, "The Perfected Phonograph," 645.
- <sup>27</sup> Bennett Maxwell, "The Steytler Recordings of Alfred, Lord Tennyson—A History," *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 3 (1980): 153-55.
- <sup>28</sup> A digitally retrievable version of this recording, dubbed from a tape copy of Gouraud's cylinder, is available at the British Library National Sound Archive website: <<http://www.bl.uk/sounds/nighti56.ram>> (7 November 2002).

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- <sup>29</sup> Cited in Frank Andrews, *The Edison Phonograph: The British Connection* (London and Rugby: City Of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society, 1986), xiv.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.
- <sup>31</sup> John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 281.
- <sup>32</sup> William Wordsworth, "To the Cuckoo," in *William Wordsworth: Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 159.
- <sup>33</sup> Mary Jacobus, "The Art of Managing Books: Romantic Prose and the Writing of the Past," in *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1984), 217.
- <sup>34</sup> W. H. Preece, *The Phonograph; or, Speaking Machine* (London: London Stereoscopic Company, 1878), 54.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>37</sup> "Editorial Grams," *Phonogram* 1 (1893): 10.
- <sup>38</sup> Horatio Nelson Powers, "The First Phonogramic Poem," Thomas A. Edison Papers, Edison National Historic Site, D-88-50; 124:705. This Edison archive document is available for viewing in digital format at < <http://edison.rutgers.edu>> (7 November 2002).
- <sup>39</sup> Horatio Nelson Powers's "The Phonograph's Salutation" was later published in his *Lyrics of the Hudson* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1891). I am working from the text of the poem as it appears in the slip prepared to accompany the sound recording: Powers, "The First Phonogramic Poem."



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<sup>40</sup> This passage from the *Davenport Democrat* (19 May 1857) is cited in Bennett Maxwell, *The Incunabula of Recorded Sound: A Guide to Early Edison Non-Commercial Recording* (Unpublished MS: 1990), 5.

<sup>41</sup> "The Phonograph's Salutation." Horatio Nelson Powers, Performer. New York, 1888. A dubbing of this recording is available for listening at the British Library National Sound Archive in London.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the elocutionary concept of "pure voice" see Mark Morrison, "Performing the Pure Voice: Elocution, Verse Recitation, and Modernist Poetry in Prewar London," *Modernism/Modernity* 3 (1996): 25-50.

<sup>43</sup> My transcription from the promotional audio recording recorded by Len Spencer, West Orange, 1906. This two-minute wax cylinder was distributed to dealers for the purpose of demonstrating the Edison phonograph, but was not sold commercially.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Morrison, "Performing the Pure Voice," 28.

<sup>45</sup> "Cohen on the Telephone," Joe Hayman, Performer. Columbia, A1516, 1913.

<sup>46</sup> "Mr. Tom Clare in His Greatest Success of Recent Years," "*His Master's Voice*" *New Records September 1911* (Swansea: Gramophone Co., 1911), 11.

<sup>47</sup> "Casey as Judge," Russell Hunting, Performer. Berliner 612, 1896; "Casey as Hotel Clerk," Russell Hunting, Performer. Berliner 614, 1895; "Casey as Chairman of the Mugwump Club," Russell Hunting, Performer. Berliner 615, 1897. These recordings are listed in Paul Charosh, comp., *Berliner Gramophone Records: American Issues, 1892-1900* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 36. Some of these recordings were also issued as Edison Two Minute Wax Cylinder Records.

<sup>48</sup> "Schultz Goes Hunting with Grover in Cleveland," Frank Kennedy, Performer. Edison Two Minute Wax Cylinder, 3841, circa 1888; "Schultz's views on Embalmed Beef." Frank

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Kennedy, Performer. Edison Two Minute Wax Cylinder, 3840, circa 1888. These recordings are listed in Sydney H. Carter and Major H. H. Annand, comps., *Complete Numerical Catalogue of the Edison Two-Minute Wax Cylinder Records, Containing all the United States Issues From 1888 Onwards* (London: City of London Phonograph Society, 1964), 1:24.

<sup>49</sup> "Colored Preacher," George Graham, Performer. Berliner 620, 1895; "Negro Stump Speech," George Graham, Performer. Berliner 621, 1895-96. Cited in Charosh, *Berliner Gramophone Records*, 37. For a brief discussion of the popularity of recitation records in the 1890s see Gelatt, *Fabulous Phonograph*, 52-57.

<sup>50</sup>Edison, "Phonograph and its Future," 533.

<sup>51</sup>"Recitation--Mr. Lewis Waller--Charge of the Light Brigade," *His Master's Voice New Records, February 1913* (London: Gramophone Co., 1913), 13.

<sup>52</sup>Robert J. O'Brien, "Literary Recordings," *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound in the United States*, ed. Guy A. Marco (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 392-95.

<sup>53</sup> "The Charge of the Light Brigade" was first recorded in 1890 by Tennyson himself. See Maxwell, "Steytler Recordings of Tennyson."

<sup>54</sup>*The Rigler and Deutsch Record Index* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Association for Recorded Sound Collections, 1983), 5582.

<sup>55</sup>A few examples of such titles include J. A. Ferguson's *The Star Reciter: A Collection of Prose and Poetical Gems, Grave and Gay, from British & American Authors* (Manchester and London: J. Heywood, Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1873); *Wehman Bros. 100 Popular Comic, Dramatic and Dialect Recitations* (New York: Wehman Bros., 1900); and the periodical *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* published in Chicago by T. S. Denison between 1879-1916.

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<sup>56</sup> Alongside these broadly cast general recitation books, more specific collections were developed according to either genre (Vaudeville Sketches, Blackface Plays, Christmas Comedies) or niche audience (monologues aimed at children “or monologists who impersonate children,” monologues “particularly for women”). My focus will be on the general, late Victorian anthology. For descriptions of some of these niche-market collections, see advertisements in Henry M. Soper’s *Scrap-Book Recitation Series: A Miscellaneous Collection of Prose and Poetry for Recitation and Reading, Designed for Schools, Home and Literary Circles* 5 (1887): 142 and back flap and cover.

<sup>57</sup> For example, “The Light from Over the Range” is cited as having come “From Scrap Collection of Miss Julia A. Richardson.” Soper, *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* 5 (1887): 115.

<sup>58</sup> Soper, *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* 5 (1887): 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Prescott’s Drawing Room Recitations* (New York: De Witt, 1881), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Henry James, *The Question of Our Speech, The Lesson of Balzac: Two Lectures* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1905), 11.

<sup>61</sup> J. E. Frobisher, *Good Selections, No. 2: Selected Readings, Serious and Humorous, in Prose and Poetry, with an Appendix on Elocution* (New York: J. Schermerhorn & Co., 1875), 149.

<sup>62</sup> Soper, *Scrap-Book Recitation Series* 3 (1882): 16.

<sup>63</sup> Edgar Allen Poe, “The Bells” (1849). Stanza I, here quoted from Soper, *Scrap Book Recitation Series* 3 (1882): 16.

<sup>64</sup> Stanza I of Frobisher’s parody of “The Bells,” as found in Frobisher, *Good Selections* 2 (1875): 103:

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Hear the hotels with their bells,—  
Morning bells!  
What a thundering sound of Bells!  
How they twang-ee-tee-bang!  
Tee-bang, tee-bang!  
Up the stairs and halls around;  
Twang-ee-tee-bang, tee-bang,  
What a bustling, hurrying sound!  
Now the lodgers cease from snoring,  
Now the morning cock is crowing,  
Now the meadow lark is soaring,  
And the cattle they are lowing,  
While the bells are clanging,  
Whanging,  
Clang-ee-tee-bang, tee-bang, tee-bang, tee-bang,  
Clang-ee-tee-bang, tee-bang—  
Oh! such a clanging never was heard,  
Even in the lurid lower world.

<sup>65</sup> “Medley: Mary’s Little Lamb—*New*,” in H. M. Soper’s *Scrap-Book Recitation* 1 (1879): 55.

<sup>66</sup> Francis P. Richardson, *Werner’s Readings and Recitations No. 13* (New York: Edgar S. Werner and Co., 1894), front cover inner-flap advertisement for *Emma Dunning Banks’s Original Recitations with Lesson Talks* (New York: Edgar S. Werner and Co., 1890).

<sup>67</sup> J. E. Frobisher, *Good Selections* 2 (1875): 149.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 149, 158.

<sup>70</sup> Patrick Feaster, “Cal Stewart and the Phonographic Text” (unpublished paper, 1999). As Feaster remarks in this paper: “Edison Blue Amberol cylinder 1583 is a four-minute celluloid cylinder recording of Cal Stewart's ‘Uncle Josh Buys an Automobile,’ released in November, 1912. When the original cylinder was released, it was accompanied by a printed slip of paper prepared by the manufacturer, containing a transcription of the recording...for purposes of ‘reading along’” (5). Cited with permission.

<sup>71</sup> Morrison, “Performing the Pure Voice,” 30.

<sup>72</sup> Calvin Stewart, *Uncle Josh's Punkin' Centre Stories* (Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1905), 13.

<sup>73</sup> Gavin Jones, in *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), speculates about a similar issue as it relates to vaudeville audiences: “Although it is not easy to gauge the psychological effects of such stereotypes in their observers, ethnic groups within larger theater audiences must have actively laughed at greenhorn stage types as a means to establish their own status in mainstream society” (167).

<sup>74</sup> “Cohen on his Honeymoon,” Monroe Silver, Performer. Edison 50667R, 1920.

<sup>75</sup> The following is a transcribed excerpt from an early recording of “Cohen on the Telephone,” Joe Hayman, Performer. Columbia A1516, 1913. The same script was used by Monroe Silver and Herbert Samuel Berliner in later recordings of this recitation piece:

I rang up to tell you that I'm your *tenant Cohen*. I say I'm your tenant,  
Cohen. I ain't *goin'*, I'm stoppin' here. I'm your tenant Coh--Not *lieutenant*  
Cohen. I vant to tell you thet last night the vind came and blow down the shutter  
outside my house. And I vant you to send--I say last night de vind came—De vind,

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not the devil, the vind. The vind. You know vat shhshhshh [wind sound], like that. Vell that blew my shutter down. Outside my house. And I vant you--I say it blew the shutter out. The *shutter*. No, I didn't say *shut up*...I vant you to send the karpenteh *to mend the shutter*. Not a *tremendous shutter*...I vant you to send the karpenteh...the voikman...*to mend* the shutter...Not *two men*, no, vun man, to mend...the damedge, the *damaged* shutter...I ain't swearing at you, I'm only telling you. Are you there?... (my emphases, added to underscore the *double entendres*).

<sup>76</sup> Homi Bhabha and Sander L. Gilman, "Tête-à-Tête," *Talk Talk Talk: The Cultural Life of Everyday Conversation*, ed. S. I. Salamensky (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Michael North, in *The Dialect of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), argues further that "[a]s a violation of standard English, dialect became a sign of Pound and Eliot's collaboration against the London literary establishment and the literature it produced" (77).

<sup>78</sup> "Lincoln's Speech at Gettysburg," Len Spencer, Performer. Edison Standard 8154, 1902.

<sup>79</sup> "A Few Words in Regard to Drinking," John Terrell, Performer. Berliner 6484, n.d.;

"Casey's Address to the G.A. R.," John Terrell, Performer. Berliner 608, n.d.

<sup>80</sup> "Coloured Preacher/Auctioneer," George Graham, Performer. Berliner 626W, 1900.

<sup>81</sup> "Drama in One Act," George Graham, Performer. Berliner 627Z, 1896.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond Wile, "Record Makers in 1891." *ARSC Journal* 3 (1971):10-12.

<sup>83</sup> "A Study in Mimicry – Vaudeville," introduced by Len Spencer. John Orren and Lillian Drew, Performers. Edison 50485-R, 1918.

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<sup>84</sup>See, for example, Rand Richards Cooper, "Can We Really Read with Our Ears?" *New York Times Book Review* (6 June 1993): 49; and Sarah Kozloff, "Audio Books in a Visual Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 18 (1995): 89.

<sup>85</sup>"The Flogging Scene from Uncle Tom's Cabin," Len Spencer, Performer. Victor 2674, 1904; "Talking Uncle Tom's Cabin," Len Spencer, Performer. Edison Cylinder 8656, 1904; "Svengali Mesmerizes Trilby," Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Performer. HMV, E162, 1906.

<sup>86</sup>Cooper, "Can We Really Read?" 15, 49. As Cooper puts it: "[T]he process of constructing a writer's voice, far from being a burdensome chore that can be simplified for us, as washing dishes is simplified by a dishwasher, is rather more like the main event of literature itself..." (49).

<sup>87</sup>Denis Donoghue, *The Practice of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>88</sup>Billy R. West, *The Art and Science of Audio Book Production* (Washington: Library of Congress, NLS, 1995), 2, 5.

<sup>89</sup>As Paul Duguid states in his essay "Material Matters: The Past and Futurology of the Book": "[Books] are not...simply 'dead things' carrying performed information from authors to readers. They are crucial agents in the cycle of production, distribution, and consumption." In *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 79.

<sup>90</sup>Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.