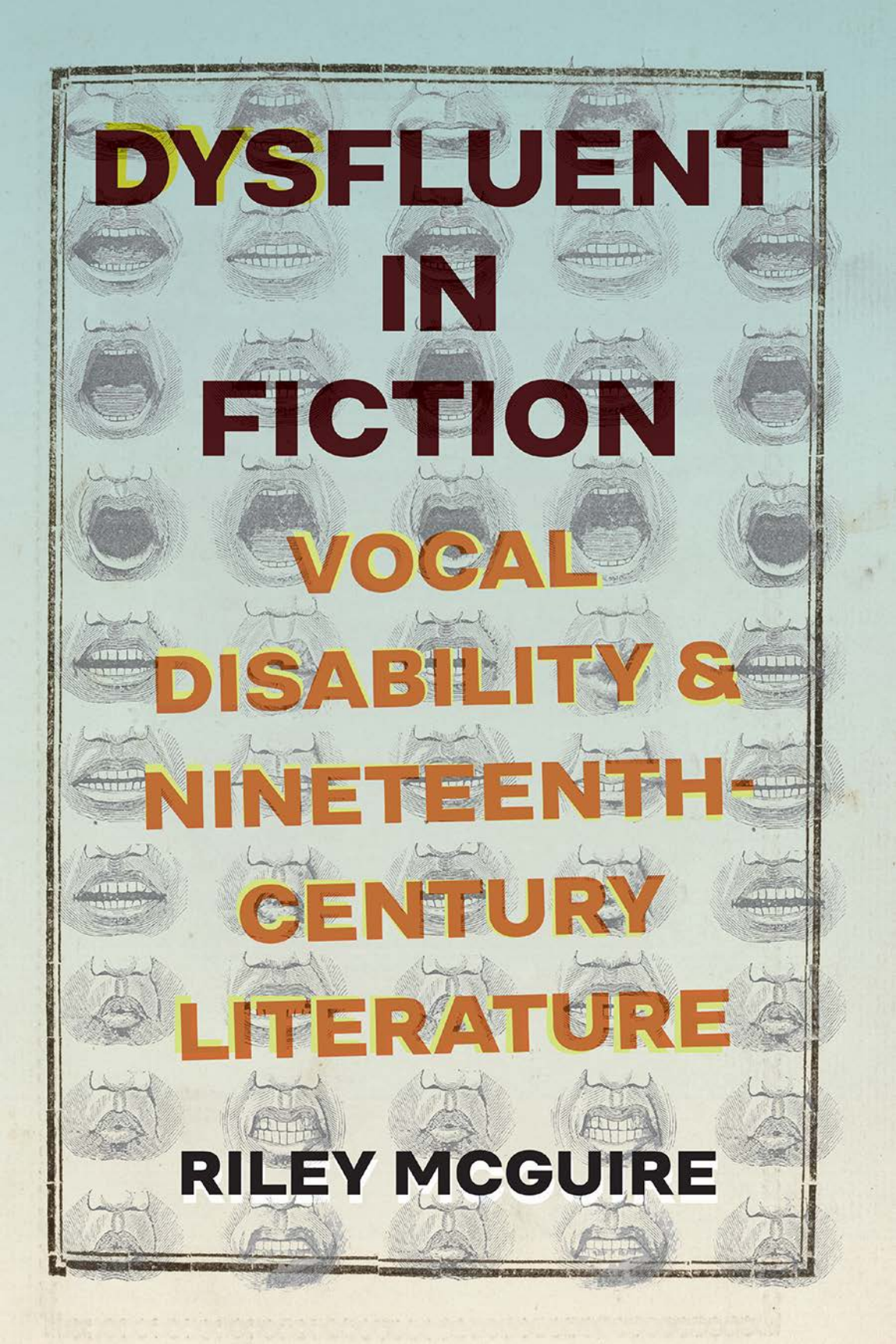
DYSFLUENT IN FICTION
VOCAL DISABILITY & NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE
RILEY MCGUIRE

DYSFLUENT IN FICTION

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VOCAL DISABILITY AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

Riley McGuire

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INTRODUCTION

The Stammering Century

There's no isolated question of speech.
—Henry James, "The Speech of American Women" (1906)

A young man's speech disorder almost cost Queen Victoria her life a mere five years into her sixty-three-year reign. Or so claimed reports recounting the assassination attempt made by John Francis on the monarch on May 29, 1842. Francis, a nineteen-year-old unemployed stage carpenter, aimed a pistol at the queen as she and Prince Albert rode in her carriage toward Buckingham Palace. Francis did not fire and fled the scene. His treasonous act was witnessed by sixteen-year-old George Pearson, a wood engraver from Holborn, but Pearson did not alert anyone of the incident. As *The Times* reported, Pearson stayed silent because he "was afflicted with so inveterate a habit of stammering as to be unable to give an alarm" ("FULMINATING" 7); in other words, Pearson believed that Francis would be long gone by the time he could make himself intelligible to the authorities. Pearson's failure to precipitate the capture of Francis on the 29th left Victoria open to a second, though equally unsuccessful, attempt on the 30th. This time, Francis "attracted considerable attention, by making use of the most horrid language in [St. James's] Park, saying that the Queen lived upon the vitals of the people" and "making use of the most abusive epithets" ("Most Daring Attempt"). He then fired his pistol at Victoria, missed, and was apprehended.

If the content of Francis's speech (his tirade against Victoria) serves as a sonic index of the assassin's threat to the monarch and the nation she represents, then the form of Pearson's speech (his "inveterate" stammering) places

him in a comparable role. Discursively, Francis says the wrong thing as a British subject; physiologically, Pearson is unable to use his voice to do the right thing as a British subject—to instigate the apprehension that occurred the following day. This latter transgression proves temporary when Pearson is recuperated into national utility in a judicial context. Weeks later, in the trial against Francis, the presiding magistrate congratulated the elocutionist Thomas Hunt for his fortnight of treatment with Pearson, which apparently transformed this "key witness" from "inarticulateness to verbal spontaneity": he now spoke "fluidly, unhaltingly" (Rockey 243; Murphy 196). Thanks to Hunt, Pearson was able to testify against Francis, and there is no mention of his stammer in the trial's transcripts. The intervention of what we would now call speech therapy transforms Pearson's voice from a liability into an asset: the stammer that prevented him from warning someone about Francis's regicidal intentions becomes the fluency that helped him convict the would-be assassin.

Notably, the queen represented the ideal of refined pronunciation cultivated by elocutionists such as Hunt. Hunt's son James, heir to the family business of speech correction, referred to Victoria as the "highest example" of correct pronunciation, stressing that "Her Majesty in the delivery of her speeches . . . speaks in so clear and distinct a manner, that not a syllable is lost" (*Treatise* 22). Ultimately, a stammer did not cost the Victorians their queen and vocal ideal; instead, the standardization of Pearson's articulation was accompanied by the twin corrective of silencing the differently delinquent voice of Francis. Francis was transported to Australia for a life of hard labor after Pearson's newly obtained fluency helped convict him, thereby removing Francis's treasonous diction from the British soundscape. To uphold the tone of British nationalism, synecdochally embodied in Victoria's voice, and literally defend the body of the sovereign, Pearson's vocal form undergoes therapeutic correction to ensure that Francis's vocal content is muted by the carceral force of colonial displacement.

This anecdote reveals how vocal disability was considered a problem in both a personal and communal sense, with potentially national ramifications in the sensational case of Pearson. It demonstrates how the voice was mobilized to connect a private persona to a public context and, in the process, to determine an individual's social value based on both what they said and how they said it. At the same time, Hunt's elocutionary intervention suggests the voice's alterability: its capacity to change to fulfill or subvert expectations attendant to intersecting positions of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, and more. This dual conceptualization of the voice—a convenient social shorthand that is also malleable—gave it immense narrative utility for the period's

writers, thus inviting attention to the representation of disordered speech within Victoria's time.

Dysfluent in Fiction accepts this invitation by offering a literary history of vocal disability in the nineteenth century.[1] Speech disorders are an underexamined component of the period's literature, one that helps us to understand the historical durability of vocal hierarchies still structuring our present. The book uses the term "dysfluency" as an umbrella to designate modes of communication that depart from normative expectations of pace, articulacy, and fluency, such as stammering, lisping, baby talk, and mutism. Dysfluent speech resounds within an extraordinary number of nineteenth-century texts, while also playing a formative role in the lives of some of the period's most influential writers—both the writing body of the author and the written body of the character were impacted by the period's vocal prescriptions and deviations. In short, dysfluency is far more central to the nineteenth-century imagination than has been acknowledged.

By continuing to neglect dysfluency, we risk a facile understanding of it as the lack of fluency, rather than as a form of communication with its own literary conventions, ideological implications, and social insights. Dysfluency is more than fluency's opposite. Because dysfluent utterances are construed as anomalous or exceptional, they are well-suited to reveal how speech locates us in the world and in representations of it. In other words, dysfluency's peripherality to the vocal status quo allows it to reveal the sonic texture of that status quo and the potential rewards of deviating from it in nineteenth-century literature and lived experience. Therefore, certain pervasive social expectations—of vocal alignment in romantic relationships, of altering your articulation as you mature, of normative speech's integrality to vocational success, and more—are obfuscated by our inattention to vocal disability. Ultimately, this book demonstrates dysfluency's unique ability to elucidate the voice's governance of social connectivity, both in the fictive imagination and everyday reality of the nineteenth century.

What may first seem like a minor facet of literary representation is revealed to be a frequent condition of possibility for narrative with important aesthetic and political stakes: nineteenth-century fiction deploys dysfluency as a dynamic plot engine, essential element of characterization, and fraught analogical device. Despite dysfluency's prevalence in nineteenth-century texts, it has been glossed over in literary studies and allied disciplines—there has yet to be a book-length study of vocal disability in the period. Critical

1. This book is a cultural rather than a medical history. For histories of speech pathology and medical interventions, see Rockey; Bobrick; O'Neill.

assumptions about the rise of print capitalism in the nineteenth century and the attendant waning of vocal culture are one cause of this disinterest in voice generally and dysfluency specifically.[2] Ivan Kreilkamp has led the way in challenging these assumptions, demonstrating how orality flourishes in vibrant ways within nineteenth-century writing. In Kreilkamp's opening case study of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), he argues that the novel is seeking the "antidote for [the] 'dry' voice" of facts spawned by industrialization and utilitarian education wherein speech is in service of unemotive practicality (24). For Kreilkamp, this antidote is found in the affecting final utterance of factory laborer Stephen Blackpool in condemnation of the working-class oppression that contributes to his death. But the novel offers another vocal balm in the asthmatic, lisping "voithe" of the circus leader, Mr. Sleary (Dickens, *Hard Times* 41). Via both form and content, Sleary's dysfluent speech rejects the fixation of the novel's industrialists and educators on standardized voices droning out standardized information.

Sleary's mantra that bookends the novel best exemplifies his resistance to Coketown's stultifying mores: "People must be amuthed" (45). By the novel's close—once the characters and, by extension, readers, have been exposed to the violent limitations of strictly "factual" articulations—Sleary repeats his proclamation with a slight typographic difference: "People mutht be amuthed" (282). His words affirmed by the novel's plot, Sleary emphasizes his point by making it even more dysfluent. The challenge of Sleary's sentences encourages readers to mouth the words along with him to follow his meaning, mimicking the form of his utterances to comprehend their content. In other words, the extra interpretive effort demanded by Sleary's speech renders it participatory, inviting readers to perform dysfluency in an utterance emphasizing the importance of pleasure, one that makes amusement an imperative. In *Hard Times,* dysfluency is a way to vocalize the need for the fanciful, fun, and messy in life and to ask readers to gloss this sentiment with their eyes and form it with their lips—thereby emphasizing how orality remains culturally integral during the ascendancy of nineteenth-century print literature.

Using text to apprehend these vocal instantiations of disability is a historical necessity given the lack of audio-recording technologies before 1877. But this necessity is less a methodological constraint on access to voices than a crux of this book's analysis. Reading utterances as rendered in print shows how nineteenth-century efforts to institute vocal standards occurred first and

2. See Hoegaerts and Schroeder for assumptions about the "eclipse of the voice and the vocal in favour of the written word and silent reader" (6).

foremost textually, ranging from elocution manuals and vocal health treatises to the more subtle ideological workings of literature. As Dwight Conquergood puts it, the period's discourses of vocal normalization were "tinctured with printer's ink" (326). Therefore, a focus on vocal archives is inadequate for understanding dysfluency, both due to the paucity of nineteenth-century sonic artifacts and to the entanglement of audible and textual forms of communication in establishing certain voices as normal and ideal, and others as deviant and inferior.

Vocally disabled figures populate the most canonical nineteenth-century texts and their most obscure corollaries, appearing in the fiction of durably famous novelists as well as in largely forgotten melodramas and memoirs. Dysfluency also played a formative role in the personal lives of several influential writers, informing the stylistic innovations of authors from Lewis Carroll to Henry James, who turn to the page as a tool to remediate their dysfluent articulations in print. Indeed, it is hard to find a text from the period that does not feature at least incidental instances of dysfluency: take, for instance, Pip's panicked stammering in the opening scene of *Great Expectations* (1860–61), or the "childish lisping" of Mirah Lapidoth's "Hebrew hymn" midway through *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (374), or the feeble disjointed utterances of Jude Fawley during the final pages of *Jude the Obscure* (1894). Their dysfluencies are situational, rather than intrinsic to a character—attributable to fear, linguistic difference, and illness, respectively.

These fleeting iterations of dysfluency are innumerable throughout nineteenth-century fiction, as are the habitual forms of speech disorder this book primarily interrogates by asking: What literary conventions did authors devise for depicting dysfluency and how do they alter across genres? In what ways did literary depiction partake in debates over the perils and potentials of vocal disability within other discourses? How did fictional imaginings of vocal disability influence the identities, vocations, and relationships available to dysfluent individuals in reality? What lessons about vocal diversity can be imported from the nineteenth century into our contemporary moment? To answer the above, I turn to various dysfluencies in a range of genres: lisping lovers in courtship plots, a baby-talking fairy in a fantastical children's story, a mute detective in a sensation novel, a stammering aristocrat in a stage comedy, a variety of vocal disabilities in the archive of enslavement, and more.[3] These diverse texts cut across the canonical split, featuring quintessential

3. Poetry is perhaps conspicuously absent. Poetry's relationship with dysfluency has received more attention than other literary forms given verse's persistent relationship to orality. See Stuart's work on the "poetics of disfluency" (30); see also J. Davies.

Victorian realist novels by William Makepeace Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë and biographical writing by Frederick Douglass to now excoriated and overlooked texts by famous authors such as Lewis Carroll and virtually forgotten writers including Tom Taylor, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and Martin Farquhar Tupper whose popularity was coterminous with the nineteenth century.

Collectively, these texts provide the book's first argument by emphasizing the artificiality of an assumption of fluency in both reality and representation. It is a truism that the dialogue essential to nineteenth-century novels, though it varies dramatically in content, is relatively standard in terms of its spelling, grammar, and fluency.[4] Character speech generally reflects accepted usage and omits the repetitions, pauses, and mispronunciations endemic to quotidian orality—a concession to readability and deliberate violation of verisimilitude. By contrast, the critically neglected ubiquity of dysfluent deviations from standard usage in the period's literature reflects an increasing fixation on both delineating and violating vocal norms. Nineteenth-century writers lived with and wrote about dysfluency, often choosing to depart from dialogic norms. The frequency with which they did so led to emergent patterns around dysfluent depiction. Authors made widespread use of dialogue tags ("he stammered," "she lisped"), atypical typography (hyphens to indicate the repeated phonemes of a stutter), misspellings ("th" substituted for "s" to denote the sibilants of a lisp), and combinations thereof to represent dysfluent utterances. Rather than simply violating conventions for writing speech, authors crafted new conventions for writing dysfluency.

Though rarely addressed in later criticism, the ubiquity of dysfluency in literature did not go unnoticed by nineteenth-century commentators. John Ruskin confirms and condemns this tendency in his essay "Fiction, Fair and Foul" (1880): "It is part of the popular folly of the day to find pleasure in trying to write and spell . . . abortive, crippled and more or less brutal forms of speech" (176). Ruskin declares that less gifted authors struggle to "invent a probable conversation," so they instead choose "to chronicle the broken syllables . . . of an invalid" that are "easily rendered, and too surely recognised"; these articulations, for Ruskin, are facile gimmicks to lend a semblance of reality to a text (161). He diagnoses a kind of cheap, sick realism that has dysfluency as one of its chief symptoms. Henry James, similarly, links representational trends to what he saw as an increasing number of people "vocally limping and shuffling" their way through the nineteenth century (*Speech and*

4. Michaelson asserts that representations of speech "tend to clean up the spoken word. Anyone who has seen a transcript of a real-life conversation knows how unlike literary dialogue it is" (9). See also Chapman (248); Abercrombie (4).

Manners 39). Ruskin and James exemplify a popular discourse in the period that saw disordered speech as representative of a larger cultural ailment.[5]

Though accounts like Ruskin's and James's were influential, they are not a conclusive characterization of the period's reception of dysfluency. Ruskin's pathologizing analysis concedes that authors "find pleasure" in creating these articulations, an oblique alignment with Sleary's lisping advocation of amusement. Dysfluency provides a diversity of pleasures for readers as well. Though dysfluent figures are often stigmatized in the chapters that follow, their atypical voices also charm and endear: lisping baby talk enhances the childhood adorability of characters in Brontë and Carroll, mutism results in the pleasant surprise of professional competency in Braddon, stammering serves as the linchpin of a virtuosic stage performance of aristocratic satire in Taylor, and more. What connects this range of dysfluent pleasures is their bold and even enviable refutation of vocal standardization.

Secondly, then, dysfluent depiction was utilized for variant purposes, from comic mockery to tragic flaw, from subversive eccentricity to realistic variation, from stigmatized deviation to pleasurable difference. In this ideological register, the representation of nonnormative speech functions at times as an accomplice to the period's curative discourses of oral standardization, marking out dysfluency as substandard and requiring elimination. However, dysfluent depictions also acknowledge the helpful and pleasing diversity of human vocalization: as a way to individuate figures in dauntingly large casts of characters, as a serial memory aid, as a reprieve from dialogic monotony, and as a tool to advocate for the aesthetic and social value of vocal difference. Dysfluency's prevalence is presented as both something requiring its own forms of discipline and producing its own kinds of charm. In other words, the nineteenth-century archive of dysfluency is neither unequivocally stigmatizing nor liberatory, perpetuating the devaluation of disabled voices while also demonstrating their ability to challenge spoken mores in ways productive and pleasurable.

These formal and ideological dimensions inform one another: the repression and expression of dysfluency are divided along generic lines. The widespread portrayal of vocal disability unifies disparate forms, but the differing viability and valuation of these portrayals separates them, particularly along the axis of realism. The realist marriage plots of Charlotte Brontë and William Makepeace Thackeray in the first chapter of this book, as well as the various

5. Jones explains that in Gilded Age America linguistic decay was understood as a physical and mental disease that could infect society writ large: "Quite simply, America was the land of speech impediments" (70).

nonfiction biographies in the final chapter, feature dysfluent figures but display a wariness about the centrality and durability of atypical speech. Their narratives show how education, courtship, faith, and other forms of social training can bestow a fluency deemed integral to matrimonial and vocational success. These texts posit fluency as obtainable and essential to a voice that allows citizens to do the labor of the nation, both in the domestic sphere of family and in the public sphere of employment.

By contrast, the fantastical children's literature of Lewis Carroll, the sensation fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and the stage melodrama of Tom Taylor examined in the intervening chapters feature central figures that retain their dysfluency from the beginning to the end of their narratives. These figures remain dysfluent and often benefit from their dysfluency, anticipating contemporary disability activism in which disability is not a pathologized flaw in need of correction, but a difference to embrace with its own unique potentialities. Thus, both the stigmatization and celebration of dysfluency are imagined in the period but are generically apportioned. Genres aligned with "the real" position dysfluency as correctable and inferior, while those less wedded to verisimilitude position it as a worthy form of difference. In short, variant perspectives on dysfluency emerge when filtered through the variant affordances of genre.

Thirdly, *Dysfluent in Fiction* asserts that the relational nature of dysfluency made it an attractive aperture through which to shine light on other forms of nineteenth-century sociality. There is no such thing as an intrinsically dysfluent utterance; rather, speech is construed as such in its triangulation between speaker, listener, and their social milieu, each possessing notions of what constitutes good speech. Dysfluency, then, emerges in the interaction between orators, auditors, and context, much like the written word takes on significance in the interaction between writers, readers, and context. As a form of intersubjective communication marked by perceived deviation, dysfluency is mobilized in the period's literature to clarify how individuals relate to larger social institutions. To return to *Hard Times*: Sissy Jupe, the daughter of a circus performer, faces several challenges in her transition to the stifling structure of Coketown's education system. When Sissy is presented with information about a million people as part of a classroom question, she labels the data that connects these individuals as "stutterings," rather than "statistics" (60). Sissy's "mistake" substitutes a subjective, embodied expression of connection between people for an objective, mathematical one—our stuttering articulations clarify human interrelations, not only our statistical groupings—and her word slippage exemplifies the novel's juxtaposition of personal fancy and depersonalized fact.

We can build on Sissy's insight that stutters and other forms of dysfluency provide information about an individual's position within broader social formations. Authors use dysfluent speech to render these intersubjective positions legible, as exemplified in this project's bookends: the first chapter examines how lisping indexes a character's ineligibility for matrimony in realist courtship, while the final chapter interrogates the period's racialized rhetoric around dysfluency that declares stammering as exclusive to white men. Throughout the book, dysfluency emerges as a sounding board to apprehend the voice's essential role in locating individuals within powerful nineteenth-century social institutions, including marriage, education, and enslavement.

Specifically, dysfluency provides a vocal indication of identity failure: the inability or refusal to match social expectations regarding the appropriate speech patterns for certain subject positions, not unlike how Sissy's mixed-up words reveal her failure as a normative student in the eyes of her teachers. In the chapters that follow, dysfluency unites the effeminate lisping speech of a bungling bachelor struggling with courtship, the baby talk of a fairy-child who refuses to grow up, the finger-spelled utterances of a mute detective who shocks with his competency, the silly aphorisms of a lord bereft of any real purpose, the stammering of a young Black woman who defies "expert" discourse about the whiteness of dysfluency, and more. These voices "fail" in the sense of not matching the mode of articulation expected of a social category—the spouse, the adult, the professional, the aristocrat, the enslaved—under systems of power ranging from ableism to white supremacy. Exploring how these failures are received, diegetically by other characters and publicly by readers, reveals vocal expression as a key arbiter of perceived eligibility for different social roles. Whether a character is ready to marry or mature into adulthood is expressed through their speech, resulting in social sanctions—in the dual sense of the word, as both approval of conventional utterances and penalization of dysfluent variants—that attend different vocal identities. Importantly, though, there is often frisson to be found in the sundering of an identity from its conventional vocal performance, a dissonance enjoyable in its ability to surprise and suggest alternative ways of speaking and being.

A comprehensive list of dysfluent figures embodying these various impulses upon the nineteenth-century page is prohibitively ambitious. Nonetheless, Charles Dickens's Mr. Toots, William Makepeace Thackeray's William Dobbin, Henry Mayhew's "crippled street bird-seller," Charlotte Brontë's Polly Home, Wilkie Collins's Madonna Blyth, J. M. Rymer's Charles Monckton, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's George Morley, Tom Taylor and E. A. Sothern's Lord Dundreary, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Joseph Peters, Ellen Wood's Isabel Vane, Thomas Hardy's Andrew Candle, Henry James's Lady Aurora Langrish,

Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Lewis Carroll's Bruno, John H. Whitson's Stuttering Sam, and H. G. Wells's Montgomery and the Ponderevos, among many others, compose a long-nineteenth-century chorus performing the fiction of fluency, in two senses. They show that the period's literature is filled with dysfluent utterances, and that social imperatives toward fluent speech do not champion a natural standard, but an imposed ideal that is contextually malleable.

The following pages establish dysfluency's previously unremarked centrality to the period's cultural output, while underscoring its more local imbrications with various textual forms and social norms in each chapter. This focus, in turn, explains vocal disability's prominence: dysfluency is widespread throughout the period's literature because authors recognized its utility for explaining and/or challenging the social power dynamics that informed their narratives. The remainder of the introduction is structured into sections: the first provides germane historical context from the period; the second locates my interventions within relevant scholarship on disability, voice, dialect, and the emerging field of dysfluency studies; the third engages with methodologies for studying characterization that inform my analysis of dysfluent figures; and the fourth outlines the contents of the book's chapters.

Nineteenth-Century Vocality

Those living in the nineteenth century went as far as using the language of dysfluency to describe it: writing in 1868, American politician Horace Greeley referred to his era as "this stammering century," a characterization I take seriously as the historical backdrop for the texts I examine (169). *Dysfluent in Fiction* focuses on the representation of dysfluency in anglophone literature during "this stammering century" on both sides of the Atlantic. The story of nineteenth-century dysfluency cannot be told adequately with attention to a single national context: as print culture, colonialism, and new technologies facilitated the increasing globalization of English, its linguistic politics became more and more comparative. Debates over vocal disability were intertwined with debates over the merits of different national iterations of English, while nineteenth-century speech correctionists aided clients with altering speech disorders and regional accents alike. In 1905, Henry James reflected on what he terms a "Vox Americana," insisting that vocal "tone" is intimately bound to a nation's identity (44). Vocal form and culture are inextricable for James, who declares each nation-state should cultivate "a clear criterion of the best usage." Other nations and "the English perhaps in particular" possess such criteria,

while, for James, the American voice is of an "unsettled character and inferior quality" (35). Though James's claim that the English were not neglecting their language grates against the arguments of many of his contemporaries, the key point here is that he is only able to diagnose shortcomings in the standardization of American English via transatlantic comparison.

Regardless of national context, scholarship on literary dysfluency has largely skirted around the nineteenth century, with the notable exceptions of work by Josephine Hoegaerts, Daniel Martin, Maria Stuart, and Louise Lee. Chris Eagle has provided the most extensive account of the representation of vocal disability by focusing on its importance within modernism. This is a logical choice, as the perceived rigidity of Victorian formal realism seems less hospitable than the "Blast"ing ethos of modernism to forms of speech that balk normative conventions; Victorian fiction is less readily torqued into metaphoric alignment with dysfluent articulation than the work of Beckett, Joyce, Woolf, and others. On the other side of the Victorian era, Jeremy Davies illuminates the intertwining of dysfluent speech and artistic prowess during Romanticism—an understandable focus given Romanticism's avowed interest in the "real language of men" (Wordsworth and Coleridge 1). Representations in the interstitial years, though perhaps a less obvious site to analyze dysfluency, are essential. Scholars including Daniel DeWispelare have shown how "language difference . . . is one of the long eighteenth century's most important tropes and topoi"; however, the recurrent and thorough inclusion of vocal disability as a category of linguistic difference is a result of nineteenth-century developments (4).

These developments—technological, medical, social, and philological changes around the voice—are essential to understanding contemporaneous depictions of dysfluency. Renewed attempts to codify anglophone pronunciation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* beginning in the 1850s were preceded by a cresting wave of texts dedicated to delineating vocal "best-practices," such as elocution manuals, pronunciation dictionaries, educational grammars, medical treatises, conduct books, and, crucially, literature.[6] The explosion of technical prescriptivist publications on the voice in the second half of the eighteenth century had a very particular audience of literate upper-class intelligentsia. Nineteenth-century print culture translated these vocal attitudes into popular handbooks and etiquette guides tailored to a larger, more generalized audience. At the same time, issues of vocal standardization featured more frequently in literature as the period's writers both amplified and altered these

6. For the eighteenth-century rise of these texts, see Agha; DeWispelare. On literature's impact on conversational norms, see Wong.

vocal debates into memorable forms with mass appeal, making novels and other texts into unofficial conversation manuals.[7]

These texts reflected shifts in conceptualizing the voice, ranging from the neurolocalization of speech following Pierre Paul Broca's aphasia case studies in the 1860s, to the expanding spatiotemporal limits of the voice with the invention of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone and Thomas Edison's phonograph in the 1870s. Concurrently, the rising industrialization of the nineteenth-century workforce entailed new expectations of efficiency and uniformity that extended to the voice. Urban migration and growth, coupled with imperial expansion, meant more and more tongues speaking English, thereby necessitating quotidian communication with unknown others. This posed challenges for the vocally disabled, their speech refuting normative temporalities of communication and often received as strange and inconvenient by those outside of their immediate social sphere. In short, the tempo of industrialism and the anonymity of cities intensified dysfluency's status as a vector of oppression. On an educational front, compulsory recitation exercises aimed at standardizing the speech of children were common; at the same time, the harsh treatment exerted by many educators was often blamed for causing speech disorders in their pupils. Especially pertinent to the depiction of dysfluency, the period saw the consolidation of speech correction as a viable if variegated profession, bringing together elocutionists, physicians, surgeons, and charlatans who advocated for an equally diverse range of treatments to mitigate dysfluency.[8]

In addition, the linkages between voice and nation were newly galvanized by the growth of print culture and colonialism during the nineteenth century. Both were seen as threats to a desirably homogeneous language: the rising diversity of vocal depiction as the novel became the dominant anglophone cultural form, as well as the linguistic alterations attendant to the violent exportation of English that was both instrument and consequence of British imperialism.[9] In terms of written pages and global experiences, there was a rise in the use of English and in variants of English. A resultant unprecedented desire to codify the language meant that an openness to linguistic variation gave way to intense social consequences for those who deviated from standard

7. See Agha; Michaelson.

8. See Zakharine for cosmopolitan growth's impact on speech. See Robson, *Heart Beats*; Schroeder for Victorian education and vocal norms. See Conquergood; Connor on the influence of elocution. And see Rockey on the rise of speech correction.

9. Bailey approximates that "over the course of the century, [English] increased in mother-tongue speakers from 26 million to 126 million" (*Nineteenth-Century* 4).

usage (Bailey, *Nineteenth-Century* 12–13; Esmail 4). Print nationalism mediated vocal norms, not only codifying national languages but also proliferating their variants—both facilitating and imperiling standardization.

The nineteenth century, then, witnessed the tension between the imaginative potentials of English's vulnerability to change and intensified efforts to institute and defend a standardized articulation, a tension discernible on the scale of the individual, nation, and empire.[10] A linear trajectory of evolving dysfluent representation does not emerge across the nineteenth century. Rather than becoming increasingly pathologized or normalized throughout the period, dysfluency is consistently depicted through a blend of critique and celebration. This contiguity of revulsion and pleasure toward dysfluency is apparent across my central case studies, though in different proportions due to generic mediation, as nineteenth-century fiction articulates the ongoing negotiation between vocal control and variety. More than ever before, the voice was embroiled in technological innovation, medical discourse, demographic growth, education and literacy, and international politics, all of which were troubled by the push-and-pull between instituted oral standard and inevitable vocal diversity. The intensification of vocal prescriptivism and the proliferation of represented vocal disability in the period constituted an ongoing dialogue, the flux and reflux between them creating a dialectic generative in its undecidability. Both are essential parts of the story of nineteenth-century dysfluency and its cultural prominence.[11]

Dysfluency Studies: Disability, Voice, Dialect

The succeeding overview of insights from studies of disability, voice, and dialect illuminate the narrative strategies used to depict dysfluency in nineteenth-century fiction. The period's dysfluent writers describe the commonalities and differences between speech disorders and other disabilities, thereby making a prescient case for a dialogue between disability studies and voice studies—the scholarly fields this book primarily contributes to. Stammering poet Martin Farquhar Tupper aligns his dysfluency with "every other constitutional infirmity or affliction" (*My Life* 68). By contrast, stammering novelist Charles Kingsley emphasizes the unique challenges of dysfluency: "If he

10. DeWispelare reminds us that this is a continuation of the previous century's linguistic politics (8).

11. I am indebted to Hakala's work on literary dialect for this formulation: "Rather than erase dialect or relegate it to the literary margins, prescriptivism helped fuel its use" (650).

had a club-foot, he would know that he could not dance. If he was blind, he would not expect to see. But when . . . his organs are just as perfect as other people's, the very causelessness of the malady [stammering] makes it utterly intolerable" (5). A midcentury volume of *Punch* uses the term "dissyllability" to describe incomprehensible utterances, and the humorous coinage balances Tupper's and Kingsley's views: disability and dissyllability have textual and sonic affinities and departures ("Reform" 57).

However, critics, even those invested in the study of disability or voice, have brushed aside dysfluency as an inconsequential facet of representation—speech disorders exist in reality, and thus in fiction—and in the process have missed the potential of dysfluent analysis to enhance understandings of literature, disability, and social connection in the period. Building on the insights of nineteenth-century writers and contemporary scholars alike, examining dysfluency as a social experience can benefit from and transform disability studies. It can expand the field's heuristic capacity to the realm of sonic difference, bringing attention to audible disabilities and how they differ from questions of in/visible impairment, while demanding a more capacious understanding of what accessibility looks and sounds like. Dysfluency requires disability studies to push beyond critically pervasive ocularcentrism, a move anticipated by nineteenth-century authors; for instance, one 1855 novel repeatedly describes the main character's stammer as a "vocal disability" (Rymer 91, 112, 145). To adapt Douglas Baynton's influential claim, disability is everywhere in history, once you begin listening for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write ("Disability" 30). Listening to the record of vocal disability not only reiterates one of the central tenets of disability studies—that disability emerges from built environments, social attitudes, and bodily variations—but also foregrounds the ephemeral utterances that serve as an interface between these elements. To analyze the voice is, intrinsically, to analyze one of the nexuses from which modern conceptions of disability emerge.

It is not my contention that vocal disability has been wholly absent from disability studies. Rather, it is consistently invoked only to be located at the periphery: an addition to lists that demonstrate the diverse consequences of ableism, but not a subject requiring elaboration or discrete theorization. Thus, references to speech disorders are common in foundational texts from the 1990s (Linton 4; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary* 37; Clare, *Exile* 9; Davis 153). Vocal disability is relevant enough to warrant glancing references and is linked to questions of community, financial survival, and popular representation—some of the most pressing areas of intervention for disability studies. However, it is relegated to a fleeting example in an evocative catalog,

something for a reader to scan over as they approach the central point.[12] As the field continues to evolve—questioning its white origins and biases, including considerations of mental disability, nuancing understandings of experiences such as cure and pain—it must also incorporate sustained attention to the voice.

The emphasis literary disability studies places on the physically, socially, and materially inflected nature of bodily and mental difference is equally applicable to vocal variation. However, founding figures in the field have argued that disability accrues its modern connotations via regimes of visuality, yoking disability to the visible and thus limiting its capacity as a category of discrimination and identification—as a way to understand not only bodies and minds, but also the utterances that connect them.[13] In subsequent literary criticism interested in either the voice or disability, there is a marked omission of dysfluency. Raymond Chapman's *Forms of Speech* (1994) and Martha Stoddard Holmes's *Fictions of Affliction* (2004)—which turn to Victorian literature to examine representations of dialogue and disability, respectively—provide two representative examples. Chapman's chapter titles list the types of dialogue he examines, including "Slang," "Foreign speakers," "Dialect," "Religious speech," and more; similarly, Holmes provides an appendix of "Physically Disabled Characters in Nineteenth-Century British Literature," listing characters according to their type of disability, including blind, deaf, "crippled," people of small and large stature, people with facial "disfigurements," and others (196–99). Disabled speech does not enter her appendix and is likewise absent from Chapman's vocal categories. Peripheral to both speech and disability, dysfluency drops out in the middle.[14]

These absences suggest a generative place from which to approach dysfluency. Attention to how dialogue operates alongside characterization and plot needs to be accompanied by an emphasis on the socially contoured nature of disability. Similarly, the voice is at once personal and a form of public constitution, therefore requiring analysis in both subjective and social experience. Not necessarily of the body, but emanating from it, the voice complicates

12. Kirkpatrick concludes that "disabled and other non-normative bodies are everywhere you look, but almost nowhere you listen" (113). Marshall argues that "while it is a central tenet of disability studies that material and ideological built environments, *not* bodies, are disabling, neither crip theory nor disability studies has extended this foundational premise to voice."

13. Garland-Thomson writes that "the visual . . . is the major mode that defines disability in modernity," and Davis asserts "Disability is a specular moment" defined by the "power of the gaze" ("Seeing" 340; *Enforcing* 12).

14. See St. Pierre, "Construction"; Paterson for why stammering needs to be included in disability studies.

some of the field's central propositions: mainstream legalistic disability rights activism advocates for changes in the accessibility of public spaces—the need for wheelchair ramps and Braille signage, for instance—whereas vocal disability demands both individual and environmental reforms, changes in social behavior as much as constructed spaces. Dysfluent accessibility requires that auditors be flexible, that they accept different tempos and types of articulation as valid, and that they be open to nonverbal modes of communication.

Literary criticism's accelerating interest in voice studies provides another avenue for considering these articulations, as critics use the voice as a tool to understand prominent genres and sociohistorical contexts anew. Matt Foley, for one, examines what he terms "vococentric Gothic" narratives wherein "the voice can often take precedence over visual Gothic motifs" (1). Amy Wong, for another, turns to the poetics of talk to demonstrate how attempts to naturalize "somewhat abstract qualities of speech like fluency" were part of a "*territorialization of speech*" inseparable from the racializing logics of British colonialism (4). While an in-depth exploration of disability is outside the purview of each scholar's project, Foley's interest in "monstrous, uncanny and ventriloquised" speech and Wong's in "mimicry, inarticulacy, and dysfluency" jointly exemplify how voices that defy social conventions were inseparable from the aesthetic innovations and sociopolitical crises of the nineteenth century (13, 2).

A conversation between critical paradigms of disability and voice is not only necessary but intuitive. Recent work in both fields share a central tenet. Disability theorist Alison Kafer posits an influential "political/relational model of disability" wherein "disability is experienced in and through relationships; it does not occur in isolation"; similarly, historians of voice Josephine Hoegaerts and Janice Schroeder declare that the voice is "necessarily relational, woven into the fabric of the social world that voices co-produce" (8, 8). These assertions are interchangeable: voice does not occur in isolation; disability is necessarily relational. Disability studies and voice studies are thus organically allied fields that assert the intersubjective nature of their central concepts. Together, they reveal vocal disability's doubly relational nature and, therefore, its ability to deepen our apprehension of the power structures animating interpersonal configurations ranging from fleeting one-on-one encounters to the consolidation of national identities. Not only is dysfluency central to nineteenth-century literary culture, but it is especially well positioned to aid our examination of significant social dynamics.

The fledgling field of dysfluency studies has begun to take this critical overlap seriously (Eagle, *Dysfluencies* 3). The interdisciplinary field draws from literary studies, disability studies, and clinical practice to examine both the cultural representation of vocal disability and the embodied experience of

it. I deploy a methodological fusion of the three major paradigms for theorizing dysfluency that have emerged within the last decade or two. One is based in disability studies scholarship and aims to carve out a subsidiary field that interrogates the stigmatization of dysfluent identities in political discourse, cultural depiction, and daily experience. This approach is invested in experiences and representations of dysfluency, while remaining critical of metaphoric appropriations of it.[15] A second strand is indebted to philosophies of the atypical voice, such as those offered by Gilles Deleuze, Michel de Certeau, and Adriana Cavarero, who variously explore the ways in which writers can "make language stutter" (Deleuze, "He Stuttered" 108).[16] These thinkers, rather than eschewing analogy, embrace more abstract views on vocal inequality. Less interested in seeking rights for or critiquing representations of the vocally disabled, they posit dysfluency as a vibrant conceptual tool evocative of new forms of knowledge, relationality, and more.[17] A third variation uses biographical experiences of dysfluency to interrogate its social ramifications and is best exemplified by Marc Shell's *Stutter* (2005). Shell offers the category of "writers-who-stutter-when-they-speak," one that connects Charles Lamb, Lewis Carroll, Henry James, John Updike, Margaret Drabble, David Mitchell, and many others (44). *Dysfluent in Fiction* is in sympathy with elements of all three approaches, finding their synthesis to be particularly rich: dysfluency, in the nineteenth century as today, is an issue of individual embodiment and cultural representation, of philosophical and metaphorical richness, and of biographical resonance.

By adopting this array of approaches, the book provides an absent rib to the umbrella of scholarship interested in the period's nonnormative speech, which has primarily focused on dialect, analyzing locally, regionally, nationally, and imperially situated differences in anglophone pronunciation.[18] Dysfluency is dialect's neglected sibling in understanding vocal diversity beyond standard English. Several insights from scholarship on dialect are transferable to dysfluency; firstly, dialect depiction is not a reliable transcription of actual utterances, but a strategic shorthand to indicate elements of characterization (class, education, etc.).[19] In addition, dialect's increasing representation in the

15. See Eagle, *Dysfluencies*; Dolmage.

16. See Migone; Labelle; Connor.

17. Stuart balances these approaches to the metaphorization of dysfluency: "The challenge is to harness the energies of the metaphoric stammer in a way that amplifies the embodied voice" (16).

18. See Mugglestone; Chapman; Page; Hodson, Introduction; Hakala; Blake; S. Ferguson.

19. See Hodson, "Talking"; Blake.

nineteenth century is accompanied by its stigmatization.[20] Further, the widespread interest in dialect evinces both the openness of nineteenth-century literature to a variety of vocal performances, but also emphasizes the utility of these oral differences for hierarchizing individuals; simply put, nineteenth-century fiction insists that "who you are is how you speak" (Hodson, "Talking" 43). Comparably, representations of dysfluency are not motivated by a desire to record "real" speech. Instead, they use literary conventions to individualize characters and locate them within social categories. Dysfluency and dialect were alike targeted by a spectrum of vocal practitioners in the period and were occasionally seen as casually linked (Rockey 28). Some writers considered dysfluency to be a "species of dialect," whereas dialect was often understood as a speech disorder with grave consequences for social intercourse (Jones 64).

Though both dialect and dysfluency are important forms of vocal diversity in the nineteenth century and today, their respective valuations are different. One key contrast is dysfluency's tendency to refute the indexical specificity common to dialect. Dialect usually indicates a particular class, vocation, regional location, or ethnic heritage. The same type of dysfluency, by contrast, can be affixed to characters of any social standing or geographic origin. Accordingly, dysfluent depiction is less about conveying the background of a character than it is about contouring their symbolic function within a narrative system. Thus, dysfluency is less yoked to the typological burden of using the voice to index a stock character; instead, as the following chapters demonstrate, it is attributed to figures across class, gender, race, and more to signal moments of identity failure in relation to prominent social forms. Dysfluency therefore crosses over identity categories without being determined by them. By arguing that dysfluency and dialect have comparable literary significance, this book aims to encourage further research into the cultural dimensions of vocal disability.

Figures of Speech: Characterizing Voice, Vocalizing Character

The figures I analyze in the subsequent chapters fall into three categories: dysfluent characters of middling narrative importance in realist texts, dysfluent central characters in nonrealist literature, and dysfluent people. The following engagement with studies of characterization provides a basis for understanding representations of speech, as speech is often requisite for character

20. See S. Ferguson; Hodson, Introduction; Blake.

distinction. Naming is sometimes seen as performing this task, though nameless characters populate literature. Figures who do not utter a single word, however, fade below the threshold of representability; importantly, "character is constructed in speech" and the volume of characters' utterances influences our "estimation of characters' significance" (Michaelson 16; Menon 161). A blend of studies of disability and characterization reveals that a character's dysfluency impacts their access to narratively central roles, though not definitively, due to the mediation of generic differences. While dysfluent protagonists are unheard of in realism, they lisp and stammer their way through more sensational forms.

Reading for dysfluency puts pressure on the binary of protagonist–minor character influential in character studies. Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) provides an illustrative example with its intricate cast in which disparate forms of speech promiscuously mingle. *Bleak House* features figures so minor that the word "character" seems an uncertain designation—figures like Sir Leicester Dedlock's satellite cousins who revolve around the baronet. Among the cousinly hoard is a man who receives the appellation "debilitated cousin" instead of a proper name. The debilitated cousin appears somewhat regularly in the omnisciently narrated chapters, despite his extreme minorness. He is memorable largely for his eccentric speech, which critics surprisingly classify as a dialect, contrasting the standard speech of the ill Sir Leicester with the eccentric speech of "his healthy but indolent cousin" (S. Ferguson 8). However, the debilitated cousin's very name carries a sense of bodily infirmity made dramatically evident in his voice.

Because the debilitated cousin only appears on a handful of pages, his speech can utterly disregard typographic norms of spacing, punctuation, and spelling. To take one example: "The debilitated cousin says of [Lady Dedlock] that she's beauty nough—tsetup shopofwomen—but rather larming kind—remindingmanfact—inconvenient woman—who WILL getoutofbedandbawthstahlishment—Shakespeare" (735). Capped by his reference to Shakespeare, presenting a startling proximity between nonsensical speech and the Bard, the debilitated cousin's speech obliterates typographic and grammatical norms, often bordering on incomprehensibility. He is freed from the chains of quotation, his contagious voice infecting the narrator's indirect speech despite—or rather, in virtue of—the extremities of his minorness and rendering the divide between fluent narrator and dysfluent character porous. In other words, it is the particular ability of a minor character, inhabiting only a handful of pages, to possess this degree of vocal disability. By contrast, the vocal normality of the novel's protagonist and other narrator, Esther Summerson, functions inversely: Esther's substantial presence throughout the

novel precludes anything but highly standardized dialogue. If a voice is to be irregular and discordant, it needs to be minoritized; conversely, as narrative prominence rises, so does vocal normalization.

Dysfluent in Fiction's first chapter focuses on characters that occupy a midpoint between Esther and the debilitated cousin, both in terms of the proportion of pages they inhabit and the extent of their vocal disabilities. Characters like Esther tend to be overanalyzed, whereas figures like the debilitated cousin are too minutely featured to inform a critical analysis of the cultural reception of dysfluency. In a spectrum of character prominence, I attend to secondary characters that occupy a character-zone roughly equidistant from the capacious zone of the protagonist and the circumscribed zone of the minor character.[21] These characters, I contend, feature the most detailed depictions of dysfluency in nineteenth-century realism precisely because their middling allotment of narrative attention mandates that their nonnormative speech be carefully controlled. In other words, the expanded though delicately tempered representation of dysfluency is the realm of secondary characters who are not minor enough to allow for exaggeratedly eccentric utterances, nor central enough to mandate a strict adherence to vocal norms. Therefore, it is primarily via secondary characters that realist novelists, lightly but consistently, spread variations in speech via dialogue tags, punctuation, spelling, and other strategies, rather than overwhelming readers with vocal oddity in a few pages.

Character types and vocal types have long been associated in studies of characterization. Building on work by Georg Lukács and Alex Woloch, it becomes apparent that a realist character's vocal patterns inform the amount of narrative attention they are allotted, and vice versa. Lukács emphasizes the ordinariness of the protagonists of Walter Scott's novels, starring a "more or less mediocre, average English gentleman" and a "correct, normal English woman," a durable pattern in nineteenth-century realism from Charlotte Brontë's "plain" Jane to Charles Dickens's "common" Pip (33–34). For Lukács, this average quality distinguishes protagonists from those with whom they share a narrative: "The majority of . . . minor characters are more interesting and significant as human beings than the mediocre main hero" (35). This logic extends into the realm of speech: just as the protagonist is surrounded by eccentric characters that highlight their normalcy, the discursive regularity of the hero is brought into relief by the vocal "abnormalities" of other characters.

Woloch balances Lukács's comments on protagonists with an emphasis on minor characters, describing them as "obstreperous" and possessing "highly

21. Bakhtin defines a character-zone as "the field of action for a character's voice" (316). I am interested in how the sonic dynamics of a character-zone intersect with its size—a spatial acoustics of characterization.

distinctive speech patterns"—they pepper novels with atypical vocalizations (6, 129). Their narrative compression and vocal eccentricity are mutually enabling: they can speak bizarrely due to their limited narrative space and their limited narrative space encourages abnormality. Like Woloch, I map the political stakes of characterization—in my case, emphasizing the establishment and transmission of vocal hierarchies through literature. However, unlike Woloch's spatialized and consequently synchronic model of character representation, I explore the diachronic dynamics of vocal change across the depiction and history of individual characters.

Woloch's emphasis on minor characters has been expanded in recent scholarship that positions his work as the origin for turning critical attention to the minor, a move I have so far replicated.[22] However, this lineage effaces one strand of scholarship particularly germane to the study of the minor: disability studies, largely by necessity, has long made the minor character a major object of study. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's earlier work puts it plainly: "Main characters almost never have physical disabilities" (*Extraordinary* 9). The ordinariness Lukács locates in protagonists contrasts with the extraordinariness of the figures studied by Garland-Thomson decades later. Literary disability studies needed to be invested in minorness from its inception.

However, disability's frequent lockstep with minorness does not mean a low volume of depiction, but rather its proliferation. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder emphasize the near-ubiquitous depiction of disabled figures in narrative: a story exclusively featuring normality is not worth telling, and so the social effacement of disabled people has paradoxically occurred alongside their extensive literary representation (52). Therefore, if "minor characters are the proletariat of the novel," then minor characters are also—figuratively and often literally—the disabled of the novel, both populous and marginalized (Woloch 27). The minor, by definition, have limited access to roles of narrative centrality as, due to pervasive ableism, the disabled have limited access to roles of social centrality.

Of course, exceptions exist in both the literary and social realm: not all disabled characters occupy a minor position in nineteenth-century literature. Critics present a now-routine cast of narratively prominent disabled characters such as Tiny Tim and Edward Rochester that demonstrate that the "Victorian period does not, in fact, demand to be cripped . . . it has always been so" (Prizel 13). This cataloging of significant disabled characters dates to the nineteenth century itself. The narrator of Justin McCarthy's novel *Paul Massie*

22. See Camden on "secondary heroines"; McWeeny on "the stranger"; Rosen on the "minor-character elaboration."

(1866) states: "We have had for heroes the consumptive, the insane, the inane, the hunchbacked, the lame, and the blind" (40). Ranging from mental disability to physical disability, from sensory impairments to respiratory ailments, McCarthy's narrator identifies the high volume of disabled characters transcending minor roles.

Notably absent from this list, however, are heroes possessing disabled voices. As Arthur Lovell wrote over a century ago:

> There is no case on record . . . of a hero and heroine in a novel possessing a disagreeable voice. The heroine may be nothing to look at, she may even be what might be called ugly, but as soon as she utters a word her fascination is irresistible. . . . The hero, again, may be an arrant coward, but to retain his title of hero his voice must be absolutely above reproach. . . . A bad voice is an unpardonable sin. (85–86)

There is ample evidence from the nineteenth century to support Lovell's claim; for instance, Jane Eyre repeatedly asserts the "fine" and "sonorous" qualities of Edward Rochester's voice throughout the novel that bears her name, and *Middlemarch*'s (1871–72) Will Ladislaw declares that Dorothea Brooke speaks with a "voice of a soul that had once lived in an Æolian harp" (269, 170; 51). Though protagonist status and disability are not oppositely magnetized, the case is different when it comes to dysfluency. The dearth of dysfluent heroism travels in both directions: authors are less prone to ascribe dysfluent vocal patterns to their central figures, while readers are less likely to ascribe heroic status to those with disabled speech. If, as Deidre Lynch suggests, characterization is based on "discursive economy . . . , decorum, and readability," then the lack of dysfluent protagonists is unsurprising, given that they violate all these elements (14). A typographically rendered stammer is indebted to stylistic repetition, rather than economy; dysfluent utterances, by definition, oppose linguistic decorum; and an orthographically represented lisp can leave a reader unsure of the words being represented.

With this in mind, my study of dysfluent depiction yields insights into character typologies. It is ultimately misleading to insist on a conclusive antithesis between dysfluency and protagonist status. Davis argues that "realism, with its emphasis on probability, is bound to presenting normative characters and situations" ("Who" 328)—true enough. However, many nineteenth-century protagonists exist outside the gravitational pull of realism: I locate dysfluent protagonists—baby-talking Bruno, mute Mr. Peters, stammering Lord Dundreary—outside of, or on the fringes of, realist representation. Roughly, the likelihood of a dysfluent protagonist rises with the

distance from realist conventions. Dysfluent heroes and central figures exist, then, but are generically partitioned from the vocally normative protagonists of realism.

Throughout the book, I examine both dysfluent protagonists in nonrealist genres and dysfluent secondary characters in realist genres. The comparison of the two across chapters does not result in a facile conclusion that positive and foregrounded dysfluent depiction is the recipe for widespread sociopolitical change; however, it does show that literary forms occupy a crucial place in a discursive system through which dysfluent identity, and dysfluent intimacies in particular, are sounded out. Interspersed with the analyses of dysfluent characterization, I discuss the experiences of nineteenth-century dysfluent people as a related element of how the period's literary culture was intertwined with the politics of vocal disability.

Dysfluent authors and dysfluent characters were often united on the nineteenth-century page. To take one instance, *Punch* magazine published a notice of the stammering poet Martin Farquhar Tupper's new collection *Cithara* (1863) written in the voice of the stammering and lisping stage character Lord Dundreary. Dundreary declares "I THAY, whath this new book of TUPPARTH? He calls is *Thithawa,* which is a word no fellah can be expected to thay," importing his eccentric lisp from the stage into the magazine ("Lord Dundreary" 235). *Punch* has a dysfluent character chastise a dysfluent author for choosing a word that is challenging to articulate orally as the title of his poetic collection. To highlight dysfluency's unexplored role in the bidirectional translation between voice and print for the creators and creations of nineteenth-century literature is the focus of the chapters that follow.

Each chapter explores dysfluent figures in nineteenth-century literature with an attention to their formal, ideological, and social implications. Rather than being arranged in chronological order of the texts under discussion, the chapters are arranged according to these main areas of interest. Formally, the chapters focus on diverse mediums to demonstrate the wide range of dysfluent depiction, as well as to unpack the variant relations between dysfluency and genre. The novel, though, features more prominently than other modes. Formal elements of the nineteenth-century novel—its length, its high number of characters, its use of narration to explain speech—render it the richest site for diverse and detailed dysfluent representation. Thus, the first three chapters focus on British novels before expanding the generic and geographical purview in the final two chapters. The project is bookended by texts aligned with realism that "cure" or minimize dysfluent articulations, while the intervening chapters look at fantastical, sensational, and melodramatic texts that centralize and embrace dysfluency for variant purposes.

In the ideological register, authors function as speech therapists for their characters, altering characters' voices both in the diegesis of a narrative and throughout the compositional history of a text. The editorial practice of changing a figure's speech has received substantial critical notice in the case of dialect (Blake 153, 166). A similar though undocumented history of authorial alterations of dysfluency is apparent in my archive. For instance, genetic criticism reveals how Thackeray downplayed the lisping of William Dobbin in *Vanity Fair* from the manuscript to the book's serialized print version. The actor E. A. Sothern, by contrast, amplifies the stammers and lisps of Tom Taylor's Lord Dundreary in his massively popular alterations of the original playscript of *Our American Cousin*. Lewis Carroll, differently still, retains the degree of vocal deviation characteristic of the fairy-child Bruno from his original appearance in a short story to his novelistic resurrection decades later, but changes the kind of deviation. In other words, authors minimize, intensify, or simply change the dysfluency they attribute to a character across a text's history.

In terms of their social implications, the chapters move from dysfluency's role in one-on-one intimacy to its role in larger communal settings, gradually widening the scope of nineteenth-century relationality under consideration. The first chapter examines the voice's relationship to courtship, matrimony, and dysfluent reproduction. The second expands beyond the marital dyad to consider how vocal disability related to the experiences and education of children. The third chapter moves away from the comparatively private sphere of familial relations to analyze the stakes of vocal disability for one's public profession. The fourth chapter jumps from local contexts to a consideration of how dysfluency's popular entertainment value connected different national audiences. Finally, the fifth chapter both collapses these widening rings of social connection and expands them: it looks at the individual experience of dysfluent speech within life-writing as it relates to the immense consequences of transatlantic enslavement.

Deliberately, the chapters focus on a variety of dysfluencies as an alternative to the near-exclusive focus on stammering in current scholarship. In addition to stammering, I explore the meaning of lisping, baby talk, and mutism. Lisping, for instance, has received almost no critical attention, despite or perhaps because of its cultural alignment with marginalized identities. The fact that the majority of scholarship on literary dysfluency has focused on stammering is unsurprising given that there is more nineteenth-century discourse on stammering than any other speech disorder.[23] This disproportionate focus

23. See J. Davies; Dolmage; Eagle, *Dysfluencies*; Martin, "George Catlin's"; Shell.

owes to stammering's definition as male and white in nineteenth-century accounts (Hunt, *Treatise* 78; Hoegaerts "Victims"). Stammering's alignment with white masculinity, with the bodies at the apex of oppressive and gendered imperial power dynamics, is inseparable from its discursive prominence. By contrast, the other dysfluencies I examine alongside stammering were often associated with marginalized groups: women, children, Jewish characters, communities of color, queer figures, and more. This is not to efface, for instance, the reality of women stammering or men lisping, but to put pressure on how the identities associated with a vocal disability impact its eligibility for analysis. For instance, lisping is comparably ubiquitous in nineteenth-century fiction as stammering, cropping up in stereotypical depictions of the vain artifices of women (Mrs. Skewton in *Dombey and Son*), pathos-laden portraits of misunderstood children (Jane Pocket in *Great Expectations*), anti-Semitic representations of Jewish characters (Barney in *Oliver Twist*), and depictions of queer figures who defy relational norms (Mr. Sleary in *Hard Times,* to stay in the key of the Dickensian minor). Expanding beyond stammering is essential for demonstrating the importance of dysfluency within nineteenth-century culture.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter focuses on a different literary genre, type of social affiliation, and vocal disability to show dysfluency's entanglement with a range of textual forms and relational norms. Chapter 1 explores the gendered dynamics of dysfluent speech and the ways in which it mediates intimacy and reproduction. It pairs readings of lisping lovers in realist courtship plots by William Makepeace Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë with an examination of contemporaneous medical writing that construed dysfluent speakers as undesirable spouses and proto-eugenic threats to national speech, liable to spread their nonnormative utterances through both nature and nurture. *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) and *Villette* (1853) reveal the collusions between the novelist and the speech correctionist: both texts stigmatize and cure their characters' dysfluency to render them conjugally fit, while also showing that homeopathic doses of dysfluency are desirable for narrative interest in excess of a disciplinary function.

The central text of the second chapter, by contrast, resists the imperatives of speech correction. It links biographical research on Charles Dodgson—pen name Lewis Carroll—and his experiences with stammering to his fantastical children's literature and the Victorian education system's approach to atypical voices. I argue that Dodgson's fixation on depicting childhood is

informed by nostalgia for a period of life in which chaotic vocalization is comparatively permissible and manifests in a genre hospitable to dysfluency. Eccentric speech in children and in children's fiction is expected: subject to remediation, certainly, but not reviled, whereas adulthood and its attendant genres demand the standard speech instrumental in courtship, professional employment, and other forms of conventional social advancement. Dodgson thus uses writing as a prosthetic device to attain the narrative control elusive to him in speech and, in his final novel about the young fairies *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889/1893), to explore the pleasures of dysfluency that were muffled in his adult life.

Sensation fiction proved comparably accommodating to dysfluent central characters. Building on her time on the Victorian stage, Mary Elizabeth Braddon imports the figure of the mute from theatrical melodrama into her debut novel and the subject of chapter 3. Her novel *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860) asserts the worth of mutism in an oralist culture by departing from the stage convention of rendering mute figures pathetic and dependent; instead, she makes a mute detective the novel's hero. This character communicates via fingerspelling and sensation fiction's eschewal of probability allows most characters to understand him, while a few exceptions construe manual speech as threateningly foreign. Braddon oscillates between proposing a communicative utopia in which manual languages are as "natural" as oral ones and reinforcing a hierarchy of vocal over digital speech. Her successors in detective fiction, including Arthur Conan Doyle and Richard Marsh, develop the link between the genre and mutism by depicting orality as inessential to solving crime. Braddon thus bridges eighteenth-century stage melodrama to fin-de-siècle serialized detective shorts by reimagining the narrative possibilities of mutism within the sensation novel.

Chapter 4 retains an interest in stage culture while expanding the geographic and generic purview of the book, looking at the ways in which dysfluent representations traveled across the anglophone world by virtue of their capacity to amuse. This chapter reconstructs the immense popularity of the stammerer Lord Dundreary in a stage comedy by Tom Taylor. Best remembered as the play Abraham Lincoln saw the night he was assassinated, *Our American Cousin* (1858) became a transatlantic hit thanks to a dysfluent character who stole the spotlight and—in contrast to trajectories of speech correction—became more dysfluent as his celebrity increased. Critical accounts have mirrored the playscript's emphasis on contrasts between American and British articulation, whereas my attention to the staging and reception of the play illuminates an obfuscated story of dysfluent stardom. The stammering lead of the play, as performed by E. A. Sothern, proffers the theater as a space

of exploitation and possibility, cruelly instrumentalizing a stammer for humor, while also positioning it as a constitutive element of fame. In the process, the play's history demonstrates how entertainment value alters the reception of socially marginalized speech patterns, so that a dysfluent character is embraced in ways that dysfluent people often are not.

The final chapter deliberately moves away from fiction and toward life-writing to explore the embodied experience of dysfluency, its analogical capacities, and the ways in which it was racialized in the period. Chapter 5 explores the role of voice in the biographies of formerly enslaved and dysfluent writers: as marker of narrative authenticity, as symbol of personal development, and as analogy bringing disparate experiences into dialogue. Using material ranging from newspaper advertisements seeking the recapture of fugitives from enslavement to life-writing by Frederick Douglass and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, I interrogate the relationship between the binaries of slavery–freedom and dysfluency–fluency on literal and metaphorical levels. The fraught analogizing between vocal disability and slavery—in which enslavement is akin to having a stammer or being mute is like being enslaved—in these texts reimagines what it means to speak and to be free. The chapter refutes the nineteenth-century whitewashing of dysfluency and attends to the racialization of vocal difference. It also provides a vocal supplement to the emphasis on literacy in the move from enslavement to freedom and elucidates the ramifications of using voice as a symbol for political agency.

A brief coda turns to George Eliot and the cartoon character Porky Pig as surprising allies in theorizing the impact of audio technologies including the phonograph on dysfluent experiences. I end with a critique of contemporary humanities scholarship wherein our work is often oral, and vocal discrimination is abundant, ranging from impatience with to the deliberate exclusion of voices regarded as atypical. Sharing the history of dysfluency is one method for altering the vocal exclusivity of academic work.

The range of forms, authors, and voices that populate the book demonstrate the integrality of speech disorder to nineteenth-century literary culture. They also reveal that dysfluency functioned differently in relation to particular genres and subject positions; in other words, different literary forms told different stories about vocal disability. Therefore, *Dysfluent in Fiction* is disinterested in establishing a grand, cohesive narrative about vocal disability. What is powerful about dysfluency is its refutation of the idea that a single tempo, rhythm, and choreography of articulation is possible, let alone desirable. Accordingly, dysfluent representation is used toward a spectrum of often grating narrative purposes and social ends. What emerges in the book is a vocal corollary to contemporary notions of neurodiversity, where the

irreducible variety of human vocalization is something to value rather than stymie. The book, then, demonstrates how certain voices have been historically denigrated and recuperates moments where dysfluency is the source of pleasure and connection—both as strategies to expand the range of voices that are valued today. I invite you to listen to the voices of nineteenth-century dysfluency and the stories they tell.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout the book, when not specifying a particular mode of speech (stammer, lisp, etc.), I use various terms to indicate vocal nonnormativity related to disability: speech disorders and impairments, vocal impediments and disabilities, and more. This variety acknowledges the plethora of terms used to designate these types of speech that predate dysfluency and continue to have purchase today, as well as to make for a less repetitive reading experience. Most frequently, though, I use "dysfluency" and "dysfluent," a vocabulary for which I am indebted to Chris Eagle. Style again plays a part in this choice: echoing Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's explanation of her use of "stigma," "dysfluency" is helpful as it "can take many grammatical forms to match the component strands of a complex social process," this "semantic flexibility" rendering it appealing (*Extraordinary* 30). Thus, I can discuss dysfluent figures and dysfluency as an experience.

Conceptually, I am drawn to dysfluency for its sonic affinity with disability and textual distinction from it: the prefixes "dys" and "dis" sound the same aloud but look different on the page, indicative of how the study of disordered speech benefits from theorizations of other disabilities, but also requires its own vocabulary and methods. As Simi Linton states, the "dis" in disability connotes "separation, taking apart," thereby "cleaving in two ability and its absence" and rendering disability "the repudiation" of ability (24). The relational nature of disability and ability dissolves as the prefix indicates absence, rendering the two as antithetical. The more common term "disfluency" replicates this logic and carries with it medicalized connotations, whereas I am interested in the cultural registers of vocal variation. The polarization of disfluency obfuscates how most people have moments of both fluent and dysfluent communication daily, not only those with vocal disabilities. As nineteenth-century speech correctionist James Hunt writes, "dys," rather than bifurcating, indicates "difficulty" with a particular form of speech (*Manual* 304).

Dysfluency, then, offers a less binary notion of vocalization: it is a way to indicate departures from dominant standards of "fluency," but it does not

render them rigid opposites—a shorthand for deviations from spoken norms that is also suggestive of a spectrum of vocal difference. My preference mirrors that of contemporary dysfluency activists, who take "disfluency" to indicate a lack of normative speech, and "dysfluency" to suggest a transgression of imperatives toward normative speech (St. Pierre, "Disfluency").[24]

24. Visit the blog *Did I Stutter?* as well as Conor Foran's recently launched magazine *Dysff-fluent* (2023) for more on the use of "dysfluency" ("Home").

CHAPTER 1

Lisping Lovers

Plotting Dysfluent Union in Thackeray and Brontë

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) resonates with William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) in several keys, unsurprising given Brontë's approbation of Thackeray's novel in the preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the lasting impression that his public lectures made on her. However, one similarity between these influential novels of psychological realism has been unremarked upon by critics: they both feature lisping characters of middling narrative importance. Thackeray's William Dobbin and Brontë's Polly Home demonstrate how dysfluency and character centrality shape one another, as well as how the diminishment of the former is requisite for the achievement of the conventional marriage plot. As secondary characters, they inhabit a role roughly equidistant from the centrality of the protagonist and the marginality of an extremely minor character. The paucity of dysfluent protagonists and the fleeting nature of dysfluent minor characters means that the richest realist depictions of dysfluency take place via these secondary figures.

Notably, though, while dysfluent characters such as Dobbin and Polly do not have comparable airtime to the protagonists in their narratives, they are granted many of the attributes otherwise associated with heroism. They are likable, virtuous, and, in Polly's case, charismatic. Dobbin is morally upright and industrious; Polly is charming and beautiful—qualities absent in the figures that overshadow them in terms of page count. While dysfluency limits their centrality, it does not prevent them from being enticing figures.

Thackeray and Brontë offer instances of positive dysfluent representation but relegate these figures to roles of middling significance, demonstrating that narrative prominence and character appeal are often distinct.

Both Dobbin and Polly are depicted with habitual lisps, rather than with a situational speech disorder, such as the "stammer" of "lover's awe" described by George Eliot in which the context of courtship leads to a temporarily atypical articulation, an example of the quotidian nonfluencies to which we are all prone (*Daniel Deronda* 753). Thackeray and Brontë go beyond this formulation of dysfluency as plot symptom wherein a character only stammers or lisps due to fleeting emotions. Focusing on characters with persistent vocal disabilities demonstrates that dysfluency not only derives from plot, but also shapes it: the progression of a particular marital narrative is impacted by the speech patterns that comprise it. In other words, novelistic dysfluency is neither pure plot device nor mere character trait. Instead, it is essential to both foundational elements of fictional narrative, proper to a situation and a figure. Lisping Dobbin and Polly, despite their positive representation, show how dysfluency was depicted as unwelcome to the resolution of the most conventional plotline and relational dyad of the period: heterosexual marriage. Given the recurrent presence of dysfluency within nineteenth-century literature, it is unsurprising to find it as an animating force within the period's popular courtship plots; however, the vexed place of vocal disability within the matrimonial context has yet to receive critical attention. Turning to dysfluency has the additional benefit of revealing how crucial the voice in general is to courtship and stories invested in its representation.

My focus on two lisping lovers in particular is motivated by the comparative dearth of scholarship on this speech pattern, as well as its cultural alignment with social marginalization, as opposed to stammering, which has inspired a variety of contemporary work and was largely associated with white masculinity during the nineteenth century.[1] Complex depictions of lisping characters, however, were as widespread as their stammering counterparts. Dobbin's lisp is the vocal encapsulation of his artless humility, and Polly's complements her adorable precociousness, though both representations also suggest the negative dimensions of dysfluency. Thackeray's ambivalence about Dobbin's lisp is evident in his paring down of its frequency: several of Dobbin's lisped phrases in the manuscript of *Vanity Fair* are amended into fluency in subsequent publications, an alteration followed by contemporary editors, thereby solidifying Dobbin's status as comparatively fluent and, thus, a more

1. For more on lisping's associations with marginalized social positions, see the introduction. For more on stammering's associations with white masculinity, see chapter 5.

eligible suitor. While Dobbin's lisp is reviled by his fellow characters, they do not explicitly mention their disdain to him; by contrast, Polly's lisp inspires gentle teasing and serious remonstrance from the men in her life, including her father and eventual husband. The loss of her lisping indexes her qualification for courtship.

Before their vocal standardization, Dobbin's and Polly's lisps mark their ineligibility for marriage: his proves his failure to match Regency ideals of masculine suavity and obfuscates his latent heroism, whereas hers suggests she is too young to match the relational and linguistic expectations of marriage. In both cases, the other characters find something queer about Dobbin and Polly—a relational oddity given synecdochic expression in their vocality. The type of "cure" they are both subjected to is less explicit than, say, Edward Rochester's regained vision, but is nonetheless operational as their lisps undergo a timely silencing before they wed. Their atypical speech helps make them lively and interesting as characters, but nonetheless needs to be edited out.

Realist novels participate in a culture of vocal standardization—by excluding dysfluent characters from narrative centrality and demanding they undergo a form of speech therapy before they marry—and simultaneously acknowledge the inherent diversity of human speech and the pleasing quality of this variety. *Vanity Fair* and *Villette* present and then muffle dysfluency via the rubric of marital fitness. Dysfluency is not represented only to be bemoaned and expunged, but also due to its capacity to entertain and endear readers by diversifying dialogue with symbolically rich deviations, a representational strategy that is both widely used and carefully regulated, ubiquitous though disciplined. Homeopathic doses of dysfluency are desirable for narrative interest and varied characterization, functioning in excess of a strictly "curative imaginary" (Kafer 27). In this way, the roles of fiction in spreading and in censoring dysfluency are intimately linked: the pleasure of variety and the politics of control are concomitant. The next section focuses on the crucial role the voice and disability play in the period's courtship narratives alongside contemporaneous medical discourse that warned against dysfluent spouses to provide a foundation for understanding dysfluent remediation as a conduit to matrimony in Thackeray and Brontë.

Dysfluent Speech and Marital Access

"The most determined and provoking stutter" signals the end of the short satirical piece "The Last of a Few Days in a Country House," featured in an 1877 issue of *Punch* magazine (148). It begins with several hangovers as the

guests at Mr. Boodels's home feud and admit their trip to the country is a failure. They decide on a contrived mass departure the next morning, leaving the narrator desperate to find his own way out. He telegraphs a friend asking him to send a fake message demanding the narrator's immediate return to town. This escape successfully initiated, Boodels performs nonchalance at his final abandonment by announcing the imminent arrival of a new and superior guest: Mr. Dulton. Dulton is funny, original, and artistic, though the narrator suspects Dulton's existence has as much reality as his own urgent business in town. The narrator's inquiry after a Mrs. Dulton sends Boodels into ecstasies: apparently the best thing about Dulton is his wife. Incomparably lovely and a close friend of Queen Victoria's, Mrs. Dulton is the crowning detail in Boodels's portrait of his friend. As the narrator takes his leave, Dulton himself appears in "dingy" clothes and significantly alone. Worst of all is his "wildly irritating" speech as he stammeringly inquires after his host: "Is M—M—M—M—Mister BOO—HOO—HOO—HOO—HOO—HOO—DELS in?" (Burnand 77–78). For the narrator, Dulton's stammer contradicts all Boodels's claims, while the latter admits guilt by trying to draw Dulton "out of earshot" of the departing narrator. Dulton's purported talents vanish as he appears with a stammer and without a wife, his first repeated syllable puncturing Boodels's aggrandizements. The narrator heads back to town and scathingly reflects "what desolation, after a week of company, to be left . . . with only a stuttering man for a companion" ("The Last" 148).

The short sketch encapsulates the close connections between voice and intimacy within nineteenth-century literature, demonstrating how the attribution of dysfluent speech to a character often had an adverse impact on their marital potential and narrative significance. The incompatibility of stammering speech and social desirability is the punchline of the piece; perversely, Boodels's insistence on Dulton's hilarity is confirmed for readers as his speech is intended to provide the biggest laugh. Dulton both lands the joke and ends the story: the narrative collapses in the wake of his dysfluency. He manages to be a minor character in what is only a four-page piece, permitted only two utterances before the narrator departs, taking his readers along with him once the promise of an idealized wife has been substituted for the reality of a stammering voice. The narrator's parting rejection of Dulton as an appealing companion suggests the interpersonal undesirability of dysfluency. If it is torturous to spend a few days with an acquaintance who stammers, then how much worse to work with someone with the speech disorder, to befriend them, or to live with them under the auspices of marriage?

The cruelly humorous instrumentalization of dysfluency is common in the period, as is its connection to issues of matrimony. The comic songs "Wery Pekooliar; or, the Lisping Lover" and "Wery Ridiculous," both written by Jacob

Beuler in the 1820s, are full of irregular spellings that signal the lisping pronunciation of the speaker, Nicholas, as he attempts to court a woman named Julia. When Nicholas asks Julia to dance, he is pleasantly surprised to find that she also lisps, as he "love[s] in pertiklar a lithp in a ooman" (42). The song ends with Nicholas's shock over his rejection by Julia who marries a pawnbroker and leaves Nicholas "pining and lisping" after her (45). The comedy of the songs derives from Nicholas's rejection despite Julia's lisp and because of his own. While a woman lisping during courtship can indicate her coquettish femininity, a man lisping during courtship is, as the second song title insists, ridiculous. The lesson is clear: a lisping man trying to find a wife is both hilarious and doomed to failure.[2]

The incompatibility of vocal disabilities such as stammering and lisping with normative forms of intimacy such as marriage appears with heightened frequency in both medico-scientific and literary texts in the nineteenth century. Speech correctionists and novelists alike articulate anxiety around dysfluent union and reproduction. Novelists craft a narrative trajectory of dwindling dysfluency—a variation of the courtship plot in which a character becomes more marriageable as they become more normatively eloquent. This occurs compositionally through authorial revisions as the speech of a character is altered between versions of a text. It also happens narratively through the changing representation of a character's voice within the diegesis. Taken together, these methods present vocal diversity as inimical to marital intimacy in the midcentury realist novel, an issue to be resolved before both marriage and plot can be concluded.

The idea that a book could alter speech held sway in the nineteenth century. The period witnessed the rise of speech correction as a profession consisting of a mix of elocutionists, physicians, surgeons, and charlatans. Among the treatments for vocal disability there flourished elocutionary manuals with directives for achieving standard speech: the written word, providing advice and exercises for the dysfluent, was mobilized as a tool for vocal reform. These manuals included detailed instructions on how to breathe properly, position the tongue correctly, and other physiological practices, as well as passages to repeat to improve enunciation. These excerpts were often drawn from the canon of Western literature, positioning fiction as a key element of the printed page's ability to alter the spoken utterance (Helmore 92–96; Ball 53–128). London speech correctionist William Abbotts writes that "I now generally recommend patients, residing at a distance . . . to undergo

2. Hoegaerts describes the period's comparable stuttering songs in which "the stammerer is a figure to be laughed at . . . he is rejected by his beloved because of his impediment" ("S-s-s-syncopation" 745).

treatment by correspondence, entirely" (45). The efficacy of textual treatments is interchangeable with that of in-person therapy for Abbotts, thereby ameliorating the challenges posed by distance from the metropole and thus from practitioners.

The broader public circulation of novels over these elocutionary manuals meant that dominant perceptions of dysfluent voices were largely shaped by the depictions that populate nineteenth-century fiction (Agha 257). Several novels possess a similar therapeutic energy emanating from fluent characters and authors and directed toward dysfluent characters and readers as they transmit social codes of desirable speech and methods for obtaining it. They detail the types of intimacy and vocation apparently foreclosed to the vocally atypical, and function as implicit and even explicit advertisements for treatment. Characters remark upon, judge, and attempt to reform each other's speech. Novels, in this sense, are tools of speech therapy, depicting deviations from standard articulation as barriers to certain social relations and character roles, as well as suggesting approaches for reducing these differences.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *What Will He Do With It?* (1858) provides an exemplary instance: the stammering character George Morley, fearful that his marital prospects and profession as a preacher are imperiled by his "difficulty in utterance," receives elocutionary lessons from the elderly Waife (110). Waife's instructions are detailed across several pages: "All you want is time, time to quiet the nerves, time to think, time to breathe. The moment you begin to stammer—stop—fill the lungs thus, then try again" (110–11). His general plan of instruction—"observation, imitation, reflection, reproduction"—encourages George: "At the end of the first lesson [he] felt that his cure was possible . . . at the end of a month the cure was self-evident" (113). Waife's directives for fluent speech are made available to George and to the novel's readers, the former endorsing them to the latter through his "cure."

Nineteenth-century novels often possess comparable curative or rehabilitative drives toward otherwise disabled characters, as evidenced in Brontë's blinded Edward Rochester regaining his vision or Dickens's Mrs. Clennam rising from her wheelchair to walk. However, this impulse toward recovery cannot be extended toward disabled readers in wheelchairs or with low vision in the same way that it could be extended to dysfluent readers. Dysfluency was conceived of as transitory, something to be trained out of existence by the end of a text, rather than miraculously cured. If a character could normalize their speech, these texts suggested, so could readers. Therefore, there is a unique representational relationship between novels and dysfluency, one absent in depictions of the broader category of disability. The voice's status as educable gives it intense narrative utility and symbolic significance. And the

nineteenth-century novel—as a form invested in transformation via narrative conventions like bildung and the marriage plot—is an ideal site for depicting these dynamics of vocal alterability. It demands change for its narrative energy, and represents both organic and forced development, natural evolution and violent alteration.

The novel and the speech correctionist partake in a shared project of vocal normalization: to rephrase Lennard Davis with a vocal emphasis, normality must protect itself by listening to the chorus of dysfluency and then recovering from that sound (48). Rather than taking a rigidly critical stance on the treatment-oriented thrust of nineteenth-century discourse on dysfluency, however, it is prudent to consider the social and individual factors that inform it. In other words, the therapeutic work of the novel is not inherently good or bad; instead, we must question its coercive and homogenizing force, without automatically demonizing it, as if treatment were always anathema to a progressive sociopolitical stance on dysfluency, either then or now. This difficult balancing act is aided by contemporary scholarly and activist theories: recent work in disability studies questions a reflexive dismissal of curative desires, while, in a different vein, an increasingly active dysfluency pride community balks against assimilationist expectations to pass as fluent.[3] The work of critics and activists to claim dysfluency as an integral component of identity prompts reexaminations of cultural productions to trace out a history of vocal norms still structuring our present. It is an opportunity to look critically at representations of disabled speech, to interrogate the narratives, intimacies, and characteristics attributed to dysfluent figures.

The ubiquity of these dysfluent figures in nineteenth-century culture is not exclusively predicated on mockery and expulsion. "The Lisping Lover" was still being performed decades after its composition, its popularity undiminished: in 1876, a Mr. George Thorne sang the "comic ditt[y]" at a charity event. The audience was delighted by the "'peecoliarites' [*sic*] of the song" and gave Thorne an "encore which . . . he well deserved." A local reporter provides a simple explanation for the praise Thorne received for performing Nicholas's lisped wooing, which came at the end of the entertainment, stating that "variety is pleasing" ("Bridport Church Charities"). Novelists agreed, varying the dialogue they ascribed to characters and, more particularly, using dysfluency to diversify the discourse of courtship.

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3. As Kafer puts it, a "desire for a cure is not necessarily an anti-crip or anti-disability rights and justice position" (27). See also Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection* (2017). The blog *Did I Stutter?,* created by self-stylized dysfluency activists, articulates a commitment to stuttering pride. Martin argues that stuttering pride works to undo the "damage of the speech clinic" ("Stuttering from the Anus" 119).

Dysfluent speech, then, provides entertaining variability, the appeal of difference. It is also a source of narrative interest, the cause of courtship complications in a song like "The Lisping Lover," and a similarly dynamizing force in the period's novels. Standardized speech functions as a vocal indication of eligibility for matrimony, dysfluency as a hurdle to overcome—an imperfection to remedy in the dialogic dynamic between potential spouses. Furthermore, dysfluent representation participates in what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have termed "narrative prosthesis," the idea that fiction relies on and exploits disability as both a near-ubiquitous element of characterization and a useful symbol to communicate other themes (47–49). Dysfluency is specifically mobilized in courtship plots to suggest the types of maturity and gender performance deemed requisite in marriage. As entertaining diversity, narrative grist, and analogical crutch, dysfluency is widespread in the midcentury novel.

Notwithstanding, a pattern of reducing representations of dysfluency is discernible in the period's marital fiction. The compositional histories of novels provide one avenue of investigation, as certain novelists attribute dysfluent speech to their characters only to reduce and standardize this vocal eccentricity in subsequent editions. In these cases, novelistic revision functions as a form of speech therapy, with authors normalizing the voices of their creations, ambivalently offering and then retracting dysfluency. Furthermore, the fictional interlocutors of dysfluent characters disparagingly comment on their nonstandard utterances, encouraging them to alter their articulation. Characters are highly attentive to vocal variation, hierarchizing differences and expressing dissatisfaction with dysfluent deviations. It is through both these compositional and diegetic dynamics that the corrective force of the novel is exerted on characters' voices. The nineteenth-century novel performs a balancing act between providing populous representations of dysfluency and social scripts for minimizing it.

The novel's use of dysfluent representation takes on special meaning in relation to matrimony, depicting voice as an integral element of marital alignment. Specifically, the marriage plot of dwindling dysfluency affirms the writings of speech correctionists on the incompatibility of dysfluent speech with heteronormative marriage and reproduction. Writing in the 1830s, Joseph Poett explains how:

> In consequence of the erroneous opinion that Impediments of Speech are hereditary, several matrimonial alliances have been refused on the females' part, with gentlemen who happened to be afflicted with the disease, and proposals for marriage with ladies who were similarly affected, have been

> avoided by gentlemen, in consequence of the absurd idea that marriage . . . would entail upon their offspring this distressing infirmity. (32–33)

Poett describes how dysfluent individuals were subjected to the same proto-eugenic anxieties as other disabled individuals throughout the nineteenth century—their marital and familial prospects damaged by fears of the transmissibility of their speech patterns. Even if people agreed with Poett that the hereditary transmission of dysfluent speech was "erroneous," the competing and more popular nineteenth-century theory that dysfluency was spread via imitation did not improve the cultural acceptance of dysfluent parentage. James Hunt, another prominent speech correctionist, described stammering as a contagious affliction perpetuated by deliberate or unconscious imitation, sometimes "caught" after a single conversation with a stammerer (*Treatise* 23–25).[4] Reports even existed of fetuses "catching" a stammer due to their mother's interactions with someone with the disorder, an instance of "maternal impression," of sonic fetal imprinting (Ball 9). In other words, if children did not inherit a vocal disability from dysfluent parents, they would learn it from them instead, an influential epidemiological theory of infectious speech. These theories construct dysfluency as an overdetermined threat: both the nature and nurture of dysfluent parents imperil the normativity of their children's speech.

The idea of dysfluency as contagion complicates the therapeutic impetus of the novel, as the representation of disabled voices could be seen as a method of propagating rather than curbing readerly dysfluency. In this sense, the novel is both a form of speech therapy and a type of dangerous exposure, although the latter role is tempered by the translation of dysfluent speech into text: the sonic contagion of speech disorders is muffled when encountered on the page. The pages of nineteenth-century novels, however, were frequently read aloud and in company. In domestic spaces, families listened as a parent read serialized installments of a novel; in public spaces, those without the financial means and literacy to read gathered to hear someone vocalize the latest text. Exemplified by Charles Dickens, novelists embarked on reading tours of their prose throughout the century. Significantly, the first excerpt from a full-length novel Dickens performed in public derived from *Dombey and Son* (1846–48) and featured the stammering character, Toots; indeed, while many minor characters were "progressive[ly] eliminated" in the oral iteration of the narrative, Toots's "speeches had sometimes been amplified beyond what

4. For more on dysfluency as derived from imitation, see Good 566; E. Lee 18; Helmore 58; Rockey 144. For the persistence of hereditary theories of stammering, see Shell 13.

appeared in the novel" (Collins, *Charles Dickens* 127). In this sense, novels—not unlike the score of "The Lisping Lover"—were scripts for performing dysfluency for authors and readers alike. They provide narratives depicting the reduction of dysfluency, but necessitate the performance of these vocal patterns in order to transmit those narratives. Both cure and contagion coexist in the same form.

The notion of a speech disorder as a marital impediment sketched by Poett persisted throughout the century's fiction. Scholarship on the marriage plot has yet to consider how deeply the voice, dysfluent or otherwise, is imbricated in courtship and procreation. Critics have long recognized the centrality of marriage to the novel form, with its prevalence—both as a plot convention and an ideologically motivated resolution to sociopolitical problems—being theorized across subgenres and critical frameworks. While scholars such as Nancy Armstrong have shown how marriage functions as a social contract within literature, an emphasis on the voice reminds us that matrimony is not only a contract to be signed, but also a set of vows to be uttered. More recent scholarship has expanded the bodies, identities, and relationships considered alongside the marriage plot, moving beyond white heteronormative couplings.[5] This work has been complemented by critics within disability studies who explore the eugenic fears as well as unique relational possibilities that surround disabled characters in nineteenth-century courtship plots.[6]

This interest in invalidism and sensory and physical disabilities can be further broadened by turning to dysfluency: not only considering various bodies, but variously speaking bodies. Attention to the role of (dysfluent) voices in courtship narratives is crucial, as the voice is often the means of working toward, ultimately achieving, or rejecting marital union, unsurprising in a form that eschews overt depictions of physical affection. Thus, analyzing the norms and ideals that govern vocal interactions is key to understanding the dynamics of the marriage plot. Verbal exchanges are mobilized to knit intimacy between characters or to repel unwanted suitors, and proposals are frequently sonic in nature. Ranging from networks of gossip to verbal outbursts, the vocal is a tool for the matrimonial in the nineteenth-century novel. Even in Jane Austen—well-known for refusing readers access to the speeches that comprise the marital culminations of her books—and, furthermore, even in an instance of Austenian epistolary courtship, the voice is inseparable from the act of proposing. Captain Wentworth's proposal letter to Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1817), written while he overhears Anne speaking to another,

5. See duCille; Ablow; Marcus, *Between Women*; Hager; Schafer.
6. See Holmes, *Fictions*; Gore.

declares "I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak. . . . I offer myself to you again. . . . You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice when they would be lost on others" (191). Despite its textual mediation, Wentworth's proposal is motivated by his sonic affinity with Anne's voice and expressed in vocal metaphors.

The voice is even more integral to the marriage plots of several canonical Victorian texts. The seductive verbal sparring of Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester binds them before Jane's flight from Thornfield Hall; it is their (in) famous disembodied utterances that eventually reunite them; and, upon Jane's conclusive arrival at Ferndean, a blind Rochester is convinced of her reality due to "her voice . . . that peculiar voice of hers, so animating and piquant" (422–23). In *Middlemarch* (1871–72), Mr. Casaubon's desire to wed Dorothea Brooke begins when he takes note of her voice, turning "his eyes very markedly on [her] while she was speaking": he goes on to remark that he wants "a reader for [his] evenings" but is "fastidious in voices" and "cannot endure listening to an imperfect reader." Dorothea is likewise drawn to the "balanced sing-song neatness of his speech" (11–12). Vocal attraction, albeit of a chillingly pragmatic nature on Casaubon's end, is at the origin of their ill-fated union. Basil Ransom's infatuation with Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians* (1886) derives from his eroticization of her vocal tones, from his interest in the somatic rather than semantic elements of her speech, as he both listens to and "taste[s] her voice," hoping to turn it into his domestic property, rather than a public commodity (258). In the nineteenth-century novel, intimacy and marriage are not just about who you are, but how you sound. Furthermore, vocal sympathy and alignment are presented as significant for matrimonial access. Would Jane have stayed with Rochester if he had lost a tongue instead of a hand, had been rendered mute instead of blind? Would Casaubon have been interested in Dorothea if she lisped, or would that have disqualified her from marital utility by rendering her an "imperfect reader"? Would Basil be drawn to Verena if she were a stammerer, as opposed to a fluent orator?

Rather than dwell with these counterfactuals, there is abundant dysfluent representation in nineteenth-century courtship plots to analyze. These texts suggest that dysfluency need not be incompatible with marriage if it is carefully controlled by the time the marriage occurs. Dysfluency's apparent ephemerality allows it to give way to marriage through the therapeutic practices exerted on dysfluent figures by other characters and their authors. The voice, then, serves as a marker of marital eligibility: a way to ascertain a character's readiness for marriage. Dysfluent lovers in the period range from Charles Dickens's Toots and John Chivery and their hapless stammering courtships of Florence Dombey and Amy Dorrit, respectively, to

the precarious marriage of H. G. Wells's husband-and-wife lispers, the Ponderevos, nearly seventy years later. Amid this abundance, two instances are particularly illustrative. I turn from the fleeting representation of dysfluency in the pages of *Punch* to the sprawling novelistic triumph of one of the magazine's most notable contributors: William Makepeace Thackeray. The multimarriage plot of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* intersects with the novel's heteroglossic nature, featuring dysfluent characters who echo Thackeray's own vexed relationship to vocalization. Secondly, I analyze the equally rich soundscape of Charlotte Brontë's final novel, *Villette,* well known for its concluding challenge to the marriage plot. The dwindling of Dobbin's and Polly's lisps within these novels exemplifies realism's extractive relationship to dysfluency, using it to imbue plots and characters with interest before excising it from a narrative.

Compositional Speech Therapy and Dobbin's Diminishing Lisp

> I often forget people's names in life; and in my own stories contritely own that I make dreadful blunders regarding them; but I declare, my dear sir, with respect to the personages introduced into your humble servant's fables, I know the people utterly—I know the sound of their voices.
>
> —William Makepeace Thackeray, "De Finibus" (1863)

Eleven days before his death on Christmas Eve 1863, William Makepeace Thackeray gave a speech at Charterhouse, the school he attended from 1822 to 1828 (Collins, *Thackeray* 6–7). Over thirty years later, G. S. Davies, a fellow alumnus of the school at the remove of a few decades, ends a series of recollections about Thackeray by referencing this speech. Rather than outlining the content of the speech, Davies closes his account by describing the sonic impression made by Thackeray's voice: "His voice . . . had a slight metallic ring in it, when he spoke, and we think also a slight lisp" (67). I follow Davies's lead by attending to the embodied voice over linguistic speech through an exploration of the cultural meanings and narratological workings of lisping in nineteenth-century society as embodied in Thackeray's William Dobbin, the dedicated Regency soldier and hapless admirer of Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair.* Dobbin serves as an illustrative instance of the intersection of nonnormative corporeality and nonnormative vocality and the impact of this intersection on heroism and marriage within the novel.

The connotations of a lisping man in the nineteenth century were various, though largely unflattering, as evidenced by examples from the 1820s, a period covered in the chronology of *Vanity Fair.* John Leach, a prominent Regency politician and lawyer, is remembered for his role as George IV's legal officer and his efforts to collect evidence of Queen Caroline's supposed adultery to persuade the king into demanding a divorce. Many believed Leach was deceiving the king and his campaign against the queen, who was very popular, made him the target of public opprobrium. One caricature labeled him "Lisping Leech," with both the attribution of dysfluent speech and animalizing resemblance to a bloodsucking worm denigrating Leach and his supposed brand of villainy. The satire linked Leach's dishonesty to his "tongue . . . tip'd with venom'd death," playing off the perception that his "manner of speaking . . . was regarded as affected" (Lobban). In this caricature, the lisping man is a false one, faking a form of speech and lying to a king, and a threat to domestic and national union. Lisps—and satires of them—were common in the period, often affected as part of a performance of genteel dandyism, as evinced in *Vanity Fair* itself: the minor figure Paddington is scornfully described as "lisping and twiddling his hair" (672).

Recall also Beuler's "The Lisping Lover," originating in the Regency period *Vanity Fair* reconstructs, and detailing the lisping Nicholas's ill-fated attempts at courtship. Both examples demonstrate interest in the collision of masculinity and lisping—from courtroom caricatures to comic songs—and show that whether intended to convey villainy or humor, these representations ultimately call for distrust and mockery of their subjects. Furthermore, both the affected speech of the bachelor lawyer Leach and the "ridiculous" lisp of the hopeless lover Nicholas remain decidedly outside of the marital sphere, whether emanating from an advocate for royal divorce or a rejected suitor. Together, they provide information about the cultural perceptions of lisping in the 1820s: the years Thackeray attended Charterhouse and the ones during which much of *Vanity Fair* takes place. The idea that lisping is antithetical to gentlemanly skill with women and the ability to marry them is key to understanding Thackeray's evolving representation of Dobbin's lisp.

In addition to sharing given names, Thackeray and Dobbin are united in eccentricity, with both author and character being physically and "vocally odd" (Carey xi). Charlotte Brontë noted Thackeray's bodily irregularity, writing that he had "a peculiar face—not handsome, very ugly" (Collins, *Thackeray* 107). Similarly, Dobbin is declared as "homely-looking" by *Vanity Fair*'s narrator, this description directly following the remark "He lisped" (293). This is not to argue that Dobbin lisps because Thackeray did, but, more precisely, that Thackeray's awareness of the cultural resonances of lisping masculinity influenced

his depiction of the tension between dysfluency and marital intimacy. Notably, both Thackeray and Dobbin were involved in "vexed courtships" leading to ambivalent unions, and the latter's lisp is an overlooked component of the novel's multimarriage plot (Sutherland viii).

Dobbin in general is an understudied figure and extended attention to his lisp is rare. In the multitude of voices that comprise *Vanity Fair,* it is unsurprising that Dobbin is neglected for more irresistible characters such as Becky Sharp. Dobbin was "evidently [an] afterthought" to Thackeray himself in composing the novel, and most commentators—both in Thackeray's time and ours—align with Becky in failing to give "the existence of Captain Dobbin one single moment's consideration" (Sutherland xxxi, Thackeray 72). Nonetheless, it is clear that Dobbin was intended to be likable, if unremarkable. While those that do attend to Dobbin generally agree he is an attempt at the "redefinition of the gentlemanly ideal" in the wake of the shift from Regency to Victorian mores, there is no consensus as to the success of this attempt (Litvak 62). Anthony Trollope dismissed Dobbin as "deficient" and "ridiculous" as a hero, while George Henry Lewes echoed the latter adjective—both recalling the failed lisping lover, Nicholas (Collins, *Thackeray* 93, 46). Almost a century later, Juliet McMaster argues that while the male characters of *Vanity Fair* have some heroic characteristics, they "never achieve the full status: Dobbin, whose moral strength might qualify him for hero, has a lisp" (33). Robin Gilmour notes that Dobbin's noble interior but ludicrous exterior is symptomatic of Thackeray's style, with his "notorious ambiguity" compelling him to insert "disparaging reminders of [Dobbin's] lisp" (39). What these readings fail to do is interrogate why a lisp is incompatible with heroism, or why normative speech is requisite for gentlemanliness. These assumptions call for reexamination. Closely listening to Dobbin's shifting voice clarifies the tensions between lisping and masculinity and between dysfluency and marriage.

The opening pages of *Vanity Fair* suggest that it will be a novel open to nonnormative, socially disruptive speech, such as lisping. The preface announces that the reader is about to enter "VANITY FAIR; not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy" (1). A few pages later, the first full-sized illustration within the narrative proper, captioned "Rebecca's Farewell," depicts Becky Sharp hurling her begrudgingly obtained copy of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* out of the carriage window as she and Amelia Sedley leave Miss Pinkerton's academy. This irreverent opening vignette of Becky banishing the dictionary, and, by extension, the lexicographer whose connection helped establish Miss Pinkerton's educational reputation, is full of symbolism. Johnson saw his dictionary as a way to save written language from "the corruptions of oral utterance" by standardizing English spellings and

pronunciations, and therefore letting idiosyncratic modes of speech "perish with other things unworthy of preservation" (qtd. in L. Davies 49–50).

Johnson envisioned his dictionary as a tool to improve the pronunciation of the English populace, whereas Becky's defiant rejection of both book and author prefigures *Vanity Fair*'s openness to nonstandard spellings that index nonstandard pronunciations. "So much for the Dixonary," Becky quips, using her voice as a weapon against Johnson's standardizing imperative as the transcription of her pronunciation ("Dixonary" [13]) clashes with the transcription of Miss Pinkerton's earlier utterance ("Dictionary" [5]). The narrator himself spells dicti/dix-onary both ways, suggesting a willingness to accommodate multiple pronunciations in the novel's authorizing voice. The narrator's linguistic openness mocks the class pretensions of the Pinkerton sisters, as the eldest insists that the younger replaces her pronunciation of "bow-pot" with "bouquet" as "'tis more genteel" (4). The implication seems to be that Vanity Fair, both as location and thematic, is an obstreperous place where the rulebook for pronunciation has been chucked out the window. We then hurtle along in a carriage with Becky and Amelia to begin hatching their respective marriage plots, leaving behind close-minded pedagogues. As the filigree gates of Miss Pinkerton's academy close, the floodgates of dysfluency, dialect, and other eccentric idiolects are poised to open.

And, sure enough, speech patterns that depart from standard English abound: Sir Pitt's "coarsest and vulgarest Hampshire accent," the racialized "hysterical yoops" of Miss Swartz, Mrs. O'Dowd's Irish brogue, and the Germanic English of the Pumpernickel socialites, to name a few (84, 10). In addition, the nameless masses of Vanity Fair are collectively dismissed as "mute personages" left only to "grumble anonymously"—figures who are denied clear vocalization seem, by extension, denied character status (525, 97). Specifically dysfluent speech is also frequent, often located in the extremities of age with little Georgy "lisping" his prayers, Sir Pitt reduced to "inarticulate deprecatory moans" after his last illness, and Mr. Osborne exiting the novel struck with mutism (493, 510–12, 777). In this sense, *Vanity Fair* proves Mikhail Bakhtin's claim that comic novels, of which he considers Thackeray's work to be exemplary, are "encyclopedia[s] of all strata and forms of literary language" (301). This linguistic variety helps distinguish the substantial cast of the novel and adds humor, poignancy, and interest to their speech.

Dobbin's lisp joins this cacophony of voices rebelling against the discarded dictionary. His dialogue warps standard orthography; for instance, when a young Dobbin defends himself against a school bully who intercepts his letter from home, he declares that "no gentleman readth letterth" and warns "Don't strike or I'll *thmash* you" (50). This moment of dysfluency is both emphasized

and rendered foreign via italics. As the novel progresses, Dobbin's lisp continually appears, primarily in dialogue tags, and often accompanied by a stammer, thereby compounding his dysfluency. Dobbin's vocal patterns repel Amelia, of whom he is enamored, despite her tentative engagement to his friend, George. The narrator tells us that Amelia "had rather a mean opinion of her husband's friend, Captain Dobbin. He lisped—he was very plain and homely-looking: and exceedingly awkward" (293). Dobbin's lisp appears first in the list of reasons Amelia thinks poorly of him: it both takes precedence and is intimately linked to his awkward physicality. And, as suggested by Amelia's judgments, lispers are not husband material, but sidekicks to more dashing and marriageable figures like George. On the same page, we are told "George had mimicked Dobbin's lisp and queer manners many times to her": Dobbin's dysfluent, queer vocalization is a source of mockery for George and Amelia, allowing them—as well as readers—to overlook his superior morality. In this way, his lisp is a vocal mask for his heroism.

Dobbin is differently overlooked by scholars in queer readings of *Vanity Fair.* They instead focus on Jos Sedley, the "effeminate double" of the narrator who serves as a "protohomosexual," as well as George, who holds a set of "homoerotic and autoerotic desires for the male body" (Litvak 56, Cole 138–39). Though Dobbin is sedate whereas Jos and even George are flamboyant, the former is consistently described as queer, particularly when proximate to scenes of heteronormativity. After George and Amelia's wedding, Dobbin is left behind: he "stood in the church-porch, looking at it, a queer figure" (264). Like many queer literary successors, Dobbin is an outsider to marriage; he can observe and facilitate union, but remains apart, marked as other. Later, "the greatest buck of all the Indian army," Swankey, is engaged in a tête-à-tête with Amelia, talking "to her with great humour and eloquence," and lamenting the presence of the "long, thin, queer-looking, oldish fellow" near the widowed Amelia who "took the shine out of a man in the talking line" (767). The swaggering Swankey, an aggressively heterosexual rake possessed of eloquent speech, contrasts sharply with the queer Dobbin who not only speaks strangely, but also seems to impede the loquaciousness of others. Dobbin's vocal and social oddities are connected and his lisp, with its attendant queerness, is key to the relational possibilities available to him.[7]

Key, yes, but ultimately delible. The final mention of his dysfluency sees it being qualified when the narrator describes Dobbin as having "very long legs, a yellow face, and a slight lisp" (792). For the first time, and in contrast to the

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7. Today lisps are often interpreted as indexes of homosexuality in male speakers. For work specifically on the "gay lisp," see Van Borsel et al.

aggrandizing modifier "very" applied to the length of his legs, Dobbin's lisp is diminished as only "slight," and after this downplayed reference, it drops out of the novel for the last one hundred pages or so. While Dobbin's body seems permanently resigned to unappealing gawkiness, his speech is malleable. The final reference to Dobbin's lisp occurs when the narrator declares him to be a true gentleman, a rare commodity in society, and rarer still in the world of the novel: once Dobbin is conclusively knighted as a gentleman, his speech attains normalcy. This shift emphasizes the mutability of vocal characterization, showing that "whereas many narratives require consistency of character for their effectiveness, consistency of voice is not necessary" (Phelan 47). Rather, a changeable voice is an essential element of Thackeray's novel.

The narrative diminishment of Dobbin's lisp is mirrored in the publication history of *Vanity Fair* as made apparent in genetic criticism by Peter Shillingsburg. Although the original manuscript of the novel has Dobbin uttering such orthographically irregular statements as "Be off, you foolth!," "thtupid," and "alwayth talking nonthenth and thcandal[,] Othborne ith," these are standardized in subsequent editions to read "Be off, you fools!," "stupid," and "always talking nonsense and scandal[,] Osborne is" (Shillingsburg 714, 717). These changes isolate Dobbin's sole instance of orthographic lisping to a childhood flashback, mentioned above, and thereby position his dysfluency as something he can, and seemingly does, grow out of. A type of speech therapy is performed on Dobbin narratively and compositionally, thereby edging his speech closer to normativity, without effacing his dysfluency entirely.

Thackeray, described in reviews of his public lectures "as an elocutionist," rescinds and tempers Dobbin's lisp ("Mr. Charles Dickens" 10). We can take this symbolic alignment further, as Charlotte Brontë did in her characterization of Thackeray as a "savage surgeon" who "has pleasure in putting his cruel knife or probe into quivering living flesh" ("To George Smith" 17–18). Thackeray, as elocutionist-surgeon-author, dissects and reconstructs Dobbin's tongue in the same decade in which violent surgeries were performed on dysfluent speakers in an ultimately ineffective attempt to standardize their articulation.[8] The question is why: Why does *Vanity Fair* need to tame Dobbin's unruly tongue? The choice to purge his lisp proves significant for the novel's approach to characterization and the marriage plot. In terms of the former, *Vanity Fair* is a novel that troubles norms of character centrality, notably through its subtitle, *A Novel without a Hero.* As the book proceeds, the narrator tantalizingly proffers Becky as a potential heroic option, declaring "If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine" (369). The

8. For more on stammering surgeries, see chapter 5.

narrator oscillates between granting and revoking Becky's heroic status, but, despite this uncertainty, she is more closely followed than any other figure.

Even though Becky is the one who hurls the *Dictionary* onto the ground, her speech is incredibly normative, in both English and French, as she strategically toggles between languages and accents. Becky is introduced as speaking French with a "perfect accent," is described as a "good linguist," and, as the novel progresses, her multilingual fluency helps her craft the illusion of her aristocratic French extraction (9, 19). Becky's vocal mastery extends to her ability to imitate other characters, including the Pinkertons, Sir Pitt, Briggs, Lady Southdown, Champignac and Truffigny, and Jos. "The little mimic, Rebecca" has control over a variety of voices across social classes, giving her an aptitude for oral replication that parallels that of the narrator (17). Becky's imitations frequently target the vocal nonnormativity of her victims. She lampoons the wheeze of Sir Huddleston, the "noisy manner" of Sir Giles Wapshot, and Sir Pitt's dialect pronunciations, translating them into print in a letter, again granting her skills otherwise only accorded to the narrator (127, 89). Later, as she begins to improve her class position, it only takes Becky a fortnight to master "the genteel jargon" so well "that a native could not speak it better" (356). She becomes a societal "nightingale," leaving her less eloquent spouse to wonder in a passage of free indirect discourse "Was there any woman who could talk, or sing, or do anything like her?" (652, 658). Someone as vocally skilled as Becky can climb the social ladder—through Becky, the novel insists that vocal grace is an inestimable instrument of social mobility, whether or not that mobility is endorsed—and is qualified to be the heroine of an otherwise hero-bereft novel.

Or at least the antiheroine. Becky's excessive fluency is a sign of her moral perfidy and dishonesty, her excellent French an indication of her dubious social origins. Nonetheless, her showy utterances charm society and readers alike, while Dobbin's more reserved vocal performances are differently received. Dobbin, who may have otherwise solved *Vanity Fair*'s hero-problem, is disqualified in part due to his dysfluency. In a sense, *Vanity Fair* is a novel without a hero because Dobbin is a clumsy lisper. Thackeray may have been trying to address this by downplaying Dobbin's lisp in subsequent rewrites, thereby bringing his speech into closer alignment with his heroic superiority over the other male characters in the novel: the lecherous Sir Pitt, the rakish Rawdon, the disloyal and narcissistic George. As succinctly put by Thackeray, "Dont [*sic*] you see how odious all the people are in the book (with exception of Dobbin)" ("To Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth" 309). Dobbin is intended to be a moral counterbalance to an otherwise damned cast, his lisp evoking a certain guilelessness. However, these efforts to illuminate Dobbin's comparative

heroism seem unsuccessful. A reviewer from 1848 writes: "There is no hero to this novel. . . . Not Dobbin, certainly; though kind, warm-hearted, generous and a soldier, he is not intellectual enough; and, worse than all, he lisps" ("Notices" 377).

On the one hand, Dobbin's dedication and nobility are insufficient to overcome the stigma of his lingering lisp, thereby precluding him from functioning as the hero. His lisp is a type of shibboleth, his inability to articulate in a particular way denying him membership in a community of hero-protagonists. Therefore, Dobbin is relegated to a secondary-character-zone, one much less expansive than Becky's. The narrative loses sight of Dobbin for extended periods: he is a scarce presence after the events at Brussels, totally absent during the Gaunt House episode, and is often nothing more than a disembodied imperial presence writing letters from India. As a carefully controlled lisper, Dobbin can have a substantial role in *Vanity Fair,* but he is rejected by his author (via the novel's subtitle) and by his readers (at least by the quoted reviewer) as a viable candidate for the text's paramount role. On the other hand, Dobbin's middling narrative significance makes him available for a degree of dysfluent articulation. His lisping is dependent on his inability to become the text's focal point. In other words, character prominence does not unidirectionally determine character speech, or vice versa; instead, these elements of characterization mutually contour the writing and reception of literary figures. And thus Dobbin falls somewhere in between Alex Woloch's one (the vocally dazzling Becky Sharp) and many (the spectral "mute personages" of Vanity Fair): he is a lisper caught in the middle.

The unstable and ultimately waning depiction of Dobbin's lisp is also integral to the marriage plot of *Vanity Fair,* from which he is barred access until he is granted a reprieve predicated on the ephemerality of his dysfluency. Throughout the novel, Dobbin seems destined for perpetual bachelorhood, an example of what Eve Sedgwick designates the "odd character the bachelor" with a "dissolutive relation to romantic genre" (recall Leach and Nicholas), a type of character that Thackeray brought into currency (*Epistemology* 188–89). Sedgwick argues that the "bachelor hero can only be mock-heroic" (189). While Sedgwick's example from *Vanity Fair* is Jos, the same description aligns neatly with Dobbin's characterization as well—that is, up until the moment when he is conclusively affirmed as a gentleman and his lisp vanishes.

Again, Becky provides an illustrative counterpoint to Dobbin. She launches her "campaign" of courtship in the second chapter and is actively "husband-hunting" for the next several pages (12, 26). Most memorable is her attempt to "snare" the imperial dandy, Jos (23). Though Jos is vocally awkward around women, Becky's conversational aptitude gives him "eloquence,"

and her "deep-toned voice" while singing almost puts his "bachelorhood [to] an end" (40, 42). Becky's talents at vocal seduction are key to her appeal and, before and after Jos, she amasses a considerable list of proposals: the curate Mr. Crisp, the country doctor Mr. Glauber, the apothecary Clump, and Sir Pitt—all of which are foiled by others, rejected by Becky, or prevented by her union to Rawdon Crawley. Becky is magnetically, even dangerously, marriageable, winning suitors over with her dazzling wit and musical prowess, her speech and her song.

Not so with Dobbin. While the narrator declares that "a woman with fair opportunities, and without an absolute hump, may marry WHOM SHE LIKES," Dobbin is a man in possession of a variety of corollaries to the undesirable hump, including his lisp, that collectively complicate his matrimonial prospects (34). In the flashback to Dobbin's school days, he is characterized as "dumb and miserable" and not much seems to have changed upon the introduction of his adult self in the Vauxhall chapter (49). The novel thereby suggests that forms of physicality, communication, and emotion thought of as disabling—humps, "dumbness," misery—are inimical to matrimony. At the pleasure gardens, George pairs off with Amelia, Jos with Becky, and Dobbin is left to pay entry for the party, carry their things, and quietly pine. At dinner, this seemingly marriage-bound quartet of "mated pairs" forget to include a chair for their fifth wheel—Dobbin, a terrible singer and clumsy speaker, is excluded from the happy "prattling" of the "united couples" (64–65). His dysfluency symptomatizes his failure to perform the role of a desirable bachelor. Dobbin is then denied his long-standing desire to marry Amelia: he is instead conscripted into a "Messenger of Hymen" when she marries George, whose "voice was rich and deep" (235, 249). Dobbin is left behind by the couple to offer a stuttering explanation of the union to Mr. Sedley; much later, he admits his management of the same to Mr. Osborne, again with a stammer. The dysfluent suitor—according with Martha Stoddard Holmes's account of how disabled characters serve as midwives of union—is more a marital facilitator than an active participant: he is the one who "applauded, encouraged, transacted almost the marriage" between George and Amelia (277).

Despite this, Dobbin continues to desire Amelia. His other marital options seem scarce, consisting of the stereotypically frigid spinster, Jane Osborne, and Glorvina O'Dowd, recommended to Dobbin as "you're a quiet man yourself, and want some one to talk for ye" (545). Glorvina, replete with her own Anglo-Irish lisp, cannot displace Dobbin's affections from the insipid Amelia. Dobbin instead feeds into vocal prejudices comparable to those that work against him, as Amelia's "sweet fresh little voice went right into the captain's heart" (59); as the narrator later suggests in reference to Amelia, "What dulness may not red

lips and sweet accents render pleasant?" (491). Dobbin's and Amelia's positions are, in a sense, inverted. Dobbin idealizes Amelia, focusing on a sweet voice that is a synecdoche for her anodyne though vacuous personality, whereas Amelia refuses to overlook Dobbin's awkward lisping speech, representative of his physical ungainliness, thereby failing to notice his virtues. Again, his lisp works to obfuscate his heroic and marital appeal. Voice, then, is a powerful mediating force in the forging or sundering of intimate bonds.

The point is not that dysfluent speech is the root cause of unsuccessful marital aspirations: failed unions proliferate in the novel. Rather, the point is that Dobbin's vocal disability and its physical parallels trump his possession of most other qualities conventionally associated with marriageability: appropriate age, abundant income, decent (and rising) class position, polite manners, and respectable vocation do not save him from having to wait eighteen years for a questionably satisfying union. Anxieties about who is eligible for marriage infuse the novel, frequently in relation to race. Mr. Sedley's repeated fear of marital miscegenation is followed by George's overtly racist rejection of Miss Swartz as a potential wife. This explicit racism is akin to an implicit vocal aversion in which dysfluency is linked to undesirable characteristics; for one, Dobbin's speech convinces Mr. Osborne he has "a rogue to deal with," serving as a sonic refutation of the admirable qualities that make Dobbin an eligible bachelor (495).

The novel's quasi-refrain that the "major is unmarried" seems poised to dissipate upon Dobbin's return to London from imperial service and reunion with Amelia (544). Dobbin's speech remains dysfluent as he could barely "falter out the words" inquiring after Amelia, and when he finally encounters her, he is rendered "speechless," before stammering out a few syllables (739, 745). Their marriage is then delayed for another one hundred pages. Ultimately, Dobbin is allowed to shed his bachelorhood on the condition that his lisp is "slight" and infrequently mentioned, making him more matrimonially appealing and rendering his speech less of a transmissible threat to his children, either through heredity or imitation. He develops from the dysfluent messenger of others' unions to the apparently fluent participant in his own, a sort of curative reward for his long-standing devotion. The dwindling of Dobbin's dysfluency is concomitant with a diminishment of his queerness, as he finally marries Amelia and has a daughter with her in the final pages. The vanishing of his lisp before reproduction is particularly notable given the fear of hereditary transmission of various socially stigmatized traits that *Vanity Fair* consistently articulates.

In addition, the fact that Dobbin's lisp has been downplayed, though may still exist, works to preclude him from the idealized unions that end other contemporaneous novels. In contrast to Dickens's *Dombey and Son,* Dobbin has not ended the novel in marital bliss with an idealized wife like Florence Dombey: someone like Florence is equally inaccessible to Dobbin as she is to *Dombey*'s own dysfluent suitor, Toots. Instead, Dobbin ends up with a "tender little parasite" for a wife (871). Dobbin, operating under "love's delusion," succumbs to the common plight of all denizens of Vanity Fair: "striving for what is not worth the having" (767, 607). Dobbin replicates Amelia's misplaced devotion for George in his regard for her, though not all the blame is to be laid with Amelia: Dobbin's oblivious romanticization of her and his narrow-minded expectations regarding gender roles are equally culpable. This dynamic, coupled with the narrator's thinly veiled scorn for the parasitic Amelia, makes Dobbin's eventual marital triumph deeply ambivalent.

Vanity Fair demonstrates how dysfluent vocalization is a malleable characteristic that can fade in and out of hearing to suit the allotment of focus on characters and the contours of plotting. The therapeutic reduction of Dobbin's lisp—both narratively and compositionally—allows him to access a conventional marriage-plot ending, though not an idealized one. The inherently limited growth of characters, how their development is circumscribed by a page limit, prevents us from declaring whether Thackeray endorses or resists the positioning of fluent voices as prerequisites for certain novelistic roles and forms of intimacy. Whereas depictions of other disabilities often end in death or cure, dysfluency does not operate on an absolute demarcation between deviation and its banishment. Instead, Dobbin's speech is not polarized, an ambiguity fitting in a novel that refuses clean-cut binaries between hero and villain, good and evil, endearing and revolting, entertainment and instruction.

Rather, *Vanity Fair* demonstrates how novels mediate vocal intimacy. It emphasizes the immense narrative resource that is dysfluent speech, for both character and plot, and how it helps form notions of what a hero and a desirable spouse should sound like. The novel concludes with Amelia and Dobbin in a sort of social equilibrium with Becky at a charity bazaar. The follies of Becky's hyperfluent speech, facilitating her meteoric social rise and spectacular fall, land her on a plateau with the wedded pair. However, while Becky's morals are evidently unreformed, the same cannot be said for Dobbin's speech. Thackeray's partial novelistic speech therapy, reducing but ultimately retaining the traces of Dobbin's lisp, evinces the dual role of novelistic dysfluency as both variety that entertains and difference that is remediated.

Proleptic Marriage/Speech Therapy in *Villette*

> She spoke with a kind of lisp, not disagreeable, but childish. I soon saw also that there was more than girlish—a somewhat infantine expression in her by no means small features; this lisp and expression were, I have no doubt, a charm in Edward's eyes, and would be so to those of most men, but they were not to mine.
>
> —Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* (1857)

> The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I suppose the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled with the lisp of childhood; and in very bad taste that point was: at least I thought so.
>
> —Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Charlotte Brontë's interest in the dubious desirability of lisping femininity recurs throughout her novels, whether William Crimsworth is meeting his brother Edward's wife, or Mr. Rochester's French ward Adele is showing Jane Eyre the "accomplishments" she formerly used to entertain her mother's gentlemen callers. William's dislike for Mrs. Crimsworth's lisp is positioned as contrary to normative masculine inclinations, but also as discerning. It is a more refined preference that wants to keep the childish and the wifely disparate, to purge the infantine from the spousal. The situation is somewhat reversed with Adele, though Jane's judgment parallels William's: instead of a grown woman childishly lisping, a lisping child sings words belonging to a maturity beyond her years. For Jane, the content of Adele's song—love and jealousy—are inappropriate for the youthful, lisping form of her voice. The lyrics perform a sort of discomforting transformation of the childhood lisp into the lisping coquetry of a grown woman, unsurprising given Adele's symbolic function as an embodied warning to Jane of Rochester's past sexual indiscretions. In these two passages, the lisp is a fulcrum balancing between the inappropriately persistent infantilization of the wife and the premature sexualization of the child, both of which are decried by Brontë's protagonists. In short, Brontë implies that lisping is undesirable in the discourse of love.

That lisping is seen as attractive but should not be, and that it is both endemic to childhood and affected in adulthood, are indicative of attitudes regarding feminine lisping that both pre- and postdate Brontë's writing. Erasmus Darwin, in his *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education* (1798), characterizes lisping as a common childhood habit that is both easy and desirable

to break. By contrast, Edmund Burke asserts that imperfection is key to feminine beauty, claiming that women "learn to lisp" because they are "sensible" that "weakness and imperfection" heighten their attractiveness (100). For one eighteenth-century polymath, a lisp is a childhood foible to correct, for the other it is a womanly artifice to acquire. Either way lisping is inextricable from education as a mode of articulation to lose or gain. Attitudes around feminine lisping altered in the years contemporaneous with Brontë's novels, with conduct manuals stressing the importance of young women avoiding this speech pattern (Abell 238, Hartley 153). Victorian speech correctionists viewed lisping as gendered and performative, declaring that "unlike stammering and stuttering, which are more common in males than in females, lisping is much more frequent amongst the latter . . . some ladies take pleasure in converting the *s* into *th,* probably in order to attract attention to themselves by this singularity of speech" (Abbotts 47).

Progressing from the glancing references in her earlier work, Brontë provides an extended meditation on the desirability and educability of the feminine lisp in her final novel, *Villette.* The majority of scholarship on *Villette* has been preoccupied with vision: the medical gaze, references to phrenology, the depiction of tools for ocular enhancement, and the Foucauldian powers of surveillance exercised by institutions within the text.[9] Ivan Kreilkamp provides a welcome departure from this tendency with his examination of the unspoken in Brontë's novels, though his description of *Villette* as an "antivocal narrative" of disembodiment is predicated on privileging Lucy Snowe for analysis (151). Polly Home's lisp refutes this characterization: her mode of articulation brings attention to the ways in which the interaction of tongue, teeth, and lips modulates how words leave the body.

However, the early chapters of *Villette* feature a scene with a very different relation to linguistic norms than that which opens *Vanity Fair.* Polly Home, around six years old, is spending her evening with Graham Bretton, around sixteen, whom she dotes on in a manner somewhat incongruous with her young age. Polly offers to rehearse a hymn she has learned for Graham, who replies "Speak nicely, then: don't be in a hurry"; afterward, "The hymn being rehearsed . . . in a little singing voice, Graham would take exceptions at the manner, and proceed to give a lesson in recitation. She was quick in learning" (32). Rather than the inaugural verbal anarchy of *Vanity Fair,* Graham presents Polly with a list of vocal norms to adhere to, stipulating both the tone ("Speak nicely") and the pacing ("don't be in a hurry") of her rehearsal. When her utterance falls short, he resorts to a "lesson in recitation," a pedagogical effort

9. See S. Shuttleworth 17, 243; Gilbert and Gubar 409; Stockton, *God* 142; Inglis 348–49.

to reshape her speech. Why should Graham be so intent on improving Polly's voice? The answer is twofold. First, she, like Dobbin, is a habitual lisper, and, second, she will become—after a series of dizzying plot coincidences—Graham's wife. For the marriage to come to pass, her lisp must be relegated to the past. In other words, Graham is performing a sort of proleptic speech therapy on Polly who exemplifies the fluidity of vocal characterization in her educability, being "quick in learning." Graham's actions anticipate his future vocation as a doctor, as someone who fixes or normalizes bodies: his lesson with Polly is the incipient medical professional practicing on his child bride-to-be.

Young Polly, like many Victorian children, is represented with various vocal oddities. The orthography of the novel stumbles with Polly over her ambitious attempts at multisyllabic adverbs ("Tor-rer-ably," "par-tic-er-er-ly" [20]), these instances of nonstandard spelling coincident with the introduction of Graham into the narrative and into Polly's life: she begins a flawed performance of linguistic adulthood after meeting him. Her "imperfect articulation" is primarily categorized as "her piteous lisp," emphasizing that it belongs to her, and is not just an incidental slip of the tongue (31, 36). Her dysfluency also has elements of a stammer, as in the above pronunciations and elsewhere. Like Dobbin, Polly's specific dysfluency is a blend of lisping and stammering, unsurprising given the relative infancy of a loose amalgam of speech correctionists emerging in the nineteenth century and attempting to differentiate between disorders.

Also, like Dobbin, there is something queer about Polly: when she accuses Graham of being "queer," he retorts that he "cannot possibly be queerer" than she is (21). The queerness of Polly, Graham, and their relationship inheres in its prematurity. Polly is not queer in the sense that she is outside of the marriage plot, but rather in that she delves into it too deeply at too early an age. Akin to Polly's attempts to pronounce adverbs that surpass her young tongue's ability, she rushes into a semblance of adult courtship beyond her years. She wants to speak and relate in ways that surpass her maturity, leading her to perform the conventions of courtship at the age of six, ignoring the decade age gap between her and Graham. She attends to him, tries to engage him in witty banter, reprimands him playfully, feuds with him dramatically, and, in a word, flirts with him. Polly's lisping attempts at an adult idiom are part of her appeal, part of her precocious charm that endears her to Graham, his mother, and readers, marking her as a child–adult hybrid at once unnerving and enticing.

But this endearment remains platonic in the novel's opening. When Graham suggests that Polly likes him as much as if she were his sister, she replies "Oh! I *do* like you . . . I *do* like you very much," affirming her attachment, but refusing its relegation to a sororal connection (33). Polly is left in the Bretton

household by her father, much to her distress, but her emotional allegiances swiftly shift to Graham, so much so that she is vexed when Graham ultimately returns her to her father. Quickly acclimatized to one stage in this male traffic in female bodies, from father to suitor, young Polly balks against being returned to the paternal figure and forced to recognize that she is a child and not a wife; unlike the lisping Mrs. Crimsworth, Polly cannot be both.

Polly's dysfluency is inextricable from these events. Her feminine lisping is a vocal synecdoche for her performance of flirtatious courtship, but, generally speaking, lisps are used to catch a husband, and are then abandoned by more mature, wifely figures. Polly is too young to change her speech in accordance with matrimonial expectations, despite Graham's interventions. Her premature efforts at courtship parallel her premature efforts at vocalization as she fails to take on the identity of an attractive protowife in Graham's eyes. Polly's separation from Graham suggests she must wait to be granted access to normative speech and thus normative marriage. *Villette*'s interest in courtship and lisping suggests a complication to J. L. Austin's account of the performative utterances that constitute marital vows, with the vocalization of the phrase "I do" describing a state of consent and altering the legal and social terms of a relationship by enacting the state of marriage; in short, "To marry is to say a few words" (6). It is unclear if fluent speech in the utterance of "I do" is a prerequisite for contracting marriage: we must ask the "uncomfortable question" of whether a ceremony with stuttered questions and dysfluent answers would be legally binding (Eagle, "'Stuttistics'" 95–96). If Polly had prematurely lisped her consent to marry Graham, would this desire be effaced by both her young age and nonnormative speech? Is a lisp a performative infelicity, a misfire? Brontë, however, refuses to answer these questions by purging Polly's lisp prior to matrimony.

Before examining this vocal alteration, it is important to note another similarity between Polly and Dobbin. Polly is also a secondary character, her atypical speech relatively controlled and her character-zone of middling size. Polly and her lisp disappear for hundreds of pages when her character-zone ceases to intersect with that of the first-person narrator, Lucy Snowe. Lacking the conventional characteristics of heroism, more bountiful in the comparably idealized Polly, Lucy nonetheless occupies the most pages—has the loudest voice—within *Villette*. As Lucy's and Polly's lives diverge, we lose sight and sound of the latter. Scholars have mirrored Brontë's allotment in their critical attention, finding the use value of characters other than Lucy to reside primarily in their ability to illuminate her. Polly, then, is interpreted as an embodied repository of information about Lucy: she is Lucy's "alter ego," "a double for young Lucy," locked in an "odd, inverse identification" with Lucy, one of "two

antithetical figures [with] much in common" (S. Shuttleworth 223; Stockton, *God* 128; Auerbach 340; Gilbert and Gubar 404). In short, she is of interest for the ways in which she mirrors or contrasts with Lucy. Polly has a voice of her own, however, and it tells a tale of vocal normalization.

The absence of lisping Polly after the opening chapters of the book does not signal the absence of voices that diverge from standard English. *Villette,* like *Vanity Fair* and most nineteenth-century novels, is full of nonnormative speech. In London, Lucy encounters the "strange speech" of a cabman and an "accent [of] . . . mincing glibness" from a chambermaid, both of which disconcert her (51). On her way to Villette, Lucy's entrance into a nonanglophone nation is marked by new forms of spelling in the dialogue, as a custom-house agent informs her that he will "haf [her] tronc soon" (65). These typographical markers of "foreignness" crop up unevenly: sometimes French utterances are silently translated into English, other times French spellings of English words and English spellings of French words pepper the speech of characters. Pages later, Lucy meets Mrs. Sweeny, Madame Beck's governess whom she is destined to replace. While the Irish Mrs. Sweeny professes "to speak the English tongue with the purest metropolitan accent" to unwitting Francophones, in Lucy's estimation she speaks "a smothered brogue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections" (77–78). The classed and racialized speech of Mrs. Sweeny is sparsely represented and rapidly excised from the narrative. Lucy is later forced to spend a holiday with a "crétin" student who "rarely spoke," and the lack of interpersonal dialogue famously drives the staunchly Protestant Lucy wild enough to attend a Catholic confessional (174).

In addition to these encounters, Lucy's eventual employment as the English teacher at Madame Beck's *pensionnat* involves anglicizing or otherwise improving the speech of others. One of Lucy's tasks is converting the tongues of her continental students into the "lisping and hissing dentals of the Isles," provocatively aligning the English language with dysfluent lisping and animalistic hissing in a novel where most of the dialogue is ostensibly in translated French (169). Similarly, M. Paul Emmanuel returns to the narrative by giving the students and teachers "lessons in elocution" prior to their acting debut at Madame Beck's fête (142). Critics have argued for Paul's symbolic alignment with a variety of medical and therapeutic professions, and we must add speech correctionist to the list.[10] Paul's own interest in vocal pedagogy, recalling Graham's earlier "lesson in recitation" with Polly, leads us to consider the role of speech and education in Lucy's own marriage plot. Paul's efforts to improve

10. Specifically, an ophthalmologist in Inglis (359) and a psychoanalyst in Stockton (*God* 138).

the pronunciation of others indicates his particularity when it comes to voices, an unsurprising quality in the constitutionally irritable professor who flies into a rage when "some pupil had not spoken audibly or distinctly enough to suit his ear" (267).

Paul's early work to shape Lucy's vocal performance in the fête's play—locking her up until she passes his auditory test by pleasing him with her recitation—later evolves into a concerted education of Lucy, further suggesting that *Villette* is a novel wherein men attempt to educate their would-be wives into more desirable spouses. However, despite Paul's efforts at pedagogically changing and religiously converting Lucy, their speech remains mismatched. For one, Lucy never exerts her vocation as an English teacher on Paul: his English consists of a "jargon . . . most execrable" and he jokes he only knows "three phrases of English" (147, 172). In a parallel way, Paul teases Lucy for her "barbarisms" and "insular accent" when speaking French, mimicking her pronunciation, and reminding Lucy that, in her words, "however I might *write* his language, I *spoke* and always should speak it imperfectly" (449, 532). Furthermore, Paul is struck by Lucy's Protestant "tones" (462). The national and religious affiliations that separate Lucy and Paul are vocalized not just in what they say, but in how they say it. Other vocal contrasts between them proliferate: Lucy enforces and values silence, Paul is thunderously noisy; after an eloquent lecture delivered by Paul, all Lucy can do is "stamme[r] some lame expressions" of praise (345).[11] In terms of language, faith, volume, and fluency, Paul and Lucy are in a sonically wrought opposition.

Their inability to speak in accord anticipates their inability to marry as Paul dies at the novel's conclusion before Lucy can potentially utter flawed French marital vows to him, or, at the very least, it reroutes their intimacy into textual channels. Paul and Lucy's relationship evolves as the former sneaks books into the latter's desk, cultivating a print-based intimacy while also establishing a patriarchal dynamic of control as he censors the books for her perusal. Regardless, Lucy remains content in Paul's "wordless presence" as their silent understanding develops (385). This nonvocal intimacy proves useful when Paul departs to oversee a plantation in the West Indies. Lucy describes the years when verbal communication with Paul is impossible as the "three happiest years of my life," in which "his letters were real food that nourished" (543–44). Vocal alignment becomes irrelevant as a textually mediated relationship seems amenable to Lucy's tastes, which earlier found a similar savor in Graham's letters. In other words, Lucy's vocality need not and cannot

11. Elizabeth Gaskell claims this scene was inspired by Brontë's encounter with Thackeray following one of his lectures (448).

change to suit the demands of normative intimacy: Paul merely gets used to her "strange stammering[s]," rather than banishing them (463). Lucy, then, lacks the vocal fluidity of Polly, though she can instead redirect her emotional intensities into writing, a fact evidenced by the existence of the novel *Villette*. As Lucy puts it, where "the speech [is] contemptible, surely there cannot be error in making written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve?" (255).

Lucy's static vocality and marital ambiguity contrast with Polly's ephemeral lisp and conclusive union. Polly's reintroduction into the narrative sees her transformed after an absence of several years into the Countess Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre. However, Polly's acquisition of a title has not cured her of her childhood dysfluency, particularly in her conversations with Graham when the two reunite. Indeed, it seems the remove of over a decade has not matured Polly beyond the state of childhood. After Polly is trampled by the mob egress from Vashti's performance and rescued by Graham, her utterances are twice attributed to a "girlish voice" (291–92). Polly's voice is again granted a central role in identifying her and it is determinedly gendered and youthful. Various appellations expand this notion of Polly's durable girlishness after her reintroduction: she is a "kitten," a "daughterling," a "pretty infant," a "little girl," and Mrs. Bretton reflects that "the child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen" (311, 311, 475, 318, 307). These descriptions come from several sources, though Polly reserves her most youthful behavior for Graham. Her demeanor when alone with Lucy is comparatively demure and ladylike, contrasting with her lively and childish actions with the doctor. When Graham teases her with a taste of ale "she continued to look up exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty" (313). The scene is imbued with a nostalgia for the novel's opening pages of playful skirmishes between the two, a temporal collapse exaggerated by the uncanny transportation of the Bretton furnishing from England to Villette.

This infantine quality persists in descriptions of Polly's speech, a key element of her adorability. Lucy recounts how Polly "in speaking fast, . . . still lisped; but coloured whenever such lapse occurred, and in a painstaking, conscientious manner . . . repeated the word more distinctly" (319–20). Her "painstaking" efforts to correct her mispronunciations, to purge them via repetition, are often in front of Graham, a fact dwelt on by Lucy: "When [Graham] spoke, [Polly's] answers failed of fluency" (332–33). Whereas Lucy, and later Polly herself, can compose multiple epistolary responses to Graham, revising language and affect to an appropriate degree, there is no equivalent method to erase a vocal utterance. Thus, Polly's father reprimands her for these durable public mistakes, telling her if she persists in her current "manners, [she] will

hardly be fitted for society" (333). Now that Polly has grown up, it is time for her to stop failing at fluency, no matter how charmingly, and start succeeding at courtship.

This is especially the case given the vocal nature of her relationship with her eventual husband: "Ten years ago this pair had always found abundance to say to each other; the intervening decade had not narrowed the experience or impoverished the intelligence of either: besides, there are certain natures of which the mutual influence is such, that the more they say, the more they have to say" (320). The infinitely replenishing discourse of Polly and Graham juxtaposes with the stunted bursts of passion, silent glances, and textual preferences evident in Lucy and Paul's relationship. The latter pair's mode of communication aligns with the institution for which they work, fitting with the air of secret, thwarted, and punished desire at the *pensionnat,* whereas Polly and Graham's externality to this space facilitates their mutual loquaciousness. As such, Polly needs to reach a feminine equivalent to the masculine vocal charms of Graham, possessed of "deep" and "pleasant tones" that make up a "mellow voice" emanating from "handsome lips" (196, 203, 469). Graham's voice has already matured and altered; as Polly recalls, he used to speak "not so deeply—more like a girl," but has now reached a normative masculine articulation that she needs to complement (308).

And it is clear that Polly has the raw materials necessary to obtain an idealized voice as she is repeatedly described as vocally attractive. Her German teacher thinks that "her voice sounded like music," Lucy describes it as "naturally liquid as a lark's," and she "never seemed to speak too fast or to say too much" (337, 413, 410). This last description invites readers to compare Polly's conversational poise with that of her florid foil and cousin, Ginevra Fanshawe, something that Lucy does explicitly: she is charmed with Polly's "French; it was faultless—the structure correct, the idioms true, the accent pure; Ginevra . . . could do nothing like it: not that words ever failed Miss Fanshawe, but real accuracy and purity she neither possessed, nor in any number of years would acquire. . . . M. de Bassompierre was gratified; for, on the point of language, he was critical" (346). Ginevra is a vocal peacock, preening but unsophisticated, whereas Polly is reserved and more adept. What distinguishes Polly from Ginevra, though, and ultimately makes the little countess triumphant over her cousin in Graham's affections, is her educability. Polly has a beautiful voice, but so does Ginevra; crucially, Polly's is malleable, while "any number of years" could not improve Ginevra's. *Villette* is fundamentally a novel about pedagogy—about how and what to teach, and the ways in which education intersects with faith, nationality, desire, and more—and Polly's vocal adaptability is essential to her achieving a socially approved form of wifehood. This

is a role she seems destined to fill, as her very name, Polly Home, conveys a sense of comfortable domesticity, giving a sense of inevitability to her social training. And thus Polly is granted Graham, a man desired throughout the novel by Ginevra, Madame Beck, and Lucy herself.

But first Polly's vocality must change, which it does in response to the influence of the male figures around her. Graham's youthful recitation exercises—of which the novel takes pains to remind readers—are afterward supplemented by her father who, as noted above, was "critical" regarding language. Thus, unlike the "piteous" lisp of her childhood, Polly's father now claims she has a "little tendency to stammer now and then, and even to lisp" as she had when she was six, going on to tease her lisped pronunciations to Graham of "yeth" and "theveral" for yes and several (333). While Dobbin's lisp is ridiculed without his knowledge by the other characters and it is the narrator/author who is at the root of his shifting pronunciation, Polly's dysfluency is mocked to her face in an effort to train her out of it.

Polly's developing speech, her "little tendency," again parallels Dobbin, specifically the late qualification of his lisp as "slight": as their respective narratives draw to a close, their dysfluencies receive reductive modifiers. Once again recalling Dobbin, after this diminishing description of her dysfluency, any reference to Polly's lisp vanishes for over one hundred pages. The alignments between Polly's and Dobbin's dysfluent trajectories invite consideration of the gendered differences between them. Dobbin's lisp is exclusively construed as unappealing, whereas Polly's initially contributes to her youthful charm. However, while Dobbin's social circle reserves their judgment of his speech for behind his back, as she grows up Polly is repeatedly reprimanded about her articulation by the men in her life. Both dysfluencies are stigmatized, but the belated judgment of the feminine lisp ultimately leads to more explicit censoring.

The final time Polly's lisp is mentioned it is relegated to the past tense as Graham "remembered the touch of her small forefinger" and "the lisp" she used to speak with (469). Polly's lisp becomes a memory because it has disappeared, removing the vocal index of her childishness that disqualified her from entering the marital sphere. Lisping in *Villette* needs to be conclusively relegated to children, to the "lisped and broken prayers" of little Georgette Beck or to the "little children of the third division" who "lisped each her congratulation" on Paul's fête, not to those on the cusp of matrimony (133, 382). The vanishing of Polly's lisp is confirmed and memorialized, not coincidentally, in the chapter that wraps up her marriage plot with Graham. With the lisp gone, vocal and marital bliss can proceed together—as Lucy puts it, "each liked the way in which the other talked; the voice, the diction, the expression

pleased" (469). Graham's youthful speech therapy finally pays off in the perfection of his bride's voice.

It is unsurprising that Graham's, or rather Dr. John's, medical authority imbues his curative prematrimonial relations with Polly. The two careers *Villette* gives the most sustained attention to—those of medicine and education—were the nexus from which the emergent vocation of speech correction began to thrive. Opinions varied whether dysfluent speech was the result of physiological differences and thus required medical intervention or was caused by bad habits and therefore demanded reeducation. The field, then, was comprised of both doctors like Graham and educators like Paul, both of whom attempt to alter the voices of those around them. Speech correction relied on both surgery and schools, and its practitioners were primarily middle-class men with a wide range of experiences and education. Alongside the medically and educationally oriented professions were, of course, a swath of comparably unqualified amateurs: we can add Mr. Home, of a "scientific turn" and "critical" in language, to the doctor and pedagogue in *Villette*'s cast of would-be speech correctionists (9). As such, Graham's proleptic speech therapy is part of a patriarchal system of which his marriage with Polly is but an instance.

Polly's vocal alteration also suggests a larger trend in *Villette* in which characters' bodies are altered to make them more conventionally marriageable and in closer accordance with normative Western standards of attractiveness. When Paul and Lucy begin to bond, his "very complexion seemed clearer and fresher; that swart, sallow, southern darkness which spoke of his Spanish blood, became displaced by a lighter hue" (355). Teenage Graham's ginger hair becomes Dr. John's "dark, glossy chestnut," a shift from "red [to] deep nut-brown" (302–3, 478, 480). Skin and hair color, replete with racial and regional significations, shift in *Villette*'s representational world, emphasizing the unstable nature of embodied character descriptions. These shifts in color and speech are often overlooked in favor of alterations tied to emotional and intellectual maturity. Surprisingly, in a novel lauded as a significant achievement in realistic depth psychology, the starkest changes occur in the exterior traits of characters. The three characters that "grow up" within the diegesis have relatively static personalities: Graham is a charming egoist from start to finish, Polly is a striking hybrid of poise and playfulness throughout, and Lucy remains introverted and volatile. However, hair, skin color, and vocal patterns alter to demonstrate desirable development in pursuit of a marital conclusion. Polly and her dwindling dysfluency reveal "cultivation of the voice" as "something far more than the sphere of the elocutionist . . . it becomes an indispensable adjunct of self-development" (Lovell 90).

The specifically vocal bildung of Polly places her in a trajectory of literary successors who undergo oral alterations at the behest of men who marry them, or at least want to. Thomas Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield has the "dialect on her tongue" until she picks up Angel Clare's "vocabulary, his accent," "his speech and phrases," parroting his thoughts and using his "accent and manner with reverential faithfulness" (15, 204, 311). George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle is subjected to an even more sophisticated and explicit vocal conversion under the auspices of the phonetics professor and, eventually, rejected suitor, Henry Higgins; in this case, the sonic education is almost too successful, and Higgins is refused his bride. In both instances, the voice is educated out of a regional and class dialect, rather than a dysfluent mode of articulation, making Polly's case both distinctive and a fascinating precursor. In all three, vocal education and marital potential are indissociable.

Polly's married life still bears the traces of nineteenth-century anxieties over dysfluent parenthood. She not only becomes a wife but a mother as well in the chapter that confirms the disappearance of her lisp. Now a fluent speaker, she can procreate. Crucially, however, Polly and Graham's many children all take after their father: "Dr Bretton saw himself live again in a son who inherited his looks and his disposition; he had stately daughters, too, like himself; these children he reared with a suave, yet a firm hand; they grew up according to inheritance and nurture" (483). All of their children, regardless of gender, are "like himself," with no commonalities with their mother mentioned. Graham's children both inherit from him and are reared by him—nature and nurture derive from the ever-fluent doctor, whereas the quasi-eugenic fears of hereditary/contagious dysfluency are expelled as the threateningly feminine and flirtatious lisp of Polly is adamantly not passed on.

Polly and Graham then retreat to the background as the narrative returns its focus to Lucy, its central voice. In this way, lisping is rendered practically extinct in the soundscape of *Villette,* with the final usage of the dialogue tag "lisped" attributed to an anonymous girl, "a little child—the least child in the school," delivering a message from Paul to Lucy (491). This figure, aggressively insignificant, only gets to lisp one line of dialogue as she delivers the words of someone else before exiting. She escorts dysfluency out of the realm of individually marked characters into an undifferentiated sphere of anonymity, generalizing it out of the purview of the novel's plot, rather than fully purging it. She lisps and vanishes, taking dysfluency with her into the obscurity of the nameless masses.

Together, Thackeray and Brontë affirm dysfluency's narrative utility for understanding important social connections, specifically demonstrating the inextricability of the vocal and the matrimonial. They are united in their use

of dysfluency to animate their realist novels and in their banishment of it to conclude their multimarriage plots. By contrast, the following three chapters explore how nonrealist genres—children's literature, sensation fiction, and stage melodrama—embraced vocally disabled central characters and even advocated for the communal benefits dysfluent speech could provide. The baby talk of Lewis Carroll's Bruno provides the first, vibrant instance: by steadfastly choosing his atypical mode of articulation, Bruno refutes the insistence of Dobbin's and Polly's interlocutors and authors that dysfluency's value is, at best, transitory.

CHAPTER 2

Refusing to Grow Up and Speak Right

Prosthetic Authorship and Dysfluent Choice in Dodgson

"The rule for social advancement in England is, 'Be a fluent speaker'" declares an 1856 article from Charles Dickens's literary magazine, *Household Words* (465). The article is entitled "Psellism," a word for speech disorders and stammering in particular. The piece details the consequences of stammering in mid-nineteenth-century England, pointing to the coincidence of standard articulation and social respectability. Dickens himself was no stranger to representing vocal development, perhaps most notably in *Great Expectations* (1860–61), a quintessential bildungsroman.[1] The novel narrates Pip's vocal progress as he navigates nonstandard forms of speech emanating from his various parental figures, ranging from the dialect of Joe and Magwitch to the aphasia of Mrs. Joe and eventual mutism of Miss Havisham. The first sentence invites readers to interpret the novel in this way: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip" (3). It begins with an act of attempted vocalization, with the fallibility of Pip's tongue serving as the culprit for his self-naming that solidifies his orphanhood.

Great Expectations then features a smattering of moments when Pip stammers, all of which take place in the first half of the novel and then cease. The

1. Francis Jeffrey Dickens, Dickens's fourth child, stammered—much to his father's distress.

development of Pip's "infant tongue" is delivered via first-person narration: a complex heteroglossia emerges between a fluent adult Pip and a stammering youthful Pip, a split between a narrative voice and a diegetic voice belonging to the same character, as the former works to control the latter. The uncertain, dysfluent voice of childhood is subjugated to the purifying, fluent adult voice, thereby consolidating Pip's position as protagonist and distancing him from the fate of minorness reserved for the lisping voices of one of Mr. Jaggers's unnamed clients and one of Mrs. Pocket's innumerable children—both inhabiting character-zones of no more than a page or two.

A list of instances, fictional and nonfictional, that link growing up with growing out of dysfluency is potentially endless; by contrast, accounts interested in what it means to stay a child and to stay dysfluent are illuminating anomalies. One such example is found in the writing of another celebrated "CD": children's author and lifelong stammerer Charles Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll. While Pip cannot articulate his name without stammering in the opening vignette of *Great Expectations,* Dodgson was known to stutter on the first syllable of his last name, a parallel difficulty with articulating one's identity fluently. This biographical detail is frequently recycled by scholars to account for Dodgson's self-caricature within *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) as the Dodo, with the repeated phoneme of the extinct bird recalling Dodgson's stuttering repetition of the first phoneme of his surname (Susina 9; Haughton xvi). Literary critics have not gone much further than noting this inspiration for auto-parody when considering the impact of Dodgson's stammer on his writing. As a response, I argue that Dodgson's interest in depicting childhood—and, in particular, perpetual childhood—is informed by nostalgia for a period of life in which chaotic vocalization is comparatively permissible. Atypical speech in children is expected: subject to remediation, certainly, but not castigated. Adulthood, by contrast, demands the standard speech utilized in courtship, professional occupations, and other forms of conventional social advancement. In addition, the genre of children's literature for which Dodgson is best known is more amenable to the representation of dysfluency than "adult" fiction, wherein dysfluency is received as discordant when largely featured. Dodgson utilizes assumptions about age and genre and their respective openness to atypical speech to carve out a space for prominent dysfluency in his final novel and this chapter's focus, *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889/1893).

Furthermore, Dodgson's obsessive revisions of written dialogue offer a satire of and fixation on the societal imperative for children of certain classes to acquire a standard mode of articulation that allows them to become normative spouses, parents, workers, and citizens. Dodgson's writing process

consisted of a hypervigilant adherence to "proper" typography and syntax, though it resulted in a constellation of eccentric textual voices often disconcerting to readers. This mixture of rigidly correct form and abnormal content indexes two competing impulses in late-Victorian oral culture: a proliferation of representations of vocal nonnormativity made perceptible in relation to a regime of standardization that aimed to make voices generic.

The nineteenth century abounded with fictional depictions of voices deviating from social standards; however, the period also witnessed an increase in forms aimed at normalizing dysfluent utterances, including elocutionary manuals, pronunciation dictionaries, and vocal health treatises. At one end, a type of vocal anarchy was diagnosed by writers as diverse as elocutionist Alexander Melville Bell and cultural critic John Ruskin as infusing nineteenth-century novels. Bell decried the dominance of the novel as responsible for a nationwide deterioration of speech, evidenced in his interactions with stammering patients (*The Tongue*); similarly, Ruskin attacked Victorian writers for filling their novels with "crippled" speech (176). For Bell and Ruskin alike, the ubiquity of dysfluent speech in the Victorian novel is a source of anxiety, one shared by speech correctionists who consistently note the increasing rates of dysfluency in the latter part of the century (Abbotts 9). At the other end, these fears were counterbalanced by the rise of philological societies intent on collecting and codifying national spelling and pronunciation. The latter is exemplified by the publication of the first fascicle of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as Dodgson was compiling *Sylvie and Bruno,* which he considered his magnum opus and which most critics see as his biggest misstep. Dodgson's strict adherence to conventional rules of print to represent a score of atypical voices in this text is not so much a contradiction as it is an encapsulation of the vocal negotiations of his time between an imperative toward homogenization and an ever-proliferating diversity. The copresence of vocal discipline and variety is symptomatic of the period's discourse on the voice generally; rather than canceling each other out, they spur the growth of their antonym.

Sylvie and Bruno illustrates this dynamic: Dodgson's own stammer led to his encounters with speech correction that in turn inform his depiction of dysfluency in the novel, full of oscillation between vocal deviance and normalization. Dodgson is mirrored in the unnamed narrator, an elderly stammerer, who shares his encounters with the two titular fairy-children; notably, Bruno's atypical baby talk is presented as an agential joy to embrace, rather than a youthful folly to be educated out of. Attending to dysfluency provides a new entryway into the novel, usually mentioned by scholars only to be ridiculed for its perceived artistic shortcomings. By contrast, a focus on vocal disability in Dodgson's life and literature demonstrates the integral nature of dysfluency

to both the experience of childhood and popular representations of it. To be a child is to be dysfluent and, for Dodgson, one of the greatest losses attendant on maturation is the capitulation to normative articulation.

The novel was Dodgson's last and longest, split across two volumes: *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893).[2] Throughout each, the narrator travels between fin-de-siècle England and various fantasy realms, including Outland, a twisted parody of Oxford, and Fairyland, loosely based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600). In England, he becomes principal witness to a courtship plot, going to stay with his doctor friend Arthur Forester due to his own flagging health, and observing the love triangle between Arthur, his object of desire Lady Muriel Orme, and her cousin Captain Eric Lindon. This familiar marriage-plot geometry recalls both *Vanity Fair* and *Villette,* as discussed in chapter 1. Dodgson provides sentimentalized character types recognizable to readers of Victorian novels: a playful and beautiful earl's daughter (Muriel Orme/Polly Home), a competent and charming doctor (Arthur Forester/John Bretton), and a brave foreign-service soldier (Eric Lindon/William Dobbin). Despite Muriel's engagement to Eric, he eventually releases her due to religious differences, allowing Arthur to marry her instead. The narrator is present for everything—from Arthur's heartbreak to his marriage, from his supposed death from a plague-like illness to his miraculous recovery.

The narrator is likewise enmeshed in the political turmoil and nonsensical adventures of the fantastical worlds, as the Warden of Outland is betrayed by his power-hungry brother, the Sub-Warden Sibimet, his wife Tabikat, and their grotesque son, Uggug. The narrator meets and becomes enamored of the Warden's young fairy-children, Sylvie and Bruno, who feature prominently in both plotlines. The Warden leaves Outland and his children to become the King of Elfland, only returning at the end to chastise and forgive his brother and sister-in-law—though he transforms their unrepentant son into a porcupine.

Dodgson sets up a convoluted tripartite model of psychical states experienced by the narrator to explain the transitions between these plots: an ordinary state in the "reality" of Victorian England; an "eerie" state in which he can perceive the presence of fairies within this normal world; and a series of "trances" in which he is transported into the fantasy realms. The narrator shifts between states, the transition initiated by a sound or action that connects events across worlds. These shifts are often jarring and confusing, and

2. Dodgson compiled the entire novel during the same period, only splitting it in half due to its length; therefore, I refer to the volumes as a single novel.

Dodgson himself described the novel as a "huge unwieldy mass of litterature [*sic*]," a collation of bits and pieces gathered over a long period of time (381). It is full of "*verbatim* report[s]" of "dialogue[s] overheard" from university students, poets, and, of course, children—a narrative composed of vocal scraps (391).

These scraps, however, were meticulously organized. Dodgson "was always fussy about the representation of speech," fretting about punctuation and italics, as part of his "concern with the relationship between the textual and the oral," and this typographical precision reached new extremes with *Sylvie and Bruno* (Haughton lxx). His preface to the second volume chastises reviewers for questioning his contractions and spelling—examples include "ca'n't" and "traveler"—and lectures them about "correct principle[s]," while also asserting that in many cases "the popular usage is wrong" (387). Dodgson at once insists on linguistic norms and smashes them, only to replace them with his own. He is a firm adherent to rules, but only when they suit him. His fixation with standardizing textuality juxtaposes with his interest in the "vocal individuality" of his characters; in the case of *Sylvie and Bruno,* his grammatical exactness clashes with the novel's "variously speech-impeded characters," including the stammering narrator and the atypical utterances of Bruno (Haughton lxxix; Shell 44). Bruno's speech breaks with norms of pronunciation and syntax, and although other characters attempt to wrangle his voice into conventionality, he mischievously resists.

This play between correctness and subversion marks *Sylvie and Bruno* as a novel both formally and thematically in transition. The entire plot is constructed around transitions between psychical states and locations. Scaling out to literary history, those critics who are willing to take the text seriously view it as a transitional step, if a failed one, toward modernism. Dodgson's obsession with novelty, one that led him to attempt a conscious departure from the *Alice* books, is a central ethos in modernist writing. His drive to "releas[e] the novel from Victorian norms of realism" has been seen as "preparing the way" for modernism; more specifically, critics have noted the influence of *Sylvie and Bruno* on the work of Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce (Christensen xii). Perhaps what makes *Sylvie and Bruno* difficult to digest is its function as a rickety suspension bridge connecting Victorian realism and protomodernist experimentation: it is shaky as readers walk across it, but its voices echo marvelously through the canyon it attempts to traverse. The novel also marks a transitional moment in terms of vocal norms, encapsulating the nineteenth century's preoccupation with diagnosing and alleviating vocal nonnormativity, while also reveling in creative ways to refuse this impulse.

Rather than choosing a side in these schisms, Dodgson puts conflicting notions of narrative and voice beside one another. Gilles Deleuze noted this tendency in his brief but favorable impressions of *Sylvie and Bruno,* arguing that a complex interplay of surface and depth is characteristic of Dodgson's corpus. Deleuze shows how Dodgson's most famous figure, Alice, "progressively conquers surfaces" in a text that nonetheless retains a surface–depth binary as Alice tumbles down the rabbit hole (21). By contrast, spatial transition is done away with in *Sylvie and Bruno,* "a further advance" to Deleuze where "the previous depth itself seems to be flattened out, and becomes a surface alongside the other surface. . . . Not one story within another, but one next to the other. *Sylvie and Bruno* is no doubt the first book that tells two stories at the same time, not one inside the other, but two contiguous stories, with passages that constantly shift from one to the other" (22). The surface–depth binary collapses: fantasy is not nesting inside of reality, not a dream that will end, but both narratives progress beside one another contemporaneously and with frequent intersections. A realist didactic courtship plot and a nonsensical adventure in imaginary realms hold hands and stand beside one another.

The preposition "beside," as Eve Sedgwick suggests, is striking "because there's nothing very dualistic about it. . . . [It] permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking" (*Touching* 8). Dodgson utilizes this quality of "beside," placing a linear marriage plot beside a nonsense narrative of oscillation and inertia and, in so doing, refuses dualisms of realism–fantasy, child–adult, convention–experimentation, beginning–end, and more. Among the dualisms undercut by the beside-ness of Dodgson's plots is that of vocal normality and eccentricity. *Sylvie and Bruno* is not the story of standard vocalization overtaking deviant speech at a shared terminus; rather, it represents vocal typicality and abnormality running parallel for the entirety of the two volumes, distinct but copresent. By resisting a curative impulse, Dodgson insists on the dynamic pleasures of dysfluency.

This is particularly apparent in Bruno's speech, which partakes of various dysfluencies but resolutely is never normalized, despite the efforts of his interlocutors. Bruno is a child who, to borrow Kathryn Bond Stockton's phrase, grows sideways (*Queer* 6). This is represented in the diversity of his utterances that do not tend to a final point of vocal maturity, but experiment with different possibilities—including a speech disorder concentrated on the letter *r,* lisping baby talk, a Cockney accent, and standard English. Bruno puts these modes of pronunciation beside each other, rather than hierarchizing them, even though he inhabits an imaginary realm that retains the vocal mores of Victorian England.

We find an illustration of Dodgson's approach to narration and voice in one of his characteristic bits of nonsense. In the first chapter of *Sylvie and Bruno,* the Professor of Outland discusses "horizontal weather" where it rains side to side, rather than down from the sky, and demonstrates the knee-umbrellas he has invented to stay dry in a bout of this precipitation (8). This Carrollinian wordplay is an apt image for how Dodgson departs both from a Matryoshka-doll structure of fantasy nesting within reality as well as from the conventional plot of advancing a character from dysfluency into fluency as rain conventionally falls from the sky to the ground. Instead, he writes what can be described as a pair of horizontal narratives that never merge vocal eccentricity into standard articulation.

The contiguity of dysfluency and fluency within Bruno's discourse in particular refutes the hierarchization of speech variations, instead advocating for a simple acceptance of vocal differences and the occasional revelry in the enjoyment they can provide. This revision critiques both the general societal prioritization of fluency as well as the particular Victorian educational practice of oral recitation. The following section shows how Dodgson's personal relationship to disordered speech, from a childhood of contented dysfluency to an adulthood fixated on vocal remediation, informs *Sylvie and Bruno,* as he turned to writing as a prosthetic tool of fluent narration—a way to correct his stammer in print. This, in turn, demonstrates the continuing utility of biography as method when considering dysfluent representation. The closing section argues that dysfluent author and prosthetic text combine to depict Bruno's resistance to the pressures of family and education to alter his vocal individuality and grow out of his lisping baby talk. In short, Bruno chooses dysfluency.

Dysfluent Biography and Textual Prosthetics

The proximity between linguistic rules and dysfluency within *Sylvie and Bruno* also appeared in Dodgson's life. He was the oldest son of eleven children who grew up in a noisy nursery with parents prone to the "encouragement of baby talk" (Amor xxxix). Vocal standards were difficult to impose on the Dodgson children as those with speech disorders outnumbered those without, so that a mix of "normal" childish experimentation with language and "abnormal" speech disorders filled their familial soundscape. Dodgson had a positive childhood, the experience of which he remembered well in later years, and the end of which he deeply regretted (Cohen, *Lewis* xxii). There are surviving traces of Dodgson's childish voice in a letter he wrote to his nurse: "My dear Bun, I love you very much & tend you a kitt from little Charlie with the

horn of hair. I'd like to give you a kitt, but I tan't, betause I'm at Marke. What a long letter I've written. I'm twite tired" ("My Dear Bun"). Dodgson's textual rendering of youthful nonnormative speech at the age of five anticipates his extended fictional representation of the same in his fifties as he compiled *Sylvie and Bruno.* This self-transcription conveys not only an impulse to preserve, but also to interest: there is a strategic desire to show the idiosyncratic joy of childhood articulation that suggests a burgeoning literary consciousness.

However, Dodgson's childhood of rampant vocal eccentricity gave way to his confrontation with speech correction to address his persistent stammer in 1860. Dodgson, then in his late twenties, began to grapple with the "stigma attached to stammering" and sought elocutionary instruction from James Hunt, a prominent speech correctionist (Smith 179). His initial account of Hunt's treatment is positive, writing that "I like Dr. Hunt's system very much, and think I am benefitted by it" (Dodgson, *Letters, Volume One* 42). Dodgson was encouraged enough to go and stay with Hunt at his clinic, Ore House, about a year later. However, whatever fondness Dodgson had for Hunt's system did not extend to its practitioner for long: after another year he advised an acquaintance against sending her daughter to Hunt as he thought "him so little of a gentleman" (54).

Nonetheless, his interest in treatment persisted, and throughout the following decade he corresponded with and visited Hunt's brother-in-law and successor, Henry Frederick Rivers, who took over the family speech correction business following Hunt's death in 1870. Rivers proved more amenable to Dodgson's tastes: he sent his new correctionist requests, anxieties, and referrals across several years, and he soon became "my dear Rivers" in subsequent epistolary exchanges. He repeatedly suggests that Rivers offer classes for "*adults only*" as he feels too "*middle-aged*" to "care to join a class of boys," deflating frequent caricatures of Dodgson as exclusively preferring the companionship of children (191). Dodgson discusses how his stammer limits his career in the church, its intensity worsened by "the presence of a congregation," and confides moments of extreme frustration where his stammer renders it necessary for him to spell out words he cannot pronounce (194). His letters to Rivers capture the cyclical nature of his dysfluency—ebbing and flowing, full of triumphs of fluency and stammering relapses—all rendered with his characteristic penchant for the fantastical: the hard *c* sound that Dodgson particularly struggled with becomes his "vanquisher in single-hand combat," while Rivers's sensible advice is, at the moment of distress, as ridiculous as being told "to stand on my head" (202).

Dodgson's faith in Rivers—he describes visits to him as a "pleasure and a great benefit"—leads him to recommend several patients to his care (213).

Dodgson's motives are simple, as he confides that a stammer is "a bar to so many occupations in life," recalling his difficulties as a stammering deacon who never became a priest—for many in Dodgson's sphere, his professional limitations and mode of articulation were inseparable (210). Most extensively, Dodgson writes to Rivers about his sisters, many of whom stammered to varying degrees. The letter has the air of the preliminaries of one of the mathematical problems Dodgson was fond of composing:

> There are 7 in all.
>
> 1 does not stammer.
> 2 stammer very slightly (of these one is such an invalid, you are not likely ever to see her).
> 2 stammer to a moderate amount (of these one is married and lives in the north of England—you will never see *her*).
> 2 stammer rather badly.
>
> So that probably you might have coming to you for lessons *two* rather bad cases, *one* moderate, and *one* very slight. (207)

Dodgson's list of stammering sisters invokes the nineteenth-century fear of a hereditary basis for dysfluency, while the unmarried status of all but one sister underscores the limited marital prospects of dysfluent individuals discussed in chapter 1. Furthermore, subsequent letters in which Dodgson checks in on the progress of his sisters reveal his desire to become Rivers's adjunct: he hopes to "induce [his sisters] to have a daily reading aloud" (209–10). He wants his siblings to participate in his growing domestic fluency, as he excitedly tells Rivers that he "twice . . . got through family prayers, including a chapter, without a *single* hitch—a thing that has not happened before . . . more than once perhaps in many years" (239–40). Hoping to improve his speech for his dual vocation as clergy and lecturer, and wanting to extend this improving ethos into his family, Dodgson demonstrates how dysfluency was perceived as something requiring alleviation for the navigation of both public and private spheres, whether reading to a congregation or to family. His liminal position as both patient and quasi-practitioner of speech correction helps elucidate the duality in his style mentioned previously: his tendency, in one moment, to dictate obsessively over the placement of apostrophes in his characters' dialogue, and, in the next, to give one of his eponymous protagonists bizarre lisping baby talk.

Dodgson's seesawing letters to Rivers, of both dejection and celebration, eventually dwindle; he retained his stammer for the rest of his life, declining

an invitation to lead church prayers due to his speech a few days before his death. Indeed, Harry Furniss—the illustrator of the *Sylvie and Bruno* books—recalls Dodgson stammering throughout their seven-year collaboration. Having failed to produce the promised illustrations before meeting with Dodgson, Furniss pretends to be a perfectionist to dissuade the author from wanting to see the nonexistent drawings, to which Dodgson, in Furniss's transcription, replies: "I—I—I ap—appreciate your feelings—I—I—should feel the same myself" (xxx). Likewise, Isa Bowman, Dodgson's child-friend to whom *Sylvie and Bruno* is dedicated, recalls that "for several years he read a scene from some play of Shakespeare's every day aloud, but despite this he was never quite able to cure himself of the habit" (Cohen, *Interviews* 90–91). Despite his continued efforts at recitation and therapy, those whom *Sylvie and Bruno* was made with and for note the persistence of Dodgson's stammer. Though Bowman never makes this claim, several of Dodgson's other connections insist that his difficulty with speech vanished when speaking to children and, therefore, helped account for his fondness for discoursing with them (Cohen xxi, 202).[3]

Writing, however, was a more assured gateway to fluency. Whether in his carefully maintained journal, voluminous correspondence, mathematical treatises, or the children's verse and prose that he is best remembered for, writing was a textual prosthetic for Dodgson: he could use his pen to attain normative articulation. Prosthetics, in the most general sense, are "assistive devices that people use to support what they want to do," often expanding the mobility or the communicative capabilities of their users (Ott 140). In literary studies, the term has been deployed in David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's concept of "narrative prosthesis," in which fiction heavily depends on disability as a common element of characterization and a convenient analogy to transmit other themes; in their words, "disability has been used as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power" (47–49). This sense of narrative prosthesis also informs representations of dysfluency in which abnormal speech symbolizes other issues within a text; in Bruno's case, his refusal to perform increasing maturity on the way to adulthood.

In application to Dodgson as a storyteller, though, I do not mean "prosthetic" only as a narrative/symbolic tool, but also as a literal one. Both the *Alice* and *Sylvie and Bruno* books have their roots in oral performance, in

3. This gestures to an absence in my biographical account of Dodgson, one that scholars seem compelled to acknowledge: the nature of his relationships with young girls. Robson suggests one must choose to either "support, deny, or ignore" characterizations of Dodgson as a pedophile, with critics ranging the gamut from "stoic defense to gleeful accusation" (*Men* 9, 137). *Sylvie and Bruno* has been mobilized to prove and disprove the pathological nature of Dodgson's relationships with children: either Lady Muriel, an adult source of femininity to be adored, exculpates him, or the narrator's attraction to the fairy-children damns him.

stories Dodgson would share aloud before publication, the "storytelling sessions" serving as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the novels (Amor xiii). One auditor recalls how Dodgson's dysfluency could complicate such performances: "When he got one of these stammering bouts it was rather terrifying. . . . There was a wait, a very nervous wait from everybody's point of view. . . . When he was in the middle of telling a story about Sylvie and Bruno, he'd suddenly stop and you wondered if you'd done anything wrong. . . . He fought it very wonderfully" (Cohen, *Interviews* 171). Dodgson's narration of the adventures of Sylvie and Bruno is temporarily halted by his stammer in a way that their eventual textual form would alleviate. He could attain narrative control through the prosthetic powers of writing in a fashion not guaranteed via speech. His use of text remediates his dysfluency, "curing" nonnormative articulations emanating from his body in their translation onto the page. Dodgson could do, as Ott puts it, what he wanted to do: share his fantastical stories to children unimpeded. Unable to obey the March Hare's declaration that "you should say what you mean" at all times, he instead writes what he means as, in Alice's words, "that's the same thing, you know" (61).

As with any prosthetic, the substitution is not exact. The performative aspect and component of audience interaction concomitant with oral storytelling vanish in the move from vocal dysfluency to written fluency. Still, as the narrator of *Sylvie and Bruno* suggests, "the shyest and most intermittent talker must seem fluent in letter-writing," recalling not only Dodgson himself, but his various stammering peers in the realm of nineteenth-century letters (240): fellow stammering Charleses Lamb and Kingsley, as well as Henry James and Martin Tupper. For these writers, the dictum with which this chapter began, "Be a fluent speaker," could be achieved in the move from time-based, bodily communication to the recursive space of the page. Prose becomes a communication prosthetic: a pros(e)thetic.

However, writing was not an uncomplicated cure for Dodgson's dysfluency or a simple "fix" for his stories. It was also a tool for him to explore the persistence of dysfluency: to represent characters, including Bruno, who unabashedly speak in eccentric ways, reveling in the subversiveness and fun of nonnormative speech in a way that the adult Dodgson never fully could. He could use text as "a way of preserving . . . that imperfect speech" that characterized his childhood and that of so many others (Smith 184). In so doing, writing became a way to show mastery over speech in the precise transcription of dysfluency into his narratives; rather than demonstrating communicative control via standard speech, he accomplishes it by writing atypical dialogue. Dodgson could orally perform Bruno's dysfluency to the amusement of his listening audiences, fusing the baby talk of the nursery child and the

vocal apparatus of the adult cleric in one temporally fluid voice.[4] Furthermore, he could amplify Bruno's speech to reach other audiences across space and time by writing it down.

In reference to Dodgson's stammer, his friend Gertrude Thomson wrote that "though Mr Dodgson deplored it himself, it added a certain piquancy, especially if he was uttering any whimsicality" (Cohen, *Interviews* 235). Dodgson, too, seemed to realize this dual nature of dysfluent speech. Though embodying dysfluency was traumatic for him as an adult, he recognized the power of eccentric voices to entertain, engross, and charm—to add "piquancy"—particularly in his own fantastical, or "whimsical," writing, and this was undoubtedly a motivating factor for his characterization of Bruno. Dodgson could deplore and want to mask his stammer, while also creating Bruno's unique voice out of an understanding of the allure of nonnormative speech. More than just functioning as exploited spectacles of otherness, Bruno and dysfluent characters like him perform the charisma of disordered speech: Bruno, in particular, vocalizes the nostalgic pleasures of dysfluent childhood.

The prosthetic function of Dodgson's writing, then, accords with Mara Mills's description of prosthetics as "*enjoining objects,* for they at once prescribe and prohibit a given conduct or condition," including "normal speech" (125). In this sense, the written form of *Sylvie and Bruno* is a way for Dodgson to normalize his speech in accordance with societal expectations, to impart the fluency that therapy could never give him, and also a way to refuse making vocal standardization imperative or even preferable in his writing. It is both a tool for him to speak in an otherwise elusively normative voice and a tool to infuse eccentric speech into the same purifying medium. As his final completed work of fiction, *Sylvie and Bruno* places the baby talk of Dodgson's childish epistle beside the exactitude of his mathematical publications, and, in this way, functions as a prosthetic text that masks authorial dysfluency in order to depict character dysfluency.

My turn to Dodgson's personal relationship with baby talk and stammering is a capitulation to a biographical imperative characteristic of scholarship on various disabilities: a need to account for, to justify, one's interest in these topics with recourse to personal information. In this case, it manifests in the notion that a dysfluent reading of Dodgson's fiction is validated by his stammer. Beyond this, however, an emphasis on biography lets us dwell productively on how identities—the corporeal and social force of voices being a constituent element of identity—help us account for what is written, whether

4. Amor contends that Dodgson performed Bruno's speech for audiences: "It can be safely assumed that one of the reasons why these story-telling sessions were so popular is that Dodgson impersonated the various voices of characters, especially that of Bruno" (xxiv).

by Victorian novelists or contemporary scholars. Biography lets us consider how the voice of the person holding the pen matters. It also allows us to query recent scholarship on Dodgson and Victorian oral culture to show how dysfluency illuminates literature's imbrications with education, socialization, and power in new ways.

Catherine Robson's work on nineteenth-century childhood recitation and Dodgson, both in *Heart Beats* (2012) and various companion articles, provides a good instance. Robson explains how public schools became a powerful source for shaping childhood speech as they bolstered the rise of rote learning, epitomized in the vocal recitation of memorized verse. While oral repetition was the "defining feature" and "default mode of instruction" throughout the nineteenth century, Robson designates the last three decades—the period in which *Sylvie and Bruno* was conceived, written, and published—as the "true heyday" of poetic recitation, as free and prolonged elementary education was consolidated (46–47, 5). Originating in a drive to improve "vocal delivery" through oratorical exercise, Robson shows how recitation came to be viewed as a "universal panacea" for improving speech, deportment, memory, self-discipline, aesthetic appreciation, confidence, and social mobility ("Burning Deck" 153).

However, Robson's disinterest in investigating "the relationship between recitation and the sociocultural dimensions of pronunciation" leaves no account of how differing vocal (dis)abilities resounded in the space of the classroom (168). What did it mean for the dysfluent voice of a student to be subjected to the strictures of mandatory recitation? What was the fate of students whose pronunciations were discordant during collective recitations, or who failed individual exercises due to a persistent stammer or lisp? What happened when the pervasiveness of articulatory difference toppled assumptions of normative performance?[5]

J. M. Rymer's fictionalized memoir *The Unspeakable* (1855), a vocal bildungsroman of sorts in which the protagonist, Charles Monckton, attains, combats, and is ultimately cured of a stammer, sheds light on these questions. Early in the narrative, Charles enters a boarding school and is greeted by the sounds of recitation: "The school-room was large and lofty, and the moment I got into it I became conscious of that murmuring sort of sound which arises from a number of persons, some whispering, some shifting their positions, and some few, in the monotonous schoolboy drawl, reciting lessons" (31). Unfortunately for Charles, the onset of his stammer is coincident with his

5. Schroeder moves closer to answering these questions, revealing how the strictures of compulsory recitation meant that "students who failed in their pronunciation, who mumbled, or spoke in a low tone of voice would be demoted to a lower rank in the class" (39).

arrival at school where he is informed by Dr. Briggs, the institution's proprietor, that "stammering is not allowed . . . in this establishment," between lashes from a cane (33). He recounts various difficulties with recitation due to his "infirmity," and physical and emotional abuse are the repeated consequence before he flees the school (35, 39). He recounts how once when Dr. Briggs was listening to the recitation exercises "I found it quite out of my power to speak, on which the Doctor, as he dealt me long strokes with the cane, roared out, 'Oh! Indeed, we are stammering away at a great rate to-day, are we. Ha! Ha! You may *hesitate,* Master Monckton, but I won't,'" blending cruel mockery with corporal punishment (40–41).

Granted, this fictionalized account by Rymer, a well-known penny-dreadful author, must be taken with a grain of salt. However, the general point that the vocal demands of recitation ingrained in Victorian pedagogy were often exclusionary and damaging to dysfluent students is a salient one bolstered by other writing from the period. Elocutionary manuals and stammering treatises often bemoan how the abusive treatment of teachers toward dysfluent pupils intensifies their vocal challenges (Behnke 7; Abbotts 25). Speech correctionist T. Bartlett emphasizes that few schools could be found without stammering students whose speech is adversely impacted by the "scolding, threatening, and frequen[t] beating" they encounter, leading him to advise that "every child who has the slightest disposition to a hesitation in speaking should be removed from school" (4, 69). German practitioner A. E. Gerdts agrees that the harsh treatment that dysfluent students encounter at school from peers and instructors alike worsens or even causes their stammer (11, 36, 60). Voice teacher Frank Helmore concurs, writing that stammering is "fostered, established, and confirmed by the frequent harshness" and "cruel punishments" of teachers (58). Novelist Charles Kingsley laments "the stupidity and cruelty with which stammering children are too often treated" (4). As a response to this consensus, practitioners including Walter Yearsley established government-sanctioned classes specifically for stutterers at local schools (Rockey 184).

The punitive dimension of compulsory recitation therefore made dysfluent pupils the target of disproportionate violence. The challenges of students like Charles who knew the right words to recite but were unable to articulate them due to a habitual disorder were exacerbated by the anxiety-producing pressure of this form of education. This is not to condemn recitation entirely, but to note another instance in a long history of ongoing ableist pedagogical practices. Ambivalence toward recitation is dramatized in Dodgson's fiction itself. Alice, as Robson points out, views herself as an ideal student who can expertly parrot her schoolroom knowledge, a self-perception that is demolished in the

topsy-turvy worlds of the *Alice* books where "getting it wrong is getting it right," so that her recitations are deemed failures by the denizens of the fantasy realms, even when "unfailingly correct" ("Reciting" 101–2).

Dodgson creates a striking contrast to Alice, the model pupil, in his representation of Bruno. On the one hand, he demonstrates the stranglehold of Victorian recitation as even a fairy-child is subjected to recitation lessons. On the other hand, he depicts Bruno's subversive glee in refusing and failing his lessons and retaining his atypical speech. Bruno never goes to school, nor is he carefully trained out of his dysfluency like Pip or Charles; instead, he precociously refuses oral education, inhabiting a type of queer bildungsroman where he repeatedly changes form and speech, but never grows up either physically or vocally. Attention to dysfluency both confirms the importance of recitation to Dodgson's fiction, while also demanding that we consider how a lifelong stammerer representing and subverting oral pedagogy illuminates the traumas of an assimilationist vocal mandate. In this way, recourse to biography encourages readers to examine germane though overlooked contexts, without giving them definitive or causative force. It also helps sensitize us to different frameworks that call for social generosity, in this case starting with a recognition of the potential tyranny of vocal normalization in nineteenth-century education. A tyranny in response to which Dodgson imagines a character who chooses to remain dysfluent, a character I now turn to.

"His Own Voice": The Charms and Revulsions of Bruno's Vocal Choice

Two things drew me to *Sylvie and Bruno.* First, its reviled reception from the time of its publication until today, encapsulated in Derek Hudson's comparatively charitable assessment of the novel as "one of the most interesting failures in English literature" (230). The novel's history as a critical and commercial failure has led to a type of scholarly apologetics in work on the text, a need to insult it in order to discuss it, especially by emphasizing its shortcomings in comparison to the *Alice* books: *Sylvie and Bruno* "lack[s] the consistent brilliance and wit" of *Alice,* and oozes "the worst kind of cloying sentimentality" absent in the "infinitely superior" Wonderland (Susina 117; Robson, *Men* 153). Secondly, I was fascinated by Bruno's speech, a type of lisping baby talk that is a marked exception to the vocal norms conventionally assigned to protagonists. Bruno's vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar are all eccentric. The syntax of his sentences mixes up pronouns and verb tenses, while his diction ranges from relatively simple differences in articulation—nuffin/nothing,

wiss/wish, oo/you, wiz/with, gived/gave, mouf/mouth, comfably/comfortably, togevver/together—to comically extreme departures from received pronunciation—lizard bandages/disadvantages, muddlecome/multiplication, umbrella string/embarrassing, gemplun/gentlemen, and more.

I anticipated that these two elements would be tightly linked: that Bruno's vocal atypicality would feature prominently in dismissals of Dodgson's work. The case, however, was quite the opposite, at least in the late-Victorian reviews following the novel's publication.[6] Indeed, Bruno and his sister are the only part of the novel that reviewers could stand. Their complaints centered around a few key ideas: the novel is too long; too serious, religious, and moralizing, rather than amusing; and, ultimately, it fails to arrest the attention of either children or adults, even though capturing this dual audience was one of Dodgson's main aspirations. *Sylvie and Bruno* seemed determined to refute the notion that post-*Alice,* children's literature was more fun, containing "less the tone of the preacher and more the voice of a friend" (Cohen, *Interviews* xvi). Dodgson places these two tones side by side and is ill-received. Thus, the notion of failure permeates the Victorian reviews compiled by August and Clare Imholtz, a collective prefigurement of Hudson's later pronouncement: *Sylvie and Bruno* is "unquestionably a failure," and "as a story it is a failure" (*The Spectator,* no. 62, p. 15; *The Literary World,* no. 67, p. 9).

Although the novel is a failure, reviewers rush to qualify their dismissal: "Not that Sylvie and Bruno are not worthy of kinship with their immortal elder sister"—they are the only redeemable part of the novel (*The Academy,* no. 62, p. 13). The adult figures are "disgusting," but the fairy-children are as "irresistible [and] as winning in their way as Alice," and Bruno is "even more fascinating than Sylvie" (*The Spectator,* no. 63, p. 8; *New York Daily Tribune,* no. 63, p. 6; *Athenaeum,* no. 62, p. 14). Amid the "dreary twaddle" of the books is the reprieve of the fairy-children who are "as fascinating as possible," "charming children" and "the most lovable creatures," who "appear to perfection" (*The Literary World,* no. 78, p. 19; *The Literary World,* no. 67, p. 9; *Book Reviews,* no. 67, p. 10; *Atalanta,* no. 76, p. 29).

Sylvie and Bruno escape the critical censure of *Sylvie and Bruno* due to their youth and their nonhuman status, being both children and fantastical creatures: as fairy-children they are the preferred side of the parallel tracks of adult/child and reality/fantasy that structure the text. Reviewers declare the "realities" in the books are "of no interest whatever," and offer suggestions

6. I am indebted to August Imholtz Jr. and Clare Imholtz for compiling reviews of *Sylvie and Bruno* across eight issues of *Knight Letter.* In-text citations for the reviews refer to their original source, the number of *Knight Letter* in which they are reprinted, and the page number on which they are found.

of how to truncate the text beneficially, instructing readers to skip chapters where they "will never find Sylvie or Bruno" (*The American,* no. 67, p. 9; *The Academy,* no. 62, p. 13). Another declares that the next edition should "let the nonsense be printed in the ordinary black ink, and the rest of the book in red. The red would denote danger to the reader" (*The Speaker,* no. 67, p. 8). These reviews anticipate future abridgments of the novel that excise the excrescence of the "adult" courtship sections, though they did little to improve the book's reception. Thus, what is most unsettling about *Sylvie and Bruno* is the proximity, the beside-ness, of realism and nonsense, of conventional marriage plots and fairy worlds, a dissonance sonically noted by one reviewer: the novel "passes rapidly from key to key, and frequently without modulations" (*The Speaker,* no. 67, p. 8).

The key of Victorian England is dreadfully dull and generic, whereas the key of the fantasy realms is pleasingly chaotic. For instance, one reviewer proclaims that only the chapter that takes place in Dogland is "suitable to read aloud to a pair of longing ears in whose recesses memories of Alice faintly sound" (*The Critic,* no. 62, p. 13). In other words, only the dialogue between Sylvie, Bruno, and the denizens of Dogland, taking place in the language of Doggee—for example, "Woobah yahwah oobooh! Bow wahbah woobooyah?"—is worthy of vocal replication (172). Whereas reviewers bemoan adult reality and its attendant speeches about marriage and faith, they revel in the fleeting nonsense speech of Dogland and find Bruno, dysfluency and all, utterly charming. Recalling the letter about the "piquancy" of Dodgson's stammer, Bruno and his vocal eccentricity add a much-needed flavor to an otherwise regrettable work. Bruno, then, gets a reprieve from strictures of novelistic vocalization in virtue of the entertainment he—and his dysfluent speech—provide. Instead, the jarring shifts between Bruno's fantasy realm of vocal anarchy and the narrator's domain of ho-hum realism is the source of critical dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Bruno's lisping baby talk was in good company in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in children's literature. The speech of the eponymous hero of *The Adventures of Herr Baby* (1881) by popular novelist Mary Louisa Molesworth and moments of dialogue across the Atlantic in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) anticipate without precisely matching the transliteration of Bruno's utterances (Amor xli–ii). The equation of youth and lisping also pervades more serious, ostensibly "adult" literature: Thackeray's Georgy Osborne is heard lisping his prayers at night, Dickens's Jane Pocket lisps her anxieties to her oblivious mother, Trollope's Madeline Neroni declares her child will "first be taught to lisp" her catechism in Barchester (100), Brontë's Polly Home lisps her way through childhood and

beyond, Eliot's Mirah Lapidoth derides her own singing by declaring "It is too childish. . . . It is like lisping" (374), and Schreiner's Bonaparte taunts Waldo by "speaking with a lisp, as though to a very little child" (92).

The difference between the dedicated children's fiction of Mrs. Molesworth and these examples from the "grown-up" Victorian canon lies primarily in volume of incidence. Dickens, Eliot, and their peers mostly employ glancing references to childish dysfluency, relegated to minor characters and figures of speech. By contrast, Herr Baby's utterances—to give an instance, "Ganfather must do somesing to zem locks. Zem is all most dedful 'tiff"—pervade the entire narrative (Molesworth 1). This difference in degree reveals the complexity of Dodgson's depiction of Bruno. Bruno's speech is, on the one hand, utterly conventional coming from a children's author as the period's children's literature often embraced nonnormative protagonists. On the other hand, the extended use of Bruno's eccentric pronunciation in a text deliberately aimed at a dual audience of children and adults and full of adult plots makes it unheard of. Dodgson relies on a generic trope, but then violates its terms of use. Readers excuse atypical speech from child characters, but not its consistent and prominent use throughout hundreds of pages in part intended for adult readers.

The cultural prominence of baby talk at the fin-de-siècle was not limited to prose: it is perhaps most notable in the "great lava-flow of verse in baby talk that erupted towards the end of the . . . century," as epitomized in Bertha Moore's "A Child's Thought" from the 1890s (Turner 32–33). Moore's poem, featuring lines like "I would not let the babies cry / Because veir tooths was coming froo," was popular in Victorian England, but today is only remembered when accorded a spot in a collection of *Very Bad Poetry* (Petras and Petras 1997). Similarly, Bruno's escape from judgment by Victorian critics has melted away in more recent assessments of the novel. In 1939, Evelyn Waugh designates Bruno as "a creation of unique horror, who babbles throughout in baby-talk" (23). And my expectations regarding the links between scholarly dismissal and vocal abnormality are confirmed in more contemporary accounts following Waugh. Silver dismisses Bruno as "saccharine and unpersuasive" due to his "baby talk" (188), Robson cites "the noxious baby talk" of Bruno as one reason for the neglect and castigation that has been the book's fate (*Men* 150), Christensen lists his "rather cloying baby-talk" as one of the "most off-putting element[s] of the books" (xiv), Gardner complains that "surely no English child ever talked like Bruno" (x), and Amor dismisses Bruno and his "sickening baby talk" as "insufferable" (xxxviii, xlii). Byron Sewell went as far as publishing a parody of the novel titled *Bruno and Uggug Cursed, or Sylvie and Bruno sans Baby Talk* (2004).

This collective clamoring for a world "sans" Bruno's eccentric speech is ostensibly blamable on inartistic writing, sentimentality, and a failure of realism on Dodgson's part, but lurking underneath is an intolerance of certain forms of vocal expression—a desire for a world "sans" eccentric speech in toto. No longer a charming character in an otherwise repugnant book, Bruno is now mobilized as proof rather than exception of *Sylvie and Bruno*'s inferiority, suggesting a provocative decline in readerly openness to childhood dysfluency on the page, part of an increasing aversion to overly sentimental representations as the nineteenth century drew to a close. In short, Bruno has become the most spectacular emblem of the novel's conspicuous failure. His failure to grow up and grow out of his baby talk is a distinctly queer failure, evincing the ways that "failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood" (Halberstam 3). Persistently "unruly" and "anarchic," Bruno's refusal of and failure at linear maturation is most clearly represented in his voice.

Dodgson himself was uncertain about how nonnormative to make Bruno's speech. The kernel of what became *Sylvie and Bruno,* a short story published in 1867 entitled "Bruno's Revenge," remains relatively unchanged as chapters 14 and 15 in the first volume. Most of the alterations, usefully summarized by Denis Crutch, regard punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, unsurprising given Dodgson's usual fussiness in such matters ("What Happened"). However, the two most significant changes have important ramifications for the representation of dysfluency in the novel. In the original story, the narrator declares to Bruno "My name's Lewis Carroll" (69); in the novel version, he simply writes "I told him my name" (198). The former formulation, unique in Dodgson's fiction, gives way to the latter, consistent with the garb of anonymity with which the novelistic narrator is clad throughout the extended text. As the narrator is fleshed out over hundreds of additional pages, Dodgson deems it advisable to evacuate him of an identity, especially one that can be linked back to the author, even at the remove of a pen name. This double distancing—Dodgson is not Carroll is not the narrator—is an attempted refusal of a biographical reading of the narrator. It is a refusal to self-depict as an aging bachelor with a fondness for children and a persistent stammer.

In addition to disentangling the writing Dodgson from the stammering narrator, of which more later, Dodgson also rewrites Bruno's dialogue. While the content of Bruno's speeches remains the same, the form of his dysfluency shifts, his difficulty with the medial *r* in the original publication transforming into his baby talk full of "oos." Bruno's original dysfluency dissipates into

something to be laughed at and smiled upon, as lisping baby talk generally had positive connotations (Shell 62). Akin to Thackeray, as discussed in chapter 1, Dodgson performs a slight but incomplete act of speech therapy on one of his characters through the compositional history of the story. However, while Thackeray minimized Dobbin's lisp, Dodgson is more interested in exchanging one of Bruno's dysfluencies for another.

Indeed, it is debatable which of Bruno's vocal patterns is more comprehensible and which is more taxing and transgressive. In the original narrative, Bruno shares Dodgson's difficulty with self-enunciation, calling himself "B'uno," whereas his novelistic utterance is simply "Bruno"; however, when he asks the narrator for his name in the short story it is rendered "What's yours?," later replaced with "What's oors?" (69, 198–99). Comparing longer sentences reveals a similar pattern, his utterances different in their kind of deviation from standard speech but comparable in the degree of their departure, a rather painstaking substitution that retains its abnormality: "I suppose you call it c'ooel and dangerous because if you went too far and tumbled in, you'd get d'owned" / "I suppose oo call it cruel and dangerous 'cause, if oo wented too far and tumbleded in, oo'd get drownded" (69/200); "don't be f'ightened: you shan't t'ip" / "don't be frightened: oo sha'n't trip" (76/217). Other instances abound, following the general rule of adding the letter *r* back into words where it was previously missing, but turning "ou" sounds into "oo" instead, among other tweaks. The speech of the two Brunos, published over two decades apart, indexes a type of perfectionism that is not about standardization. Some phrases are simplified via revision, others complicated. Dodgson is trying to represent Bruno's vocal individuality, not fix it. In contrast to the fiction by Thackeray and Brontë discussed in chapter 1, Dodgson shows that vocal alteration need not follow a linear path from dysfluency to standard speech.

By effacing the biographical roots of the narrator and by altering Bruno's dysfluency, though retaining the challenge posed by his vocal eccentricities, Dodgson creates a fascinatingly fraught text regarding vocal norms. It is a yearning back in time for a lost childhood where stammering was the norm rather than an aberration, where youth was permission for vocal nonnormativity. Yet it is a qualified yearning, with the specter of speech correction embedded in its publication history, and Bruno's dysfluency only accepted by reviewers in the static form of a fairy-child whose speech does not have to develop because nothing else about him does. Bruno's life is not meant to be mimetic, but rather a foray into alternative, fantastical possibilities. Dodgson gives him a type of speech that is grown out of but in someone that does not grow up, hinting at the potential of bildung while sidestepping it. A desire for and shame of dysfluency is thus conveyed through Bruno.

The centrality of vocal education in the novel is already apparent in the germinal short story. It begins with the narrator, here named Lewis Carroll, contemplating an imbalance in the pedagogical flows between humans and fairies: "I want to know why fairies should always be teaching *us* . . . and we should never teach *them* anything?" (65). Soon after, the narrator encounters a diminutive fairy; unfortunately for him, it is the idealized Sylvie, who has no need for his tutelage and is indulging her own educational penchant by lecturing a beetle about correct pronunciation. He then comes across a more suitable student in Bruno, who affirms the narrator's claim that fairies tend to educate humans by chastising the narrator for not saying "please" when asking for Bruno's name. Carroll is eager to invert this power dynamic: he ascertains that Bruno is in the midst of destroying his sister Sylvie's garden because she made him finish his lessons. Despite Bruno's professed aversion to lessons, the narrator takes this as an opportunity to teach him something on both a moral and vocal level. Carroll informs Bruno that his actions constitute a form of revenge and are thus inappropriate; he then discovers that Bruno does not know what the word means, nor can he pronounce it, instead repeating it as "river-edge."

The remainder of the story can be glossed as an effort to make Bruno understand the ethical purport of revenge and to make him say the word properly, an apt lesson given Carroll's desire to reverse the trends of fairy–human instruction; in a sense, he gets his revenge by teaching Bruno about revenge. The fairy-child proves more amenable to the moral lesson than the elocutionary one. Carroll tells Bruno to say "the word very slowly and distinctly," coaxing him along: "Come! Try and pronounce it, Bruno! . . . Revenge, rev-enge." Bruno dissents and only "tossed his little head, and said he couldn't; that his mouth wasn't the right shape for words of that kind," using his physiological uniqueness to refute social norms of articulation (70).

Carroll is more successful in the ethical vein, convincing Bruno to beautify rather than destroy Sylvie's garden. The two collaborate on various aesthetic improvements, but when Sylvie sees the results a penitent Bruno proclaims "Do you know, that was my river-edge, Sylvie?" (78). He has learned his lesson that it is better to help than punish those we care about but retains his atypical pronunciation. However, in response to Sylvie's ensuing perplexity, he attempts the word once more: "Bruno drew in a long breath, and made up his mouth for a great effort. 'I mean rev—enge,' he said: 'now you under'tand.'" The narrator ensures we notice that Bruno's correct articulation of revenge does not constitute a conquering of his dysfluency, going on to add "I rather think Sylvie didn't 'under'tand,'" thereby letting Bruno's atypical speech invade the narratorial voice within the containment of quotation marks (78).

At the story's conclusion, Sylvie requests an encore: "'Bruno, I've quite forgotten that hard word—do say it once more. Come!' . . . But Bruno wouldn't try it again" (78). Bruno's refusal ends the story and evinces an important distinction in his vocal characterization: it is not that he is incapable of standard pronunciation, but disinterested in it, especially when at the behest of others. He refuses both Carroll's and Sylvie's entreaties to say "revenge" yet can pronounce it of his own volition: he will say "river-edge" when he wants to, and "revenge" when he wants to, but always according to his whim. Bruno, then, represents vocal choice: he chooses dysfluency, rather than grappling with it as an involuntary necessity. In so doing, he inverts the cultural logic in which "un-choosing" disability is celebrated and made a collective imperative while "choosing" disability is shamed, pathologized, and sensationalized (Clare, *Brilliant* 130). At the same time, he contradicts the common Victorian assertion that letting a child persist in nonnormative speech is "the most wanton cruelty" by remaining in buoyant spirits throughout the lengthy text (Kingsley 6).

Bruno's decision is made more apparent as the subsequent novel grows out of either side of the seed of "Bruno's Revenge." Bruno's reintroduction in the novel is still vocally eccentric, asking "Doos oo know where Sylvie is?" (5). This new default mode of speech is not the only form Bruno's voice takes throughout the novel. In one scene, the now-nameless narrator encounters a governess and her young charge leaving a train station and about to ascend a staircase. The young girl has the appearance of one afflicted with "illness and suffering" and uses a "little crutch" as a mobility aid. The narrator offers to carry the girl up the stairs, and the governess receives an affirmative when she asks her charge "Would you like it, dear?" He persists in carrying her once reaching a more horizontal plane, causing the governess to protest, "Indeed it's troubling you too much, Sir!" The small group is then accosted by a "ragged little boy, with bare feet, and a broom over his shoulder" who demands "Give us a 'ap'ny!" in the "melancholy drawl of a professional beggar" (280–81).

This cluster of social types is then revealed to be the work of the playful Sylvie and Bruno: the young girl is in fact Sylvie and the beggar boy is Bruno, whereas the governess is a magical illusion conjured by him (see figure 1). This explanation does not satisfy the narrator, however, who remains perplexed about one thing: "But who did her *voice*?" Bruno proceeds to repeat phrases in the governess's tones before proclaiming "That were *me*!" in "his own voice" (286). Bruno is both the vocal caricaturist of the impoverished Cockney street sweeper and the ventriloquist behind the vocally refined governess: he is both Dickens's Jo and Brontë's Jane. His vocal flexibility across classes and genders suggests he can articulate anyone in the novelistic worlds or social realities of Victorian England, but is most content using "his own

FIGURE 1. Harry Furniss's illustration of Bruno and the "evanescent nursemaid" from chapter 19 of *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889).

voice" when speaking: the voice of a dysfluent child in defiance of standard grammar and pronunciation.

Bruno's rebellious preference for vocal atypicality is not the result of a world in which vocal norms do not exist; instead, his choice resists repeated attempts to standardize his speech in an imaginary realm that recalls the vocal expectations of the society Dodgson was writing within. The first pages of the novel represent the masses of Outland incorrectly using the letter *h,* as they shout "It makes yer look a hidiot" and "'ear, 'ear!" instead of "idiot" and "hear, hear" (6). Both the addition of spurious *h*'s and the subtraction of necessary

ones (dropped aspirates) were recognized as the "prime diacritic of the linguistically and socially unacceptable": an audibly perceived code conveying a lower-class position (Mugglestone 95). It was the "fatal letter" capable of concisely indicating social class, an idea abundantly deployed by nineteenth-century novelists who used "strategic misspellings" as "one of the prime signifiers of status," both the ease and recognizability of this form of characterization ensuring its widespread use (117, 122). Though popular, the blunt binarism of the *h*—segmenting a complex multiplicity of classes into two categories—sacrificed nuance for a representational shortcut.

Dodgson thus adopts a long-standing novelistic convention to amplify the ignorance of the Outland crowd, further conveyed in the content of their chanting, which reveals their uncertainty over whether they want "Less—bread—More—taxes!" or "More—bread—Less—taxes!" (31). "Improper" usage of the letter *h* was deemed a substantial enough issue to warrant manuals dedicated to its alleviation, such as C. W. Smith's *Mind Your H's and Take Care of Your R's* (1866) and *Poor Letter H, Its Use and Abuse* (1854). Its status as a regional and class defect as opposed to speech disorder was unstable. Prominent elocutionist Alexander Melville Bell insists that the letter *h* is "very irregularly used in many parts of England" and is also a severe "stumbling-block" for stammerers, "perhaps the most troublesome feature in [their] impediment" (*New* 128–29). For Bell, both dropped aspirates and stammered *h*'s were instances of atypical pronunciation to be eradicated in pursuit of a uniform national articulation (130, 13). The Lord Chancellor of Outland, the first character we meet, shares Bell's fantasies of linguistic homogeneity, insisting to the narrator that the masses "all shout the same words" and "with such unanimity," a claim contradicted by both the narrator's ears and the reader's eyes (3). *H*'s in *Sylvie and Bruno,* at the intersection of dialect and dysfluency, indicate that a system of vocal norms, and their attendant deviations, is operational even in Outland. The deprived masses misuse the letter, whereas the high-ranking bureaucrats who listen to their demands do not: vocal differences exist in Outland, they fracture any notion of "uniformity" in utterance, and they are hierarchized.

Therefore, the persistent efforts of Sylvie and others to correct Bruno's speech are unsurprising. Bruno collapses the vocal hierarchy of Outland: he is its future patrilineal ruler, but, like the common masses, he misuses the letter *h.* When Sylvie reprimands Bruno for the phrase "*us* put it in a flower"—trying to convince him to say "we put it in a flower," instead—Bruno responds with "well, *hus,* then. . . . I never can remember those horrid H's" (363). Bruno both refuses to be corrected, coming back with an even less standard utterance, and aligns himself with a distinctly low-class speech pattern, despite his

princely status. This is not to say that Bruno is a democratic champion, railing against monarchic authority one *h* at a time. Rather, this moment is further proof of his vocal flexibility.

At other times, his speech pointedly contrasts with working-class characters and elevates him above them. As the fairy-children attempt to reform an alcoholic laborer, Bruno's utterance "He's coming now!" is echoed by the laborer's "He be a-coomin noo!" (225). This scene of repetition with a difference gives Bruno standard pronunciation and grammar to distinguish him from a troubled menial, a deliberate vocal distancing. He also loses all vocal eccentricity when singing, a phenomenon oft-noted in the writings of speech correctionists, many of whom recommend the adoption of a singsong chant as a reprieve from stammering (Abbotts 32–33; Behnke 20; Bartlett 82–83; Gerdts 35; Helmore 6). At other moments, Bruno possesses somewhat perplexing national allegiances—given that he is a denizen of Outland, not England—proclaiming that "Flenchmen never can speak English goodly as us" (270). Bruno understands vocal demarcations along the lines of class and nation, but also realizes that the point of this knowledge is to enhance pleasure by playing across those differences.

The movement from "us" to "we" to "hus" is one instance of a dialogue pattern between siblings in which Bruno misspeaks, Sylvie corrects, then Bruno alters his original phrase but persists in his refusal of standard speech; for instance, Bruno says "writed," Sylvie insists on "wrote," Bruno compromises with "wroted" (231). By doing so, he disrupts a simple progression from spoken deviation to proper norm, instead placing possibilities for utterance beside one another, rather than collapsing them under "correct" usage. His speech refuses the narrative schematic identified by Mitchell and Snyder as structuring most representations of disability, in which a disability is revealed, consolidated/centralized, then cured (53–54). While central, Bruno's speech is never normalized. Unsurprisingly, then, Bruno hates the lessons Sylvie and others consistently subject him to: his demand to "stop lessons!" in the first chapter recurs throughout the novel (10). Bruno's aversion to education is as characteristic of his identity as his atypical speech.

Despite Bruno's aversion, the lessons themselves are not arduous. Conducted by his beloved sister, any pretense of top-down education evaporates in flurries of hugs and nonsensical banter. A geography lesson consists of Bruno crawling around a massive map to point out the locations mentioned in a chant about a bird, and when he gets off topic Sylvie merely kisses his mouth shut to force him to focus. The efficacy of Sylvie's methods is dubious and they are permeated by physical and emotional intimacy typically deemed inappropriate in Victorian teaching relationships. Sylvie's affections prove as

ineffective as the abuse mobilized by actual nineteenth-century teachers and condemned in the writings of speech correctionists.

Regardless of these lax learning conditions, Bruno's hatred for education persists, as given full expression in the chapter "Bruno's Lessons." At the beginning of the second volume, the narrator is lamenting how long it has been since he has encountered his fairy-children friends. Distracted, he almost steps on a diminutive Bruno who asks "Doos oo know what the Rule is . . . when oo catches a Fairy, withouten its having tolded oo where it was?" causing the narrator to declare that "Bruno's notions of English grammar had certainly not improved" (191). Bruno attributes this lack of development to a lack of desire: he declares he "Ca'n't learn no more!" to which Sylvie adjoins, "Oh Bruno! You know you can, if you like," to which her brother replies, "Course I can, if I like . . . but I ca'n't if I don't like!" (20). Uninterested in learning, Bruno does not.

This is made especially clear when Bruno encounters a more standard Victorian lesson, rather than Sylvie's eccentric pedagogy. When the siblings accompany the narrator to a dairy farm, the farmer's wife subjects Bruno to an exercise to test his memory, elocution, and morality. She gives Bruno some cake and begins:

> "And don't you waste the crust, little gentleman. . . . You know what the poetry-book says about wilful waste?"
>
> "No, I don't," said Bruno. "What doos he say about it?"
>
> "Tell him, Bessie!" And the mother looked down, proudly and lovingly, on a rosy little maiden. . . . "What's that your poetry-book says about wilful waste?"
>
> "For wilful waste makes woeful want," Bessie recited, in an almost inaudible whisper: "and you may live to say 'How much I wish I had the crust that then I threw away!'"
>
> "Now try if you can say it, my dear! For wilful—"
>
> "For wifful—sumfinoruvver—" Bruno began, readily enough; and then there came a dead pause. "Ca'n't remember no more!"
>
> "Well, what do you learn from it, then? You can tell us that, at any rate?"
>
> Bruno ate a little more cake, and considered: but the moral did not seem to him to be a very obvious one. (*Concluded* 52–53)

Bruno's recitation is woefully inaccurate, mispronouncing the second word before devolving into near gibberish and ceasing prematurely, only repeating the two words used as a prompt by his interlocutor. Unable to remember the phrase, articulate its words, or comprehend its lesson, Bruno is a spectacular

failure at recitation. The full significance of Bruno's failure is illuminated by returning the verse to its Victorian context. The ethical purport of the verse recalls the writing of Dodgson's predecessors in children's literature, such as best-selling author Mary Martha Sherwood whose *Waste Not, Want Not* (1832) drives home the same moral embedded in the verse Bruno does not repeat. The popularity of Sherwood's brand of children's fiction, steeped in Evangelical Christianity, waned following the massive success of Dodgson's *Alice* books, regarded as a sharp break from didactic narratives in preference of nonsensical fun. Furthermore, this same verse was a staple in the classroom recitation guides studied by scholars including Robson, such as *Watson's Third Book of Reading* (1862). Watson titles it "The Crust," and its epigraph echoes Sherwood's book, "Waste not, want not," before providing typographical hints about how to pronounce the more complex words, such as "Whole'-some" and "Kind'-est" (14). Bruno's deliciously botched recitation, then, is a critique of both a literary genre and an educational practice, of both didactic literature and recitation exercises. In a clever twist, Bruno does not waste his words, offering only three before giving up, because he does not want to.

This raillery of Victorian moralizing directed at children recalls scholars of the *Alice* books who have identified the original sources of the verses and songs that Dodgson parodies in his first novels, sources familiar to many Victorian readers (Robson, "Reciting Alice" 94). However, Bruno's resistance does not take place in the celebrated amoral world of the *Alice* books, but within the widely castigated *Sylvie and Bruno* books, dismissed for being too preachy. Once again, Dodgson is putting two disparate things beside one another: playfully mocking Christian morality while also trying to transmit it. Bruno, with his youthful precociousness, is the ideal agent to strike this balance as his resistance feels playful rather than threatening.

John Spink laments that with *Sylvie and Bruno* Dodgson undercut the revolutionary energies of *Alice* and "joined the earnest improvers" to become "just another teacher, 'Dodgson the Don,'" thereby betraying his earlier work that embraced amorality within children's literature (226). The fact that Bruno never learns his lessons, however, challenges this reading of the novel as exclusively instructive: the text is also energized by educative failure and refusal. And the simultaneous endorsement and criticism of educational practices played out in Bruno's interactions fits neatly within the novel as a whole. Dodgson parodies Oxford—the preeminent British bastion of education, with its wardens, subwardens, and professors—by turning it into Outland, and then fills it with Bruno's baby talk. He accompanies this disruptive speech with critiques of the shortcomings of postsecondary education, including the need to attain comprehensible teachers and abolish competitive examinations. From

childhood recitation to university curricula, education matters to this text, but its current modes are shown to need reform.

Of course, we must remember that Bruno does not fail the farmer's wife's lesson due to inability, but lack of inclination. He takes on a multitude of voices and speech patterns throughout the novel, but he ultimately declares "I *can* live without learning! . . . Oo just try me!" (*Concluded* 230). Bruno's willful stasis—despite his vocal flexibility and the constant corrections of those around him, his default speech remains unaltered—contrasts with the developments in the marriage plot that stretches across the novel. At the end of the first volume, a dismayed Arthur decides to move to India because his beloved Muriel is engaged to her cousin, Eric; at the start of the second, the engagement is off, and Arthur remains in England with renewed hope. Arthur and Muriel learn that their sympathies of character and faith outweigh outmoded notions of duty, culminating in their union. Their plot develops in the expected way, but it develops. After they are engaged, Arthur declares "*what* a change it makes in one's Life" (65).

By contrast, and like Alice before them, Sylvie and Bruno grow and shrink, alternating between tiny fairies and the size of "regular" human children: their physical trajectories are about oscillation, not growth. Morally, Sylvie's ultimate test comes early, and she passes it immediately. Her father offers her a choice between two lockets: one declaring "Sylvie—will—love—all" and the other saying "All—will—love—Sylvie." After some deliberation, Sylvie opts for the former, declaring "it's nicer to love other people" (77). She makes the right choice, championing a selfless beneficence over selfish vanity, and she does so in chapter 6 of fifty. Furthermore, Sylvie has already attained a pinnacle of vocal idealism, particularly in her singing, therefore abnegating any need for her oral education. When the narrator hears Sylvie sing, his response borders on euphoria: "The sweetness of her voice was simply indescribable" and "realized one's idea of perfect beauty" (329). Whereas Bruno does not want to learn anything and so does not, Sylvie has nothing to learn. The adult pair of suitors grow in sympathy and love, and the fairy siblings vary drastically in corporeal form and stay the same vocally and ethically. In short, they do not grow up, a common fantasy of Dodgson's who often regretted the inevitable aging of his child-friends.

Crucially, Dodgson places the two trajectories of growth and stasis beside one another. He wants readers to parallel these character dyads, placing them so close together that they begin to overlap: as Crutch suggests, "Muriel and Arthur are 'doubles' of Sylvie and Bruno" ("Sylvie and Bruno" 49). Muriel is described as "fairy-like" and the narrator claims she speaks "in Sylvie's own voice" (*Concluded* 28, 70). Arthur borrows some of Bruno's eccentric phrases,

calling Muriel "my very mine," Bruno's designation for Sylvie (167). The narrator even describes the discourse between Muriel and Arthur as "exactly like Sylvie talking to Bruno" (78). Their voices and characteristics begin to meld into one another as the narrative energies propelling their respective plotlines sharply contrast. Muriel and Arthur plod along conventional plot points toward an expected conclusion, while Sylvie and Bruno backpedal, zigzag, and mostly dwell in inertia. Placing these pairs and plots side by side generates readerly unease, both in the paralleling of young siblings with courting adults, and in the nearness of conventional development, in one line, and abnormal fluctuation and stubborn constancy, in the other.

These proximate though contrasting narratives are expressed vocally as well, as the novel demonstrates how writing can grant fluency to the "most intermittent talker," while allowing Bruno to choose dysfluency. Writing with a vexed relation to his own speech, Dodgson uses *Sylvie and Bruno* to demonstrate that standardizing imperatives and heterogeneous explorations can coexist. Lynda Mugglestone is right to suggest that children's literature "ensured early exposure to notions of norm and deviation" in speech, but in Dodgson's case he does not place the deviation under the norm as something to be purged as one matures or socially ascends (210). Instead, he puts norm and deviation beside each other for the entire novel. On the last page of the book, when Sylvie and Bruno's father reemphasizes that loving others is the same as being loved, Bruno declares, in reference to Sylvie's choice of locket, "Then [Sylvie] choosed it from itself. . . . Father, could Sylvie choose a thing from itself?" And while his father ignores the "embarrassing question," readers cannot, and are faced with a dysfluent character who remains so throughout this lengthy text (237).

The narrator provides a somber counterpoint to the dysfluent exuberance of Bruno. Though providing the bridge between the novel's horizontal plots by taking the reader between them in his trances, he ends up peripheral to both. Rendered nameless in his novelistic incarnation, the closest he gets to an appellation is "Mister Sir"—a playful invention of Bruno's. The nickname suggests the narrator is both incomplete, possessing only a prefix with nothing to follow it, and redundant, being strapped with two such prefixes. Furthermore, he is often literally invisible to the inhabitants of Fairyland as he observes their actions and is figuratively so in England.

In the second chapter, the narrator is taking a train to see Arthur about his failing health when he encounters Muriel for the first time:

> And then, with . . . most superfluous politeness, [the porter] flung open the door of my compartment, and ushered in "—a young and lovely lady!" I

> muttered to myself with some bitterness. "And this is, of course, the opening scene of Vol. I. She is the Heroine. And I am one of those subordinate characters that only turn up when needed for the development of her destiny, and whose final appearance is outside the church, waiting to greet the Happy Pair!" (9)

The passage demonstrates Dodgson's ample awareness of the generic marital trajectories of which the novel partakes, with the narrator's bitter words proving prophetic as he eventually attends the church wedding between Muriel and Arthur. He rightly apprehends his own role in such a story and critiques the obviousness of the narrative he comes to narrate—a lovely woman is undoubtedly a marriage plot heroine—but quickly sheds his bitterness upon speaking to Muriel. The subversive energy of this passage, criticizing courtship conventions and norms of character centrality, dissipates as they banter. As he dozes in and out of trances in Outland, he takes up a disjointed conversation with Muriel, stammering throughout, a habit he retains across the novel. Regardless of his stammering, he reflects on the advantages of his advanced age of seventy for the naturalness of their rapport. They discuss the narrator's ailing health, mathematics, and more, even though he is more than three times her age.

It is hard not to see Dodgson in the narrator: an older man with waning health, a persistent stammer, robust mathematical knowledge, and an aptitude for discoursing with females a fraction of his age. Either despite or because of this resemblance, Dodgson wanted the narrator to be innocuous, almost invisible. Not only is the narrator literally invisible for much of the action in the fantasy realms and a passive witness to the events in England, Dodgson also stipulated to his illustrator, Furniss, that the narrator was never to appear in the images commissioned for the novel, an absence that feels improbable in some instances. His invisibility both to characters in the narrative and to readers in the illustrations is joined by the foreboding sense that death is soon to render him forever invisible. Whereas Arthur experiences an improbable recovery from a severe plague, the narrator is ill when the novel begins and ill when it ends. At the beginning of *Sylvie and Bruno,* he seeks Arthur's medical support since his symptoms point to heart disease. Later, as *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* begins, Muriel declares "I think you look more of an invalid than when you left us," suggesting a further decline in health (28).

The implication is that the stammering narrator, peripheral to both the marital suitors and the fairy-children, is nearing death. His deterioration is linked to his dysfluency, at least in the minds of those who aided Dodgson in

minimizing his own stammer. James Hunt, the speech correctionist Dodgson first visited, describes the "mental depressions and sufferings of stammerers" and declares that "a defective utterance seriously injures the health" (*Treatise* 75–76). He goes on to remark that it "is rarely we meet with an old person that stammers; but this is not owing to years having effected a cure, but because the efforts made, and the organs which are abused in attempting to speak often, sooner or later, excite some organic disease, which once induced, invariably consigns the sufferer to an early tomb" (76). One of Hunt's other novelist patients, Charles Kingsley, imbibed this view, declaring that the life of a stammerer is "not likely to be a long one" (6). For Hunt and Kingsley, stammering is both symptom and cause of ill health: it is debilitating and ultimately fatal, and the elderly stammerer is destined to follow the dodo bird toward extinction. Dodgson had an almost obsessive fixation on his mortality as he was composing the *Sylvie and Bruno* books, filling each volume's preface with projects he wanted to complete but feared he never would, and writing in a letter that "my great anxiety is to get my *Book* done, before bodily and mental powers begin to fail. That anxiety gets greater, as life gets shorter" (*Letters, Volume Two* 694–95). Dodgson died a few years after the publication of *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* at the age of sixty-five.

Regardless of Dodgson's own life and death, the novel exports dysfluency to the extremities of age. Bruno's lisping baby talk marks the pole of optimistic youth, and the narrator's stammering the pole of pessimistic advanced years. The characters residing in between extreme youth and old age—Sylvie, Muriel, Arthur, Eric—possess fluent speech. Bruno and the narrator are thus linked by virtue of their eccentric speech patterns, as well as by their roles as storytellers. Whereas the narrator transmits the plot of the books, Bruno repeatedly embarks on tangential vocal narratives that recall the inception of *Sylvie and Bruno* in oral performance. While both Dodgson and the narrator can shed their stammers by committing their narratives to the page, Bruno vocalizes his stories in characteristically abnormal fashion. For the narrator, there is a distinction between his stammering speech and his standard written commutation, the novelistic pages both disguising and representing his vocal difference; by contrast, the rebellious joy of Bruno's baby talk remains the mode of transmission for his own narratives.

Bruno's mispronunciations are apparent in all of his stories, as evidenced by one example that does not require context as even in context it is nonsensical: "He said to the Goat, 'Oo will walk about here till I comes back.' And he went and he tumbled into a deep hole. And the Goat walked round and round. And it walked under the Tree. And it wug its tail. And it looked up in the Tree. And it sang a sad little Song. Oo never heard such a sad little Song.

. . . It singed it right froo" (376). Bruno revels in his narratives and his hate of lessons is discernible within them: his stories begin and end suddenly and are so jumbled that they have no moral takeaway. In this sense, Bruno's storytelling functions as a self-conscious critique of Dodgson and the narrator for erring on the side of didacticism when they hold the fictive reins. Even when Bruno deliberately attempts to transmit a moral, his delivery is atypical: "I'll tell oo a Fable! . . . Once there were a Locust, and a Magpie, and a Engine-driver. And the lesson is, to learn to get up early" (231). Dysfluently delivered with premature or absent morals, Bruno's stories are juxtaposed with the narrator's.

In addition, a persistent porosity between these two narrators again defies a surface–depth binary in the text. Bruno is not a subservient tool of the narrator's own storytelling. Instead, their voices and actions blend into one another, despite their substantial differences. Bruno has a habit of sticking his thumb into his mouth and he later transfers this infantilizing gesture to the narrator. The narrator also has his ideas interpreted via Bruno's speech: "'What are its disadvantages?' was the question that rose in my mind—and, as usual, Bruno asked it for me. 'What *are* its lizard bandages?'" (139). Bruno is capable of taking thoughts from the narrator's mind and translating them into his own eccentric idiom, permitting the narrator to embrace dysfluency at a remove in a way he never does directly.

The novel thus uses Bruno to show that there are many forms of vocal expression, and though they each have affordances and limitations, they need not be hierarchized. While there are certainly "joys such as no baby-language could in the faintest degree describe"—including, presumably, Bruno's own baby talk—the novel insists on the inverse as well: that there are joys or woes or a variety of thoughts and feelings that could only be expressed in this form of vocalization (*Concluded* 157). Throughout the novel, the young fairy makes references to "Bruno's World," his own unique psychic space, from which issues his vocal individuality that allows him to challenge the linguistic norms that surround him:

> "How far have you come, dear?" the young lady persisted.
>
> Sylvie looked puzzled. "A mile or two, I *think*," she said doubtfully.
>
> "A mile or *three*," said Bruno.
>
> "You shouldn't say 'a mile or *three*,'" Sylvie corrected him.
>
> The young lady nodded approval. "Sylvie's quite right. It isn't usual to say 'a mile or *three*.'"
>
> "It would be usual—if we said it often enough," said Bruno.
>
> It was the young lady's turn to look puzzled now. (*Concluded* 98)

From strangers like the "young lady" to family members like Sylvie, Bruno is surrounded by those who adhere to and insist on standard linguistic usage. But Bruno can also make his own usual, happily retaining the dysfluency characteristic of childhood in defiance of social and educational pressures to abandon it. His role is to advocate for the fun of dysfluency in an outrageous fantasy world nonetheless wedded to Victorian vocal norms, while his narrative prominence and commitment to atypical speech make him a rare figure in the works of canonical Victorian authors. The following chapter examines another such figure, demonstrating how sensation fiction provided the formal conditions conducive to creating a mute hero.

Dodgson's biographical experiences refute a declaration made by the Outland Professor near the end of the novel: "There is no judging by the voice!" He is referring to the sounds issuing from Uggug's chamber, the vile son of the Sub-Warden who is punished by the Warden for his selfishness by being transformed into a porcupine. Before the other characters see Uggug's new appearance, they hear his voice: "Its voice was a sort of mixture—there was the roaring of a lion, and the bellowing of a bull, and now and then a scream like a gigantic parrot" (227). The diversity of Uggug's transformed voice renders it impossible to judge what he has become. Voice cannot reveal identity, sonic expression fails as a clue to who or what Uggug has become. This statement has an aspirational rather than mimetic relation to Victorian society, where there was plenty of judging by the voice: with dropped aspirates indexing low-class positions, baby talk indicating immaturity in both age and education, and stammers hindering the personal and professional aspirations of people like Dodgson. By creating a character that prefers his own unique dysfluency to any vocal alternatives, Dodgson shows how vocal variation is ineradicable, despite community pressure, educational practices, and even personal desire. Dodgson did not live in a world free of vocal judgment, nor did Bruno, nor do we. But author and character could at least suggest the possibility of such a world and not make it seem like nonsense.

CHAPTER 3

"The Dumb Detec(k)tive"

Braddon's Professionalization of the Mute Role

Vocal disability and detection have a long history of literary intertwinement, dating back to the origins of British detective fiction. A mute detective serves as the hero of what is "probably the first British detective novel," *Three Times Dead; or, the Secret of the Heath* (1860), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's debut novel (Willis 408). Following Edgar Allan Poe's "tales of ratiocination" conducted by C. Auguste Dupin and the vibrant subplot of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) featuring Inspector Bucket, Braddon introduces readers to Mr. Joseph Peters, a mute police officer who appears in print years before Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). Peters is mute, but he is not deaf, though many assume he is both. This misapprehension makes people speak candidly in his presence: believing he cannot hear them, they reveal incriminating information that allows him to solve the mysteries he is confronted with. *Three Times Dead* was later republished though virtually unchanged under the title *The Trail of the Serpent* following Braddon's growing popularity. The novel catalogs the international crimes of Jabez North, the tribulations of his victims, and their banding together under the direction of the mute detective, Peters, to punish North.[1] Though the novel has received increasing critical attention in

1. Several characters from *Three Times Dead* are renamed in *The Trail of the Serpent*. I quote from the latter text.

recent years, an extended analysis of its ambivalent representation of mutism has yet to emerge.

Braddon began serializing the novel as she was transitioning from an actress into the period's preeminent sensation novelist. This evolution left its mark on the novel, full of theatrical plots, settings, and characters. Notably, Peters is indebted to stage melodrama's prevalent mute figures, but is recalibrated with professional competence, garrulousness, and narrative centrality—qualities absent in his theatrical predecessors that he acquires by virtue of his novelistic form. The novel asserts the worth of mutism in a profoundly oralist culture by featuring a mute detective as its protagonist. Peters uses fingerspelling and sensation fiction's eschewal of probability allows most characters to understand him without explanation; however, a few exceptions construe manual speech as threateningly foreign, rendering him a linguistic "other."

Braddon thus oscillates between proposing an alternative social sphere in which manual languages are as "natural" as oral ones and reinforcing a hierarchy of vocal over digital speech. As an early instance of the supercrip trope, Peters's vocal disability is depicted as enhancing his occupational excellence as a detective.[2] Unlike the vocational challenges posed by dysfluency for figures in chapters 2 and 5, mutism is depicted as a professional asset that can benefit society more broadly, revealing dysfluency's significance in another form of relationality: the sphere of labor. At the same time, Peters is often misunderstood and devalued due to the prioritization of oral communication by his interlocutors. In other words, he demonstrates that while verbal speech is unnecessary in the specialized realm of detection, it nonetheless remains a desirable ability in interpersonal relations. As a narratively significant dysfluent figure in a text that generically bridges stage melodrama to serialized detective shorts, Peters argues for the potential heroism of mute individuals in nineteenth-century society, though without effacing the challenges encountered by actual nonoral communicators. Ultimately, Peters's characterization provides a rich though uneven critique of not only the prioritization of fluent speech, but the prioritization of speech itself as a social requisite. Following an overview of Peters's derivation from theatrical mute characters, the remaining sections contrast the trajectories of the antagonist North and the protagonist Peters. This dialogue shows how mutism's heroism is indebted to its use in punishing other linguistic deviations, as embodied in North's polyglot flu-

2. For insight into the supercrip trope, see Clare, *Exile* 2; Garland-Thomson, "Seeing" 341; Schalk.

ency; in short, the acceptance of Peters's mutism is predicated on his thorough Englishness.

Mutism on the Stage and Page

Whether to include mutism in a study of nineteenth-century dysfluency is a complex question as mutism is not characterized by nonstandard articulation of oral language, but by the substitution of other forms of communication for it. Nineteenth-century speech correctionists such as James Hunt often made glancing references to mutism in their discussions of speech disorders: he declares "mutism, does not . . . concern us, the subject of this treatise being Dyslalia, which consists either in the impossibility or difficulty of correctly forming and enunciating certain articulate sounds" (*Stammering* [1861] 9). Rather than indistinct utterance, mutism is construed as the absence of utterance and is thus only evoked to be dismissed. However, the fact that Hunt mentions mutism early in his work is unsurprising, as the treatment and education of deaf-mutism was already a prominent topic by the end of the eighteenth century, whereas speech disorders including stammering and lisping were not: the nascent field of speech correction largely emerged from deaf-mute pedagogy in the nineteenth century (Rockey 21, 47). This origin was thought of as a stymieing reliance to some, such as German practitioner A. E. Gerdts who declared that treatments for stammering were "too much allied to the remedy for the deaf and dumb" (10).

Outside the realm of treatment, the alignment between dysfluent speech and mutism remained: stammering was often framed as rendering speakers temporarily mute as they had "the dumb devil of stammering close at [their] elbow," in Charles Kingsley's evocative phrase (11). Nineteenth-century discourse, then, did not assert a consistent and clear-cut distinction between dysfluent speech and mutism. And nor does contemporary work on vocal disability that shows how both the absence of oral speech (mutism) and what is seen as excessive speech (such as the vocal/phonic tics of Tourette's syndrome) are comparably pathologized; in addition, anxiety about stammering can lead some to adopt muteness rather than risk atypical pronunciations (Eagle, *Dysfluencies* 14; Shell 8). Both then and now, attention to how diverse departures from normative speech are stigmatized and represented emphasizes the breadth of vocal discrimination.

The fraught position of mute individuals in the nineteenth century was coming into sharper relief as they began to be studied as a group. Sir William

Wilde, Oscar Wilde's father, gathered the first census data on deaf-mutism in the British Isles in 1851, using a common patronizing logic to justify his focus: "Shut out by his unhappy circumstance from thoroughly communicating his ideas to the rest of mankind, the deaf mute . . . claims the sympathies of all" (Wilde 413). The contemporaneous rise of deaf-mute schools and communities positioned mutism less as an individual shortcoming and more as a collective linguistic difference. These occurrences buttressed the claims of Victorian writers that "mutes . . . form a larger portion of the population of our country than we, perhaps, are aware of," with census data suggesting 1 in 1,590 people in the United Kingdom were deaf-mutes in the 1850s, the decade leading up to Peters's appearance in print (Tonna, *Happy* 28; Hunt, *Manual* 336).

Speech has long functioned as "the ticket to entrance into the human community, as the laws concerning deaf-mute people made clear" and the nineteenth century witnessed the continuation of this damaging belief: the rendering of mute people as animals, as excluded from the knowledge of God, as undeserving of voting rights, as failing at socially prescribed gender roles, and more (Pettman 4; Bourke 32, 48–51). This pejorative rhetoric of social irrelevance also took new forms in the period: efforts at undercutting burgeoning deaf-mute communities and systems of knowledge coalescing around sign languages aimed to elevate an oralist insistence on "teaching the deaf and mute to speak as if they could hear" (Sterne 12). In short, mute individuals were deemed socially inferior and the formation of autonomous languages and communities was often opposed. The character of Peters undercuts these ableist views of vocal disability with his deft navigation of his world through fingerspelling and the immense vocational respect he accrues.

In a literary historical frame, mutism has not received ample representation comparable to that of other disabilities: Jonathan Rée declares "There are no noble literary mutes to set alongside" famous blind figures including Oedipus, Tiresias, and Samson (91). However, mutism was prominently featured on theatrical stages, and its depiction took on special meaning in printed forms. Mikhail Bakhtin traces how a rise in print culture "served to shift discourse into a *mute* mode of perception, a shift decisive for the novel as a genre" (379). The textual form of the novel coupled with rising literacy and the resultant increase in silent reading did not quell a diverse vocal culture around the novel; nonetheless, Bakhtin's point that mute perception was key to the novel is significant. Actors on a stage are independent vocal agents, rooted in a script, though retaining the power of personal articulation. Novelistic figures are in essence mute until their authors and readers make them speak. Granting them the power of speech is one way to mark them out as a

character—as someone who can and will further the plot through dialogue. Braddon presents readers with both: a character who is mute as well as a crucial plot agent, complicating notions of oral speech as requisite for personhood and thus for characterization. The novel is at once the only form for Peters to arise within—he can have a large role due to text's ability to translate his finger-spelled utterances in a way that was impracticable on a large scale in the theater—and an unexpected one, given the centrality of vocalization to most nineteenth-century novels.

Moving from form to genre, it is unsurprising that we find such a figure in the first novel of the period's predominant sensation novelist. Victorian thinkers characterized sensation fiction as "a degenerate subrace of literature that, despite its apparent cultural unfitness, thrived and multiplied" and disabled characters—representations of individuals who were often considered degenerate and unfit—thrived in the pages of these texts (Steinlight 160). These notions of unfit genres and unfit bodies were interwoven, with the representation of the latter leading to the castigation of the former. Braddon's biggest rival in sensation fiction, Wilkie Collins, often depicted disabled characters: deaf-mute Madonna Blyth, multiply disabled Misserimus Dexter, and blind Lucilla Finch, to name a few. This last instance, from *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), came under especial derision from John Ruskin for exemplifying a "cretinous school" of literature by crafting a narrative in which "the heroine is blind, the hero epileptic" (163–64). In a binary between realist and sensational fiction, a high volume of prominent disabled characters in the latter was seen as excessive and improbable, as a "detour from realism"; at the same time, these depictions were deplored for being "too real," too steeped in medical fact and troubling affect (Holmes 90). Caught in a double bind in relation to realist aesthetics, disabled characters often received complex depictions in sensation fiction that nuanced the over-the-top melodramatic formulas characteristic of the genre. To fully understand Peters, however, we need to take a detour from the novel and trace his origins back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stage culture.

Throughout her career, Mary Elizabeth Braddon was an actress, playwright, poet, and novelist. She performed in hundreds of stage productions throughout England from 1852 to 1860, often under the name of Miss Mary Seton, before writing her first of over ninety novels in 1860. Braddon's familiarity with theatrical performance allowed her to adapt the conventions of melodramatic plays—emotional excess, visual exhibition, neat resolutions—into the elaborate sensation plots that would make her one of the century's top-selling authors. In particular, she translated prominent stage archetypes

into her texts. In her debut novel, Braddon imports the melodramatic figure of the mute and resignifies its representational power within the novel form, using her textual medium to expand the mute character's independence and narrative significance. Braddon appeared in multiple plays featuring mute characters; significantly, she performed in B. F. Rayner's *The Dumb Man of Manchester* in February 1860 on her fourth-to-last night as a professional actress (Carnell 375). During this month, she was a paid actress simultaneously serializing her first novel, the first two numbers of which were published while she was still performing (Carnell 103). This means Braddon was on the stage in a play focused on a mute character at the same time she was creating her own mute character on the page.

The history of theatrical mutism is long, functioning both as a legislated formal necessity and embodied character type. Silent characters were staples on the English stage due to the popularity of eighteenth-century pantomime that influenced the spread of melodrama. The commonality of mute figures, however, is not attributable to their vitality to plot, but is rather symptomatic of a closely regulated theatrical culture. The Licensing Act of 1737 restricted the performance of "legitimate drama" within London to a handful of theaters with royal patents, originally only Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Booth 53). Legitimate theater was, in practice, a synonym for plays using the spoken word, meaning that throughout much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, all legal dramatic performances outside of the patented playhouses were restricted to "dumbshow, music, and spectacle": "the monopoly of the patent theatre was hence a monopoly of the word" (Brooks 53, 63). Performers would mime along to musical accompaniment and display large scrolls with text to convey information or emotions outside the scope of their gestures. These restrictions on spoken drama ended with the Theatres Act of 1843, though by then audiences were so acculturated to "illegitimate" drama that their tastes desired more of the same, the continuation of dumbshow. The development of silent pantomime into mute melodrama was, therefore, informed by the law as playwrights and stage managers innovated ways to convey meaning without articulate speech.

The foreign influence of figures including the French melodramatic playwright Pixérécourt helped transform a necessity into a character type that Peter Brooks calls "the mute role" to distinguish it from the generalized use of silent tableau, posture, and gesture, the combination of these constituting the "text of muteness" central to melodrama (56, 62). Pixérécourt often used mutism in his works, a tendency that was carried into English by Thomas Holcroft in his *Deaf and Dumb* (1801), the first English play billed as a melodrama,

and *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), an unacknowledged translation of Pixérécourt's *Coelina* (1800). These plays featured prominent mute figures and initiated the popularity of the character type in England. The initial legal utility and eventual rich symbolic resonances of the mute role ensured its continuing prominence: it persisted after dumbshow melodramas were legislatively mandated. The mute role featured in countless works, including those that Braddon frequently performed in, such as *The Dumb Girl of Genoa* (1856).[3] The mute role, usually featuring a hazy and awful past, operated to inspire pity in audiences as figures of defenseless innocence: their "extreme physical condition" was mobilized to index "extreme moral and emotional conditions" (Brooks 60, 56). Melodrama often deploys other forms of "picturesque affliction" in deaf, blind, and otherwise disabled characters, but there was particular utility in the mute role's ability to communicate without words (Holmes 23).

Mute roles tended to be written for actors with especially expressive gestures and faces and were considered demanding and virtuosic, requiring intense skill to convey meaning. The complex relationship between text, performance, and meaning is evident in playscripts where written words are used to explain gestures that are to be enacted to articulate meanings. When speech did occur in melodrama, it was "one of the most distinctive aspect[s]" of the form, taking part in "a whole set of peculiar pronunciations and syllabifications as well as a special rhythm" (Booth 193). Some actors pronounced every syllable with extreme distinctness, others conveyed their deep feelings through broken speech and dramatic pauses; as a whole, "the melodramatic system of pronunciation . . . made hash and havoc of the English language" (Cook 194). Whether silent or audible, melodramatic form resounded with dysfluent content: mute roles, broken utterances, and peculiar articulations constituted its soundscape.

Brooks connects stage melodrama's fondness for silent gestures to the use of transcribed pantomime and metaphoric movement in novels, bridging the

3. An incomplete list of plays that reference the mute role in their title gestures to the figure's ubiquity: Thomas Holcroft, *Deaf and Dumb: Or, the Orphan Protected* (1801); *Homicide, or the Dumb Boy and the Spectre Knight* (1824); Henry M. Milner, *Masaniello, or the Dumb Girl of Portici* (1829/30?); C. P. Thompson, *Dumb Savoyard and his Monkey* (1830); W. B. Bernard, *The Dumb Belle* (1831) and *The Dumb Brigand* (1832); W. J. Lucas, *The Death Plank; or, the Dumb Sailor Boy!* (1832); Henry Willoughby Grattan Plunkett, *The Dumb Conscript; or, A Brother's Love and a Sister's Honour* (1835); Thomas G. Blake, *The Dumb Guide of the Tyrol* (1837); Barnabas F. Rayner, *The Dumb Man of Manchester* (1838); *The Dumb Boy of Avignon* (1841); *The Dumb Norwegian and his Pony of Iceland* (1842); George Wood, *The Irish Doctor; or, the Dumb Lady Cured* (1844); Thomas G. Blake, *The Dumb Driver* (1846); *The Dumb Girl of the Inn* (1847); John Farrell, *The Dumb Girl of Genoa; or, the Bandit Merchant* (1856).

distance between theater and print fiction. His account of how muteness is translated from stage to page, however, focuses on the "text of muteness"—gesture, posture, tableau—but loses sight of the mute role's persistence in the novel. Braddon utilizes the mute role in *Three Times Dead*: combining the conventions of criminal case study and stage melodrama, she produces a sensational detective novel starring an extremely competent mute investigator. Martha Stoddard Holmes and Mark Mossman have elucidated how disability is "central to the very poetics of sensation fiction" while remaining surprisingly undertheorized, an apt assessment of the formal centrality and scholarly neglect of Peters (493). Unlike his stage predecessors, he is not a pitiable secondary figure; instead, recent critics have declared him one of the most positive depictions of disability in Victorian fiction (Willis 411).

Rather than evaluate Peters as positive or negative, I argue that his nuanced representation, while scaffolded by his stage predecessors, could only happen in a novel. Braddon's sensation fiction retains melodrama's indifference to realism, allowing her considerable flexibility in depicting Peters. Peters communicates using fingerspelling, which is inexplicably understood by the majority of the novel's cast, suggesting that such widespread literacy in digital alphabets could be the norm. In addition, the formal affordances of print and narration characteristic of the novel allow Braddon more control over Peters's language. No longer limited to cumbersome banners dragged onto stage, the mute role in the novel can be loquacious, dynamic, and the main plot agent. Both Braddon's text and Peters's digital utterances are alternatives to oral communication, with the novelistic form proving hospitable to the content of the latter.

The novel presents a conflict between Peters's mute righteousness and the antagonist Jabez North's threateningly flexible and increasingly foreign speech, a voice that stays silent though garrulous and a voice that shifts between classes and nationalities. This opposition is only sporadically tenable as Peters's mutism is also coded as foreign at times. Nonetheless, the triumph of the English working-class mute detective over North's transatlantic and aristocratic machinations suggests an advocation of static, insular speech over fluid, international speech. An analysis of the theatrical foundations of Braddon's novel, its international setting (interweaving an English industrial town with London, Paris, New York, and South America), and the intricacies of Peters's depiction elucidates the nature of his heroism. Specifically, the dynamic between the valiant Peters and villainous North dramatizes debates about the relative worth of different types of communication: it allows nonoral speech a heroic function provided the mute role's new competency and centrality is in service of castigating departures from English culture and language.

The Cosmopolitan Criminal

Three Times Dead began serialization in penny weekly parts in early 1860, a formative novel that established several of Braddon's enduring literary preoccupations. Her printer suggested that the story "should combine . . . the human interest and genial humor of Dickens with the plot-weaving of G. W. R. Reynolds" ("My First Novel" 422). Reynolds, a pioneer in the realm of penny fiction, was notoriously successful for his Gothic serials; Dickens was Braddon's idol, his influence discernible across her oeuvre. Combining two divergently popular modes of writing seemed like a recipe for success, though the resulting text was written swiftly and imitatively. Thus, Braddon muses that she "greatly doubt[s]" that "one living creature ever bought a number of *Three Times Dead*": sales were abysmal, and Braddon never received any remuneration beyond a meager fifty-shilling advance (423–24).

Braddon's second book, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), became one of the best-selling novels of the century. Its success and the sensation genre it exemplified were associated with a changing literary marketplace responding to rising literacy rates and a resultant expansion of the reading public. Braddon's debut was released in penny parts and thus consumed predominantly by a growing industrial working-class readership—the same people who flocked to stage melodramas, rather than the middle-class audiences she later garnered. However, the triumph of *Lady Audley's Secret* prompted Braddon to rewrite *Three Times Dead* as *The Trail of the Serpent* and save it from obscurity. This new iteration of fundamentally the same text sold one thousand copies within one week, sparking the ire of George Eliot: "I sicken again with despondency under the sense that the most carefully written books lie . . . deep undermost in a heap of trash. . . . They are not so attractive to the majority as 'The Trail of the Serpent'" ("GE to" 309–10). The repackaged novel's newfound popularity meant it was serialized again in the mid-1860s and reprinted several times subsequently.

However, as Eliot's scorn suggests, the high readership did not guarantee the novel or sensation fiction a place of cultural reverence: it was routinely condemned by Victorian critics for emphasizing plot over character, shocking incidents and convoluted mysteries over psychologically rich figures. This view is exemplified by Henry Mansel: "A sensation novel . . . abounds in incident . . . it consists of nothing else. . . . The human actors in the piece are, for the most part, but so many lay-figures on which to exhibit a drapery of incident" (486). Rather than refuting Mansel's claim, I demonstrate that characters who primarily function to buttress plot are worthy objects of study no less capable of illuminating their cultural milieu. I focus less on Braddon's

characteristic twists and turns and more on the social, geographic, generic, and linguistic itineraries of the novel's central characters, North and Peters, to demonstrate Braddon's depiction of mutism as disruptively foreign but also capable of inaugurating a communicative utopia.

The echoes of Braddon's theatrical career are incessant throughout the novel. One character mistakes the Victoria Theatre for the House of Parliament, suggesting the two buildings have equal national importance; another utters sentences that are "verbatim from a playbill" (271). The second, Splitters, is a "dramatic author" who needs to be reminded not to "stop to compose a five-act drama" whenever given a task (363). He attends every staging of his compositions, "tear[ing] his hair when the actors leave out the gems of the dialogue and drop their h's" (268). Splitters's dismay positions the stage—particularly the stage that would produce one of his plays, full of violence and crime—as a space that damages English speech. Furthermore, the novel's cast repeatedly label the events they are embroiled in as a farce, a drama with a chorus, a play, a charade, a fashionable comedy, and a melodrama.

The last is worth dwelling on as one of the most consistently evoked. Midnovel, the river Sloshy floods the dwellings of the nearby town of Slopperton: "Its manner of entering an apartment was, after the fashion of a ghost in a melodrama, to rise though the floor" (204). The text's setting, its stage so to speak, is melodramatic, the river theatrical, pointing to the novel's foundations in stage culture. Later, a minor character complains that events are becoming "so intolerably melodramatic," though he concedes "melodrama[tic] circumstances generally are convenient" (323, 331). He evokes Braddon's strategic ambivalence around melodrama, her toggling between critique and capitulation to its literary utility: both intolerable and convenient, melodrama is eschewed by some characters and embraced by her plots, mocked by her narrator, and praised by other figures.

The antagonist Jabez North also contributes to the novel's theatrical lexicon: he is described as a "first-rate light-comedy villain for a Porte-St.-Martin drama" and his eventual apprehension is compared to a scene in *Coriolanus,* including both French melodrama and Shakespearean tragedy in the novel's stage referents (270). These comparisons culminate in North's immortalization by the dramatist Splitters following his death: he "put the Count [North] into a melodrama. . . . This piece was very popular . . . [with] the transpontine audiences" (397). Like Lord Dundreary discussed in chapter 4, North's aristocratic and performative identity as "the Count" is imagined as an enduring theatrical success across the Atlantic. Braddon thus points to the long tradition of novelistic adaptations of plays and dramatic stagings of novels, a symbiotic circuit of representation between two forms that ensured that theater was "both gone

and omnipresent" (Kurnick 8). During the midcentury, it was challenging to make a living by writing novels or plays, so rapid composition and frequent adaptation using popular melodramatic formulas were widespread. Braddon's novels were not only source material for the stage but drew on her firsthand knowledge of theatrical conventions.

Unsurprising coming from an author accustomed to the vocal variety of the melodramatic stage, Braddon's novel features a cacophony of voices ranging from Cockney accents to Lancashire dialect to the "Hindostanee" of an Indian servant, suggesting the classed, regional, and imperial linguistic diversity of nineteenth-century England (339, 392). It also features students who resent Virgil—"If he hadn't been a spiteful beast he would have written in English"—and characters accused of "murdering . . . Lindley Murray and the language of [their] country" (10, 230). In other words, the depiction of linguistic variety is accompanied by Braddon's citation of a transhistorical and transnational desire for English, particularly English regulated under a system that scorns deviations from standardized linguistic forms. Lindley Murray, an American Quaker who moved to England, was an influential grammarian who published numerous treatises dictating the "proper" way to write and pronounce English. Departures from the tenets of Murray and his ilk are coded in the hyperbolic language of murder, crimes on par with the homicides that populate her novel. In short, Braddon gives us a plot full of murders in a genre accused of murdering English letters. Her novel thus represents both the rising diversification of the English language and the discourses of standardization that deplore this increasing variation.

The transatlantic scope of the novel is inseparable from its depiction of English and is made apparent from its opening pages. Braddon begins by describing the industrial town of Slopperton with recourse to North American geography: the city's gutters are a "little Niagara" and the nearby river is a "dirty Mississippi" (5). A geographic parallel to the invocation of the linguistic ideas of anglophile Americans like Murray, Braddon interpolates North American landmarks onto British industrial space. Figuring Slopperton as a diminutive and filthy version of geographic features across the ocean both distinguishes the mechanized economy of the town from these natural formations while also foreshadowing the international dynamic of the narrative that begins there. The text's internationalism is embodied in its villain, Jabez North, though his introduction insists on his localness: as a baby, North is "found in a Slopperton river by a Slopperton bargeman, resuscitated by a Slopperton society, and taken by the Slopperton beadle to the Slopperton workhouse; he therefore belonged to Slopperton" (7). Discovering this foundling baby left to drown, the town's landscape, population, and institutions

sustain North, seemingly forging an inextricable link between person and place.

However, after a third of the book, North has left Slopperton for Paris, leaving a trail of bodies in his wake. This alteration is instigated when Montague Harding, an invalid "Anglo-Indian," arrives to stay in the vicinity of the town (12). He brings a colonially derived fortune and a "half-caste" servant named Mujeebez with him: Mujeebez's nominal proximity to North's given name, Jabez, connects them, linking Mujeebez's current international mobility with North's future movement, as he heads in every cardinal direction from his starting point except, ironically, north. The narrative is less a whodunit mystery and more a tale of howdunit, explicitly depicting North's crimes for readers (Willis 409). Now a young man, North decides to tap into Harding's global commerce to solve his domestic difficulties with a young woman and the child she has borne him. North kills Harding and poisons a potential witness, though his scheme fails as Harding had already given his fortune to his nephew, Richard Marwood, who is found guilty of the murder. North swiftly precipitates the suicide of the mother of his child, murders his long-lost twin Jim, and uses the latter's corpse to stage his own suicide before vanishing, causing four deaths in less than a hundred pages with the reader as direct witness.

North's financial fortunes and geographic mobility rise in tandem. He is next seen in an opera house in Paris, his eyes fixed on a Spanish heiress. Distancing himself from industrial squalor, North adopts the name Raymond de Marolles. Observing the wealthy Valerie de Cevennes, North discerns she is in love with the singer, Gaston de Lancy. He discovers the secret marriage of the heiress and the tenor, convinces the former of the latter's infidelity, manipulates Valerie into poisoning her husband, and then blackmails her into marrying himself instead to keep the dazzling sequence of events quiet. Following his lucrative marital conquest in Paris, he takes Valerie to South America, accrues more wealth, and then settles in London where he is known as the "South American banker" from Paris who has bought a title, becoming the Count de Marolles (265). His cosmopolitan "Anglo-Spanish-American Bank" is located near the Bank of England, this spatial proximity suggesting the dependence of domestic European economies on the exploitation of imperial holdings in the Americas and elsewhere (262). While in London, North and Valerie are construed as foreigners by their English domestic: when asked if North is English, she declares "A Englishman! Lor' bless your heart, no. They're both French; she's of Spanish igstraction . . . and they lived since their marriage mostly in Spanish America. But they always speaks to each other in French," giving a concise version of the national and linguistic itinerary North

wants others to believe he has traversed (282). At this point, North wields a threatening polyglot hyperfluency and national fluidity reminiscent of *Vanity Fair*'s Becky Sharp, as discussed in chapter 1.

The effort to unravel North's crimes is bound up in the need to concretize this fluidity. To escape legal repercussions, North disguises himself as the corpse of an American being shipped to New York City for burial, the second "sham die" referenced in the novel's original title (381). This attempt fails, resulting in North's return to Slopperton to face trial. From Slopperton to Paris to South America to London to an attempted journey to New York before returning to Slopperton, North circulates internationally to further his status and wealth. Untangling the equivalent nominal changes from Jabez North to the Count de Marolles is essential to the court case against him, and his voice serves as compelling evidence of his derivation: people question how a Parisian acquired such a perfect English accent, while a witness can only distinguish North from his dead twin Jim because he does not speak with "Jim's voice" (325, 386). The voice becomes a reliable sonic marker of both national origin and class identity, undercutting North's mobility and social ascension to reestablish him as an industrial town foundling. When testimony delivered by the mute Peters results in a verdict of guilty and a sentence to hang, North "destroy[s] himself" in his cell, completing the triad of death evoked by the title *Three Times Dead* (395–96).

North's death does not signal the death of the novel's internationalism, however. A now-exonerated Richard Marwood and a now-free Valerie de Cevennes, along with their respective partners, end the novel in South America, which was previously evoked as the source of North's wealth. The now-prosperous protagonists—English, French, and Spanish alike—leave behind the crime and filth of Slopperton for a "new world" (407). Their relocation suggests that colonial entanglements are the realm of the novel's "good" and "bad" characters alike and, in turn, are a quotidian reality for a range of nineteenth-century Europeans.

The novel itself provides a striking image of the rising globalism of the plots and circulation of novels when a toppled bookshelf results in a mix of "loose leaves" comprising "the most fascinating *olla podrida* of literature, wherein the writings of Charles Dickens, George Sand, Harrison Ainsworth, and Alexandre Dumas are blended together in the most delicious and exciting confusion" (303). Paralleling the national extractions of the novel's closing quartet, two English novelists and two French ones are blended into a literary equivalent of a Spanish stew. *The Trail of the Serpent* is represented by this paper stew, mixing French melodrama, Spanish characters, and colonial settings in an English novel to insist that interconnected European powers

depend on the colonies they subjugate, both for the food they eat and the books they read.

The Dumb Detective

Tracking the twists and turns of North's, the titular serpent's, trail across the globe is Braddon's mute role, Joseph Peters. Peters is introduced as the assistant of the detective who wrongly arrests Richard Marwood for the murder committed by North. Peters receives a lengthy though strikingly ambiguous description:

> He might have passed in a hundred crowds, and no one of the hundreds of people in any of those hundred crowds would have glanced aside to look at him. You could only describe him by negatives. He was neither very tall nor very short, he was neither very stout nor very thin, neither dark nor fair, neither ugly nor handsome; but just such a medium between the two extremities of each as to be utterly commonplace and unnoticeable. If you looked at his face for three hours together, you would in those three hours find only one thing in that face that was any way out of the common—that one thing was the expression of the mouth. It was a compressed mouth with thin lips, which tightened and drew themselves rigidly together when the man thought—and the man was almost always thinking. . . . This was the only thing remarkable about the man, except, indeed, that he was dumb but not deaf, having lost the use of his speech during a terrible illness which he had suffered in his youth. (28–29)

Peters is a composite of ordinariness. He is unworthy of notice by as many as ten thousand people, evoking the crowded public places characteristic of Victorian industrial urbanization as England's population tripled throughout the course of the century. Peters possesses characteristics that reside between polarized descriptors: his height, weight, complexion, and attractiveness all suggest an unspecifiable regularity. His only striking anatomical feature indexes his atypical mode of communication, with his mouth attracting notice due to the intensity and frequency with which it is shut—it is "compressed, "tightened," his lips "rigidly together." Peters's closed mouth anticipates the description's final sentence, which indicates the other "remarkable" thing about him: he is mute without being deaf. Notably, his acquired muteness is not remarkable in and of itself, but only due to its occurrence without attendant deafness, for the untangling of aural and oral disabilities. The fact that

Peters cannot communicate vocally but can hear is an essential piece of the plot.

The description continues:

> The dumb man was a mere scrub, one of the very lowest of the police-force . . . but he was useful, quiet, and steady, and above all . . . he was to be relied on, because he could not talk. He could talk though, in his own way, and he began to talk presently in his own way . . . ; he began to talk with his fingers with a rapidity which seemed marvellous. The fingers were more active than clean, and made rather a dirty alphabet. (29)

Peters's employment is low-ranking and insignificant, though this introduction inaugurates the novel's insistence on the utility of his mutism; in this case, granting him trustworthiness due to his nonoral speech. Instead, he uses his fingers to communicate, which often function as a synecdoche for Peters, with dialogue tags attributing his speech to his fingers rather than to his person: "say the fingers," "continued the fingers" (242, 244). Peters's use of his fingers to convey meaning would be familiar to many readers, particularly given the global fame that accrued to the deaf-blind American Laura Bridgman following the publication of Charles Dickens's *American Notes* (1842), wherein he describes how Bridgman "often soliloquizes in the *finger language*" (93). Interestingly, the novel reaches a creative impasse in describing Peters's communication, often using the language of orality, seemingly unable to describe his manual alphabet on its own terms: Peters thinks "aloud upon his fingers" and at times "his very fingers seemed out of breath" (264, 301).

Peters's introduction also introduces the term "dirty alphabet," which the text has habitual recourse to. Because Peters uses his fingers to converse and because he is a working-class member of an industrial town, the produce of urban labor is visible in his manual communication. Secondly, his speech is labeled as an alphabet, rather than a language; nonetheless, some critics describe it as a "BSL [British Sign Language]-type sign language" (C. Ferguson 12). The use of "alphabet," however, alongside the novel's consistent references to Peters spelling, rather than signing, controverts this anachronistic attribution. Instead, Peters employs a system of fingerspelling, or dactylology, that carries with it particular connotations of literacy and temporality. Fingerspelling involves spelling out discrete letters of the alphabet to convey words, whereas sign language uses a combination of hand shape, movement, location, and facial expression to convey a word or phrase; furthermore, fingerspelling does not have the grammatical structures characteristic of most sign languages. Peters spells (and often "misspells") the words he wants to

convey, demanding a different kind of attention and engagement from his interlocutors.

Both the uncleanliness and alphabetic nature of Peters's speech are conveyed in his first words: he uses "two grimy fingers laid upon the dirty palm," but this "dirty" medium is able to penetrate through the "dirty" crime that has been committed (29). The words he spells are "not guilty" in reference to Richard Marwood's role in his uncle's murder. Peters is correct, though this is not the trope of penetrating insight being granted to a disabled character, most often depicted as the oracular prophecies of blind individuals. Rather, Peters's claim results from careful observation of Richard when he is confronted with the news that he is being arrested for murder. Peters's knowledge of human nature and criminal behavior allows him to discern that Richard's shock at this information is genuine, in effect exonerating Richard via his affect. As the earliest proponent of Richard's innocence, Peters's digital voice distinguishes itself from an otherwise homogeneous chorus of accusation: "Slopperton had but one voice—a voice loud in execration of the innocent prisoner" (42). He functions as an early and thoroughly competent investigator in the burgeoning genre of detective fiction where careful observation is used to unravel nefarious deeds, while the complexity and comprehensibility of his digital speech indicate a figure confident in his communicative aptitude, a departure from his theatrical predecessors in mute representation.

Peters's prowess is not immediately acknowledged, however: "Of very little account this scrub among the officials. His infirmity, they say, makes him scarcely worth his salt, though they admit that his industry is unfailing" (45). The rest of the novel operates to disprove the former claim, routinely demonstrating the advantageous nature of Peters's "infirmity," particularly for his profession, while validating his ceaseless work ethic. Peters's major advantage in the realm of detection is ascribed to his being "dumb, but not deaf," as the novel consistently reminds readers. This allows Peters to take advantage of the widespread Victorian assumption that the two go hand in hand (Hunt, *Manual* 319): when people ascertain that Peters is mute, they feel they can speak freely in his presence, and thus reveal personal and often incriminating information.

By bearing mute witness, so to speak, to those around him, Peters is more adept at surveillance than his average peer, while his silent mode of communication allows him to pass on messages with less risk of interception. Furthermore, he controverts the double connotation implied in the second part of the designation "deaf and dumb," with "dumb" suggesting the absence of both voice and intellect. Peters undercuts the "audist bias" that a lack of speech indicates a lack of intelligence with his impressive powers of perception and

deduction (Davis 118). Assumed to be deaf and stupid—two characteristics still prejudicially fused with mutism today—Peters strategically mobilizes these judgments to his occupational advantage. As critics have noted, Peters's intellect and mutism are not antithetical, but mutually constituting, as he flirts with the supercrip trope.[4]

Thus, we witness Peters "ris[e] in his profession":

> He has assisted at the discovery of two or three robberies, and has evinced on those occasions such a degree of tact, triumphing so completely over the difficulties he labours under from his infirmity, as to have won for himself a better place in the police force . . . and of course a better salary. But business has been dull lately, and Mr. Joseph Peters, who is ambitious, has found no proper field for his abilities as yet. "I should like an iron-safe case, a regular out-and-out burglary," he muses, "or a good forgery, say to the tune of a thousand or so. Or a bit of bigamy; that would be something new. But a jolly good poisoning case might make my fortune." (102)

Peters's ambitions eclipse the demands of his position. Despite the grating "overcoming" rhetoric deployed in the passage and common to descriptions of disabled achievement, Peters mobilizes his mutism as a kind of "communicative capital," using his bodily abilities to increase his professional position and financial status (Paterson 166). The silence and subtlety of his manual communication is consistently of use in toppling North, earning him the appellations the "silent detective" and the "dumb detective": his mutism distinguishes him from other police officers and serves as his primary asset, rendering disability a boon. In addition, his desire for more burglary, forgery, bigamy, and poisoning to whet his detecting appetite functions as a self-aware acknowledgment by Braddon of her audience's desires: desires that will be satiated by the novel, which has no shortage of burglary, forgery, bigamy, and poisoning.

Peters's introduction to a young woman named Kuppins at this stage in the narrative is distinctive because it explains her communicative aptitude in a manual alphabet. Peters has taken lodgings with Kuppins's domestic assistance, bringing with him a foundling baby named Slosh. This atypical familial unit has an auspicious beginning. Kuppins is filled with "delight at the idea of a dumb lodger": she had been acquainted with a "dumb boy" previously and "understood the dumb alphabet, and had conversed in it for hours" (47). Nearly all of Peters's associates understand fingerspelling, though no reason

4. Peters's "supposed disability gives him an extra level of ability" (Willis 411); his "physical impairment becomes an advantage to him" (Tomaiuolo 109); his muteness allows him to become "the ultimate . . . silent watcher of society" (Carnell 240).

for their knowledge is provided. The need to explain is done away with following Kuppins: Richard Marwood understands Peters even under emotional duress; Richard's friend, Augustus Darley, is "as great an adept as the dumb detective" in "the silent alphabet"; Darley's sister Bell easily follows Peters's "manual recital"; later, Peters communicates in the same way to a Liverpool police officer (209, 242). The novel presents a striking depiction of the universality of manual communication in which people understand Peters's fingerspelling with no effort or experience of it, even though it is never designated as a formal system. These moments suggest that Peters's "dirty alphabet" is not an idiosyncratic and individual mode of communication, but a relatively widespread form of fingerspelling. While his various interlocutors understand Peters's alphabet, few of them communicate in it: they follow its letters and respond vocally, blending systems of meaning-making.

This common comprehension of fingerspelling is "downright unconvincing" to some in a way that minimizes the very real challenges faced by nonvocal communicators in an orally oriented society (C. Ferguson 12). However, at the same time, sensation fiction's disinterest in probability allows for a fantastical elision of oralist mandates against manual articulation. There was widespread suspicion and antipathy to digital modes of communication from speaking populations in the nineteenth century; notably, deaf educator Alexander Graham Bell was fixated on "imparting the power of articulate speech to deaf children" and wanted to forbid the use of manual alphabets and languages as pedagogical tools for deaf students, perpetuating a deep linguistic violence (Bell ix; Davis 81).[5] Thus, the nineteenth century's "pre-eminent world-imperial language" was not just English, but orally and textually articulated English, rather than a manual variation (Anderson 18). Braddon's novel, by contrast, portrays a society where Peters's fingerspelling is something that many people can implicitly understand.

Many, but not all. The novel includes scenes in which Peters's language is opaque to or withheld from others, including when Darley and Peters interrogate a stranger: "'My friend,' said Mr. Darley, introducing Mr. Peters by a wave of his hand, 'is a foreigner, and hasn't got hold of our language yet; he finds it slippery, and hard to catch'" (350). Darley equates mutism with foreignness to avoid difficulties with a stranger who presumably would be incapable of understanding Peters's fingerspelling, which might as well be a foreign language. Though Darley is lying in characterizing Peters as a foreigner, the label correctly signals his linguistic otherness. Peters's inability is conveyed using haptic verbs like "hold" and "catch," actions less attributed to

5. For more on oralist violence in the period, see Baynton, *Forbidden*; Esmail.

the tongue instrumental in orality and more to the hands that are the medium of his fingerspelling. Peters's agile hands and fingers are refused participation in this dialogue, though, in favor of a default to oral communication.

At the same time, the passage undercuts these implications by suggesting the near universality of digital meaning-making. Darley introduces Peters "by a wave of his hand," demonstrating the ubiquity of gestural communication with his assumption that the stranger will understand the wave's import. This is not to suggest that gestures are equivalent to fingerspelling any more than a yelp or groan constitutes a spoken alphabet, but it demonstrates the basic tenet of Peters's alphabet that digital configurations are every bit as effective at conveying meaning as articulate sounds. However, when Peters is examined in North's climatic trial, he testifies "by an interpreter," as Braddon mobilizes a common tactic of stage melodrama (393). For a large audience and in an institutional setting, Peters's otherwise comprehensible communication requires translation.

Peters himself acknowledges the difficulty of his initial interactions with new people. Relating his intercourse with a young sailor, he explains "Not bein' so fortunate as to have a voice, you know, it comes awkward with strangers, and I was rather put to it to get on with the young man. And didn't he sing out loud when he came to understand I was dumb; he couldn't have spoke in a higher key if I'd been a forriner" (247). Here, Peters articulates the disadvantages of mutism in the arena of the "modern stranger sociality" that characterized nineteenth-century England: the increasing density and anonymity of Victorian sociality posed unique challenges for those with communication disabilities (McWeeny 29). This time, he is not presented as a foreigner by a friend, but his muteness is interpreted as a marker of otherness once his interlocutor becomes aware of it. Whether pretending to be a foreigner or construed as such, Peters's social position in modern urban settings where conversing with strange people is a quotidian occurrence aligns his disability with cultural and geographic difference. In so doing, it modulates the dynamics of these interactions: Peters is kept out of communication by Darley and the young sailor raises his voice due to his uncertainty about how to communicate with Peters.

A final example shows Peters's language confounding not a stranger nor a large crowd, but an ally in the campaign against North. The Left-Handed Smasher, a boxer and associate of Richard's, declares his frustration with trying to communicate with Peters:

> "Oh!" muttered the Smasher, "blow them fingers of his. I can't understand 'em—there!" The left-handed Hercules knew that this was to attack the

> detective on his tenderest point. "Blest if I ever knows his p's from his b's, or his w's from his x's, let alone his vowels, and them would puzzle a conjuror."
>
> Mr. Peters glanced at the prize-fighter more in sorrow than in anger, and [took] out a greasy little pocket-book, and a greasier little pencil. (366)

The Smasher presents the novel's sole instance of Peters talking to a known associate who cannot follow his meaning. There are various reasons for this miscommunication: the Smasher is upset, frustrated at the inertia of the efforts to apprehend North, and is depicted as one of the least educated members of the cast. Regardless of the narrative logic behind it, the Smasher's lack of understanding serves many purposes. It repeats the novel's assertion that Peters uses fingerspelling, rather than sign language, by lodging a complaint at his indistinguishable letters, his atomized language. It also features the only moment in the novel that implies Peters's emotional vulnerability regarding his mode of communication and the toll of inhabiting an oralist society: the narrator calls misrecognition of his digital speech Peters's "tenderest point" and he responds with "sorrow" at the outburst. Peters is forced into written communication, using (characteristically dirty) pencil and notebook to convey his message. The moment punctures the otherwise utopic communicative implications of Peters's interactions: textual English is the only substitute for his lack of spoken English in this case and there is an affective cost to the times when Peters needs "recourse to the pencil" (46).

Ultimately, though, the Smasher qualifies his critique and acknowledges Peters's impressive intellect, declaring "that man's got head enough to be prime minister, and carry the House along with every twist of his fingers," only adding that he "must make his p's and b's a little plainer afore he'll get a bill through" (368). Though still quibbling about Peters's representation of particular letters, the Smasher imagines a fantastic continuation of Peters's upward mobility, moving from the "scrub" of a local police force to a man of sizable wealth and respect to the apex of political power in the world's most powerful nation. Though the novel does not actualize this vision of Peters's fingers dictating British affairs, it asserts his qualification for such a position; in so doing, it presents a sharp departure from the pitiful mute stage characters from which Braddon is drawing.

Peters's class mobility, though not as dramatic as North's, is more stable. After climbing the ranks of the police force, the Marwoods bestow a living allowance on him thanks to his efforts to exonerate Richard, and he ends the novel independently wealthy. The conclusion of his time with the police force entails a hygienic shift as well, rendering "the digital alphabet . . . a great deal cleaner" than before (242). Despite his improving financial fortunes and

personal hygiene, Peters retains what Braddon depicts as a Cockney mute dialect: she uses atypical spelling and other typographical strategies in depicting Peters's speech as a shorthand for his durable inhabitation of the working class. He never loses his distinct articulation, a "style of orthography [that] takes the final *g* off some words to clap it on to others, as his taste dictates," along with other variations (242). Peters thus combines dialect and disability—both threats to a standardized national utterance for the period's elocutionists—"misspelling" words in Braddon's textual transcriptions of his dactylology. Braddon's depiction importantly acknowledges the heterogeneity of manual communication, showing how it is as individual and diverse as oral communication. Speaking with his own Cockney mute idiolect, Peters asserts "I can't say as I ever paid much attention to grammar myself" (244–45). Though both the form and content of his speech are devalued iterations of English, they are still English: Peters's static anglophone eccentricity is superior to North's polyglot evolution in the novel's vocal economy.

Those in Peters's immediate domestic sphere—his eventual wife Kuppins and his foundling son Slosh—share his low-class pronunciation. Early on, Peters tells Kuppins "that he shall 'ederkate,'—he is some time deciding on the conflicting merits of a *c* or a *k* for this word—he shall 'ederkate' the foundling, and bring him up to his own business." When Kuppins asks what business he means, Peters announces "'Detecktive' . . . embellishing the word with an extraneous *k*" to which Kuppins replies, "'Shouldn't I like to be a perliceman'" (49). Neither Peters nor Kuppins articulates these synonyms for "police" in a standard way, united in their nonnormative linguistic content as they differ in mode of communication, via hand and voice. They warp their words in a way that suggests Peters's atypical inhabitation of the police vocation. By coupling mutism with detection, Peters embodies the detecktive—a different type of character and employment, thereby allowing him to sidestep some of the fraught politics of idolizing the police. Critiques of police discrimination against marginalized populations are as old as the police: formal detectives were roughly two decades old at the time of Braddon's writing and Victorian "working-class communities" already "felt themselves to be the permanent object of suspicious scrutiny by a vigilant and unsympathetic police force" (Walvin 72). As a member of the working class himself, Peters instead devotes his detection prowess to ending the crimes of one immensely rich pseudoaristocrat.

Critics including D. A. Miller have compared the ideological force of novels to the carceral and punitive powers of the police, both working to "repai[r] . . . normality," a defining characteristic of the detective genre as the criminal is purged from the narrative fabric by the conclusion (3). While both *The*

Trail of the Serpent and Peters work to "file" delinquent lives, Peters's disability remains a norm that is never repaired: he resists the "normalizing coda of endings" and remains a Cockney mute from beginning to end (Miller 21; Davis 49). Peters is both a police officer who dismantles North's criminal transgressions around the flow of wealth, marital integrity, and self-identity and a disabled figure who possessed "'undesirable' traits" according to nineteenth-century eugenicists who frequently grouped the blind, deaf, mute, and otherwise disabled with the poor, criminal, sexually "deviant," and racially othered as requiring control and reduction (Davis 35; Kafer 30). He at once forces criminal deviations back into the status quo while remaining equated with social deviation himself via persistent disability. As the mute detecktive, then, Peters transgresses the "perceptual grid in which a division between the normal and the deviant" is maintained in nineteenth-century novels (Miller 18). Like Dickens's Sloppy, Peters can "do the Police in different voices" (*Our Mutual Friend* 198): he substitutes digital communication for the interpolating force of a police officer's oral utterances, and uses it to punish one wealthy and powerful figure, rather than other socially marginalized individuals.

Though Peters and Kuppins never have biological children, assuaging the anxieties that constellate around the reproduction of disabled figures, they do coparent foundling Slosh. As an incredibly noisy baby, Peters muses that Slosh's "lungs might be a fortune to me. . . . I don't look upon that hinfant as a hinfant. I looks upon him as a voice" (102). Displaying the telltale Cockney spurious aspirate, Peters posits Slosh as a potential prosthetic voice for himself, a source of wealth and verbal articulation he can harness. Slosh fulfills his adoptive father's vocational wishes, becoming a child-detective and assisting Peters's efforts to incriminate North; in a sense, he also becomes Peters's voice. Slosh is fixated on the destruction of crime, so much so he "bellow[s] for three mortal hours because [North] committed suicide, and disappointed the boy of seein' him hung" (404). Slosh's prolonged oral outburst allows him to express audibly Peters's frustration at North, in a sense, dodging justice. Peters was the primary agent in North's apprehension: unable to bellow out his own frustration, the prosthetic voice of his son does so instead. What this all means—the refusal of procreation to Peters, his use of his adopted son's voice—is that muteness is not propagated in the text but circumscribed to one character. Nor does the figure of the dumb detecktive become a widespread generic entity: "Peters is a rare creation. Even nowadays, few novels feature detectives with physical disabilities" (Willis 411). The mute detecktive is rendered singular both in the local context of the novel and in the broader context of detective fiction.

Though Peters is not followed by a long line of mute investigators, his insistence that vocal disability and silence aid in detection is embraced by his more famous successors. Voice and print provide the two essential clues that Sherlock Holmes uses to solve "A Case of Identity" (1891). Arthur Conan Doyle's story finds Mary Sutherland lamenting the disappearance of her fiancé, Hosmer Angel. Faced with an unsympathetic stepfather, James Windibanks, who tells her to forget Angel, Sutherland appeals to the famous detective for help. Sutherland's description of her missing suitor goes into detail regarding his speech: "Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and swollen glands when he was young . . . and it left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating, whispering fashion of speech" (177). Armed with the history of Angel's vocal disability as well as typewritten letters from both fiancé and stepfather, Holmes rapidly clears up Sutherland's mystery. Angel could not vanish because he never existed. Rather, Angel was Windibanks in disguise, seducing a promise of eternal devotion out of his stepdaughter to prevent her from marrying, taking her living allowance with her, and diminishing Windibanks's household income.

Using his characteristic inferential leaps obtained from minutiae, Holmes deduces that Sutherland's description of Angel is suspicious: "the curious voice" hinted "at a disguise" (184). Angel's vocal eccentricity—his "slight infirmity of speech"—signals his ontological falsity to Holmes, associating dysfluency with the performative, the unreal (180). The detective's hypothesis that Windibanks strategically "sunk [his] clear voice into an insinuating whisper" to assume the identity of Angel is confirmed by a comparison of typewritten letters from the two men: both share "characteristic defects . . . there is some little slurring over of the 'e'" (183, 184). Evidently, both men used the same typewriter, confirming that they are one and the same. Holmes's description of the typewriter's apparent "defects" uses the language of dysfluency, the typed missives slurring through a particular letter. The description of a fake vocal dysfluency, the contrived difference between the speech of Windibanks and Angel, and the description of a real textual dysfluency, the subtle similarity between the letters of Windibanks and Angel, combine to prove the former's guilt.

"A Case of Identity" insists that identity is determined by communication, both oral and textual, in which it is not what we say, but how we say it that reveals our true selves. Identity is doubly a matter of communication in the sense that it is partially dependent on one's interlocutor: an assumed voice convinces Sutherland of the existence of Angel, whereas a typographic imperfection makes the same personage evaporate for Holmes. Confronted with

his misdeeds, a flustered Windibanks becomes dysfluent after all: "'It—it's not actionable,' he stammered" (182). Deploying both the situational attribution of dysfluency as well as its metaphorical usage, Doyle makes speech disorder key to the crime and resolution of his detective story.

Doyle was not alone in doing so: Richard Marsh's fictional detective Judith Lee, born in the interstitial years between Holmes's ostensible demise and eventual resuscitation in print, was indebted to her vocation as a teacher of "the deaf and dumb" for her prowess in solving crime. Though not dysfluent herself, Lee's vocational aptitude in lipreading gives her access to utterances she would otherwise not be privy to, the essential ingredient in her own unique brand of detection. Underlying the connection between dysfluency and detection in both Doyle and Marsh is the physiology of the voice—the way someone whispers, the way the lips move—as a tool for mendacity and perpetuating crime as well as for identification and mitigating crime.

Braddon's representation of dysfluency in the sensation novel occupies a midpoint between the stage melodramas she adapted in her text and the fin-de-siècle serialized shorts of Doyle and Marsh that inherited her blend of dysfluent detection. For Holmes, Lee, and Peters vocal description and observation are evidentiary. Misconceptions about Peters's mutism make him an effective spy, as does Lee's lipreading: both are indebted to their relationship to vocal disability to break from the necessity of having a dialogue with another to obtain information. Instead, they can observe oral speech without participating in it. Similarly, Holmes solves "A Case of Identity" in part because a dysfluent voice is described to him and seems dubious, not because he has a conversation with the voice in question; Holmes's silent observation is only replaced with explanatory loquacity when prompted by Watson. All three characters insist that the literary figure of the detective does not need to speak—only listen and observe. Both Doyle's and Marsh's popular characters depict orality as inessential for solving crime, an idea that has its literalized genesis in the critically neglected figure of Peters. The character type of the mute detective does not survive beyond Braddon's novel, but the link between mutism and detective fiction it inaugurates is transmuted in her successors into the general notion that oral speech is an unnecessary part of the detective's skill set; however, speech remains a necessary element of transforming the crime and its resolution into narrative. This partial though incomplete rejection of vocalization is at the core of Braddon's novel.

Mute, but not deaf, unintelligent, or dependent; a descendant of the theater's mute roles, but with the novelistic affordance of linguistic complexity; a policeman, but a champion of the working class, the demographic he was written for; a disabled character, but one who remains "uncured": Peters fails

to affirm an array of social, generic, and ableist assumptions about mutism. As Peters's mutism is presented throughout the novel as a boon to his profession and those in his social sphere, it sidesteps the curative logic prominent in nineteenth-century fiction. Instead, his mode of communication is aligned with linguistic foreignness, while he remains thoroughly local, literally marked by the residue of the English cities he moves within. This combination of vocal difference and intense domesticity allows him to undermine North's eminently fluent and normative, though threateningly fluid and mobile, linguistic characterization. This dynamic exposes the complexity of nineteenth-century vocal hierarchies, influenced by intersectional identities and geographic location. Alexander Melville Bell would scorn North's adoption of French and otherwise "foreign" linguistic influences as making him a disloyal anglophone, while his son Alexander Graham Bell would attempt to force Peters to adopt oral communication over fingerspelling. Thus, Braddon makes a hero and a villain out of vocally deviant figures, thereby dislodging the "norm" of standard speech demanded by speech correctionists as both description (showing the small proportion of the population that spoke with this kind of voice) and prescription (demonstrating how unsustainable any equivalence between vocal identity and moral orientation proves to be). In short, the majority of people do not have "standard" modes of communication, nor should they.

While Braddon transformed a stock stage character in her novel, thereby affixing mutism to connotations of heroism rather than pathetic dependency, vocal disability remained a vibrant component of nineteenth-century theatrical culture. Though the mute role's prominence continued to decline, other forms of dysfluency literally took center stage. As Braddon and her fellow sensation novelists dominated the literary marketplace, the foppish aristocratic figure of Lord Dundreary, the subject of the following chapter, came to dominate the anglophone stage—in large part due to his performative stammer and lisp.

CHAPTER 4

Our American Cousin, Our Dysfluent Nation

Celebrity Speech Disorder on the Transatlantic Stage

One of Queen Victoria's main comforts following an assassination attempt—and there were several both before and after John Francis's, as discussed in this book's opening pages—was to go to the theater. These occasions gave her an opportunity to witness the outrage and support of her subjects in the wake of an attempt on her life. Rather than serving as a site of reassurance, the theater provided conditions conducive to an assassination across the Atlantic decades later: the unsuccessful stage carpenter and assassin John Francis was followed by the successful stage actor and assassin John Wilkes Booth who shot American president Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865. Two weeks later, Queen Victoria wrote to the president's widow, Mary Todd Lincoln, to commiserate on their shared loss of a husband, stating that she "cannot remain silent when so terrible a calamity" has taken place (Victoria 266).

The setting of Lincoln's assassination was similarly averse to silence. The president was attending a staging of Tom Taylor's hit comedy *Our American Cousin* (1858) at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC, when he was shot, the noise blending in with the boisterous laughter of other playgoers and the lively performances of the actors. Once again, a stammer was embroiled in an attempt on a national leader's life as one actor was portraying the character of Lord Dundreary, a silly English aristocrat with an exaggerated dysfluency: Dundreary's affected lisping and stammering occupied the same sonic space as the fatal gunshot. This coincidence is more than an incidental footnote

in nineteenth-century history; rather, it points our attention to the key role of debates over vocal disability in the period's popular culture and national imaginaries.

Though an unprecedented transatlantic success in the nineteenth century, *Our American Cousin* is almost exclusively remembered today as the backdrop of Lincoln's mortal injury. When it is discussed more substantively, it is seen as staging a humorous conflict between American and British customs, particularly through contrasting colloquialisms and other facets of national speech. This is an apt characterization of Taylor's original playscript, though it fails to describe the actual voices Victorian audiences flocked to hear for decades. The play became a hit thanks to the dysfluent Lord Dundreary, primarily as performed by Edward Askew Sothern from 1858 to 1881, who stole the spotlight and—contrary to the logic of speech correction—became more dysfluent as he amassed more fame. Dundreary's role gradually eclipsed all other parts: his dysfluent articulations aimed to amuse the audience and eventually constituted the majority of the play.

A combination of critical reflexes conspire to disguise this text's importance to both nineteenth-century popular entertainment and the representation of vocal disability: a general devaluation of Victorian theatrical culture in preference to print literature; a tendency, when theater is discussed, to turn to a few select and "high-cultural" playwrights; and a reading practice that prioritizes the author and the textual artifact of a play, rather than its key performers and their enactments, despite how instrumental the latter elements were to a play's longevity. The magnetizing force of a piece like *Our American Cousin* is only apprehensible in its oral performance by actors like Sothern; its lack of dynamism on the page partially accounts for its scholarly neglect. As a remedy, my analysis focuses on the play's staging and reception to illuminate an obfuscated story of dysfluent celebrity that unfolds in newspaper reviews, magazine parodies, fan accounts, and play mimeographs. In other words, examining theatrical dysfluency requires different methodologies that yield different cultural histories. In the case of *Our American Cousin,* attention to a noncanonical play and an attempt to reconstruct its vocal performance counters a knee-jerk assertion that dialectal differences—speech patterns tied to nationality or region—are the most significant form of anglophone variation in nineteenth-century culture. Showing that dysfluency had a similarly large cultural impact as dialect is one aim of this chapter and the book as a whole.

This reorientation asks that we pay equal attention to what a stage character says and to how they say it, with the printed dialogue of a playscript serving as only a piece of the puzzle. The role of the eponymous American cousin peppered the play with "Yankee" slang: this we can understand by reading

Taylor's script. Dundreary's intense dysfluency, however, can only be appreciated by turning to the media coverage, personal recollections, and numerous imitations of Sothern's performance. This material shows the play's eventual reliance on dysfluency, rather than dialect.

The story of Dundreary also raises the question of the differences between having a dysfluency and depicting one. The theater yokes a "real" person and a "fake" persona in one actor, rendering it especially rich terrain for crystallizing the differences between lived and dramatized dysfluency. By situating the fluent Sothern's performance of the dysfluent Dundreary within a larger theatrical culture that imposed vocal norms on its actors, I elucidate the perpendicular valuations of staged and lived dysfluency in which a stammering character is beloved, but a stammering actor is incompetent. The stammering lead of the play highlights the mismatch between the daily inhabitation and the fictional representation of dysfluency, proffering the theater as a space of exploitation and possibility, cruelly instrumentalizing a stammer for humor, while also positioning it as a constitutive element of stardom and a form of articulation to emulate. Dundreary's popular-entertainment value works to multiply the performance of dysfluency—both on and off the stage, in performers and playgoers alike—while the theatrical culture that created him remains critical of innate dysfluency. I use writing by the elocutionist Alexander Melville Bell to clarify the relationship between dysfluent speech and literary trends before crafting an account of Dundreary's dysfluent rise in the popular consciousness and eventual fall following Sothern's death.

Dialect, Dysfluency, and National Vocalization

To disaggregate dysfluency from dialect, it is first instructive to consider their discursive interconnections in the nineteenth century. Both forms of speech came under intensified scrutiny given the period's growing interest in vocal alteration. The eminent elocutionist Alexander Melville Bell grouped together disparate forms of nonnormative vocalization as targets for correction, hoping to facilitate a "uniformity to . . . national utterance" by providing "Exercises, in the practice of which the student will find the certain means of his improvement, whether in Distinctness of Articulation, the Anglicising of Provincial Characteristics, or the Removing of Individual Faults of Utterance" (*New* 13, 78). Both nonstandard regional pronunciations and departures from articulatory norms such as stammering must be excised to conform to Bell's ideal of English national pronunciation. Both the dialect and dysfluency that populate *Our American Cousin* and society at large, instances of what Michel de

Certeau calls the "noises of otherness," are to be purged (30). As is often the case, differences deemed nonstandard are simultaneously coded as substandard and as perilous to national unity.

These intimacies between vocalization and nationality are not distinctive to the nineteenth century. Katie Trumpener, for one, explores the "voice-centered model[s]" of national culture in England and its colonies in the eighteenth century under her fitting titular rubric of *Bardic Nationalism* (33). Nonetheless, the relationship between standard vocalization and national belonging was impacted by the growth and consolidation of British print culture and colonial dominion that took place as Victoria continued to survive subsequent assassination attempts. Rising literacy rates and attendant expansions in print culture have long been acknowledged as essential to the consolidation of nationalism, particularly via newspapers and novels, which foster national conceptualizations by circulating vernacular print-languages, resulting in a "standardized language-of-state" (Anderson 56). These same developments in textual production and consumption also play a crucial role in modern Western imperialism. The violent exportation of the English language orally and textually beyond the nation resulted in anxious efforts at linguistic codification as well as acknowledgments of the malleability of the increasingly global tongue. The coincidence of the rising geographic scale of the British Empire and the shift in the dominant form of British popular culture toward print instigate a crisis of English vocality that positions dialect and dysfluency, the major categories of "Defective or Uncouth Articulation" targeted by Bell and others, as the chief indicators of an enervated English language (*New* 130).

The place of dysfluency in the matrix of voice, print, nation, and empire was extensively considered by the period's prominent writers. The same thinkers dedicated to alleviating speech disorders also wrote poetry and fiction, whereas some of the century's most prolific literary authors wrote at length about the importance of vocal standards that excluded dysfluency. Elocutionist Bell published *The Tongue, A Poem* (1846), detailing how the rise of the novel as a genre coupled with an increasingly global consciousness precipitated a decline in national utterance. Meanwhile, novelists Charles Kingsley and Henry James, both stammerers, produced pieces such as the former's "The Irrationale of Speech" (1859) and the latter's "The Question of Our Speech" (1905) that link appropriate national citizenship to particular modes of vocal articulation. All three make use of the discourse of nation and empire to advance their programs of vocal purity. They also show how elocutionists and novelists alike were concerned about the deleterious effects of print on speech. These texts punctuate the mid- to late nineteenth century, demonstrating the durability of these concerns during and after Victoria's reign.

Notably, Bell, Kingsley, and James are all white male literati particularly invested in vocal policing. This commonality is indebted to more than generalized societal power dynamics: it is shaped by the particularities of Victorian writing on dysfluencies such as stammering, which was described as male and white. Nineteenth-century texts note the "comparative infrequency of female stammerers," likely below 5 percent (Hunt, *Treatise* 78). Furthermore, Victorian accounts assert that stammering is a disease of Western modernity, widespread in white middle-class men and all but absent in racialized populations, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.[1] According to a generation of leading speech correctionists, stammering was a sort of pre-Freudian neurosis and another piece of the proverbial white man's burden. It disproportionately impacted those who believed themselves to be the most intelligent and civilized segment of the world and who, due to this ostensible superiority, were faced with the daunting concerns of business and politics and the requisite fluency these realms demanded. Stammering was born of these specialized pressures. Thus, women, children, and colonized and racialized others were seen as more or less immune to the speech disorder. *Our American Cousin*'s Lord Dundreary presents a fictive parallel to this logic, adhering stammering speech to a white British male aristocrat.

Stammering's alignment with white masculinity places it in a unique position: though it needs to be purged to maintain a standard of national utterance, it is rooted in the heart of the empire itself, rarely heard in its peripheries except via the tongues of imperial agents. Therefore, while the multiplication of Englishes attendant to colonization represented an external threat to the linguistic homogeneity writers like Bell longed for, the stammering "victims" of civilization were thought to be internal. These distinctions operated along racial and ethnic lines, rather than linguistic ones. Correctionists such as James Hunt did not claim stammering as the sole purview of English, going as far as to list "synonyms expressive of impediments of speech" in other European languages that were likewise embroiled in colonial projects (*Stammering* [1861] 9–10).

Though not unique to English, concerns over nonstandard articulation cut across the borders and oceans of the anglophone world. Individual identity and geographic location altered the form that problematic deviations of utterance were thought to take, whether "the howl and whine of rustic dialect" or "the discords of corrupted speech" (8.124–25). These phrases I take from Bell's poem, to which I turn to demonstrate how shifts in popular culture and imperial growth were perceived as having a harmful impact on national utterance.

1. See Hunt 25; Abbotts 10; Hoegaerts, "Victims."

The title of the poem, *The Tongue,* evokes the dual meaning of the word as both a language and an organ of speech, each definition key to national identity for Bell. His work aims to alter the performance of the physical organ (tongue) in pursuit of effecting changes in the articulation of the English language (tongue). *The Tongue* is designated as "A Poem, in Two Parts by Alexander Bell, Professor of Elocution," bringing the poet and the elocutionist together in one identity. As the nineteenth-century consolidation of speech correction changed the institutional and epistemological place of the voice as something also belonging to science and medicine, Bell's title page asserts that these changes have not divorced the voice from art. In short, the rise of the speech correctionist need not mean the fall of the poet.

Bell's poem grapples with the changing artistic tides in England writ large: "Delivery refin'd now wanes apace: / Not thus it pin'd when our theatric taste / Maintain'd the drama as the lauded chief / Of merry England's national delights" (8.126–29). In other words, Bell declares that "the art of graceful speech has found no place" since the theater was displaced as the dominant form of cultural entertainment in England (7.108). According to Bell, the performative space of the stage—echoing with the socially improving tones of actors trained in vocal art—has been supplanted by a silent textuality:

> We dwell enraptur'd on the polish'd page,
> And form a dreamy vision of its power:
> But fault catch from the poor signs of thought,
> Aught more than a faint spark of those bright fires
> Which blaz'd in sounds of living eloquence. (6.85–89)

He laments that the "living eloquence" of orators and actors has succumbed to the "lifeless page" of the "astounding press" (18.309, 2.13).

The poem's 1846 publication date is notable in this regard: the theatrical "'decline thesis'" postulated by Bell was common during the midcentury wherein "the idea of the theater's disappearance," while obviously hyperbolic, "expresses a crucial truth about the period's economies of literary value" (Kurnick 7–8). As Bell suggests, while the theater lost cultural prestige, other forms gained. *The Tongue* was published on the very cusp of the "decisive" twenty months that, for Raymond Williams, saw the publication of several novels comprising "a new and major *generation*" in the novel, one that cemented it as the "major form in English literature" (9). Bell, then, is diagnosing what he construes as a regrettable, genre-fueled deterioration of speech: a move from the performative public space of the theater to a novelistic print culture as causative factor in a decline in vocal standards. The novel, in many senses,

diversified representations of speech: the Yorkshire dialect of Emily Brontë's Joseph and the stammer of Charles Dickens's Toots, to take two instances, sprang into fictive existence with a durability unobtainable in theatrical representation during Williams's twenty months.

The faded dominion of the stage is paralleled to Britain's military might by Bell: "Britain's eloquence sway'd every heart, / As her bold navy triumph'd o'er the waves. / The acted drama, cherished, inspir'd / A polish'd utt'rance of the pointed phrase" (9.140–43). He triangulates British stagecraft, imperial dominion, and good speech. Along with decrying the decline of the British stage, however, Bell posits the increased globality of Britain as another cause of declining national speech as people "neglect . . . native, home-bred arts / And lavish patronage of foreign airs / Prefer exotics to our island plants; / The puling song to Britain's manly sense" (11.176–79). Print and exotics, the novel and empire, are at the root of the increase in "vulgar accents, utter'd with grimace, / And mumbling, stutt'ring, and ill-formèd sounds" that, for Bell, threaten Britain's intertwined masculinity and language (20.346–47). Among this list, stuttering is the "Afflictive most of all vocal ills," the clearest sign that Britain's "native eloquence" now "slumbers in its letter'd folds" (57.284, 67.458).

Throughout, Bell insists that "voice articulate" requires education (45.77); therefore, his solution for Britain's oral peril is universal vocal education, a redirection away from the vocally debilitating forces of print literature and foreign influence. The institution of vocal education for all will allow for more than the recuperation of a standardized national utterance: it will help build the "Linguistic Temple of Human Unity" Bell longs for (*Visible Speech* 21). Put differently, Bell did not want an end to the imperial project, but rather its alignment with his desire to homogenize human utterance rather than diversify it—to guide more people away from the deviances of dialect and dysfluency. Bell's ideas resounded internationally, not only because of the popularity of his writings across the Atlantic, but also because his son, Alexander Graham Bell, moved the family business of elocution to North America later in the nineteenth century.

Unacknowledged by Bell is the fact that the "standard" fluent pronunciation of English is one dialect among countless, the "one that happened to be spoken by groups of people responsible for compiling dictionaries and assembling grammar manuals" (Ahmad 17). Writers like Bell actively rendered "London pronunciation . . . the prerogative of a new breed of specialists" who decided on correct pronunciations and then sought to disseminate them (Fisher 72). Despite Bell's critique of print culture, the coincidence of print technology in England with generations of popular vernacular writers

functioned to promote the "lingo" of London to a germinal type of standard, or received, English (Ahmad 18).[2] Not only did writers like Bell worry about variations of English in Britain, but they were also forced to contend with the fact that as Victoria's empire expanded so did the variations of "the Queen's tongue": the imperial desire to spread English had the inevitable consequence of diversifying it as the "empire dispersed mutating Englishes" to its colonies (Ahmad 19). Thus, the originally "local dialect" was exported across the globe by British colonial projects that transformed the language in return. Dohra Ahmad elucidates these competing impulses that characterized the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Bell and his peers "poured their energy into regularizing the fluid and hybrid English language" as a range of variant Englishes refuted this standardization in speech and print (20).

Attention to popular nineteenth-century texts such as *Our American Cousin* further illuminates the vexed place of dialect and dysfluent variations of speech in relation to the vocal violences of British imperialism. Taking a cue from Bell's interest in the supposed cultural supplanting of theater by print, I examine the relationship between atypical utterances and geographic imaginaries on the Victorian stage. *Our American Cousin* is a play that resists a corrective approach to deviant voices as it explores issues of speech, literature, and "foreign" influence.

This is made particularly apparent in the lisping and stammering aristocrat Lord Dundreary. Dundreary was one of the most popular theatrical characters of the nineteenth century, chiefly depicted by E. A. Sothern who performed the role hundreds of times on both sides of the Atlantic, creating an international stage sensation. Crucial to Dundreary's characterization was his dysfluent speech that enhanced his charm and comedic value to audiences. Dundreary was originally a small role in a comedy largely focused on the divergences between British and American linguistic culture, with many punch lines deriving from differences in speech patterns. However, Sothern expanded his role until Dundreary's dysfluent speech drowned out all other voices. While many accounts of nineteenth-century vocal discourse fixate on differences of dialect—of regional and national variation—a reorientation to a spectrum of fluency reveals speech disorder's imbrication with popular entertainment and national belonging.

The play's cultural ubiquity denies Bell's notion of a vanished theatrical medium, though the voices that comprise it grate against the vocal standards he advocates for. The theater did not disappear, but midcentury hits such as *Our American Cousin* spread the performance of dysfluency, rather than

2. For more on Received Pronunciation, see Agha.

curbing it. The domination of the midcentury stage by a dysfluent voice, then, affirms Bell's anxiety that the theater, while still popular, no longer models a fluent vocal standard for its attendees. I examine Dundreary less to determine whether he fulfills the very real need for positive or accurate representations of vocal disability, nearly a negative fait accompli given his generic inhabitation of stage comedy, and more to see what information he communicates about the period's vocal culture. First, he embodies how dysfluency was used to emphasize the precarity of a homogeneous English language during a changing theatrical culture, expanding print sphere, and increasingly global empire. Secondly, Dundreary shows that dysfluent depiction was not marginal but central to midcentury popular culture, accruing immense fame and attention. This fact is dependent on his appearance in a stage melodrama, demonstrating how melodramatic forms resounded with dysfluent voices, even rendering them conventional, as discussed in chapter 3. Lastly, Dundreary directs our attention to the evaluative schism between the amusing role of a dysfluent persona and the stigmatized reality of a dysfluent person in the period. Akin to contemporaneous blackface minstrelsy performers' vocalized caricatures of racial difference, Sothern's role exemplifies the inverse valuation of acted dysfluency when compared to actual dysfluency, and invites examination of vocal hierarchies of both ability and race.

Sockdologizing to Stammering: Dundreary's Dysfluent Takeover

John Wilkes Booth, actor turned assassin, was familiar enough with *Our American Cousin* to plan to pull the trigger on President Lincoln at a moment likely to result in loud laughter from the audience, thereby obscuring the noise of the gunshot and cannily navigating the theatrical soundscape. The line Booth chose, famously the last words Lincoln heard, was "you sockdologizing old man-trap" (T. S. Good 153). It was uttered by the titular American cousin, Asa Trenchard, to disparage the scheming British matriarch Mrs. Mountchessington after she is foiled in her attempt to get Asa's fortune at her daughter's disposal.

Much of the original play revolves around Yankee Asa's comical interactions with snobbish British relations as he journeys to London to collect an inheritance that has devolved on him. How to define the word "sockdologizing" remains a controversial point, but it is clear that the raucous laughter Booth correctly anticipated is in part because it was "an 'American' word put in the mouth of an American type, the hearty backwoodsman" whose

incongruous eruption into the domestic space of an English country manor is meant to amuse—the word is "fantastic, improper, and extravagant" (Bailey, "American English" 456). Tom Taylor, the playwright, tended to "flavor . . . the speech of his characters with distinctive diction" and "stage dialects," also giving the minor character Lord Dundreary a slight lisp; in so doing, Taylor ridiculed British and American English simultaneously, seeking laughs at both the affected "febrile fop with a lisp" Dundreary and Asa's rustic colloquialisms (457). While mocking both, he dramatized a "rivalry" between the vain Dundreary and the "moribund" British aristocracy he stands for and the youthful Trenchard and the lively new American society he embodies (458).

Richard W. Bailey's account, from which I am drawing, concludes that the play uses linguistic difference to assert that Asa's "Americanisms qualify him to father the new generation that will revitalize England and English" ("American English" 458). This is a fair gloss of the original playscript. However, attention to the multidecade, transatlantic success of the play reveals a very different story. The eventual star, the winner, of *Our American Cousin* is Lord Dundreary, specifically as performed by E. A. Sothern, who expanded both the character's role and the extent of his dysfluency until, by 1875, one writer declared "*Lord Dundreary* is no doubt better known in England and America than any other character on the stage or in fiction" (Hutton 46). Rather than Asa's revitalizing Americanisms, the thousands that attended the play across decades and oceans primarily listened to the lisping and stammering of Sothern's Dundreary. Attention to the stage history of the play and its reception illuminate this in a way that a close reading of a now silent playscript does not.

Despite the play's association with a violent national event, it remained popular; indeed, it "enjoyed a longer production record than virtually any other play of the nineteenth century" (Lea 2). Though it was penned in the early 1850s, it premiered in October 1858 at Laura Keene's Theatre in New York City. Tom Taylor's melodramatic comedy script tells the story of the honorable but socially discordant Asa Trenchard's arrival in England to claim the family estate and his comical interactions with his newly discovered aristocratic relations and their servants. Within three acts, Asa falls in love with his poor cousin Mary Meredith and surrenders his inheritance to her, and helps his other cousin, Florence Trenchard, stop an unscrupulous estate agent from bankrupting her father. The play ends with a ream of marriages involving almost the entire cast, from the aristocrats to their domestics.

Throughout, the dialogue brims with a bidirectional mockery of American and British English, often pitting the Cockney accents of servants against Asa's Americanisms. Binny, a butler, is utterly perplexed by Asa's demands

that he leave—articulated as "vamose," "skedaddle," and "absquatulate" by the latter (Taylor 18). However, moments later Asa takes his revenge by mocking Binny's misplaced *h*'s:

> BINNY: Miss Florence begged me to say she had borrowed a costume for you, for the harchery meeting sir.
> ASA: Hain't you dropped something?
> BINNY: Where?
> ASA: What do you mean by the harchery meeting?
> BINNY: Where they shoot with bows and harrows.
> ASA: There goes another of them, oh! (19)

Both Asa's American slang—he calls milk "cow juice"—uttered with a "strong nasal twang" and Binny's dropped (or added) aspirates invite the initial American audiences of the play to laugh at themselves and at their British contemporaries (26, 6). The play's title suggests a familial intimacy with a degree of distance, avoiding parental/filial or sororal/fraternal bonds in favor of that of cousins: there is a linguistic link that encourages British and American spectators to laugh at each other's variations of a shared tongue.

However, this vocal comic conceit was recalibrated during the performance history of the play: the original intent to derive laughter from Asa's uncouth speech and his contests with British butlers gave way to the sound of Lord Dundreary's ever-expanding dysfluencies that eventually all but silenced the voice of the eponymous protagonist. In other words, the durable interest in the play is not attributable to American slang, or the illustration of national dialect variances, but rather to dysfluency, a stammering and lisping British caricature that captivated audiences on both sides of the Atlantic for decades. Differences in national identity could be conveyed through dysfluency, not just dialect—through stammering and lisping articulation, not just rustic diction.

Initially, E. A. Sothern, the originator of Lord Dundreary, was reluctant to portray the part, given that it had only forty-seven speaking lines. Dundreary was a preening fop and his main purpose was to attend to his eventual wife, a hypochondriac named Georgina, otherwise serving a negligible purpose within the plot. Sothern was encouraged to overcome his scruples by his friend and the originator of the titular cousin, Joseph Jefferson, who supposedly coined the famous phrase that "there are no small parts, only small actors" to encourage him (Harvard and Sylvester 40). Sothern eventually agreed to the role, provided that the theater's manager, Laura Keene, would allow him to alter it. Keene was amenable as the plot of the play was thin

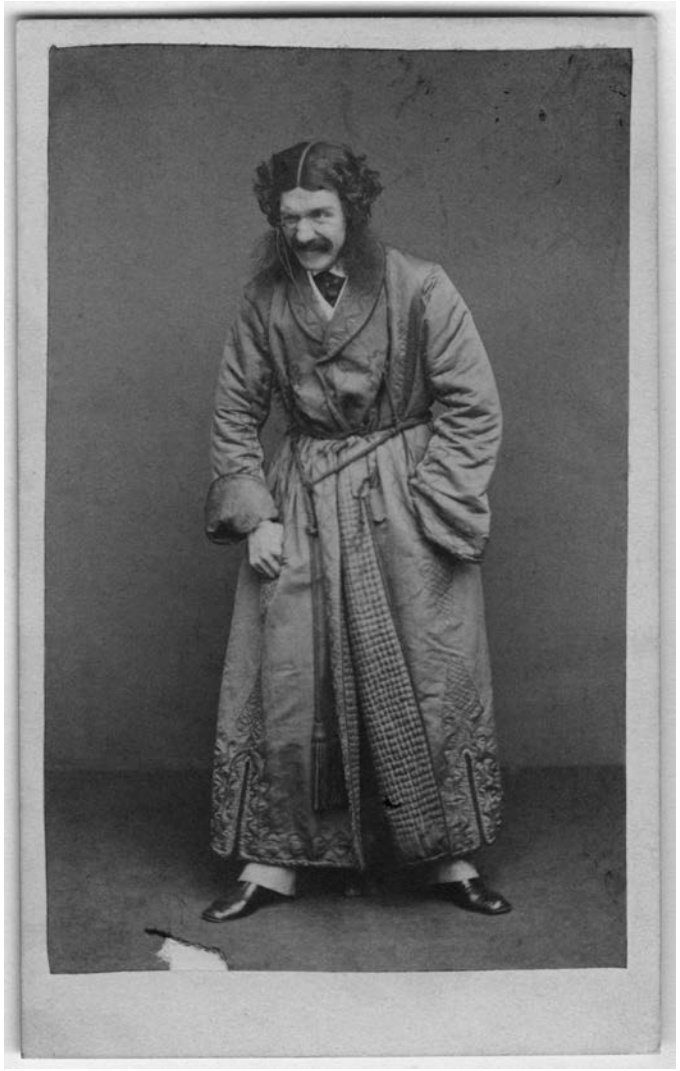

FIGURE 2. Alexander Bassano's photograph of E. A. Sothern as Lord Dundreary (1862). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

and the comedy predictable. Sothern proceeded to rewrite much of Dundreary's speech; while retaining the character's vanity, he infused Dundreary with "everything that struck him as wildly absurd," including an eccentric sartorial style, an outlandish wig and whiskers, and "the lisp and the stutter, [and] the ingenious distortion of old aphorisms" that he became known for (Pemberton 23; see figures 2 and 3).

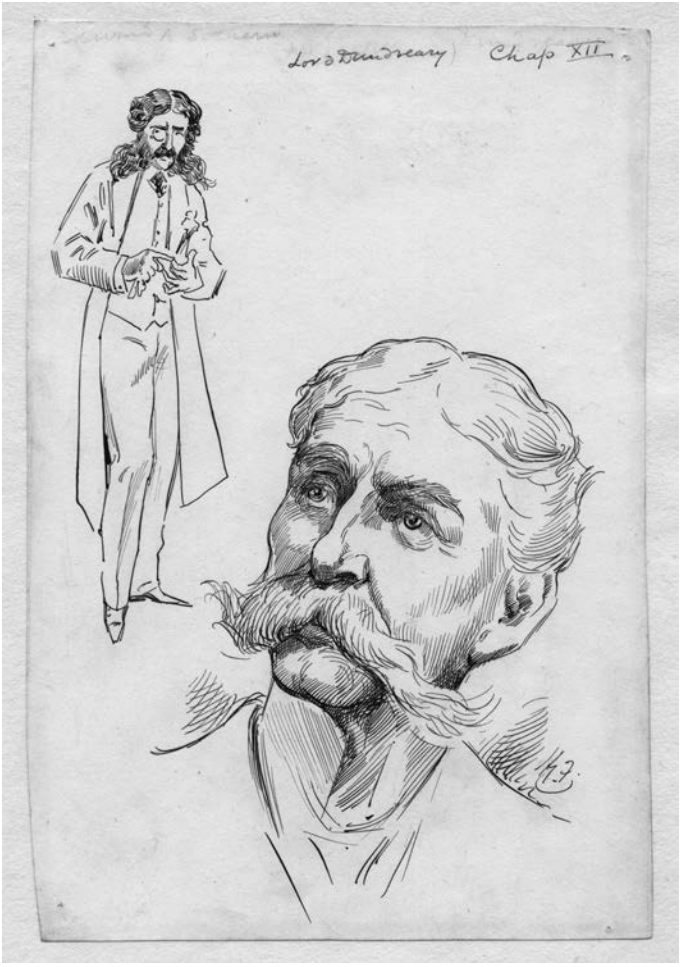

FIGURE 3. Harry Furniss's pen-and-ink sketch of E. A. Sothern as Lord Dundreary (1870s). © National Portrait Gallery, London.

These interventions by an actor were not atypical for midcentury performers, though the extent of the changes and their eventual immense popularity certainly was. Notably, Sothern gives Dundreary a range of intersecting characteristics that can be construed as disabilities: the Victorian dramatist John Oxenford asserts that Dundreary had "impediments of all kinds—in speech, in gait, in eyesight, and, worst of all, in judgment" (qtd. in Pemberton 321–22). The blending of vocal, mobility, perceptual, and moral impairments into one further foiled Dundreary to the physically and ethically upright Asa, feeding into nineteenth-century discourses that aligned disabled speech with

disabled bodies and moral shortcomings (Kingsley 11). Amid this catalog of interrelated impediments, Dundreary's speech was most prominent. Sothern takes the original hints of a lisp in Taylor's script—Dundreary on Taylor's page says "repothe" for repose, "thoft thorp" for soft soap—and amplifies it and compounds it with a stammer to utter Dundreary's silly nonsense "widdles"/riddles (22). Sothern takes on the role of the performer-author and mobilizes both the form and content of Dundreary's speech to make an impression on audiences and transform his minor role into a major focal point, twisting turns of phrase into outlandish perversions and delivering them with a markedly dysfluent enunciation.

Before the play debuted, Sothern subjected Taylor's manuscript to extensive revision, making Dundreary a younger man and adding scenes between himself and Georgina and Asa. As a British actor in America, Sothern utilized his firsthand observation of his compatriots to craft a satirical depiction of British society embodied in a bumbling aristocrat. After a slow few weeks, Dundreary became the surprise star of the play, thanks in large part to his speech. This is evident in numerous responses to Sothern's performance: "The Dundreary lisp . . . [the] halt-lisp enunciation . . . set the audience roaring with laughter"; "His talk, in which a combined lisp, stutter, and stammer, punctuated by quaint gurgles and chuckles, made an unprecedented novelty in human vocalism" and constituted "a new kind of fun"; "The wonderful combination of those three graces of speech, the lisp, the stutter and the drawl, could be accomplished by the vocal apparatus of no other person" and the result is "irresistibly funny"; "When he lisped, stuttered and screamed, the audience laughed increasingly" (qtd. in Lea 110, 122, 150, 109). Dundreary's dysfluency defies simple categorization—it is a stammering lisp mixed with gurgles, chuckles, drawls, screams—and is attributed to Sothern's physiological uniqueness. These varied descriptions repeatedly claim that the only way to appreciate Dundreary's speech is from Sothern's lips and not a playwright's script or critic's pen. And the consensus is that these novel, undefinable, and excessively dysfluent vocalizations are a source of pleasure and laughter. The initial run of the play gave thousands the opportunity to hear Dundreary, consisting of 144 performances from 1858–59, a record number for a legitimate theater, rendering it "one of the most popular productions of the mid-nineteenth century" (Lea 80).

These successful months extended into years as "*Lord Dundreary* reigned supreme upon the American stage," leaving English playgoers curious to see this "most original of stage creations" (Pemberton 25). Dundreary sails "home" to debut at the Haymarket Theatre in London on November 11, 1861, but not without considerable trepidation: Sothern, who had become synonymous with

Dundreary, worried that the character's popularity stemmed from an American desire to revel in a crude caricature of the British aristocracy and that a London audience would find the same figure insulting and tasteless. The move away from dialect to dysfluency entailed scaling up the social ladder for a central figure. Moving away from the rustic Asa's linguistic skirmishes with a butler to the aphoristic "widdles" of Lord Dundreary made the British aristocracy the prime target of satire.

Dundreary emerged into the post-Crimean 1860s, a time of British imperial expansion and middle-class dominion over sociopolitical affairs at home; thus, Britain's increasingly consolidated place as the world's most powerful nation was attributed to the middle class, not the traditional aristocracy; to industry, not agriculture; to the House of Commons, not the House of Lords (G. Taylor 87–88). The British heroes of international conflict were professionals including the nurse Florence Nightingale and the journalist W. H. Russell, rather than the aristocratic Duke of Wellington immortalized by Waterloo. The aristocracy were becoming increasingly decorative as implied by Dundreary's divestment of any real plot function. Beloved but pointless, amusing but irrelevant, he is deemed an "aristocratic superfluity" in the play itself and suggests that the main utility of lords and ladies was now as a source of laughter (*Our American Cousin*).

Furthermore, Dundreary's speech parodied popular notions of the indolence of aristocratic articulation. Scholars have warned against the assumption that "Victorian upper-class speech is necessarily more correct than the speech of the lower classes," as "fluency in speech is generally not a characteristic of the . . . gentleman" (Phillipps 36, 38). The specific forms of "aristocratic disfluency"—drawls, lisps, staccato articulations—were often perceived as conscious affectations on the part of the aristocracy to distinguish themselves vocally from other classes (Agha 267). These speech habits received comparable criticism as lower-class vocal traits, such as the spurious aspirate. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, for one, deplores that the "regular and polished smoothness of conversation . . . [is] utterly unheeded by the circles of the English aristocracy" who instead value "Hesitating, Humming, and Drawling" as "the three Graces of our Conversation" (*England* 89). Lord Dundreary's dysfluency is not a random comedic choice, then, but a deliberate way to mimic and tease the aristocracy's failure to model "proper" articulation for others.

However, Sothern's anxieties about his mockery of the British aristocracy and their speech proved unfounded: the first London run of Dundreary extended for over four hundred consecutive nights before his popularity spread out of the city into the rest of the country. In short, "concerning *Dundreary* three parts of England went more than half mad" (Pemberton 30).

Punch asserted that Dundreary, "with a stutter and a lisp," was "a very novel [and] attractive sort of character" ("Our Dramatic Correspondent" 206); *The Athenaeum* concurred that Sothern's performance "is certainly the funniest thing in the world" (qtd. in Pemberton 35). Sothern continued to expand the part, an evolution attested to in manuscripts of the play brimming with his handwriting: they declare "the character of Lord Dundreary" was "written and created by Mr. Sothern" (Pemberton 44–45). Embracing the dual function of performer and playwright, actor and author, Sothern proves Jefferson's dismissal of the notion of small parts by transforming a minor role into the main attraction.

After his success in New York and London, Sothern toured stock theaters in smaller towns as a solo performer with a rotating cast of local actors, a common practice in the period. The play was revived again and again in London and in America, remaining a popular transatlantic repertoire piece (G. Taylor 84; Pemberton 55, 63; Bailey, "American English" 457). Writing to a friend after a series of performances in Edinburgh, an elated Sothern shares that "our houses are *full.* . . . Instead of finding the Scotch audience cold I find them . . . the most enthusiastic I ever played to," describing the multiple encores that he received (Sothern). Insisting on the rarity of this kind of staying power, *The Times,* writing of one relatively early revival, announces that "*Lord Dundreary,* having attained the enormous age of nearly nine theatrical years" returns "in 1870, looking as fresh as ever, drawing crowds to the Haymarket with as much attractive force as the newest novelty could command" (qtd. in Pemberton 64). He is labeled "the inextinguishable *Lord Dundreary,*" a "perennial novelty," in the period's journalism, though a less laudatory writer joked that "he won't say his Lordship is never 'dreary,' but he is certainly never 'done'" ("Actors at Home" 22; "Multiple Essay Items" 132).

Contemporaneous accounts are populated with mildly hyperbolic assertions of both the volume of Sothern's performances and their international reach: "He is said to have played the part five thousand times . . . he pleased the theatre-going population of almost half the world, and has made his own fortune. His drawl, his lisp . . . were laughed at, were copied, and were talked of in every corner" (Hutton 47). Though primarily relegated to the anglophone world—Sothern had a brief and punishing run in Paris—the wide reach of a single role as portrayed by a single actor was almost unprecedented and evinces the increasing globality of theatrical networks.

By this point, Sothern had incontrovertibly established Dundreary as the blazing sun around which other thespian satellites merely orbited. One 1872 review declares that "everything needful had been done to keep Dundreary in the center . . . and all details subordinated around him" (qtd. in Lea 200).

When he was not on stage, the other characters discussed Dundreary, keeping the idea of him before audiences when his body was absent. Even his dysfluency remained on stage without Dundreary, as the other characters regularly discuss his "peculiar speech patterns," even offering their own imitations of them: they utter "queem" for "cream," "wooks" for "rooks," and "th-th-tham" for "Sam" (Lea 201, 289). When Dundreary does appear, the other characters are relegated to goading him into long-winded monologues: they go from talking about him to encouraging him to talk about himself.

The part of Asa, formerly the lead, had been cut so intensely that he only appears in a few shared scenes with Dundreary. One reviewer writes that "Lord Dundreary leapt into the place of honor designed for Asa Trenchard, and no one has ever ventured to question his right to sit there" thanks to "his stammer, his whiskers, his riddles" ("Haymarket Theatre" 8). Thus, the major role with dialect speech and the minor role with dysfluent speech are inverted, undercutting Bailey's account of the triumph of Asa's "Americanisms": ridiculous but ridiculously popular, Dundreary overshadows all others. By 1875, Sothern's script had become relatively static in an expanded four-act iteration: *Our American Cousin* was now "An Evening with Dundreary," the undisputed "theatrical hero of the day" (Lea 200; Pemberton 54). While Dundreary displaced Asa as central character, Sothern displaced Taylor as playwright. Dundreary was "a creation of Mr. Sothern's own, an original conception of which Mr. Taylor had no idea" and the play was so altered that theater managers often "left [Taylor's] name from the bills" (Hutton 46).

Traces of these substitutions are absent in extant published playscripts of *Our American Cousin* that retain Trenchard's centrality and Taylor's authorship. A mimeograph of the play from over a decade after it premiered, however, reads very differently. Nineteenth-century theatrical culture was plagued by piracy, spurred by feeble copyright law and increased demand for new plays. Theater managers would pay individuals to obtain illegal copies of popular productions like *Our American Cousin*: "Stenographers attended hit plays and copied down the dialogue and stage business . . . the plays were then mimeographed into manuscripts . . . and sold for a fraction of the royalty payments" (Slout 46–47). Essentially, these mimeographs reverse the relationship between text and performance embedded into a playscript. A script provides textual instructions for the embodied performances of actors whereas a mimeograph, by contrast, textually transcribes the embodied performance of actors. In other words, the script provides the source material for the actors; the actors provide the source material for the mimeograph, and therefore this second genre better documents dysfluent performance on the stage.

A decade into the play's popularity, one stenographer had the uniquely onerous task of recording Dundreary's speech in all its peculiarity and, in so doing, demonstrated the increased volume and extent of his dysfluent utterances. The cover sheet of the mimeograph states it is "based on the English play by Tom Taylor in which the elder Sothern made famous the part of Lord Dundreary," encapsulating the competing authorships that resulted in this text. The significance of Dundreary's dysfluency is apparent throughout. Even the costume section includes references to Dundreary's speech alongside his clothing: "speaks with a drawl, stutters, changes R.'s to W.'s" (*Our American Cousin*).

Dundreary's heightened significance is established almost immediately. Taylor's playscript first mentions him on the twelfth line of dialogue in the middle of a list of six characters, jumbling him up with the rest of the cast; in the mimeograph, he is mentioned in isolation in the second line, singled out from the first rejoinder. The plot remains essentially the same, but is forced to unravel in a contracted space to leave more room for Dundreary to speak. He first appears only as a voice, singing in another room, while the other characters remark that "he sings very well, and what is very curious, he don't stut-t-ter so very much when he sings," trading in the common belief that singsong articulation is one way to alleviate stammering (*Our American Cousin*). Dundreary's first line of dialogue emphasizes his mixture of nonnormative articulations: "But if you cawnt get your horses b-b-by post wh-wh-why don't you telegraph for them?" The stenographer is aware that it is the articulation as much as the content of Dundreary's lines that account for his popularity and thus strives to capture both within the limits of textual transcription. Throughout the first scene, the other characters laugh at Dundreary's speech as he bellows out "Sam is a f-f-f-fellah that you nevaw can f-f-f-find" before the curtain falls.

Dundreary's thievery of Asa's spotlight is perhaps most apparent in the third scene of the first act. Originally, this portion of the play began with a humorous repartee between Asa and the butler in the former's bedroom; in the mimeograph, it begins with Dundreary berating his own domestic in the same bedroom, declaring "He's nevaw heaw when he's w-w-wanted and w-w-when he is heaw he is n-n-nevaw w-w-wanted." Asa eventually arrives to sleep in the bedroom, only to find it occupied by Dundreary: not only has "the young lord who stutters" taken most of Asa's room in the play's dialogue, but he literally occupies the room at Trenchard Manor formerly meant for Asa. When Asa calls it "my room," Dundreary dysfluently dissents "my woom sir." The addition of his winding monologues and frequent asides to the audience

establishes a special relationship between playgoers and character and suggests that not only the bedroom, but the whole playhouse, have become Dundreary's "woom," rather than Asa's. The play's conclusion cannot resist affirming the inversion of character centrality once more. Asa pronounces the end of the play, the curtain begins to fall slowly, and then Dundreary bursts out from under it to leave the audience with a final assortment of dysfluent riddles (*Our American Cousin*).

The popularity of this version of the play led to sequels and adaptations, primarily revolving around Dundreary, such as Henry J. Byron's "Lord Dundreary, Married and Settled," John Oxenford's piece about Dundreary's sibling "Brother Sam," as well as "Dundreary Becomes a Father," and "My American Aunt; or, Dundreary in Difficulties" (Pemberton 55, 58; Lea 267). These plays were often staged in the same season, meaning that most of an annual run at a popular playhouse could be dedicated to Dundreary's exploits. Sothern reprised the role in many spin-offs, enforcing the inextricability of actor and role, even to his detriment. The popularity belonged to the character, not the performer, making Sothern "one of the first actors to get trapped into the typecasting of a specific character" (G. Taylor 90). The eccentricity of Dundreary was not easily converted into other roles: Dundreary came to limit Sothern's career—reviewers wondered if he would be able to "play other parts than those of stupid-witted stuttering dandies"—while Sothern continued to bring Dundreary through decades and across oceans ("Our Dramatic Correspondent" 53). Journalistic references to the figure often neglected to distinguish between performer and performed, writing of the utterances "stammered [by] LORD DUNDREARY SOTHERN" ("Mr. Punch's" 310).

While Sothern seemed fused to the part, Dundreary developed a life outside of the playscript and in excess of Sothern's body, migrating into the print sphere, as "little books . . . dealing with the imaginary doings of *Dundreary* under every possible condition, and on every quarter of the globe, were in their thousands sold at the street corners" (Pemberton 31). A success of vertical marketing, Dundreary obtains generic and geographic mobility, translated from the stage to the page, with his textual iteration visiting more diverse parts of the world than those traversed in his multinational performances (see figure 4). He becomes an emblem of the far reach of the imperial language of English, though he propagates a specifically dysfluent variant.

Dundreary's popularity made him an inevitable source for imitation. Onstage, after Asa mimics Dundreary's oddities, the latter declares of the former: "He's mad, he's deaf, he squints, stammers," construing the conscious mockery as unconscious habit (31). Even offstage, Dundreary popularized monocles, side-whiskers that became known as "Dundrearies," his aphoristic

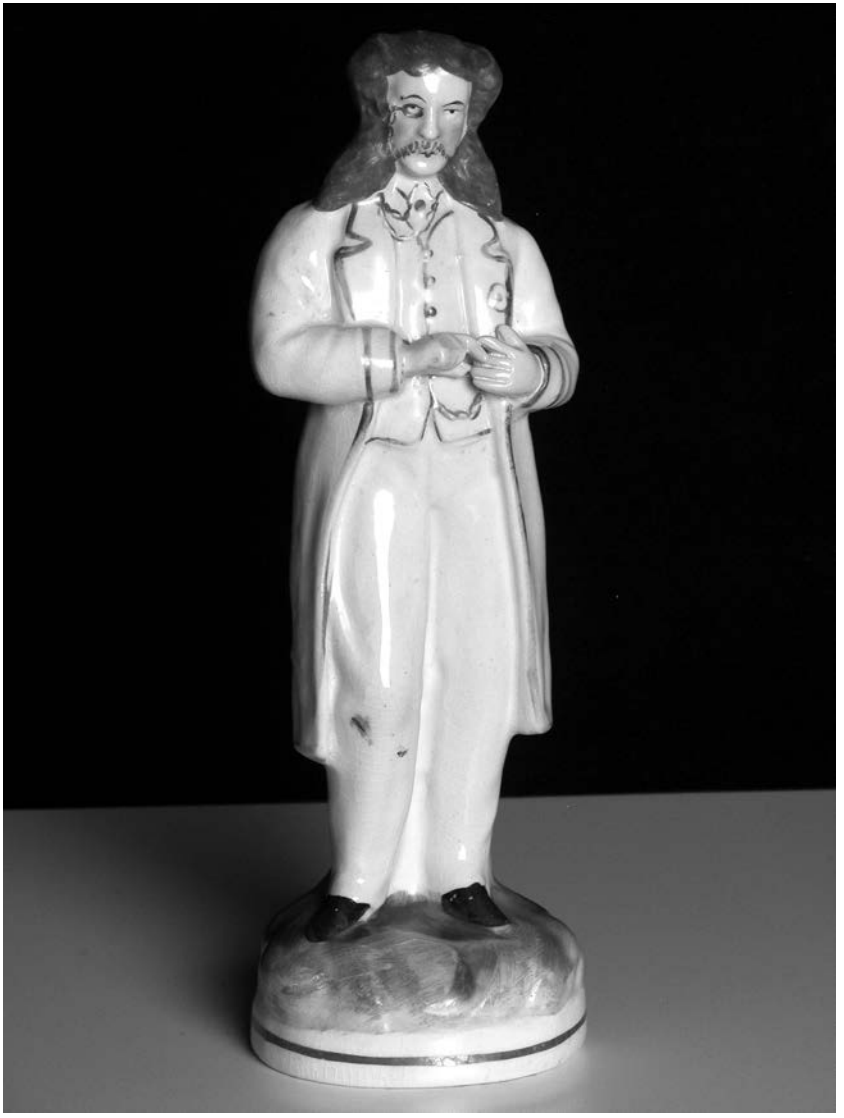

FIGURE 4. Ceramic of Lord Dundreary (1861). © National Trust / Catriona Hughes.

"Dundrearyisms," and, of course, his mode of articulation: "His speech was imitated by the fashionable young men" of both America and Britain throughout the 1860s and 1870s (Lea 2, 267–68). In virtue of the millions of regular theater attendees each year in the midcentury, particularly in metropoles such as London where Dundreary was a staple, the character's reach was immense.

Heard by at least hundreds of thousands of listeners throughout the period—a feat virtually impossible prior to the consolidation of audio-recording technology later in the century—Dundreary showed dysfluency to be not only a source of comic mockery, but a fashionable articulation worthy of emulation, one labeled the "Dundreary accent" by the period's commentators ("Romance" 110).

Punch, for one, made much of what they diagnosed as an "imitation mania" around Dundreary, castigating both music hall performers who "trad[e] on the likeness that they bear to the first lord" and teasing theatergoers who translated Dundreary's oddities into everyday life ("Imitation Mania" 174). Two comics are particularly illustrative. "Dundreary Row—Hyde Park" depicts Dundreary's liberation from the theater and infiltration into other public spaces (see figure 5). The park's popular destination for nineteenth-century horse-riding, Rotten Row, is replaced by a row of innumerable Dundrearies, sporting matching whiskers, clothes, and deportment as the caption emphasizes the multiplication of the lord with the phrase: "said one Dundreary to another." The caption also gestures to the vapidity of Dundreary's discourse, a point even more explicit in "After Dundreary," which features two Dundreary lookalikes. The sample of speech provided for them emphasizes the silly content and atypical form of the lord's utterances: "A-a-waw! Waw! Waw! How do you like him?" says one, as the other responds "Waw-waw-waw. No fellaw evaw saw such a fellaw. Gwoss cawicature-waw!" Emphasizing Dundreary's dysfluency, the text also wryly suggests that the speakers are two "gwoss cawicature-waws" of Sothern's character who is, himself, a "gwoss cawicature-waw" of an aristocrat—the grossness of the caricature, inclusive of atypical speech, is no barrier to its profusion.

Though *Punch* is poking fun at the fervor over Dundreary, they cannot help but participate in it. Across decades, the columns of the magazine were peppered with quotes from the famous lord and attempts at his bungled proverbs that retain his dysfluency in print: "There's a silver lining to every cloud—no, no (*stuttering, hesitating, correcting himself, and attempting all the while to sneeze*)" ("Proverbs" 79). There are even entire essays written in Dundreary's eccentric voice, giving his opinion on issues ranging from pantomime to evolution ("A Terrible Hitch" 210). Whether inspiring admiration or mockery, Dundreary was a cultural phenomenon to engage with and to replicate. Not only did Sothern perform Dundreary across expanses of time and space, cementing the consensus that he was the only man who could depict Dundreary, but he also created a role amenable to reproduction by many offstage, as Dundreary spread through the lives of his fans and commentators. Crucially, though, his attendant dysfluency was a performative choice for the actor

FIGURE 5. "Dundreary Row—Hyde Park" from *Punch* magazine (1862).

and his devotees: the appeal of his affected lisps and stammers was inseparable from the idea that a reversion to fluent speech was always possible.

However, not everyone was enthralled by Sothern's character. Charles Macready, one of the major midcentury tragedians, deplored Dundreary's success during retirement: "What would actors like Lewis, Elliston, Henderson, or Garrick think of a Lord Dundreary running four hundred consecutive nights!" (qtd. in G. Taylor 90). Both the high quantity of performances and the low quality of the role are condemned by Macready. He posits a generational decline in the star roles and actors of the British stage; thus, it should be unsurprising that Alexander Melville Bell—in his diatribe against the twined decline of British theater and vocal standards—proclaims Macready as "sole votary" of a vanishing tradition of thespian excellence worthy of emulation (*Tongue* 14.242). Similarly, Charles Plumptre, during his lectures on vocal culture, declares Macready to be the best example of "the art of Dramatic Elocution" in England (290). *Punch* even joked that "it would be good of Mr. Macready to come out of his retirement" and provide "lessons on elocution" (qtd. in Crystal 60).

Macready and his "quieter style" of vocalization, emphasizing "syllabic equality," retired from professional performance in 1851, right as *Our American Cousin* was being written, suggesting a midcentury shift away from a voice full of mannered harmony to one replete with stammering lisps, from Macready's Shakespearean tragic figures to Sothern's comical Dundreary (Booth 207). In other words, Bell's notion that the theater was vanishing from cultural centrality in the 1840s could, by the 1860s, be better envisioned as the stage betraying Bell's vocal standards rather than disappearing. Nudged out of cultural supremacy by the novel, Dundreary's stage became its accomplice as another venue for dysfluency to resound upon.

This is not to suggest that the stage utopically embraced dysfluent speech. Henry Irving, the first actor to receive a knighthood, owed his success in part to eliminating, rather than embracing, his stammer. Beginning to stammer around age seven, a young Irving (then John Brodribb) took classes to improve his posture and voice, "practising how to overcome his stammer" and "mastering the phrases he found most awkward by stubborn repetition" (Bingham 24; Holroyd 93–94). His parents also sent him to the actor William Hoskins to help eliminate both his stammer and his "West Country accent": dialect and dysfluency alike were a liability on the stage (G. Taylor 1). Patient labor and distinct repetition of each syllable were apparently key to Irving obtaining a voice that would allow him to achieve his theatrical aspirations; indeed, some critics suggest that his method of onstage articulation was an affect–effect of corrective stammering procedures (Richards 318). It was Irving's training to efface his stammer, then, that helped make him one of the most remarkable Victorian thespians. While Irving's acting prowess in part derived from the "curing" of his dysfluency, Sothern was lauded for being an otherwise-fluent speaker who imitated dysfluency onstage, suggesting a stark division: dysfluency was acceptable, even celebrated, in a character, but undesirable in a person—it was a boon to entertainment when performed, but an impediment to acting when innate.

For Dundreary, "the impediment in his speech had been more than half his fortune" (Pemberton 72); Irving, by contrast, establishes his financial and vocational success by losing such an impediment. This notion is exemplified by one attendee of *Our American Cousin* who mistook Sothern's dysfluent characterization as inherent to the actor rather than the role, declaring that "Lord Dundreary was the worst played part in the piece, because the actor had such an unfortunate impediment in his speech" (qtd. in Pemberton 52). This playgoer misses the comedic intent of Sothern's speech and their misattribution of Dundreary's speech to Sothern himself evinces the clashing valuations of staged and lived dysfluency. In short, a stammering character is hilarious,

but a stammering actor is inept. As reviews praising Dundreary's eccentric voice continued to populate newspapers, so did ads offering advice on how to eliminate his form of speech.

A nineteenth-century version of contemporary patterns of casting and critical acclaim in the realm of acting becomes apparent. Today, awards and accolades tend to cluster around nondisabled, cisgender, heterosexual actors who portray disabled, transgender, or queer characters, while these roles are often refused to those whose identities accord with the figure being represented.[3] Marginalized identities remain a locus of acting excellence when performed by those who do not inhabit them, as if a privileged person portraying less privileged subjectivities is the pinnacle of the acting craft. Praise when feigned, oppress when embodied: this logic separates Lord Dundreary from Henry Irving in a way that remains operational today.

Cure, then, is dictated offstage, whereas the stage itself is a space to circulate dysfluency. The success of Dundreary in America and in England, in urban centers and on rural tours, and the veritable "Dundreary craze" for imitating his dysfluency that followed can be juxtaposed to the vocal alterations demanded of Irving (Lea 2). *Our American Cousin* makes a stammering, lisping enunciation temporary anglophone fashion in the same decades when thinkers like Bell were fixated on disseminating a standardized national articulation. In this sense, cultural productions are not simple accomplices to the homogenizing impulse of medical and pedagogical discourses on the voice, nor starkly chaotic oppositional forces. They are invested in depicting eccentric speech, but instrumentally: Dundreary is not meant to draw attention to the complex subjectivity of dysfluent speakers or the systemic discrimination they faced, but to fill seats and make people laugh, to make a profit and to entertain. Sharon Marcus has shown how celebrities can either "elude social constraints and defy social norms" or "reinforce dominant values" and Sothern's Dundreary does both in the realm of vocalization (*Drama* 4). The popularity of his dysfluency subverts prescriptive notions about which voices deserve to be heard, while his presentation of a stammer as something to laugh at buttresses distinctions between admirable and shameful speech.

The dysfluent lines that audiences found remarkably droll repay closer analysis. Sothern's most popular vocal performance consisted of Dundreary reading out a letter from his brother Sam, which, according to an 1878 playbill, was "received nightly with the unprecedented compliment of a triple encore" ("Walnut Street Theatre"). The mimeographed version of the letter reading

3. Regarding dysfluency, see speaking actress Sally Hawkins's Oscar-nominated depiction of a mute character in *The Shape of Water* (2017) and fluent actor Matthew Needham's role as the stammering Greenwood in the Oscar-winning short *Stutterer* (2015).

totals over six hundred words—the longest monologue in the play. Sothern expanded it by adding multiple postscripts to the original letter: Dundreary amusedly explains that "S-S-Sam is a deuce of a f-f-fellah for P.S.'s" (*Our American Cousin*). Dundreary's stammers and the postscripts serve the same function: they lengthen a letter, whether an alphabetic character or an epistolary document. Both the textual letter and its oral performance dramatize linguistic addition, resulting in hilarity as Dundreary wanders offstage, apparently finished, only to return when he notices another postscript to vocalize.

Accounts of Sothern's performance emphasize that the printed page could never capture Dundreary's speech, but a surviving description of a portion of the monologue suggests the extent of Dundreary's intertwining dysfluencies and his penchant for dissecting proverbs:

> Birdth of a f-f-feather g-g-gather no m-m-moth. . . . What demd nonsenth! No; Th-h-that itnn't it. It ith b-b-birdth of a f-f-feather, f-f-flock together. Thath d-d-demd nonsenth, too. B-b-birdth of a f-f-feather! How could all th-th-those b-b-birdth have only one feather? I'th absurd! One of th-th-the birdth mutht have had that f-f-feather, and th-then he's f-f-fly all to one th-th-thide. (qtd. in Lea 215)

This account makes use of common typographical strategies for depicting dysfluent speech on the page: repeated letters and dashes to signal a stammer, and the substitution of "th" for "s" to index a lisp. The sheer volume of dysfluent utterances is striking, with nearly half of the words rendered via atypical spelling. Audiences certainly laughed due to the supposed hilarity of dysfluent articulation, an idea that persists today as dysfluency remains an "auditory gag" where the sole purpose of certain characters is "to stutter and thus amuse" (J. Johnson 163–64).

However, there is also provocatively agile wordplay in Dundreary's ramblings. He begins by fusing "birds of a feather flock together" with "a rolling stone gathers no moss," implying the interchangeability of conventional wisdom where half of one phrase can be sutured onto another and be as "nonsensical" as the correct phrase, thereby insisting on the semantic dearth of the proverbial. He combines a saying about irresponsible nomadism—a desire to refuse commitments via constant mobility—with one about commonality linking a community and declares them both to be absurd. Dundreary is quasi-nomadic himself, a theatrical rock rolling across countrysides and cityscapes; in addition, his characteristic indolence is antithetical to responsibility. Belying the constant movement of the character, though, are the tireless exertions of Sothern the performer to improve his role and its reception—a

great deal of moss, if you will, that in turn generates the popularity requisite for Dundreary's consistent mobility.

He goes on to question "How could all th-th-those b-b-birdth have only one feather? I'th absurd." While in part a misunderstanding of the proverb, Dundreary uses this line to question notions of homogeneity, to reveal the ridiculousness of expecting a diversity of birds to display only a single feather. This antiassimilationist sentiment is unsurprising emanating from a figure predominantly characterized by his eccentricity. In this sense, we can see Dundreary as a dissenting rejoinder to the desire of Bell and his peers for a standardized English articulation: to rephrase the question of this character best known for his dysfluency, how could all those people have only one voice? It's absurd.

The play's resistance to vocal conformity is limited. The similarly undesirable low-class articulations of the servants and the vulgar colloquialisms of Asa are put into dialogue with Dundreary's lisping stammer, all modes of speech abhorred by writers such as Bell. However, the play features a range of utterances that are nonetheless racially homogeneous. On the periphery echo other voices refused any dialogue. Georgina remarks that Dundreary "only likes negro melodies," and Asa reminds readers of his scripting prior to the Emancipation Proclamation by describing the ends of Dundreary's whiskers as "black as a [n——'s] in billing time" (*Our American Cousin,* G. Taylor 31). Premiering on the cusp of the American Civil War and onstage during Lincoln's assassination, the context of slavery is interwoven with *Our American Cousin*'s inception and performance history. In Sothern's four-act version of the play, a bored Asa declares that he wishes he had brought a "band" of Black "minstrels" along to sing him to sleep (qtd. in Lea 296). Even the suggestion of a voice for Black figures is only present as an instrumentalized collective to serve Asa—there is no possibility of individuated, agential speech. Had stagings of the play realized Asa's desire, the minstrels would almost certainly have been performed by white actors: at the time of *Our American Cousin*'s prominence, blackface minstrelsy was common in England, part of an "active network of transatlantic forms and performance that were energized by old complicities in slavery" (Featherstone 249). As Saidiya Hartman argues, these performances utilized the temporary porosity of racial identification to reassert racist hierarchies as "the loosening of the strictures of identity enabled by the blackface mask in turn fortified a repressive and restrictive reception of blackness" (29).

Furthermore, Dundreary's form of comedy—his garbled colloquialisms and eccentric articulations—recalls the "stump speeches" that were popular components of minstrel performances. These speeches were comic addresses

that blended "nonsense" and "verbal pomposity" delivered in "a heavy malaprop-laden dialect" (Toll 52, 56). Consisting of a caricature of vocal disability rather than of racialized speech, Sothern's role is based on a comparable logic of extracting amusement from audiences and accruing praise for himself by performing an exaggerated version of a marginalized vocalization that was often met with derision in everyday life. While vocal discourse in the period worried about the potential of disabled, racialized, and classed articulations to challenge standard pronunciation, cultural productions used variant strategies to both encode and silence subversive speech. *Our American Cousin* provides a stage for Dundreary's white dysfluency while ensuring its transatlantic cast consists of one dominant racial group, thereby silencing other voices. This book's subsequent and final chapter challenges the durable association of whiteness with stammering exemplified by Dundreary with a turn to the archive of enslavement.

The Death of Dundreary Sothern, or Sothern Dundreary

Though one nineteenth-century journalist declares that "the name of Lord Dundreary will no doubt live long in theatrical history . . . lisp, limp, stutter, whiskers, and all," the death of Sothern the actor in 1881 sounded the slow death knell of the popularity of Dundreary the character ("Strand Theatre" 6). Sothern remained typecast as Dundreary: he played the role for the rest of his career, even in the year of his death, the endpoint of over two decades of performance. Dundreary's cultural force then began to evaporate, as traceable in references to the character in *Punch,* which discussed Dundreary over one hundred times from 1861 to 1900. In 1879, toward the end of Sothern's life, an article claimed that Mr. Punch had been approached to write "a list of those whom *he* considers to be the 'Hundred Greatest Men of History.'" The list includes Lord Dundreary alongside King Arthur, Don Quixote, and Robinson Crusoe; clearly tongue-in-cheek, it nonetheless asserts Dundreary's looming presence in the popular imagination ("Our 'Hundred Greatest'" 277). Unlike the other figures listed above, however, public amnesia quickly sets in: upon Sothern's passing in 1881, *Punch* declares he will "be famous in theatrical annals as the creator of *Lord Dundreary*"; in 1882, the character is "the late *Lord Dundreary*"; by 1888, he is the "once popular *Lord Dundreary*"; and in 1891, a decade after Sothern's death, reference is made to a "now nearly forgotten artist, called DUNDREARY SOTHERN, or SOTHERN DUNDREARY" ("The Theatres" 45; "Multiple Essay Items" 288; "Notes" 136; "Lost in the Mist" 21). Inextricable to the last, actor and role succumb to obscurity in tandem,

the union of their names and the uncertain precedence between them all that remains in the public consciousness.

Sothern's son, Edward Hugh Sothern, revived the role in 1908, half a century after its debut. A playbill for the 1908 staging summarized the elder Sothern's legacy in a sentence: "The character of Lord Dundreary was written and created by Mr. Sothern's father, the late E. A. Sothern, and played by him for over twenty years in America and England" (*Our American Cousin*). The younger Sothern retained his father's lisp and stammer in this production as well as another revival in 1915, but reviews were less enthusiastic. The play was revived as recently as 2015, retaining much of the additional material penned by the elder Sothern, though critics attribute its brief but sold-out run only to its "historical-curio value," dismissing its comedy as "cracking the kind of puns that would be scorned by an eight-year-old" (I. Shuttleworth). Much like the diminished popularity of Lewis Carroll's Bruno and his baby talk discussed in chapter 2, Dundreary's cultural clout is circumscribed to the nineteenth century.

This is not attributable to a rising demand for better rounded and less comically instrumental depictions of dysfluency: Jeffrey Johnson has demonstrated the ubiquity of "coarse caricatures" of stammerers in the twentieth century, grounded in derogatory and unrealistic stereotypes that use stammering as a source of amusement, an index of weakness, and/or a sign of villainy (162, 169). Instead, Dundreary's demise is rooted in that of his principal performer, as well as changes in the comedic and generic preferences of audiences. *Our American Cousin* is a comic melodrama, full of sensational stock characters and coincidental events aimed at inciting laughter. This genre was particularly hospitable to Dundreary as melodrama was known for embracing peculiar modes of speech, making him a centralized and further exaggerated version of an already widespread trope. The techniques of melodrama actors like Sothern are now routinely dismissed as "unnatural and inflated when judged by modern modes of acting," partially accounting for the lack of enthusiasm for the revivals (Booth 190).

Dundreary thus works as both confirmation and spectacular transgression of a range of nineteenth-century views on dysfluent speech. As a quintessentially British and ridiculously cultivated aristocrat, he affirms the view that stammering belongs to those with the most social power: he is a dysfluent lord in the most powerful empire on the planet. However, he refutes widespread calls for purging dysfluent articulation to pursue a unified national utterance by not only performing his dysfluency on stages across the anglophone world, but also making it fashionable for imitation among his audiences. In so doing, Dundreary simultaneously elucidates and complicates the nineteenth-century

vocal hierarchies at the core of *Our American Cousin*. He demonstrates the centrality of dysfluent representation in midcentury popular entertainment, with a stammering and lisping starring role in one of the period's most frequently staged plays. This is not to efface the systemic discrimination faced by dysfluent individuals, but to illuminate how the coincidence of dysfluency with entertainment value was enough to mitigate many of the social consequences of vocal disability. Though faced with the risk of ridicule and misapprehension, Dundreary is still a star. Depictions of dysfluency therefore work to support damaging stereotypes while also putting pressure on the assumptions that underlie those stereotypes. Dundreary's foundational claim that stammering is hilarious both mocks dysfluency and celebrates it in the same repeated phoneme.

Nineteenth-century theatrical commentators noted how the stage facilitates this kind of duality. English essayist Charles Lamb, himself a stammerer, suggested that successful comic actors performed an act of "sub-insinuation," portraying certain character types while simultaneously marking the distance between actor and role for their audience. This balancing act allows the comic actor to make figures who are unlikable in reality—cowards, misers, and those with "pitiable infirmities" are Lamb's examples—into something charming. In Lamb's words, these actors can substitute "a diverting likeness . . . for a very disagreeable reality" because in comedy audiences "are content with less than absolute truth" (225–26). The nineteenth-century theater, for Lamb, is an effective vehicle for driving home the otherwise elusive positive qualities of certain social realities, including disability.

Characters such as Sothern's Dundreary, with his agile performance of dysfluency, "please by being done under the life, or beside it; not *to the life*" (Lamb 225–26). Though theater does not have exclusive licensure over these depictions under or beside life, it is particularly hospitable to them. The embodied quality of theatrical performance provides a proximity to life that print mediums such as the novel find elusive; at the same time, this proximity is mobilized to present narratives enjoyable in their distance from everyday existence as actors use their real lives to animate the unreal lives of their roles. The aesthetic logic of the theater thus allows for a shift in the cultural logic of dysfluency. The portrayal and reception of Dundreary's stammer exemplifies how the provision of entertainment creates a different relationship to socially marginalized speech, obviating the stigma around vocal disability in a staged performance, while retaining it in quotidian social relations.

CHAPTER 5

"I Have Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue"

Enslavement, Dysfluency, and the Vocal Metaphors of Freedom

A brief account of an unnamed enslaved African woman with a stammer ends James Hunt's *Stammering and Stuttering: Their Nature and Treatment* (1870), one of the most widely circulated nineteenth-century texts about speech disorder, going through seven editions in a decade. Throughout the preceding 350 pages, Hunt argues—in consonance with his peers in the nascent field of speech correction—that stammering is the unique burden of white men as a symptom of their civilizational and intellectual superiority. For Hunt and his colleagues, high social status presumes a high quality of discourse that is more prone to breakdown. According to these writers, the content of women's speech, construed as idle prattle and trivial gossip, facilitated fluency; relatedly, the ostensible inability of nonwhite speakers to discuss anything beyond concrete reality promoted the same. The white middle-to-upper-class man's tendency to stammer was a result of the stress of his powerful social position and an indicator of his intelligence, his vocal apparatus unable to keep up with the pace of his complex thoughts (Hoegaerts, "S-s-s-syncopation" 751). In short, the superior content of white male speech rendered it susceptible to dysfluent forms.

Hunt's racialized and gendered cordoning of stammering was, of course, symptomatic of virulent ideology rather than verifiable claims; in fact, his assertions were so untenable that he was unable to avoid including evidence to the contrary. In the final pages of his major work, Hunt denies that colonized

Africans can stammer, only to follow this with a lengthy footnote admitting his generalization is false. To defend his original point, he subscribes to the view of a colonial medical official, R. Clarke, that while "stuttering is a defect very common amongst the people [of Africa] . . . it is affected by many among them as it is considered *fashionable* to stammer" (Hunt, *Stammering* [1870] 353). Stammering is thus attributed to an "imitative faculty" of colonized Africans who wrongly believe that flawed British articulation is worthy of emulation (351). Hunt refuses to unpack this strange fantasy of the colonized volitionally imitating the dysfluent colonizer: Is it a type of misguided social aspiration, a mocking vocal expression of otherwise inexpressible hostility, something else altogether? Instead, he uses the assertion of mimicry to reinforce his initial view that stammering is naturally a white affliction, though it can be imported via imitation to other racial groups as part of the violent intimacies of imperialism.

However, Hunt goes on to describe how:

> An interesting account of a negro girl stuttering, was given to me by a Turkish gentleman, who recently consulted me respecting an impediment in speech under which he laboured. . . . He said one of the slaves of his wife was a young African girl, who stuttered very badly, and who weeps continually because she cannot speak properly. Her defect came on after a fright, produced when she was captured. (353)

An embodied refutation of the racist diagnosis of stammering as an exclusively white male disorder, a young enslaved African woman is described as stuttering. Rather than attributing her dysfluency to the imitation of the vocal "impediment" of the Turkish man, apparently her enslaver, and thus providing evidence for his theory, Hunt identifies the "fright" caused by her initial enslavement as the root of her stutter. He acknowledges the traumatic repercussions of the violent relocation from one's home and conscription into slavery, but then curiously assumes the young woman's crying is "because she cannot speak properly." Her grief is because of improper articulation, and not the attempts to relegate her to a piece of property: slavery can cause stuttering, but the true tragedy must be the latter.

Though Hunt finds the case "interesting," he fails to mobilize it to prove his overarching theories, unlike the other "counterexamples" he grapples with in the long footnote. Positioned as an afterthought in the substantial text, the young woman comes last only to disprove many of Hunt's preceding arguments. She is not typical of the culturally prominent and widely circulated depictions of nineteenth-century dysfluency that this book has thus far grappled with due to their abundance and detail. Stories such as hers must be

sought in elusive places, as told by an enslaver and transcribed by a proslavery speech correctionist—a trace of a trace buried under layers of power-inflected mediation. But in her disruptive force, challenging Hunt's scientific racism, she demands attention to the intersections of slavery and dysfluency in the period: to the formal strategies developed for their depiction, their symbolic interchange, the reality of their embodied experiences, and the enduring coincidence of racism and ableism.

To create a framework for understanding this anonymous figure is the aim of this chapter. The period's life-writing provides ample material to interrogate the fraught relationship between the binaries of slavery–freedom and dysfluency–fluency in the nineteenth century on both literal and metaphorical levels, thereby establishing such a framework. The following four subsections each examine a different type of "tongue" that articulates a facet of the relationship between these binaries. An account of the religious and surgical connotations of "cutting loose a stammering tongue" provides an initial instantiation of this dialogue. Formerly enslaved people also deploy the language of dysfluency to describe their biographical experiences in the second section, using it as an analogy for enslavement, with the alleviation of vocal disability signaling the attainment of freedom. Thirdly, white dysfluent biographies echo this metaphoric alignment in a different key: they violently appropriate the language of slavery to understand speech disorder, faith, and more. Lastly, denotative references to dysfluent enslaved Africans and African Americans serve as contemporaneous refutations of the prevailing discourse of Hunt and his ilk, challenging the racial exclusivity of speech disorder. These references populate the proslavery genre that I refer to as fugitive-from-slavery advertisements (Foreman et al.).[1] In these ads, white enslavers concede the vocal particularity of self-liberated individuals to instigate their recapture.

This diverse cluster of texts is marked by the issue of mediation throughout—of the alteration of another's experiences for a variety of political and generic aims. Collectively, they show how discourses on race and dysfluency mutually informed one another in the period, with vocal disability understood as resulting from both the pressures of civilization apparently faced by white men and from the resistance of enslaved Black people to the violences of racial inequality. This archive constructs a counterdiscourse to the whitewashing of dysfluency, provides a vocal supplement to the emphasis on literacy in the progression from enslavement to freedom, and elucidates the ramifications of mobilizing the voice as a symbol for liberation and agency.

1. I am indebted to Foreman et al. for providing guidelines for preferred terms when writing about enslavement.

Cutting Tongues: Morte's Conversion and Stammering Surgeries

These disparate sources provide an absent nineteenth-century account of the durable imaginative linkage between slavery and dysfluency, articulated elsewhere in reference to figures ranging from Aesop to Moses. Both the continuation of transatlantic slavery and the consolidation of quasi-medical fields like speech correction were indebted to a midcentury rise of racial science that "treated races as biologically defined groups, and confused the relationship between physical traits and cultural or learned behavior," thereby endowing race as the primary determinant of an individual's worth to preach "a new doctrine" of white supremacy (Lorimer 14; Gilroy 8). Again, anthropologist and speech correctionist James Hunt is illustrative of the period's anti-Black racism: he presented a paper in defense of slavery in the Confederate States of America in the same decade that his influential monograph on speech disorder was continuously reprinted. Hunt's work is but one instance of "how deeply implicated the science of speech and voice is in Eurocentric, eugenic, and fundamentally racist narratives" (Martin, "George Catlin" 65–66).

However, the persistent analogical relation between freedom–enslavement and fluency–dysfluency is not reducible to the period's scientific racism. Take, for instance, Ellen Derry's tract *Elton Wheatly, the Stammerer* (1863), which uses a series of interactions between a stammering white boy and his peers as moral parables for children. Throughout, the text relies on an uneasy paralleling between racial and vocal discrimination. Initially, Elton's stammer is conceived of as a gendered inadequacy, rendering him quiet when boys are meant to be "full of noise" (7); as a result, Elton is bullied for being "more like a girl," taunts he cannot refute due to his "stammering tongue" (10). Elton reluctantly finds common ground with one schoolmate, a young Black student named Shadrach, who "can't behave like a white boy" (29–30): Elton's speech and Shadrach's race prevent them from performing the idealized childhood role of the garrulous white boy.

Their teacher has sympathy for Elton but treats Shadrach as if he were the boy's enslaver: Shadrach receives "sound whipping[s]," is deprived of food, and is bound to his desk for "underperforming" on his lessons (31, 40–41). Elton realizes that both boys are "not like other folks" and decides to help Shadrach with his spelling and articulation assignments, though this proves difficult as Shadrach "could not pronounce the word, and Elton's stammering prevented his pronouncing it very well" (47). Though Elton's own racism renders his assistance an unpleasant duty, he eventually helps Shadrach obtain a cautious acceptance at school, with Derry declaring "It is not natural

to despise our fellow-man on account of his color, or any other such circumstance" (54). The story thus suggests that the social devaluing of dysfluent speech and of black skin are comparable, while at the same time retaining the dominant racial hierarchy by making the stammering white boy the conduit for the Black boy's social liberation.

Another example can be found in the conversion narrative of the enslaved man Morte, a quotation from which serves as the title of the edited collection *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue* (1991). Morte's account, like so much of the archive of slavery, is mediated by white transcribers: it was part of an effort to gather autobiographical accounts of formerly enslaved individuals in the 1920s by anthropologists at Fisk University. The transcribers declare that the accounts were "written down exactly as they were obtained (except for very minor editing plus some modifications of dialectic peculiarities to facilitate readability)" (C. S. Johnson xxix). The emphasis on "exact" transcription, closely yoked to an admission of a variety of alterations, will be unsurprising to those familiar with narratives of enslavement. The avowed banishment of linguistic alterity by effacing various linguistic "peculiarities" coupled with the disavowed bias of having these accounts gathered by white interviewers prefaces both Morte's account and those of his predecessors in life-writing about transatlantic slavery (Coleman x; Stampp, "Rebels" 42).

The narrative begins when Morte is plowing a field, hears someone calling his name, and assumes it is the punitive voice of his enslaver yelling "Morte! Morte," suggestive of a translinguistic threat of death (Morte 15). Instead, he realizes that the natural environs—plants, animals, water—are crying out to him before a voice declares "Preach the gospel, and I will preach with you" (15). This angelic inner voice tells Morte to praise God, who appears in a vision before him and tells him to be unafraid. Morte awakens from his reverie, realizes he has plowed up the corn, and fears repercussions from his enslaver. Instead, when confronted by his enslaver, Morte begins to preach spontaneously: "The words seemed to flow from my lips" (16). Departing from his visibly shaken enslaver, Morte has another vision of the angel Gabriel who declares "Go in peace, fearing no man, for lo! I have cut loose your stammering tongue and unstopped your deaf ears" (16–17). Morte awakens again and feels an undeniable impulse to preach—his enslaver can only listen and ask that Morte preach for his family and neighbors. When he does so, Morte declares that "my thoughts came so fast that I could hardly speak fast enough" (18).

Stammering is thus positioned as a condition of the unenlightened heathen and fearful enslaved person: a religious awakening removes the symbolic impediment and grants Morte remarkable fluency as he rapidly preaches.

Vocally inverting the power structures of slavery, Morte tells his white auditors that "they must be born again so their souls are freed from the shackles of hell" (18). His tongue cut loose by miraculous faith, Morte can position his enslaver and his associates as those in shackles who require the freedom that his discourse holds the key to. Notably, the account does not clarify if Morte remains enslaved after these events, or if his liberation came later; however, it does associate the divine removal of metaphorical disabilities, both oral and aural, with Morte's new powers of spiritual manumission.

The angel Gabriel's proclamation in Morte's vision has biblical precedent, particularly in Isaiah: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped / Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing" as well as "The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly" (35:5–6, 32:3–4). These verses symbolically align the removal of disability with the attainment of knowledge and clear communication, providing the contours of Morte's conversion narrative in which knowledge of God is the impetus to move from enslaved stammering to fluent preaching.

Notably absent from Morte's story, however, is the Bible itself. Henry Louis Gates Jr. influentially explores what he calls the "ur-trope of the Anglo-African tradition," "the trope of the Talking Book"—usually the Bible—by tracing its use in narratives of enslavement (143, 182). A revision of the dominant trope, *The Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher* (1811), literalizes the notion of the talking book. Jea prays for "a bilingual facility with the text of God" and God sends an angel and a Bible to teach him how to read in Dutch and English (178). Jea can then exclusively read the Bible, and no other books, which convinces his community that he was miraculously taught by God. Due to an ostensible policy freeing any enslaved person who could give a satisfactory account of the word of the Lord in New York, Jea is liberated after reading the first chapter of John to witnesses; for Gates, he "literally reads his way out of slavery" (173, 177). Though he functions as a "third-term resolution between the illiterate slave and the fully literate European," never able to read other texts or to write, Jea also partakes of a broader trend of (auto)biographies of enslavement in which an escape from sinful ignorance, freedom from physical bondage, and the enlightenment of literacy are intertwined (180).

Morte, like Jea, becomes a preacher following his revelatory intercourse with angels, though he otherwise departs from this prevalent pattern: as his narrative declares, he preaches "without a Bible or anything" (18). Morte dispenses with the mediation of the Bible and textuality in his attainment of the knowledge of God and of freedom; instead, it is the liberation of his

voice—the cutting loose of his stammering tongue, rather than the obtaining of literacy—that facilitates his multilayered conversion. Morte's narrative demonstrates the necessity of considering the voice as an alternative tool for the performance of freedom alongside the "complex of literacy-identity-freedom" often found in narratives of enslavement (Olney 65). In Morte's case, "to have one's tongue 'cut loose' is also to have one's mind, body, and spirit set free" (Coleman xvi): his newfound hyperfluency grants him a position of authority among his oppressors, underscoring how certain modes of speech had the power to alter the conditions of bondage.

The presence of the verb "cut" in the angel Gabriel's declaration is a break from its probable source in Isaiah, suggestive of a more visceral, even violent, transformation. The symbolic notion of cutting stammering tongues loose was made horrifically literal on both sides of the Atlantic contemporaneously to Morte's midcentury experiences of slavery. Alongside the elocutionary and mechanical remedies proposed for stammering, the 1840s saw the introduction of a wave of surgical techniques for its supposed cure. The increasing popularity of remedying clubfoot by dividing the Achilles tendon, an operation with its own potentially tragic consequences immortalized in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), inspired a spree of surgeries in which making incisions in, and excisions of, portions of the tongue, uvula, tonsils, and other elements of vocal anatomy was thought to combat stammering (Rockey 198, 201).

German surgeon Frederick Dieffenbach and British surgeon James Yearsley performed the first of many stammering surgeries in early 1841, followed by a comparable wave of operations in France. According to Hunt, "the rage for operations spread to America," where doctors cut into the tongue, afterward leaving their patients "as bad as ever" (*Stammering* [1870] 132–33). There were several variations of the procedure, but regardless of technique, the number of surgeries was high, as were their consequences. Yearsley did three hundred operations in a four-month period, Dieffenbach two hundred, and these were but two surgeons among many performing iterations of the procedure (Rockey 212). The risks of any surgery before the advent of anesthetics and antiseptics were manifold, and the survivors of these surgeries faced ramifications ranging from discomfort to death: sore throat, blunted taste, difficulty swallowing, abscesses, and fatality caused from "infection, asphyxia and hemorrhage" were common (203, 209). Any perceived benefit in those who survived was likely attributable to a placebo effect rather than any anatomical intervention. While some medical professionals gave credence to stammering operations, the majority saw it as charlatanism and "one of the greatest outrages upon modern surgery" (210).

Both proponents and opponents of surgical intervention used the language of slavery and freedom in their discourse. Dieffenbach, describing a postoperative patient, writes that "he neither grimaced nor stuttered" as "the movements of the tongue are free" (25). Yearsley declares that "almost all patients immediately after the operation are sensible of the freedom they have gained" (30); they are given "freedom to the throat" that allows them to "swallow, breathe, talk, and hear with freedom" (7, 12). Decades after the enthusiasm for stuttering operations had dissipated, another speech correctionist of the name of Yearsley, Walter A., refutes that stammering is merely a bad habit; if this was the case, "is it possible that scores of smart intelligent persons would be such slaves to it" and would, after treatment, relapse and become "a slave to . . . former vices" once again (54, 185)? The stammering poet Martin Farquhar Tupper was grateful to have avoided "surgical experiments" on his tongue, but wrote of his desire for "free unshackled utterance," paralleling his stammer to the condition of "an eagle chain'd to earth" and "a restless panther in his cage immured" as he grappled with the "Constant, galling, festering chain that binds / Captive my mute interpreter of thought" (*My Life* 73; "Of Speaking" 96; "Complaint" 119–20). The voice of the stammerer was conceived of as enslaved, shackled, chained, caged, captive—the stammerer's tongue in need of liberation—in a way reminiscent of the movement from impeded to hyperfluent vocality that is the crux of Morte's conversion narrative.

Perhaps most eloquent in condemnation of stammering operations was Alexander Melville Bell:

> To cut and come again—to cut again . . .
> He calls upon the newly loosen'd tongue
> To give a specimen of franchisement:—. . .
> The patient rises, pale as Banquo's ghost,
> And wildly stares, and shakes his gory locks.
> 'Say, sir, are you well?'—Y-y-y-e-s s-s-s-ir,
> b-b-b-better now!" (*Tongue* 64.406, 417–18, 421–23)

The angel Gabriel's declaration to Morte that he has "cut loose your stammering tongue" is gruesomely reimagined here: the enslaved individual becomes a stammering patient, the angel a surgeon who cuts and cuts again, demanding that the "newly loosen'd tongue" prove its resulting "franchisement." Akin to the ambiguous conclusion of Morte's narrative—he declares he was a preacher from that day on, but does not mention if he remained enslaved—the form and content of the patient's response are in ironical tension, the repeated

phonemes that assemble the assertion of a cure at once evincing the surgery's failure.

These two midcentury instances of cutting loose stammering tongues, by interventions divine and surgical, share a vexed relation to the attainment of bodily and vocal freedom. I do not bring them together to argue for a deliberate intertextuality, nor to assert analogical soundness between them by suggesting that irresponsible operations on dysfluent patients in any way mirror the scale, duration, or racism of the violence inherent in transatlantic slavery. Rather, putting Morte and Bell's patient in dialogue shows how idioms around both freedom and fluency, slavery and dysfluency, were mobilized to apprehend each other. Tracing the literal coincidence of enslavement and dysfluency and the symbolic substitution of these terms provides a rich interpretive site to consider how these disparate bodily states illuminate their shared context. How are notions of communicatory aptitude and the achievement of liberty intimately yoked in the period? What insights about the mediation of voice and narrative can be gleaned from juxtaposing the life-writing of enslaved and dysfluent individuals?

The politics of metaphor have received ample comment in scholarship on both slavery and disability.[2] Julia Lee emphasizes "the sheer ubiquity of slavery as metaphor," as slavery was used to describe anything ranging from marriage to industrial labor, showing the flexibility of metaphors for variant political agendas (19–20). These undeniably fraught analogies have generative aims and effects. As William Andrews reminds us, "metaphors *are* arguments. Their success depends greatly on the capacity of the reader to accept and explore the creative dialectic of the semantic clash until new meanings emerge from the debris." For Andrews, the period's Black and white autobiographers create metaphors from which emerge "meanings that could not 'fully exist'" without the metaphor itself (10–12). What new meanings emerge from metaphorizing a stammer as enslavement or liberation as the cutting loose of a tongue?

Firstly, these critical insights reveal the partial and problematic resonances proposed by the symbolic alignment of slavery and dysfluency. Rather than evaluating these analogies as "good" or "bad," however, we can interrogate the meanings they produce: they function in service of both "metonymic alliance" (carving out unanticipated solidarity around vocal oppression) and "metaphoric appropriation" (ignoring material realities for rhetorical efficacy) (Lee 10). Metaphorical linkages between dysfluency and slavery suggest that the speech of enslaved individuals was understood as categorically different, inferior, and even incomprehensible when contrasted to that of free people—that

2. See Sontag 58; Eagle, *Dysfluencies* 162; Shell 1; Holmes, "After" 265; Boster 67.

the voice of the enslaved person was inherently an impeded one. They also gesture to the inadequacy of normative language to convey the horrors of slavery, a recurrent idea within the antislavery archive. In the other direction, this symbolic pairing intimates that the stigma and discrimination accruing to dysfluent speech was externally imposed and systemically regulated—the product of institutions, rather than attributable to individual inadequacies.

To dwell purely with the analogical would be to reinforce, however implicitly, the idea that stammering was the exclusive purview of white oppressors in the nineteenth century. A move to consider vocal politics in narratives of enslavement will demonstrate that the attainment of various speech patterns had comparable prominence as the attainment of literacy in the genre, though the latter is almost exclusively foregrounded in scholarly accounts. A subsequent turn to the auto/biographies of two white dysfluent Victorians demonstrates the rhetorical and generic dialogue between the life-writing of the enslaved and the vocally disabled, emphasizing the congruences and tensions between the conventions and aims of these genres. A concluding examination of fugitive-from-slavery ads will elucidate a context in which white enslavers were forced to recognize the vocal particularity and diversity of enslaved people. Ellen Samuels has analyzed what she calls a "fantasy of identification" in relation to slavery in which "the truth of identity is immediately and fundamentally visible" (96). The advertisements reveal a vocal complement to this fantasy with descriptions that insist that identity is also immediately and fundamentally audible. In contrast to visible markers such as skin color and scarring, the voice individualizes differently given its associations with performance and mutability.

This work adds to a growing area of scholarship invested in the intersections between Victorian studies and African American studies by triangulating these fields with disability studies and focusing on contemporaneous autobiographical texts from across the Atlantic.[3] Previous scholarship has demonstrated the impact of nineteenth-century African and African American writing on Victorian novels, poetry, and other fictionalized forms, but not the reciprocal influence of life-writing from midcentury Black and white authors. Voice emerges as essential to the life-writing of both enslaved and dysfluent individuals: as marker of narrative authenticity and reliability, as symbol of personal evolution, and as fraught analogy bringing disparate experiences into

3. See Brody's "critical miscegenation" (5–6), duCille's interracial intertextuality, Hack's "African Americanization" of Victorian texts (3), and Lee's attention to the uptake of African American works by white British authors. Collectively, these scholars work to "reconnec[t] fields 'born' of a segregated academy" and show Victorian and African American works to be "important archive[s]" for understanding each other (Brody 6; Hack 2).

conversation. This dialogue reveals how literal and metaphorical instantiations of the relationship between voice and power reshaped what it meant to speak and what it meant to be free.

Oratorical Tongues: Frederick Douglass

Voice plays an integral and often contradictory role in the composition, circulation, and reception of narratives of enslavement, texts largely concerned with the articulation of freedom. The question of whose voices are being conveyed in the genre are bound up in notorious issues of authorship and authenticity, the narratives either written directly by a formerly enslaved individual or by a (sometimes deliberately obfuscated) editor or amanuensis. Speech disorder functions as a useful metaphor for the voice of transatlantic slavery that emerges within these texts—the speech of those directly oppressed by slavery impaired by unequal access to literacy, layers of mediation, and physical and psychic violence—if accompanied by the reminder that an impaired voice is not an inferior one, but a different, albeit stigmatized, mode of expression.

Narratives of enslavement deploy elements of spiritual autobiography, picaresque adventure, and abolitionist propaganda in different proportions from their inception in the mid-eighteenth century until their peak in the mid-nineteenth. James Olney unpacks the "overwhelming *sameness*" of the estimated six thousand extant narratives of enslavement, exploring the figures, scenes, phrases, and authentications prominent within them (46–48). It is imperative for these narratives to deny any sort of creative molding in their composition—not, of course, because this work is not happening, but because of the paramount need to convey veracity, to provide an irrefutable account of experiences under enslavement. These heterogenic creations were accompanied by paratext aimed at authenticating their contents: a portrait of the author, claims to be written by said author, testimonials from white abolitionist acquaintances, assertions that the account does not exaggerate the horrors of slavery and if anything understates them, and more. This textual apparatus was used to verify the identity of the author (this narrator exists) and their claims of obtaining freedom from the brutality of enslavement (their experiences are real). The narratives proper featured the "omnipresent thematic trio" of "literacy, identity, and freedom," with the acquisition of reading and writing and freedom from bondage often presented as inextricable (Olney 55).

These narratives also staked their truth on direct access to an oral source. Prior to the advent of audio-recording technology, the dominant modes of

preserving voices were through oral traditions and written transcription, two methods often in tension. In one sense, orality must be subjected to the written word to gain the wider circulation sought by abolitionists. Conversely, orality was a crucial marker of authority in these accounts, as evident in the repeated invocation in mediated narratives that amanuenses have taken the story from the formerly enslaved individual's "lips": direct transcription from the vocal organs becomes an emblem of authenticity (Prince 3; J. Williams 3; Blassingame 338). In addition, white editors would insist that they read the narrative back to the Black subject to confirm its truth, an oral act of affirming textual material that aims to disguise the fact that the power relation endemic to this type of composition inevitably alters it. Cyclically, this authenticity is made more meaningful when recorded and circulated to a literate public. The importance of vocalization is understandable, as enslaved individuals were often conscripted into silence, mobilized by enslavers and abolitionists alike as mute and "spectacular texts" at both slave markets and antislavery demonstrations (Boster 1–2). The textual forms of their narratives function as metonymic extensions of the voices of formerly enslaved individuals: orality and textuality, source and mediation, mutually rely on each other to publicize the truth of narratives of enslavement.

The subjects of these narratives often doubled as prominent figures on the antislavery lecture circuit, eventually translating their oral recollections into textual form. James Freeman Clarke, a white American abolitionist, describes the cacophony of voices that filled these antislavery meetings: "Their orators were of every kind,—rough men and shrill-voiced women, polished speakers from the universities, stammering fugitives from slavery, philosophers and fanatics, atheists and Christian ministers" (322–23). His list demonstrates the gender, racial, institutional, and religious diversity of the speakers while presenting them in opposing pairs. Male voices are contrasted to female, atheist oration to Christian, and the syntactic parallelism and proximity of "polished speakers from the universities" and "stammering fugitives from slavery" puts them into binary relation. Polished speech is contrasted to stammering and the university is contrasted to slavery, as are the speaking bodies that derive from each context. Stammering serves as the default mode of utterance for all fugitives from enslavement, suggestive of connotations ranging from the emotional intensity of what these speakers relay to their presumed lack of education in elocutionary ideals. Collectively, for Clarke, these voices "murdered the King's English," but "the eloquence we heard there was not of the schools, and had nothing artificial about it . . . and was all direction to action. Every word was a blow" (323). Evidently, the "polished" utterances of higher education are lost in this rhetorically effective slaughter of standard English,

one that impels social action while also bifurcating polished and stammering speech along racial lines.

Perhaps the most famous formerly enslaved writer and speaker, Frederick Douglass, presents a contrasting narrative of oratorical improvement. Diverse vocalizations are inextricable from Douglass's experiences with enslavement and liberation throughout his three autobiographies. Douglass posits two sonic experiences as the origin of his consciousness of enslavement: he describes hearing the wrenching screams of his Aunt Hester while she is viciously assaulted as "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery"; pages later, he discusses the songs collectively performed by enslaved people as the root of his "first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery" (*Narrative* 6, 14). As Fred Moten has argued, "the phonography" of both the screams and the songs provides Douglass with "the knowledge of slavery and the knowledge of freedom" (21–22).

Dysfluency, too, figures in Douglass's life story at crucial threshold moments. Prior to his relocation to Baltimore, he attributes his desire to see the city to his cousin, Tom: "a boy two or three years older than I, [Tom] had been there, and though not fluent in speech,—he stuttered immoderately,—he had inspired me with that desire by his eloquent descriptions of the place" (*Life* 46). Countering Clarke's binary of polished and stammered speech, Douglass refuses to make dysfluency and eloquence antithetical: his enthusiasm for the city where he would obtain literacy and journey to liberation—key moments in his life, and in many narratives of enslavement—comes from the stuttered and evocative utterances of his cousin.

Stammering is also at the beginning of Douglass's multidecade career as an orator, one that spanned over 2,500 speeches. Douglass provides an atypically amnesiac recollection of the inauguration of his oratorical career at an antislavery convention in Nantucket in 1841: "My speech on this occasion is about the only one I ever made, of which I do not remember a single connected sentence. It was with the utmost difficulty . . . that I could command and articulate two words without hesitation and stammering. . . . I am not sure that my embarrassment was not the most effective part of my speech, if speech it could be called" (*My Bondage* 358). Once again, halting, stammered utterances are differentiated from speech proper, despite perhaps possessing rhetorical efficacy, an echo of the impact of less "polished" oration gestured to by Clarke. The content of Douglass's speech is lost to his memory but its tendency toward stuttered form is preserved. He continues: "Convulsed as I was, the audience, though remarkably quiet before, became as much excited as myself. Mr. Garrison followed me, taking me as his text; and now, whether I had made an eloquent speech in behalf of freedom or not, his was one never

to be forgotten" (358). Douglass's halting, dysfluent articulation energizes the previously dormant audience, priming them for white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's remarks.

In other words, dysfluent Black oration provides the affective foundation for eloquent white oration as the latter transforms the former into his "text" for propounding the abolitionist cause. Douglass's words do not matter so much as his style of delivering them for generating investment and interest in the auditors; his words are rendered irrelevant, as he himself becomes the text for Garrison. In his previous memoir, Douglass provides a more positive account of his remarks in Nantucket, though he admits "the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down" (*Narrative* 100). Racial inequity is both the cause of Douglass's stammered remarks and the beneficiary of them: the burden of speaking in front of a predominantly white audience causes the halting speech that then provides the conditions for Garrison to become "the orator wielding a thousand heads and hearts" (*My Bondage* 358).

Despite this unidealized introduction to abolitionist oratory, Douglass's eventual status as an internationally renowned public speaker denouncing slavery garnered mistrust from early audiences for what can be described as hyperfluency: his use of an idiom and form of speech believed to be out of the purview of the formerly enslaved. He is subsequently pressured by white abolitionists including Garrison and John Anderson Collins to "include some 'plantation dialect'" and otherwise "modify his language" in his public lectures to present the voice of a previously enslaved individual that would meet the racialized expectations of white audiences (Drake xxiii). Douglass himself describes how auditors declare he "did not talk like a slave" and thus "denounced [him] as an impostor." White, Northern notions of "slave" speech are used to discredit the authenticity of Douglass's experiences. Rather than altering his vocal presentation, he has recourse to the pen: "After becoming a public lecturer, I was induced to write out the leading facts connected with my experience in slavery . . . thus putting it in the power of any who doubted, to ascertain the truth or falsehood of my story" (*Life* 186). Because Douglass's vocal form is seen as a mismatch for a phantasmal identity of the formerly enslaved, he turns to writing to provide the proof thought lacking in the oral presentation of his life. His experience dismantles a polarized yoking of oral effectiveness to fluency, wherein fluency is always sought and prized in speech.

A different relation between voice and authenticity thus emerges in Douglass's anecdote. While stories often circulated of formerly enslaved individuals shedding their disabilities upon emancipation, there is skepticism that Douglass could undergo a similarly miraculous vocal transformation, and even less faith that he could have possessed his impressive mode of speech

prior to liberation. A stammering, uncertain Douglass is more credible to white audiences, inverting the widespread nineteenth-century (and contemporary) association of stuttered speech with mendacity. Whereas "stammering . . . embarrassment" is likely "the most effective part" of Douglass's first public speech, fluency later connotes a lack of authenticity to his listeners. Nineteenth-century elocution and the vocal ideals it both described and prescribed have been defined as "the performativity of whiteness naturalized," a racialized set of oral expectations deemed incompatible with Douglass's embodiment by his early listeners (Conquergood 325). Douglass's oratorical prowess and its racist reception at the outset of his career motivate his turn to textual narration, part of a larger pattern in the period in which "black people could become speaking subjects only by inscribing their voices in the written word," an immense challenge given the "institutionalization of illiteracy as a mode of 'silencing' populations rendered 'voiceless'" (Gates 141; Mullen 249). In short, to transcend his status as a "text" for Garrison and others, Douglass needed to publish his own text. Thus, stammering is found on the cusp of intense life changes for Douglass and exemplifies the racialization of the binary of fluency and dysfluency: his dysfluent oration is believable, but his fluent oration must be buttressed by a written supplement.

Attention to the role of stammering in narratives of enslavement provides a vocal complement to the emphasis on literacy as a tool for asserting one's identity and freedom, "a necessary principle of structure" in narratives of enslavement (Gates 160). Voice, too, emerges as crucial in the self-presentation and reception of formerly enslaved (auto)biographers. The language of dysfluency is mobilized to diverse ends in contrast to Clarke's homogenizing description of all fugitives from slavery as stammerers; instead, it arises as a nervous symptom in a new role for Douglass and conveys a trustworthy fallibility to his first auditors, while also revealing the racist expectations of predominantly white audiences encountering Black orators.

I turn next to the biographical work of two white dysfluent writers who detail the lived experiences of vocal disability and deploy the metaphorics of slavery. While both narratives of enslavement and of disability had wide readership in the nineteenth century and were often framed by a white and/or nondisabled person not sharing the social position of their subject, the two genres diverge in other key aspects. The white privilege of these authors ramifies on a narrative level, possessed of a "social, cultural, and linguistic sanction" to self-revelation and an attendant "assumption of trustworthiness" that absolves them of the need to begin by justifying their credibility to readers—they start by explaining why they are writing, instead of assuring readers of the truth of their experiences (Andrews 2). Their life-writing provides

another avenue for interrogating the overlap between racial inequality and the pernicious normativization of vocal articulation.

Dysfluent Tongues: Charlotte Tonna and Martin Tupper

Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and Martin Farquhar Tupper can be described in similar terms: both were prolific nineteenth-century writers, but are all but forgotten today; their staunch Protestantism structures their respective oeuvres; they discuss a dizzying range of topics in a comparably diverse range of literary forms from their comfortably middle-class social positions; and they are biographers of vocal disability. Scholars have begun to mine the depths of disabled biographies from the past, though memoirs dealing with dysfluency, a subgenre of a subgenre, have yet to be examined. I answer Mary Klages's call for the "examination of more examples of th[e]-as-yet-unexplored genre" of disabled autobiography with a turn to the life-writing of Tonna and Tupper (147).

Nineteenth-century dysfluent biographies are scarcer than publications by speech correctionists on vocal disabilities, their causes, and their cures; they are also rarer than the fictional representations of dysfluency this book primarily interrogates. These texts provide another perspective on dysfluent embodiment without the primary aim of correcting or erasing vocal difference. However, like their fictional corollaries, they are arranged for strategic effect and, akin to elocutionary texts, they dwell on the benefits of a life in tune with the dictates of standard communication. While Tonna minimizes references to her own disabilities and expands on the disabilities of her companion, the mute John Britt, Tupper writes extensively about his own experiences with stammering. In dialogue, they provide instances of both mediated memoir and direct biography.

In each case, writing proves to be an appealing vocation for the vocally nonnormative as disability "could be revealed or concealed at the author's discretion": textual labor for Tonna and Tupper transcended "the oppressions and limitations" imposed on them "by insisting that bodies that wrote were all the same" (Holmes 148–49). Autobiography's ability to emphasize and deemphasize difference links the life-writing of enslaved and disabled people in the nineteenth century. Klages explains how contemporaneous efforts at supporting the blind and abolishing slavery often involved comparable rhetoric, with blind life-writing utilizing the "devices of slave narratives to present blindness as a form of social oppression and autobiographical representation as a means of resistance" (9). Though Klages argues that a key dissimilarity between blind

autobiography and narratives of enslavement lies in the former's lack of an "abolitional purpose" (151)—these texts are not trying to end blindness—the case is more ambiguous with dysfluent memoir. Dysfluent life-writing does not unilaterally deplore treatment, but rather advocates for finding the right treatment and discrediting baleful alternatives, while operating under the assumption that the alleviation of dysfluency is both possible and preferable.

Tupper and Tonna alike present a nonfictional iteration of the perceived malleability of dysfluency that makes it so narratively energizing in fiction. They suggest that the alteration, if not the outright "abolition," of dysfluency is instrumental in acquiring various freedoms. To do so, they constellate the binaries of dysfluent–fluent and enslavement–freedom with other terms: religious enlightenment for Tonna and personal success for Tupper. Their dysfluent memoirs associate particular vocal states with the achievement of freedom, broadly construed, while conversely aligning disordered speech with enslavement. The language of slavery becomes a rhetorical tool rather than denotative content: they wield their class and racial privilege to craft narratives that unevenly express antislavery positions that coexist with their linguistic usurpation of the experience of slavery.

One of the biblical verses that influenced Morte's conversion narrative also prefaces the *Memoir of John Britt: The Happy Mute* (1850): "Then the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped . . . and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35:5–6). The epigraph is altered to remove the intervening reference to a "lame man"; instead, it brings the "curing" of "the deaf" and "the dumb" into closer proximity. This choice is apt given the memoir's content, which is compiled by the deaf Tonna about her mute subject. The *Memoir of John Britt* is a unique biographical artifact from the period given that it is the account of one disabled individual provided by another. Discrepancies in age and education between Tonna and Britt create a familiarly fraught form of mediation. Britt's own thoughts are elusive, replaced by Tonna's account of how she liberated him through linguistic education and religious conversion. Tonna presents herself as an amanuensis for the mute Britt, providing him with language to "save" him from what she describes as the "slavery" of Catholicism.

While visiting Ireland, Tonna taught several deaf-mute children while "surreptitiously influencing them against Catholicism" (Maume x): one of these pupils, Britt, became her companion for the remainder of his life. Tonna's linguistic education and religious inculcation of the eleven-year-old Britt are inseparable: she brings both language and Protestantism to him, recalling the intermingling of literacy, religion, and freedom that pervades narratives of enslavement. After she uses a "dissected alphabet" to free his mind from its "prison," Britt uses a system of signs "of his own contriving" to ask Tonna

about the difference between himself and a dog, "neither of whom could talk" (62–65). This allows Tonna to explain her conceptions of God and, in a few pages, Britt obtains comprehension of the "grand doctrine of [Christ as] a substitute for sinners" (66, 68). Tonna attributes his rapid enlightenment to her pedagogical capabilities as complemented by God's will that collaboratively transform Britt's "once stupid countenance" into an "eloquent look" (68–69).

As Britt's knowledge increases, so does his anti-Catholicism, a parallel development that Tonna unconvincingly attributes to his insights rather than her influence, acting surprised at the "sudden and violent turn his feelings took against Popery" (70). As Tonna proceeds, only pages later, to declare that "it will be an awful item against our souls if we do not hate, actively hate, the deeds of Antichristian Rome," her protestations provoke readerly skepticism (72). Tonna uses the language of slavery as a key rhetorical strategy to condemn Catholicism. She announces her pity for the "passive slaves of Rome" (385); describes her "compassion over [popery's] unhappy slaves" (175); and construes Catholic confession as a "net . . . that holds these people in bondage," leading "to an abject slavery," adding that "the priest himself is equally enslaved" (214–15). Notably, her hatred of Catholicism prevents her involvement in antislavery organizations that welcome Catholic members; for Tonna, someone who perpetuates "Catholic slavery" cannot be an ally in the effort to abolish "negro slavery." Tonna views Catholics as victims of their faith as she wields the metaphorization of slavery with no qualifications, suggesting a disturbingly easy equivalence between transatlantic slavery and the Catholic Church as institutions that exert the same kind and degree of violence.

To retain her spiritual victories with Britt over the perils of Catholic "enslavement," Tonna takes him with her when she leaves Ireland, admitting that if they were separated Britt "must earn his bread by some laborious or servile occupation, [so] I had kept him humble" (88). The extent of this submission is clear: Britt eats in the same room with Tonna's family, but at a removed side table; he does household work for them, but receives no money and scant food for such services; whatever money he does receive, he is coerced into donating to the British Reformation Society (88, 102, 105). In addition, Britt is violently punished for the expression of "any angry emotions," especially if conveyed verbally (88). In an illustrative instance, Tonna asserts that Britt was flattered by the commotion he could stir by asserting his displeasure, thus becoming "a vocalist on very trifling occasions." In response, Britt is met with "raps on his head with the bend end of a hooked cane" and is subsequently "locked . . . up in a dark kitchen" (88). Tonna maintains that Britt was grateful to be disciplined into respectability, but this account of the

experience of violence from its instigator rather than its recipient is dubious at best. Tonna both doles out the punishment and describes its consequences—she regulates Britt's affect and narrative. His verbal outbursts, construed as unruly sonic indexes of unruly emotional states, are quelled by abuse. The form and content of the scene parallel one another; in both, Britt is present but enjoined to silence, unable to narrate Tonna's refusal to let him be a "vocalist." Tonna's espoused philanthropic and spiritual motivation for raising Britt are destabilized by her affective control, extraction of unrecompensed labor, and violent treatment of him.

Tonna remains in charge of Britt until his death at nineteen and beyond, retaining control over his narrative through the posthumous circulation of his biography. She releases *The Happy Mute; or, the Dumb Child's Appeal*—a brief account of Britt's life, its title evoking Tonna's emotional regulation of Britt and strategic use of him as a mouthpiece for religious doctrine. By 1847, sixteen years after Britt's death, the text reached its tenth edition. All profits from *The Happy Mute* purportedly went to the Juvenile Association for the Education of the Deaf and the Dumb; the book had a pictorial depiction of the "Two-Handed, or English Manual Alphabet" appended; and it concluded with a call for prayers and donations for young mutes (39). The book was framed by anxieties around the need to save the "ignorant" souls of mutes from the dual perils of atheism and Catholicism (9). The book's charitable purpose, educational apparatus, and evangelical content are inseparable, blending the pedagogical and moralistic, and indicative of how the desire to develop manual languages was wedded to the "desire to bring the deaf and dumb to salvation" (Maume x).

Britt's story thus demonstrates the capacity of education and language to provide disabled individuals access to new forms of knowledge that at once liberate and control. We can query what exactly Tonna provided Britt access to: a form of communication, certainly, but with it came rigid religious doctrines that dictated his inhabitation of the world. Access, then, signals not only inclusivity, but also access to regimes of regulation and discipline. Tonna declares that "every one of us is born dumb," both literally and spiritually, and those who gain linguistic aptitude without also receiving her religious tenets "are deaf and dumb in a far more pitiable degree" than Britt (28). Britt's disability is dislodged as a description for his communicative capabilities and instead functions as a label for moral debility.

By 1850, years after Tonna had died, Britt's story continued to circulate as a collation of references to his life in her writing under the title *Memoir of John Britt.* These variant versions of Britt's life lend themselves to two grating, though reconcilable, interpretations. On the one hand, they detail

an interdisability alliance between a deaf author and her mute student and the intimacy they forged across years—a communicative, affective, spiritual intimacy. On the other hand, Tonna's insistence that she is, for all intents and purposes, Britt's sole communicator opens the narrative to skepticism. Is Britt's vehement disdain for popish idolatry his own? Or are these sentiments attributed to his memory or indoctrinated into his life by the staunchly anti-Catholic Tonna? Is Britt's willingness to work without any renumeration comparably suspect? In short, is this a story of intense affiliation derived from a shared form of communication, or a story of imposed zealotry and exploited labor? Or, very likely, both?

In either reading, Britt's worldview was obscured in layers of mediation, especially in its final iteration, as an editor cobbled together a version of his life using another person's writings. It is infused with the vexed politics of metaphor as both slavery and deaf-mutism are used to convey the severity of various kinds of spiritual dereliction: refusal to conform to Protestantism, according to Tonna, is equivalent to being enslaved and to being deprived of communication. The three concepts become triangulated as interchangeable: for Britt, to lack language is to be denied spiritual truth and freedom; for Catholics, their "misguided" faith renders them slaves to their church and spiritually "deaf and dumb." To be free, for Tonna, one must have language and the correct version of religious knowledge. In other words, freedom is inextricable from a particular way of communicating with the external world and a particular set of internal spiritual beliefs.

In his dysfluent memoir Martin Farquhar Tupper also aligns the obtainment of fluency after decades of stammering with a more generalized emancipation, though rather than associating his fluent freedom with religious beliefs, he describes its facilitation of his personal success. Tupper was comparably prolific as Tonna: he constructs *My Life as An Author* (1886) as a retrospective on his writing career, all while touching on a compendium of Victorian debates ranging from slavery to teetotalism. *My Life* also provides an account of the impact of stammering on Tupper's life: for Tonna, her work with Britt demonstrates her pedagogical ability and God's will, whereas for Tupper his stammer is proof of his intellectual fortitude, of an extra challenge that his talents transcended.

Indeed, the self-aggrandizement bubbling under Tonna's text is flagrant in Tupper's. References to his fame crowd *My Life*: he recounts moments of "author worship" as fans seek locks of his hair (307), details the hundreds of "authorgraphs [*sic*]" he has given (304), mentions the "surprising" fact that he does not have a peerage (214), and more. *My Life* is penned by a late-in-life author very satisfied with his own story. This self-satisfaction is primarily

rooted in his transatlantic bestseller, *Proverbial Philosophy,* a collection of advice presented in essayistic blank verse.

Tupper's experiences with stammering do not undercut the tone of a celebratory career retrospective that characterizes *My Life*; rather, they enhance the sense of personal impressiveness and providential felicity that Tupper presents as the causes of his success. In other words, he presents a version of the "overcoming" narrative often mobilized in relation to disabled achievement in which (frequently condescending) praise accrues to disabled individuals for a variety of (often mundane) accomplishments, "miraculously" executed by "overcoming" the perceived limitations of their disability. Tupper details the deleterious effects of his stammer, describing it as "a very bad impediment of speech, which blighted my youth and manhood" (72). However, he does not become a prominent author by doing great things as a stammering individual, but rather because he once had a stammer and no longer does. Both are key: his stammer leads him away from vocally oriented careers toward the at-times silent vocation of writing through which his success is garnered, while its eventual alleviation allows him to further propagate his celebrity through lucrative speaking tours.

In a book with an immense range of topics, references to Tupper's stammer stand out as one of the only constants. Despite his titular insistence that he will focus on his life "as an author," references to his stammer appear in chapter 2, chapter 45, and consistently in between—even though he stopped stammering about forty years previously. For Tupper, then, stammering is an experience proper to the authorial: he is not breaking from the rubric of inclusion for his biography, but affirming that dysfluency and authorship are inextricable for him. He largely attributes the advent of his dysfluency to pedagogical abuse: early educators are blamed for "fix[ing] for many years the infirmity of stammering, which was my affliction until past middle life" (14–15). This moment both introduces Tupper's stammer and signals its eventual dissipation, again suggesting the importance of both dysfluency's commencement and alleviation. Tupper's stammer presents limitations in an educational context wedded to oral performance: he laments that "as I couldn't as a stammerer speak in school, high places were out of my reach" (24). Tupper finishes his university education, though "all on paper; for I could not answer *vivá voce*" (76–79).

Following his time at Oxford, Tupper's stammer becomes an occupational rather than an educational problem when he decides to take orders. Tupper reads in front of a bishop who, perceiving his "only half-cured infirmity," declares that he "could not be ordained unless [he] had speech" (62). The bishop's words characterize stammering as something categorically different than speech: a stammerer does not only lack fluency, but speech altogether. This

rebuff turns Tupper toward the law, where he hopes his "intellectual attainments . . . might yet be available to society . . . though on the 'silent system'"; however, he meets with more disappointment given that "verbal explanations" are necessary because "all could not be done on paper"; an "M.P.ship" is similarly dismissed (63, 67). Tupper codes his vocal disqualification from these professions as a failure in earning potential and masculinity, declaring that he made "every effort to speak like a man" but his "tongue seems only able to say veto" to each career, thereby foiling his efforts to eke out an independence (68, 400–401).

Writing is presented as a recuperative path to the economic status of normative masculinity. Tupper's disordered speech prevents his entry into the triumvirate of professions associated with young men of his social class—ecclesiastical, legal, political—and redirects him to "the office of a writer" (68). He describes being forced into an "era of silent thoughtfulness" that provided the "seed of several volumes as well as innumerable ballads and poems" (63). In other words, his experience as a stammerer provides the raw material for his subsequent career as a writer. Tupper views his "grievous impediment" as a sign that he is destined for "a writer's employment," thereby transforming his vocal disqualification into his inherent suitability for another line of work (68–69). Stammering, then, is not a curse of exclusion from the law court or church pulpit, but a providential invitation to sit at the writer's desk.

Importantly, though, his stammer is alleviated after two decades of acuteness. He recounts his father's attempts to engage "well-paid pretenders to make a perfect cure of my affliction" as well as the sufferings imposed on him by recitation drills, mechanical apparatuses, and medicines to no avail—he narrowly avoids the "surgical experiments on the muscles of lip and tongue" discussed earlier (72–73). Tupper thus describes common nineteenth-century treatments for stammering, as well as their associations with ineffectual charlatanism. Rather than endorse these treatments, Tupper attributes his "cure" to his agency and God's: "Nobody could cure me, until I cured myself; rather . . . until God answered constant prayer . . . and gave me good success in my literary life, and made me to feel I was equal in speech, as now, to the most fluent" (73). Tupper provides a sequence of events wherein appeals to God result in literary success, which in turn provides the basis for fluency. The relationship between authorship and stammering receives another dimension: stammering led him to his authorial career and his providentially bestowed success allows him to "feel" vocal equality with others. In short, stammering made him an author and then authorship removed his stammer.

Tupper makes his trajectory programmatic, instructing other stammerers to take comfort from his cure and pray to obtain "man's proudest

prerogative—the privilege of speech" (73). Rather than dwelling on the utility of dysfluency, Tupper opts to valorize fluency once he has obtained it, construing his movement from "man who cannot speak" to "emancipated orator" as further propelling his career (246). He outlines his successful reading tours across North America and Britain, dwelling on their improbability: "How strange that the stammerer should have so become the orator" (283). The stammerer becomes the writer becomes the orator who fuses textual and vocal performance to enhance his fame and finances.

Tupper's comments return us to the intersection of enslavement and dysfluency. His role as the "emancipated orator" conjures the antonymic counterpart of the enslaved speaker (his previous status as a stammerer), thereby positing fluency as an index of freedom. Describing his reading tours as the efforts of an "emancipated orator" also suggests the multitude of literally emancipated orators addressing audiences contemporaneously with Tupper: formerly enslaved public speakers. The relationship between authorship, oration, and freedom sketched by Tupper—a stammer leading to a writing career leading to complementary work as a fluent speaker—inverts the vocal trajectory of Frederick Douglass previously discussed. The end of stammering initiates Tupper's oratorial career, whereas a stammer is at the advent of Douglass's. Tupper begins as a writer, Douglass as a speaker, but both strategically combine the two: to further his career, for Tupper, and to authenticate his experiences, for Douglass.

Tupper's use of the language of emancipation and slavery requires insisting on the trauma of enslavement in a symbolic register while simultaneously downplaying the same in its literal iterations. To make his metaphoric usages effective, he muffles the unique horror of enslavement while amplifying its descriptive utility for understanding other experiences. Together, these rhetorical moves departicularize slavery and sunder the word from its denotative relationship with specific lives, thereby rendering it exportable to other experiences that it can connote, such as stammering. Echoing Tonna, Tupper uses the language of slavery to indict Catholicism, describing Catholic clerics as "cringing slaves . . . Chain'd by Rome" (413–15).

While Tupper is vehement in denouncing this apparent religious slavery, he adopts a studied neutrality in his stance on actual slavery. He describes himself as "one who had helped a little in slave emancipation," and includes a poem that declares "God made the freeman, but man made the slave, . . . Freedom all around is humanity's right" (249, 365). This generalizable sentiment lets Tupper apply the symbolic language of enslavement to women working in coal mines, omnibus hack horses, and his experiences with stammering; however, when discussing transatlantic slavery itself, he is more relativistic.

Tupper describes learning "the truth about American slavery" by visiting the South and accuses authors including Harriet Beecher Stowe of misrepresenting the region by "exaggerat[ing] isolated facts." In response, he aims to do "justice to both sides," and shares a poem detailing how the South has been maligned: "Yes, it is slander to say [the South] oppressed [slaves]" (276–79). His two-sides-to-every-story approach to slavery is in stark opposition to his wholesale condemnation of Catholicism. By deemphasizing the violence of transatlantic slavery he retools its language to emphasize the violence of other institutions.

Tupper dedicates several pages to describing portraits of himself, and one such description exemplifies the above rhetorical move particularly well: the portrait is "so dark and lacking in Caucasian comeliness that the engraving therefrom in one of my books makes me look like a [n——], insomuch that some Abolitionists claimed me as all the more their favourite for my black blood" (306). In addition to bolstering racist aesthetic valuations that render "Caucasian" and "comely" synonymous, Tupper references the benefits that can accrue from the appropriation of an experience, whether visually or linguistically. That some misconstrue the portrait as that of a Black person garners Tupper more popularity in certain circles; relatedly, his use of the language of slavery to describe experiences that are distinctly not those of enslavement works to elicit more empathy and support for his perspectives. Tupper wields the privilege of gaining the symbolic affordances of appearing Black or being described as a slave without having to grapple with the realities of those experiences.

Resistant Tongues: Dysfluency in Fugitive-from-Slavery Advertisements

Seeking the intersection of enslavement and dysfluency in lived experiences rather than appropriative metaphors is challenging. The paucity of sources on the interior lives of enslaved Africans and African Americans—diaries, letters, and the like—has been a consistent source of regret for historians of slavery who seek to reconstruct now-elusive personalities. Scholars instead rely on the autobiographies of self-emancipated and free individuals, collections of songs and folklore from enslaved communities, and oral interviews conducted with formerly enslaved people in the early twentieth century. This archive lacks the diversity and density of material written by and for the purposes of enslavers. Due to issues of mediation and temporal remove that plague most of these sources, some scholars turn to fugitive-from-slavery advertisements.

This genre is indifferent to the agency of the enslaved in comparison to abolitionist sources, existing for the contrary purpose of perpetuating slavery, though the ads are unstable texts trying to contain two opposing impulses. On the one hand, they erase the diversity of the enslaved people they sought to recapture, construing them all as lost "property"; therefore, they are "largely standardised" and homogenize self-liberated people as disobediently mobile possessions (Wood 80–81). On the other hand, the writers of the ads were forced to describe the individuality of particular fugitives to heighten the chance of their eventual recapture: scholars thus depend on the "descriptive reliability" of the ads because to misrepresent a fugitive "would obviously defeat the purpose of advertising" (Stampp, "Rebels" 44).

John Franklin and Loren Schweninger provide a detailed account of "slave flight" to demonstrate the large scale of resistance from enslaved populations and to sketch the dominant profile of a fugitive by analyzing over two thousand ads (xiv, 210). They created forty-seven interpretive categories based on information frequently relayed in the ads, including gender, age, height, complexion, scars, dress, literacy, and, notably, "speech patterns" (329–30). These traits were assembled by the enslavers who penned the ads because each individually had its limitations: clothes could be changed, scars covered up, so more information provided higher chances of recapture. Franklin and Schweninger note a "remarkable continuity" in the typical characteristics of fugitives, which stayed relatively static as the institution of slavery itself changed: most fugitives were strong young men, though those of different genders and ages also absconded (232, 210).

The fugitive-from-slavery ads contain several instances of enslaved individuals with disabilities who sought freedom: though features like physical strength and stamina were important factors in self-emancipation, they were not determinate. The prevalence of scars and impairments in the ads made them a "perpetual catalogue of the abuse of the slave body" (Wood 80–81): the ads objectified enslaved folks, but also acknowledged the capacity of enslaved people to rebel and escape, as well as their reasoning for doing so by recounting the violence enacted on them. Although most enslavers insist that fugitives from slavery ran away with "no cause," references to injuries and disfigurements collectively refute this posture.

The speech habits of fugitives came under close scrutiny in the ads, though there is disagreement regarding the prevalence of dysfluency within them: Kenneth Stampp declares "the astonishing frequency of speech problems among slaves," asserting that "no descriptive phrases were more common" than references to stammering ("Rebels 70"; *Peculiar* 381–82); conversely, Franklin and Schweninger argue that "only a tiny number stuttered or had

speech impediments" (225). My interest is less in the sheer quantity of references to dysfluent enslaved people and more in what attention to their specificity reveals about intertwining notions of freedom and fluency. My subsequent analysis of ads—primarily drawn from Arkansas and Mississippi, two states not covered in Franklin and Schweninger's work—suggests a volume of dysfluency far higher than the scant instances they identified, though it by no means substantiates the hyperbolic ubiquity that Stampp attributes to stammering.

Additionally, I am cautious of affirming the pathologizing tendency apparent in references to dysfluent fugitives from slavery, with Stampp asserting that "the stutterer often seethes with anger" ("Rebels" 70–71). This psychological interpretation echoes that of the enslavers writing the ads who often associate dysfluency with rage and rebellion. Though these readings feed into the damaging and popular alignment of stuttering with violence, they also implicitly subvert the idea of dysfluency as a sign of biological inferiority (Eagle, *Dysfluencies* 159; Shell 127). Instead, dysfluency is ascribed to the affective aspects of enslavement, suggestive of anger at racialized power asymmetries. This presents a fascinating counterbalance to the period's speech correctionists who connected dysfluency to the pressures concomitant with supposed white racial superiority. The period's symptomatology, then, equates dysfluency with both white Western "civilization" and with anger at the violence committed by white Western "civilization." In each equation, dysfluency derives from racial power imbalances and its emotional manifestation—feeling overwhelmed or enraged by this imbalance—is apportioned along a racial divide.

In his outline of dysfluency studies, Chris Eagle calls for readers to be "attentive to those seemingly minor phenomena of vocalized utterance—hesitations, accents, tonalities" ("Talking Normal" 6). It is these very phenomena that the fugitive-from-slavery ads describe, dwelling on fluency, tone, pitch, and other variables. The *Documenting Runaway Slaves* (*DRS*) project at the University of Southern Mississippi provides ads from Jamaica, Arkansas, and Mississippi from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which enslavers describe the speech disorders of fugitives from slavery as a means of tracking them down. The following account is not granular, instead crafting a composite look at dysfluent enslavement, and thus does not unpack the contextual variations in the *DRS* collection that contains material spanning from 1718 to 1865 from the Caribbean and the Southern United States. Rather, it emphasizes the yoking of dysfluency to various physical and psychic characteristics in the fugitive-from-slavery ads: references to dysfluency function to particularize fugitives from slavery, to distinguish their voice from others, but do so in an effort to initiate their return to enslavement.

The description of variations in fugitive speech implies that a conversation would occur prior to accosting a potential fugitive. It positions enslaved and self-liberated people as worth interrogating, someone to speak to enough to pick up on a certain habit of speech, rather than drawing assumptions solely from external appearances such as skin color. Ads declare that Dave "stutters very much when closely questioned" (*Mississippi* 95, 1835), Jasper "has an impediment in his speech when spoken to abruptly" (*Mississippi* 107, 1832), and Carter "stammers when interrogated" (*Mississippi* 120, 1833), while another asserts that "by strict attention it may be discovered that [Stephen] stammers" (*Mississippi* 226, 1835). The speech disorder—the primary marker of difference in these ads—reveals itself upon "close" questioning and "strict attention." As such, engagement with the voice of an enslaved person becomes a significant tool for identification: the fugitive tongue that falters must be heard to signpost the fugitive's identity as such. In this way, the fugitive-from-slavery ads implicitly acknowledge the diverse voices of enslaved people, the need to engage them in dialogue, and the integrality of speech to identity.

The variety of descriptions of dysfluency in the ads is notable. The following high volume of instances demonstrate the particularizing effect of the ads: a simple reference to a stammer did not suffice to establish vocal individuality, but references to the manner and context of dysfluency were deemed necessary. Daniel has a "kind of trembling in his speech" (*Mississippi* 77, 1831), Nat is "slow of speech, and speaks as if his mouth was full of something" (*Mississippi* 389, 1837), and Sam "had a peculiar voice; when he speaks he raises it (his voice) high, and drops it before he closes his sentence" (*Arkansas* 127, 1850). Furthermore, the ads acknowledge degrees of dysfluency, affixing adjectives to demarcate the precise extent of the disorder. Some have minor dysfluencies: John "at times stammers a bit" (*Arkansas* 145, 1853), Jack "lisps somewhat" (*Arkansas* 55, 1836), Ben has a "slight impediment in his speech" (*Arkansas* 19, 1831), Nielson "stammers lightly" (*Mississippi* 316, 1837), Harry "lisps a little" (*Mississippi* 117, 1833), and Ransom "nearly stutters" (*Mississippi* 217, 1835). Others have more consistent disorders: Tom "stutters in speaking" (*Arkansas* 157, 1858), Albert "stutters when conversing" (*Mississippi* 450, 1843), John simply "stutters" (*Mississippi* 440, 1841), Burrel is "quick spoken and stutters when confused" (*Mississippi* 527, 1857), Johnson "lisps when he talks" (*Mississippi* 453, 1843), Jack has "an impediment in his speech" (*Arkansas* 1, 1821), and Daniel "stutters when excited" (*Arkansas* 143, 1854). A third cluster have intense forms of dysfluency: Abel "stutters very much" (*Arkansas* 78, 1839), Lewis "stutters considerably" (*Arkansas* 47, 1836), George "stutters badly, especially when excited or frightened" (*Mississippi* 487, 1850), and Cornelius is "a thick-tongued fellow, and lisps very much" (*Mississippi* 221–22, 1835).

A somewhat inverted form of the ad extends the notion of dysfluency's utility for differentiation: ads were also posted by jails describing enslaved people recently placed in their custody with the hope that enslavers would read the ad and then pay to take the enslaved individual away. Once again, references to dysfluency permeate this variation: Mason "has a stoppage in his speech or stuttering" (*Arkansas* 104–5, 1843), Joshua "speaks slow and with a slight lisp" (*Arkansas* 66, 1838), Peter "has an impediment in his speech" (*Arkansas* 148, 1854), and Kitt "stutters very much when talking" (*Mississippi* 216, 1835). Newspapers also posted ads that compiled long lists of incarcerated fugitives from slavery with brief descriptions to make the prisoners recognizable to the enslaving class. Brevity was even more essential in these collated ads than in the individualized and longer-form variants, though the truncated style did not efface references to dysfluency. To take a few examples: "JACK, black, lisps, 25 yrs 5 ft 8"; "CUDJOE, 5 ft 3, black, thick set, lisps"; "PETER—20 yrs. 5 ft. 11 in. slender stutters badly"; "SMITH, dark complexion, 4 feet 11 inches high, 15 years of age, slender made, stutters"; and "HENRY, 22 years, 5 feet 5 inches, lisps in speaking" (*Mississippi* 376–77, 1837; 213, 1835; 492, 1851). The violently reductive nature of these statements is chilling. They prioritize dysfluency as a key element in interpersonal recognition: listed alongside other select characteristics, speech disorder is deemed necessary to include even in this abbreviated variant, suggesting the perceived integrality of a stammer or lisp to a particular fugitive's identity.

Importantly, dysfluencies are presented as distinct from other speech variations within the ads. One ad describes George who "speaks very little English" and "has an impediment in his speech" (*Jamaica I* 26, 1779). There are over seventy references to fugitives from slavery who speak "little," "broken," or "no" English among the Jamaican ads, but George is the only one who is also mentioned as having a speech "impediment." As such, references to speech disorders cannot be dismissed as consequences of linguistic difference. Additionally, dysfluency was not attributed to a lack of education. An ad seeking Ransom notes he "has an impediment in his speech, nearly stutters" and "can read and write well" (*Mississippi* 217, 1835). Ransom has a verbal disorder and prowess in literacy and both are markers of distinction to locate him: just as the reference to his dysfluency necessitates a dialogue with him to be of use, his ability to read and write are only a clue (or trap) if they are engaged by those seeking his recapture. He must be acknowledged as a person with a verbal and textual voice if the descriptions are to serve any purpose. These ads demonstrate that dysfluency was understood as a unique element of speech and one that did not preclude fugitives from cultivating skills in other areas.

The instances above share striking similarities, particularly in terms of gender. The disproportionate number of fugitive men with vocal disabilities is attributable to the far lower proportion of fugitive women coupled with the comparatively minuscule reported statistics on women with speech disorders in the period. Many enslaved women were involved in the labor of caring for children, which made absconding far more challenging than it was for most enslaved men (Franklin and Schweninger 212). References to fugitive women with disordered speech do exist, however: Betsey "stammers a little in her speech," a particularly salient feature as "no particular mark" is recollected on her person (*Arkansas* 7, 1825). In addition to ads that describe fugitive women, others posit a tacit connection between dysfluency and femininity: Henry has a "voice rather effeminate, speaks quick and stammers a little when confused" (*Arkansas* 49–50, 1836). Not only is dysfluency mobilized as a crucial component of identity, but it is more likely to intersect with certain elements of subjectivity than others.

In addition to confirming broader trends around the gendered apportioning of fugitivity and speech disorder, the ads gesture to the intensely violent relationship between enslavers and enslaved people. Slavery can be understood through what Jasbir Puar has described as "the right to maim": the racialized process of injuring, socially excluding, and maintaining certain "populations as perpetually debilitated, and yet alive, in order to control them" (x). The proximity of bodily trauma and dysfluency is a common feature of the ads: Jim "stutters very bad, and has many scars on his back caused by the whip" (*Mississippi* 468, 1844); Nelson is "inclined to stammer a little when spoken to; and has lost a part of one of his fingers as well" (*Mississippi* 443, 1842); and Moses has "a scar on his lip; stutters when speaking" (*Mississippi* 432, 1839). The characteristic silence of these ads regarding the cause of scars, mutilations, and other marks suggests their origins. Vocal and physical markers of difference are formally aligned, gesturing to the external and internal traumas of slavery. This is not to buttress arguments that the violence of enslavement is the root of the disordered speech of enslaved individuals. However, some ads explicitly link the two: Charles has "one of his fore teeth . . . partly broken out, producing a slight impediment in his speech" (*Arkansas* 22, 1831). Physical injury and vocal disorder frequently inhabit the same sentences in the ads and are causatively linked in the lived experiences of some fugitives.

The psychic setting of speech also pervades the ads, suggestive of the power dynamics of communication between enslavers and enslaved people: George "stammers when speaking, and has rather a dogged look when spoken to by a white man" (*Arkansas* 135, 1852), whereas Taylor "lisps when he

speaks, and cannot look at any person when conversing with him" (*Mississippi* 433, 1840). The context and attending facial arrangements of speech indicate a habitual need for fear and self-effacement in the lives of these individuals. These ads, along with several others that describe fugitives from enslavement as speaking slowly or looking downcast when conversing with white people, recall Douglass's sense of being "weighed . . . down" by the effort of speaking to a white audience and the resulting dysfluency of his speech in Nantucket.

A detailed description of a multiply disabled fugitive named Harry appears in an ad that exemplifies the structuring tensions of the genre. Harry is "deaf, and stutters, and appears to talk with considerable difficulty, making signs and a kind of stuttering noise." Though said to be a "helpless old man," Harry absconds with a rifle, ten beaver traps, an axe, and a canoe—the ad providing evidence to disprove its own assertion of his impotence (*Arkansas* 34–35, 1834). The ad is representative in its strategic need to include information that balks against the ideologies that enslavers sought to promulgate. Enslavers maintained that there was no cause to escape from slavery, while the high volume of ads they produced undercut this; they plead ignorance of the reasoning behind a fugitive absconding, while cataloging the violence enacted upon enslaved people; they assert the helplessness of disabled fugitives from slavery in particular, while describing how they effectively eluded recapture. Harry's ad is an intensified instance that demonstrates that the ads do not require great feats of interpretation, of reading between the lines, to reveal their semantic instability. The deaf, stuttering, old man is "helpless," and the deaf, stuttering, old man has successfully liberated himself along with a plethora of his enslaver's possessions: the ad tells us both "facts" and cannot reconcile their contradictions.

Two other patterns emerge within the ads that exemplify dysfluency's alignment with qualities that were threatening to the institution of slavery: the idea of passing and the trait of artfulness. One ad describes the circumstances of the disappearance of the fugitive Fanny: she "will probably try to pass herself for an Indian woman, but her speech and hair will be sufficient to detect her" (*Mississippi* 424, 1839). Although the ad does not contain a reference to a speech disorder, it does introduce an anxiety around passing—about the potential of fugitives from slavery to disguise their identity as such. In addition, the ad points to the power of the voice to reveal Fanny's "true" self: "her speech" will help enslavers to "detect her." Similarly, Winn, who is "inclined to stutter when speaking quick," has "been trying to pass himself sometimes as a Choctaw and white man" (*Arkansas* 143, 1853): the ad offers the reality of Winn's stutter as a tool to prove the falsity of his claims to other racial categories.

Similar ideas appear in two ads from Jamaica. The first describes Cook who "stammers in his speech," "was flogged two days before he took his departure, for thieving," and "may possibly pass for a free fellow as he knows how to work in boats" (*Jamaica I* 18, 1777). The ad provides Cook's reason for fleeing as a response to the violence of his enslaver following his theft, which leads him to commit a further act of "theft": the removal of his own body from his enslaver's control. Cook also has the dangerous capability of passing for a freeman due to his specialization in water transportation. Cook's speech disorder becomes enmeshed in claims about his ontological status as a "slave." The ad makes the following claims: Cook is a "slave"; he can pass for free, which he is not; Cook has a stammer. Therefore, if one encounters Cook and he has a stammer, the truth of the ad is confirmed including its claim that Cook is a "slave," despite his ability to perform freedom. The ad links the reality of Cook's speech disorder with the imposition of his enslavement, while its construction also tacitly aligns his stammer with his threatening potential to pass by mentioning both in the same sentence.

Relatedly, an ad for the fugitive Jonathan mentions "he has an impediment in his speech, is of a very black complexion and has often passed as free" (*Jamaica I* 21, 1777). Jonathan is mentioned in an ad for five fugitives from slavery sought by the same enslaver, and his speech disorder is utilized to mark him out from his fellow self-liberated individuals. Significantly, Jonathan is the only one of the five to be described as having a speech "impediment" and the only one who is said to pass as free. These ads exemplify the conflicting ideas suggested by the fugitive tongue that stutters: it is both aligned with captivity, as an indicator of enslaved status, and uneasily associated with an ability to perform freedom convincingly.

The potentially threatening nature of the dysfluent fugitive from slavery is extended in two other ads that mention "artful" fugitives. The description "has an impediment in his speech, and is very artful" is attributed to Will, who is suspected of "skulking" at the estate where his wife is enslaved (*Jamaica II* 4, 1815). Both the words "artful" and "skulking" connote something cunning about Will's personality and despite the ad containing six sentences, the text places his speech disorder side by side with his artfulness, suggesting an affinity between the two. An ad focused on Robin states "He is an artful fellow, and will change his name, 5 ft. 6 in. or 8 in. high, has an impediment in his speech, and when speaking fast stutters" (*Jamaica II* 7, 1816). The ad repeats the syntactical formation that relates speech disorder to craftiness, exemplified in his forethought to change his name. As such, Robin's name is no longer a stable marker of his identity (it can be shed), but his stutter cannot—it remains a marker of enslavement.

These ads raise questions about whether these alignments between dysfluency and resistance are mere textual coincidences or point to something deeper: the perceived threat of the enslaved person with a speech disorder who has the artfulness to escape, the capabilities to pass as free. Phrased reductively, is the stammering fugitive from slavery subversive? Is the mute fugitive mutinous? A generalizing claim that speech disorders are linked to violence is untenable and problematic; however, Marc Shell's notion that the "inability to get words out can lead to acting out—and to action" in the context of slavery positions the dysfluent fugitive from enslavement as a figure who potentially transforms the double marginalization of slavery and disability into a "resistant orality," a performance of freedom (Shell 129; Mullen 253). The traces that remain of stammering and lisping individuals in this dehumanizing genre attest to the racial diversity of dysfluency and to the ways that vocal disability was understood as a significant component of identity with connections to other characteristics. While the content of an enslaved person's voice could efface their enslavement, the ads operated on the understanding that the forms of their voices were reliable indicators of their fugitivity from slavery. The ads provide literal instances of the symbolic alignment between notions of freedom and fluency deployed in the life-writing of formerly enslaved individuals and white dysfluent people previously explored.

As these ads demonstrate, the meanings of enslavement and dysfluency are not monolithic; unsurprisingly, then, neither are the new meanings that emerge as these terms converse with each other on literal and analogic registers across genre, time, and location. Their dialogue does create particular arguments—that a speech disorder imposes a type of social enslavement, that one of the major ramifications of being enslaved is the impairment of (public) speech—that together emphasize the importance of vocal fluency in conceptions of freedom, whether legal, spiritual, or otherwise.

The preceding textual assemblage facilitates a return to the "interesting account of a negro girl stuttering" that, for speech correctionist James Hunt, serves as a disruptive footnote to a racist theory of vocal variation. The young woman's story—even more troublingly mediated than the folklorists transcribing Morte's conversion or Tonna narrating Britt's life and death—complicates Hunt's assertion that stammering is primarily an affliction of powerful white men. Her experiences demonstrate both the effectiveness and inadequacy of the meanings that emerge from the convergence or substitution of dysfluency and slavery. Her enslavement leads to her stammer, which leads to her constant weeping, which in turn further impedes her ability to communicate in a conventional way. Her enslavement and stammer point to each other as compounding indicators of her imposed social limitation—her lack of free

speech, movement, and more. However, as a Black woman she insists on the racial and gendered specificity of her experience of stuttering and of enslavement, glossed over by Tonna and Tupper in their eagerness to use slavery as an evocative tool to describe vocal disability and religious difference. She troubles the symbolic interchanges between dysfluency and enslavement in the period, demonstrating how metaphoric substitutions often belie the reality of dual inhabitation: by embodying both experiences, she reveals the inadequacy of using either term to understand the other.

Contemporary poet JJJJJerome Ellis exemplifies this idea in their collection *Aster of Ceremonies* (2023). The book considers how "to use lyricism to investigate beauty in Black life, and Black dysfluent life, without romanticizing the experience of the enslaved" (5). To do so, Ellis turns to fugitive-from-slavery advertisements as "an archive of Black dysfluency": building on m. nourbeSe philip's work in *Zong!* (2008), they reorder and reform words and phrases from fugitive ads referencing speech disorders to create poems (29). Ellis's efforts simultaneously function to honor the past experiences of their ancestors and to show how these dehumanizing archival traces can potentiate alternative, socially empowering conceptions of dysfluency in the present. In one poem, they assert "*the art of the stutter / is to utter in time / not on time,*" suggestive of dysfluency's power to challenge restrictive though widespread expectations of vocal pacing and instead multiply the temporalities of communication (39). Ellis's poems formally echo this idea as they use a range of tools—from musical notation to botanical illustrations to typographical renderings of stuttered phonemes—to exceed the standard confines of a written poem. In other words, Ellis uses the space of the page to evoke the time of the stutter, demonstrative of the artistic power of refuting standard genres of both print and speech. Ultimately, they take their audience beyond a facile metaphoric alignment between speech disorder and enslavement, instead using Black dysfluent subjecthood as a catalyst for creative expression and self-realization. They conclude the book by considering how their poetic methodology allowed them to pluralize their relationship to their own voice; rather than considering dysfluency as an issue to correct, Ellis declares "*my stammers free me*" (132).

CODA

"Th-th-th-that's All, Folks!"

Dysfluency's meanings far exceed the mere absence of fluency. Across the preceding chapters, vocal disability has nimbly moved from functioning as a marital impediment, to a nostalgic childhood joy, to an occupational asset, to an amusing though exploitative component of stardom, to a fraught analogy for freedom. These examples are indicative of the cultural ubiquity of dysfluent representation throughout the nineteenth century—across authors, mediums, decades, and borders. The purposes of these depictions have proven as diverse as they are plentiful, though they are united in their demonstration of the voice's power to locate people within or exclude them from significant social structures.

Cultural entanglements with vocal disability persist into the twentieth century. To take one notable instance, dysfluency was commonplace in animated cartoons following the introduction of sound into the medium. Marc Shell has shown how the animation juggernaut Warner Brothers found the mockery of nonstandard English in the form of talking animals to be lucrative. From the exaggerated Mexican accent of the mouse Speedy Gonzales to the French intonations of the skunk Pepé Le Pew, from the lisping Daffy Duck to the disordered speech of Tweety Bird, vocal difference was part and parcel of the so-called "Golden Age" of American animation (88). While the racialized caricature of Speedy was greeted with outrage, comparable collective ire over the representation of dysfluent figures took longer to foment. Indeed, critiques

of the "most famous speech-impeded personage" of the midcentury, the stammering Porky Pig, were not publicly voiced until the 1990s—over fifty years after the character's creation (199, 89). Porky holds the record as the longest-continuing character from the Looney Tunes franchise, known for his signature farewell: the stammeringly articulated "That's all, folks!" Like his textual precursors, Porky's specific form of stammering is not motivated by mimetic accuracy: it is atypical and exaggerated when compared to actual dysfluent speakers (Shell 292, n. 32).

Though the product of a notably different context and medium, Porky emerges as an unlikely synthesis of many of the claims of *Dysfluent in Fiction.* The character's social circle shows the durability of both the heredity- and contagion-based models of dysfluent origin discussed in chapter 1: his father Phineas's stutter suggests Porky inherited his articulation, whereas his girlfriend Petunia's stutter gestures to vocal infection via social proximity (Shell 13–14). Porky comes to reembody Charles Dodgson's stammer in the cartoons *Porky in Wackyland* (1938) and its colorized remake *Dough for the Do-Do* (1949), the titles evoking Wonderland and Dodgson's stuttered articulation of his surname and self-caricature as the Dodo bird. Recalling the failed recitation of Dodgson's Bruno examined in chapter 2, Porky's inaugural appearance in *I Haven't Got a Hat* (1935) shows the young pig struggling through a school reading of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride" (1860). The scene calls to mind the specific pressures of recitation for dysfluent students, while Porky's stuttered articulation of the patriotic poem conjures the problematic place of the dysfluent citizen in the nation-state—a point similarly embodied by stuttering wood engraver George Pearson in the introduction.

Furthermore, the history of Porky's voice actors echoes the contrasting valuations of E. A. Sothern's performed dysfluency and Henry Irving's habitual stammer from chapter 4. Porky was initially voiced by Joe Dougherty, who also had a small (and silent) part in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), a key film in the transition from silent film to talkies. Dougherty stuttered in his daily life and performed his dysfluency to bring Porky to life: he played the porcine role from 1935 until 1937 when he was fired in part "because it was expensive to have an actor who stuttered when he didn't want to" (Shell 86). Dougherty was replaced by Mel Blanc, one of the most influential voice actors of all time, who would provide Porky's stammer for over fifty years.[1] Though Blanc voiced "a parliament of hundreds of speech-impeded animals," including Tweety and Daffy, he had no vocal disabilities himself (87). Recalling the

1. Blanc reflects, "It must have seemed ideal at first—need a stammering cartoon pig, hire a stammering actor. But problems unfolded. Recording was still done on expensive optical film, and Dougherty's inability to come in on cue wasted a lot of it" (Blanc and Bashe 66).

vocal evaluations of Victorian stage culture, lived dysfluency is to be lamented and purged, feigned dysfluency lauded and perpetuated as entertainment alleviates the social marginality of vocal difference.

This book's chapters reflect on the dynamics between a certain dysfluency, cultural medium, and social encounter; similarly, the opening sequence of the short *Porky's Poppa* (1938) explores the vexed relationship between dysfluency and the sonic media that allowed for the cartoon pig's depiction. The film focuses on the dynamic between animals and machines in a way that also clarifies humanity's dilemmas regarding emergent technologies. The short begins with a variation of the nursery song "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," substituting Porky's Poppa for the titular farmer; it is sung by an off-screen group of vocalists who describe various farm denizens. The original song features repeated onomatopoeias that supposedly recall the sounds made by respective animals; in this rewrite, the goose still honks and the duck still quacks, though the calf opts to show off her calves instead. When Porky himself is invoked, he does not oink, but speaks, offering his then-catchphrase "oh boy"; however, the temporality of his stammered articulation is too slow for the tempo of the song and he declares, with frustration, "Skip it." After the other farm animals have been featured, the shot returns to Porky, now armed with a crank-phonograph. Apparently, Porky has recorded himself saying "oh boy," which he can replay using the machine to keep pace with the other vocalists. The first few "oh boy"s come out fluently before the machine begins looping Porky's stammered pronunciation. Now incensed, Porky hurls the machine to the ground, smashing it to pieces and further warping his articulation as it offers a distorted slow-motion "oh boy" with its dying "breath."

Porky distances himself from his animal embodiment by refuting the script of "Old MacDonald," speaking rather than making a conventional "oink" or other pig noise. His failure to speak fluently, though, suggests something nonhuman about him—an association durably grafted by the legion of twentieth-century dysfluent cartoon animals. In his second attempt at the verse, Porky conscripts a machine to give him the rapidity of utterance demanded by the song's pace. The phonograph can repeat his catchphrase for him, a vocal externalization that allows his voice to harmonize with the others. Rather than effacing the dysfluency he wishes to muffle, however, the machine renders it permanent, repeatable, and thus undeniable. Aghast at this vocal mirror and suggestive of the discomfort many people feel when hearing their voice reproduced, Porky destroys both the record of his speech and the machine that made it. Much to the fictional Porky's dismay, perhaps, the character would go on to record several popular songs on vinyl, ranging from "Blue Christmas" to "K-K-K-Katy," each with his characteristic stutter (Shell 145, n. 88).

The opening of the film anticipates the theme of what follows: the danger of technologies that are meant to alleviate embodied vulnerabilities but instead exacerbate them. The song concludes with the scariest thing that Porky's Poppa has on the farm: the accruing debt of an unpaid mortgage. His financial hardship is attributed to his cow, Bessie, who is failing to produce milk. Poppa, with a stammer, orders a new cow over the telephone and receives an air-delivered "New 1938 Creamlined Cow"—a robotic cow fueled by hay and capable of producing milk, cream, cheese, and more in an assembly-line fashion, complete with a conveyor belt. Porky urges Bessie to beat out her "tin-can cow" competitor before Poppa decides to use her for meat instead. He encourages her to have more hay to help with her milk production; in short, she must eat to avoid being eaten. In contrast to the Creamlined's factory production of milk, Bessie lovingly "births" each bottle of her milk, Porky swaddles them in a blanket, and then places them in a basket. Together, they collect a "quartuplet" of milk/children. A competition of divergent methods of production between the machinic cow and its organic counterpart ensues, the former consuming all the hay so Bessie has no "fuel" to continue making milk—you need to consume to produce, the cartoon insists. Eventually the two cows collide: what appears to be the Creamlined produces an immense amount of milk and is hailed as the "winning" cow by Poppa, before it is revealed that only Bessie survived the collision and was clothed in the broken metal of the Creamlined. By the end of the film, Porky has smashed the phonograph and Bessie has smashed the Creamlined—two technologies mobilized to redress their respective bodily limitations that, in the process, emphasize their inability to "produce," whether speech or milk, in an efficient and thus profitable manner.

Porky's desire for the phonograph to assist his speech as well as his dismay that it instead returns his stammer to him in a disembodied though preserved form, both his hope for and frustration at the technological remediation of dysfluency, are nineteenth-century inheritances. In January 1878, George Eliot wrote to a friend, asking "What do you say to the phonograph, which can report gentlemen's bad speeches with all their stammering?" Eliot is characteristically up-to-date. Her inquiry comes only two months after Thomas Edison announced his invention in print, and a month before the phonograph was patented. Eliot's question ends her letter, and is preceded by the remark that her partner George Henry Lewes is "preoccupied with the case of a man who has an artificial larynx, with which he talks very well" (234). Eliot's statement and following question present a striking juxtaposition.

Firstly, the technological marvel of the phonograph, celebrated in its day by Edison and the cult that arose around him for the "gathering up and retaining

of sounds hitherto fugitive, and their reproduction at will," receives a curious reception from Eliot (Edison, "Phonograph" 527). While contemporary media theorists echo Edison's proclamation, Eliot is less enthusiastic (Peters 177). She does not want her friend's opinion on the epoch-shifting and immortalizing powers of the phonograph, its inscription of ephemeral sound onto replayable surfaces; instead, she is interested in how the phonograph will capture dysfluent articulations including stammering. In a sentence, Eliot deflates the phonograph's ability to liberate the human voice by shattering the spatiotemporal boundaries that once held it. Rather than endorsing this quasi-mythical view of the phonograph, she elucidates how it emphasizes the voice's imperfections by arresting and repeating them. When a stammer is ephemeral, it remains potentially malleable, as evidenced by the growing ventures of speech correctionists during the period to alleviate the disorder. But when inscribed into the wax or tinfoil of Edison's phonographic cylinders, it becomes indelible. While Edison predicted the phonograph would become a crucial tool in the "teaching of elocution," thereby improving speech in immeasurable ways, for Eliot, it will catch and infinitely circulate our most ineloquent utterances (Edison, "Perfected" 646). For Edison, the phonograph alleviates stammering, while for Eliot the former makes the latter permanent.

Secondly, however, Eliot's comment about Lewes has a strikingly different resonance. Lewes, and, by extension, Eliot, are interested in how a different vocal technology—the artificial larynx—is allowing a man to speak "very well." Taken together, Eliot's two sentences express a crucial ambivalence about technological mediations of the human voice. The semipermanently inscribed speeches spoken into the phonograph replay our stammers to us; the extemporaneous, fleeting speech facilitated by the artificial larynx produces utterances of a fine quality. Technology both highlights the voice's fallibility and reduces these "flaws" in complex ways. In short, for Eliot, new media both augment the human body's adaptive capabilities and reveal its limitations.

In this sense, Eliot preempts both Porky Pig and contemporary scholars as a theorizer of new nineteenth-century vocal technologies, seeing them as double-edged swords for human communication.[2] For Eliot, human imperfection is both cause and result of technological advancement, the former emphasized via the much-circulated story of the partially deaf Edison ending the reign of sonic impermanence; in Friedrich Kittler's phrase, "A physical impairment was at the beginning of mechanical sound recording" (22). Eliot's insight is that sound technologies both render the voice immortal at the expense of highlighting the body's fragility (the phonograph) and transform

2. See Peters 187; Picker 11; Dolmage 2.

bodily disabilities into technological possibilities (the artificial larynx)—debilitating and enhancing the voice, immortalizing and alleviating vocal disability. Eliot and Porky are united in declaring technology's at once nightmarish and utopic relationship to vocal disability and its futures.

New media continue to contour the public reception of vocal disability today. The field of speech correction that coalesced throughout the nineteenth century is more profitable than ever, spreading beyond the limits of traditional speech disorders: vocal coaches and speech–language pathologists treat queer men who want to sound "less gay," immigrant populations seeking "accent modification," trans individuals who undergo gender-affirming voice therapy, and many others.[3] Contemporaneously, a growing number of dysfluent activists reject the notion that their modes of speech need "fixing" and instead embrace their voices as points of pride and uniqueness.[4] This book's interest in how vocal disability has been understood in relationship to different cultural forms and subject positions during a crucial period in the history of the human voice aligns with these efforts to expand the types of voices that are deemed worthwhile.

This work has encouraged me to reflect on the vocal norms of the institutional space from which it was conducted. Within contemporary academia, a failure to recognize and work with dysfluency as something other than a deficit forecloses productive challenges to our communicative norms that could reshape the types of knowledge we create and the procedures we use to disseminate and evaluate that knowledge. Humanities scholarship is a vocation that champions and even demands fluent speech: whether in seminar discussions, oral examinations, dissertation defenses, conference presentations, job talks, classroom lectures, or even impromptu networking chats, a certain vocal standard of pace, pitch, and fluency is linked to perceived competency. We must speak slow enough to be comprehensible, but fast enough to adhere to the inflexible time allotments attendant to different vocal performances within the academy. We must be able to express ourselves swiftly and coherently, tackle multisyllabic, even polyglot, jargon, and minimize any "mispronunciations," while assessments of our capability as researchers and educators are adversely impacted by deviations from these norms. In both roles, our work

3. The speech of the foppish Dundreary and "queer" Dobbin anticipates modern discourses around "gay speech." In addition, Polari, a type of cant that draws on multiple linguistic traditions, was associated with both the nineteenth-century theatrical world and gay subculture. Polari—from which we derive terms in the current queer lexicon—often made use of lisping sibilants in its pronunciation. In short, we can find progenitors of the "gay lisp" within the reciprocal influence between in-group slang and nonstandard articulation.

4. See Schick who, speaking of her stutter, declares "my mouth spit shines syllables 'til they sparkle."

is fundamentally about communication, and the tendency is to stigmatize those who do not communicate in the prescribed way, rather than blaming a dialogic dynamic that privileges "normal speech." Instances of vocal ableism abound, ranging from impatience to outright dismissal of voices deemed atypical. Vocal discrimination extends across lines of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, language, ability, and more, leaving many to question their right to be heard.

Critiques of the inhospitable nature of the academy to various disabilities are increasing: Georgina Kleege provides vivid reflections on the inequalities of being blind within the university, and Margaret Price elucidates how "the most common topoi of academe intersect problematically with mental disability" (190–93, 5). Dysfluent voices are also marginalized in academia's fixation on vocal productivity and performance, where "good speech" functions as an in-demand commodity.[5] Stammering, for instance, refutes the "normalized 'choreography' of communication" instrumental in the relentless efficiency of academic life, an institutional culture that insists on the "correct" speed of thought and expression (St. Pierre 49).[6] We judge our students and are judged ourselves according to one's "level of articulate performance, as if articulacy were a neutrally agreed-upon merit rather than a proprietary aesthetic with its own history" (Wong 23). To both denaturalize and historicize the notion of anglophone fluency has been one goal of this project.

For those of us who struggle with verbal expression to any degree, the fear of authors discussed in these pages, from Charles Dodgson to Martin Tupper, about the detrimental impact of their stammering on their vocation and their attendant embrace of writing may be familiar. Tracing the history of representation of dysfluent speech is one route for putting pressure on the vocal norms of academic life, one way to advocate for a recalibration of vocal hierarchies that encourages us to imagine and enact different linkages between vocal form and individual worth. The explicit aim of *Dysfluent in Fiction* is to understand how certain voices have been historically devalued and to uncover instances where dysfluency charms and unites people, while, implicitly, seeking ways to diversify the spectrum of voices celebrated today, both in and out of the university.

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5. See also Martin's "Stuttering from the Anus" and Marshall.

6. "Crip time" evokes alternative temporalities hospitable to varying abilities (Kafer 25–46). For crip time and dysfluency, see St. Pierre, "Distending."

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