

The Work and Play of Rhyme in Victorian Verse Cultures, 1850-1900

by

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Dedication

**To my Mom and Dad
With Love**

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation recovers a remarkable range of debates about rhyme between 1850-1900, in order to ask how rhyme made sense to communities of readers and writers, and how rhyme in turn produced those communities. As a form of social play, rhyme also performed ideological work in Victorian verse cultures. For the Victorians, rhyme did more than merely bind lines; it also bound persons to individual and collective identities.

The introduction argues that the 1860's were an important turning point in Victorian ideas about rhyme, as versification manuals proliferated to impose rules on the rhyming games of popular Victorian verse, while the growing popularity of nursery rhymes reflected the continual reworking and replaying of ideas about rhyme. The first two chapters demonstrate how Algernon Swinburne and Christina Rossetti responded in different ways to the popularization of rhyme. Swinburne mastered rhyme so that rhyme might master him, while Rossetti reworked a tradition of rhyming riddles in Poetess verse to explore the relationship of rhyme and poetic closure. The last two chapters consider more broadly how the Victorian culture of rhyme produced various class and gender identifications. The third chapter analyzes debates about the proper pronunciation of rhyme, by tracing how anxieties about "cockney rhyme" that were originally applied to John Keats intensified over the course of the century and became applied to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. My fourth chapter considers how youths at Victorian Cambridge, particularly Charles Stuart Calverley, did and undid their manhood through extravagant performances of rhyme, expressing ambivalence about outgrowing the age of rhyme.

The dissertation contributes to historical poetics by offering a new set of concepts for how to read rhyme in the nineteenth century. Rhyme play, I argue, was a mode of display, and particularly a performance of class. Indeed, for the Victorians, rhyme worked to create relations not only between words but also between persons: what was most social about the poetic genres considered in this dissertation, surprisingly, was rhyme.

Introduction

The Work and Play of Rhyme

Rhyme is a rich resource for thinking about Victorian poetry and poetics. In the entry “Near Rhyme” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), the historian of prosody T. V. F. Brogan describes how debates about “perfect” and “imperfect” rhymes contributed to the proliferation of ideas about rhyme in England, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century:

In much late-Victorian and Edwardian crit[icism], one finds frequent attacks by reactionary prosodists on all less-than-correct rhyming as decadent, degenerate, and incompetent, attacks epitomized in [George] Saintsbury and Brander Matthews. But in retrospect such practice is to be seen not as a falling away from a standard but as a redefinition of that standard. In a radical age, the breaking of conventions is an expansive and creative act. N[ear] r[hyme] is in this sense not an abandonment of r[hyme] in defeat but an opening up of the r[hyme] cannon—not supplanting r[hyme] but enriching it.

In what follows, I consider how and why rhyme expanded into a diversity of rhyme practices and theories in Victorian England. For some the only acceptable rhyme was perfect rhyme, and an imperfect rhyme was no rhyme at all; imperfect rhyme signified the poor technique of the poet and supposedly offended the reader. For others, playing with rhymes—“imperfect” or “anaphoric” or “mechanical” or “uncommon,” or Iberian *rima asonante* and French *rime riche*, or “cockney” and “patrician”—was a way poets displayed their poetic technique and furthered

the ends of rhyme. Both in theory and in practice, the play of rhyme did important cultural work in the nineteenth century.

For example, as 1897 turned to 1898, the poet and scholar Andrew Lang ended the year, as many do, not by looking ahead to the future, but by looking back on the past. In his poem, “Rhyme of Rhymes,” printed in the 1 January 1898 installment of his monthly column “At the Sign of the Ship” in *Longman’s Magazine*, Lang used rhyme to reflect on rhyme. His column frames this poem as a consideration of “traditional conventions in the matter of rhyme” (278), targeting poets who continue to write time-honored rhyme pairings long after those pairings no longer sound alike in pronunciation. The poem playfully inquires whether poetic tradition or present-day pronunciation should determine the acceptability of a rhyme:

Wild on the mountain peak the wind
Repeats its old refrain,
Like ghosts of mortals who have sinned,
And fain would sin again.

For ‘wind’ I do not rhyme to ‘mind,’
Like many mortal men,
‘Again’ (when one reflects) ’twere kind
To rhyme as if ‘agen.’

I never met a single soul
Who *spoke* of ‘wind’ as ‘wined,’
And yet we use it, on the whole,

To rhyme to 'find' and 'blind.'

We *say*, 'Now don't do that *agen*,'

When people give us pain;

In poetry, nine times in ten,

It rhymes to 'Spain' or 'Dane.'

Oh, which is wrong or which is right?

Oh, which is right or wrong?

The sounds in prose familiar, quite,

Or those we meet in song?

To hold that 'love' can rhyme to 'prove'

Requires some force of will,

Yet in the ancient lyric groove

We meet them rhyming still.

This was our learned fathers' wont

In prehistoric times.

We follow it, or if we don't,

We oft run short of rhymes.

When Lang considers the antagonism between poets who continue to rhyme "wind" with "mind" or "find" or "blind" despite the current pronunciation of "wind" rhyming with "sinned," he

shows how controversial imperfect rhyme (what Brogan defines as “near rhyme”) had become in the nineteenth century. What, Lang asks, was the relationship of proper rhyme and proper pronunciation? Was perfect rhyme the only “right” way to write rhymes? Or could poets write imperfect rhymes, even if they sounded wrong? Which was right and which was wrong, the changing sound of the voice or the traditions of “song”?

Turning theory into practice and practice into theory, Lang’s poem returned at the century’s end to debates about how one judges the legitimacy of a rhyme that had gone on since before the century’s start. In 1775, John Walker’s *Rhyming Dictionary* argued that imperfect rhymes were “allowable rhymes” because poets so frequently practiced them. But while Walker’s dictionary was immensely successful, imperfect rhyme over the course of a century became less and less allowable, so that, in 1869, Tom Hood’s *Rules of Rhyme* could state definitively that only perfect rhymes were legitimate, a prescriptivist ideology that continued to hold sway until the fin de siècle. According to Hood, students needed to be taught the rules of rhyme in order to inculcate proper English pronunciation, so that they “would not fall into the slipshod way of pronouncing ... ‘again’ as if ‘agen’” (ix). The irony of course is that while Hood hoped learning the rules of rhyme would prevent “Again” from being pronounced as “Agen,” that pronunciation had become the norm by the time Lang wrote “Rhyme of Rhymes,” so that Lang questioned rhymesters who rhymed “Again” and “Dane”! The reminder that the rules of pronunciation were ever changing and therefore the felicity of rhymes was time-bound became a frequent rejoinder by descriptivists in debates about the intersection of proper rhyme and proper pronunciation.

Whether Lang had Hood’s specific claim in mind when Lang asserted that “again” should rhyme with “ten” and not with “Dane” is uncertain. But what is certain is that Lang rhymes both

“refrain ... again” and “men ... agen,” even as he critiques the former practice in favor of the latter. In other words, by opening with the “sinful” rhyme that he questions a stanza later, Lang performs the problem before critiquing it, suggesting how much of a performance medium rhyme was. But by setting up a disjuncture between practice (doing the rhyme) and principle (critiquing the rhyme), Lang not only performs the debate in miniature, but he also ironizes the debate. His use of internal rhyme, “refrain ... fain ... again,”—which many critics, such as Saintsbury, considered against the rules of rhyme—further emphasizes the rule breaking that he shortly after critiques. The repetition ups the volume of the supposedly improper sound of the rhyme, making it hyperbolic, humorous. By ironizing his handwringing regarding which side in the rhyming debates should emerge victorious, Lang ironizes the self-seriousness of those debates, tacitly critiquing them. Through much of the century, imperfect rhyme was a serious concern for poets and prosodists. At the end of the century, however, imperfect rhyme was a concern one can no longer take seriously. Lang’s irony implies the decadence of these debates. Indeed, in the last decades of the century, the rules of rhyme not only enabled rhyme play but also themselves became their own kind of rhyme play.

My dissertation recovers the remarkable range of discourses and debates in late-Victorian England about the social meanings of rhyme in order to offer a history of how poetic form collaborated in the construction of individual identity and communal relations. Rhyme, scholars often argue, produces either *pathos*¹—sound producing emotion—or *logos*²—sound making sense. But what about *ethos*—sound making senses of selves? Rather than ask whether sound makes feeling or meaning, or whether sound undermines or supports a poem’s sense, both of which risk reducing rhyme to an aesthetic abstraction, I ask how rhyme made sense to the communities of late-century readers and writers who produced and consumed it. For the

Victorians, I argue, the experience of rhyme was not only about the intrinsic relationship between sense and sound; rhyme also possessed extrinsic social functions: how one rhymed helped define who one was. The energetic cultivation of rhyme both in theory and in practice in the latter half of the century suggests the urgency of the social work that rhyme was called upon to perform.

Indeed, rhyme for the Victorian did more than merely bind lines; it also bound persons into communities, defined in part by how one theorized and practiced rhyme. By showing how cultivated were one's ear ("hearing" when reading the nuances of rhyme), one's mouth (showing that one properly pronounced rhyme words), and one's hand (writing perfect rhymes), readers and writers of verse might fantasize about fashioning (and un-fashioning) their class status, even as the work of rhyme and the making of class were often incoherent: no one could settle how class sounded. To break the rules of rhyme might mean that, in the words of the fin-de-siècle Columbia University professor Brander Matthews, "the poet is revealed as regardless of all delicacy and precision of speech," at best seeming "careless," at worst "vulgar" (454). In other words, rhymes in the second half of the century were often read as allegories, metaphors, or personifications of the persons who wrote them. Because versification was a major component of a gentleman's education, when done properly, versification was assumed to signify cultivation; when done poorly, versification was a sign of crudity. Thus, how (well) one manipulated of poetic form was a commentary on one's education, taste, manners, and social class. Poets wrote rhymes, but rhymes were also read as having written their poets. From the post-1867 intensification of concerns about "Cockney rhyme" to the "patrician rhymes" of *vers de societe* ("society verse"), the practice of rhyme in the second half of the century was constructed as a performance of class.

The “work” and “play” of rhyme in my dissertation title refers to a number of cultural and social phenomena pertaining to rhyme; through the production, circulation, and reception of various rhyming games, we can trace the social play and cultural work of rhyme in Victorian verse. My introduction focuses on the late 1860’s as a turning point, when ideologue prosodists were both effects and causes of changes in prosodic taste. By codifying and disseminating the rules of rhyme, they sought to turn the rhyme play of a mass culture of recreational versifiers into ideological work, even as they insisted that the newly hard work of rhyming needed to look like effortless play. The chapters that follow consider the agency of rhyme in Swinburne, the play of the resolutions of rhyme and the solutions of the riddle in Christina Rossetti, the doing and of undoing of class identifications through “cockney” rhymes, and the performances of “uncommon rhyme” by Cambridge youths to perform maturity and immaturity at once. Rather than abstracting the ideology of rhyme into a homogenous set of values, I focus on different poetic genres in order to identify particular practices of rhyme—its cultural contingencies, local histories, and communal meanings—within local contexts of Victorian “verse cultures,” where each term (verse, culture) dialectically produced the other. By emphasizing the diversity of discourses about rhyme, and by demonstrating how this diverse rhyming culture is continually reworked and replayed in Victorian verse, I develop a reading of nineteenth-century poetic genres that contributes to the field of historical poetics.

What Happened to Rhyme in 1869?

In the 300 years between 1570 and 1867, only nine rhyming dictionaries (excluding reprints) were published in England, a ratio of one every thirty years. Of those nine, four rhyming dictionaries, given their popularity, had cultural impact.³ In 1570, the Oxford-educated lexicographer, teacher, and practitioner of medicine Peter Levins published *Manipulus*

Vocabulorum, a Latin-English dictionary for students, which is widely considered the first rhyming dictionary in English (it contained a rhyme dictionary of ~9000 rhyme words) and “the most original lexicographical venture in 16th-century England.”⁴ In 1702, the writer Edward Bysshe published the popular versification manual and rhyming dictionary *The Art of English Poetry* (which went through eight editions in the eighteenth-century) and, in 1714, he published the two-volume *The British Parnassus*: taken together, these rhyming dictionaries contain ~14,000 rhyme words. Then, sixty years later, in 1775, Walker published the immensely popular *A Dictionary of the English Language Answering at once the Purposes of Rhyming, Spelling, and Pronouncing*. Walker’s rhyming dictionary contains ~41,000 rhyme words, nearly tripling the size of Bysshe’s dictionary, which was the largest on the market until Walker’s.⁵ In part because of the comprehensive size of Walker’s rhyming dictionary, it was frequently reprinted through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, for most of the nineteenth century, it solely supplied the increasing demand in England for rhyming dictionaries.

The end of the 1860s, however, saw a remarkable proliferation of new rhyming dictionaries in England. Three were published in the two years between 1867 and 1869, over 30 times a rate of increase. In 1867, a founder of the Early English Text Society, Henry B. Wheatley, re-issued *Manipulus Vocabulorum*, which for centuries had been lost. A year later, in 1868, the versifier, songwriter, and dramatist (and later, Ph.D. and elocutionist) J. E. (Joseph Edwards) Carpenter published the versification manual and rhyming dictionary *A Handbook of Poetry*. Most influentially, in 1869, the humorist and editor of the periodical *Fun* (and son of the great experimenter with rhyme, Thomas Hood) Tom Hood published the immensely successful versification manual and rhyming dictionary, *The Rules of Rhyme* (also called *The Rhymester: Or, the Rules of Rhyme*). Indeed, rhyming dictionaries continued to proliferate through the end of

the century. In 1893, the high school English teacher and elocutionist R. F. (Robert Frederick) Brewer published *Orthometry: A Treatise on the Art of Versification*. In 1905, the American Consul at Bristol Andrew Loring (a pseudonym for Lorin Andrews Lathrop) published *The Rhymers's Lexicon*.⁶ The forty years between 1867-1907 saw a fourfold increase in the rate of publication of rhyming dictionaries in England.⁷

So what happened to rhyme in 1869? Why in the late 1860s were rhyming dictionaries, versification manuals, and prosodic studies published with greater frequency than ever before? What did these verse manuals want? Why did they want it? While versification manuals rarely achieved consensus, they did share some beliefs in common: a nativist fascination with Englishness (the English language and national identity; what it was, is, and should be), a desire to establish the study of the English language and literature alongside the study of the classical languages and literatures, and a distrust, even disgust, of imperfect rhyme. As I will show, beginning in the 1860s, some Victorians sought to put rhyme play to ideological work.

When late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century critics reflected on this late-1860s concern with the rules of versifying, they often attributed the fascination with the rules of verse to a response to the work of a coterie of elite poets and contextualized it within a broader cultural return to poetic art and technique. At the end of the century, when this ideological trend seemed to be ending, the poet and critic Theodore Watts reminisced fondly about the ideological shift in the rules of rhyme that had taken place thirty years before. In an anonymous review of William Morris's *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, published in the 1897 *Athenaeum*, Watts recalled the late 1860s as "a most remarkable period in the history of English poetry." Critics and major poets, such as the Pre-Raphaelites (D. G. Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne) and Tennyson, were once again "paying great attention to the artistic side of poetry" (777). Beginning in the late 1860s and

lasting for three decades, Watts suggests, art and technique—making “music” through versifying; employing “faultless,” perfect rhyme—returned to the writing of English verse. A decade later, in the *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (1910), George Saintsbury similarly implies that prosodies proliferated in the late 1860s to respond to Pre-Raphaelite formal experiment, such as their 1860s importation, translation, and Anglicization of medieval French fixed forms (ballade, rondeau, rondel, sestina, triolet, villanelle, etc.) following a similar revival in France in the 1850s by Theodore de Banville, and the 1870 publication of D. G. Rossetti’s *Poems* and William Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise*. “On the whole, however, it was not, as has been said, till the very eve of 1870, when the Prae-Raphaelite school had made its appearance, that any considerable amount of prosodic writing came. Then, and in the very same year, 1869, there was a remarkable outburst” (Bk. III 258). In sum, these late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century critics constructed the return to rhyme in 1869 as a top-down phenomenon: its engine was an elite coterie of poets.

While Watts’ and Saintsbury’s claim that an elite coterie of poets were central to a return to technique may have some validity, the fascination with verse technique is better understood as both a cause and an effect of the ongoing popularization of reading and writing poetry among a broad range of social groups. While amateur versifying had long been a part of a gentleman’s education and practice, over the course of the nineteenth century versifying had spread to the working classes, middle classes, and women, all of whom were disbarred from a gentleman’s education in classical versification and therefore understood as producing masses of incompetent verse that threatened to degrade British culture. By the start of the nineteenth century, writing and reading poetry had become increasingly prominent modes of popular leisure, recreation, and sociability in which amateurs wrote and read poetry “for pleasure and recreation” (Carpenter in

1868) and “recreative pleasures” (Brewer in 1893). The popularity of writing and reading poetry took shape in and was cause and effect of a proliferating array of oral recitation cultures, such as the mid-Victorian music hall, and a diversity of print formats such as the burgeoning mid-Victorian field of newspapers and periodicals, with columns such as the “Poets’ Corner.” The Victorian pastime of versifying might be understood as the ongoing emergence of what today might be called a broad, popular, “middlebrow” or mass culture of verse, which proliferated alongside but was disdained by what might be called, following the American poet Charles Bernstein, “official verse culture,” the poetry deemed acceptable by polite taste (246-48).

Because writing and reading poetry were nineteenth-century popular pastimes, rhyming dictionaries and versification manuals became bestsellers as a mass market sought rhymes for their verses and as writers and publishers sought to capitalize on this demand. The popularity of Walker’s dictionary in the nineteenth century was both cause and effect of its rebranding through its publisher’s decision to change its title. When Walker published *A Dictionary of the English Language Answering at once the Purposes of Rhyming, Spelling, and Pronouncing* in 1775, he announced its purpose as an aid to spelling and pronouncing; aiding poets and poetasters with rhyming was “[t]he last, and perhaps the least, advantage of the following work” (xxii). When it was republished in its second edition thirty years later in 1806, however, it was re-titled *A Rhyming Dictionary: Answering, at the Same Time, the Purposes of Spelling and Pronouncing the English Language on a Plan Not Hitherto Attempted*. What was originally a secondary purpose of the dictionary (a dictionary of rhymes) now became its primary purpose, whereas what was formerly its primary purpose (the teaching of spelling and pronunciation) receded in importance. This re-branding was cause and effect of Walker’s success: its title change helped it go through a very high number of editions well into the twentieth century.

The demand for verse manuals and rhyming dictionaries was a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Hood's *Rules* went through at least eleven editions well into the twentieth century, and Brewer's *Orthometry* went through fourteen. The success of verse manuals and rhyming dictionaries in the nineteenth-century was due not merely to the frequently referenced point that English, unlike French, is a rhyme-adverse language. While Blake, Byron, and Tennyson owned and employed rhyming dictionaries, the success of rhyming dictionaries in the market was mainly due to the nineteenth-century rise of the amateur versifier.⁸

As poetry became more popular in the nineteenth century, however, longstanding concerns that newly literate, undereducated social groups were demeaning verse culture intensified. Just as Alexander Pope rankled 150 years earlier at the spread of "Grub Street" hacks in such satires as *Peri Bathous* (1727), *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), and *The Dunciad* (1743), so too did elitist Victorian readers confront with disdain, even dismay, what seemed an "innumerable" "great army of amateur verse-makers" whose poetic licenses suggested not cultivated experiment, but slipshod verse deemed "offensive to a fine ear and cultivated taste" (*Glasgow Herald* n.p., Carpenter vi). Verse manuals and rhyming dictionaries were thought to contribute to the spread of offensively bad verse among the undereducated. For example, in the chapter, "Rhyming Dictionaries," from his 1841 three-volume *Amenities of Literature*, the writer Isaac D'Israeli called the rhyming dictionary "a monstrous device" and "as miserable a contrivance to assist a verse as counting the syllables by the finger is to regulate the measure" (46, 47). In the 1893 *Yorkshire Herald*, a reviewer of Brewer's *Orthometry* (1893) concludes lamenting the appearance of Brewer's verse manual and rhyming dictionary: "It is clearly not desirable that the production of verse for which no true inspiration can be claimed should be increased. There is too much of that kind of verse already" (6). D'Israeli's epithets, "monstrous

device” and “miserable a contrivance,” suggest that what made rhyming dictionaries and versification manuals a problem for some is that they made versifying and particularly rhyming *mechanical*—planned, unthinking, unspontaneous, uninspired, but also coarse, vulgar--and therefore the antithesis of what the Yorkshire Herald reviewer prizes: “true inspiration.”

D’Israeli, like the reviewer, feared that writers would choose their rhymes before writing their lines, that poets would succumb to their medium rather than master it, and that as form misshaped content, poet’s idea would be lost or deformed. “In the case of rhyme,” admonished D’Israeli, “it is sense which should regulate the verse,” not sound or the demands of form (47).

A similar assumption was held by Alfred Tennyson. When the anthologist and art critic Francis Turner Palgrave asked his friend Tennyson, ““Did he ever use a rhyming dictionary?”,” Tennyson replied that he “had tried it in earlier days, but found it of little use: ‘There was no natural congruity between the rhymes thus alphabetically grouped together’” (qtd. in Rowlinson 349-50). What makes words linked by similar sound seem “naturally congruous,” rather than artificial or mechanical, Tennyson assumes, is that those words are linked not just by shared sound but also by a shared sense in the context of the poem; the intentions of the poet and the sense of a poem, not an artificial, mechanical contrivance like a dictionary, should produce the choice of rhyme words. Tennyson, in other words, feared that rhyming dictionaries made rhyme into an abstraction because they divorced rhyme from the requirements and constraints of the poem and the desires of the poet. Similarly, in “Rhyme, 1600-1900,” an appendix to *A History of English Prosody* (1910), Saintsbury called rhyming dictionaries “pestilent” because they had “a bad effect on poetry” (538). Did Saintsbury forget that he published one of his most important essays, “English Versification,” as the introduction to Loring’s *The Rhymers’ Lexicon*? “*Quoi*

qu'ils en disent,” wrote l’Abbe Du Bos in 1719, “*ils ont tous ce livre dans leur arrière cabinet*” (336). Regardless of what they may say, they all have this book in their back office.

The popularization of poetry threatened to break down often overlapping class and cultural hierarchies. If everyone wrote poetry, many fretted, then could anyone be a poet? If versifying had been a part of a gentleman’s education and therefore a practice that helped constitute his identity, what would mass culture’s appropriation of versifying mean for the identity of the gentleman? How might the aesthetic, and the upper classes, remain a rarified world apart from popular culture? The theory that polished form equated with polished personhood and the practice of educating gentlemen in classical versification went hand-in-hand. Reading and writing verse was a means by which the gentle classes wrote and read their cultivated identity into being. This however made versifying appealing to aspiring classes who sought to earn cultural capital. By mid century, a practice through which gentlemen discerned their identity apart from other classes could no longer do the social work it once did.

To carve out a space for recreational, amateur versifying for members of the cultured elite, the poet and anthologist Frederick Locker imported, anglicized, and popularized the genres of *vers de société* and *vers d’occasion* from France and constructed them as new English genres. His successful 1867 anthology, *Lyra Elegantiarum*, went through at least five editions by the end of the century. *Vers de société* (“society verse”), as the genre’s name implies, was a genre of verse for a specific class. To write this “exquisitely rounded and polished verse,” writes Locker in his genre-constructing preface, “the writer of *vers de société*, in order to be genuinely successful, must not only be more or less of a poet, but he also must be a man of the world, in the most liberal sense of the expression; he must have mixed throughout his life with the most refined and cultivated members of his species, not merely as an idle bystander, but as a busy

actor in the throng” (ix-x, xiv). Soon after, Locker notes in an aside, “[I]t is curious to see what a large proportion of [the authors quoted in this volume] are men of a certain social position” (xv). What *vers de société* was not was “vulgar,” Locker claims, and as *vers de société* was to be the leisure activity of the worldly sophisticate, it was to be distinct from mass culture: a realm of verse for the educated classes. Locker performed an act of gate keeping: by constructing a genre that only the cultivated could write, elite culture could be preserved from mass culture, and versifying could remain for the upper classes a way of performing their class.

Because Locker constructed a genre of verse for the cultivated, however, versifying ironically became even more appealing for the masses because now, even more than before, if one wrote elegant, polished rhymes, then one might seem a polished person. In his 1875 study of *vers de société* in *Victorian Poets*, the American poet and critic E. C. Stedman opens his discussion of the genre by noting its most salient quality—“patrician rhymes” (272). Because versification was associated with education, rhyme “revealed” the person who wrote them; skill in rhyming became a figure for refined personhood and a sign of “cultural capital.” The poet Austin Dobson’s rhymes, Stedman claims, “show their author to be ... a gentleman and a scholar” (273). Dobson might have thrilled at the claim: he was not an Oxbridge man; he was a civil servant. According to Stedman, however, through such skillfully rhymed verse as *Vignettes in Rhyme* (1873), Dobson achieved the status of the educated elite.

Locker responded to the rise of a mass amateur verse culture by carving out a space in the generic field for Victorian elites to versify. But the contemporaneous writers of verse manuals responded to the popularity of poetry by doing just the opposite: opening the gates of official verse culture, which had heretofore been the purview of the rich, to the masses. By disseminating the rules of versification to the masses, Victorian verse manuals attempted to capitalize on the

burgeoning mid-Victorian mass culture of recreational versifying, to sanitize a popular verse culture to make it innocuous to the elite, and to put that recreational play to ideological work by both subverting social hierarchies and reaffirming cultural ones. They sought to transform versification into a mode of discipline at once constraining and enabling while sequestering the aesthetic as a realm apart from mass culture.

In so doing, nineteenth-century versification manuals responded to amateur versifying in a way that was entirely different from verse manuals of the past. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century versification manuals and rhyming dictionaries were often written for “hopeful young Gentlemen” (Poole) and those “born to be” professional poets (Bysshe); they frequently eschewed a broad audience of amateur versifiers (Bysshe, Walker).⁹ Post-1860 versification manuals and rhyming dictionaries, however, sought just the opposite, eschewing an audience of gentlemen and professional poets and instead seeking to refine a broad and burgeoning verse culture of untrained, amateur versifier-hobbyists.¹⁰ Rather than ignore or attempt to exclude newly poetically literate but undereducated groups from official verse culture, as elitists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had attempted to do, Victorian prosodists sought to incorporate these new writerships and readerships within official verse culture. By the second half of the nineteenth century, versifying had become too popular to be ignored or excluded; the mass culture of versifiers had to be included and managed.

Carpenter and Hood both tightened the rules of versifying and disseminated them to a broad, undereducated audience to turn the play of versifying into ideological work, reimagining rhyme play as a means of disciplining and civilizing the masses *and* offering them the fantasy of social mobility. In *A Handbook of Poetry*, Carpenter, while opening the door to exceptions, teaches only “the strictest rules” (2). In *The Rules of Rhyme*, Hood distinguished between poets

(special men) and versifiers (common men) to argue, “The thoughts presented by the poet may be rough-hewn; the fancies of the versifier must be accurately finished, and becomingly set. Poetry, therefore, abounds in licenses, while Versification boasts only of laws” (viii). By focusing a mass culture of versifiers on learning the art of technique and on working within the fetters of an even more tightened form, they made a recreational culture of versifying into a mode of subordination to rules. If versifying was a late-century mode of leisure, then versifying was going to have to do ideological work.

Writers of verse manuals simultaneously sought to undermine social hierarchies by offering an education in versifying to excluded groups and to reestablish aesthetic hierarchies by recirculating and reworking the old distinction of “verse” and “poetry,” “versifier” and “poet.” “A great writer may commit a solecism, which would not be tolerated by ‘a ‘prentice hand,’” Carpenter argues, “If we are to admit imperfect rhyme and poetical licenses, then the study of poetry as an art becomes an unnecessary task, and the most random rhymer may take his place beside the most accomplished poet; but it is not so” (10, 18). A year later, Hood argued that Carpenter did not go far enough in reaffirming the distinction between the “random rhymer” and the “accomplished poet.” Carpenter’s *A Handbook of Poetry* “is full of grave errors,” Hood demurs. “It begins with a definition of ‘Poetry’ which makes it identical with ‘Verse,’ and it tends too much to the side of license in consequence, from the fact of permitting to the versifier freedoms which poets only can claim” (22). Hood begins by condemning what he felt was the absurd, “Dogberry spirit which is now abroad,” which insists that “to be ‘a poet’ a man needs to be advantageously placed in the world [i.e. possessing natural ability and / or wealth], but that anyone can ‘write poetry’” (vi). Instead of distinguishing those who write poetry well from those who write poetry poorly, as Carpenter does, Hood recirculates the old distinction of “poet” and

“versifier,” “poetry” and “verse,” but reworks their meanings to his ideological ends: rather than simply synonyms of the superior and the inferior poet, for Hood, poets and versifiers worked in entirely different genres or modes:

A Poet, to paraphrase the Latin, is created, not manufactured. . . . In a word, poetical genius is a gift, but education and perseverance will make almost any man a versifier. . . . Poetry is far less a question of manner than of matter, whereas versification is purely a question of form. I will even venture to say that some of our noblest poems are prose; and that many great poets have been but inferior versifiers. But what these last wrote has possessed qualities compared with which the mechanism of their verse is as nothing. The poet gives to the world in his sublime thoughts diamonds of the purest water. It would be idle to quibble about minor points of the polishing and setting of such gems—they would lose in the process! But the writer of verse does not—and should not—pretend to give us diamonds. He offers paste-brilliant; and therefore [must] see to the perfection of the cutting, on which their beauty depends.

The thoughts presented by the poet may be rough-hewn; the fancies of the versifier must be accurately finished, and becomingly set. Poetry, therefore, abounds in licenses, while Versification boasts only of laws (v, vii-viii).

Hood separates poetry from both form and genre and makes poetry a *mode* (prose could be poetry, just as a sonnet might not be poetry). Poetry is synonymous with sense, depth, content, intellect (“sublime thoughts”), interiority, rough / irregular form, and rule breaking. Verse is synonymous with sound, surface, form, technique, smooth / regular form, and rule following. The deep ideas of the poet could not and should not be constrained by aesthetic form lest they be

diminished, whereas the middling thoughts of the versifier could only find value through the polishing of form. Poets, in other words, could employ poetic license in rhyme (i.e. imperfect or “near” rhyme), whereas versifiers could not; perfect form and perfect rhyme, regularity, and polish would now define the medium of the mass culture of versifying. Versifying was therefore constructed as a means of discipline. The masses were to train their ears, hands, and mouths—and regulate themselves by internalizing structure—by writing within the bounds of formal constraint. On the other hand, Hood redefined the poetic as the preserve of a few and understood as mental freedom, license, the breaking of rules and the irregularity of form.

As more and more people wrote poetry, poetry needed to be separated from the people, regardless of class. Put another way, as writing and reading poetry became popular, the aesthetic had to become esoteric in order to prevent mass culture from totalizing the aesthetic. By making poetry intellectual and verse technical, Hood separated the head (poet) from the hand (versifier), intellectual labor from manual labor. By disseminating the rules of verse to the masses while separating “poet” from “versifier,” “poetry” from “verse,” Hood opens the gates of official verse culture to the masses while closing the gates of poetry to them. He at once both incorporates a mass culture of versifying into the social system, turning versifying into a means of discipline at once repressive and enabling, and he preserves the aesthetic from mass culture, preventing its commodification. Thus, Hood at once both undermines social (class) distinctions by democratizing a form of education that was previously only available to the upper classes, and bolsters cultural (aesthetic) distinctions by separating mass culture and aesthetic culture.

But just as the popularization of poetry led writers of verse manuals to reestablish aesthetic hierarchies, so too did it lead writers of verse manuals to undermine social hierarchies. By tightening the rules of versifying, disseminating them to a broad audience, and insisting they

be followed, Carpenter and Hood helped turn versification into a means of civilizing the masses. That disciplining, however, was also enabling, for it democratized a formerly elite education, enabling the masses to access a discipline (versification) formerly only available to gentlemen (classical versification) and thus offering cultural capital, transforming versification into a fantasy of social mobility. One might say they declassified poetry by putting poetry in the classroom. By giving access to an education in English versification to those denied training in classical versification—i.e. by democratizing education—these verse manuals both contributed to and were an effect of the coeval Oxbridge University extension movement, which sought to extend University education to women and the working classes.¹¹ By the fin de siècle, versification manuals were understood as having contributed to “University Extension [which] is gradually moulding the mind of our youth, and leading the choicer spirits into the paths of literature,” a reviewer of Brewer’s *Orthometry* in *The Western Times* claimed. “To these aspirants ‘Orthometry’ will be a welcome aid to good work” (3). Concluding the introduction to *Orthometry*, the prosodist Brewer wrote confidently, even utopianly, “Culture is no longer the privilege of the wealthy. The study of our poets has now happily obtained a footing in the curriculum of nearly all our public schools and colleges, while the millions who attend our elementary schools have suitable poetic passages indelibly impressed upon their memory in youth” (ix-x). The implication was that training in versification, available formerly only through an education in the classics, was no longer solely the purview of the gentle. With the establishment of English as a discipline, the rules of versifying and the cultivation they enabled were now available to a broad audience, thus offering both a fantasy and possibility to the aspiring classes that they might acquire cultural capital that might enable social mobility.

Playing with Rhyme

While after 1860 prosodists turned the rhyme play of an emerging mass culture into difficult work by narrowing the rules of rhyme and emphasizing the poet's skill, this ideological work was being turned on its head by the growing popularity of nursery rhyme. Nursery rhyme was at once the epitome and the antithesis of the prosodists' understanding of rhyme. As prosodists insisted that rhyme specifically and verse generally should be sonic more than semantic genres, that ideology materialized in its purest form in nursery rhyme. But prosodists also insisted that versifying be difficult so that only the educated could do it, and this was precisely what nursery rhyme inverted through masterful performances of childhood. While verse was associated with voice to train the nation in pronunciation, the popularity of nursery rhyme also suggested that "speaking" *unclearly* through the babyish babble of rhyme also had appeal. And while prosodists argued that versifying in English as well as the classics should be taught in schools to make boys into men, through nursery rhyme—an adult genre—Victorian adults indulged in the pleasures of recovering their childhood selves in order to temporarily undo their masculinity and maturity. Nursery rhymes contributed to late-century modes of recreation and sociability, featuring in Christmas pantomimes and rhyme games and offering a common ground to a diverse citizenry that enabled social cohesion. Victorians also used nursery rhymes to put rhyme play to work through employing them for satire (baby sounds belittling opponents) and as early advertising jingles (the sounds of rhyme lodging products in the mind).

Most of all, nursery rhymes became popular in the nineteenth-century not only because of the Victorian fascination with children, but also because of the related Victorian fascination with rhyme. Nursery rhyme offered writers and readers an opportunity to explore the limits of rhyme. The Victorians most interested in rhyme and sound of verse—Christina Rossetti, Swinburne, the

English Parnassians (Andrew Lang, Edward Dowden, Robert Louis Stevenson, et al.)—were the Victorians most interested in nursery rhyme. That the poets most associated with artifice were the one’s most fascinated by seemingly the most naïve of forms suggest that nursery rhyme’s appeal was in what the genre could offer to the expanding canon of rhyme.

Nursery rhymes were a quintessential nineteenth century genre; indeed, antiquarians and poetesses of the long-nineteenth century might be said to have invented it. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951, 1997), Iona and Peter Opie point out that while “the first book expressly designed for the young which had traditional rhymes in it” appeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century (29), not until Ann and Jane Taylor’s 1806 *Rhymes for the Nursery* was the neologism “nursery rhyme” invented. Previously the genre was comprised of traditional verses known mainly as “songs,” said or sung to children. Indeed, in the entry “Nursery Rhyme,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), Mabel P. Worthington writes, “[V]ery few [nursery rhymes] originated in the nursery. Material from adult life was introduced to children either for reason or by accident, often simply because of its memorability” (846).

While “Mother Goose” nursery rhymes had been circulating in England since the start of the eighteenth century, at the start of the nineteenth century, female poets began to turn the practice of singing traditional songs to children into a gendered, print genre for mothers to read to children. In so doing, they construct identities as female poets and entered the marketplace of print by capitalizing on a cultural need for the emergent genre of children’s literature. In 1807, Catherine Ann Dorset, the sister of Charlotte Smith, published her poem for children, *The Peacock at Home*, which, despite mixed reviews, sold “40,000 copies within a year, and reach[ed] a twenty-eighth edition by 1819” (“Dorset, Catherine Ann” DNB online).

Out of this century-long tradition of women's nursery rhyming came Christina Rossetti's 1872 *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*. Rossetti was called "the high priestess of baby-worship" by a fellow baby-worshipper, A. C. Swinburne, who also explored and exploited the popularity of nursery rhymes along with the genre of child elegies in his 1883 *A Century of Roundels* (see Chapter 2). In "The History of an Infancy: I and II," published in the 1890 *Longman's Magazine*, the poet and writer Jean Ingelow, whom Rossetti considered "a formidable rival," attempts to establish the genre of "the history of an infant written by itself in after-life" (269), an aesthetic, rather than scientific, exploration of memory. Recalling her childhood, she writes of hearing Isaac Watts' didactic hymns for children in the nursery, which was when "I first began to feel a distaste for false and imperfect rhymes." For that reason, later in life, "If the rhyming word was not right I made it so at the expense of the sense, the ear being much in advance of the reason" (385) (cf. Chapter 4).

The genre of nursery rhyme was also constructed through the anthology. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarian desire to preserve England's fading oral, antique, folk cultures in print led antiquarians to collect and anthologize not only the genres of ballads but also nursery rhymes, which led to their revival. In 1842, the twenty-two-year-old former Cambridge student and current antiquarian, James Orchard Halliwell, published the immensely successful anthology of traditional nursery rhymes, *Nursery Rhymes of England*, and in 1849, Halliwell published the successful *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales*.

Nursery rhymes were thought to cultivate the imagination of children. In the "Preface to the Fifth Edition," Halliwell writes,

The nursery rhyme is the novel and light reading of the infant scholar. It occupies, with respect to the A B C, the position of a romance which relieves the mind from

the cares of a riper age. The absurdity and frivolity of a rhyme may naturally be its chief attractions to the very young; and there will be something lost from the imagination of that child, whose parents insist so much on matters of fact (iv).

Ultimately, for Halliwell, nursery rhymes “sooth[e] the misery of many an hour of infantine adversity” (v). Similar to Wordsworth’s claim in the 1802 “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, “Now the co-presence of something regular ... cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling.... [t]hose [situations and sentiments] which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be [better] endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose,” Halliwell also suggests that rhyme manages the emotions; it relaxes and assuages unpleasant feelings (172). Rather than didactic children’s literature, which sought to cultivate the child’s reason, nursery rhymes were a form of nonsense literature to which children had a special connection, which cultivated their minds’ ability to play. Thus, nursery rhymes circulated to socialize children, but that socializing was based not on inculcating rules or facts but on encouraging imaginative, rule-breaking play.

But by the second half of the century, nursery rhymes were understood as adult literature as well. In “Nursery Classics,” published in the 1863 *Temple Bar*, the recent graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, (and later, literary scholar and poet) Edward Dowden writes, “The literature of the nursery may ... be fairly considered ... a new literature” (494). What makes nursery rhymes pleasurable to adult readers is in part that they return one to the past: “[I]n reverting to these relics of our past, a certain antiquarian curiosity is naturally awakened,” Dowden argues. “Besides, when we come to reconsider old things with new feelings, new insight, and new associations, we may well expect to find not a little that is itself absolutely new” (494). Not only do they help us recover our own childhoods, but they also offer access to the mind of the child,

unspoiled by culture, custom, and education: “Whatever gives us an opening into the marvelous mind of a child cannot indeed but be [curious and interesting]” (495). The late-century popularity of nursery rhymes is an offshoot of (post-)Romantic primitivism. Lastly, they offer a respite from Victorian utilitarianism, scientism, and facticity, into poetry, imagination, and play (501-2). These points are echoed in “The Humor of Nursery Rhymes” in the 1894 *Spectator*, which claims that “Nonsense is one of the fine arts” because we enjoy “the incongruities and contradictions of nature and of man’s life” (53).

In the second half of the century, nursery rhymes circulated beyond poetess verse and antiquarian anthologies by also featuring in Victorian modes of leisure and play for the middle-class family. The article, “Children’s Private Theatricals,” in Charles Dickens’ 1885 *Household Words* notes, “The fashion of having plays performed entirely, or almost entirely, by children has increased very rapidly of late years” (414), and nursery rhymes featured in Christmas pantomimes, such as W. S. Gilbert’s 1867 “Harlequin Cock Robin and Jenny Wren,” or Alfred Paxton’s 1870 “Nurseryrhymia, or The Party, the Prince, and the Pie: a Christmas play for children” which, the 1885 *Household Words* notes, “is extremely pretty when nicely acted” (415).

Even more prominently, travesties and burlesques of nursery rhymes were a mode of nineteenth-century humor and satire. Often-anonymous writers travestied the antique genre of nursery rhymes to mock current events. For example, “Nursery Rhyme for the Time,” extracted from *Punch’s Almanack* and reprinted in the 1874 *Bury and Norwich Post*, satirizes the New Woman:

Needles and Pins! Needles and Pins!—

A Man must not marry for Needles and Pins!

What can a Wife who's at least a B.A.

Know about sewing or buttons to-day?

How can a Wife who six languages knows

Be expected to know how to darn her own hose?

Needles and Pins! Needles and Pins!—

When a Man marries Learning, his knowledge begins.

The jingle of nursery rhymes were humorous, catchy, and appealing; their childishness could easily be exploited to mock and minimize the persons and / or events that their authors set out to critique; and the disjuncture between old, children's forms and current, adult events was exploited helped produce humorous, satiric irony. As many contemporary readers assumed that nursery rhymes were coded references to political events of the past, transfiguring them to refer explicitly to events in the present was an easy transition.

Using nursery rhymes for satire, however, had its detractors. In "The Nursery and Popular Rhymes and Tales of England and Scotland," an anonymous review of recent anthologies of nursery rhymes published in the 1843 *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, the journalist, writer of children's books, and editor of *Tait's*, Christian Johnstone lamented not only didactic children's literature, but also the

fashion of late, in compliance with a vicious and debased public taste, to travesty the most exquisite and precious gems of our early popular literature, and the sweetest and tenderest morsels of our nursery lore. The talents of clever artists

have been employed in embellishing these cold-blooded mockeries with ludicrous caricatures; as if starving the infant imagination and narrowing the heart were the set purpose with one class, and the deprivation of the moral sensibilities of childhood the object of another (114).

Johnstone argues that nursery rhymes were valuable because, in contradistinction to imagination-starving utilitarian children's literature and morality-depriving nursery-rhyme travesties, authentic nursery rhymes "possess a strong imagination-nourishing power," necessary for the growth of a child's mind (114). Rather than doing ideological, disciplinary work, nursery rhymes, for Johnstone, should be forms of play that nourish the child's imagination.

In addition to being appropriated for satiric purposes, the tinkle of nursery rhymes was appropriated in the second half of the century for commercial purposes. As exemplified by "Nursery Rhyme," a limerick printed without line breaks in the 6 May 1885 *Standard*, the sonic appeal and mnemonic potential of nursery rhymes served as early advertising slogans and jingles in the emerging commercial economy of late-Victorian commodity culture, lodging the brand name in the "consumer's" mind: "There was a young person named Crowder, Who used Borwick's Gold Medal Powder; Of her pastry and buns, and sweet 'Sally Luns,' No pastry cook ever was prouder." Nursery rhymes were travestied into advertising jingles like these, which circulated in the burgeoning field of newspapers in late-Victorian print culture.

Nursery rhymes became increasingly popular over the course of the nineteenth century, and particularly at the end of the century. In his article, "Children and the Poets," published in the 1890 *Leisure Hour*, the American John Dennis writes, "The place children occupy in modern literature is, I think, a significant proof that if they are not loved more than in earlier days, there is in our time a far stronger expression of the interest they excite.... [I]t is only within the last

twenty or thirty years that books for children, or about them, have filled a large and prominent place upon the shelves of libraries” (236). Lastly, in “Nursery Rhymes,” published in the 1907 *Academy*, “A. D.” points out, “Every year scores of volumes of [nursery rhymes] are turned out” (341). In his 1884 review of the work of the novelist and playwright Charles Reade, Swinburne, who had recently turned to writing nursery rhymes and child elegies in *A Century of Roundels* (1883), explains this popularity as a result of “a larger and a far nobler proportion of female writers” than in previous eras, the two most prominent being George Eliot and the children’s author Mary Louisa Molesworth (563).

Beyond the rise of the female writer, the late-century popularity of nursery rhymes was cause and effect of the post-1860 fascination with verseform in which verse was aestheticized as “music” and “song” in order to intensify the pleasurable cognitive dissonance of synaesthetically hearing when reading. Nursery rhymes are a sonic genre; their repetitious rhymes offer more sound than sense. In a sense, the genre embodied the arguments of late-1860s prosodists in its purest form: verse was the use of writing to make sound, not sense and therefore needed to be an aural, not a visual mode. Exploiting the play of visual and sonic modes, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century nursery rhymes were frequently illustrated and set to music, as in *The Nursery Songbook* (1906) edited and harmonized by H. Keatley Moore and illustrated by Mary Sandheim.

Chapter Summary: From Play to Work and Back Again

As we have seen, the post-1860 proliferation of versification manuals and rhyming dictionaries, along with antiquarian collections, popular anthologies, and parodies of nursery rhymes, all served to put the play of rhyme to work within Victorian verse culture. By narrowing and elaborating the rules of rhyme and disseminating them to social groups excluded from a

gentlemen's education in classical versification, these prosodists sought both to shore up and undermine social and cultural hierarchies. In Chapter One, "Round Games: Swinburne and the Ends of Rhyme," I explore how Algernon Charles Swinburne responded to Victorian rhyming culture by giving himself over to the agency of rhyme: perversely, Swinburne mastered rhyme so that rhyme might master him. I argue that Swinburne's early and late verse was both a cause and an effect of a counter-culture of poets and theorists from England and France interested in revaluing the "agency of rhyme." They explored models of poetic practice that might unleash versifying from the poet's controlling designs in order to undo the nineteenth-century emphasis on authorial intention, poetic will, technical mastery, and masculine authority. By separating versifying from technique, these writers opened a space for the undereducated versifier and thus helped to democratize verse. Specifically, I examine how in "Faustine" (1862) Swinburne explores the pleasures of automatic, mechanical rhyming and imagines rhyme as having desires on its own designs. Then, I explore how *A Century of Roundels* (1883) Swinburne broke all the rules of rhyme in order to show his mastery over rhyme; ironically, the biggest rule he broke was in circulating the mastertrope of "chance" to undo the technical mastery that was synonymous with his verse and a fetish of his verse culture. Thus, masterful rule breaking came to seem a self-conscious performance of studied naïveté and a political stance.

Swinburne dedicated *A Century of Roundels* to Christina Rossetti, who also came of age as a poet playing with rhymes and who in her mature verse also explored how chance might undo the poetic will. But whereas their interests were similar, Rossetti's verse plays on a different set of social relations and verse genres than Swinburne's does. In my second chapter, I show how Rossetti's verse emerged from, perpetuated, and transfigured a nineteenth-century popular verse culture of enigma, or riddle-in-verse, writing by women writers for women

readers. Whereas prosodists attempted to distinguish elite poet from popular versifier, Rossetti undermined that distinction by reworking the riddles of popular culture into unsolvable riddles in rhyme. Through enigmas without end, Rossetti explored the relationship between resolutions and solutions, how rhymes might bring about closure to verse even as the solutions to her open-ended riddles were anyone's guess. But while her means are different than Swinburne's, her ends are similar to his: Rossetti is also interested in the suspension of will in rhyme. While Swinburne understood the "cunning" of rhyme as an opportunity to undo his will through rhyme, Rossetti develops a different kind of "cunning": not "knowing," as "cunning" once meant, but the suspension of knowing in guessing. Indeed, for Rossetti, the "cunning" of rhyme is in how rhyme both offers resolution in clinching the line *and* suspends the mind between like-sounding words and similar-seeming choices. Likewise, I argue that solution of the "riddle" of Rossetti's lists of similes, which have puzzled critics, may be "riddle" itself: Rossetti's poetry reworks the enigmas of her culture, which are also lists of similes with one term, the tenor, hidden. Through her riddling verse, Rossetti not only explored divine revelation but also "likeness," which points at once to her interest in comparison, guessing, and rhyme.

While my first two chapters consider the responses of individual poets to a verse culture that sought to make rhyme play into work, my third chapter, "Classifying Rhyme: Cockney Rhyme and the Sound of Class, 1800-1900," considers how that verse culture shaped the reputation of poets by assuming a relationship between verse and voice. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the rise of a mass culture of untrained versifiers caused concerns about imperfect rhyme to intensify, which in turn caused concerns about "cockney rhyme" to intensify. Usually associated with Keats, "cockney rhyme" was more a phenomenon of the second half of the century than the first. Indeed, the change in the taste for rhyme had a considerable effect on

the reputation of poets, from William Morris to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Here I consider how the theory and practice of rhyme became central to debates about the late-century establishment of Standard English and Received Pronunciation. In rhyme, readers thought they heard both the sound of the poet's pronunciation and evidence of their technique, and therefore the poet's education and social class, but the relationship between rhyme and class was so variable as to prove incoherent. What emerged instead were various fantasies and anxieties about class being done and undone through rhyme as well as the reclassifying of types of rhyme to recodify rules for classes of rhymes and classes of persons.

If rhyming wrongly could undo your class identity by making you seem uneducated, then rhyming rightly could make you seem like a polished person. In my fourth and final chapter, "The Age of Rhyme: Cambridge Revisited, 1850-1900," I show that Cambridge was a hub for the production, circulation, and reception of witty light verse clinched by extravagant performances of rhyme through which youths did and undid their classed manhood. I focus on a tradition of student verse in Victorian Cambridge—from Tennyson, to C. S. Calverley, to Owen Seaman—to explore the uncertain and changing relationship of rhyme and maturity. While rhyme is often associated with the primitive and the puerile, rhyme at Cambridge bore many ages: it helped make boys into gentlemen, it helped men indulge in eternal youth, it caused anxieties that one was not acting one's age, and it seemed like it was being outgrown. Cambridge was more than one of the major training grounds of Victorian poetics. I show how Cambridge wits constructed, exploited, and lamented a relationship between aesthetics and identity, rhyme and youth, in order to historicize the relationship between forms of self-fashioning and the fashioning of poetic form.

In sum, my dissertation offers a history of overlapping cultures of the emerging genre of light verse (what Swinburne called “social verse,” emphasizing how the genre was a medium for sociability)—Swinburne’s French fixed forms, Rossetti’s enigmas, University wit—that burgeoned in the second half of the century as versifying became increasingly popular among a broad range of social groups. In the second half of the century, forms of rhyme produced genres of verse defined by rhyme. While the first two chapters demonstrate how particular poets like Swinburne and Rossetti identified with the cultivation of rhyme in Victorian England, the last two chapters consider more broadly how this rhyming culture produced various class and gender identifications, along with questions about the English language and national identity.

By shifting scholarly attention from meter to rhyme, I contribute to the emerging field of historical prosody. While critics have analyzed nineteenth-century metrical discourses from historical perspectives, I examine the work and play of rhyme between 1850-1900 to ask what can rhyme tell us about Victorian poetics that meter cannot.¹² For example, in *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (2012), Meredith Martin considers the post-1860 transition from classical to vernacular education as one in which Victorian prosodists sought to associate metrical order and national order.¹³ Her recovery of the diversity of Victorian versification manuals shows that their one common goal was to put meter to work to define Englishness and to produce national identification, though few could agree on what meter was or how it should be understood. Just as the Victorians put meter to serve the production of national identity, so too did the Victorians put rhyme to work to serve nationalist ends. But while Martin argues that meter after 1860 served to tie citizens to the imagined community of the nation, I argue that rhyme in social discourse was more prominently understood in terms of pronunciation, debates regarding the standardization of English, and ultimately the politics of

class. Theories of meter might have served to connect readers to the nation, but practices of rhyming also helped construct *local* and class communities, which were in turn defined by those shared practices of poetry.

Certainly the question of rhyme has never disappeared from twentieth-century formalist criticism, and in twenty-first century it appears that critics are starting to think again about rhyme in new ways, philosophical and otherwise.¹⁴ But in thinking historically about rhyme in Victorian England, my work is most immediately in dialogue with recent critics in Victorian studies who approach rhyme as a cultural phenomenon. For example, in her fine article “Rhyming as resurrection” (2000), Gillian Beer considers rhyme as a performance of resurrection in the context of Victorian anxieties about belief and origins, including evolution and thermodynamics where one no longer knew where humanity came from or would go.¹⁵ Herbert Tucker also takes up the question of rhyme in his ongoing exploration of cultural neoformalism in Victorian poetry; most recently, in “What Goes Around: Swinburne’s *A Century of Roundels*” (2013), Tucker focuses on the circularity of the roundel genre as a metaphor for the play of sameness and difference, demonstrating how the returns of the roundel make the familiar (the recurring details, images, and tropes of a poem) unfamiliar and then familiar in an entirely new way. For Beer and Tucker, what is interesting in rhyme is how rhyme resounds, or re-sounds, throughout a poem, to resonate more generally with the preoccupations of Victorian culture. Likewise, in “Rhyme’s End” (2011), Adela Pinch argues that fin-de-siècle poets used rhyme to represent and explore time, particularly its compression when time seemed to be moving faster than ever before. And in *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (2012), Peter McDonald argues that the rhyme scheme of the poem may have as much say as the intentions of the poet when determining the choice of words.

McDonald's argument is crucial for my opening chapter on Swinburne. I too explore the relationship between the intentions of the poet and the intentions of the poem. But I disagree with McDonald's reiteration of the argument that Swinburne's poetry failed because the sonic requirements of his verse seemed to choose his words for him; instead, I suggest that Swinburne *deliberately* sought ways to cede control of his verse to circumstance in order to undo his culture's fascination with the poet's masterful technique. Likewise, while McDonald approaches rhyme formally through prosodic analysis, stylistics, and close reading, my dissertation develops a different methodology for the study of rhyme. I not only analyze poems; I also synthesize a broader and variable Victorian discourse of rhyme to weave together a sense of how rhyme was being read and theorized not only in poems but also outside of poems. Indeed, while I began some of my chapters reading rhyme in a poem to generate a broader understanding of rhyme, a number of chapters began from reading Victorian discourse about rhyme, and then considering the interplay of the rhymes in a poem and "rhyme" in prose. My goal was to recover some of how the Victorians understood rhyme. Thus, my dissertation makes an argument for distant reading alongside that of close reading, reception studies as well as textual analysis.

Moreover, while I, like a number of the critics above, focus on canonical poets, I also weave those poets together with writers who were never known and who will never be known, like the Cantabridgian "C. G." who in "An Oarsman's Mourning" shows how versifying was made into a pose of studied indolence. In so doing, I recover a diverse array of poems and participants in a culture of verse that was everywhere in the nineteenth century, and I further destabilize the hierarchy between elite and popular culture.

My dissertation therefore contributes to historical poetics generally and historical prosody specifically by offering a new set of concepts for how to read rhyme in the nineteenth century. In

addition to considering how rhyme makes sense and sound, reason or emotion, I show that for the Victorians, rhyme also helped fashion and unfashion senses of selves and collectivities. If meter for the Victorians produced national identifications, then rhyme for the Victorians produced various fantasies about doing and undoing one's class and contributed to emerging class identities. The Victorian culture of rhyme worked to create relations not only between words but also between persons: what was most social about the poetic genres I consider in this dissertation, surprisingly, was rhyme.

Chapter 1 Round Games Swinburne and the Ends of Rhyme

Versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical.

~William Hazlitt, “Lectures on the English Poets: On Chaucer and Spenser” (1818)

[T]he agency of RHYME in the construction of our Poetry ... instead of curbing an author’s power ... usually suggests to him his ideas, the best of which ... would never be introduced but to fill the interval between the rhymes.

~“A Lover of Rhyme,” *Dublin Inquisitor* (1821)

The poet who begins a ballade does not know very exactly what he will put into it: the Rhyme, and nothing but the Rhyme, will whisper things unexpected and charming, things he would never have thought of but for her.

~Jules Lemaître, “Théodore de Banville” (1884)

According to a century-long tradition of criticism, the problem with Algernon Charles Swinburne was that he was a slave to his rhymes. In *Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Critical Study* (1912), the early-twentieth-century English poet Edward Thomas read Swinburne’s 1866 *Poems and Ballads* to complain that Swinburne rhymed without intention, will, or control:

Love of sound and especially of rhyme persuaded [Swinburne] to a somewhat lighter use of words than is common among great poets. Space would be wasted by examples of words produced apparently by submission to rhyme, not mastery over it. The one line in *Hesperia*: “Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that was mute as a maiden,” is enough to illustrate the poet’s carelessness of the fact that alliteration is not a virtue in itself. (94)

Later, speaking of Swinburne’s logophilia and how that love of words might produce verse that, “to another view, might seem words only, begotten of words,” Thomas condemns Swinburne for ceding his intentions to the shaping power of rhyme: “Rhyme certainly acted upon Swinburne as a pill to purge ordinary responsibilities” (158). Swinburne took the blame because he let rhyme do all the work.

Thomas’s contemporary, the American expatriate poet Ezra Pound, perpetuated Thomas’s censure that Swinburne ceded his intentions to form in order to let the play of rhyme do all the work of writing, choosing his words for him. In “Swinburne Versus Biographers” published in *Poetry* (1918), Pound laments: “Swinburne’s art is out of fashion.... He neglected the value of words as words, and was intent on their value as sound. His habit of choice grew mechanical, and he himself perceived it and parodied his own systemization” (325-26). Like Thomas, Pound similarly criticized what he saw as Swinburne’s problematic habit of giving his intentions over to poetic form, of writing without thinking, and letting sound and rhyme play, rather than sense and intention, do the work of choosing his rhyme words.

More recently, in *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (2012), the poet and Oxford professor of English poetry Peter McDonald argues, “By dealing in rhyme, many poets after Wordsworth are aware that they are dealing with chance, and

that rhyme is a test of their strength of design in the face of otherwise pre-formed associations and connections. The pre-determined nature of rhymes ... presents poets with a test of their own authorial powers of determination” (21).¹⁶ According to McDonald, however, Swinburne failed the test. Rather than take “the full force of Wordsworth’s formal encounters with sound and intention in verse” as Keats, Tennyson, Christina Rossetti and Hopkins did, McDonald cites Thomas and Pound to argue that Swinburne problematically “treated rhyme and repetition as matters more mechanical than metaphysical” (322). Unlike the abovementioned contemporaries, Swinburne was an unintentional (“mechanical”) poet; Swinburne’s rhymes, more than Swinburne, write his lines. Thus, his poetry is more sound than sense (“metaphysical”). Indeed, the “danger” to which Swinburne succumbs, McDonald writes, is “that of a copious facility, where poetic expression is straightforwardly aided by the rhyming it appears to find second nature.... [T]he most damaging case against ease of utterance would center on Algernon Swinburne.” (322). Swinburne made rhyming look like child’s play, but only because his rhyme did all the work; with the exception of the 1866 *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne’s rhymes are “facile” for McDonald because they are often mere “jingles,” babyish babble, “banal relation[s]” of mere sound play rather than the hard work of making ideas. In short, McDonald is the latest inheritor of a tradition that argues that Swinburne’s verse suffers from a failure of will: rather than Swinburne mastering rhyme, as he should have, rhyme mastered Swinburne.

But what if Swinburne’s unintentional, “mechanical” rhymes were not a problem for Swinburne’s aesthetic, but a solution to an aesthetic problem? What if Swinburne deliberately ceded his will to rhyme in order to overturn an assumption about proper versifying that was central to his verse culture and with considerable stakes for it, that “True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,” as Alexander Pope put it in *Essay on Criticism* (1711)? Critics from

Gillian Beer (1994) to Peter McDonald have recently pointed out that rhyming involves an interplay of intention and chance, the desires of the poet and the designs of rhyme.¹⁷ Rather than succumb to this interplay, however, I believe Swinburne deliberately gave himself over to form, exploring and exploiting the role of chance in artifice to redesign rhyme for his time.

Thomas, Pound, and McDonald are the latest inheritors of a neoclassical ideology that held that proper verse form was a product of intention and technique, not accident and dumb luck. As my introduction shows, this ideology was renewed in the second half of the nineteenth century when prosodists narrowed the rules of rhyme and insisted on obedience to them in order to make poetry difficult. These rules were disseminated by elites in part to curtail a growing mass culture of versifying by social groups denied a gentleman's education in classical versification, and to restore social and cultural hierarchies frayed by the entrance of the masses into domains (versifying) of the elite. The touchstone of good poetry would be the poet's technical mastery over the exigencies of form: only the educated would be able to do it. As rhyme was made into a form of work that needed to look like effortless play, emphasis was placed on the poet's will to master the requirements of rhyme. To be mastered by rhyme was the sign of the bad poet. For example, In "On the Use of Rhyme" published in the 1821 *Dublin Inquisitor*, the pseudonymous "A Lover of Rhyme" laments the rise of a mass culture of undereducated versifiers, who, despite lacking ideas to express and the technique to express it, unfortunately succeed because of "[rhyme's] assistance." The writer ironically "praises" "the agency of RHYME in the construction of our Poetry [which] instead of curbing an author's fancy ... usually suggests to him his ideas, the best of which ... would never be introduced but to fill the interval between the rhymes" (250, 254). The sign of bad verse is when rhyme, not the poet, writes the lines.

Swinburne's early and late verse, however, contributed to a counter-culture of poets and theorists from England and France that revalued the "agency of rhyme," exploring models of poetic practice that untethered versifying from the poet's controlling designs in order to undo the nineteenth-century emphasis on authorial intention, poetic will, technical mastery, and masculine authority. By separating versifying from technique, these writers opened a space for the undereducated versifier and thus helped to democratize verse. Specifically, I examine how in "Faustine" (1862) Swinburne explores the pleasures of automatic, mechanical rhyming and imagines rhyme as having desires on its own designs, and I explore how *A Century of Roundels* (1883) Swinburne circulates the mastertrope of "chance" to undo the technical mastery that was synonymous with his verse and a fetish of his verse culture. While many Victorians understood poetic form as an opportunity for self-fashioning and manipulated rhyme to form a self, in this chapter I argue that Swinburne deliberately explored the pleasures of undoing a self through rhyme and of ceding will to form. Swinburne exploited his culture's fascination with rhyme games and games of chance to make rhyme play do the work of writing his verse. In so doing, Swinburne rethought a fundamental assumption of Victorian verse—that the poet needed to control the poem, that intentionality was central to verse making—in order to undo the Victorian fascination with will and masculinity performed through poetic form.

"Faustine": "A Love-machine / With clockwork joints"

Swinburne as a young adult flirted with his cousin, Mary Gordon (later Mrs. Mary Disney Leith), by playing *bouts-rimés* with her in 1863-64. *Bouts-rimés* are rhyming contests that challenge participants to produce a poem from a predetermined set of rhymes. Invented by a seventeenth-century French poet named Dulot, *bouts-rimés* migrated to England in the eighteenth-century where they "became a popular pastime" and "parlor game" through the

nineteenth century (Augarde 135, 37; *Princeton Encyclopedia* 143). This rhyme game inverts the writing process as it is traditionally understood: if when writing a poem, poets start with an idea and then find the words to express it, then when writing *bouts-rimés*, poets start instead with (rhyme) words and then find or fill in the idea (Augarde). Poets would work backwards from (rhyme) ends; the (rhyme) ends became the means. In short, in *bouts-rimés*, form takes precedence in the writing process over content.

For that reason, while playing *bouts-rimés* was popular practice, it was also unpopular among cultural elites because *bouts-rimés* signified precisely how poetry was *not* to be written. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, *bouts-rimés* were a metaphor for bad verse. In “Rhyme and Reason: Or a New Proposal to the Public Respecting Poetry in Ordinary” published in his 1822 *Liberal*, the poet, journalist, and critic Leigh Hunt used *bouts-rimés* to depict the central flaw of English poetry: that all the poetry is in the rhymes; the rest of the poem is unimportant (81). A half century later, in the note, “Campbell’s ‘Lochiel’s Warning’” in the 18 December 1869 *Notes and Queries*, Julian Sharman includes the following epigraph, “*Bouts-rimés* are strings of rhyme which stupid poets fill up to make verses stupider still” in his claim that Thomas Campbell may have used *bouts-rimés* to generate his poem. Sharman is surprised by this, because Campbell’s verse is smooth and not disordered, as many expected a poem generated by this method to be (532). While Sharman does not elaborate on why *bouts-rimés* are “stupid,” “stupid” might refer to poets whose use of *bouts-rimés* resulted in rhyme determining the line.

But for Swinburne, *bouts-rimés* were a means to re-imagine how poetry might be written, and a metaphor for a new theory and practice of versifying. Swinburne’s “Sestina,” which he “scribbled off this morning” of 15 November 1871 and published in the 1872 *Once-a-week*, made artifice seem spontaneous, just as theorists said it should seem. But his “Sestina” was

“[a]pparently constructed according to M. Dulot’s [the inventor of *bouts-rimés*] theory,” notes the American lawyer Brander Matthews in “Rhyme and Reason,” published in the 1874 *Galaxy*: in other words, his means of generating verse, theorists would say, were also entirely wrong (621). Yet many mid- to late-nineteenth century English and French poets, such as Stephane Mallarme, who wanted to separate value from technique, employed *bouts-rimés* as a method of poetic production. In *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Clive Scott notes, “[A]ny school of poets which regards rhyme as the generative principle of verse composition will favor a method of working essentially by *bouts-rimés*, as did the Parnassians, for example, guided by Banville’s axiom that ‘an imaginative gift for rhyme is, of all qualities, the one which makes the poet’” (143). In the hands of Swinburne, who was the most French of all the English poets, *bouts-rimés* became a means to re-theorize English versifying on the French model that Scott outlines. While Swinburne is justly famous for his versifying virtuosity, he also used word games both to display his mastery of technique, “scribbling off” a sestina in a morning, and to undo his mastery by employing a word game considered the very mark of bad poetry to generate verse.

Swinburne used games to imagine various ways of giving up control over his poetry, not in the sense of turning a finished poem over to an audience, but in the sense of losing control over writing itself and surrendering intentions to rhyme. These games condense in Swinburne’s promiscuously rhymed dramatic monologue, “Faustine,” which he wrote just before playing *bouts-rimés* with his cousin Gordon, and which he published first in the 1862 *Spectator* and then collected in *Poems and Ballads* (1866). The persona of the poem (at once reader and writer) describes the eternal returns throughout history of a woman named Faustine who is the object of his disdain and desire: the erotic, imperious, eponymous female whose name both puns on Faust

(God and Satan dice for her soul; God loses; it's Swinburne, after all) and refers to a series of Roman noblewomen from the Nerva-Antonine dynasty who shared the name. Formerly a femme fatale who experienced erotic joy in the death of gladiators, she is now in the present a somewhat downtrodden bourgeois who may continue to possess sado-lascivious sensibilities and is the screen of her descriptor's projected fantasies.¹⁸

As Faustine is fated to eternally return throughout time, the same woman in new contexts ("You come back face to face with us, / The same Faustine"), as every Faustine is a different version of the same woman, she not only anticipates Nietzsche's "eternal return" and Pater's "Mona Lisa," but also Faustine self-reflexively personifies the poem's eternally recurring, implacable rhymes. All forty-one abaB quatrains rhyme off the refrain: the proper name "Faustine."¹⁹ "Faustine" therefore theorizes rhyme through the practice of rhyme, exploring while performing the relationship of repetition and slight variation of sound and sense.²⁰ In this poem, rhyme, like time, is at once cyclical and progressive. In "Faustine," rhyme is used to explore repetition through time, how the same trope can appear both the same and slightly new when situated in new contexts, and how that repetition does not so much renew as abrade. The latest incarnation is at once regal and domesticated: "Curled lips, long since half kissed away / Still sweet and keen." Indeed, as each new incarnation of Faustine emerges tabula rasa with no memory of the experiences of the previous ("Yea, this life likewise will you not / Forget, Faustine?"), so too does this poem suggest that repetition does not so much lodge in the memory as become as forgettable (and as fascinating) as the modern Faustine. Recurrence degrades.

"Faustine" also thematizes games, from the gladiatorial combats that entertain the Empress Faustine to the parodied Faustian wager for Faustine's soul. Satan beating God for Faustine's soul is more than just Swinburne's characteristic blasphemy, though John Morely

condemned “Faustine” for that reason. This dice game also theorizes rhyme play as the interplay of chance and determinism. If all the games in “Faustine”—from Satan’s dicing with God for Faustine’s soul to the gladiatorial combats “Where death must win”—are games of chance whose outcome is already predetermined, then so too is the poem’s rhyme play predetermined—all the stanzas end on the recurring name. The only space for surprise is in the rhyme or rhymes that precede it. With rhyme, usually the first rhyme word builds in reader the anticipation and curiosity of how the rhyme will be clinched: we know the rhyme will come but we don’t know what the rhyme will be. Thus, rhyme works by expectation and surprise. But “Faustine” turns this on its head, as the reader is immediately made aware that the clinching rhyme will always be the same. Surprise is therefore inverted, reversed, as the reader now asks not how the rhyme will be clinched, but how the rhyme will begin. The surprise is therefore not produced by the result or clinching rhyme, but the cause or word that inaugurates the rhyme. Like the man gazing on Faustine and imagining her history, the rhymes make the reader not look forward, but back, or forward and back as the experience of surprise is immediate: as soon as you hit the first rhyme, you know how the rhyme will play or has played. In such a (rhyme-)determined world, whose outcomes are always already decided, the game is over before it has even begun.

Moreover, by representing play, “Faustine” also tacitly refers to the history of its production: “Faustine” was constructed out of a number of rhyme games. “Faustine” the poem, like Faustine the woman, is therefore a memorial to its own history, which is Swinburne’s way of saying that art, like life, is a memorial to its own history. As a rhyme game about games, “Faustine” is an endless regress or *mise en abyme* of play that “rhymes” its content and form, the games that the poem describes and the game that the poem is. In *The Whistler Journal* (1921), the painter Frederick Sandys remembered that Swinburne wrote “Faustine” in an attempt “to see

how many rhymes he could find to the name [Faustine]” (44).²¹ As Swinburne used games to help him generate verse, he raises questions about how he understood his authorship in relation to his culture’s fetishization of the poet’s mastery of form. On the one hand, Swinburne’s rhyme game figures rhyme play as a mode of display. By producing a near interminable series of rhymes off the name “Faustine,” including the virtuosic, erotic “Lampsacene . . . Faustine,” Swinburne displays his mastery of poetic form: Swinburne could rhyme all day. In 1869, seven years after Swinburne published “Faustine,” Hood in *The Rules of Rhyme* claimed, “Proper names should not be used as rhymes [because] to introduce an imaginary name for the sake of a rhyme, is . . . too cheap to be good” (58). For Hood, employing a proper name to fill the need for a rhyme was facile rhyming. Swinburne, however, made rhyming off a name difficult by pushing those rhymes to their limits: rather than use a name to clinch a rhyme, he uses a name to generate rhyme. Swinburne here deliberately displays his abilities as a rhymers, his mastery of rhyme.

On the other hand, however, when Swinburne began this poem hoping “to see how many rhymes he could find to the name,” he did not rhyme to support any underlying idea, argument, or purpose, but simply to generate innumerable sonic equivalences. Indeed, “Faustine” is nearly merely *bouts-rimés* by another name: come up with the rhymes and then generate the lines. Swinburne generates the rhymes, but then the rhymes, as much as Swinburne, generate the verse. Likewise, Swinburne’s endless repetitions produce a sense that the rhymes are self-generating. While Swinburne frequently employs imperfect rhyme to break the monotony and to theorize rhyme as repetition that produces difference, the repetition of the proper name takes on a life of its own. For Tennyson, repeating his name put him in “A kind of waking trance” that ultimately expanded his consciousness into the infinite.²² By repeating “Faustine,” however, Swinburne minimizes himself into his rhymes, undoing his agency in the construction of verse and giving it

over to rhyme. Swinburne starts with the germ of a rhyme (the proper name “Faustine”), which then suggests a rhyme and then another and another, to the point where the iterated jingles of rhyme take on their own echoing momentum, the way a rhyme gets in your head so that you cannot stop rhyming: the echoes just keep coming. This suggests an understanding of rhyme as childlike babble or nursery rhyme, or as a self-perpetuating, mechanical system endlessly capable of generating more and more rhymes, more and more lines. Rhyme is both the engine of this self-generating verse (verse that generates itself and therefore seems “a self”) and it takes over the poem. Swinburne’s rhyme game “to see how many rhymes he could find to the name [Faustine]” testifies to the playful desire to produce an unlimited set of rhymes, to make rhyme perpetual, unintentional, at once repetitive, mechanical, and automatic, and excessive, out of his control.

So when the speaker describes Faustine as an automaton held together by “hinges” and composed of “clockwork joints” that achieves animation, Swinburne also describes “Faustine,” a poem whose mechanical rhymes—its “hinges” or “joints” of networked, interlocking sound that recur with clocklike regularity and adhere the poem’s lines—run away on their own volition, almost beyond Swinburne’s control:

You seem a thing that hinges hold,
A love-machine
With clockwork joints of supple gold—
No more, Faustine. (ll. 141-44)

Within this context, Swinburne’s description of “Faustine” as a “love-machine” refers to the mechanism of rhyme which Swinburne theorizes not as a performance of mastery but as “mechanical,” unintentional, and automated: an automaton. The strange, almost absurd metaphor

“love-machine” figures rhyme in revisionary terms by paradoxically equating desire with what should be its antithesis, the mechanical. For Swinburne, however, these concepts are not antagonistic, but mutually supporting. Swinburne suggests that the mechanism of rhyme has its own desires on the designs of the poem, while also suggesting the pleasure, not the anxiety, of ceding one’s will to the clockwork gears of mechanical form. “Faustine”—the proper name from which Swinburne generates his rhymes, the poem that emerges from them—are in a sense what Swinburne winds up only to let go. Like the automaton Faustine that comes alive and expresses desire, so too does Swinburne’s stanzas take off on their own self-generating momentum.

Because Swinburne began “Faustine” as a game to see how many rhymes he could produce, he resisted formal closure.²³ Yet Swinburne also needed to end his poem. He did so by putting closure almost out of his control by submitting the length of the poem’s form to an external constraint. As the *Whistler Journal* points out, “Sandys went once with Rossetti, Swinburne and George Meredith to Hampton Court, and between Waterloo and Hampton Court Station [a distance of 3-4 miles] each one of the three wrote a poem,” Swinburne’s being the first draft of “Faustine” (44). I infer from this suggestive anecdote that the three poets dashed their poems off quickly, and perhaps even played a game against the clock set by the timetable of British Rail. Anticipating the automatic writing techniques of the Surrealists, Swinburne may have used a game to free the production of the poem from his own controlling designs. He achieved formal closure less on his own volition than by ceding his will to circumstance, creating a space for chance to play (even as that chance was determined by the rail schedules) among the determinations of implacable rhyme. Thus, Faustine, who seems masterful but is in fact determined, allegorizes Swinburne. By finding ways to cede his authority to accident, Swinburne

makes an argument against his culture's fantasy of the poet's mastery triumphing over the difficult strictures of rhyme.

"Faustine" is essentially a poem about power and submission—from the opening repetition, "Lean back / ... lean / Back" (ll. 1-3) to the dice game in which he "that wins" may "take / And keep Faustine." In the context of rhyme and rhyme games, in a Victorian verse culture that fetishized "mastering" rhyme, power relations take on additional saliency. Swinburne's thematizing of power in the context of rhyme is also a theorizing of rhyme in the context of power. "Faustine" is an allegory of Victorian verse culture's fascination with the poet's mastery over his medium, but also "Faustine" is an argument about how easily that mastery can tip over into subservience. Rhyme, for Swinburne, becomes a mode of both mastery and submission. He at once exploits his culture's fetishization of poetic technique, and Swinburne undoes his intentions by submitting them to something external to the self: train timetables, or the desires of mechanized, automatic rhyme. In creating the rule that a train timetable, not Swinburne, would decide when the rhymes end, Swinburne created a game to cede his will to it, employing his creativity to undo his creativity, and creating rules—the rules of a game, the rules of rhyme—in order to submit to them.

Swinburne often breaks his culture's rules of rhyme in this poem, employing imperfect rhymes on the name Faustine in order to vary the repetition. But more often than not, Swinburne creates more "rules of rhyme," making them excessive to ironize them. Rhyme itself becomes the rule to which the poet must obey. The irony of course is that in so doing Swinburne both performs his verse culture's most pleasurable activity—its fascination with perpetuating the rules of rhyme—and he undoes that fascination by having those rules not enable his mastery but undo it, as Swinburne cedes his will to circumstance and turns intention over to timetable-determined

accident and chance. While Peter McDonald argues that Swinburne's early work is where Swinburne most controls his rhymes (and therefore where his poetry most succeeds), here Swinburne uses a series of games to both perform and undermine one of the central assumptions of Victorian verse: that the poet must master his rhymes.

A Century of Roundels

When Swinburne published *A Century of Roundels* in 1883, it received mixed reviews from critics on both sides of the Atlantic. Those who understood poetry as emerging from labored artifice, as a medium for manipulating sound, praised the volume, while those who understood poetry as emerging from inspired, spontaneous expression, as a medium for expressing ideas, criticized it. The Dutch painter Axel Thorsen Schovelin loved it, claiming in "Mr. Swinburne's Roundels" in the 1883 *Dial* that *A Century of Roundels* struck the right balance of "Power and form, the expressed and the expression, the ideas and its mode of appearance" (90). For that reason, the volume signified Swinburne's (he was 46) coming of age and becoming a man as both a person and a poet; a volume of verse about and for children surprisingly expresses "the deeper charm of true and earnest manliness" which Schovelin understands as "Modesty" (90).²⁴ Swinburne's long anapestic rhymes and scandalous crimes here were curtailed into lines as short as a word, as tender as a child, which meant the poetry was as modest as a man. More than equating rhyme with logos (sound that makes sense), or pathos (sound that makes emotion), Schovelin understands rhyme as ethos, self-fashioning, sound that makes Swinburne a man. Not only does he gender rhyme, but he also equates manhood with modesty, traditionally associated with women. The turns of rhyme also enable the bending of gender.

But many reviewers continued the traditional critique of Swinburne's verse: that it valued sound over sense and form over content and testified to the triumph of a falsifying artifice over a genuine spontaneity and true, inspired feeling. In "Mr. Swinburne's Roundels" in the 1883 *Literary World*, the reviewer claims, "But however much these roundels are admired as dexterous feats of versification, their intellectual content is deplorably slight.... [W]e do not know that [Swinburne] has ever revealed his intellectual poverty to the world in so convincing a manner as in this *Century of Roundels*" (222).²⁵ This critique eventually won out. Even today, scholars continue to dismiss *A Century of Roundels*, and Swinburne's late verse more generally, as mere "rot about babies, a blether bathos" as Swinburne's contemporary Gerard Manley Hopkins growled (qtd. in McSweeney 153).²⁶ Most recently, Peter McDonald claims, "It is easy to point out instances of banal relation in Swinburne's habits of rhyme, and (especially in his later work) of banality that topples over into triviality. Certainly the author of *A Century of Roundels* (1882) [actually 1883, but who's counting], in his protracted and pitiless *homage* to Christina Rossetti's self-scrutinizing and acoustically self-attentive verse, comes close to rendering the startling originality of that poetry completely inaudible." Indeed, "jingles and facile harmonies ... constitute[d] so largely the verse of his later career" (323).

Swinburne, however, knew what he was getting into when he published *A Century*. In his opening roundel, "Dedication to Christina G. Rossetti," he anticipates the disparagement of the roundel genre as trivial and valuing sound over sense, and he defends the genre by revaluing the terms used against it. The roundel genre was considered an instance of a larger genre *vers de société* or light verse. As such, the roundel was considered "trivial," "brilliant trifles." Andrew Lang characterized *vers de société* as an "intellectual cigarette": intimating that these fashionable poems of the moment were just momentary poems: they offered merely a quick buzz of

cognitive pleasure but no real substance; their repetitious rhymes were as narcotic as they were exciting; their value was felt to reside paradoxically in their disposability. In his “Dedication,” Swinburne accepts these critiques while defending light verse as having lasting appeal:

SONGS light as these may sound, though deep and strong
The heart spoke through them, scarce should hope to please
Ears tuned to strains of loftier thoughts than throng
Songs light as these.

Yet grace may set their sometime doubt at ease,
Nor need their too rash reverence fear to wrong
The shrine it serves at and the hope it sees.

For childlike loves and laughters thence prolong
Notes that bid enter, fearless as the breeze,
Even to the shrine of holiest-hearted song,
Songs light as these.

Swinburne was never humble about his poetry. When George Meredith claimed his verse was worth as much money as Swinburne’s, Swinburne slapped him in the face, ending their friendship (*Whistler Journal* 24). But here Swinburne performs humility self-consciously, admitting that the roundel is mere light verse: “SONGS light as these . . . scarce should hope to please / Ears tuned to strains of loftier thoughts.” By acting as meek as the children he describes, Swinburne refers to the content of the roundels that exploited the pathos that writing about children could produce (“deep and strong / The heart spoke through [the roundel]”—light verse

can have depth of feeling too). He also refers to the form of the roundel, which he personifies as “childlike”: at once monosyllabic, minimal, meek, and fragile; and sonically excessive, babyish babble. Critics who value sense over sound, who understand poetry as philosophy more than art, who believe in an ideology of the poet as inspired and spontaneous rather than a laboring craftsman, Swinburne suggests, approach these poems with the wrong assumptions in mind. Swinburne’s *A Century of Roundels* offers more than the banal, trivial, “tinkling and jingling” of “facile harmonies” that critics then and now condemn it for offering. But Swinburne’s *A Century of Roundels* also does not offer the depth of sense that these critics demand as the touchstone of good poetry—at least, Swinburne’s *A Century of Roundels* does not offer that depth of sense in the form they imagine. In *A Century of Roundels*, Swinburne explores the value of sound, what sound can do, how sound itself is an argument and makes an argument: what in “The Roundel” Swinburne called, deconstructing the binary, “the ear of thought.”

Swinburne’s roundels are not mere nonsense but rather make sense in the context in which they emerged and circulated. In the 1860s, following a similar revival in France in the 1850s by the French poet and critic Théodore de Banville and the Parnassians, the Pre-Raphaelites (mainly D. G. Rossetti and Swinburne) imported, translated, and Anglicized medieval French fixed forms (ballade, rondeau, rondel, sestina, triolet, villanelle, etc.). These medieval French fixed forms were said to have been given their final shape by their mid-fifteenth century masters: the duke Charles d’Orleans, and François Villon, the “Student, Poet, and Housebreaker,” as Robert Louis Stevenson called him in the title of his biographical study in the 1877 *Cornhill Magazine*. Swinburne’s and Rossetti’s 1860s translations of Villon and Swinburne’s work with French fixed forms in his 1866 *Poems and Ballads* led the coterie known as the “English Parnassians” (Austin Dobson, Edward Dowden, Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang,

and R. L. Stevenson) to produce a series of articles about and books of verse between 1870-90. In so doing, they popularized medieval French forms in England, which seemed to be everywhere in the 70s and 80s.²⁷ This led Swinburne to rework Villon's rondeau to invent his roundel in 1883.

The heyday of French fixed forms was both a cause and an effect of the emergence of a Victorian verse culture that was fascinated by form, that insisted that technique and overcoming difficulty were the touchstones of good poetry, and that codified, narrowed, and disseminated the now-tightened rules of versification. Indeed, the importation of medieval French fixed forms into England was understood as both cause and effect of a new era of artifice and technique in Victorian verse culture, a revival of rhyme after the blank verse "formlessness" of the Spasmodics. In "A Plea for certain Exotic Forms of Verse," published in the 1877 *Cornhill Magazine*, the critic Edmund Gosse claims, "[I]t has been proved in the history of literature that law is better than anarchy.... Those who are impatient of rules and prefer to be a law unto themselves, may turn elsewhere.... [T]he literary opinion of the time is generally in favor of exact form in literature" (56). Likewise, in his 1887 anthology of medieval French Fixed Forms, *Ballades and Rondeaus, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, etc.*, the critic Gleeson White echoes Gosse, "[T]hose who read [a French fixed form] simply as a dainty poem never suspect the stern laws ordering the apparent spontaneity of the whole. To approach ideal perfection, nothing less than implicit obedience to all the rules is the first element of success" (xlii). He goes on to claim, "The genius which consists in breaking rules is looked upon with suspicion in all these forms" (lxiii). In order to master the genre, paradoxically the poet must submit to the rules.

For Gosse, following the rules was an all-or-nothing affair: if done well, the poet achieved mastery; if done poorly, the poet was a failure: "[I]nstead of appalling us by its

difficulty [the strict rules of versifying] encourages us to brilliant effort” (56). Overcoming the difficulty would make the poet seem a master of form and thus legitimize his writing in the first place. Imposing narrow rules would also close the gates of official verse culture, dividing those who could and should write from those who couldn’t and shouldn’t. “We acknowledge that the severity of the plan and the rich and copious recurrence of the rhyme,” Gosse writes, “serve the double end of repelling the incompetent workman and stimulating the competent” (56). As mentioned in my introduction, this verse culture treated versifying as either a mode of disciplining or gatekeeping, either civilizing a mass culture of undereducated versifiers or excluding them from official verse culture altogether. Motivating the dissemination of rules of rhyme was the desire to shore up cultural hierarchies frayed by the rise of a mass culture of amateur versifying among undereducated social groups. For Gosse and prosodists of his ilk, treating poetry as an art and disseminating its unbreakable rules made poetry difficult, which had the effect of excluding undereducated versifiers and thus making poetry *unpopular*, while enabling the educated (gentlemen) to shine. Thus, the new rules of rhyme would shore up aesthetic hierarchies (between poet and not) and social hierarchies (lower class and upper class) frayed by the entrance of the masses into versifying, formerly a domain of the gentle through which they constituted their identity apart from others.

This context of rules and mastery is precisely what Swinburne in *A Century of Roundels* sought to both exploit and explode. Swinburne’s *Century* was accused by contemporaries of exemplifying Swinburne’s betrayal of his radical, scandalizing roots. For example, in “Mr. Swinburne’s Roundels,” in the 1883 *Literary World*, the reviewer concludes, “Mr. Swinburne’s muse is here no longer the wild bacchante of earlier days; she treads a statelier measure, clothed to the point of decency, if not precisely in her right mind” (223). But Swinburne was never more

radical and scandalous than in his late-century rhymes. As I will show, in *A Century of Roundels*, Swinburne set about breaking all the rules of rhyme: specifically, the assertions by contemporary prosodists that a rhyme should not equate with a line (i.e. no one-word lines / rhymes), that French *rime riche* could, would, and should never work in English verse, that frequent rhymes could only make lighthearted chimes and therefore should not be used in serious poetry, that rhymes should be aural and not visual (i.e. eye rhyme), and that proper verse technique was based in the rules of art and the intentions of the poet, not chance or dumb luck. Another way of putting it is that Swinburne broke every rule except the golden rule of obeying the rules of form. As I will show, Swinburne was so obedient to form that he dissolved under form's mastery. In so doing, Swinburne showed that there was a better way to break a rule than, perversely, to follow that rule perfectly. In making rhyme into a crime, Swinburne at once showed himself to be the greatest critic of his verse culture's fascination with the rules of rhyme, and the epitome of what his verse culture most valued: the master of poetic form. In short, Swinburne sought both to exploit his verse culture by implicitly taking advantage of the benefits formal mastery could confer on the poet, and to explode his verse culture by insisting that rules were only made to be broken. Indeed, codifying the rules of rhyme by prosodists made possible the pleasures of rule breaking by poets.

For that reason, Swinburne's rule breaking might lend itself to being read as another example of his tour-de-force technical wizardry as a poet, and therefore as ethos-building, masturbatory. But I would argue Swinburne's rule breaking was also social, outward-oriented. Not only did Swinburne's masterful rule breaking offer pleasure to the reader and expand the range of rhyme, but it was also implicitly a political act that enabled the democratizing of versifying. By freeing verse from narrow rules, one would not need a gentleman's education in

versification to gain access to official verse culture. Rule breaking might come about by mastery or ineptitude, but that rule breaking might no longer guard the gates of official verse culture. Versification need no longer feel like work that hides its own work, ideological or otherwise, but a form of play.

Thinking about rhyme in *A Century of Roundels* allows us to read the volume more generously rather than dismissing it as yet another instance of Swinburne valuing sound over sense. In dismantling his culture's assumptions one by one, Swinburne extends the range of what rhyme is capable. For that reason, Swinburne's *A Century of Roundels* is not banal or trivial, as many critics would have it, but instead rather radical and experimental. Indeed, *A Century of Roundels* should not be dismissed but admired: I therefore join Herbert Tucker in arguing that it is important both to Swinburne's canon and to late-Victorian verse culture as a whole.

Crimes of Rhyme

Just as Victorian poets and prosodists debated whether the quantitative meters of Classical poetics could be translated into English verse, so too did they discuss, following the late-century importation of medieval French fixed forms into English poetics, whether or not French rhyming forms could be Anglicized, particularly whether *rime riche* could be imported too. Rhyme supposedly requires different consonant sounds to precede the identical sounding vowel and phoneme sounds, lest the rhyme words sound too similar to produce the pleasurable play of sameness in difference. In *rime riche*, however, even the preceding consonant sounds the same; indeed, the rhyme words may be homophones (same sound, different spelling: night, knight), and homonyms (same spelling and sound, but different sense: swallow (verb), swallow (noun)), even puns.

The refrain of the late-century French poet Jean Richepin's rondeau, which begins "votre beau thé" and concludes with the *rime riche* "votre beauté," was frequently cited by Victorian prosodists and poets as exemplary of why *rime riche* would not work in English. The English language was supposedly rhyme poor, English culture supposedly disdained the pun, and the English ear supposedly required rhyme to have some dissonance to be truly appealing. In "A Note on some Foreign Forms of Verse," the appendix to William Davenport Adams' 1878 anthology *Latter-Day Lyrics*, the poet Austin Dobson sought to codify the rules of rhyme for the newly popular medieval French fixed forms. *Rime riche* "is not held to be admissible in English," writes Dobson, echoing the assumptions of any number of Victorian theorists of verse, so he finds a compromise between needing to meet the difficulties of medieval French fixed forms and wanting to popularize them:

[I]t should be allowable to rhyme such words as 'hail' and 'hale;' but not allowable to rhyme such words as 'prove,' 'approve,' 'reprove,' in which the philological relationship is of the closest. Even in the former case, however, the skilful writer will be careful not to bring the rhymes into close proximity; and in the shorter forms, will probably find it best to avoid them all together. The purist would never employ them under any circumstances (348-49).

Dobson claims that English verse, unlike French verse, requires more contrast between the sonic equivalences of the rhymed words to succeed. To "rhyme" words with similar sound and spelling is worse than to rhyme words with the same sound but different spelling. Even stricter than Dobson, however, is Gleeson White:

Purists forbid in our tongue the use of words of distinct spelling, but identical sound, as 'sail' and 'sale,' 'bear' and 'bare;' nor would they allow words closely

allied, as ‘claim,’ ‘disclaim,’ ‘reclaim,’ to be employed, the strict rule being, *that no syllable once used as a rhyme can be used again for that purpose throughout the poem, not even if it be spelt differently while keeping the same sound; nor if the whole word is altered by a prefix; the syllable that rhymes must always be a new one both in sense and sound* (xliii, White’s italics).

To Anglicize *rime riche* often meant employing puns, still considered in the nineteenth century a form of “easy vulgarity” that would ruin the “delicacy” of the poem, as White put it. Indeed, an unsigned review of verse in the 1877 *Athenaeum* called *rime riche* a “barbarism” (762).

As you would expect, in his roundels Swinburne was decidedly *impure*. Against the rules of rhyme being disseminated by his contemporaries, in *A Century of Roundels* Swinburne employed the most “impure” of rhymes--homonymic *rime riche*—in order to take pleasures in breaking the rules and thereby extend the range of rhyme. In “The Way of the Wind,” Swinburne rhymes “swallow ... swallow,” where the first word is a bird, and the latter is a verb. While he puts distance between the homonymic rhymes in the poem, Swinburne exploits the recurrence of similitude that cloaks a form of difference in order to trouble the cognitive distinctions that the categories of sameness and difference serve to anchor. In other words, Swinburne uses rhyme to enact the problem of recognition in a poem concerned with the limits of understanding. He also uses rhyme to consider the relationship of repetition and change, just as he uses repetition and change and the problem of limited recognition to theorize rhyme:

The wind’s way in the deep sky’s hollow

None may measure, as none can say

How the heart in her shows the swallow

The wind’s way.

Hope nor fear can avail to stay
Waves that whiten on wrecks that wallow,
Times and seasons that wane and slay.

Life and love, till the strong night swallow
Thought and hope and the red last ray,
Swim the waters of years that follow
The wind's way.

One would expect Swinburne's roundels to thematize and perform continuity, given their rhyme scheme, which suggests a cycle. But they also perform rupture. "Life and love" seems better suited to follow from "Times and seasons that wane and slay [life and love]," and less suited to introduce "Life and love ... Swim the waters of years that follow / The wind's way." Either the opening of the third stanza elides a preposition ("In"?), or the poem asks our attention to suddenly swerve; it starts us down one road but ends us up another. The opening of the third stanza is in a sense a false start; like sound, the alliterative phrase "Life and love" just lingers. Rather than the rhymes smoothing the poem into an imagined sense of "unity," the roundel shows its seams. The roundel is therefore not so much undone by its ruptures so much as it is done up in them.

Just as Swinburne sought to show that French *rime riche* could work in English verse, so too did he break the rule that poetic lines had to be more than one-word rhymes. In "Rhyme and Reason," Leigh Hunt derided attempts by poets and librettists to import from Italian verse the use of one-word rhyme lines, which equated rhyme and line:

It is doubtless an [overinvestment in rhyme] that has made so many modern Italian poets intersperse their lyrics with those frequent single words, which are at once line and rhyme, and which some of our countrymen have in vain endeavored to naturalize in the English opera. Not that they want the same pregnancy in our language, but because they are neither so abundant nor so musical; and besides, there is something in the rest of our verses, however common-place, which seems to be laughing at the incursion of these vivacious strangers, as if it were a hop suddenly got up, and unseasonably.

Hunt concludes, “We do not naturally take to anything so abrupt and saltatory” (83).

Swinburne, however, felt that he could make English verse dance more roughly (and thus better) with their inclusion, and in so doing, to question the notion of a natural English verse warranted by a natural English taste. Indeed, the very importation of medieval French fixed forms attempted to make English verse more cosmopolitan and less insular. Even as Swinburne remains most associated with long-line verse, his roundels’ one-word rhymes controversially equated rhyme and line. Swinburne’s “Eros” for instance repeats a one-word rhymed refrain; the fourth line and the last are nothing more than “Eros.” So when Hunt satirically proposed that English poets save “time and paper ... by forgoing at once all the superfluous part of his verses ... and confining himself, entirely, to those very sufficing terminations” (83-84), his scheme proved unintentionally auricular, for Swinburne did exactly that. A half-century after Hunt, the equation of line and rhyme became the index of avant-garde English verse.

Contemporary critics disparaged Swinburne’s rule-breaking rhymes, finding one-word line-rhymes “jarring” and complaining that they drew attention away from the matter to the manner” (“Mr. Swinburne’s “Century of Roundels” 970). Swinburne, however, argues that all

the poetry of the roundel is in the rhymes. While almost producing bathos by closing the poem with a thud, equating the rhyme and the line not only produces a poetics of the miniscule, apt for verse that seeks to be as delicate and fragile as a child, it also “impregnates” the keyword with suggestive meaning. Thus, the epigraphic conclusion of “Sorrow”: “All things pass in the world, but never / Sorrow” reads not only as description but also as hortatory: sorrow never passes, but paradoxically one should also never feel sorrow. Swinburne gave birth to a poetics of the miniscule, the child: in the poetic detail is a world of meaning.

Because of the frequent “tinkling and jingling” rhymes of medieval French fixed forms, and because working in fixed forms meant the poet had to overcome their difficulty which often led to producing pleasurable surprise in readers, medieval French fixed forms were thought suitable only for lighthearted subjects. Austin Dobson notes that French fixed forms “may add a new charm of buoyancy,—a lyric freshness,—to amatory and familiar verse ... they are admirable vehicles for the expression of trifles or *jeux d’esprit*” (335). More specifically, the rondel and rondeau are “well suited for the expression of brief emotions, and sportive or amatory incident; in short, for any light lyrical theme of defined extent” (341). In “Theodore de Banville” published in 1878 *New Quarterly Magazine*, the poet and scholar Andrew Lang concludes, “If [de Banville] has a lesson to teach English versifiers, surely it is a lesson of gaiety. They are only too fond of rue and rosemary, and now and then prefer the cypress to the bay” (578). For Lang, the late-century turn to French fixed forms brightened English verse, a counter-affect to the gloom of diurnal modernity.

But while theorists sought to limit French fixed forms to humorous subjects, Swinburne sought to expand light verse into darker terrain, using the circular repetitions of the roundel’s rhyme to explore memory and trauma in child elegies. Swinburne used the roundel to theorize

the possibilities of the form, arguing in verse that poetic form generally and rhyme specifically were not inherently bound to a certain affective experience but instead were flexible and could produce any emotion. Swinburne's "The Roundel" theorized the form as appropriate for "all or of aught" emotions, pathos as much as gaiety:

Its jewel of music is carven of all or of aught—
Love, laughter, or mourning—remembrance of rapture or fear—
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.

Swinburne here disconnects poetic form from specific affects, so that the former does not determine the latter. For Swinburne, no form could be inherently "well suited" for any particular emotion; form instead was flexible, undetermined by any particular affect and therefore appropriate for any subject. In his review of *A Century*, James Noble sums up Swinburne's revision of late-Victorian verse culture's assumptions about rhyme:

One thing certainly is proved by this *Century of Roundels*—that these so-called artificial forms are not limited in range to the light and playful motives and the dainty finger-tip touch with which they have been for the most part associated. The majority of Mr. Swinburne's roundels are somber, or at least pensive, rather than gay or trifling; and some of his greatest triumphs are achieved in poems where the thought is weightiest and the emotion most profound (429).

Art of Chance

Swinburne indulged in the pleasures of breaking specific rules of rhyme explicitly to show what he could do with rhyme, and implicitly to show up the theorists who proliferated the rules of rhyme. But Swinburne's biggest coup was dismantling the assumptions upon which those rules were based: that versifying was based in the intentions and technical gifts of the poet,

that the poet needed to master the constraints of rhyme. Writing in fixed forms required the poet's technical skill to manage the demands of form made more difficult by the narrowed rules of rhyme. For that reason, the popularity of these genres was cause and effect of a Victorian verse culture that argued for the value of mastering form. In a review of books of French fixed forms in the 1877 *Athenaeum*, the reviewer argues that these poems produce “‘pleasurable surprise’ [through the display of] difficulty overcome” by the poet (762). Likewise, in “Mr. Swinburne’s *Century of Roundels*” in the 1883 *Spectator*, the reviewer claims that with “an elaborate composition like a roundel [h]ere man is master of what he deals with. He sports with language, twists it and turns it at his pleasure, and so stirs no deeper feeling than the satisfaction with which we regard the skillful exercise of art” (970).

The fundamental assumption of Victorian verse culture, that art came about through “mastery,” was codified by Alexander Pope in “*An Essay on Criticism*” (1711), when he famously averred, “True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance, / As those move easiest who have learn’d to dance.” The longstanding neoclassical theory that verse is an art and therefore requires a concept of intention at its base, because only through skill, not accident, does one make art, was revived in the second half of the nineteenth century by prosodists and poets to become the master-warrant of a culture invested in the poet’s will to form.

But if versification technique and mastering the rules of rhyme were so important to writing fixed forms particularly and to the Victorian culture of verse more generally, then why do the tropes of “chance” and “perchance” appear over and over in *A Century of Roundels* from “A Dead Friend” (III), “Past Days” (I and II), “A Baby’s Death” (I and III), “Three Faces” (“Genoa”), “Eros” (I), “In Guernsey” (VII), and “Envoi”?²⁸ Why does “chance”—the unexpected and accidental—appear over and over in a fixed form of rhyming poetry that

contemporary theorists of rhyme such as Robert Louis Stevenson described as following “mechanical laws?” In other words, in *A Century of Roundels*, why does contingency verge on design?

In *A Century of Roundels*, Swinburne theorizes rhyme while practicing rhyme to explore the relationship between rhyme and chance: how rhyme produces in both writer and reader both anticipation and surprise, how and where randomness might play among all the “fated” repetitions of the roundel’s rhyme, and how a masterful poet might perform “chance” and the accidental in order to both do and undo not only his mastery but also to assert and undermine his verse culture’s investment in mastery, masculinity, and poetic will. For official verse culture, art and chance were supposedly antonyms, but the rhymes of Swinburne’s roundels link them together to undermine a fundamental assumption about verse that was often mobilized to keep poetry from spreading to the masses. If *ars et celare artem* is the touchstone of Victorian verse culture—the hard work of rhyming had to read as effortless play—then for Swinburne, art undoes its own art through chance: Swinburne’s mastertrope of chance might very well be his masterstroke.

Indeed, the presence of chance in a roundel is particularly surprising, given that Swinburne created the roundel form to increase the regularity of recurrence and to decrease the possibility of the random. A quarter-century after first experimenting with Villon’s fixed forms, Swinburne in 1883 reworked or “translated” Villon’s rondeau to invent his “roundel.” The thirteen-line, two-refrain rondeau has three stanzas of five, three, and five lines each, rhyming aabba aabR aabbaR (R standing for the refrain, the first word or phrase of the poem, which does not rhyme with the rest of the poem). Swinburne shortened the rondeau to produce his eleven-line, two refrain roundels shaped into three three-line stanzas, rhyming abaB bab abaB (where B

is the refrain). By shortening the rondeau, Swinburne increased the delicacy and fragility of the form while easing the necessity of rhyme. While the refrain of the rondeau does not rhyme with any other word (other than itself), the refrain of the roundel rhymes with the rest of the poem as an additional b-rhyme. This intensifies both the frequency of rhyme and our auguries of recurrence. While the structure of the roundel opens itself to minor changes as in the reversal of the middle stanza, it is best understood as routinizing its alternating rhyme scheme. The last stanza hints at symmetry with the first and therefore produces an impression of equilibrium and regularity, the vagary of the second stanza serving only to briefly mask the essential continuity of the whole. In other words, by discarding the surprise of an unrhymed phrase, he made the roundel less “random” and more regular than the rondeau. The effect of the more recurrent rhyme scheme reduces ludism and surprise, and increases rumination and remembrance. In a form this tightly wound, chance should have no place to play, and yet it recurs throughout the volume.

Swinburne sets up a significant tension between recurrent rhyme and coincident sound, intention and the unintended, expectation and surprise, design and contingency, or, more rhymingly, between trance and chance. The interplay of repetition and chance trouble the writer’s intention and the reader’s attention. If rhyme at the fin de siècle was used to measure time, as Adela Pinch argues in “Rhyme’s End,” Swinburne’s roundels ask us to think about rhyme and the *untimely*, those moments of unexpected sonic “coincidence” in every sense of the word. Swinburne’s roundels offer an aesthetics of the unpredictable in a poetic form that is predictable. In other words, the repetitions and rhymes of Swinburne’s roundels are *both* unpredictable *and* inevitable. The surprises of rhyme are more than the sense of gratification we receive when our expectations encounter the unexpected or when our anticipation is defeated.

Through networks of unexpected sound, Swinburne's "cunning" rhymes, I argue, not only come to have intentions, but also to have intentions on our attention. As a political and aesthetic act, Swinburne is determined to undo his intentions in the writing of rhyme: a performance of mastery that seeks to undo mastery. By tracing the interactions of Swinburne's punning, cunning rhymes—how rhyme's networks work on both Swinburne and his readers—we can establish that Swinburne's poetry did not appear "senseless" to his readers, so much as it was imagined to be "sensible," strangely alive.

Chance and Intention

In his self-reflexive poem, "The Roundel," an *ars poetica* of the roundel genre, Swinburne intentionally dismantles his intentions:

A ROUNDEL is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere,
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear

A roundel is wrought.

Its jewel of music is carven of all or of aught—
Love, laughter, or mourning—remembrance of rapture or fear—
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.

As a bird's quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,

A roundel is wrought.

By putting the refrain, “A roundel is wrought,” like the other verb of poiesis, “is carven,” in the passive voice, Swinburne absolves himself of agency in the process of writing and shifts intentionality to the “moves” of a poetic “device” out of which “A roundel is wrought.” As in “Faustine” a quarter-century earlier, the punning of “device” suggests Swinburne understands the roundel’s rhymes as a machine he winds up only to let go; intentionality is involved but his rhymes take off on their own self-generating momentum. Swinburne implies at once that an overinvestment in technique paradoxically undoes the very technique that it was intended to exemplify, and that rhyme, more than the poet, writes the poem. This was a direct affront to a verse culture that felt that rhyme-determined lines were the very definition of bad verse and that technique, the realization of intention, was the touchstone of artistry. Recall “A Lover of Rhyme” in 1821 mocking “the agency of RHYME in the construction of our Poetry” as the very sign of the lamentable mass culture of undereducated versifiers who should not be allowed to versify.

But most important is Swinburne’s description of his sound play through the curious genitive phrase, “cunning of sound unsought.” What does it mean to imagine “unsought,” unwanted, unintended rhymes as “cunning”? This complex phrase refers to unintended and unexpected repetitions and rhymes that disappear (“Pause answer to pause”) and reappear (“and again the same strain caught”) as if at random through the volume. “Cunning of sound unsought” clearly alludes to and therefore further complicates keyword of chance that circulates haphazardly through *A Century of Roundels*.

Jerome McGann zeros in on this curious phrase to argue that Swinburne implies the roundel form surprises the writer and reader “with a music of unsought sounds.” The “music” of the roundels, for McGann, “descends as a gift from outside one’s self, and the fulfillment of

rhyme comes upon one as a sort of surprise, something wholly beyond one's own designs and purposes." In other words, rather than Swinburne choosing the rhymes, the preexisting or fixed rhyme scheme of the roundel does most of the work, determining to great extent the "choices" of rhyme words Swinburne makes, which ultimately surprise Swinburne: "[I]f you don't have to depend on your own efforts and improvisations for the fundamental sound structure, but can look to a form which possesses an anterior and objective existence, all the practical music of the verse will take its character from the given, 'unsought' rhyming pattern" (44-45). Swinburne, as read by McGann, implies how the form of the roundel does some of the work of the poet by implying even supplying the rhymes. Thus, the work of the roundel is to shift the work of rhyming from writer to rhyme scheme.

While McGann is right, he does not go far enough. Swinburne's rhymes do not merely surprise him with unexpected sound; those rhyme *schemes* also have secret skill, they have more artfulness than the artist, and therefore seem almost alive. The phrase "cunning of sound unsought" suggests not only that the give-and-take between the poet and the poem is always part in the writing process, but also that, at the fin de siècle, rhyme's tug was felt so strongly that rhyme could be imagined as intentional, even personified as alive. "Cunning of sound unsought" can suggest rhymes unintended by Swinburne ("sound unsought") actually possess hidden ends or intentions of their own ("cunning") that are at odds with Swinburne's intentions. Swinburne understood his rhymes as a network: a web of implacable, intractable and yet half-noticed connections that becomes, strangely, an entity. His network of rhymes reworks chance to suggest that his rhymes are out of his control, *and* his network of rhymes intensify rhyme's sense of predetermination to the point of seeming self-made, "cunning," even in control of their own production—even as this "agency" of rhyme might be Swinburne's masterful work all along.

What might the “life of rhyme” look like in practice? In “What Goes Around: Swinburne’s *A Century of Roundels*” (2013), Herbert Tucker rightly argues that the work of the roundel is that of change within similitude, of recirculation and “microvariation,” to revisit a word or image and see it anew, as if for the first time (125-35). For me, however, the echo chamber of the roundel makes rhymes, words, and phrases seem as if they call each other up in a drive more powerful than Swinburne can regulate. Through its occulted anagrams, hypograms, and paronomasia, the language of Swinburne’s roundel, “Eros,” which explores the circulation and circularity of rhyme and desire, seems mechanically to write itself. The “cunning of sound unsought” here takes the form of an anagrammatic texture that weaves its own verse. Language becomes a generative machine fueled by its own transfiguring desire.

EROS, from rest in isles far-famed,
With rising Anthesterion rose,
And all Hellenic heights acclaimed
Eros.

The sea one pearl, the shore one rose,
All round him all the flower-month flamed
And lightened, laughing off repose.

Earth’s heart, sublime and unashamed,
Knew, even perchance as man’s heart knows,
The thirst of all men’s nature named
Eros.

Rather than “mechanical,” Swinburne’s rhymes are better understood as centrifugal.²⁹ In the centrifuge of the roundel’s rotary rhymes, each word torques its letters to spin out a related word. From the more obvious anagram, “Eros . . . rose,” to the slightly less obvious “Eros . . . rest” (er*s→res*) and “shore . . . rose” (s*ore→rose), to the encoding of desire (Eros) and its incarnation (rose) in the late winter floral festival for Dionysus (“the blooming god”), “Anthesterion,” to the shifting of the “h” in “Earth’s heart” (Earth→heart), this anagrammed language is self-consciously designed to seem self-generated by the turning gears of its own torquing words. Rather than Swinburne choosing his words, each word seems to spin out from itself the next word in the sentence. As Swinburne’s virtuosic “cunning” makes his language seem more intentional than him, Swinburne both exploits and undoes his culture’s fascination with virtuosic technique, a fascination related to preventing mass culture from appropriating poetry and fraying class distinctions. (As an aside, Swinburne here mobilizes eye rhyme (sea, pearl, Earth, heart). As eye rhymes were considered unacceptable by prosodists, Swinburne engages in another act of rule breaking that also exemplifies virtuosic rhyming: mastering the form by writing it wrong.)

While critics then and now have imagined rhyme as having “agency,” shaping the production of the poem as much as the poet, Swinburne’s theorizing of the “cunning” work and play of his roundel’s rhymes was both a cause and an effect of transition in the nineteenth-century culture of rhyme involving poets and theorists on both sides of the channel. The “agency” of rhyme went from signifying the failure of the poet’s will to signifying the pleasures of having one’s will undone, from being satirized as signifying bad verse to being taken seriously as the very mark of the aesthetic. Indeed, models for imagining the “agency” or “life” of rhyme in positive terms proliferated in the second half of the century to undo the ideological valuing of

authorial intentionality—even as the “life of rhyme” might be produced through the art of the poet. For Charles Baudelaire (1857), versifying was not intentional but accidental, a game of chance. For the French poet and theorist Théodore de Banville (1872), rhyme had more imagination than the poet. For Robert Louis Stevenson (1876), writing in rhyming was like playing a game of tennis with the poem. And for the fin-de-siècle French critic Jules Lemaître (1884), rhyming was a game of seduction in which rhyme whispered sweet somethings to the poet.

Swinburne’s circulation of the metaphor of chance to question his own mastery in the context of rhyme and the rules of rhyme was part of a broader questioning of the fascination with the mastery of the artist. In his 1857 poem “Le Soleil” from *Fleurs du mal*, Charles Baudelaire explored the relationship of rhyme and chance to rethink artistry as coming about unintentionally, by accident rather than through the poet’s mastery.

Je vais m’exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés.³⁰

In “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Walter Benjamin famously read “Le Soleil” as an example of Baudelaire placing “shock experience at the very center of his art” (178). In other words, the poet in modernity is no longer sensitive or open to experience but attempts to parry its blows through a mediating consciousness. But to me the poem suggests the opposite: Baudelaire is not protecting himself from the blows of unwelcome experience but playfully opening himself to “experience” in the form of the “shock” of surprise, of chance. Poetry comes through gamesome swordplay (“fantasque escrime”) between authorial intentions and poetic form. Chance is half-

welcomed, half-bewildering: rhyme comes by accident, not intention or art (“Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime”). Baudelaire’s verse and Swinburne’s verse had a deep affinity; a quarter-century after “Le Soleil,” Swinburne considers how chance might be just the trope to burn his own verse culture’s overheated fascination with artifice and rules so that the sun might shine on a new day for rhyme.

In his 1872 *Petit traité de poésie française*, the French poet and theorist Théodore de Banville stated, “[L]’Imagination de la rime est, entre toutes, la qualité qui constitue le poète.” Clive Scott translates this axiom as, “An imaginative gift for rhyme is, above all, the quality that makes the poet” (Scott 143). Translated as such, however, the genitive phrase: “[L]’Imagination de la rime” (literally, “the imagination of rhyme”) loses all its paradoxical strangeness. For just as the poet imagines—invents—rhymes, so too does Banville suggest that rhyme possesses its own imagination, inventiveness, and intentions. Banville’s genitive, like all genitives, cuts both ways: rhyme is both the object of the sentence (that which the poet imagines), and the subject of the sentence (that which itself imagines). If the poet imagines rhymes, then so too does the poem; Banville offers a model of the agency of rhyme in which not only the poet, but also the rhyme possessed imagination, life. Indeed, “the imagination of rhyme”—that which seems to threaten the poet’s intentions or agency—is precisely that which paradoxically also makes the poet a poet.

In “Charles of Orleans” published in the 1876 *Cornhill Magazine*, Robert Louis Stevenson called writing medieval French fixed forms “intellectual Tennis”:

Sometimes things go easily, the refrains fall into their place as if of their own accord, and it becomes something of the nature of an intellectual tennis; you must make your poem as the rhymes will go, just as you must strike your ball as your

adversary played it. So that these forms are suitable rather for those who wish to make verses, than for those who wish to express opinions (703).

Stevenson circulates a model of the life of rhyme that likens the relationship of author to rhyme as an interactive game. On the one hand, the back-and-forth between rhymer and rhyme on the one hand offers the freedom of play; on the other hand, that back-and-forth is constraining: the “adversarial” demands of form make expressing ideas difficult, because they have to be shaped to the requirements of form. Regardless, the giving of control over to one’s rhymes is figured as pleasurable, not a failure.

Lastly, in his monthly column, “At the Sign of the Ship,” in the 1887 *Longman’s Magazine*, the poet Andrew Lang, who was fascinated by rhyme and who contributed to rhyme’s late-century revival, translated a paragraph from the fin-de-siècle French critic Jules Lemaître. In “Théodore de Banville” (1884) from the first series of his multivolume *Les Contemporains*, Lemaître claimed, “The poet who begins a ballade does not know very exactly what he will put into it: the Rhyme, and nothing but the Rhyme, will whisper things unexpected and charming, things he would never have thought of but for her” (665). Rather than a game of chance as in Baudelaire or a game of tennis as in Stevenson, Lang, following Lemaître, imagines the life of rhyme as a game of seduction, a sexual submission to rhyme. Rhyme seduces, rhyme surprises. Rhyme whispers sweet somethings. Like Stevenson, the rhymes become co-authors of the poem, but here the relationship between poet and rhyme was not competitive but erotic.

Early in the century, the agency of rhyme seemed a problem; now, it seemed to have almost erotic appeal. This is not to say that everyone at the fin de siècle felt this way. Many still lamented the “possible danger of rhyme becoming the ‘rudder of verse,’” as Frank Ritchie claimed in “Rhyme” from the 1900 *Longman’s Magazine* (115-16). But at the fin de siècle,

surprisingly one could also take pleasure in locating agency more in the rhyme than in the poet. These late-century cross-channel poets and theorists revalued rhyme as the co-author of the poem, invested rhyme with agency, even life, and rethought the poet as taking pleasure in being seduced by his own rhymes. Call the life of rhyme the flipside of Intelligent Design. Ironically, the more artifice or design the poem takes on, the more “alive” it seemed. Through the artifice of rhyme, poetic production becomes subject to form.

“Cunning of sound unsought,” however, is a genitive phrase, and therefore it cuts both ways. Swinburne plays the subjective genitive off the objective genitive. In other words, agency oscillates between “sound unsought” and “cunning,” unintended rhyme and poetic technique, ends and means, poem and author. “Cunning of sound unsought” can also suggest that Swinburne rhymed seemingly without effort (i.e. “sound unsought,” the rhymes come to Swinburne without his even needing to try) only because these rhymes in fact cloak the skill (or “cunning”) necessary to produce them. *Ars et celare artem*. Intentionality and unintentionality, mastery and mistake are in play. The roundel and Swinburne are both subject and object at once, both agent and device, active and mechanical. Swinburne both intends his rhymes *and* his rhymes have their own intentions. As Swinburne at once asserts his mastery and undoes it, circling from one to the other, Swinburne seeks to both capitalize on and undo his culture’s investments in the poet as master of rhyme.

Chance and Attention

If Swinburne suggests that chance troubles his intentions in the writing of the roundel’s rhymes, then how does chance affect our attention when reading them? In the roundel, Swinburne suggests, chance intervenes between the author, the poem, and the audience as a fourth quadrant in the rhetorical triangle, so that we experience both more and less than what

Swinburne intended, which is precisely the intent. When the “Envoi” notes that our “chance-caught eye” might “Note in a score of you twain or three,” then Swinburne asks us to reflect on what lasts: which poems, which details, lodge in our memory and why. In noting that poetic details may stand out to us more than the poem, the rhymes seeming more important than the lines, and that we notice these insistent details almost unawares, Swinburne asks whether we can treat the volume as a unified whole, or whether the proliferation of rhyme detail stands out over the possibility of any sense of the whole:

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Frail pale wings for the winds to try,
Small white wings that we scarce can see
Fly.

Here and there may a chance-caught eye
Note in a score of you twain or three
Brighter or darker of tinge or dye.

Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a low long sigh:
All to the haven where each would be
Fly.

By titling the final poem “Envoi,” Swinburne suggests that the volume is one unified poem in which “Envoi” serves as the closing “stanza” of the volume *as poem*. Indeed, *A Century of Roundels* is often read as a circle: like the roundel form that composes the volume, whose final

word echoes the first word, the closing “Envoi” also “rhymes” with the opening Dedication. Thus, the initial anxiety in the “Dedication” about the volume’s reception is overcome in the “Envoi’s” surety in relinquishing control of the poetry to an audience (“Fly...out to sea”). Moreover, Tucker argues, “Three major poet-critics—Coleridge, Swinburne, Eliot—all apprehended the workings of imaginative form as metamorphoses of the circle” (129) and he shows how the closing poem of *A Century*, “Envoi” also comes back around to echoing “In Harbor” on page one of *A Century* (127).

But that middle stanza of “Envoi” troubles the notion that this volume and these poems round themselves into a whole. “Here and there may a chance-caught eye / Note in a score of you twain or three / Brighter or darker of tinge or dye” suggests not only that we only remember particular poems within the volume but also that we remember the details of a roundel more than the whole; we remember the rhymes more than the poem. In *A Century of Roundels*, details of barely noticed and yet insistent ear and eye rhymes recur and circulate not just within an individual roundel but also across the intervening pages of the volume. They reappear as if by chance, and one only notices them after they are read.

The word “ear,” for instance, recurs as ear and eye rhyme over and over throughout the volume, buried but audible in such repeated keywords as “Earth,” “heart,” “pearl,” “fear,” “hear,” “ere,” etc. Swinburne’s language is subliminal: when we read, we are encouraged to listen, and we hear more than we understand. Swinburne’s language is also centripetal: even as the centrifuge of his turning rhymes seems to spin out words, those words point inward to their phonemes that are at once cloaked and cacophonous. Swinburne’s language cannot get small enough, but those details are themselves whole worlds: those buds flower outward, blooming into meaning. Moreover, in the roundels, certain elements of content flash out from the

camouflage of the text and disappear. Almost without realizing it we hear this “wandering rhyme,” to borrow a provocative phrase from Swinburne’s nearly contemporaneous love poem *Tristram of Lyonesse* to describe this hidden, barely noticeable and yet insistent sound. In *A Century of Roundels*, rhyme equates with the line, but rhyme also abandons the line.

The roundel, “Plus Intra,” has the refrain, “Soul within sense.” Thirty pages later, the roundel, “Eros II,” references “spirit in sense.” This iteration is as much a rhyme as it is productive of a sense of theme. Phrases echo across the volume, at once passing beneath our consciousness and insinuating themselves into our memory without our realizing it—catching our eyes as if by chance. Do these implacable, intractable “rhymes” produce a network across the pages that connect apparently distinct poems into a volume? Or do these rhyme details stand out like those “twain or three” among a “score” and thus interfere with or overwhelm any sense of the whole?

Swinburne’s roundels about babies, for instance, usually serialize the child: his poems about children usually take the form of multiple roundels cohered under a title. But the individual roundels fixate on details; each roundel in the series describes a particular body part of the child. His seven-part roundel, “A Baby’s Death,” like his three-part roundel, “Étude Réaliste,” do not describe the whole child all at once, but instead dissect the child piecemeal: each roundel in the series focuses on a particular body part. For example, the first roundel of “A Baby’s Death” begins, “A little soul;” the second roundel begins, “The little feet;” then the third begins, “The little hands;” and the next roundel begins, “The little eyes.” The series of roundels that compose “Étude Réaliste” echoes (read: *rhymes with*) the serial structure of “A Baby’s Death” by similarly patterning its series of imagery, “A baby’s feet,” then, “A baby’s hands,” and

concluding, “A baby’s eyes” (both series move from feet→hands→eyes). The effect is a series of discrete but interrelated images, accumulating detail that may or may not add up to a whole.

Are these series of dissected body parts paratactic or hypotactic? Can the individual parts be shuffled around without a loss of narrative sense because those parts neither produce nor are subsumed under any logical order? Or do feet lead up to hands, which lead up to eyes? (We might imagine the gaze ascending the body from below, Swinburne prostrate before the child in worshipful babyolatry). Does Swinburne use rhyme to tie the anatomized body parts into a whole? Or does he just give us details?

The symmetrical pattern or “rhyme” between the structures of “A Baby’s Death” and “Étude Réaliste” suggests teleology, an occulted logic. Moreover, the final roundel of “A Baby’s Death” finally names the child, “Michael,” thus reconciling the autopsied parts into a coherent and identifiable whole.³¹ When another of Swinburne’s roundels about children, “A Ninth Birthday,” repeats the refrain “Three times thrice” through its series of three roundels, that refrain refers as much to the form of the roundel—three three-line stanzas here in a three-part poem—as it does to the age of a nine-year-old child. Indeed, “A Ninth Birthday” is a mathematical formula that adds up to an imagined sense of subjectivity, figured as bits of multiplied data or detail.

But “Étude Réaliste” only offers body parts, it never names the child and therefore it never coheres its body parts into a whole child; it dissects rather than amalgamates. A sense of discontinuity characterizes its series of related images; it gives us parts rather than the whole. Moreover, while the refrain of “A Ninth Birthday” equates poem and child, the title of the poem that immediately follows, “Not a Child,” clearly undoes that equation, suggesting instead that

“three times thrice” adds up to zero. In other words, whatever sense of total is implied in the equations of “A Ninth Birthday” gets ruptured in the gap between the adjoining poems.

These details do not so much synecdochally replace or symbolize the whole, as in the Freudian fetish; instead, the whole may no longer be a possibility: the detail is all. In “Rhyme and Reason,” Leigh Hunt lamented that his verse culture had become overinvested in rhyme to the point that one could read only a poem’s rhymes and know the whole: “Yet how many ‘Poems’ are there among all these nations, of which we require no more than the Rhymes, to be acquainted with the whole of them? You know what the rogues have done, by the ends they come to” (81). Hunt laments that the importance of rhyme has overcome the line. Swinburne inverts this, however, taking pleasure and offering his readers pleasure in the bits of rhyme detail that recur at “random” and celebrating the rhyme overwhelming the line, the part over the poem. When rhyme became the dominant feature of late nineteenth-century poetry, it shifted emphasis from the whole to the part, the line to the rhyme, the divisible gestalt to the irreducible detail. The detail, for Swinburne, came to be more valuable than the whole; the rhyme came to be more valuable than the line. The “Envoi” suggests that when we read *A Century of Roundels*, we remember the poem, not the volume, just as we remember the rhymes, not the poem. When Jerome McGann concludes his magisterial *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* recollecting quotations from—the details, snippets, or parts of—Swinburne’s poetry, he exemplifies this sense that Swinburne’s poetry is all in the details, all in the rhymes.

Conclusion

Swinburne’s play of his mastery of rhyme and rhyme’s mastery of him might fuel readings of Swinburne’s poetry as hermetic, solipsistic, even masturbatory: Swinburne shows off his mastery of rhyme *by* performing rhyme mastering him. But Swinburne’s “Envoi” suggests

that what might seem like merely hermetic language games are in fact better understood as an invitation to sociable play. While releasing his “white butterflies” might suggest masturbatory ejaculation, he is in fact bequeathing his verse to his audience, offering the pleasures of his rhyme play to his readers.

Indeed, I read “Envoi” in two ways. First, Swinburne intimates that losing control over his rhymes is pleasurable. Swinburne’s roundels fly “All to the haven where each *would be*” (my italics). The subjunctive suggests that rather than go where Swinburne wants them they go where they want. The roundels are no longer in his control and possess more animus than Swinburne does. Moreover, rather than a performance of autotelic, masturbatory mastery over rhyme, Swinburne offers his verse to his audience as a show of playing with others, and letting others play among his rhymes. While the “Dedication” admits anxiety about the roundel’s reception-- “SONGS light as these ... / ... scarce should hope to please” (ll. 1-2)-- by the time we reach the closing roundel, “Envoi,” Swinburne has become able to confidently relinquish his poems to his audience, passing the pleasures on to them, and turning his rhymes over to their desires. In both cases, Swinburne minimizes himself and opens a space for rhyme and for readers of rhyme to play. Rather than a performance of mastery, his roundels are about the pleasures of letting go.

When Swinburne describes his interminable rhymed poem “Faustine” as a “love-machine,” and when Swinburne’s thematizes “chance” in the context of rhymes that seem to circulate without end, Swinburne suggests the pleasures of suspending one’s will in rhyme. These performances of turning one’s intentions over to one’s rhymes, I argue, are aesthetic and political. “Faustine” and *A Century of Roundels* circulated in a context of rules that the poet had to submit to in order to show his mastery over them. By making rhyming difficult, those with an

education in versifying could display their virtuosity, while a mass culture of undereducated versifiers would capitulate to the hard work of rhyming. Establishing this distinction would stay the popularization of poetry to undereducated groups and re-instantiate cultural and social hierarchies that were frayed when undereducated groups entered domains formerly occupied by the elite.

But Swinburne's verse was cause and effect of a counter-context as well: Anglo-French poets and theorists of rhyme in the second half of the century were revaluing the work of rhyme in the writing of a poem and proliferating models that imagined different ways of figuring the life of rhyme. Rather than the influence of rhyme signifying the failure of the poet's will and ability, as many from the nineteenth century to the present describe it, these Anglo-French poets and theorists of rhyme described rhyme as a repeating machine that had desires, as in "Faustine;" as having as much imagination as the poet, as in de Banville; as a game of chance and accident, as in "Le Soleil" and *A Century of Roundels*; as a game of tennis, as in Stevenson; and as a game of erotic seduction, as in Lemaître. These Anglo-French poets and theorists of rhyme re-imagined the poet's relationship to rhyme not as mastery, not as a display of technique, but as interplay, a giving over of will to rhyme, and even, in Baudelaire and Swinburne, as mistake, accident rather than intention, largely out of one's control. In so doing, they undermined one of the central ideologies of nineteenth-century verse culture: that art was a product of intention and technique, not chance and dumb luck. As this theory warranted the proliferation of the rules of rhyme and more broadly elitist practices to curtail the democratization of poetry, these writers, by arguing a counter-ideology that freed versifying from technique, helped enable poetry's popularization to social groups excluded from a gentleman's education in versification. They also helped undo the gendering of rhyme. Rhyme would no longer be associated with the poet's

mastery, will, and masculine authority. Whereas in later chapters I explore how rhyme was a mode of self-fashioning, for Swinburne rhyme was an opportunity to unfashion a self that he also took pleasure in creating.

Chapter 2
“You, Guess”
Christina Rossetti’s Guessing Games and the Resolutions of Rhyme

Now if I could guess her secret

Were it worth the guess?—

...

What care I for *no* or *yes*?—

~Christina Rossetti, “Day Dreams” (written 1857, re-titled “Reflection” 1862, unpublished)

All is riddle, and the key to a riddle is another riddle. ~Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Conduct of Life* (1860)

Asking riddles has become the latest fashionable amusement. ~“Evening Paper” (1892?)

Why did Algernon Charles Swinburne dedicate *A Century of Roundels* to Christina Rossetti? From one perspective, the two poets could not be more different. Swinburne, whose “fault is that of excess,” as the American critic E. C. Stedman put it in “Latter-Day British Poets” in the 1875 *Scribner’s Monthly* (586), was an “anti-theist” who wrote in *Atalanta in Calydon* of “The supreme evil, God.” Rossetti, frequently read as the poetess of “Tractarian Reserve,” was a devout Anglo-Catholic who was canonized as a “Sweet lady, and poet, and saint” in Theodore

Watts's eulogy, "Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti," in the 1895 *Nineteenth Century* (355). Indeed, following Swinburne's formal request to Christina for approval of the dedication, her brother William Rossetti replied in a February 13, 1883 letter with the stipulations that Swinburne must meet before Christina would accept it. "If all the poems in your proposed volume are to be as innocuous—and indeed to a Christian Reader as edifying—as these," William wrote of Swinburne's roundels, "it seems to me that Christina will gladly accept the dedication you so kindly and delicately offer." On February 17, she did.³²

Scholars, curious about why Swinburne would admire Rossetti so much given their distinct temperament, hazard the following rationale for it: "[T]heir poetic commitment to babies," writes Lona Mosk Packer, brought them together.³³ While Packer is right, the common ground between Swinburne and Rossetti, however, also exceeds their shared "babyolatry." Swinburne also recognized Rossetti as a kindred spirit in that they both grew up playing rhyme games, a cause and an effect of their ongoing fascination with rhyme. As my previous chapter mentions, just as a twenty-six-year-old Swinburne played bouts rimes with his cousin, Mary Gordon, to flirt with her, so too did a seventeen-year-old Rossetti play *bouts-rimés* sonnets with her brothers William and Dante, timing herself to see how fast she could work back from the rhymes to fill in the lines. More than that, Swinburne and Rossetti both share an interest in the mastertrope of chance and its relationship to the poetic will, which is explicit in Swinburne's *Roundels* but intimated throughout Rossetti's verse: her fascination with guessing, which leaves knowledge to chance, and how she structures the proliferation of guesses by putting the "hap" in her mastertrope, "perhaps."

While their verse was similar in theme and history, Rossetti's verse plays on a different set of social relations and verse genres than Swinburne's does. While Swinburne capitalized on

the returns of rhyme through the roundel, Rossetti's verse emerged from, perpetuated, and transfigured a nineteenth-century tradition of enigma, or riddle-in-verse, writing by women writers for women readers. Through riddles in rhyme, Rossetti explored the relationship between resolutions and solutions, how rhymes might bring about closure to verse even as the solutions to her open-ended riddles were anyone's guess. But while her means are different than Swinburne's, her ends are similar to his: Rossetti is also interested in the suspension of will in rhyme. While Swinburne understood the "cunning" of rhyme as an opportunity to undo his will through rhyme, Rossetti develops a different kind of "cunning": not "knowing," as "cunning" once meant, but the suspension of knowing in guessing. Indeed, for Rossetti, the "cunning" of rhyme is in how rhyme both offers resolution in clinching the line *and* suspends the mind between like-sounding words and similar-seeming choices.

One of the most productive debates in Rossetti studies seeks to settle why Rossetti's poetry is so interested in "secrecy," a mastertrope that leads Isobel Armstrong to call Rossetti's 1857 poem "Winter: My Secret," "almost a summa of her work" (357). My chapter, however, shifts focus from "secrecy" to the lesser-known but no less important trope of "guessing." Such published and unpublished poems as "What?" (1853), "Guesses" (1854), "Winter: My Secret" (1857), "Day Dreams" (1857), "The Queen of Hearts" (written 1863, first published 1866), "Sunshine" (1864), "Under the Rose" (1865), "What's in a Name?" (first published 1881 but written before then), and "Brandon's Both" (1881) focus on or reference the "guess," a trope that recurs repeatedly in her verse, nearly as frequently as references to the "secret" do. Indeed, the frequency of poems that both explicitly invoke the metaphor of guessing shows how preoccupied Rossetti's poetics was with "guessing," particularly in the early and middle decades of her poetic career.

What makes these guesses so curious is that they all are guesses at something unsolvable, often a secret that will never be revealed or a mystery that defies all reason: enigmas without end. Most often, her verse performs guessing for the reader (ex. “Guesses,” “Day Dreams,” “The Queen of Hearts,” “Under the Rose,” and “What’s in a Name?”). Less often, her verse directly addresses the reader, asking the reader to guess at an insoluble riddle (ex. “What?”, and the pendant poems “Winter: My Secret” and “Sunshine”). In these latter poems, Rossetti revises the enigma genre so that they have no solution in order to make the riddle open ended.

Because her riddles are insoluble, what happens when characters “guess” is that they proliferate alternative solutions without resolution, usually structured by her mastertrope, “Perhaps ... or.” This usually results either in a paratactic list or series of guesses, or in parallelism, as opposing alternatives are juxtaposed against each other and weighed in the balance—producing rhyme by another name. In that sense, guessing often operates as the generator of the verse; it is the engine that drives the verse forward. This is her other inversion of the enigma genre: whereas the enigma offers readers lists of clues, Rossetti’s verse often offers readers lists of solutions. The paradox then is that the vacuum at the center of the poem (the unstated mystery or secret) produces the plenitude of the poem (the stated series of guesses). In short, Rossetti’s insoluble enigmas often give us choices without choosing, what we might call “guessing without settling.”

From the intentionally imperfect sonnets structured on a series of “or’s” from her semi-autobiographical novella, *Maude* (1850), to “An Old-World Thicket” (1881), which below opens in Keatsian fashion, Rossetti’s verse was fascinated by alternatives:

Awake or Sleeping (for I know not which)

I was or was not mazed within a wood

Where every mother-bird brought up her brood

Safe in some leafy niche

Of oak or ash, of cypress or of beech,

In *On Compromise* (1874), the politician and writer John Morley argued for “the duty of conclusiveness” by complaining, “[P]eople are too willing to look on collections of mutually hostile opinions with the same kind of curiosity which they bestow on a collection of mutually hostile beasts in a menagerie. They have not the least predilection for one rather than another” (101-2). Rossetti, however, advocates just the opposite, indulging in alternatives without choosing, occasionally balancing them against each other in parallelism, at other times letting them stream in profusion in lists. In *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2008), Andrew Miller points out that for the Victorians, skepticism, doubt, and ungoverned desire threatened to disable the will. Rossetti, however, takes pleasure in both doing and undoing the will, examining a need to know that results in indulging in inconclusiveness.

This indulgence in uncertainty revises Romantic surmise and John Keats’ 1817 “Negative Capability.” For Geoffrey Hartman, “surmise” “becomes a genre in the Romantic period” (11). What characterizes surmise is the move “through the solitary to the social,” “fluidity,” “‘whether ... or’ formulations, alternatives rather than exclusions, [and] conjecture ... rather than blunt determinateness” (8-9). Given these characteristics, Romantic surmise and Rossetti’s “guesses” seem similar. Hartman generalizes the characteristics of surmise from Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper.” There, Wordsworth overhears a reaper singing: he accesses private expression not meant for others. In Rossetti, accessing the private is impossible; instead, one witnesses a persona confronting another with a demand to know, or the poem confronts the reader with a

demand to be known. So in Rossetti, the mode is always already social, but neither intersubjectivity nor conjecture leads to any higher awareness; they are rather problems for thought. While Wordsworth, on the one hand, develops his conjectures, Rossetti, on the other hand, discards them. For instance, her unpublished poem "Guesses" hardly dwells on its conjectures: "Perhaps she did it carelessly, / Perhaps it was an idle thought; / Or else it was the grace unbought" (25-27). Whereas surmise notably displays a "meditative slowing of time" (12), Rossetti's guesses are often restless, deposited almost as soon as posited in a relentless skepticism of the possible. Indeed, Wordsworth's "Perhaps ... Or" seems balanced between two alternatives, but Rossetti's seems unbalanced: the guesses just keep coming. If surmise is engraved under the sign of the epitaph, then "guessing" is engaged under the sign of play: a flippancy whose only surety is the constant search for new possibilities, a radical doubt that is as fun as it is ferocious. Rossetti makes surmise into a riddling guessing game, as concerned with (not quite) knowing another as it is with making a game of "knowing." Lastly, while surmise is cued by overhearing, Rossetti's guessing games perform the vocative direct address: "You, guess" as she put it in "Sunshine"; "Or you may guess," as she put it in "Winter: My Secret." If in Wordsworthian surmise the "poet" becomes self-conscious, in Rossetti's guessing games cue *us* to self-consciousness of our own status as audience. What Rossetti shares with her forbears, however, is a refusal to commit to certainty: after offering alternatives, Wordsworth refuses to choose one: "Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang / As if her song could have no ending." The same seems true for Wordsworth's surmises, which similarly avoid conclusiveness. This is true for Rossetti as well: "What care I for *no* or *yes*?" Like Wordsworth, her figures seem both interested and uninterested in a final word, and more interested in the act of thinking or guessing itself.

Whereas in Keats' "Negative Capability" "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason," Rossetti's figures often reach for certainty, but because certainty is impossible, reaching after certainty only causes more uncertainty, as the alternative solutions proliferate. Thus, Rossetti's guessing may be understood as exploring a tension between both resolution (the desire to proliferate answers) and irresolution (the refusal to choose one), will and the suspension of will at once. But like Keats, Rossetti intimates the value of choices rather than choosing, and guessing without settling. In "An Old-World Thicket," published three years after Morley's *On Compromise*, Rossetti writes in the persona of a character, "Of possibility, alternative, / Of all that ever made us bear to live," suggesting the deep value of being among choices while choosing none.

In her references to guessing without settling, she also asks the reader to think about rhyme, a master-device of her sonic verse. Occasionally, as in "Winter: My Secret," "Sunshine," and "Queen of Hearts," the series of guesses or the request for the reader to guess come at the end of the poem. Her riddling poems therefore establish a tension between solutions (lists of possibilities that proliferate and therefore resist closure) and resolution (the closure of the poem through rhyme). Another way to put it is that she plays one meaning of "resolution" (will, desire: here the interminable desire to solve an insoluble riddle) against another meaning of "resolution" (closure). Yet another way to put it is that her poetry establishes a tension between closure and disclosure: resolution without a solution.

The unpublished poem "Day Dreams" (1857) explores the intersection of open-ended guessing and the closure of end-rhyme. In 1862, she retitled the poem, "Reflection," in order to meet a request for verse on that theme from the Portfolio Society, a meeting group of poets and painters with which Rossetti was loosely affiliated. More than meeting their theme, the new title

“Reflection” illuminates one of the poem’s central concerns: the interplay of guessing (reflection as “depth” of thought) and rhyme (reflections as echoes of surface sound). Her poem describes a man infatuated with a woman but who is spurned by her because she, sphinxine, ignores him merely to gaze out her window in silent reflection. Thus, he obsessively “guesses” at the impenetrable secret upon which she reflects; they might be read as allegories of the reader and the poem:

But she sits and never answers;
Gazing gazing still
On swift fountain, shadowed valley,
Cedared sunlit hill:
Who can guess or read her will?

...

Is it love she looks and longs for;
Is it rest or peace;
Is it slumber self-forgetful
In its utter ease;
Is it one or all of these?

...

Now if I could guess her secret

Were it worth the guess?—
Time is lessening, hope is lessening,
Love grows less and less:
What care I for *no* or *yes*? —

I will give her stately burial,
Tho', when she lies dead:
For dear memory of the past time
Of her royal head,
Of the much I strove and said.

I will give her stately burial,
Willow branches bent;
Have her carved in alabaster,
As she dreamed and leant
While I wondered what she meant.

Because the tone of her guessing games is rarely stable—some poems are playful, some frighteningly obsessive—I cannot agree with critics who read Rossetti's secrecy simply as flirtatious play.³⁴ Rather, her dramatized acts of guessing are better understood via poetics as an exploration of poetic form: parallelism, as she balances alternative against alternative, sameness within difference, constructing a form of rhyme; and parataxis, as the guesses proliferate into lists of metaphors that attempt to understand mystery X as explanation Y, often linked by another form of parallelism, anaphora. But that proliferation of guesses is also carefully managed by the

parallelism in the verse, the balancing of “I will give her stately burial. . . . I will give her stately burial” and “Time is lessening” against “hope is lessening,”: this play of sameness against difference—rhyme—suggests how structured the verse is.

As in many of her poems, Rossetti exploits the tension between interminable solutions and closing resolution. The interrelated devices of anaphora, paratactic lists, and guessing, as in the second stanza above, produce rhetorical abundance in the proliferation of possibilities that just keep coming. Regardless of whether the main character is desirous to know or apathetic about knowing, alternatives proliferate on their own self-generating momentum. They are therefore at odds with poetic closure. Despite the resolution of the rhyme closing the poem—and *because* of that resolution, which closes the poem before it can reveal the solution—the riddle remains open to anyone’s guess: the persona, like the reader, is both suspended in not knowing and incited to go on and on guessing.

But while the closure of rhyme is at odds with the open-endedness of guessing, rhyme and guessing also have similarities. Indeed, while solutions and resolution, guessing and rhyme, are often structured perpendicularly, at cross-purposes, they also parallel each other. Rossetti structures series of guesses through anaphora, which is to say through parallelism. In so doing, she plays anaphora against rhyme—repetition that generates a line against repetition that closes it--deconstructing the seeming antitheticals. The relating of parallelism and guessing is particularly heightened when Rossetti structures the guesses in a “perhaps . . . or” structure, balancing one alternative against the other—a kind of rhyme. Rather than a series of solutions (endless) being antagonistic to rhyme (ends, closure), a series might be the same as rhyme: guessing, as Rossetti writes it, is rhyme by another name. For Rossetti, guessing without settling was a way of revealing just how riddling rhyme could be.

Rhyme, like these insoluble riddles, holds one in suspense. For that reason, rhyme, like Rossetti's riddles, also asks one to guess. Rhyme works through an interplay of anticipation and satisfaction: you know a rhyme will come, but you do not know what the rhyme will be, so the first rhyme word produces a sense of suspense, as it encourages the reader to quickly anticipate, perhaps even to guess at, how the rhyme will be closed. This play of expectation and surprise has one looking forward to the next rhyme and, when one reaches it, has one looking back to the first word. In other words, even as we move forward in the poem, the micro-moments of rhyme ask us to behave like the Janus-faced woman in "Reflection": "Looking northward, looking southward, / Looking to the goal, / Looking back without control.—" As she is a metaphor for the riddle of rhyme, i.e. the reader's experience of the time of rhyme, she is more reader than read.

Just as one's attention oscillates back and forth between the rhymes, so too does one's attention oscillate between the options that proliferate, as the man guesses and proffers solutions without resolution clinched in rhyme. Rossetti's guessing is at once an act of will (churning out possibilities) and a suspension of will (refusing to settle on one). Put another way, the desire for resolution paradoxically produces solutions. This is one reason why mastertropes of Rossetti's verse are "perhaps" and "or": just as our attention swings between the rhymes, so too is our will suspended among options, surrounded by possible solutions: choices without choosing. Thus, for Rossetti, guessing and rhyming are at once willful acts and acts that threaten to suspend the will: the both hold us in suspense, suspenseful and suspended.

While guessing without settling may seem either absurd or playful, as it has to a number of critics, the fact that Rossetti returns to the mastertrope of "insoluble guessing" so often suggests that we should take it as seriously as she does. In these poems, she asks the reader to

think about the value of proliferating answers but refusing to settle on one; why indulging in possibilities might be more significant than having an answer. “Guessing without settling” allegorizes reader and text and therefore might be understood as a celebration of interpretation premised on the illegibility of verse. Her insoluble riddles might also be understood within a context of religious riddling that points in an era fascinated by scientific progress to the limitation of human knowing. Rossetti echoes the Bible by suggesting revelation will occur only at the apocalypse: as the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13.12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” In addition, in claiming to have a secret but not revealing it, her poems intimate without allowing for intimacy.

I shift from exploring Rossetti’s “secrecy” to exploring the “guess” to change focus from interiority to sociability and to ask why Rossetti is so interested in guessing when no solution can be found. I shift the terms of debate from the information the poems withhold to the dramatizations of thinking that her poems offer. Rossetti’s poetics often imagines verse as a *guessing game*: a serious game of cognition that, to borrow a phrase from Pierre Macherey, “reintroduces into the exercise of thought an element of play which, far from weakening its speculative content, encourages it, on the contrary, to follow unknown paths” (233). Her guessing games seek not to arrive at “certainty” but to free thought from certainty; that is her guessing games seek to unsettle thought so that thought might unsettle us, so that thought might play. Her poetry makes a game of learning wherein “knowledge” achieves its validity not through testing and confirmation but instead through chance—a gamble that is also a gambol. When one “wagers a guess,” Rossetti reminds us, one cedes autonomy and self-sufficiency to the variable and out-of-(one’s) control. That is to say that her poetics, like Swinburne’s, makes an

argument for the abdication of mastery: here of the mastery of “knowing” undone through the play of chance.

Riddle Cultures, 1780-1900

My chapter starts from a simple premise: the critical commonplace that characterizes Rossetti’s poems as “riddles” and “riddling” actually deserves more consideration than critics have hitherto given it.³⁵ Rossetti’s youthful interest in riddles was more than just a pastime divorced from her major verse. They were in fact important to the work and play of her poetry. Indeed, Rossetti’s supposedly “secretive” verse is contextualized by scholars almost everywhere else than the women’s riddle-writing context from which that verse also emerged and transfigured. One tradition of criticism contextualizes Rossetti’s secretive poetry as a Tractarian “Poetics of Reserve.”³⁶ Another argues that Rossetti’s secretive style is best understood as producing a playful form of intensified ambiguity and paradox, as hermetic wordplay valuing surface over depth, sound over sense, and having much in common with nonsense verse and nursery rhyme.³⁷ I do not disagree with either of these perspectives, but rather argue that both emerge from the broader culture of writing riddles in verse. While my other chapters explore how a mass culture of versifying threatened elites, who sought to preserve the aesthetic from popular culture, for Rossetti, popular culture was the very source of her aesthetic.

In October 1816, a number of periodicals, including *The Ipswich Journal*, *The Morning Post* (London), the *Liverpool Mercury*, and the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (Portsmouth), published the following poem that they attributed to the poetess Anna Seward (the “Swan of Lichfield”), who had died seven years earlier in 1809:

The noblest object in the works of Art;
The brightest gem which Nature can impart;

The point essential in a Lawyer's lease;
The well-known signal in the time of peace;
The Ploughman when he drives his plough;
The Soldier's duty, and the Lovers vow;
The planet seen between the earth and sun;
The Prize which merit never yet has won;
The Miser's Treasure and the badge of Jews;
The Wife's ambition and the Parsons dues.
Now, if your nobler spirit can divine,
A corresponding word for every line,
By all these letters clearly will be shewn,
An ancient City of no small renown!

As long as a sonnet and in the form of a rebus, this anaphoric poem was titled “Enigma”—a title that foregrounds the poem’s genre as a riddle in verse. It quickly became known, however, as “Miss Seward’s Enigma,” for the newspapers claimed that Seward had written it in her will, thus electrifying the enigma with a further charge of mystery and significance. According to these newspapers, Seward’s will directed “her Executors to pay 50£ to the person who should discover the true solution” (*The Ipswich Journal* 10/19/1816), a large reward for the reader who could render the rebus by spelling the city.

The response was immediate. Excited readers, encouraged by the substantial financial reward and titillated by the thought of solving a dead poetess’s last request, started to write in solution after solution to the various newspapers. These solutions came in verse form and offered answers in stanzas that ranged from “Alexandria” to “Jerusalem” to Seward’s home of

“Lichfield.” Newspapers published (or perhaps manufactured) the sardonic commentaries of pseudonymous respondents, who publicly debated the merits of others’ solutions. For instance, one controversial wag, writing under the pseudonym “The Wise Man of Gotham,” took the enigma challenge to its ironic extreme by writing an elaborate elucidation. He argued that “ancient City” was in fact a metaphor for “ancient Thoroughfare” and that the answer to the enigma was in fact “Mutton Lane” (*The Morning Post* 10/24/1816). The next day, incensed (or just pretending to be incensed) “readers” accused him of having overread the poem and “altered the sense of the line,” or as one respondent put it, “forced interpretations” (*The Morning Post* 10/25/1816). In short, the impenetrability of the enigma floored many a wit; many a newspaper’s sales rose.³⁸

But if you’re skeptical of the whole affair, then you’ve guessed right: “Miss Seward’s Enigma” was in fact not Seward’s at all. A month later, as the excitement faded, the poem was revealed to have been excerpted from a longer rebus published in the March 1757 *Gentleman’s Magazine* and attributed to Lord Chesterfield (Seward would have been aged 10 at the time).³⁹ The sensation-producing ploy sought to capitalize on readers’ fantasies of gaining access to a poetesses’ last words, her final breath. It worked. The editors had riddled “Seward’s” riddle, framing one form of deception (a riddle) in another (a scam). Call it the original “Seward’s Folly”—only this time, the joke’s on *us*.

This ironic anecdote starts to manifest some of the more fascinating aspects of the explosion of riddle writing and reading that ignited in England in the mid-eighteenth century, became white hot in the 1790s and again in the 1860s and 70s, and burned for 150 years.⁴⁰ Understanding just how excited nineteenth-century England was for riddling word games may be difficult for us today. Word games like the enigma were more than just the nineteenth-century

version of Sudoku. Two centuries ago, as the phenomenon of “Miss Seward’s Enigma” suggests, audiences “overread” these riddle poems to the point where riddle writing and reading, as the abovementioned anecdote exemplifies, became on occasion cultural events.⁴¹ Most commonly associated with Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, and Emily Dickinson, nineteenth-century authors as diverse as William Wordsworth and George Eliot offered competing theories as to the characteristics of enigma genre, discussed how audiences were to read them, debated how they might affect their audiences, and deliberated over what might be their value as verse.⁴²

In *Puzzling the Reader: Riddles in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2008), Gregg Hecimovich points out that developments in print culture and a growing middle-class readership facilitated the “extraordinary explosion of published riddles ... in the period” (7).⁴³ Indeed, the rise of the periodical and the revival of the enigma helped accelerate each other’s popularity. Riddles functioned in Christmas rituals where they circulated as gifts and were read during the winter holidays. One could even go so far as to say that alongside the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ballad revival, another revival was going on: that of the riddle and enigma, those oldest of English genres. Indeed, not until 1893 could the *Chamber’s Journal* claim, “Luckily for this generation, the tyranny of the English riddle is overpast” (479), even as in 1892 the Cambridge wit A. C. Deane suggested that riddling was the “latest fashionable amusement” for women.

Riddles were a tradable form that lent themselves to recirculation. In 1844, thirty years after the phenomenon of “Miss Seward’s Enigma” had ended, *The Aberdeen Journal* revived “Miss Seward’s Enigma” for Scottish audiences (now called “Miss Seward’s Riddle”).⁴⁴ While “Miss Seward’s Enigma” version 2.0 failed to produce the same excitement, this re-instantiation of the contest format suggests that it had become—like the enigma form itself—a reusable technology exploitable whenever necessary to boost readership and produce sensation. Just as an

old contest could be recirculated, publishing “A New Version of an Old Enigma” was also common. Aware of this phenomenon, late-eighteenth-century periodicals like *The Wit’s Magazine* (which William Blake illustrated) demanded that its “Correspondents . . . subscribe their names, or at least Initials, to all *Original Compositions*.” It warned, “Every person that attempts to impose on the Editors any article *as original* which has ever before been printed, will be forever excluded from receiving a Medal” (March 1784). In other words, periodicals and anthologies sought not only to manage but also to exploit how both the enigma form and the enigma format lent themselves to recirculation. Because reprints subtly allude to their “original” versions or conditions, a reprinted enigma may have been read as an open secret at once tacitly referencing its earlier versions while purporting to be “new.” Eighteenth and nineteenth-century enigma writers and publishers may have been more interested in the status and possibilities of recirculation in print than in originality and origination.

One of Rossetti’s riddles, “There is one that has a head without an eye,” published in *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872), is in fact *not* her original composition:

There is one that has a head without an eye,
And there’s one that has an eye without a head:
You may find the answer if you try;
And when all is said,
Half the answer hangs upon a thread!⁴⁵

It was instead a recirculation of a riddle that long participated in altered form in the English and the African American culture. In his 1927 article “Negro Folk Tales from the South (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana),” Arthur Huff Fauset offers the following version: “Them has [as] got eyes ain’t got no head, / An’ what got head ain’t got eyes.” (287). Rossetti did not so much

invent this riddle as aestheticize it. These conventional poems may have been recognizable to the Victorian public and, perhaps *for that reason*, were available for appropriation and re-circulation for one's own ends.

To the contestants and audiences of enigma competitions, what mattered in judging the “winner” may have been not only *what* the right answer was but also *how* that answer was given, style as much as substance, the excitement for playing with genre. For instance, “The Wit’s Magazine” published solutions rather than the solution to the prizewinning enigma. While the answer to one prize-winning enigma is “coffin,” “The Wit’s Magazine,” published six different verse solutions that played with this keyword in varying genres from the epigram to the anacreontic. One would be judged not simply on solving the riddle, but also on how creatively one could resolve the riddle in rhyme. Enigma contests made word games the impetus for generating verse.

The Enigma of the Poetess

“Miss Seward’s Enigma” became a phenomenon in part because it exploited the figure of the poetess in the nineteenth-century verse culture of riddle writing and reading. Although many nineteenth-century male authors wrote riddling word games, reading and writing enigmas was considered an activity for women—a mode of recreation between women and a form of didactic verse by mothers for children. In the early nineteenth century, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, Elizabeth Inchbald, Henrietta Battier, Marianne Curties, Catherine Ann Dorset (the sister of Charlotte Smith), and Elizabeth Hitchener all published enigmas. The wildly popular “The Riddle on the Letter ‘H’,” often attributed to Lord Byron, was in fact written by the poet Catherine Maria Fanshawe.

Even Queen Victoria took pleasure in the genre. In her 1861 riddle anthology *Victorian Enigmas; or, Windsor Fireside Researches*, Charlotte Capel sought to capitalize on the Queen's interest by attributing to Victoria the difficult "Windsor Enigma," a double acrostic written "for the royal children": "Some five years ago, a copy ... was handed me to solve, with these words—'A friend at Windsor had this from the palace, said to be written by the Queen.'" (v). Capel suggests that readers "should emulate her Majesty" (v-vi). And in *The Private Life of the Queen* (1897), "A Member of the Royal Household" offers the following anecdote:

Her Majesty was very fond of a clever riddle or rebus, but on one occasion she was very angry at having been hoaxed over a riddle which was sent to her with a letter to the effect that it had been made by the Bishop of Salisbury. For four days the Queen and Prince Albert sought for the reply, when Charles Murray (Controller of the Household) was directed to write to the bishop and ask for the solution. The answer received was that the bishop had not made the riddle nor could he solve it (98-99).

Queen Victoria's interest in the enigma helped catalyze the genre's mid-century popularity, especially among women.

Seward herself noted that, in the early nineteenth century, riddles and other word game genres were understood as practices for women and gendered female. In a letter to Lady Marianne Carnegie regarding how her friend the natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin's love for Elizabeth Pole had emasculated him, Seward laughs, "The poetic philosopher [Darwin] ... transfers the amusement of his leisure hours, from ... the composition of odes, and heroic verses, to fabricating riddles and charards [sic]! Thus employed, his mind is somewhat in the same predicament with Hercules's body, when he sat among the women, and handled the distaff" (qtd.

in Barnard 118). In other words, for a man to write a riddle and “charard,” rather than a masculine “ode,” was to enervate if not emasculate himself.

Likewise, Anna Letitia Barbauld’s “Enigma: To the Ladies” (1820s?) suggests that riddle poems were written by women poets for women readers; the solution is “umbrella” or “parasol,” a commodity that the poem suggests (“But lately am I known to Britain’s isle” (l. 20)) was a novelty in England and a fashionable female accessory. Keepsake books such as *Forget-Me-Not* and *The Amulet* likewise geared riddles and enigmas by publishing them as highly wrought aesthetic objects, printed on high-quality paper alongside a number of expensive engravings in a sentimental format.⁴⁶ Female poets wrote riddles that were marketed for women readers, helping to construct the identity categories of both women writers and the woman readers.

Riddle-in-verse writing and reading continued to be a popular female practice through the end of the nineteenth century. In 1892, the Cambridge wit Anthony Charles Deane, just finishing Clare College, republished his parody, “The Lover’s Complaint” (A reference to the poem that closes Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*) in his collection of wit, *Frivolous Verses*. In it, Deane depicts a woman whom he is attempting to woo but cannot because she only speaks in riddles-in-verse. Thus, Deane mocks the continuing excitement, at the fin de siècle, of women for writing and reading riddles and other word games. As the epigraph, a line from an Evening Paper, notes, “Asking riddles has become the latest fashionable amusement.”

The frontispieces of nineteenth-century riddle anthologies helped market riddles for the women readers that they were in the process of making: both *A Choice Collection of Riddles, Charades, Rebuses, etc.* (1792) and *Home Amusements* (1859), despite their 60+ year separation, similarly foreground women readers in domestic contexts of familial scenes. In the former’s engraving entitled, “The Solution of a Riddle,” five children in mixed states of excitement and

concentration sit and stand around a table as (presumably) their mother reads from a book of riddles. In the latter, an august family that is divided by gender (the girls surround the mother, the boys the father) unifies around riddle reading, while the mother reads riddles to her husband and children. In both cases, the mother reads aloud to her family, and the family coalesces around this domestic, sociable, familial genre. The ideological work of these frontispieces helped manufacture women readers not only as teachers but also as readers of light verse.⁴⁷

Word games were written, read, and circulated among women in particular for pedagogical reasons as part of what Richard Brodhead calls the “domestic-tutelary complex” (43). Riddles capitalized on information women were expected to know as well as train women in what they should know. To solve these teasing riddles successfully, women readers needed to draw on a broad, cosmopolitan spectrum of knowledge—in short, “facts.” These riddling word games circulated under the banner of Horace’s *dulce et utile*: the pedagogical value they were promoted as having came in part due to their pleasure. They disciplined students into certain forms of literacy by attempting to make schoolroom-reading fun. Through the enigma, the poetess constructed her identity as what Angela Sorby calls a “schoolroom poet.”

Woman readers needed training in not only what to read but *how* to read. In *Victorian Enigmas* (1861), Charlotte Capel advertizes her purpose: to promote in women readers “a method of digesting information to its most interesting particulars, and [correcting] the superficial tone acquired by hasty and inattentive reading, which sometime tends to vain conceit, from ill grounded knowledge” (vii). In other words, by disciplining female attention and by sharpening critical skills, enigma reading would turn superficial female readers into “close” readers. Moreover, Capel’s riddles offer women readers “a good conversational knowledge ... such as should be the distinctive mark of every well-educated gentlewoman” (viii).



The Solution of a Riddle :

Figure 1: Frontispiece to *A Choice Collection of Riddles, Charades, Rebuses, &c.* (1792)



Frontispiece.

Figure 2: Frontispiece to *Home Amusements* (1849; 2nd ed. 1859)

The poet Anna Letitia Barbauld was perhaps the most prominent and prolific of poetess riddlers; not only did she write a number of riddles, enigmas, and logogriphs, but also she theorized the genre in a essay, “On Riddles,” posthumously published in 1825 in *A Legacy for Young Ladies*.⁴⁸ Like many poetesses, Barbauld framed the genre as a form of cognitive training for her “young friends,” one that “gives quickness of thought, and a facility of turning about a problem every way, and viewing it in every possible light” (360). This training of the mind was linked to a disciplining of the body: solving “riddles is the same kind of exercise to the mind which running and leaping and wrestling in sport are to the body,” she avers, since both “make [one] alert and active for anything [one] may be called to perform in labor or war” (359). The kindly tone of the essay polishes its ideological work: riddles synonymize individualization with militarization, wholly apt for the production of future subjects within the British Empire. By doing so, Barbauld equates the identity of the poetess not only with a maternal role but also with that of the pedagogue.

In “The Gush of the Feminine” (1995), Isobel Armstrong argues how important it is “to get away from the gush of the feminine regarded simply as a consent to nonrational and emotional experience” (15). Often considered poets of performed emotion and highly wrought affect, given the prominence of the riddle in the poetess oeuvre the poetess might be better understood as achieving self-definition around a prominent but understudied ludic tradition. While poetesses capitalized on the popularity of the enigma genre to succeed in the literary marketplace, they also circulated word play rather than pathos to manage—if not oppose—the demand for sentimentality expected of their gendered verse. In *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1999), Eileen Gillooly argues that in the nineteenth century, humor was a male discourse that women could only participate in through

stealth and transgression. But Victorian riddle culture suggests just how brazen “female humor” could be. Poetess verse *plays* with sentiment: a recognizable performance or circulated pose. The laughter that accompanies surprise, the risible in the riddle, may have provided a counterweight to the expectations for the gravity of poetess pathos. Humor just as much characterized nineteenth-century women’s as men’s writing, and its mobilizations were both disciplinary and transgressive.

For instance, Barbauld claims wit for women’s (riddle) writing. In “On Riddles,” her defense of the enigma genre, she acknowledges that while “Addison would put [riddles, charades, conundrums, and rebuses] all in the class of false wit [or drawing surprising associations between words], [Jonathan] Swift, who was as great a genius, amused himself with making all sorts of puzzles; and therefore I think you need not be ashamed of reading them” (362). Defending the merits of the riddle genre by pointing to tradition (the Bible, Aristotle, the Saxons, etc.) was a frequent strategy. But what is provocative about this moment is the tacit argument Barbauld makes for the value of ludic wit in a poetess tradition now constitutively constituting itself around the riddle form.

Likewise, Catherine Anne Dorset’s 1809? poem, “On Wit” instantiates how central the aesthetic category of “wit” was for poetess poetics. Her argument is performative, itself wittily making its case in neoclassical form. Wit was a form of flirtation, and therefore wit’s style is erotic: “Seducing Wit,” the poem opens, marking the erotic rhetoric of wit as both the seducer and the seduced, both the desiring subject and the elusive object of desire (interestingly, the word “wit” only appears once in the poem). When used to cut and critique, wit is hardly better than “playful malice.” But Dorset ultimately concludes for wit’s value by subverting Locke’s classic seventeenth century dichotomy of “wit” and “judgment”: for Locke, the former troublingly

unifies ideas, the latter more properly discriminates between them. But Dorset's poem re-unifies the binary, finding that if "wit" and "judgment" work together rather than remain antithetical, the latter might offer the necessary check for wit's more discourteous excesses: if "*judgment* deigns thy [wit's] erring steps to guide" (my italics), then wit can seduce: "Who but must yield to thy [wit's] bewitching power / And rather brave the thorn—than lose the flower." Where Locke offered division, Dorset embraces dialectic, finding a tandem poetics of wit and judgment in erotic union. Dorset interestingly accepts Locke's argument that "wit" and reason are at cross-purposes: "By reason prompted I would break thy [wit's] chain" ("chain" suggestively suggesting both wit's metaphorical "syntheses" and the erotics of marriage). But while wit and reason are at odds, unreasonable desire—i.e. the irrationality of metaphor—overwhelms restraint: the poem concludes, "But one bright look would lure me back again." Irrational desire surprisingly offers an illuminating clarity ("bright look") that marks "wit" as a valuable mode of knowledge in its own right. "Wit" in its metaphoricity is both seducer and seduced: poetess verse self-constituted around an erotics of style.

The Riddle of Rossetti's Lists of Similes

In her youth, Rossetti was enthusiastic writer and player of word games. In 1850, the twenty-year-old Rossetti published an enigma and a charade in *Marshall's Ladies Daily Remembrancer* as part of a series of riddling word games in verse by various authors; like many riddlers, Rossetti signed her contributions with only her initials. In his 1872 riddle anthology *Guess Me*, Rossetti's contemporary, F. D. Planché, defines an "enigma" as a riddle in verse, or "a most ancient form of Riddle ... often a real poem as well as a question for solution." "Riddles," in the 1891 *Cornhill Magazine*, glosses a "charade" as a word game that "turns upon

the letters or syllables composing a word” (519). These riddling word game genres, while perhaps obscure to many of us today, were popular in mid-Victorian England and were immediately recognizable to her contemporaries. At once both poem and game, the poem as game, they count among Rossetti’s first poetic publications.⁴⁹

By publishing riddling word games in *Marshall’s Ladies Daily Remembrancer*, Rossetti capitalized on the popularity of the enigma and the charade as genres written by and marketed for women. Here is her enigma:

Name any gentleman you spy,
And there’s a chance that he is I;
Go out to angle, and you may
Catch me on a propitious day:
Booted and spurred, their journey ended,
The weary are by me befriended:
If roasted meat should be your wish,
I am more needful than a dish:
I am acknowledgedly poor:
Yet my resources are no fewer
Than all the trades; there is not one
But I profess, beneath the sun:
I bear a part in many a game;
My worth may change, I am the same.
Sometimes, by you expelled, I roam
Forth from the sanctuary of home.

A note in pencil on Rossetti's copy provides the solution to this enigma: "Jack."⁵⁰ "Jack" as in a generic proper name; as in a type of fish (amberjack etc.); as in a bootjack for pulling off boots; as in a smoke-jack for turning the spit in roasting meat; as in "poor Jack," a name for dried hake; as in a Jack-of-all-Trades; as in a knave in a deck of cards; and lastly as in a "Jack-out-of-doors," a homeless person. That her enigma's closure "discloses" alienation is perhaps unsurprising. By exploring the multiple registers of homonymic meaning, the fact that "Jack" can be both a fish and a man, Rossetti's enigma—like all homonymic enigmas—works to "jack" (as in hijack) our cognitive frameworks: they subvert the orienting structures that the a priori categories of sameness and difference serve to anchor. Through the enigmas she wrote in her youth, Rossetti explored the signifying possibilities of words that her later verse would exploit. The play of the enigma works by exploiting the ambiguity or metaphoricity of language, a word's semantic potential as a pun (how one word could have many meanings; how different clues could all refer to the same thing, or how seemingly different things can have a likeness in common). What excited the youthful Rossetti about riddles may have been what excited her about bouts-rimé: "how readily Christina could utilize the same rhymes for three entirely distinct lines of thought or subject," as William Rossetti noted (490). Just as one set of rhymes could contain many poems, so too one word could contain many meanings. For Rossetti, identity was a form of difference.

The fundamental structure of riddles and enigmas is the simile. Take, for example, Lewis Carroll's riddle: Why is a raven like a writing desk? As scholars have long pointed out, enigmas posit some "hidden likeness" of things, or as Eleanor Cook puts it, "A simile asserts openly that X is like Y. The trope of enigma makes simile into a question: *What* is X like? We might call the figure of enigma a closed or hidden simile" (32). The enigma therefore is a simile or metaphor

with one term—the tenor—hidden. Thus, that the simile was a crucial structure for Rossetti’s riddling verse should come as no surprise. Rossetti’s “Mirrors of Life and Death,” first published in the 17 March 1877 *Athenæum*, is a series of twenty stanzas all introduced with a simile: “As the flush of a Morning Sky,” the poem begins, and continues through lengthy series of similes pulled from the natural world, evocative of the life cycle, and resonant with Christian symbolism. In “‘Goldengrove unleaving’: Hopkins’ ‘Spring and Fall,’ Christina Rossetti’s ‘Mirrors of Life and Death,’ and the Politics of Inclusion” published in the 2005 *Victorian Poetry*, Jude Nixon reads “Mirrors” as a Homeric simile without resolution: “an epic cycle that never experiences consummation (there is no Homeric “thus” or “so” with which the epic simile achieves climax)” (480).

But the similes with a hidden tenor that constitute “Mirrors” suggest that the poem is better understood not as an epic simile without resolution but as an *enigma without solution*—or, as a play on the genre of the enigma, which were so important to Rossetti’s youth. Like a riddle, “Mirrors of Life and Death” is all vehicle and no tenor, a sustained series of secondary subjects that hides while hinting at the primary subject. Indeed, when Rossetti republished the poem in 1881, she gave her readers an additional clue to the genre on which the poem tropes: a new stanza that begins the poem by referencing the Apostle Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians 13.12—“For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face”:

The mystery of Life, the mystery

Of Death, I see

Darkly as in a glass;

Their shadows pass,

And talk with me. (ll. 1-5)

“Darkly” in the Septuagint and Vulgate is “enigma”: the epistle in “the original Greek uses a form of ‘enigma’ (*en ainigmati*) and the Vulgate repeats the word in its Latinate form: ‘Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate’” (Cook 66, her italics). Thus, if the lists of similes were not enough to hint to readers well versed in the enigma form that the poem is riddling the riddle, then Rossetti invokes “enigma” itself, though in semi-secreted form. Moreover, the poem’s movement from darkness (“Darkly”) to its conclusion in “light” alludes to Revelation in both a Biblical and a rhetorical sense. The poem employs what Cook calls the “enigma as mastertrope”: writ small in this poem is fundamental movement of the enigma trope from obscurity to clarity, darkness to light.

Indeed, throughout her verse, Rossetti was fascinated by “likeness” and by the device of the simile. Just as Rossetti’s riddling verse proliferate lists of guesses, options, and possibilities most notably in her use of “perhaps” and “or,” so too does her riddling verse produce lists of similes. In “Faithful Likenesses: Lists of Similes in Milton, Shelley, and Rossetti,” published in the 2006 *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Erik Gray reads Rossetti’s lists of similes as emerging from Shelley. But given her interest in the enigma genre, which as we have seen in “Name any gentleman you spy” and “Mirrors of Life and Death” works by a series of similes, Rossetti’s lists of similes are better understood as aestheticizing the riddles that she wrote in her youth particularly, and the Victorian popular culture of enigma writing more generally. *Goblin Market* exemplifies how her transfiguring verse reworked Victorian riddle culture:

Laura stretched her gleaming neck

Like a rush-imbedded swan

Like a lily from the beck,

Like a moonlit poplar branch

Like a vessel at the launch

When its last restraint is gone.

Gray “find[s] it impossible to imagine someone who is simultaneously like a swan and a lily and a branch and a boat” (292). However, in the same way that Rossetti’s “Jack” can surprisingly be at once a fish, a card, and a spit for roasting meat, the riddle here is how Laura’s neck can be “simultaneously like a swan and a lily and a branch and a boat.” In other words, the solution to the riddle of Rossetti’s lists may be “riddle” itself.

Indeed, Rossetti’s paratactic lists of similes structured through anaphora have a common root: the popular enigma culture that her transfiguring verse reworked into something rich and strange. The generic characteristic of popular enigmas was paratactic lists of clues (similes that hide the tenor) structured by anaphora, as “Miss Seward’s Enigma” exemplifies. Through her anaphoric, paratactic lists, Rossetti’s verse points at once to the riddle culture from which it emerged, and to the Bible, which also uses anaphora. Here Rossetti reworks these tropes to produce a sense of profusion and to explore likeness: how one thing can be like so many things, or, as she put it in “An Old-World Thicket”:

Such birds they seemed as challenged each desire;

Like spots of azure heaven upon the wing,

Like downy emeralds that alight and sing,

Like actual coals on fire,

Like anything they seemed, and everything.

Here the anaphoric, paratactic list of similes distends on its own profusion; the comparison becomes infinite: the birds, she concludes, are like “anything ... and everything.” Most scholars argue that these lists of similes exemplify poetic failure (intentional or not): Katherine Mayberry

vituperatively calls them “desperate and hopeless;” Gray calls these “self-cancelling metaphors” a “failure [that] is purposeful” (305, 291-92). But the reason these similes seem to fail is that they are being read wrongly: as a poem, rather than as a riddle poem. What is missing is the hidden similitude that allows Laura’s neck to be at once bird, bulb, branch, and boat. Rossetti, in other words, asks us to rethink the conceptual categories that underwrite our perception.

Rossetti scholars from Jan Marsh to Constance Hassett note that riddles fascinated Rossetti because they fueled the “linguistic delight” (Marsh 7), defined as her playful deployments of paradox and ambiguity, which characterized her verse.⁵¹ But critics rarely move beyond this rather general understanding of her hyper-metaphoric style. What Rossetti’s enigmas allow us to see is that the central concern of Rossetti’s verse, therefore, is *likeness*—the juxtapositional play of sameness and difference, how one thing can be almost but not quite the same as another, how one word can have many different meanings, how different clues can refer to the same thing.

Moreover, because the central concern of Rossetti’s verse is likeness, the central concern of Rossetti’s verse is also the *concordia discors* of *rhyme*. The enigma’s and the simile’s play of difference within similitude (how different vehicles can have the same hidden tenor) are for Rossetti figures for rhyme (how different words could have almost the same sound). Indeed, just as Swinburne made *bouts-rimés* into a metaphor for a new theory and practice of versifying, so too does Rossetti make the enigma and the similes that constitute it into the very sign of rhyme.

Yet in *Goblin Market*, as in “Day Dreams” / “Reflection” and her verses more generally, Rossetti’s lists are tethered as much by anaphora as by rhyme. *Goblin Market*’s simile list clinches the lines more at their beginning (where the similarities are so close as to be identities (“Like” follows “Like”)) than at their end. While clinching usually happens at the end of the line,

Rossetti uses imperfect rhyme (“swan ... gone,” “branch ... launch”) to undermine that closure, allowing the list to proliferate. Because repetition happens at the beginning of the line rather than the end, repetition seems to generate verse rather engender verse closure. Likewise, as the stanza explores the relationship of sameness in difference in the lists of similes, so too does the stanza explore that relationship on the level of rhyme, juxtaposing the repetition of the anaphoric openings (concord) against the imperfect rhymes of the close (discord).

Game Over?: The Closure and Disclosure of Rossetti’s Guessing Games

In the 1850s and 60s, Rossetti found guessing so appealing for her poetic ends that she even titled another of her contemporaneous poems, “Guesses” (1854, never published in Rossetti’s lifetime). Structured on a series of guesses, this poem locates in its repeated trope of “chance” the encounter of play and probability, perhaps another reason why Swinburne found her poetry so appealing. Here is the first stanza:

Was it a chance that made her pause
One moment at the opened door,
Pale where she stood so flushed before
As one a sprit overawes:—
Or might it rather be because
She felt the grave was at our feet,
And felt that we should no more meet
Upon its hither side no more? (ll. 1-8)

Rossetti borrows the octave of the Wordsworthian sonnet form to rework it in a context of chance: the ABBA first quatrain augurs predictability while the more irregularly rhymed second

ACCB opens out to the random. Indeed, rather than close in a circle, the poem comes up short, the last line echoing the second line, not the first: the circuit is not quite closed. This first stanza establishes a pattern that the next two stanzas of this four stanza poem echo: in the first two stanzas, the first four lines refer to chance, and in the first three stanzas, the last four lines all refer to death. Rossetti in other words juxtaposes “random” chance and necessary doom.

Here again is Rossetti’s fascination with “Perhaps ... Or” and the poise it offers, suspending the reader among proliferating possibilities, guesses, that recur with greater frequency as the poem closes. Rossetti plays with the tension between an expanding series of alternatives and the need to end the poem by ironizing “closure”: the poem ends with “endeth not.” Certainty, closure, may only be possible through revelation and heavenly consolation:

Perhaps she did it carelessly,
Perhaps it was an idle thought;
Or else it was the grace unbought,
A pledge to all eternity:
I know not yet how this may be;
But I shall know when face to face
In Paradise we find a place
And love with love that endeth not. (ll. 29-32).

In heaven, love, like hope, springs eternal. In a fallen world, however, love, like poems, has to end. But poems do not have to reveal, while heaven does. Rossetti’s riddling poems trouble poetic closure the relationship between poetic closure and disclosure.

Rossetti’s 1863 poem, “The Queen of Hearts” transfigures the context of poetess riddle wit. The poem concerns itself with play and game—card games and guessing games—and the

concept of chance that was so frightening and fascinating to the Victorians, especially Swinburne. Capriciousness threatened meritocracy—the spirit of competition the Victorians so valued in field and workplace. But chance also offered the ecstatic thrill of the unruly and out-of-one’s control: the turning over of Apollonian volition and reason to a Dionysian revelry in risk, not to mention the vagaries of the stock market (i.e. guessing as risk taking, a means to engender capital). In a culture of verse, chance was seen as the antithesis of the valued terms: technique and skill. The Victorians sought to manage chance too, and as Ian Hacking argues in *The Taming of Chance* (1990), by the end of the nineteenth century, chance itself had been tamed, disconnected from fate, and transformed via statistics into a new form of knowing.

“The Queen of Hearts” asks why, during card games, “Flora” always ends up, against all odds, in possession of the queen of hearts, despite numerous attempts to prevent her from acquiring it. The poem guesses at a mystery that resists the new statistical models but never results in any sure answer. Instead, the poem becomes a guessing game that proliferates possible solutions.

How comes it, Flora, that, whenever we

Play cards together, you invariably,

However the pack parts,

Still hold the Queen of Hearts?

I’ve scanned you with a scrutinizing gaze,

Resolved to fathom these your secret ways:

But, sift them as I will,

Your ways are secret still.

I cut and shuffle; shuffle, cut, again;
But all my cutting, shuffling, proves in vain:
 Vain hope, vain forethought, too;
 That Queen still falls to you.

I dropped her once, prepense; but, ere the deal
Was dealt, your instinct seemed her loss to feel:
 “There should be one card more,”
 You said, and searched the floor.

I cheated once; I made a private notch
In Heart-Queen’s back, and kept a lynx-eyed watch;
 Yet such another back
 Deceived me in the pack:

The Queen of Clubs assumed by arts unknown
An imitative dint that seemed my own;
 This notch, not of my doing,
 Misled me to my ruin.

It baffles me to puzzle out the clue,
Which must be skill, or craft, or luck in you:

Unless, indeed, it be
Natural affinity.

Revising her first draft, Rossetti replaced “Striving” in line six with “Resolved”: in its proliferating alternatives “Queen of Hearts” seems to want to solve and *re-solve* the mystery of chance, even as that open-ended set of solutions runs head first into the *resolution* of the poem through the closure of rhyme. Again, Rossetti’s verse constructs a tension between the endless list of guesses and the poem’s close.

Rhyme, however, might offer the answer to this poem. For by achieving resolution (closure) on a solution (“Natural affinity”), that solution is given a further aura of significance, heightened all the more as the meter draws out every phoneme in the words, making them sound noteworthy, making “Natural affinity” stand out all the more among the other possibilities so quickly brushed aside in the hurry to offer another. For while Rossetti’s guessing games enumerate alternatives and value the uncertainty of not settling on an answer, based on the condition of the sequential aspects of writing, the poem’s close inevitably selects one option as the “last word”; it implicitly produces hierarchy among “equal” options. Closing the poem on an answer makes the answer stand out.

Yet even as rhyme might give you the “answer,” the answer might also be “rhyme.” For what are references to “skill” and “craft” in the context of verse if not references to the artifice of versifying, writing in rhyme? And what is rhyme if not “artificial affinity” of sound? The poem in a sense becomes self-reflexive in its close, hinting at the rhyme that ends it. Yet while Victorian riddle culture treated art and chance as antithetical terms, Rossetti lumps “skill, craft, or luck” all together, as if no distinction existed, as if their values were all the same—all the options in this list of alternatives are all equally wrong, or equally right.

For Rossetti, guessing was a paratactic form of thinking: “It baffles me to puzzle out the clue, / Which must be skill, or craft, or luck in you”: the series of guessed possibilities splay out in a list that refuses to settle down and whose elements are cataloged without any apparent logical connection or order to the sequencing. The guesses come rapidly, and give a sense of spontaneity, producing a sense that their proliferation is at once desperate and playful. Guessing becomes a single player game—a form of solitaire—that seems more invested in its own acts of intellection than understanding its purported “object” of thought. The persona is not so much evasive; thought itself refuses to settle. Rossetti’s keyword, “or,” spits out guesses (“skill, or craft, or luck”) whose terms relate to one another (as “variations on a theme”) without “following” from one another; they cannot be subsumed under any principle of logical order or sequence. In Rossetti’s guessing games, settling down (on an answer) seems like settling *for* (an answer), or, settling down comes to seem in Rossetti’s poetry like settling. Her guessing games refuse to rest in or to offer any easy certainties. In short, her riddling poetry, her guesswork, makes a sinecure of security.

We might expect “It baffles me to puzzle out the clue” to read, “It baffles me to puzzle out the answer,” since we usually seek to “puzzle out” the solution, not “puzzle out” a “clue” to the answer. The line synonymizes a “clue” to the answer with the answer itself, the means to the end with the end. The line posits an endless regress: one searches not for answers but for clues to answers, for clues as answers, which are really clues for other answers and so on. Thought seeks not to solve but to generate—to think. Her poetry unsettles: Rossetti’s guesses refuse to settle for or on answers; instead, they exist as a fluid and dynamic catalogue of possibilities that declines to harden into solutions: dogma, ideology, or orthodoxy: i.e. abstract, totalizing “truths.”

Through thinking about guessing, her guessing games also revalue knowledge as other-than-factual: as “felt” or intuited, as based on chance rather than intellection, as play and game.

Like “Winter: My Secret,” Rossetti’s “Sunshine” plays with the interrogative form of the riddling word game to encourage readers to inquire about the act of guessing, in particular the strange act of guessing without ever knowing, and by extension, the insertion of playing into “thinking”:

“There’s little sunshine in my heart
Slack to spring, lead to sink;
There’s little sunshine in the world
I think.”—

“There’s glow of sunshine in my heart
(Cool wind, cool the glow);
There’s flood of sunshine in the world
I know.”—

Now if of these one spoke the truth,
One spoke more or less:
But which was which I will not tell;—
You, guess.

Rossetti wrote “Sunshine” seven years after “Winter: My Secret,” but never published it during her lifetime. The poems share much in common however: they both make heavy weather of

internal climate change, and their near identical acts of closure are provocative: “You, guess,” “Or you may guess.” How are we supposed to respond to its closing insistence that we “guess”?

“Sunshine” is structured—balanced—on parallelism: from the repetitions with a difference of “There’s little sunshine in my heart ... There’s little sunshine in the world” contrasted with “There’s glow of sunshine in my heart ... There’s flood of sunshine in the world,” to the balance between the parallel, antithetical formations “Slack to spring” being echoed by “lead to sink,” to the repetition and variation of “I think ... I know ... You, guess,” etc. Because of this play of sameness against difference, the poem is a metaphor for riddle and for rhyme. Indeed, Rossetti suggests that the genre of riddle and the form of rhyme might be entirely suited for one another.

In my introduction, I showed how prosodists in the second half of the century reacted to the rise of a popular verse culture by attempting to divide mass culture from the aesthetic. But for Christina Rossetti, mass culture was the very source of the aesthetic, just as seemingly trivial word games were the root of true beauty: the diurnal verse of the daily newspaper became the means of her otherworldly poetry. Through the similes and anaphora of enigmas by women writers for women readers, Rossetti constructed riddles without end to explore cognition, poetics, and revelation. In her enigmas without end, she riddled the Romantic tropes of “Negative Capability” and “Surmise.” And her “guesses” explored a trope of growing concern to her Victorian contemporaries, particularly Swinburne: “chance”—the “hap” in her “perhaps”—as to guess is to leave thought to chance, to “take a shot in the dark” and to hope it hits. Like Swinburne, Rossetti explores “chance” to both do and undo the will, leaving her readers suspended and suspenseful among possibilities that proliferate without end.

Chapter 3

Classifying Rhyme

Cockney Rhyme and the Sound of Class, 1800-1900

Henry Sambrooke Leigh loved being a cockney. In charming poems like “My Birthplace,” “The Convalescent Cockney,” and “Faint Praise” from his 1882 *Strains from the Strand: Trifles in Verse*, the London versifier, music-hall poet, and wit enthused over his birthplace, the city of London, and how it defined a central part of his identity. “Gentle reader, thy bard is a Cockney by birth,” Leigh sung, or rather shouted, in “My Element,” “And a Cockney till death will remain.” Its refrain—“my element—Noise!”—pays homage in part to the blare of London’s ‘buses and buskers, above whose clamor Leigh lived only mere two stories. Leigh would be dead in a year at the age of 46. But before he passed, this brilliant conversationalist wanted his readers to know how important London was to him. He welcomed London’s sounds: they helped him clatter out the metropolitan meters of his urban verses.

So if Leigh clearly took pleasure in his cockney identity, then why did he express such disdain for cockney rhyme? In “Faint Praise,” for example, Leigh self-deprecatingly mocks his teenage attempts at unrequited love poetry. These attempts failed, Leigh suggests, in no small part due to his as yet untrained versifying technique. As a teenager, he knew no better than to write rhyme words that only cockney pronunciation would make harmonious: “I fondly loved at seventeen, / And breathed my woe in Cockney rhyme; / However weak it may have been, / The lack of brains is not a crime.” While nearly everywhere else in his poetry Leigh celebrates his cockneyism, here he associates cockney rhyme with the naivete of his youth, which he is proud to

have outgrown. The printer, publisher, and author Andrew Tuer's 1890 "*Thenks awf'ly*": *Sketched in Cockney and Hung on Twelve Pegs*, which sought to represent cockney dialect in writing for a broad audience, opens associating cockneys with "rogues," which would soon become a stereotype of low-class Londoners. Likewise, for Leigh, Cockney rhyme is almost a crime. While Leigh authored *Carols of Cockayne* (1869) (a pun linking "Cockaigne," a mythical paradise, to his beloved cockney London), he also frequently boasted that he "never wrote a cockney rhyme," a remark he wanted as his epitaph (qtd. in Morton 142). Never existed a more striking contrast between one's love for being a cockney and one's contempt for writing, or speaking, or rhyming like one.

Leigh's near contemporary and fellow Londoner, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, also associated cockney rhyming with youthful naïveté. In an 1879 letter to the novelist (and idolizer of Rossetti) Sir Hall Caine, Rossetti admitted, "[I]n my very earliest days of boyish rhyming ... I was rather proud to be as cockney as Keats *could* be." The italics defend Keats by suggesting that Keats' cockney rhymes were enacted by, not essential to, the character of the "chameleon poet." In his letter, Rossetti may have been recalling the late 1840s, when a college-age Rossetti neglected his education in painting to spend his days reading medieval Italian lyrics and songs in the old reading room of the British Library, and his nights at home translating those sonnets, canzones, and stornelli into modern English verse. In November 1850, Rossetti showed his verse translations to Tennyson, to whom Rossetti had been introduced by Coventry Patmore. As William Rossetti recounts, Tennyson "returned the MS., saying that it was very strong and earnest, but disfigured by some cockney rhymes, such as 'calm' and 'arm.'" Rossetti at once determined to remove these" (105). Rossetti did not make the mistake again. He concludes his letter to Caine expressing mock surprise at how much he had matured as a poet and as a person

since his childhood: “Is it possible the laurel crown should now hide a venerated and impeccable ear which was once the ear of a cockney?” (170-71).

More than an epithet derisive of class (low) or of place (London), Leigh and Rossetti suggest that “cockney” also marked one’s immaturity as a poet, understood as one’s undeveloped technical skill in managing the responsibilities of rhyme. “Cockney rhyme,” for Leigh and Rossetti, derides ineptitude in versifying: “cockney rhyme” is what beginner poets hopefully outgrow as they improve their rhyming technique. Indeed, through the eighteenth century, “cockney” bore associations with infantilism, even effeminacy: “A child that sucketh long’, ‘a nestle-cock’, ‘a mother's darling’; a cockered child, pet, minion; ‘a child tenderly brought up’; hence, a squeamish or effeminate fellow, ‘a milksop’” (OED online). While the OED points out that this definition was obsolete by the nineteenth century, perhaps such associations persisted through the fin de siècle. “Cockney rhyme,” in other words, was not simply a classed epithet; it was also gendered, a reference to maturity and masculinity. In “cockney rhyme” therefore, multiple types of cultivation were commented upon: the epithet criticizes not only one’s undereducated, low-class London pronunciation that was revealed in one’s rhymes, but also one’s undereducated, naïve versifying technique that might signify one’s maturity as a poet.

Moreover, versifying signified masculinity, rhyme maturity. Of course young poets are usually still developing their craft and thus they might show slipshod versifying. More than that, however, to rhyme well is to communicate the sense that one was most flush with one’s own power. Leigh loved being a cockney but hated cockney rhyme because he shared with his contemporaries the widespread aesthetic assumption that no matter one’s class, one needed show that one was a man, not a boy, when the time came to rhyme; put another way, you needed to master form so that form didn’t master you. In the second half of the century, poetic mastery was

defined in part by writing only in perfect rhyme. Only by negotiating the most difficult formal constraints could one show oneself to be an experienced versifier, a poet of power.

In what follows, I trace the valences of the epithet “cockney rhyme” to show how and why the epithet of cockney rhyme became anathema to poets far more in the second half of the nineteenth century than it did in the first half, so that Leigh could at once love being a cockney and hate rhyming like one. This disdain for sounding like a cockney (if not fear of being one), shaped the compositional choices made by a broad spectrum of poets, from lesser known versifiers like Leigh to major poets like Rossetti, Tennyson, and William Morris when writing their rhymes. More than that, for Victorians, rhyme’s associations went beyond poetic sound or “music”: rhyme in social discourse, I argue, was more prominently understood in terms of pronunciation and debates regarding the standardization of English and ultimately the politics of class. As rhyme came to embody one’s pronunciation, how one rhymed helped to define whom one was.

The Roots of Cockney Rhyme

The epithet “cockney rhyme” was coined by John Lockhart, the twenty-four-year old editor of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, in the fourth of a series of pseudonymous articles (signed “Z.”) in *Blackwood’s* called, “On the Cockney School of Poetry” (1818). He did so to deride the rhymes of his contemporary, the twenty-three-year-old John Keats, who had just begun his career as a poet. Lockhart was a proud Scotsman, Tory in politics, and a scholar of classical and modern languages and literatures, having earned a first in classics at Balliol College, Oxford, where he was also a noted wit and satirist. Unlike Lockhart, Keats was London-born (rather than country-bred), southern rather than northern, radical, of supposedly obscure

origins, and had no formal education in the classical languages and literatures. Those differences led Lockhart to criticize Keats for writing poetry marked by ignorance, low class, bad taste, and worse form.

“Cockney” contemptuously refers to Londoners: “one borne within the sound of Bow-bell, that is, within the City of London” (qtd. in OED online).⁵² Unlike the country gentry, Londoners were thought provincial, small-minded, speakers of a dialect rather than of the nation’s pronunciation, and therefore considered uneducated and impolite. “Cockney,” as mentioned above, also connotes immaturity and effeminacy; thus, Lockhart calls Keats “only a boy of pretty abilities,” a “bantling” who “has already learned to lisp sedition” (522, 524). “Cockney” also expressed rural bias against the urban in similarly gendered terms: “A derisive appellation for a townsman, as the type of effeminacy, in contrast to the hardier inhabitants of the country” (qtd. in OED online). Thus, Lockhart called the Cockney school: “flimsy striplings ... fanciful dreaming tea-drinkers” (520-21), overly urbane and domesticated. Indeed, cockney could refer to one who was at once both undereducated (improper pronunciation) and overly cultivated (“tea drinker”). In other words, at the start of the nineteenth century, “cockney” was not yet entirely a classed epithet. It had as much to do with a lack of cultivation due to being ensconced in the narrow confines of London provincialism as “cockney” did with a lack of cultivation due to being excluded from a gentleman’s education in the classics.

When Lockhart scowled, “Mr. Keats has adopted the loose, nerveless versification, and Cockney rhymes of the poet of Rimini [Leigh Hunt]” (522), he was complaining of Keats’ frequently enjambed heroic couplets in *Endymion* (which, Lockhart assumes, were supposed to be closed couplets), and such pairings as “thorns ... fawns” from “Sleep and Poetry” (1817), “higher ... Thalia” from “To [Mary Frogley]” (1817), and “ear ... Cytherea” from *Endymion*

(1818). These non-rhotic rhymes (rhymes that, in their pronunciation, elide or aspirate the “r”), Lockhart complained, only rhymed in the local context of London, but failed to rhyme everywhere else. Keats’s rhymes, for Lockhart, were as immoderate as his politics: his rhymes were either erased by enjambment or overly conspicuous for their pronunciation, melodies either unheard or blaring.

The failure of those rhymes suggested to Lockhart that Keats lacked “learning enough to distinguish between the written language of Englishmen and the spoken jargon of Cockneys” (521). Lockhart felt Keats naively assumed that his rhymes worked because he wrongly assumed that London pronunciation was the pronunciation of all Englishmen, that his particular dialect was the norm for the nation. Lockhart, however, provincializes London and Keats. Not until the second half of the century would southern / London pronunciation start to become synonymous with proper, educated pronunciation and begin to become considered as a norm for the nation. Lockhart assumed his Scottish pronunciation was the standard. This assumption that one’s local speech patterns were or should be the *lingua franca* is a recurring conflict in the nineteenth century debates about proper rhyme and proper pronunciation.

Keats, according to Lockhart, was the latest victim of “*Metromanie*,” a term (“*metromania*”) the Tory satirist William Gifford coined in his *Baviad* (1791) to complain about meter-mania, the “mania for writing poetry” (OED online) i.e. the ongoing popularization of versifying. As writing and reading poetry became popular practice, poetry, many feared, was no longer the purview solely of an educated elite and the inspired genius but had become mass culture. As a Londoner (rather than country-bred), as undereducated without a gentleman’s training in the classics, and as having an obscure heritage, Keats for Lockhart exemplified the

poetic aspirant suffering from the disease of *metromania*, who stepped out of the expectations or “habitus” of his class and did not know his place.

As the gates of “official verse culture” opened to the masses, literary gatekeeping by cultural elites enabled by the shibboleth of pronunciation was the response. Thus, Lockhart derisively argues that Keats was merely an “uneducated” “poetaster” who should have instead followed his true, utilitarian calling as an apothecary, rather than trying his hand at poetry (or, given Keats’s talents, to have not imitated the versification of Hunt) (519). In order to shore up fraying social and aesthetic distinctions, writing poetry was to be limited to those who possessed inspired talent and training in versification; writing classical themes was to be limited to those who possessed a gentleman’s education in the classics.

The concern that poetry was becoming popular was not simply a concern that the lower classes were writing verses. Among other examples of *metromania*, Gifford noted that “lords and dukes, cursed with a sickly taste” also suffer from *metromania* because they “riot on the sweepings of the stews” (45). In addition to the masses, then, the aristocracy could catch the disease of *metromania* too through having the bad taste to enjoy the verses of prostitutes, who, as fellow metromaniacs, should not be writing verse in the first place. Likewise, both Gifford and Lockhart celebrate Robert Burns, a peasant, as the exemplary poet. Thus, *metromania*, like “cockney rhyme,” were epithets not used solely to deride poetry spreading to the lower classes and to mock undereducated versifying technique. These epithets circulated to deride poetry spreading from the tasteful to those of bad taste, the inspired to the uninspired, from the special man or genius to everyman. Aesthetic and social hierarchies were feared to be changing; inspiration and education no longer underwrote the right to write; this led to gatekeeping as a response. Lockhart’s critique of Keats was both classed and not.

Print vs. Speech (Verse vs. Voice)

The politics of Keats' rhymes have been discussed by recent scholars.⁵³ In her article, "The Fallacy of the Cockney Rhyme: From Keats and Earlier to Auden" (1991), and again in her book *"Talking Proper": The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (2003), the English language historian Lynda Mugglestone briefly traces a history of the epithet "cockney rhyme." She does so to argue that, regarding pronunciation, prescriptive principle and actual practice between 1770-1920 were at odds. Nineteenth-century prescriptivist critiques of rhymes in which [r] was seen but not heard, such as "dawn ... morn," persisted, despite being at odds with how pronunciation had actually changed. "Long after the loss of *r* had been acknowledged as a prestige marker in ordinary speech," Mugglestone states, "the role of the so-called 'Cockney rhyme' as a stereotype of social and linguistic vulgarity continued, irrespective of the fallacies involved" (66). Beginning in the 1770s, in 1818 when Lockhart was critiquing Keats, and on into the early twentieth century, eliding the [r] was acceptable pronunciation, according to Mugglestone.⁵⁴

But the critique of rhymes that elide [r] as "cockney" persisted through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mugglestone argues, because 1770-1920 was "an age in which prestige is vested in the written word rather than the spoken" (66). Mugglestone points out that Lockhart condemned Keats as being "without ... learning enough to distinguish between the written language of Englishmen and the spoken jargon of Cockneys," as evidence for her argument that, between 1770-1920, writing, not speech, determined proper pronunciation and the validity of a rhyme (qtd. in *Talking Proper* 88). "Correctness [was] manifested in the written language.... Linguistic acceptability, like that conferred upon rhyming conventions, is therefore increasingly vested in the visual rather than the aural" (58).⁵⁵ Eliding the [r] (pronouncing "morn" as

“mawn”) may have been acceptable in speech, but it was unacceptable in writing: rhyme that elides [r] problematically “chimes to the ear and not to the eye” (66). In short, when it came to the rules of pronunciation and therefore the rules of rhyme, Mugglestone argues that writing held sway over speech. For Mugglestone, this was a “fallacy”: those who derided non-rhotic rhymes as “vulgar” were wrong to think so.

But while Mugglestone claims nineteenth-century prescriptivists valued writing over speech as the arbiter of propriety when it came to rhyme and to pronunciation, I argue that the opposite is true: prescriptivists asserted that, when judging written rhyme, ideas of proper speech and sound determined linguistic acceptability; voice underwrote verse. Lockhart did not criticize Keats’s rhymes that elide [r] because they were rhymes to the ear but not to the eye. Rather, Lockhart’s Scottish accent—which Mugglestone herself points to—suggests that Keats’ rhymes would have been imperfect rhymes to Lockhart. Lockhart criticized Keats in part because Lockhart deemed his northern / Scottish pronunciation more British and more educated than Keats’ southern / London pronunciation. In other words, Mugglestone’s evidence works against her argument, suggesting instead that the principle upon which Lockhart’s critique was based was not writing, but *speech* (an idea of proper pronunciation).

Indeed, the need to associate rhyme not with sight, but with sound—the need to hold onto an idea of voice when reading written verse, the need to believe that one heard more than saw while one read—intensified over the course of the nineteenth century. The increasing circulation of verse in print formats produced anxieties that poetry, which exists between an aural and a visual medium, was increasingly losing its sound and becoming silent, a purely visual mode. In response, poets and critics alike asserted poetry’s formal, sonic qualities, and even aestheticized poetry as “music.” While Mugglestone claims that rhyme had to chime to the eye and the ear in

order to be acceptable, readers and writers attacked not only imperfect rhyme but the subset of imperfect rhyme known as eye rhyme: rhymes like “wind ... mind” and “love ... prove” that rhymed only to the eye (“_ind ... _ind”; “_ove ... _ove”). In *A Handbook of Poetry* (1868), the periodical versifier and elocutionist J. E. Carpenter claimed, “There are many words ending in ‘ove,’ which have three distinct sounds, but which are used by some writers, as rhymes, indiscriminately: this is incorrect, and should at all times be especially avoided.... It is better to reconstruct a line ... than to let a false or slovenly rhyme pass” (9). In *The Rules of Rhyme* (1869), Tom Hood claimed that “sound [was] the test of rhyme, and the ear the only judge.... A ‘rhyme to the eye’ is an impossibility.... The union of sound alone constitutes rhyme” (45, 156). In “Rhyme and Reason” from *The Galaxy* (the predecessor of *Atlantic Monthly*) (1874), the American lawyer Brander Matthews, who edited Hood’s *The Rules of Rhyme* after Hood’s death, argued, “The expression ‘imperfect rhyme’ is self-contradictory. Sound is the only test of rhyme; a rhyme that is perfect to the ear is perfect in every respect. A rhyme ‘to the eye’ is an impossible absurdity. The essence of rhyme is identity of sound” (618). Later, in “An Enquiry as to Rhyme” published in the 1898 *Longman’s Magazine* (a British publication), Matthews, now professor of dramatic literature at Columbia University, reiterated his earlier point, “Rhyme has to do with pronunciation and not with orthography; rhyme is a match between sounds.... What is called a ‘rhyme to the eye’ is a flagrant impossibility.... The eye is not the judge of sound, any more than the nose is the judge of colour” (450). He concludes, “In spite of the invention of printing, or even of writing itself, the final appeal of poetry is still to the ear and not to the eye” (451).

Fin-de-siècle Victorians particularly resisted the incursions of print into verse culture. Treating poetry as an oral medium, they argued, meant that one could have unmediated access to the verse, enabling a poem to become one’s own. Print, on the other hand, was said to come

between the reader and the poem, interfering with the reader's aesthetic immersion. In "An Enquiry as to Rhyme," Matthews argues, "Even to-day, when the printing-press has us all under its wheels, it is by our tongues that we possess ourselves of the poetry we truly relish. A poem is not really ours till we know it by heart, and can say it to ourselves, or at least until we have read it aloud, and until we can quote it freely" (451). To connect with a poem, it must be heard, spoken, performed, materialized, brought to life, not read / seen.

The conservative MP and sheriff of Norfolk, Holcombe Ingleby, writes:

[E]ye-rhymes are very properly becoming recognized as a species of poetical license. These, if too frequently indulged in, would be destructive of rhyme, for poetry and painting have this distinction, that the one appeals to the mind through the ear and the other to the mind through the eye. It is true that the eye is often called into requisition in the former case, when poetry is dethroned from its proper office and is perused in private; but even then the sound is present in imagination, and poetry would not be poetry without that accompaniment (294).

Likewise, those who held onto an ideal of poetry as an oral medium—of verse as voice—did so to resist the longstanding transformation of verse under print culture into a private act of reading and to hold onto verse as a spoken mode of sociability. When Ingleby claimed, "poetry is dethroned from its proper office [when it] is perused in private" and when Matthews insisted, "[P]oetry is primarily meant to be spoken aloud rather than read silently," they give evidence of a fin-de-siècle concern that as poetry circulated more and more in print that it would no longer mediate sociability. The mediation of print therefore was felt to sunder what orality cohered: print divided reader from text, and reader from reader.

These claims are evidence that Mugglestone is mistaken when she argues that nineteenth-century readers valued writing over speech as the arbiter of linguistic acceptability. Rather, for many in the nineteenth century—particularly in the second half—the spoken word (an idea of proper pronunciation) determined the legitimacy of the written word. Ideas of voice underwrote verse. Poetry was “overheard” in the sense that its hearing was overdetermined by the conservative response to media change.

If speech more than writing determined linguistic acceptability in the nineteenth century, then important consequences follow for the study of media in the period. My interpretation complicates the work of critics who assert or assume that the nineteenth century was fully given over to print culture. In “Lyric,” published in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (2002), Matthew Rowlinson argues that what distinguished the pre-1800 lyric from the post-1800 lyric is that in the nineteenth century, lyric became “the product of print culture.” “[O]nly in the nineteenth century does print become for lyric the hegemonic medium,” writes Rowlinson, “with the result, on the one hand, that all lyric production takes place with a view to print, and on the other, that lyrics which had previously been circulated and received in other media are now remediated through print” (59). Victorian poets did “not understand themselves as located on the border between print and oral culture,” Rowlinson claims, because such a border no longer existed: print totalized (60). Rowlinson’s argument exemplifies the assumption—one shared by Mugglestone and others—that print by the nineteenth century was “hegemonic.”

The seeming hegemony of print, however, led many late-century Victorians to resist the transition. In the face of media change, they insisted poetry was an oral / aural genre, not a print genre, and they sought to recover, hold on to, manage, study judge, and transform the voice. They were invested in ideas of voice as an arbiter of verse, and particularly pronunciation as an

arbiter of rhyme, and vice versa: verse, when recited, was also a prescription for voice. To return to an ideal of orality, many became fascinated by form, which was understood as sonic, and taken by technique; many sought to aestheticize verse as “verbal music.” Readers and writers performed close listening on the sounds of rhyme, turning up the volume of verse, and directing their attentions on poetic detail. Indeed, as versification was education, displaying how nuanced one’s ear was became a performance of cultivation and class.

But even as many assumed verse and particularly rhyme was a record of voice, few could agree on how to interpret what was heard when one read a rhyme. As soon as someone made a claim whether the rhyme was perfect or imperfect, whether imperfect rhyme was allowable or not, and what constituted proper pronunciation, another would contradict that claim with an assertion of his or her own. While how well one rhymed was treated as a sign of the poet’s education and therefore cultivation and class, few agreed what education and class sounded like, or what class was heard when one read a rhyme. Arguments about proper pronunciation came to define what counted as proper rhyme (and vice versa), even as no one could agree what proper pronunciation was, as different speech communities vied to have their pronunciation become that of the nation.

Indeed, the idea of voice in verse was a generative problem for the Victorians, who were concerned with the problems of reading the voice in print. This chapter therefore parallels Eric Griffith’s *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (1989), which explores how poets exploited the relationship between print and speech, verse and voice, and how the uncertainty of hearing the poet’s true voice was productive for poets and is productive for readers. Poetry is a set of signs for the poet’s voice, Griffith assumes, and he considers how the poet translates voice into print

(through tone, stress, prosody, etc.), how the text hints at voicing, and how readers might create voice through reading.

But rather than assume the priority of a voice before a text or understand my role as close reading voice into being through attention to syntax and prosody, I recover the assumptions of contemporary readers. While they often agreed that verse was a record of voice, they could never agree as to what one heard when one read a rhyme, even as their attention was often focused on the end of lines for what they might reveal about the poet. In rhyme, readers thought they heard the sound of the poet's pronunciation and evidence of their technique, and therefore the poet's education and social class, but the relationship between rhyme and class was so variable as to prove incoherent. What emerged instead were various fantasies and anxieties about class being done and undone through rhyme—indeed, rhyme may have contributed to emerging class consciousness by generating a notion of class identity--as well as the reclassifying of types of rhyme to recodify rules for classes of rhymes and classes of persons.

Cockney Rhyme and Standardizing English

The argument between Lockhart and Keats was essentially between two antagonistic warrants for determining proper rhyme competing for legitimacy: i.e. two pronunciation systems—southern / London against northern / Scottish—competing to be the standard of British pronunciation. Keats occasionally paired words that relied on London's (non-rhotic) pronunciation to sound as perfect rhymes. In so doing, Keats made tacit arguments for the legitimacy of the oft-critiqued London dialect among the other regional dialects of Britain. Given that Lockhart was a Scotsman and Scottish is a rhotic language, however, Lockhart found offensive rhymes that aspirate the "r." His attack was not only Tory against radical, classical

educated versus undereducated, and country gentry versus urban upstarts, but also northern versus southern dialect: it was based not only in class and politics, but also nation and pronunciation. Mugglestone rightly notes, “Lockhart’s [censure of Keats’ rhymes] would also be intensified by his own regional origins; he was of Scottish birth, speaking a national dialect in which rhoticity is maintained in all positions even in the twentieth century. Such a fact would undoubtedly have increased his demonstrable antipathy to the loss *r* of as attested in Keats’s own rhymes” (63). Indeed, Lockhart opens his critique contrasting Keats with Robert Burns and Joanna Baillie, who, as Scottish poets, exemplified proper poets, as opposed to poets from London. Lockhart assumes that Scottish (rhotic) speech is standard British pronunciation but feels that Keats assumes that southern / London (non-rhotic) pronunciation is the standard. Thus, Lockhart asserts his northern / Scottish (rhotic) pronunciation as the standard while provincializing Keats as an illiterate speaker of a spoken jargon, too unsophisticated to realize that his London pronunciation is only acceptable in the city.

This argument over whose dialect—southern / London / non-rhotic vs. northern / Scottish / rhotic—was legitimate, even which should be the *lingua franca* for Britain, was not unique to Lockhart and Keats. Rather their argument was an effect of and contributed to a broader discourse of eighteenth and nineteenth century debates about which regional dialect should serve as the standard for British pronunciation. For example, in *The Pronunciation of the English Language* (the long subtitle concludes: *An Analytical Discussion and Vindication of the Dialect of Scotland*) (1799), the Scottish Jesuit and philologist Reverend James Adams anticipated Lockhart by arguing that the value of Scottish pronunciation was so great that it should be the *lingua franca* of all of Britain, thus unifying the nation:

Ramsay, Ferguson, and Burns, awake from your graves, you have already immortalized the Scotch dialect in raptured melody! Lend me your golden target and well pointed spear, that I may victoriously pursue to the extremity of South Britain reproachful Ignorance and Scorn still lurking there:-- let impartial Candor seize their usurped throne. Great, then, is the birth of this national Dialect.... In this favorable light we may place the origin of Scotch dialect, whilst *other dialects* of the English language are local corruptions, and carry with them the mark of defective education, and rustic ignorance.... The manly eloquence of the Scotch bar affords a singular pleasure to the candid English hearer (157-58, 160).

In this apostrophic, hyperbolic passage, puffed up with the hot air of nationalism heated to Chauvinism—anything but the “impartial Candor” that the statement claims to be—Adams, like Lockhart, argues that northern dialect should be the norm for the nation and therefore imposed on ignorant and scornful “South Britain.” Both Adams and Lockhart invoke Robert Burns, whose politicized performance of Scottish dialect fueled chauvinist claims that Scottish, not English, should be the speech of Britain.

Moreover, Adams, like Lockhart, genders pronunciation here. Lockhart calls Keats and his London coterie “cockneys” to imply that they are effeminate, overly civilized (and yet undereducated) “tea drinkers” in contradistinction to his rugged, northern, country, masculinity (stereotypes that persist today). Likewise, Adams claims that the Scottish burr is manly, and therefore would be welcomed as the norm throughout the nation because of the pleasure its masculine virility brings to the hearer.

William Wordsworth, a contemporary of Adams, may have disagreed. In “The Idiot Boy” from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes of Johnny, the idiot boy: “His lips with joy

they burr at you.... Burr, burr—now Johnny’s lips they burr, / As loud as any mill, or near it.... And Johnny’s lips they burr, burr, burr, / As on he goes beneath the moon” (19, 107-08, 115-16). In *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (2009), Andrew Elfenbein claims, “Although *Lyrical Ballads* features rural characters, it firmly avoids dialect representation. Even Johnny the ‘idiot boy,’ ... produced perfectly good English” (95). I argue just the opposite: “burr” refers to “A rough sounding of the letter r; spec. the rough uvular trill (= French r grasseyé) characteristic of the county of Northumberland, and found elsewhere as an individual peculiarity” (OED online). Rather than speaking *in* a burr, however, Johnny merely “burrs,” more sound than speech, somewhere between the murmur of rivers and the purr of a cat. Indeed, this poem, according to the OED, is the first to use “burr” as a verb, not a noun. Wordsworth treats the northern burr not as educated speech but as natural, onomatopoeic noise, suggesting northern pronunciation may sound incoherent to those from other areas. Wordsworth’s representation of northern accent as meaningless noise, however, is surprising. While Wordsworth was living in Somerset in south England when he wrote “The Idiot Boy,” he was born in Cumberland in the north. For Wordsworth, perhaps speaking with a southern accent was more appealing than a northern one. Yet Hiram Yorke affirms in Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* (1849), “‘A Yorkshire burr ... was as much better than a Cockney’s lisp, as a bull’s bellow than a ratton’s squeak’” (50).

While Adams and Lockhart asserted that Scottish dialect should be the lingua franca of Britain, the Irish educational writer and engineer Richard Lovel Edgeworth and his daughter, the novelist and educationist Maria Edgeworth, argued, more liberally, that Irish brogue should if not be made the standard for Britain, then certainly considered the most elegant form of speech in Britain. In *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1803), the Edgeworths disagreed directly with Adams. For them, neither Scotland nor England was the seat of proper speech; rather, Ireland was: “The Irish, in

general, speak *better English* than is commonly spoken by the natives of England” (151). The Edgeworths spend much of their time not explaining the value of Irish but devaluing the dialect of southern English, particularly the dialect of London:

Indeed the language peculiar to the metropolis, or the *cockney* dialect, is proverbially ridiculous. The londoners [sic], who look down with contempt upon all, that have not been *bred and born* within the sound of Bow, talk with unconscious absurdity of *weal* and *winegar*, and *vine* and *windors* and *idears*, and ask you *'ow* do you do? and *'ave ye bin taking* the *hair* in *'yde* park, and *'as* your *'orse* *'ad* any *hoats*, &c. aspirating always where they should not, and never aspirating where they would (153).

That lower-case “l” in “londoners” was done entirely deliberately to minimize. By claiming that “londoners ... look down with contempt upon all [outsiders],” the Edgeworths suggest that the epithet “cockney” is synonymous with ill education, but not yet entirely synonymous with lower class speech; class and vulgarity would merge in the term later in the century. Here cockneys are marked at once by both urbane arrogance and provincial ignorance. In the early nineteenth century, the epithet “cockney,” while derisive, was more an anti-urban, rather than anti-low-class epithet. Britain’s diversity of local dialects competed for acceptability, even to be the standard for Britain.

These debates about which regional dialect should be the standard for Britain continued through the nineteenth century and were often intertwined with debates about proper rhyme. As rhyme words only aligned sonically within a system of pronunciation, that pronunciation needed to be shared by many if the rhyme was to sound perfect and not imperfect for a broad audience. Proper pronunciation was therefore the warrant for determining proper rhyme; voice underwrote

verse. Over the course of the nineteenth century, especially in the second half when the rules of rhyme tightened and perfect rhyme was largely considered the only legitimate rhyme, debates about what constituted proper rhyme and proper pronunciation intensified and proliferated. But because no standard pronunciation existed, no one could settle whether a rhyme in question worked or not. Thus, these debates about rhyme and pronunciation invariably led various speech communities to argue that their dialect should become Standard English, the pronunciation of the nation.

For example, in the 1869 *Notes and Queries*, correspondents debated whether Sir Walter Scott's rhyme in *Rokeby*, "Ralph ... laugh," was cockney or not, despite Scott, given that he was a Scottish nationalist, having a particularly intense antipathy for non-rhotic rhymes. To settle this debate, however, correspondents first had first to settle how "Ralph" was pronounced (29). Stephen Jackson asserted that while "In Yorkshire we pronounce [Ralph] as if it were written *Raif*," in Scotland, "Ralph" was pronounced "Rarf," thus making Scott's rhyme "Ralph ... laugh" ironically "one of the cockniest of cockney rhymes" (29). But this assertion met quick disagreement because even participants within the same speech community could not agree on how to pronounce "Ralph." J. Dixon, for example, counters that "a thorough-bred Yorkshireman.... called him *Ralf*" (77). In Yorkshire, was "Ralph" pronounced "Raif" or "Ralf"? What this debate suggests is how uncertain proper pronunciation, even locally, within narrow speech communities, was. Moreover, the debate suggests how attendant Victorian readers were to rhyme as evidence for a poet's pronunciation, how attendant Victorian readers were to pronunciation for deciding the success of a rhyme, and what that voice in the verse might say about the technique of the poet, even his or her education and social class.

As we have seen, in the absence of a standard for pronunciation, pronunciations competed to be the standard. Inflamed with regional pride, speakers argued their regional dialects should be how the nation spoke. In a debate about the validity of eye rhyme in the 1897 *Notes and Queries*, Holcomb Ingleby claims, “I am not saying that the pronunciation of our educated society [whose seat is London and the South] is superior to that of many localities. Indeed, from the North comes a much more forcible and virile manner of speech, which is to be preferred to the colourless pattern in vogue” (294). Here, Ingleby argues that the association of a southern pronunciation with education is less justification for that pronunciation to be a standard than the association of pronunciation with appealing (masculine) sound: better to sound strong than smart.

“C. C. B.” however replies that neither the south nor the north pronounced English as well as the Midlands. The latter pronunciation was more musical and therefore more legitimate: “I am well aware that in educated society in London ... the letter *r* is frequently defrauded of its true sound, and I am not contending for the exaggerated *r* of Northumberland. In the Midlands we have a more excellent way than either. We preserve, I think, generally speaking, the true *r* sound, that of a trilled liquid, of the most musical sounds which our alphabet can boast” (357). Given “the superiority of the trilled *r*,” C. C. B. argues that poets from Gray to Tennyson must have pronounced it, even in opposition to the standard of educated London speech, and thus rhyming “born ... dawn,” even when Gray and Tennyson did it, is “not a true rhyme” (357). C. C. B. likewise writes, “I do say that the poet, being an artist in words, is bound to choose the most musical words he can, and to use every word so as to bring out fully all the music there is in it” (357). Educated speech, in other words, was not always the standard by which to judge what counts as proper pronunciation. Music or masculinity might also serve as warrants for why a

dialect should be the standard for Britain. Ingleby valued pronunciations that sounded rigorous and powerful; “C. C. B.” valued those that sounded delicate and musical. For Ingleby and C. C. B., the appealing sound of a dialect (whether that sound be masculine or musical, rough or smooth) rather than a dialect’s association with education and class, was the warrant for deciding which pronunciation would be the standard, and therefore what rhymes might be deemed proper.

As an aside, Ingleby’s argument above that London dialect is synonymous with educated dialect implies how much the location of proper speech over the course of the nineteenth century had moved from country to city. In the early nineteenth century, London pronunciation was called cockney because the urban signified provincial ill education, while proper speech was associated with the landed gentry of the countryside. By 1869, however, proper speech was associated not with the country but with the city. Alexander Ellis helped define Received Pronunciation as “the educated pronunciation of the metropolis, of the court, the pulpit, and the bar” (I. I. 23). London pronunciation now signified educated speech: rural had become provincial; urban had become urbane. This change from north to south, country to city, in what constituted educated pronunciation was engendered by migration from the country to the city. In the early nineteenth century, London was large but also still marginal; by the second half of the century, however, London was the center of England. Yet the critique of imperfect rhyming as “Cockney” persisted, despite urban dialect more than rural dialect defining proper speech.

No one could settle what proper pronunciation sounded like because everyone felt their speech should be the norm. I therefore disagree with Mugglestone when she argues, “[S]peakers could, in effect, come to recognize the discrepancy which exists between ideologies of a standard—the belief in what ‘good’ speech should be—and its corresponding patterns in terms of usage—even while the dominance of common value judgments often led them to adhere to the

former above the latter” (89). By pointing out that the Victorians recognized the distinction between practice and principle but asserted principle anyway, Mugglestone assumes that a single standard was coherent and recognizable in the nineteenth century. But as the above confirms, no single standard existed; the discourse about pronunciation was more complicated than how Mugglestone represents it. A diversity of local dialects competed for ideological dominance; what made one dialect more appealing might be its association with education, with music, or with virility, etc. Because no standard of English yet existed, the question of “what ‘good’ speech should be” was very much in question. So while Mugglestone points to a disjuncture between principle (how cultivated speech should sound) and practice (how the cultivated actually spoke), I point to disjunctures between *principles*, as regional dialects and local pronunciations competed to ascend to the standard of propriety for all of Great Britain.

Mugglestone, however, is right that the epithet “cockney” evolved in the nineteenth century from referring solely to elisions of [r] to “a term of abuse for all the linguistic sins of the age” (62). Indeed, cockney evolved beyond an epithet derisive of London dialect to become synonymous with improper pronunciation, and therefore ill education and thus signified vulgarity, regardless of locale. In other words, over the course of the nineteenth century, the epithet “cockney” moved from a term derisive of London dialect to a term derisive of low class speech and synonymous with low-class vulgarity.

But while Mugglestone is right to point out how the epithet was circulated to critique any linguistic sin, pointing out that few could agree what was or was not a linguistic sin is also important. What made someone sound cockney, and therefore what made a rhyme cockney, was rarely agreed upon. For example, even as Carpenter and Hood shared the same prescriptivist bent, they disagreed on what was proper rhyme. Carpenter ridiculed such unions of “art” and

“heart,” “Ear” and “Hear,” “hair” and “air,” “ale and hale” as assonances, not rhymes, implying that proper pronunciation elides the [h], and therefore the words would sound the same: there would not be enough difference in the likeness for the words to rhyme (10-11). Hood, however, entirely disagreed, stating a year later, “[Carpenter’s *Handbook*] pronounces as no rhyme “heart” and “art,” which to any but a cockney ear are perfect rhymes” (22). He goes on to write, “The aspirate to any but a Cockney would of course pass as constituting the needful difference at the beginning of a rhyme, as in ‘heart’ and ‘art,’ ‘hair’ and ‘air’” (45). In other words, for Hood, [h] should be pronounced, making the paired words not assonances but rhymes. Rather than a singular coherent standard of what proper pronunciation sounded like, a *heteroglossia* of speech practices competed for legitimacy: no consensus existed as to what pronunciation was cockney or not, what pronunciation was legitimate or not, or even how specific dialects sounded. Because each pronunciation was always at once being asserted by one and condemned by another, judging what was proper speech and therefore judging what was proper rhyme became impossible, even as everyone debated it. Thus, reading what education level, dialect, and social class were displayed in the sound play rhyme was at once both the norm and not possible. Verse was often read as the voice of the poet, but what that voice signified was at once clear and entirely questionable: the sound of rhyme was at once classed and unclassifiable.

Imperfect Rhyme

Keats and Lockhart are not only to be understood in a context of debates about the location of proper English pronunciation. Lockhart’s critique of cockney rhyme was also both an effect of and contributed to the growing disdain for imperfect rhyme that increased over the course of the nineteenth century. For Keats, rhymes like “thorns ... fawns,” “higher ... Thalia,”

and “ear . . . Cytherea” were perfect rhymes (and therefore inline with cultivated taste and exemplary of proper technique) because they were warranted by the non-rhotic, London pronunciation in which “thorns” sounded like “fawns,” etc. Lockhart’s Scottish pronunciation is rhotic, however, and he wants to assert Scottish pronunciation as the standard for Britain. If London dialect is unacceptable to most in Britain, then Keats’ pairings are imperfect rhymes, a sign of poor versifying technique, a criticism ratified by his seeming undereducation. (As an aside, while “cockney rhyme” emerged in 1818 as a derisive epithet for a form of imperfect rhyme that evinced what some called improper pronunciation, cockney rhyming slang emerged in the 1840s and has always been perfect rhyme. The publisher and writer John Camden Hotten’s 1859 *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words* helped codify “rhyming slang, the secret language of Chaunters and Patterers.”)

The epithet “cockney rhyme” when first coined by Lockhart, however, was relatively marginal among his many insults of Keats and Leigh Hunt. Indeed, Lockhart spent relatively little time critiquing the pronunciation that Keats’s rhymes evinced; he used the epithet “Cockney rhymes” only once, instead finding other ways of demeaning Keats’ ill education. But while the epithet “cockney rhyme” was a passing insult, redolent of intra-national concerns and directed at a hardly well-known poet, when it first appeared, the epithet had a considerable afterlife. “Cockney rhyme” circulated well beyond Keats to become not only an international phenomenon in England and America,⁵⁶ but also far more acute in the second half of the nineteenth century than in the first half. While Mugglestone shows that cockney rhyme was a concern across the nineteenth century, I go further than her by arguing that concerns about cockney rhyme intensified in the second half of the century, particularly after 1867, when the rules of rhyme, as my introduction points out, became more restricted.⁵⁷ The epithet “cockney

rhyme” became particularly prominent in social discourse after 1869 and peaked in circulation at the fin de siècle because imperfect rhyme was no longer allowable. Between 1870-1895, only perfect rhyme was legitimate rhyme.

To understand why imperfect or near rhyme fell out of favor, one has to return to Walker, whose 1775 *Dictionary* helped shape the rules of rhyme for a century. In his dictionary, Walker divided rhyme into two categories: perfect rhymes and “allowable rhymes” (what was also called “imperfect rhyme” and what we today call “near rhyme”). Imperfect rhyme had long been questionable practice because, as the name suggests, having rhymes that did not quite align suggested imperfect technique on the part of the poet and produced displeasure in the reader who was trained to expect regularity, the pleasurable play of expectation and satisfaction that makes rhyme produce in the reader what Simon Jarvis calls “bliss.”

Walker, who is rightly called a prescriptivist regarding pronunciation, was a descriptivist regarding rhyme, because he relied on the authority of esteemed poets, rather than prescriptively imposing his own rules, as to what should constitute legitimate rhyming practice. In short, for Walker, poetic practice, not prosodic principle, determined what counted as a legitimate rhyme. Because a longstanding tradition of poetic practice ratified the use of imperfect, eye rhymes such as “love” and “prove,” Walker argued imperfect rhymes are “allowable,” though less legitimate than perfect rhymes.⁵⁸ “[I]t would still be better to tolerate them, than cramp the imagination by the too narrow boundaries of exactly similar sounds” (np).⁵⁹ While Bysshe’s 1714 *British Parnassus* argued for the legitimacy of allowable rhymes as well (“no poem ... was ever yet composed of such perfect Rhymes ... But this shews in particular the Rhymes that are allowable in the English Poetry”), Walker claimed his “index to allowable rhymes is an attempt perfectly new.” Regardless of whether Bysshe’s or Walker’s rhyming dictionary was the first to canonize

as a law in poetic theory what had long been the norm in poetic practice, from 1775 to 1869, Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary* was *the* rhyming dictionary. For that reason, his admittance of "allowable rhymes" proved influential.

Over the 100 years between 1775 and 1869, however, imperfect rhyme and eye rhyme increasingly fell out of favor among a broad range of writers and readers. By the late 1860s, imperfect rhyme was so anathema that the rules of rhyme had to be rewritten to "disallow" imperfect rhyme and to allow only perfect rhyme. While the diversity of versification manuals published in the 1860s rarely achieved consensus in their arguments, they often shared similar assumptions about rhyme: they agreed that the rules of rhyme needed tightening, Walker's openness to license in rhyme was unacceptable, and perfect rhyme was the only legitimate rhyme. In "The Editor's Preface" to the 1865 edition of Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary*, the poet, lexicographer, and editor of Walker, John Longmuir, shows how much the taste for rhyme had changed in 100 years: "With regard to the ingenious Appendix, exhibiting *Perfect, nearly perfect, and allowable* rhymes,—had we been producing a new work instead of a new edition of a work of the former century, all that refers to *allowable* rhymes would certainly have been cancelled, as no longer tolerable to a poetic ear" (vi). While Walker in 1775 argued that imperfect rhyme should be allowable, a century later his editor overwrites Walker to say just the opposite. Three years later, in his chapter, "Rhymes," Carpenter writes, "Walker, whose object was apparently to make a big book, divides rhymes ... into two classes—'perfect' and 'allowable' rhymes. This idea I entirely repudiate: a rhyme is a rhyme or it is not" (14). In short, "rhymes should be perfect" (13). A year later, Hood states, "Walker admits and defends 'allowable' rhymes.... Now ... a *poet* may well be allowed to effect the compromise of sacrificing a rhyme

for a thought; but the versifier ... must have no such license. He must learn to walk before he runs” (20).⁶⁰

Not every contemporary prosodist agreed that imperfect rhymes should no longer be allowable. Edward Wadham in *English Versification* (1869), for instance, “emphatically impugn[ed]” the “small pedants” who argued “a perfect rhyme, or none at all”⁶¹ (115, 116). Wadham, however, admits that he is in the minority. As he points out, by the late 1860s, “public opinion” had come to believe that perfect rhyme now was the only acceptable rhyme. Imperfect rhymes now signified poor technique of the writer—their bad ear, hand, and mouth—and supposedly offended the ear of the reader. John Longmuir writes, when a writer uses perfect rhyme it produces “no inconsiderable pleasure” in the reader. But when a writer uses imperfect rhyme, “then the art of the rhymer, or rather his inability to manage his materials, becomes so palpable as to be offensive” (xliv).

The descriptivism that warranted Walker’s openness to imperfect rhymes (if poets used imperfect rhymes, then imperfect rhymes were acceptable) had, over the course of a century, given way to a prescriptivism (principle, not poetic practice, determined the rules of rhyme) that condemned their usage, and that insisted that perfect rhyme was the only legitimate rhyme.⁶² This transition was not simply the effect of prosodists imposing rules, but was engendered by a culture-wide change that was bottom up as well as top down; the emergence of Longmuir, Carpenter, Hood, et al. was both an effect as well as a cause of a change in aesthetic taste. Hearing, in other words, has a history, just as sound has a politics: the division between *nous* and noise was shifting, arbitrary, contested; while dissonance appealed to the ear in 1775, it was anathema by 1869.

This change in taste from 1770-1890 was due to two broad trends: one, the rise of a mass culture of undereducated, amateur versifiers and two, the rise of print culture, which changed writing and reading practices. The rise of a mass culture of versifying undermined and necessitated the shoring up of aesthetic hierarchies between elite and mass culture. In order to close the gates of official verse culture to the masses, whose untrained verse was often irregular in form but which could thrive in a verse culture whose rules of versification were loose, versifying and particularly rhyming were made difficult by narrowing the rules of rhyme. Now discerning the slipshod verses of an undereducated versifier from the poetic licenses of an elite poet supposedly would be made easier, even as poets themselves were supposed to write only in perfect rhyme. The hope was that as rhyming became more difficult, a spreading mass culture of versifying would be curtailed. Because training in versification was associated with a gentleman's education, to not only write within constraints (now bound even tighter) but also to master one's medium rather than to be mastered by it became a means of dividing the cultivated from the uncultivated, as only the well trained supposedly could do it. The purpose was to reconstruct aesthetic and social distinctions that the entrance of ever increasing numbers into the burgeoning Victorian verse culture had blurred.

As my introduction points out, verse manuals proliferated in the 1860s however to train amateur versifiers in the newly tightened rules of rhyme. They were therefore seen as contributing to the fall of the aesthetic into mass culture. But by insisting that amateurs follow the now narrow rules of rhyming, these verse manuals turned English versification into a discipline to educate the masses excluded from a gentleman's education in classical versification. This can be read equally as an elitist civilizing mission and a democratic offering of access to a form of education from which the masses were excluded but which, now that it was made

accessible, could offer cultural capital and therefore the possibility of social mobility. These verse manuals sought to sanitize a mass culture of amateur versifying to make it acceptable to official verse culture while preserving the aesthetic as a realm apart from mass culture.

Imperfect rhyme was said to be a problem for attention, distracting readers from the verse. Matthews argues that a poem's sonic repetition attaches a reader to a poem, focusing their limited attention. Thus, imperfect rhyme—breaks in the repetition of expectation and satisfaction—“shock” the reader's attention away from the poem's content to its form, robbing readers of their “dream of delight” (452). “If verse is something to be said or sung, if its appeal is to the ear primarily, if rhyme is a terminal identity of sound, then any theory of ‘allowable’ rhymes is impossible, since an ‘allowable’ rhyme is necessarily inexact, and thus may tend to withdraw attention from the matter of the poem to its manner.” Matthews goes on, “[T]he more accurately trained the ear is, the more likely these alliances are to annoy” (453). Rhyme, for Matthews, did more than bind lines into poems. Rhyme also bound readers to poems, managing and focusing their attention as they read. For Matthews, print prevents readers from accessing a poem, but the sound of rhyme enables one to possess and be possessed by verse.

Lastly, as rhyme was associated with pronunciation, imperfect rhymes sometimes sounded like improper pronunciation, which might undermine a poet's social class. Just as imperfect rhymes might reveal a poet's poor pronunciation, perfect rhymes would prescribe proper pronunciation for readers, whatever that might be. The condemnation of a mass culture's use of imperfect rhyme was put into the service of training a broad range of social groups in elocution and pronunciation. Perfect verses meant, for Hood, perfect voices. Prosodists associated verse with voice so that learning to versify would train the hands to write poetic sound, to tune the ears to hear poetic sound, and to educate the mouths to speak what was

becoming known as Received Pronunciation, even as no one could agree on what proper speech sounded like.⁶³

Pronouncing Rhyme

In *English Versification, 1570-1980* (1981), T. V. F. Brogan claims:

The First Axiom of prosodic analysis is that one is studying the sound a poem makes ... especially the precise sounds ... that were made when the poem was written, in a period prior to our own, when the phonetic structure of the English language was different ... from what it is now.... Certainly ... much of our information about pronunciation in the early stages of the language, for which reliable texts are rare, comes from the evidence of rhymes, and even though that approach is potentially circular (we assume that true rhymes were the rule rather than near-rhymes), the bulk and consistency of the evidence argue in its favor (54).

In other words, for Brogan, prosodists fundamentally assume not only the equation of verse and voice, but also that verse is an archive of past pronunciations, recorded in rhymes and recoverable across time.

Such axiomatic ideas were not always assumed, however. They may have been constructed in the nineteenth century in order to validate constraining the rules of rhyme to limit rhyming practices to perfect, rather than imperfect rhyme; attempting to standardize the pronunciation of English language by imposing a unifying norm; classifying poets based on the pronunciation that their rhymes evince; and seeking to either recover—or trouble—a fantasy of

essential English identity by recovering English voices, which they did by recovering English verse in order to read, or better, to hear the rhymes of the past.

Perfect rhyme was made the only legitimate rhyme practice because perfect rhyme was fundamental to the association of verse with voice, and more specifically, the association of rhyme with pronunciation. Indeed, prosodic texts proliferated in 1869 as both cause and effect of the growing social and cultural fascination held by many nativist Victorians with Englishness, which in this context took the form of the relationship of rhyme and the pronunciation of the English language, both in the past and in the present. If rhyme was perfect, then rhyme could have both descriptive and prescriptive functions regarding pronunciation: rhyme could serve both as a record or archive for how people pronounced English in the past, and rhyme could prescribe how people should pronounce English in the present.

The association of rhyme and pronunciation had become self-conscious and ideologically fraught since at least the late-eighteenth century. Walker's 1775 *Dictionary* made rhyme into an aid for learning (read: means for inculcating) proper pronunciation.⁶⁴ By organizing words by their endings rather than their beginnings (as in a standard dictionary)—in other words, by employing rhyme or *homoeteleuton* to organize language—Walker primarily sought to clarify the rules of spelling and pronunciation of written and spoken English. He sought to free spoken and written English from a confusing “ambiguity of sound” (xx, xxii), as well as, secondarily, to aid versifiers in the writing of rhymes. Organizing the English language by words whose endings sound the same would codify their proper pronunciation and syllabification.

Despite attempting to seem descriptivist by claiming that his dictionary represented “words as they are actually pronounced” (rather than as they *should* be pronounced), and by claiming that his dictionary was “observing the path which custom in language has taken” (rather

than *imposing* the path which language should take), Walker was in fact a prescriptivist regarding spelling and pronunciation. His claims to the otherwise were mere lip service. Using rhyme, he ultimately hoped to “regulate the pronunciation ever after” (xxi).⁶⁵ In the late-eighteenth century, therefore, rhyme was tacitly impressed into the service of ideology: the eighteenth century fascination with standardizing the English language.

While Walker sought to prescribe the rules of spelling and pronunciation, he had comparatively little interest in prescribing the rules of rhyme. The irony, however, is that while Walker intended to use rhyme to determine the rules of proper pronunciation, he also helped intensify the sense that the rules of proper pronunciation determined proper rhyme. While the rules of rhyming were trivial to Walker, the broad and growing range of readers who took rhyming practices seriously often relied on an imagined standard of pronunciation to judge how well words rhymed and therefore the technical qualities of the verse. Victorian readers often read a poet’s rhymes to judge how technically adroit a poet was, and, more importantly, how properly s/he pronounced the English language, which in turn was assumed to offer access to the poet’s social class even as no one could agree on how class sounded. Writing, proper versification, increasingly was linked to propriety with one’s mouth, proper elocution. A poet’s rhymes might “reveal,” even mark, that poet’s education, cultivation, and social class.

For example, in “The Pronunciation of ‘Orchestra,’” in the 1907 *Academy*, T. S. O. (probably the prosodist Thomas Stewart Omond), opens his odd query as to how one should pronounce “orchestra” by referring to the opening of Tennyson’s short poem, “The Beggar Maid.” “Tennyson rhymed ‘Cophetua’ to ‘say,’” T. S. O. notes, “because he was taught at school to pronounce it” (443). In “Rhyme, 1600-1900,” an appendix to volume three of *A History of English Prosody* (1910), George Saintsbury responds to Omond by defending Tennyson,

claiming that while “He had some peculiarities.... No well-bred Englishman ever was taught within the nineteenth century to call “Attila” ‘Attilay,’ or to address his sisters or his ladyloves as ‘Barbaray,’ ‘Mariay,’ etc.” (536-7). That Edwardian scholars debated how to properly pronounce “orchestra” shows how obsessive the need was to “fix” the pronunciation of English through the twentieth century. Likewise, turn-of-the-century readers would read a poem’s rhymes as signifying the poet’s technique and pronunciation, in both cases intimating the poet’s cultivation and class. Thus, Saintsbury defends Tennyson from Omond lest Tennyson’s reputation as “well-bred” start to seem spurious.

The growing disdain for imperfect rhyme and the growing fascination with “Englishness” (assumed to be located largely in pronunciation) over the course of the nineteenth century helped intensify concerns about the relationship of proper rhyme to proper speech. This intensification was both the cause and an effect of the simultaneous publication in 1869 of two blockbusters that used rhyme to respond to changes in the pronunciation of the English language: volume one of the phonetician and mathematician Alexander John Ellis’ monumental five-volume *On Early English Pronunciation*, and Hood’s immensely successful *The Rules of Rhyme*. Ellis and Hood represent opposite sides of the same ideological coin. While both assumed the value of perfect rhyme, their shared premise was put to entirely antithetical conclusions. Ellis, a descriptivist, used perfect rhyme philologically to recover how words were pronounced in the past. Hood, a prescriptivist, used perfect rhyme to impose how words should be pronounced in the present. Ellis celebrated language change as a sign of “the ever-active irrepressible vitality of language” (17). Hood conversely feared language change as a sign of its “deterioration” and sought to *fix* the English language, in every sense of the term (correct its changes and prevent its changing), through rhyme.

Both Ellis and Hood respond to Walker. For Ellis, Walker's prescriptivism of pronunciation practices was unacceptable; for Hood, Walker's descriptivism of rhyme practices was unacceptable. Ellis was attempting to modernize and scientize studies of pronunciation by repudiating the subjective prescriptivism that had marked eighteenth-century elocutionary manuals. In their place he hoped to establish objective, scientific, descriptivist studies of how words were pronounced. For that reason, Ellis condemns Walker's "insufficient knowledge" and "pedantic self-sufficiency" (Vol. 1 Vi. 6. 625). Conversely, Hood, hoping to tighten the rules of rhyme in order to train his contemporaries in proper pronunciation, derides Walker's allowing "imperfect rhymes." Taken together, Ellis and Hood exemplify the two poles—descriptivism, prescriptivism—of the Victorian debate about the relationship of rhyme to language change in which the politics of rhyme and the politics of pronunciation, education, national identity, and social class intertwined.

Ellis's *On Early English Pronunciation*, "the first major study of the history and current state of English pronunciation" (MacMahon online), used rhyme philologically to trace the history of changes in English pronunciation. To do so, Ellis tabled the rhymes of Chaucer and other English poets of the past:

[S]ince writing [in the 14th-16th centuries] was confined to a comparatively small number of persons, the majority of those who heard and enjoyed poetry would be ignorant of the spelling of the words. Hence the rhymes to be appreciated at all must have been rhymes to the ear, and not the modern monstrosity of rhymes to the eye. If we could have a manuscript in Chaucer's own handwriting, we should therefore expect to find all the rhymes perfect. Hence we might conclude that when two words rhymed together in one of Chaucer's couplets, they also rhymed

together in his pronunciation, and if they would not have rhymed together in the XVIth century, one of them must have altered.... In conformity with these principles the whole of the rhymes in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales ... have been carefully examined, and a system of pronunciation deduced for the XIVth century (27).

Like many of his contemporaries, Ellis infers that poets of the past wrote in perfect rhymes. If rhymes were perfect, then rhyme could serve as a recording device. As words only rhyme within systems of pronunciation, pronunciation was condensed and therefore preserved in perfect rhyme; the revolutions of rhyme were records of the sound of past pronunciation; verse in print granted an imagined access to voice, enabling present day readers, when reading the written rhymes of the past, to imagine themselves hearing past voices. Rhymes therefore offered preserved speech, an archive or record of pronunciation. Out of this context Brogan's axiom emerges.

Ellis's principles exemplify contemporary ideology. Like many of his contemporaries, Ellis believed that recovering how English was pronounced in the past was a valuable endeavor. Ellis was a member of the Early English Society, and, stimulated by the second-half-of-the-century fascination with Englishness of which he was both a cause and an effect, he sought to recover past pronunciations of English. While Meredith Martin argues that prosodists used meter to bind together a nation, for Ellis, using rhyme to recover the pronunciations of the past would show his contemporaries how changeable pronunciation was, which therefore would give the lie to the belief that sharing an unchanging language across time would cohere a national identity over time. Thus, Ellis argues against orthographic arguments like those in Archdeacon Julius Charles Hare's "On English Orthography" (1832), which celebrated a belief in the fixity of

language across time because it meant the unity of a people across time.⁶⁶ Disagreeing, Ellis argues that language change was a sign of language's "vitality." But while Ellis implied that language change meant diachronic disconnection, Ellis also points to synchronic unity. While England, like any nation, would always be marked by linguistic diversity and therefore division, "In the present day we may, however, recognize a received pronunciation all over the country, not widely differing in any particular locality, and admitting a certain degree of variety. It may be especially considered as the educated pronunciation of the metropolis, of the court, the pulpit, and the bar" (23). Constructing and imposing Received Pronunciation would become a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth project, even as codifying what norm counted as "educated pronunciation" would prove impossible.

Using rhyme to capture the pronunciation of the past became not only a reading practice through the end of the century but also a means of aesthetic judgment. Saintsbury's "Rhyme, 1600-1900," considers three centuries of rhyme almost entirely through the perspective of pronunciation. Saintsbury softens his critique of rhyming dictionaries as having "a bad effect on poetry" by admitting that they "helped to record the actual sound of rhymes at the time when the books were written" (538). To know how poets pronounced their rhymes, Saintsbury suggests, enables readers to properly judge their rhymes. For mid- to late-Victorian philologists and prosodists, through rhyme, the past literally speaks.

While Ellis used rhyme philologically to describe pronunciation in the past, Hood used the rules of rhyme to prescribe pronunciation in the present. Hood argues that the main value of teaching English versification is that it teaches proper English pronunciation, thus reaffirming English national identity and preventing linguistic and national degeneracy:

Were English versification taught in our schools, I believe the boys would acquire a better understanding and appreciation of their own tongue. With such training, a lad would shrink from a mispronunciation as he does from a false quantity in Latin or Greek. He would not fall into the slipshod way of pronouncing “doing” as if it were spelt “doin’,” “again” as if “agen,” and “written and spoken” as if “writtun and spokun” (ix).

Hood feared the English educational system did not sufficiently institutionalize the teaching of English to students, rich and poor, which resulted in “mispronunciation” (i.e. a diversity of pronunciations rather than a single, standard pronunciation, as well as what was considered a national problem of slurring). Mispronunciation meant language change, which in turn meant the incoherence of national identity and linguistic and national degeneration. Tightening the rules of English versification and training the populace in them would inculcate the proper sounds of English words, enabling Hood to achieve his “endeavor”: “to give fixity to our pronunciation” (xi). Hood had to argue against Walker’s allowance of imperfect rhyme. If rhyme was perfect, then it could be used to “fix” how the English pronounced their language, and if pronunciation was “fixed” then it could teach people how to properly rhyme. Repudiating imperfect rhyme for perfect rhyme, and defining what counted as perfect rhyme through standardizing pronunciation, would mean that if versification were taught in schools, Standard English would be inculcated in the populace. Proper versification would train proper speech and vice versa.

Even as Hood sought to disallow Walker’s openness to imperfect rhyme, Hood’s manual was as much an intensification of Walker’s ideas as it was a break from them. In using rhyme to prescribe pronunciation, Hood’s project is no different than Walker’s. The difference is in how

much cultural concerns about proper pronunciation and proper rhyme had intensified over a century. Motivating Hood's call for the founding of English as a discipline was his fear that the English language was deteriorating and required purification:

The purging of our pronunciation would be of general benefit. At present it is shifting and uncertain—because it is never taught.... [T]here being no standard set up, the pronunciation of English becomes every day more degraded by the mere force of the majority of uneducated vulgar. The Americanising of our language ... can only be checked by some such educational system. Surely the deterioration of our language is not a minor matter, and when it can be removed by the encouragement of verse-writing at our schools ... it seems astonishing that no effort has been made in that direction (x-xi).

Hood here wants versification to clarify English national identity. As “The purging of our pronunciation would be of general benefit” suggests, Hood's *The Rules of Rhyme* participated in the broader cultural discourse, prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century, of linguistic purism: both a nationalistic desire to define and promote proper Englishness and a xenophobic fear of foreign elements degrading the English language and culture. Hood, like many of his philologist contemporaries, from the poet and philologist William Barnes to the Cambridge philologist W. W. Skeat, sought to purge and purify English of foreign diction by founding English as a discipline.

The problem the Victorians faced when attempting to standardize pronunciation is that no one could decide what pronunciation would be proper. Everyone argued their own pronunciation should be the standard; as many pronunciations existed as standards. When Hood claims that the “correct pronunciation” of “‘sure’ and ‘assure,’ [is] of course... ‘shewre,’ ‘ashewre,’” his use of

dogmatic phrases like “of course” to imply the self-evidence of his claims reveals how unsettled the question of what proper pronunciation really was among Hood’s contemporaries. Even those contemporaries more-or-less ideologically aligned with Hood thought his pronunciation idiosyncratic. In Volume III of *A History of English Prosody* (1910), George Saintsbury agreed with Hood’s broader project of forestalling the popularization of poetry, but he also pointed out, “[Hood] is certainly wrong in forbidding ‘fire’ as two syllables” (443). Hood’s pronunciation was unique, but, like many, he asserted his as the norm.

In a similar vein, when Hood argues, “He would not make dissyllables [sic] of words like ‘fire’ and ‘mire,’ or of the trisyllable ‘really’” (ix), I believe that Hood’s overhearing was also a performance of his cultivation and class. The more nuanced ones hearing was, the finer distinctions one drew, meant the more tasteful and discerning one was. As versifying came under the threat of being totalized by mass culture, elites had to distinguish themselves as a class apart by publically playing up their cultivated ears. Thus, Hood heard more (or less) than anyone would ever read or hear in words like “fire” and “really” in order to display his ear for verse and his cultivation and class.

Revising Cockney Rhymes

Because imperfect rhyme, over the course of the nineteenth century, went from being allowable to anathema, to assess the merits of a poem, second-half-of-the-century readers would scan the verse and focus on details like rhyme. Working within constraint, the invariable writing of perfect rhymes, was the touchstone for many readers of poetic aptitude. But one imperfect rhyme might mar the success of not only a poem but also even a book of verse, as well as signify

poor technique on the part of a poet, form mastering the author rather than the author controlling his medium.

Thus, imperfect rhyme and cockney rhyme became problems particularly for poets in the second half of the century, who frequently had to revise their rhymes before or after publication as a result. For example, William Morris' sonnet "Summer Dawn" (excerpted below), when first published in *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems* (1858), contained a series of rhymes, "dawn ... corn ... dawn ... corn," that some contemporary readers considered cockney.

That are patiently waiting there for the dawn:
Patient and colorless, though Heaven's gold
Waits to float through them along with the sun.
Far out in the meadows, above the young corn,
The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises; the roses are dun;
Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn
Round the lone house in the midst of the corn.
Speak but one word to me over the corn,
Over the tender, bow'd locks of the corn (ll. 5-14)

In the conclusion to an anonymous review of *The Defence* in the 1858 *Literary Gazette*, the librarian and poet Richard Garnett averred, "The barbarous rhyme, *dawn* and *corn*, is but a sample of that carelessness of which the author must get the better if he is ever to rank as a master of his art. Still his volume is of itself a sufficient proof that it is not necessary to be a master in order to delight and astonish" (227). As "barbarous" suggests, versification was

associated with education; such rhymes may have signified coarseness and illiteracy in the poet, and were therefore possibly a sign of the author's education and social class.

Reviews of "Summer Dawn" were mixed when the poem first emerged. Concerns with imperfect rhyme, however, intensified over the course of the century, particularly after 1870, so that by the end of the century Morris had developed a reputation for being a cockney rhymers. As imperfect rhyme became less allowable, the pressure on Morris to alter his verses increased, and at the end of the century, he ambivalently revised his verses from three decades before. When Morris re-published "Summer Dawn" in the Kelmscott Press Edition of *The Defence of Guenevere* (1892), thirty-four years after he first published it, he revised "Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn" to "They pray the long gloom through for daylight new-born." This returned the [r] to one of his cockney rhymes so that rather than rhyming "dawn...corn ... dawn ... corn," the rhyme would now be "dawn ... corn ... born ...corn." In her introduction to William Morris' *Collected Works* (1910), Morris's daughter, May Morris, recounts:

In "Summer Dawn," the old line, "Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn" was changed to "They pray through long glooming for daylight new born" and ultimately appears as "They pray the long gloom through for daylight new-born." As we all know, the alteration was made under friendly pressure and my father was unconvinced of sin. "No one but a Scotchman makes any difference between dawn and morn," he said, leaving the rhyme a few lines higher up, moreover (xxvi).

William Morris frequently asserted the propriety of his southern / London speech against the northern / Scottish pronunciation of [r].⁶⁷ The bibliographer and forger Harry Forman, in *The Books of William Morris* (1897), still the standard bibliography of Morris's works, reminisces

when he asked Morris in 1875 to alter his rhyme “forth ... wrath” prior to publishing *The Aeneids of Virgil Done into English*. Morris responded, “‘not having had the misfortune of being born in Aberdeen,’ he had ‘no need to call happier people cocknies ... no south Englishman makes any difference in ordinary talk between dawn and morn for instance’” (41). A year later, the “cockney” rhyme “forth ... wrath” was in print. But while Morris argued that in his discourse community his rhymes were perfect, he nonetheless altered his verses at the end of the century. He was not the only poet to do so out of concern for his reputation. Tennyson encouraged his friend and near contemporary, the poet William Allingham, to revise his rhyme “arm ... calm” before publishing them. Likewise, Tennyson revised the first version of the *Lady of Shalott* so that “river” no longer rhymed with “lira” (cf. the writer George Birkbeck Hill’s “Letters of D. G. Rossetti I. 1854” in the 1896 *Atlantic Monthly*).

Understanding the concerns of poets over cockney rhyme can help us understand Victorian writing and reading practices. What the above suggests is that writers and readers participated in constructing the ideological climate, and how in turn that ideological climate shaped the choices of Victorian poets when writing their rhymes. Likewise, what the above suggests is how much Victorian readers scrutinized the rhymes of poets, listening while they read for any discrepancy of sound where none should be, and condemning the poet as at best technically maladroit and at worst ill educated and low class for any less than perfect rhymes. Rhyme fascinated the Victorians because rhyme revealed the poet: rhyme was thought to offer access to the poet’s voice and voice offered access to a host of ideological meanings related to social class and birthplace. Thus, rhyme became freighted with a weight of ideological significance in the nineteenth century, a heavy burden in the second half when the rules of rhyming tightened.

“Cockney rhyme. Cf. Keats and Mrs. Browning”

The change in taste from imperfect rhyme as allowable prior to the 1860s to anathema after the 1860s had considerable repercussions for the reception of EBB’s rhymes, which underwent a reversal of fortune after 1860 when tastes changed. EBB’s experiments with employing assonances as rhymes—“win her ... **Corrina**” in “Queen Annelida and False Arcite” (1841) and “**honest** ... **admonisht**,” “**silence** ... **islands**,” and “**iron** ... **inspiring**” in “The Dead Pan” (1844)—were understood by many contemporaries as an experiment in Anglicizing Spanish *rima asonante*. *Rima asonante* is a type of imperfect rhyme as only the last stressed vowel, regardless of the consonants that follow, rhymes (*Rima consonante* is perfect rhyme as both the vowel and the consonants that follow rhyme.) Soon after EBB drafted “The Dead Pan,” her friend, the writer Richard Hengist Horne asked EBB if rhymes like “silence ... islands” “were not intended as absolute rhymes at all, but euphonious quantities of the *rima asonante* class?” (260). “I mean to try it,” EBB replied, claiming that she planned to “hazard some experiments” with *rima asonante* to see “how soon the ear may be satisfied by a recurring vowel” (120-1). Thus, the curious title of her famous, “translated” sonnet sequence, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) may refer as much to EBB’s experiments with Iberian rhyme as it does supposedly to Robert Browning’s nickname for her.⁶⁸

During her lifetime, EBB’s experiments with imperfect rhyme were met with mixed reviews. On the one hand, EBB’s friend, the writer Mary Russell Mitford, accounted for EBB’s imperfect rhymes by claiming, like many of EBB’s biographers, that EBB did not get out enough. This isolation made her unaware of proper pronunciation: she mistakenly thought her rhymes were perfect when in fact they were not (Reported in Horne Vol. 2 132-33; Cf. Hayter 38-39, Morlier 97). On the other hand, Horne expressed surprise at how well her imperfect

rhymes were received: “Strange to say, while various unfortunate men have received the severest censure for trifling licenses, [EBB] has but seldom been called to account for her numerous violations of all received principles of English rhyme” (259).

Indeed, during her lifetime, her rhyme experiments were also singled out for praise. In 1860, a year before EBB’s death, the American philologist, ambassador, and conservationist George Perkins Marsh published *Lectures on the English Language*, a series of thirty lectures that he had given the year before at Columbia University. Marsh was a nativist ideologue of linguistic purism. While he admitted that Latinate diction enriched English and while he knew that purging English of its Latinate words to return to a pure Saxon tongue was impossible, he hoped that restoring lost Saxon words to English would be “of the greatest benefits to our literature.” That justified “the study of our ancient mother-tongue” alongside the classics.

Marsh claimed that EBB’s assonant rhymes helped recover the native Saxon tongue. He used statistical analysis to support his claim that the diction of “Cry of the Children,” for example, was 92% Anglo-Saxon and only 8% Latinate (Lecture VI). Because EBB “always prefers the Saxon word where choice is possible,” Marsh claims that she is “one of the very first English poets of this age, the first female poet of any age.” “I ascribe to this preference her employment of assonant or vowel-rhymes, to an extent that a more timid poet would scarcely venture upon” (565). Marsh knew that assonant rhymes were associated with the Iberian peninsula. But he also believed that the use of assonance as a poetic license encouraged the use of Saxon diction. Importing a model from Iberia ironically made possible the purification of English of Latinate diction. For Marsh, how one rhymed was a significant political act that might undermine or solidify an English national identity, which seemed in the second half of the century to be fraying and in need of repair.

More ironic is the fact that while during her lifetime, Marsh understood EBB's experimental rhymes as purifying the English language, after 1869, when the rules of rhyme tightened so that poetic license in rhyme was an oxymoron, far more readers understood EBB's experimental rhymes as corrupting the English language. The afterlife of EBB's rhymes underwent a reversal of fortune as the ideology of what counted as legitimate rhyme changed in the late 1860s. When EBB was alive, imperfect rhyme was allowable, if frowned upon. Thus, the reputation of her experimental verses was mixed. But when verse manuals like Carpenter's and Hood's made perfect rhyme the only legitimate rhyme around 1870, EBB's use of experimental rhymes was no longer acceptable, and her posthumous reputation plummeted.

I am not the first scholar to point out that EBB's "imperfect rhymes" were controversial in the second half of the century. In "Mrs. Browning's Rhymes" (1939), Fred Manning Smith opens quickly outlining "the Victorian criticism of her rhymes" from Poe to Saintsbury in order to argue for a reevaluation of her rhymes, warranted by the advent of a new aesthetic ideology. As the Victorians were "[a]ccustomed ... to convention and imitation, [they] said she had a bad ear," but as "we" Moderns are "[a]ccustomed ... to experimentation," her rhymes, Smith argues, are in fact valuable and her rhymes' reputation needs revision from critique to praise (829-30). In *Mrs. Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting* (1962), Alethea Hayter similarly points out the criticisms contemporaries leveled against EBB's rhymes, "The chief charges brought against Mrs. Browning's technique are those of perverse and affected obscurity ... and careless cacophony in rhyming." That done, like Smith, Hayter then defends the value of EBB's rhymes for their experiment: "Her oddities of diction and rhyme were unquestionably deliberate" (40, 38). While EBB's "ear was just not fine enough ... it was not as tone-deaf as her critics thought. [S]he introduced a freedom which has been of the greatest service to her successors" from

Rossetti to the Moderns (47). More recently, in “*Sonnets from the Portuguese* and the Politics of Rhyme” (1999), Margaret Morlier similarly opens quickly outlining the “Victorian reviewers” critiques of EBB’s “faulty craft” in order to follow Smith’s call for a “reevaluation” of EBB’s rhymes. Like Smith and Hayter, Morlier argues that the Victorians got EBB’s rhymes wrong; Morlier “reassesses [the rhymes of the *Sonnets*] in line with some recent feminist work that questions the seemingly artless ‘sincerity’ that Victorian reviewers so praised.” She does so to show that EBB’s use of imperfect or near rhyme was not a sign of poor technique but a political strategy at once inconsistently “subversive and elitist” and therefore “at ideological cross-purposes” (97-98). Morlier suggests that the complex ideologies embedded in her rhymes were too complicated for her contemporary readers, leaving them “at a loss to recognize or to interpret [her] rhyming experiments,” thus leaving interpreting EBB’s rhymes for Morlier to do (102). In sum, the nineteenth-century’s reception of EBB’s rhymes tends to be criticized by twentieth-century scholars of EBB’s rhymes. They imply that Victorian readers did not, even could not, properly appreciate her rhymes, while twentieth-century readers can and do.

This tradition of criticism is symptomatic of a twentieth-century way of thinking about nineteenth-century rhyme and Victorian poetry more broadly: that Victorian poetry needs to be rescued from Victorian readers. But why did the Victorians react so negatively to EBB’s rhymes? Were they simply the dupes of their own benighted assumptions, which twentieth-century critics see as conservative formally (Smith, Hayter) or conservative politically (Morlier)? Might their reactions, if considered rather than dismissed, reveal anything interesting about how rhyme was understood? Rather than “reassess” EBB’s rhymes, which risks appropriating them from the historical contexts in which they circulated and signified, I dwell on her mid- to late-century reception. I do so to recover and understand some ways rhyme was thought about in the

second half of the century and the curious role EBB played in that discourse, while also reading that assessment from the present moment. While recent critics have noted that the Victorians held EBB's rhymes in ill repute, what I contribute is that after 1869 she joined John Keats as the figure for "Cockney rhyme." Her rhymes became central to prescriptivist anxieties about the degeneration of the English language. More than gendering EBB's rhymes, male critics so sexualized them that they did not produce a poetics—so much as an erotics—of rhyme, turning cockney rhyme from a classed epithet into a gendered and sexualized one.

Indeed, by the end of the century, EBB's rhymes, nearly as much as Keats's, had become exemplary of cockney rhyme. In their edits of a draft of R. L. Stevenson's book of children's verse, *Penny Whistles* (1885) (later titled *A Child's Garden of Verses*), Stevenson's friends, the literary critic Sidney Colvin and the poet W. E. Henley, noted that in a draft of the poem, "Good and Bad Children," Stevenson had unwittingly written a few cockney rhymes, such as "bewildering . . . children." To elucidate "Cockney rhyme," Henley added: "Cf. Keats and Mrs. Browning." In other words, at the fin de siècle, EBB had joined Keats as exemplary of cockney rhyme (Stevenson, *Selected Letters*, 238). Not long after, in "An Enquiry as to Rhyme" (1898), Matthews frequently condemned EBB's "Cockney recklessness." At the same time, in *A Short History of English Literature* (1898), the historian of prosody George Saintsbury singled out EBB—"scarcely any [English poet] illustrates by defect the importance of poetic style so much as Mrs. Browning"—as exemplifying cockney rhyme. "The dullness or falseness of her ear for consonance of sound was quite unparalleled," writes Saintsbury, "and she, with all the advantages of gentle birth, feminine sex, country breeding, and an almost scholarly education, confuses rhymes in a manner usually supposed to be limited to the lower class of cockneys" (738).

In other words, the class epithet, cockney rhyme, was also gendered. First, Saintsbury assumes that not only are “gentle birth,” “country breeding,” and “scholarly education” (Saintsbury says “*almost* scholarly education” because her gender omitted her from classical study) antonyms of the low-class cockney, but so too is “feminine sex.” Femininity, for Saintsbury, implies an advantage towards refined speech, possibly even polished versification, suggesting an equation between gender and refinement, sex and speech. Mugglestone argues that in the second half of the century, women, more than men, were made responsible for preserving the purity of the language. “Guardians of the moral right and wrong, ladies were thus envisaged as assuming the role of guardians of the language, with responsibilities not merely for personal standards of use but for the language as a whole” (144).

This disjuncture between the principle of what women were expected to be and EBB’s practice might explain Saintsbury’s excessive response to EBB’s experimental rhymes. He called her rhymes “atrocious,” “disgusting,” “so hideous” that “they need not sully this page,” and characterized by “a general slatternliness.” Saintsbury concluded that EBB is “Perhaps the worst rhymester in the English language” (212, 299 (738)). Despite employing similarly licentious rhymes, Robert Browning is spared Saintsbury’s critique. EBB’s near rhymes are “false,” for Saintsbury; Robert Browning’s near rhymes, however, are “often violent, but never false” (19). Saintsbury’s out-of-proportion disgust for EBB’s rule-breaking rhymes may have resulted from his perception that she violated the expectations of her gender when she employed rhymes that seemed to be based in a cockney pronunciation. Women, more than men, were expected to speak properly and, by preserving the purity of the language, to preserve the purity of the nation.

When “cockney rhyme” first emerged in 1818, it bore connotations of urban male effeminacy. A century later, “cockney rhyme” bore connotations of a sexually unrestrained

woman. Saintsbury's claim that EBB's rhymes exemplify "a general slatternliness," equates loose rhymes with loose women. EBB's "slattern" rhymes needed a husband to return them to the realm of respectability. Saintsbury therefore praises Robert Browning for "restraining or reforming the worst faults of his wife's maiden work," especially "her appalling false rhymes" (18-19). Edmund Gosse (1896) likewise claims that the quality of EBB's verse peaked during "the short space during which Robert Browning visited her as her affianced lover, and it is not singular, perhaps, but it is at least very interesting and pleasing, to find her writings at that moment less affected than any other time, before or afterwards, by the errors that beset her" (5). When she was single, EBB's licentious rhymes were threateningly loose and therefore "appalling," requiring a husband to police them. EBB's style was saved when a slattern became a wife.

One irony is that the Brownings' marriage, which produced a scandal within her family at mid century, at the end of the century critics saw as redeeming her rhymes. Another irony is that being off the market made her and her rhymes marketable. And yet a third irony is that while "cockney" was circulated to deride weak men at the start of the century, at the end of the century "cockney" was circulated to deride willful women. Warped rhymes were associated with bent gender. In "An Enquiry as to Rhyme," Brander Matthews employs the metaphor of marriage to describe rhyme. Rather than "the dress of the well-bred woman, which sets off her beauty without attracting attention to itself," Matthews concludes, "rhyme must be adequate and unobtrusive." In other words, rhyme must be a good wife rather than a "slattern." For these fin-de-siècle critics, loose women, like loose rhymes, must tie the knot.

While cockney rhyme became a class epithet in the nineteenth century to criticize license in rhyme, cockney rhyme also became a gendered and sexualized epithet at the end of the

century. Particularly, for a single woman to break the rules of rhyme threatened the sexual-textual authority of male critics by suggesting the sexual authority of female author. Such audacity on the part of women was too assertive. To police female sexuality and female writing, loose, dissonant rhymes became equated with the threatening sexual energy of loose, sexually promiscuous women. These critics eroticized women's rhyme.

Moreover, while scholars today mention that EBB's rhymes were poorly received by many Victorians, my research pinpoints and explains a transition in EBB's reception beginning in the 1860s from the occasional belief that her rhymes that might purify the English language to the consensus that her rhymes would corrupt the English language. This reversal of fortune was engendered by a post-1860s change in the rules of rhyme. I thus offer a more historicized way to understand the changing fortunes of poets beyond EBB by recovering the broader social discourse of rhyme.

Rhyme without the "Aitch"

Earlier, I mentioned that poets might be critiqued as cockney rhymers for employing rhymes that elided the pronunciation of [h], as when Hood concluded his section "Of Rhyme" by claiming that cockney rhymes "stamp [verses] with vulgarity, as surely as the dropping of the 'h' stamps a speaker" (48)). What is ironic, however, is that while some critics of cockney rhyme, like Hood, argued that poets should "pronounce" the [h] when rhyming in order to purify the English language, a related coterie of philologists, lexicographers, and prosodists in the second half of the century argued that the word "rhyme" should be spelled *without* an "h" to purify the English language. Buried in the OED's etymology of "rhyme" is the following note: "[I]n about 1870 [the] use [of the original spelling *rime*] was considerably revived, especially by writers on

the history of the English language or its literature. To some extent this revival was due to the belief that the word was of native origin, and represented Old English *rīm* rime n.2” (online). In what follows, I expand on the OED’s note by showing how rhyme—its pronunciation and its spelling—came to figure prominently in the second-half-of-the-century concern that the authentic English language, and by extension authentic English identity, was under threat from the influx of foreign, Latinate diction and needed preservation, even purification in order to shore up English national identity. As the classics gave way to the vernacular, cultural investments in rhyme intensified.

Nativists argued that the spelling of rhyme as “rhyme” was a modern revision based on a mistaken etymology that assumed “rhyme” derived from the Latin “rhythmus.” Returning “rhyme” to its authentic spelling as “rime” would return the word to its “true” “Gothic” / Saxon spelling and thus further purify the English language of corrupting foreign, Latinate diction. Similarly, returning “rhyme” to its authentic spelling as “rime” would claim rhyme as an essentially English mode of versification by showing rhyme’s origins as not only a Saxon word but also a Saxon practice. Claiming rhyme as originally English would offer a strong argument against the classical prosodists who stressed meter, rather than rhyme, as the most authoritative versifying mode, and thus settle the longstanding debate about whether rhyme or meter was the more legitimate mode of poetic production.

While Hood did not argue for spelling “rhyme” without “h,” his investment in rhyme was similarly associated with anxieties about the degeneracy of the English language and a desire for linguistic purity associated with returning English to its Anglo-Saxon roots. Like Marsh, Hood shared the belief that “our special strength of diction comes from the Anglo-Saxon; and fortunate is it, that that primitive form of speech still forms the chief constituent of the national language

of Britain” (188). “Moreover, there has been evinced of late, it is painful to add, a growing tendency to cultivate Gallicisms [Latinated diction], to a still greater extent than has been done amongst us, and to the repression of our true native vocabulary” (198). Marsh and Hood both exemplify the desire, prevalent in the second half of the century, to purify the English language, and thus to purify English national identity, of foreign, Latinated elements, and to return the English language and identity to its “pure,” authentic, “Gothic” / Saxon roots. To preserve the English language, even to return it to its “roots,” was to preserve an imagined, coherent, English national identity. This desire to purify the language was spurred by anxieties about language change intensified by an increasingly interconnected, globalized, and modernized world, which led to nationalism as a response.

While arguments for spelling “rhyme” as “rime” intensified after 1850, they began in 1775, when the literary critic and Chaucerian Thomas Tyrwhitt published *The ‘Canterbury tales’ of Chaucer, to which are added an essay upon his language and versification, an introductory discourse and notes in four volumes*. In it, Tyrwhitt, who was also a noted classicist, adopted Chaucer’s spelling of “rhyme” as “rime,” implicitly arguing for a return to the roots of “authentic” Englishness. Tyrwhitt published *The ‘Canterbury tales’ of Chaucer* the same year (1775) that Walker published his *Dictionary*: together they exemplify the neoclassical fascination, best exemplified by Samuel Johnson, with English language orthoepy and grammar.

Arguments for spelling “rhyme” as “rime” were renewed by the lexicographer John Ogilvie, whose *The Imperial Dictionary* (1847-50) revised and enlarged Webster’s *English Dictionary*. The entry for “Rhyme” gives its etymological history as having derived from the Saxon *rim*; it argues, “The Romance forms ... are no doubt from the Teutonic, and not from L *rhythmus*.... The latter word has, however, affected the spelling of *rhyme*, which would be more

correctly written *rime*, as in Old English and by some modern writers” (705). While this etymology was in small print, it was nonetheless an ideological argument for returning English to its Saxon roots and associating rhyme with Englishness.⁶⁹

George Perkins Marsh was the first to prominently argue for spelling “rhyme” as “rime.” In “Lecture XXIII: Rhyme,” of *Lectures on the English Language* (1860), Marsh briefly argues that “rhyme” is more properly spelled “rime” because that was how the Goths, who eventually became the Anglo-Saxons, spelled it:

The word *rhyme* is not derived from the Graeco-Latin *rhythmus*. It is of original Gothic stock, and ought to cast off the Greek garb, in which the pedantic affectation of classical partialities and the desire to help the theory which ascribes to the thing, as well as to the name, a Latin origin, have dressed it. The proper spelling is simply *rime*, and though rhyming cannot be shown to have been practiced among the Gothic tribes earlier than elsewhere in Europe and the East, yet it probably sprung up among them spontaneously, as the natural poetical form of the language, just as it did among some of the Oriental nations. In any event, the current supposition that its first invention belongs to the monkish poetry of the middle ages, and that other modern theory which traces it to the Celtic bards, rest alike on a very insufficient foundation. But whether it was indigenous to the Gothic nations or not, it fell in so naturally with the love of alliteration and other coincidence of sound which characterizes all the branches of that great family, that it found ready acceptance among them as soon as models of rhyming versification were presented to them (509).

Against the theories in circulation that argued rhyme was originally Roman, Monkish, or Asiatic, Marsh argues that “rhyme,” or rather “rime,” is not a Greco-Latin word or practice but is instead Germanic and therefore indigenous: an essentially English (and therefore American) word and practice, the practice of which preserves essential Englishness.

For Marsh and his contemporaries in England and America, the stakes were high. The use of “foreign,” Latinate words to versify, for Marsh, threatened to “denationaliz[e] our poetry” (526). To “increase the proportion of Latin words in our poetic dialect” was “certainly a very serious evil, as it involves a sacrifice of purity of diction, and of a genuine native vocabulary ... and a taste perverted if not depraved by the study of foreign models” (538). Indeed, English poets have committed “mischief ... to the language by employing aliens as substitutes for worthier aboriginals” (539). For Marsh, a specialist in Icelandic, the solution was “a bold return to our ancient tongue” where poets will find “unexhausted, though long neglected, mines of ores and gems” (515). Marsh’s ideology was well received. By 1863, *Lectures on the English Language* had gone through four editions, a rate of more than one new edition per year.

Marsh was implicitly arguing against the long tradition of classicists from George Puttenham and Milton through Marsh’s era who argued that rhyme was an inauthentic, modern invention of medieval monks and therefore lacked the authority, because it lacked the tradition, of Classical prosodic models that emphasized meter as the proper mode of English verse. The seeming originality of the classics was, for Puttenham and others, the warrant that made classical poetics the proper mode for English poetics. This, however, might mean treating rhyme as a lesser form and establishing blank verse as *the* mode of English versification.

Marsh and others, however, wanted specifically to hold onto rhyme in English verse, more generally to free English poetics from classical prosodic models, and most broadly to purge

the English language, culture, and identity of classical influence: all in order to purify an increasingly incoherent and seemingly fraying English identity. If rhyme as a word and practice is rooted in Old Germanic, then they felt that rhyme is as old and therefore as legitimate as the non-rhyming, metrical versification of the classics. Thus, Saxon rhyme was invested with just as much authority as prosodic models based on classical meter, which meant that rhyme was not a trivial practice but an assertion of essential English identity, the practice of which might re-cohere the fraying borders of the nation.

A year after Marsh's lectures, the column "Spelling" from the 1861 *Saturday Review* similarly lamented, among other corruptions of the English language, that "the good old Teutonic word, *Rim, reim, rime* ... has been distorted into *rhyme*, from a notion of it having something to do with the Greek [rhythmus]" (164). While the column resists going as far as Marsh's call for returning English to its Anglo-Saxon roots—"The practical lesson which we would draw is not to go back to any forms, however accurate, which have now become quite archaic"—it does wish "to resist further innovation" in the English language. "As almost every innovation comes from the side of inaccuracy, and involves the destruction of some further piece of history, those who are careful of the purity of their native tongue will not think it beneath them to keep their eye upon the matter" (165). While "rhyme" is one of many words this column derides as impure, the spelling of "rhyme" became a particular focus for linguistic purists, lexicographers, and historians of the English language and literature in part because of the desire to claim rhyming as an authentic English practice.

Soon after, in an article "Uncommon Rhymes: Whiskey, etc." in the 3 February 1866 *Notes and Queries* [see my Introduction and Chapter 4 for more on the phenomenon of "Uncommon Rhyme], the Cambridge philologist and contributor to the *Oxford English*

Dictionary Walter William Skeat wrote, as an aside, “May I suggest, too, that ‘rhyme’ ought to be spelt *rime*; and that the present spelling is a mistake, due to confusion with *rhythm*?... I appeal to the usage of Chaucer, and all the authors from his time to that of Spenser” (102). Skeat’s aside inaugurated a thirty-year debate in *Notes and Queries* that lasted until the end of the century. As Skeat notes in “Rhyme” from the 29 November 1873 *Notes and Queries*, “The question about the spelling of [rhyme] is one of those that continually recurs” (431). When the lawyer and antiquary George Vere Irving dissented in the 24 February 1866 *Notes and Queries* by claiming that “rime” had more to do with “a reckoning” or “hoarfrost” than with binding lines of poetry, Skeat responded a month later in the 31 March 1866 *Notes and Queries* by appealing to the authority of Shakespeare. According to Skeat, Shakespeare invariably used “rime” rather than “rhyme,” and that the “introduction of *h* into the word” was a “pedantic innovation” (265). In the 7 December 1867 *Notes and Queries*, Skeat re-asserted that “rhyme” was more properly spelt “rime” because the addition of “h” to the spelling was “giving a Greek commencement to a Saxon word; and this was thought so happy and *classical* an emendation, that nearly everyone has followed suit ever since” (464).

Skeat’s nationalist arguments that “Rime” is “a true English word” informed his and others arguments for the founding of English as a discipline alongside the study of Classical languages and literatures. The “prevalence [of rhyme rather than rime] is no doubt due to ... Englishmen know[ing] a great deal more about Latin and Greek than about the history of their own language,” Skeat laments in “Rhyme” from the 29 November 1873 *Notes and Queries*. “Many a man knows all about the minutest points of Latin or Greek scholarship, and yet cannot read six consecutive lines of Chaucer” (431). The philologist and co-founder of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, F. J. Furnivall supported Skeat, when Furnivall, in his characteristic

aggressiveness, snapped in a note published alongside Skeat's, "What has any student of English to do with Anglo-Saxon? Nothing, of course. No English gentleman would think of opening a book in the language, or deign to suppose that Chaucer wrote English, or could spell. And as to looking at any dictionary to know the history of a word, why, it's plain nonsense" (432).

Furnivall, like Skeat, explicitly laments that his countrymen are unaware of this history of their own language, and thus he implicitly argues for the founding of English as a discipline (as well as the value of *The Oxford English Dictionary*). Furnivall goes on to argue, "And I think that any Victorian Englishman, who wants to cleanse our spelling from a stupid Elizabethan impurity, generated by ignorance and false analogy, should now spell either as Mr. Skeat or I do" (432). The ideology of linguistic purism found a strange bedfellow in rhyme, revising its spelling to purify the English language, claim rhyme as English, legitimize the publication of prescriptivist dictionaries, and establish English language and literature as a discipline.

Through the end of the century, scholars continued to argue for spelling "rhyme" as "rime." In "A Note on the Word 'Rhyme'" from the 30 April 1898 *Notes and Queries*, Skeat continued "to strengthen the case against the useless *h*" (344). This assertion that spelling "rhyme" as "rime" was more authentically English proved so influential that *rime* began to be considered a legitimate spelling. As "Killigrew" writes in "Rime" from the 21 May 1898 *Notes and Queries*, "Three times in one column of *Literature* of 26 May ... I find *rime* used as a matter of course, without italics, inverted commas, apology, or explanation" (404). With the weight of linguistic authorities such as Skeat and Furnivall behind spelling "rhyme" as "rime," using "rime" for "rhyme" almost became the norm through the end of the century.

Although these debates over the spelling of "Rhyme" / "rime" may seem trivial, they have important implications both for understanding the history of rhyme, the history of Victorian

poetics, and the history of English as a language and as a discipline. Rhyme--the pronunciation of rhymes, the spelling of “rhyme,” and the practice of rhyming--became associated with the English vernacular and involved in the construction of English as a language and as a discipline. More than other words, “rhyme” became a focal point for nationalist critics invested in purifying English language and culture of Latin influence because “rime” was not only a Saxon word but also a Saxon mode of versifying. Claiming rhyme as English enabled shifting English prosody from classical models based in meter to vernacular models based in meter and rhyme. Thus, a quintessentially English poetics could be founded, the practice of which would not only be more apt for English verse, but would also reaffirm and reconstitute English identity. Rhyme likewise helped found English as a discipline, as critics focused on its false etymology to support arguments for training students in the history of the English language.

Speech Impediments: Rhyme and Disability

Because rhyme was associated with pronunciation, verse with voice, when a poet wrote imperfect rhymes, then s/he was understood as having a speech impediment. The aesthetic in the second half of the century was biologized, just as poetic form was pathologized. For example, after critiquing EBB’s use of imperfect rhymes as exemplifying her “scorn of that orthodoxy [perfect rhyme] to which submission has been made by every serious poet,” an anonymous short review of EBB’s 1860 *Poems before Congress* in the 24 March 1860 *Examiner*, a London newspaper, claimed, “Bad rhymes in verse are very much like an impediment in speech.” The review goes on to define the speech impediment most analogous to “bad rhymes” as “stuttering” (181). This latter point is important because speech defects, particularly stuttering, stammering, and slurring were associated with rhyme and considered national problems contributing to the

degeneration of national culture in relation to other nations. (Slurring was supposed to afflict many: at the end of the century, R. F. Brewer called “slovenly pronunciation,” a “grave national fault in speech, at once the most universal as well as the most easily remedied” (92)). Imperfect rhyme was thought to “embody” these problems, just as perfect rhyme, when recited properly as elocution manuals suggest, was thought to cure them.

Shortly after, in “Mr. Arnold’s New Poems,” in the 1867 *Fortnightly Review*, Algernon Charles Swinburne argued, “Rhyme is the native condition of lyric verse in English; a rhymeless lyric is a maimed thing, and halts and stammers in the delivery of its message.” Swinburne’s claim has been read recently as participating in longstanding debates regarding “rhyme versus meter” (Thomas Connolly 65), or as arguing that “Rhyme *embodies* poetry and sustains its wholeness” (Gillian Beer 198), or, most recently, as associating poetic form as a particularly felicitous medium for the expression of national sentiment: “Swinburne was alert to poetry’s special capacity to mediate through the sounds and sensations of rhythm and rhyme those viscerally felt emotions familiar to a particular culture” (Julia Saville 692).

But Swinburne’s claim that “a rhymeless lyric is a maimed thing, and halts and stammers in the delivery of its message” should also be understood as contributing to a discourse that associated flaws in rhyme with speech defects, particularly stuttering and stammering. While recent critics have put pressure on Swinburne’s words “rhyme” (Connolly), “maimed” (Beer), and “native ... English” (Saville), I put pressure on his words “halts and stammers.” Swinburne implicitly associates the presence of rhyme with clear speech, and explicitly associates the absence of rhyme with a speech defect—stammering—much like the reviewer in the *Examiner* six years before.

For the writer Mary Russell Mitford, imperfect rhymes came not from a speech impediment in the writer, but a speech impediment in the reader. Near mid century, Mitford accounted for EBB's troubling use of "allowable" or "imperfect" rhymes by claiming that EBB's distant cousin and friend John Kenyon, who read to EBB, suffered from a speech defect, which caused words that should sound distinct to sound the same. Because EBB was believed to live in isolation, sequestered from the world, Mitford believed that EBB only heard Kenyon's slurring voice and no other voices. Therefore, EBB mistakenly came to believe that his slurring, which made disharmonious words sound alike, was normal and proper pronunciation. Therefore, EBB, according to Mitford, was under the misguided assumption that words that do not rhyme (when spoken properly), do rhyme. Therefore, EBB believes she is employing perfect rhyme when she is merely slurring together dissimilar words (Reported in Horne Vol. 2 132-33; Cf. Hayter 38-39, Morlier 97).

Just as imperfect rhyme was associated with a defect of the poet's mouth, so too was imperfect rhyme associated with a defect of the poet's ear. In his versification manual, *A Handbook of Poetry* (1868), the periodical versifier and elocutionist J. E. Carpenter opens, arguing, "To a great extent [incorrect rhyming] is no doubt to be accounted for by an auscultatory defect on the part of the rhymer; the same individual who could not detect when he, or another, was singing out of tune, would not detect a false rhyme if he made or read it; and this remark will apply with equal force to rhythm" (1). Forty years later, the same assumption is recirculated in Saintsbury's critique of EBB's bad rhymes as being produced by her "partially and strangely defective ear" (538). Rather than experiments, her near rhymes are signs of dysmusia, tone deafness. In the second half of the nineteenth century, imperfect rhyme was not simply criticized; it was pathologized.

If writing improper rhyme was associated with speech defects, then writing and reading proper rhyme could help cure defective speech. Hood argued:

Were English versification taught in our schools, I believe the boys would acquire a better understanding and appreciation of their own tongue, With such training, a lad would shrink from a mispronunciation as he does from a false quantity in Latin or Greek. He would not fall into the slipshod way of pronouncing “doing” as if it were spelt “doin’,” “again” as if “agen,” and “written and spoken” as if “writtun and spokun.” He would not make dissyllables of words like “fire “ and “mire,” or of the trisyllable “really.” Nor would he make another mistake (very common now, as revealed in magazine verse where such words are put to rhyme, “before” and “more”) of pronouncing “ure” as “ore,”—” shore” and “asshore” for “sure “ and “ assure,” of which, of course, the correct pronunciation is “shewre,” “ashewre.”

For Hood, learning the rules of proper rhyming went hand in hand with learning the rules of proper pronunciation. Fearing that “the pronunciation of English becomes every day more and more degraded by the mere force of the majority of uneducated vulgar,” learning the rules of rhyme would prevent “the deterioration of our language” by inculcating proper pronunciation (x). Writing verse would teach proper speech.

In the chapter, “Speech,” for the co-authored *Voice, Speech, and Gesture: A Practical Handbook to the Elocutionary Art* (1895), the elocutionist, prosodist, and high school English teacher R. F. Brewer argues, “defects in speaking ... are acquired, not natural, and are allowed to become habitual through neglect, ignorance, or carelessness” (91). “We have already said that perhaps not more than one person in a hundred articulates distinctly from habit,” Brewer

elaborates. “Neglect of early training, and crass ignorance both of the utility and charm of distinct utterance, contribute to the perpetuation of this all but universal blemish upon our national speech” (92). These “national faults” in speech, from speaking “too much with the mouth shut” to “slovenly pronunciation,” Brewer argues, can be trained away through childhood education in recitation. Through reciting verse, speech defects could be cured.

What this section suggests is how closely the imagination of Victorian readers and writers linked verse and voice, so that readers could perceive bad verse as a speech impediment on the part of the author. This also suggests how closely the imagination of Victorian readers and writers linked the poem and the poet, so that the writing of bad verse came to be a metonym for the poet’s character, even their biology; rhyme revealed the rhymer soul and body; how one rhymed helped define who one was. This also suggests how much of Victorian verse culture was an elocution, recitation, and song culture, where speech impairments were national concerns associated with class identity and national standing, and where performances of verse could pathologize (if done wrong) or cure (if done right) the speaker of speech impairments. Lastly, this section suggests that anxieties about problematic rhyming practices were so intense that they could not simply be critiqued, but they also had to be pathologized to prevent their spread.

Playing with Cockney Rhyme

The above shows how serious concerns about imperfect rhyme could become. At century’s end, however, “cockney rhyme” circulated not only as a serious critique but also as a mode of mockery that enabled the production of parody. The Oxford alumnus and wit Andrew Lang’s parody of Oxford witty verse, “Rhyme of Oxford Cockney Rhymes,” published in the 1905? *Oxford Magazine*, mocks the current Oxford verse culture and particularly the Magdalen

College don, classicist, and wit Alfred Denis Godley (“G-y”). Lang was both a Scotsman and a former Oxford wit, as well as a poet fascinated by rhyme. For those reasons, he was particularly invested in the verse culture of his alma mater, where rhyming bore considerable cultural capital (as my next chapter will show). These Oxford wits supposedly were educated gentlemen and trained versifiers. Lang, however, returns to Oxford to claim that Oxford’s verse culture has slipped into slipshod verse and cockney rhyme due, he felt, to the democratization of education to formerly excluded groups (women, working classes, and provincials). Their supposed rough accents, ham-fisted writing, and tone-deaf ears, Lang claims, corrupted with cockney rhyme a verse culture proud of its university-trained technique, and thus threatened to undermine one way how Oxonians wrote into being their masculinity and class.

Though Keats rhymed “ear” to “Cytherea,”
And Morris “dawn” to “morn,”
A worse example, it is clear,
By Oxford Dons is “shorn.”
G-y, of Magdalen, goes beyond
These puny Cockneys far,
And to “Magrath” rhymes—Muse despond!—
“Magrath” he rhymes to “star”!

Another poet, X. Y. Z.,
Employs the word “researcher,”
And then,—his blood be on his head,—
He makes it rhyme to “nurture.”

Ah, never was the English tongue
So flayed, and racked, and tortured,
Since one I love (who should be hung)
Made “tortured” rhyme to “orchard.”

Unkindly G-y’s raging pen
Next craves a rhyme to “sooner;”
Rejecting “Spooner,” (best of men,)
He fastens on LACUNA(R).
Nay, worse, in his infatuate mind
He ends a line “explainer,”
Nor any rhyme can G-y find
Until he reaches Jena(r).

Yes, G-y shines the worst of all,
He needs to rhyme “embargo;”
The man had “Margot” at his call,
He had the good ship ARGO;
Largo he had; yet doth he seek
Further, and no embargo
Restrains him from the odious, weak,
And Cockney rhyme, “Chicago”!

Ye Oxford Dons that Cockneys be,
Among your gardens tidy,
If you would ask a maid to tea,
D'ye call the girl "a lydy"?
And if you'd sing of Mr. Fry,
And need a rhyme to "swiper,"
Are you so cruel as to try
To fill the blank with "paper"?

Oh, Hoxford was a pleasant plice
To many a poet dear,
And Saccharissa had the grice
In Hoxford to appear.
But Waller, if to Cytherea
He prayed at any time,
Did not implore "her friendly ear,"
And think he had a rhyme.

Now, if you ask to what are due
The horrors which I mention,
I think we owe them to the U—
Niversity extension.
From Hoxton and from Poplar come

The ‘Arriets and ‘Arries,
And so the Oxford Muse is dumb,
Or, when she sings, miscarries.

As with all witty versifying, Lang’s rhyme play was a mode of display. By correcting Godley’s cockney rhymes with proper rhymes, Lang shows the breadth of his vocabulary, the extent of his education, and therefore the height of his cultural capital, if not simply financial class. Through his performance of poetic one-upmanship, Lang shows how competitive Oxford’s masculinist verse culture was, and by extension, how much masculinity was bound up in those rhymes. Lang’s own re-circulating of *improper* rhymes, as if he too had fallen into error, is a mode of ironic slumming that only serves to bolster his performance of facility with rhyme: what others do by accident, he does on purpose. Lang may have asserted his cultivation through rhyming to reaffirm a traditional marker of upper-class masculinity—an Oxbridge training in versification—that no longer seemed to serve as it once did.

In this parody, Lang performs his own ironic rhyme play to mock others’ rhyme play. By rhyming “due . . . mention . . . U— / Niversity extension,” Lang employed a well-known comic rhyming technique (which we call “Broken Rhyme”), which came to Lang through Byron, and was invented by the late eighteenth-century Oxford wit (and Prime Minister), George Canning. In “Of Burlesque and Comic Verse” from *The Rules of Rhyme*, Hood notes,

One trick in rhyming is often very effective but it must not be put into force too often. In some instances, however, it tells with great comical effect, by affording a rhyme to a word which at first glance the reader thinks it is impossible to rhyme. Canning, in the “Anti-Jacobin,” used it with ludicrous effect in

Rogero's song, and a few lines from that will illustrate and explain the trick I allude to :—

“Here doom'd to starve on water gru-
-el, never shall I see the U-
-niversity of Gottingen!”

Here the division of the words “gruel” and “University” has an extremely absurd effect. But the artifice must be used sparingly, and those who employ it must beware of one pitfall. The moiety of the word which is carried over to begin the next line must be considered as a fresh word occupying the first foot. There is a tendency to overlook it, and count it as part of the previous line, and that of course is a fatal error (59).

By reemploying Canning's technique and therefore alluding to Canning, a fellow alum of Oxford's wit culture, Lang here references and reaffirms the tradition of Oxford wit when it was strong, but that he currently saw coming undone due to the entrance of women, provincials, and the working classes. By referencing Canning and the Oxonian verse culture he helped perpetuate, Lang reestablishes an alumni network and tradition of wit. Lang's purpose was both to performatively suture the social bonds of a University verse culture and to performatively tether together a tradition of versifying noted by technical virtuosity, both of which Lang feared were decaying. “Rhyme of Oxford Cockney Rhymes,” an instance of the Oxbridge “revisited” genre (a genre Chapter 4 will discuss), circulated not only among a broad audience beyond Oxford, but also circulated particularly among students and alumni to reaffirm alumni networks and alumni credentials (and the classed masculinity that came with it). While the Oxford's verse culture was competitive, it was also communal; its members might pay homage to teach other and, in so

doing, reestablish male bonds. A virtuosity of poetic form, another words, helped form communities, tying versifiers into verse cultures. Rhymes bound lines, but they also might bind persons across time. Lang here does both, paying homage to an Oxford wit of a century earlier while mocking an Oxford wit of a generation earlier. Poetic form was never more sociable than in rhyme.

Even as Lang mocks the bad form of those Oxford wits who came after him, Lang also playfully performs that “bad form” by at once critiquing and recirculating the cockney rhymes “Cytherea ... clear,” “tortured ... orchard,” and “embargo ... Chicago.” By using cockney rhymes to critique others’ cockney rhymes, Lang enacts through poetic form a form of slumming. By slumming through rhyme, Lang strikes an ironic pose as shabbily genteel that mocks, from his position at the start of the twentieth century, the self-seriousness of the cockney-rhyme phenomenon of the nineteenth century. What this suggests is that by the start of the twentieth century, the critique of cockney rhyme had entered a decadence; no longer was cockney rhyming entirely a serious concern for poets; it had also become a form of ironic play.

Chapter 4 The Age of Rhyme Cambridge Revisited: 1850-1900

The Universities seem to be the natural homes of light verse.

~Anthony Charles Deane, *A Little Book of Light Verse*, 1902

We must face the setting sun.

~Herbert Arthur Morrah, Dedication, *In College Groves*, 1894

Cambridge University has always been in the business of turning boys into men. Yet the sentimental and witty verse of Victorian-era Cantabrigians repeatedly asks, “How can men become boys?” and “How can boys not become men?” From the Baron and Cambridge parliamentarian Thomas Spring Rice’s 1837 “On Revisiting Trinity College After Twenty Years” to the elocutionist and versifier Clifford Harrison’s 1900 rondeau “Cambridge (Revisited),” Cambridge men frequently rhymed in a nostalgic genre that I call the “Cambridge Revisited” poem. In it, nostalgic, middle-aged alumni fantasized about returning to their alma mater to recover the “first ripe taste of manhood’s best delights,” as the former Trinity man, Richard Monckton Milnes, put it in the second of his two 1838 sonnets of the same name, “On Revisiting Cambridge: After a Long Absence on the Continent.”⁷⁰ Similarly, students and alumni rhymed proleptically lamenting time passing, having to leave Cambridge, and needing to mature. Arthur Joseph Munby was still a Trinity undergraduate when he published “Alma Mater” in

1850, in which he contrasted his “Young green years behind” against the “desert ... Scorch’d and bare” of the post-graduate, adult years “before us.” And in his 1901 rondeau, “When I Am Gone,” Harry Catling, an alumnus of St. John’s College, went back in time to anticipate being “quite forgotten” by his alma mater upon his “impending” graduation: “Time moves apace ... And no one will recall my face / When I am gone,” he groaned. A particular style of masculinity emerges in Cambridge verse: Cambridge students and alumni, in their regressive self-representations, refuse to conform to standard narratives of development. From 1830 to 1900, a seventy-year drama of distressed manhood played out in the rhymes of Cambridge: everyone wanted to be a man, but no one wanted to grow up.

The conventions of Cambridge verse are exemplified in Milnes’ two sonnets:

Nor few, nor poor in beauty, my resorts
In forein climes,—nor negligent or dull
My observation, but these long-left courts
I still find beautiful, most beautiful!
And fairly are they more so than before;
For to my eye, fresh from a southern land,
They wear the colo’ring of the scenes of yore,
And the old faith that made them here to stand.
I paint the very students as they were,
Not the men-children of these forward days,
But mild-eyed boys just risen from their knees,
While, proud as angels of their holy care,
Following the symbol-vested priest, they raise

The full response of antique litanies.

I have a debt of my heart's own to Thee,
School of my Soul, old lime and cloister shade,
Which I, strange creditor, should grieve to see
Fully acquitted and exactly paid.
The first ripe taste of manhood's best delights,
Knowledge imbibed, while mind and heart agree,
In sweet belated talk on winter nights,
With friends whom growing time keeps dear to me,—
Such things I owe thee, and not only these:
I owe thee the far beaco'ning memories
Of the young dead, who, having crossed the tide
Of Life where it was narrow, deep, and clear,
Now cast their brightness from the further side
On the dark-flowing hours I breast in fear.

The first sonnet, in which Milnes returns to campus as an adult and laments the changes he sees (students who seem more mature than the “mild-eyed boys” of his student days) exemplifies how regressive and nostalgic this genre could be. The university seems more pleasing to Milnes as an alumnus than when he was a student because Cambridge is imbued with history: “scenes of yore” and the “old faith.” Indeed, anything that suggests time passing is a problem. Milnes not only expresses frustration that the students he sees on his return seem more mature than the students of his youth; he finds that maturity so unpleasant that he erases these overdeveloped

students from the poem to replace them with more pleasing underdeveloped ones, to signify a disdain for growth and change. Milnes was only 29 when he wrote these sonnets, but he is already anticipating his death: “the dark-flowing hours I breast in fear.”

In their verse, Cambridge students reworked the tropes of the classical verse they studied, particularly Virgilian and Horatian admonishments (the *memento mori*, *carpe diem*, *tempus fugit* topoi), to express dismay over time passing, and change happening at Cambridge. In particular, they bemoan the loss of youth and the onset of age, maturation, becoming a man: “time flies away and such changes it brings,” as the fin-de-siècle Cambridge ballad “The Freshman and the Dean” lamented. The classical reminders of death approaching, however, are reworked in Cambridge verse into reminders of graduation impending. Oscillating between witty bathos and heartfelt pathos, Cambridge verse reworked the classical pastoral, replacing shepherds being with schoolboys and fantasizing a Cambridge as an unchanging, atemporal Arcadia, because these poets confronted unwelcome changes in themselves and in alma mater, and because the characteristics of the genre required it.

At Trinity College, Milnes was a friend of and an Apostle with Alfred Tennyson. Like Milnes’ sonnets, which we can assume Tennyson knew, and like Cambridge verse more broadly, which we can assume Tennyson read, Tennyson’s LXXXVII from *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850) bears the characteristics of the Cambridge Revisited poem. In it, Tennyson describes revisiting alma mater as an adult and reminiscing about his youth as a student, and lamenting the changes that have taken place in Trinity between then and now. The difference of course is that the motifs of Cambridge verse have been put to elegiac work by Tennyson who resurrects his student days with Arthur Hallam, his friend and fellow Apostle, whom Tennyson met at Trinity in 1829 and who died, a year and a half after graduating, in 1833.

Well after *In Memoriam*'s publication, turn-of-the-century anthologists of Cambridge verse, such as E. E. Kellett in *A Book of Cambridge Verse* (1911), excerpted LXXXVII from *In Memoriam*, turning one of Tennyson's "fragments of an elegy," as Tennyson considered titling *In Memoriam*, into a freestanding instance of the Cambridge Revisited poem. Once anthologized alongside other Cambridge poems, the parallels become clear. In so doing, these anthologists not only constructed a poem but also helped to retroactively produce a "genre" of Cambridge poetry whose conventions were defined by the revisiting of alma mater. Read as part of *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, LXXXVII describes Tennyson revisiting Hallam, his lost friend. Read alongside other Cambridge poems, however, LXXXVII describes Tennyson revisiting Cambridge and his lost youth. But just as anthologists retroactively helped codify the Cambridge Revisited genre and LXXXVII as an instance of that genre, so too did Tennyson rework the generic characteristics of Cambridge verse to his own elegiac ends, using pastiche tied by rhyme to knit the fragments of various genres, and the fragments of Hallam's body, into a whole.

Indeed, Cambridge verse knitted itself into a tradition, even a genre, through reference and revision. Through allusion tied by rhyme, Cantabridgians tied together students and alumni across the decades into a shared sense of imagined community, something like an "alumni network" that helped construct the identity "Cantabridgian." For example, Tennyson's LXXXVII tied itself to the Cambridge poets of the past just as its metaphors would be borrowed, referenced, and reworked by latter-day alumni in their own Cambridge Revisited poems. Milton was an elegist and a Cambridge alumnus, so Tennyson echoes Milton's "once more ... once more" from "Lycidas" (1638). ("Yet *once more*, O ye laurels, and *once more* / Ye myrtles brown") in LXXXVII's "And heard *once more* in college fanes / The storm their high-built organs make, / And thunder-music, rolling, shake ... And caught *once more* the distant shout."

The Miltonic-Tennysonian trope reemerges 23 years later in Richard Wilton's "Cambridge Memories": "*Once more* beneath the dim expanse / Of fretted roof I hear the roll / Of *organ, wave and wave*" and "*Once more* I greet the mighty shade / Of Newton." Tennyson's startled "Another name was on the door" becomes, 38 years later, in *The Cambridge Fortnightly's* "Changes," "The names above the doors are new."

In LXXXVII, Tennyson describes Cambridge as a culture of sound, more aptly understood as a culture of rhyme. Indeed, if time is the master theme of Victorian-era Cambridge poems, then rhyme is their master scheme.

I past beside the reverend walls
 In which of old I wore the gown;
 I roved at random thro' the town,
And saw the tumult of the halls;

And heard once more in college fanes
 The storm their high-built organs make,
 And thunder-music, rolling, shake
The prophet blazoned on the panes;

And caught once more the distant shout,
 The measured pulse of racing oars
 Among the willows; paced the shores
And many a bridge, and all about

The same gray flats again, and felt
 The same, but not the same; and last
 Up that long walk of limes I past
To see the rooms in which he dwelt.

Another name was on the door:

 I linger'd; all within was noise
 Of songs, and clapping hands, and boys
That crash'd the glass and beat the floor;

Where once we held debate, a band
 Of youthful friends, on mind and art,
 And labour, and the changing mart,
And all the framework of the land;

When one would aim an arrow fair,
 But send it slackly from the string;
 And one would pierce an outer ring,
And one an inner, here and there;

And last the master-bowman, he,
 Would cleave the mark. A willing ear
 We lent him. Who, but hung to hear

The rapt oration flowing free

From point to point, with power and grace

And music in the bounds of law,

To those conclusions when we saw

The God within him light his face,

And seem to lift the form, and glow

In azure orbits heavenly-wise;

And over those ethereal eyes

The bar of Michael Angelo.

When Tennyson writes of the “thunder-music” of Cambridge’s “high-built organs,” he does more than re-work his early Cambridge sonnet “Lines on Cambridge of 1830,” in which “solemn organ-pipes ... blow / Melodious thunders.” He also represents Cambridge’s sonic culture as a culture of rhyme. Tennyson’s repeated “once more ... once more,” is a figure for the repetitions of rhyme, just as “measured pulse ... paced” is a figure for meter and therefore for rhyme. When Tennyson finds alma mater at once “The same, but not the same,” he is not only expressing ambivalence at once both personal to himself and conventional for Cambridge verse. He is also circulating a metaphor for rhyme (how rhyme resounds, or re-sounds). “[A]n outer ring ... an inner” references the outer and inner rings of the In Memoriam ABBA stanza. From the “storm” and “thunder-music” of the “organs” to the “noise / Of songs,” Tennyson suggests Cambridge culture is not only a youth culture; it is also a sonic culture of rhyme.

In “On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson,” a review of Tennyson’s *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), published in the 1831 *Englishman’s Magazine*, Hallam claimed that Tennyson’s “ear has a fairy fineness,” which helped to produce Tennyson’s reputation as one of the most musical of poets. Here, however, Tennyson represents Hallam, who was also a poet, as the master of rhyme. Hallam is the master-bowman who can string together the “rings” of rhyme, whose “music in the bounds of law” suggests the strictures of rhyme, whose “bar of Michael Angelo” not only refers to Michelangelo and Hallam having a similarly shaped forehead but also to a bar of music. In Hallam, polished voice and polished verse come together. As the Apostles “hang” on Hallam’s every word, his every rhyme, which “hang” at the end of every line, verse in the context of Cambridge emerges as a medium of sociability: rhyme not only links lines; here the circulation of rhyme also ties together Cantabridgians into a community of tightly-knit friends. Rhyme was not simply just important to the youth culture of Cambridge; Tennyson suggests rhyme also help constitute it.

In this chapter, I revisit the understudied verse culture of Victorian Cambridge in order to consider how and why Cantabridgians invested in the returns of rhyme. By rhyme, I mean surprising, original rhymes used to produce wit in verse, the production and consumption of which so appealed to Cambridge students and alumni that it produced a verse culture. I argue that rhyme was a means of self-fashioning for Cantabridgians. But while Jason Hall and others argue that Cantabridgian youths practiced writing in meter to become (gentle)men, I contend that Cantabridgians practiced writing in rhyme to become boys.⁷¹ Writing wittily rhymed verse was their means to both do and undo their classed masculinity through rhyme.

While Swinburne mastered rhyme so that rhyme might master him, Cantabridgians made rhyme seem like child’s play in every sense of the term. They wanted to make the hard work of

rhyiming look easy to perform their mastery of rhyme. In so doing, Cantabridgians showed themselves to have come of age as poets and as men. But Cambridge students and alumni also exploited wit's associations with silly, self-indulgent fun to make themselves seem like children as they played with rhyme. In short, at Cambridge, rhyme was a performance of manhood and boyhood: through rhyme play and witty versifying, Cambridge men struck a pose as at once educated and childish, man and boy, masters of wit and regressive, frozen youths.

The end of the century, however, witnessed a change in the age of rhyme: through the popularity of nursery rhyme and the working of rhyme by the nascent social sciences, rhyme became more associated with the nursery than with the university. Rather than rhyme play bearing associations of difficulty and intellect, it now seemed trivial and naïve; witty versifying seemed acceptable only within the context of university youth culture; rather than help make you a man it now was what you outgrew. Indeed, at the turn of the century, as rhyme was associated with an earlier age Cambridge itself seemed to be outgrowing rhyme.

Cambridge verse might easily be dismissed today as either trivial light verse or mere sophomoric humor, which may explain why it is so rarely studied.⁷² The proliferation of rhyme at Cambridge, however, reveals the urgency of the cultural work rhyme was called on to perform there. Given how invested Cantabridgians were in capitalizing on the returns of rhyme, and given how important rhyme was for the Victorians more broadly, Cambridge's verse culture is relevant for serious study for what it can tell us about rhyme and its social meanings in the nineteenth century. Indeed, understanding rhyme at Cambridge can help us understand rhyme in the nineteenth century on its own terms. Today, rhyme is often discussed in terms of sound or sense, particularly how sounds of a poem work against its sense. For the Victorians, however, rhyme also helped construct senses of self; rhyme had as much to do with ethos as it did with logos or

pathos. Rhyme at Cambridge was fundamental to the production of individual identity and social community, helping tether together a student body and an alumni network.

More than that, I focus on Cambridge's verse culture to complicate the association of rhyme and immaturity. As Victorian Cambridge was a hub for the production of rhyme, one can examine the relationship of rhyme to (im)maturity in one of the major training grounds of Victorian poetics. In "Rhyming as Resurrection" (2000), Gillian Beer argues that rhyme, for the Victorians, bore a "hint of the primitive—whether it be tribal past or nursery past." Rhyme at Cambridge, however, bore many ages: it helped make boys into gentlemen, it helped men indulge in eternal youth, it caused anxieties that one was not acting one's age, and it seemed like it was being outgrown. In what follows, I historicize the relationship between forms of self-fashioning and the fashioning of poetic form. By focusing on a lineage of Cambridge classicists and witty versifiers—Charles Stuart Calverley, Owen Seaman, and James Kenneth Stephen (as elegized by the fin-de-siècle Oxford student, Herbert Arthur Morrah)—I show how Cambridge wits constructed, exploited, and lamented a relationship between aesthetics and identity, rhyme and youth.

Calverley and Cambridge's Rhyme Culture

Charles Stuart Calverley, or "C. S. C." as he signed his verse and classical translations, was said to be able to rhyme all day. When he died in 1884, a eulogist in the 1884 *Spectator* memorialized Calverley as follows: "His rhymes flow with an ease and an abundance which are absolutely astonishing.... In 'Play' and 'Under the Trees,' for instance, he disports himself with a multitude of rhymes which would be sufficient to set up half-a-dozen minor poets in business" (280). In his 1891 essay, "Social Verse," Swinburne called Calverley's verbal acrobatics

“monstrously overrated and preposterously overpraised” (104). To most of Calverley’s contemporaries, however, he was the quintessential Cambridge wit and “the greatest English parodist” of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the most Horatian of English versifiers (*The Academy* (1887) 437).⁷³ He made the hard work of rhyming look easy.

After a near expulsion from Balliol College, Oxford, as a freshman, Calverley matriculated into Christ’s College, Cambridge, in 1852, graduated with a Chancellor’s Prize and a First Class in his Classical Tripos in 1856, and was elected a Fellow of Christ’s in 1858, where he became an important classicist. By the time Calverley left Cambridge to pursue law in 1863, he had published his first collection of Cambridge verse, *Verses and Translations* (1861). His only other book of verse, *Fly Leaves* (1872), solidified his reputation as a wit and master of poetic form. By 1900, *Verses and Translations* had been reprinted at least 13 times, and, by 1900, the even more popular *Fly Leaves* had been reprinted 17 times.

As the central figure of Cambridge’s verse culture of witty rhyme, Calverley essentially defined the style of Cambridge verse for half a century. Calverley was said to have “caught once and for all the peculiar and distinctive humour of the English Universities,” as a reviewer of his *Complete Works* put it in the 7 September 1901 *Spectator* (320). In other words, Calverley both inherited and gave Cambridge wit its signature style: digressions and interruptions, antithesis, blending high and low registers, and unexpected rhymes, all of which exploited the unexpected and “the sudden juxtaposition of incongruities” to produce humorous surprise (Hill 437).⁷⁴ For example, Calverley’s skill in classical translation enabled him to invent an English version of the Horatian Sapphic stanza—an ABAB heterometrical quatrain in which the final line was curtailed into a dimeter. In his witty verse, Calverley exploited its clipped close to produce the bathos for which he became so famous, or as Owen Seaman put it, the “delightful breakdowns ... bring us

by a sudden descent to earth” (qtd. in Adlard 12-13). Calverley’s Horatian Sapphic became widely popular among Victorian-era Cambridge classicist wits.

The interplay of anticipation and both satisfaction and surprise also describes the workings of rhyme: one knows a rhyme will come, but one does not know what rhyme will come. What helped make university humor “peculiar and distinctive” was its investment in uncommon rhymes—ingenious, innovative, often multisyllabic rhymes—which helped produce the effect of wit. For example, in 1829, the assigned subject for the Cambridge prize poem was “Timbuctoo.” Tennyson won the Chancellor’s medal for his submission, which he wrote in blank verse. His avoidance of rhyme was surprising, given that, to that point, prize poems had invariably been written in heroic couplets. Tennyson may have eschewed rhyme, however, because, as Walsh points out, “when the subject was given out it was said to be impossible to find a [trisyllabic] rhyme for Timbuctoo.” Tennyson, who would soon become famous for his rhymes, had met his match. In addition to the official prize poem competition, then, another unofficial competition arose. “Several university wits tried their hands at a sort of burlesque competition for the prize,” Walsh recounts. The winner was “Timbuctoo . . . hymn-book too” (972).

When Calverley parodied what he saw as the clichéd rhymes of the poetess Jean Ingelow in his 1872 “Lovers, and a Reflection,” he negatively defined this aesthetic of Cambridge verse. By concluding his parody with a plea that unoriginal rhymes like Ingelow’s “billows and pillows and hours and flowers, / And all the brave rhymes of an elder day, / be furled . . . / And carted . . . away, / Nor ever again trotted out,” Calverley argues that rhyme play was the very opposite of cliché. Rather, rhyme play was an opportunity for display: an opportunity to show off one’s ability to rhyme extravagantly and endlessly, to find the most ingenious rhymes that one could,

and to sustain the virtuosic display for as long as possible.⁷⁵ While Calverley published “Lovers, and a Reflection” a decade after he left Cambridge, his parody was at once an outgrowth of Cambridge’s aesthetic ideology—it “caught” the essence of university humor—and it helped define that verse culture’s investment in surprising rhyme. Like all Cambridge wits, Calverley did not merely want to write original, “brave rhymes,” as Calverley wrote at the end of “Lovers, and a Reflection”; he also wanted to rhyme with bravado. University men so frequently produced and consumed witty rhyme that, by the fin de siècle, it had become associated with university youth culture: “The wit of queer rhymes,” William Shepard Walsh pointed out in his 1892 *Handy-Book of Literary Curiosities*, “appeals so vividly to youth, and especially to academic youth” (972).

Cambridge poets understood themselves to be continuing a neoclassical tradition of witty versifying, in which university poets were prominent. In his 1891 eulogy of Calverley, “To C. S. C.,” the fin-de-siècle Cambridge wit J. K. Stephen imagines this tradition as reaching its apotheosis in Calverley:

The wit of smooth delicious Matthew Prior,
The rhythmic grace which Hookham Frere displayed,
The summer lightning wreathing Byron’s lyre,
The neat inevitable turns of Praed,
Rhymes to which Hudibras could scarce aspire,
Such metric pranks as Gilbert oft has played,
All these good gifts and others far sublimer
Are found in thee, beloved Cambridge rhymer.

Prior, John Hookham Frere, Byron, and Winthrop Mackworth Praed were all Cambridge wits, and wit, as Sidney Waterlow wrote in his introduction to his 1912 anthology, *In Praise of Cambridge*, was “the quintessence of Cambridge” (vii-ix). Cambridge’s uncommon rhymes were an outgrowth of the neoclassical tradition of Samuel Butler’s burlesque / travesty *Hudibras* (1663-78) and Byron’s epic satire *Don Juan* (1818-24). (Byron’s *Hours of Idleness*, published in 1807 while an undergraduate, lacks the witty, multisyllabic rhymes that characterize his adult, satiric verse, most famously in *Don Juan*). Through producing wittily rhymed verse, students and alumni saw themselves as entering and continuing a tradition marked by the mastery of poetic form.

Through witty versifying, Cantabridgians fashioned their identities as gentlemen. Because versification and translation were only taught to gentlemen, being able to write polished forms was understood as a sign of polished personhood. In his study of *vers de société* in *Victorian Poets* (1875), the American poet and critic E. C. Stedman opens his discussion by noting the genre’s most salient quality—“patrician rhymes”—which became an allegory for poet who wrote them (272). Indeed, Stedman celebrated Calverley as “the best of the new *farceurs*” (272-73). “Has it ever struck you what a gallant proportion of [those writers of *vers de société*] who have won repute hail from our Universities?” asks the reviewer of Calverley’s *Complete Works* in the 1901 *Academy*. What gave Calverley and other university poets their “trained sense of form and finish,” their “mastery of [poetic] form and technique,” and their “mastery of measured language in English rhyme,” the reviewer argues, was a rigorous university education in classical verse translation and stylistics (28).⁷⁶ Calverley was a notable classicist and his facility with classical verse translation helped produce his “literary polish and refinement,” just as a “classical training” enabled the success of “most of those [university poets] who have

excelled in [Calverley's] art," writes Owen Seaman, a fellow Cambridge classicist and wit (qtd. in Adlard 13). Because a rigorous education in the classics informed university verse, its rhyme play was understood as "mature and scholarly jesting," as the reviewer of Calverley's *Complete Works* in the 1901 *Spectator* called it (20). Stedman, with Calverley in mind, likewise called finesse with form, "a sign of intense mental activity," nearly on par with classical verse translation.

But the goal of versifying was to make the hard work of rhyming look easy: *ars et celare artem* [art that hides its own art]. While a rigorous education in the classics trained university men in handling poetic form, Cambridge poets self-consciously associated the production of verse and particularly rhyme with the contradictory connotations of indolence. "[The university undergraduate] writes," noted the fin-de-siècle Cambridge alumnus Vernon Rendall, "if he writes at all, at leisure" (205). Lord Byron's *Hours of Idleness* (1807), which he wrote while a student at Cambridge, equated the production of verse with gentlemanly ease, thus helping fashion his persona as a gentleman-poet. A half century later, the Cambridge wit G. O. Trevelyan's 1858 collegiate burlesque, *Horace at the University of Athens*, confirms the association of idleness with witty rhyme. Trevelyan's figure for Calverley, the modern Cambridge classicist wit, is Horace, who has "a turn for rhyme" and is "far too idle to be very bad." And "An Oarsman's Mourning" from the 1891 *Granta* exploits the bathos of Calverley's Horatian Sapphic stanza to equate the pastime of rhyme with passing the time:⁷⁷

Yes, let me try my hand at rhyme,

There's nothing else to do to-day,

I don't know how to pass the time

Away.

Through these aggressively idle productions, university men fashioned themselves as unabashedly amateur poets, antagonistic to any sense of writing as a profession. This association of rhyming with idling was an ideological method of social distinction for those university men looking to segregate themselves from the bourgeois classes and ratify themselves as upper class. By concealing their art and making the hard work of rhyme look easy, Cambridge poets affected a *sprezzatura* style marked by aristocratic ease. By asserting their amateurism and nonchalance, university men attempted to fashion themselves as gentlemen-poets. As the Oxonian W. B. Woodgate recounted in 1888, “amateur” and “gentleman” “were simply convertible terms” (192).

In *The Idea of a University* (1852), John Henry Newman famously defined the mid-Victorian gentleman as one who possesses “a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life” (120). “Gentleman” in the nineteenth century also meant “A man of superior position in society, or having the habits of life indicative of this; often, one whose means enable him to live in easy circumstances without engaging in trade, a man of money and leisure” (*Oxford English Dictionary* online). This combination of cultivated intellect and leisured idleness helped define the ideal of the Victorian gentleman; it also made the production and consumption of rhyme for students and alumni such an attractive expedient to achieve that ideal. Through their witty rhymes, university men produced humorous surprise in their reader and struck a pose as a writer. Rhyme play, for university youths, was a form of display, a performance of class; it was how boys became gentlemen: classically educated and idle at once.

Just as witty versifying was a means of student self-fashioning, it was also a medium for student homosociality. What made Calverley’s verse appealing to men was the charm of his wit:

“Charm, masculine charm, the indefinable attraction of a man for other men, is the secret of Calverley’s extraordinary popularity with men of all kinds and ages,” writes a reviewer of his *Complete Works* in the September 7, 1901 *Spectator* (320). More recently, in *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920*, Paul Deslandes argues, university humor “construct[ed] images of undergraduate life that contributed to the formation of corporate identities.” Deslandes argues that university humor helped produce corporate identities through the production of insider / outsider groups. By getting the joke, students ratified their sense of community: “For these students, the ability to recognize the joke,” Deslandes argues, “was one hallmark of their insider status ... and signified another rite of passage that they had to negotiate as they made the transition from boyhood to manhood” (14).

University humor, however, also helped produce corporate identities through its exchange and circulation, and in particular, the exchange and circulation among Cantabrigians of witty rhyme. For example, Victorian-era students would frequently exchange old jokes, producing and maintaining Cambridge traditions. In his 1889 anthology, *In Cap and Gown: Three Centuries of Cambridge Wit*, Charles Whibley acknowledges “the recurrence of University myths” and the “perpetuity of anecdotes”; “The same stories against the dons, which amused our great-grandfathers in their first term, are told to the freshmen of today as entirely modern” (xxi-xxii). “[T]he commencement of each University year,” the Cambridge wit G. O. Trevelyan noted in the preface to the 1884 edition of *The Ladies in Parliament and Other Pieces*, “still brings [demand] for some Cambridge squibs I published [in] 1858.” Tradition spurred an annually renewed demand for Trevelyan to republish the witty verse of his student days. At Cambridge, the jokes never got old. And if they did, in their age was precisely where their value lay.

This endless recirculation and reprinting of old wit produced a literary tradition as well as a common store or “word-choard” of tropes. In his introduction to his 1912 anthology, *In Praise of Cambridge*, Sydney Waterlow writes, “In print, in manuscript collections, and in the mouths of men, there exists an immense body of epigrams, facetiae, anecdotes of University events and personages, from traditional jokes which can be traced back for centuries and which every freshman learns anew, to the latest *mot* which makes the round of the high-tables and common rooms” (viii-ix). Younger students loitered outside of the rooms of Cambridge wits “to hear jokes and carry them away” (Sendall 103). In this informal economy of wit exchange, students borrowed, re-contextualized, and re-published each other’s wit. Wit became proverbial and was circulated and re-circulated over decades at Cambridge. A. C. Hilton’s famous misogynous joke from *The Light Green* (1872), “When young women get their degrees they wont [sic] be Bachelors, but Spinsters of Arts,” appeared two decades later in the fellow Cambridge parodist A. C. Deane’s 1891 collegiate parody “The Don and the Damsel”: “And he sneered at the Doctress of Sewing, and jeered at the Spinster of Arts!” Sometimes the borrowing would be acknowledged and sometimes not.⁷⁸ Acknowledgement did not matter: with proverbial humor, everyone was already in on the joke. These students rethought authorship as non-proprietary: they produced a common store of tropes, appropriable and recognizable by all Cantabridgians. Retelling wit produced Cambridge traditions, culture, and lore: retelling old jokes helped students identify as Cantabridgians and enter into Cambridge’s traditions. A local idiom was produced; its shared recognition produced social cohesion synchronically (students could connect with each other) and diachronically (all students and alumni were in on the same tropes). In the verse culture of Cambridge, verse was exchanged to produce collective identification among students and alumni and the identity of Cambridge itself as the school of wit.

University Rhyme vs. Nursery Rhyme

Writers of witty verse had long exploited uncommon rhymes to produce humorous surprise in their readers. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the fascination with uncommon rhyme became a popular phenomenon involving both elite poets and the average person. In the 1860s, Swinburne flirted with his cousin, Mary Gordon, by “finding the most ridiculous and expressive rhymes to names of all sorts. I recollect one evening he said of a name casually mentioned, ‘I wonder if one could find a rhyme to Atkinson,’ and then immediately spouted: ‘A tree with all its catkins on / Was planted by Miss Atkinson!’” (21). In *Of Pacchiarotto, and How He Worked in Distemper* (1876), Robert Browning employed such uncommon rhymes as the masterful “*ranunculus* ... uncle us.”

Moreover, from the 1860s through the 1880s, in journals academic and popular from *Notes and Queries* to *The Graphic*, scholarly symposia were held and popular challenges were given in order to find rhymes to words that seemingly had no rhyme, like “silver,” “month,” “chimney,” and “orange.”⁷⁹ These challenges brought together an array of persons interested in rhyme: versifiers of witty rhyme interested in exploiting unexpected rhyme to produce humorous surprise, philologists curious to understand the language by unearthing hidden patterns, and versifiers of nursery rhyme interested in not only the acoustics of verse but also extending the limits of rhyme. Cambridge men, such as Calverley’s former classmates the philologist Walter W. Skeat and the dramatist and wit Francis Cowley Burnand were prominent; so too was Christina Rossetti.

In “Our Weekly Gossip,” in the 1862 *Athenaeum*, the following solution to the problem of finding a rhyme for “orange” and “month” was offered:

From the Indus to the Bloreng
Came the Rajah in a month
Eating now and then an orange
Conning all the day his Grunth.

The problem, however, is that “‘Grunth,’ if correctly pronounced, would probably not meet the difficulty,” responds “Jaydee” in the 1865 *Notes and Queries*, “and besides it is inadmissible as being a purely Indian word” (377). Judges of these “uncommon rhyme” competitions were punctiliously concerned that versifier-entrants obey the rules of rhyme, lest a rhyme be no rhyme at all or a too-easy evasion of the fetters of form. The purpose was to face, not evade, the difficulty, and thus show one’s virtuosity, which ultimately is what this rhyme play was meant to reveal.

These challenges pushed writers to new feats of word play. Along with other participants in a 1865-66 *Notes and Queries* symposium to find a rhyme to “silver,” Skeat contributed versed answers in the form of quatrains and epigrammatic couplets that showed him to be not only a philologist but also a Cambridge wit, playful and serious at once: “Just try—you will find it a test for your **skill, ver-** / y much so, to find out a ‘double’ for *silver*” (*Notes and Queries* 23 Dec. 1865 530; my bold, Skeat’s italics). Here Skeat uses the comic technique of “broken rhyme,” invented by the late eighteenth-century Oxford wit (and Prime Minister), George Canning, and employed by Lord Byron, to trump the difficulties of the rhyme: to master rhyme rather than be mastered by it. Following this, in the 1870 *Graphic*, Burnand humorously challenged readers to find a disyllabic rhyme to “silver.” His friend the librettist wit W.S. Gilbert took up the challenge by replying in a latter issue that he was “engaged in perfecting an ingenious apparatus for the

purpose of extracting sunbeams from the cucumber of commerce ... and when it is completed I shall call it a “Chilver!” (427)⁸⁰

“The subject is curious and almost inexhaustible,” Skeat noted, and few months later called searching for “uncommon rhyme,” “in its way, very interesting” (*Notes and Queries* 4 Nov. 1865 377; 3 Feb. 1866 102). That these symposia on uncommon rhyme took place in *Athenaeum* and the antiquarian *Notes and Queries*, journals that had pretensions to academic credibility, suggests that these rhyme games were understood as scholarly work as well as witty wordplay, distinctions that became synonymous when linked by uncommon rhyme. Skeat’s interest in uncommon rhymes was influenced by both the Cambridge verse culture of wit from which he emerged and his philology: at the time he was contributing to discussions of uncommon rhymes, he was also working with F. J. Furnivall on what would become the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

But as much as “uncommon rhyme” was a university phenomenon, it was also a nursery phenomenon. The *Nursery Rhyme Book* (1898), edited by the Oxonian Andrew Lang, publishes the following nursery rhyme: “What is the rhyme for *porringer*? / The King he had a daughter fair, / And gave the Prince of Orange her” (37). Versions of this nursery rhyme were frequently circulated as solutions for the seemingly rhymeless “porringer.”⁸¹ Moreover, in “What is pink? a rose is pink” from *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme-Book* (1872), Christina Rossetti responded to these abovementioned challenges in periodicals to find an “uncommon rhyme” for “month” and “orange”: “How man weeks in a month? / Four, as the swift moon runn’th.” Later, she responds to the challenge to find a rhyme for “orange” by rhyming orange with itself. After a series of definitions, “What is violet? clouds are violet / In the summer twilight,” Rossetti concludes tautologically by rhyming “orange” (an adjective) with “orange” (a noun): “What is orange?

why, an orange, / Just an orange!” The audience of her nursery rhymes only ostensibly was mothers and children; she was in fact also writing to those wits and philologists in the “uncommon rhyme” competitions of her day. But those judges would have never accepted Rossetti’s “orange ... orange”: rhyming a word with itself would have been deemed either mere assonance or *rime riche*, and therefore a form of rhyming that either was no rhyme at all or too easy. But Rossetti argues the rhyme for “orange” may “just” be “orange,” an employment of *rime riche* that Rossetti cunningly, punningly suggests is “just.”

In so doing, Rossetti beats the university men at what was supposedly their own game. She also makes an argument for what should be considered legitimate rhyme. Her participation in this contest is an instance of a broader conflict between the university and the nursery over the location of proper rhyme, who might play with rhyme (the gendering of rhyme), how rhyme might be played with, and, more specifically, how rhyme might be played with to establish a relationship to the past. Immediately after Rossetti published *Sing-Song*, the Cambridge wit Arthur Clement Hilton parodied it as “Ding-Dong,” in *The Light Green* (1872), his celebrated parody of the famous but short-lived Oxford periodical, *The Dark Blue*. Hilton mocked the babyish nursery rhymes of Rossetti:

Baby sleepy,
Go to bed.
Baby naughty,
Smack his head!

“Ding-Dong” concludes mocking Rossetti’s catechistic nursery rhymes⁸²:

What are fast? Tides and times.
What are slow? Nursery rhymes.

The Light Green, like many Victorian parodies, sought to police the boundaries of legitimate taste. For Hilton and his Cambridge peers, Rossetti's *Sing-Song* read as "puerility ... scarcely intelligible nonsense," as his college friend Sir Robert P. Edgcumbe put it in *The Works of Arthur Clement Hilton: Together with His Life and Letters* (1904) (74). Nursery rhyme was growing in popularity, but nursery was deemed unacceptable by University rhymesters for its too easy, too simple, nonsense rhymes, for its female authorship, and for its mis-valuing of sound over sense.

At the same time that Hilton was parodying Rossetti's nursery rhymes, Calverley was ridiculing the rhymes of the nursery rhymist Jean Ingelow in "Lovers, and a Reflection" from his 1872 *Fly Leaves*. In so doing, Calverley made an argument for what he felt counted as legitimate rhyme, echoing Hilton that proper rhyme would be difficult, "uncommon rhyme," sense as much as sound, and produced by technical mastery; not simple, babyish babble, and rhymes that determine the lines. Indeed, through "Lovers, and a Reflection," Calverley sought to teach Ingelow how to rhyme.⁸³ In "Lovers," Calverley chuckles that Ingelow's control over her medium is so enervated that rhyme determines her word choice, thus producing merely empty, nonsensical sound play: "And all least furlable things got 'furred;'" writes Calverley, "Not with any design to conceal their 'glories,' / But simply and solely to rhyme with 'world'" (ll. 39-40, 50-2).⁸⁴ Rather than originate innovative pairings as in Cambridge versifiers' uncommon rhyme, Ingelow repeats her old pairings: "I need hardly remark it was glorious weather.... I must mention again it was gorgeous weather, / Rhymes are so scarce in this world of ours," Calverley writes, mimicking Ingelow's limited rhymes (l. 7, 15-16). Ingelow's worst fault is that she recycles clichéd pairings: her "trotted out" rhymes, like "bowers ... flowers ... showers" and "sorrow borrow ... tomorrow," all "have done much duty." If Ingelow's rhymes show any

creativity, it is in the form of the invention of nonsensical neologisms (“kneaden”) to meet the difficulties of rhyme, rather than undertaking the more challenging, and therefore more legitimate creativity of having a deep vocabulary to create an original, uncommon rhyme.

To rhyme as Calverley says Ingelow does—to use familiar pairings, to choose words that make sounds but not sense, to invent words to evade the difficulty of rhyme—was to rhyme too easily. The value of innovative rhyme lay in the writer’s technique overcoming difficulty: master form rather than be mastered by it. For Calverley, rhyme should be difficult, but seem easy. These university wits stressed that their wordplay was not anti-intellectual childishness but intellectual and disciplined work, apt for classically trained university men, but that work produced play, which cloaked the work necessary to produce it.

For Calverley as for all university wits, rhyme play was the very opposite of cliché; rather, it was an opportunity for *display*: an opportunity to show off one’s ability to rhyme extravagantly, endlessly, to find the most ingenious rhymes one could, to never run out of rhyme. Like all Cambridge wits, Calverley did not just want to write “brave rhymes,” as Calverley puts it at the end of “Lovers, and a Reflection;” he also wanted to rhyme with *bravado*. Calverley does more than criticize Ingelow for derivatively writing “what . . . has been expressed in the same way many times before” (King 387). Calverley defines what counts as legitimately innovative rhyme and then claims it for the University, not the nursery.

While Hilton and Calverley argued that sense should not be sacrificed to sound, Jean Ingelow argued that sound should not be sacrificed to sense. In parts one and two of “The History of an Infancy” in the 1890 *Longman’s Magazine*, Ingelow makes a suggestive point about rhyme. Her exposure as an infant to the perfect rhymes and meters of Isaac Watts’ hymns taught her to feel a lifelong “distaste for false and imperfect rhymes.” Ever since, Ingelow would

rather sacrifice sense to sound, reason to sensation: “If the rhyming word was not right I made it so at the expense of the sense, the ear being much in advance of the reason” (387). Ingelow’s curiously phrased justification of her nursery rhymes—“the ear [is] much in advance of the reason”— suggests not only that the body is quicker to sense a perception than the mind can make sense of it, but also that sensation is paradoxically both more rudimentary and more cognitively advanced than cognition. Rhyme, for Ingelow, is more an experience of body than of mind, more a question of sound than sense. Her suggestive phrasing intimates that sensation, because it is more primal, more childlike, more embodied, is more valuable than cognition, even that sensation may be a form of thinking more complex (in advance of) reason itself.

By asserting sound over sense, Ingelow and Rossetti were associating rhyme with the nursery, at the transition point from the pre-linguistic to the linguistic. Cambridge wits, however, wanted to associate rhyme with youth and the university, to make rhyming difficult, work that should seem like play. Nursery rhyming, to the Cantabridgians, seemed like facile rhyming: through simple diction and nonsense neologisms, the poetess evaded of the difficulty of unearthing uncommon rhymes. Their parodies implicitly argued that their rhymes were not mere anti-intellectual wordplay of children but were intellectual work of men. Their disdain of the babyish babble of female nursery rhyme was an attempt to resist the associated rhyme with infancy, naïveté, and immaturity, which would undermine the work of rhyme at Cambridge in turning boys into men.

University Rhyme *as* Nursery Rhyme

But even as rhyme play at Cambridge worked to turn boys into men, rhyme play also helped Cambridge men become boys. Indeed, while Calverley criticized nursery rhyme for its

babyish babble, in his witty verse Calverley also exploited nursery rhyme to help produce the masterthemes of his verse and of Cambridge verse more generally: memory, the nostalgia for lost youth, and the desire to return to and recover one's childhood. Eight of the eighteen verses of Calverley's 1861 *Verses and Translations*—nearly half—thematize nostalgia (“Visions,” “Gemini and Virgo,” “There stands a city,” “Voices of the Night,” “To Mrs. Goodchild,” “Ode—‘On a Distant Prospect’ of Making a Fortune,” “Isabel,” and “Hic *Vir*, Hic Est”). While only six of the thirty-six poems in Calverley's 1872 *Fly Leaves*—approximately 20 percent—thematize nostalgic reminiscing (“Changed,” “First Love,” “Sad Memories,” “Companions,” “Precious Stones,” and “Flight.”), the proportion is still significant and constitutes the major theme of the volume. In *Verses and Translations*, memory often takes the form of nostalgia for schooldays (“Visions,” “Gemini and Virgo,” and “Hic *Vir*, Hic Est”). Whereas *Verses and Translations* thematizes sound memory, a decade later *Fly Leaves* curiously thematizes unsound memory: memory in *Fly Leaves* more often than not is *bad* memory, forgetting but wanting to remember; or it is *sad* memory, remembering but wanting to forget. By *Fly Leaves*, recollection has become an unrealizable desire or an unwanted possession.

In “To Mrs. Goodchild,” excerpted below, Calverley begins with an extended reference to nursery rhymes:

And to my gaze the phantoms of the Past,
The cherished fictions of my boyhood, rise:
I see Red Ridinghood observe, aghast,
The fixed expression of her grandam's eyes;
I hear the fiendish chattering and chuckling
Which those misguided fowls raised at the Ugly Duckling.

The House that Jack built—and the Malt that lay
Within the House—the Rat that ate the Malt—
The Cat, that in that sanguinary way
Punished the poor thing for its venial fault—
The Worrier-Dog—the Cow with crumpled horn—
And then—ah yes! and then—the Maiden all forlorn!

O Mrs. Gurton—(may I call thee Gammer?)
Thou more than mother to my infant mind!
I loved thee better than I loved my grammar—
I used to wonder why the Mice were blind,
And who was gardener to Mistress Mary,
And what—I don't know still—was meant by “quite contrary.”

“Tota contraria,” an “*Arundo Cami*”
Has phrased it—which is possibly explicit,
Ingenious certainly—but all the same I
Still ask, when coming on the word, “What is it?”
There were more things in Mrs. Gurton's eye,
Mayhap, than are dreamed of in our philosophy.

As is characteristic of Calverley's verse, the poem begins with a man reminiscing, returning to boyhood, here in the form of remembering the fairy tales and nursery rhymes he listened to in his

childhood. The second stanza above contains multiple references to the popular nursery rhyme, “This is the House that Jack Built,” just as the next stanza references *Gammer Gurton’s Garland, or the Nursery Parnassus*, the first collection of nursery rhymes in English, which the antiquary Joseph Ritson published in 1784.

Indeed, references to nursery rhyme appear throughout Calverley’s verse, from the closing reference to “Who killed Cock Robin?” at the end of “Lines Suggested by the Fourteenth of February” (I), to “A, B, C,” a burlesque of mnemonic acrostics used to teach children the alphabet. Indeed, poems like “Play” and “Under the Trees,” which take the form of incessant monorhyme, might be seen as nursery rhymes in their sheer indulgence in sound making, even as that simple sound play cloaks the exemplary technique necessary to produce it.

Referencing nursery rhyme allowed Calverley not only to produce humor by contrasting the worldly-wise Cantabridgian with the naïvite of childhood, but also to both indulge in and ironize the tropes of nostalgia associated with Cambridge verse. By mocking one level of childishness (the Cambridge desire to be eternally young), he produces childishness on another level (the flippancy of wit). Calverley, in other words, uses his mastery of wit to at once do and undo his mastery, his maturity, and his masculinity. Put another way, Calverley, like his Cambridge peers, rhymed like a man in order to seem like a child.

Referencing nursery rhyme was a convention of Cambridge versifying. Calverley’s reference to “*Arundo Cami*” or the “Reed of the Cam” was a reference to *Arundines Cami*, a successful book of translations from English into Classical languages that the Cantabrigian classicist and clergyman Henry Drury and his Cambridge peers edited and published in 1841, and which went through six editions. A good number of the translations are of English nursery rhymes into rhymed classical verses. For example, Drury translated Gammer Gurton’s “Mistress

Mary / Quite Contrary” into Latin rhymes: “O mea Maria, / Tota contraria.” Thus, the naïvete of nursery rhyme is reworked into an opportunity to show how educated one is, how much of a man one is when it comes to rhyme. University rhymesters took every opportunity to employ and exploit nursery rhymes—citing them, writing them, and translating them, and especially reworking them. Transfiguring nursery rhymes from an expression of babyish babble and facile rhyming into a display of rhyme play was how university poets both paraded their wit and versifying technique and indulged in juvenile banter, allowing them to seem both mature and immature at once.

While witty versifying was a central practice of university culture at Oxford and Cambridge, the practices or styles of versifying at the sister schools were different, and therefore the way the Universities were imagined in the social imaginary were different.⁸⁵ Oxford wits were said to sum the world up in an epigram; Oscar Wilde was true Oxford “blue.” Cambridge wits were said to knock the world down in a squib. Oxford students were seen as the more serious and mature, Cambridge students the more playful and immature. Their distinct identities were both imposed on the universities from outside and cultivated by students and alumni from within. Even as producing witty verse signified the one had come of age as a poet and man, the silliness of witty verse was contributed to the stereotype of the Cantabridgian as the suspended adolescent, in contradistinction to the Oxonian who was seen as mature before his time. Indeed, the interest of Cambridge versifiers in nursery rhyme was a way Cambridge students self-consciously fashioned their identity as frozen youths. The implication is that versifying was a way of fashioning communal identities, a “school” of verse: how one rhymed helped to define who one was, the ethos of both student and school.

For instance, “The Literary Week” in the 1906 *Academy* argued that Cantabrigians were better wits than Oxonians because Oxonians mature and move on to serious pursuits while Cantabridgians go on wittily versifying and therefore remain stuck in suspended adolescence. “But the Oxford wit has, far more noticeably than the Cambridge wit,” the author writes, “a tendency to grow more serious as he grows older—to turn from the quip and crank to the serious criticism of life.” The writer blames the curriculum for this phenomenon. “Cambridge men study the Classics as linguists [read: students of versifying], and excel in the verbal felicities [read: mastery of poetic form and witty rhyme play]... They have often, also like Calverley, had nothing to say, and have said it excellently well.” On the other hand, Oxford men are more educated in ideas; the Oxonian “mind bears the additional burden of Mill’s ‘Logic’ and Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason.’ Language, therefore, bears a closer relation to thought at the older University, and the Oxonian, when he leaves Oxford, puts away what he considers childish things” (172). Conversely, the Cantabridgian, invested in rhymes, never grows up. The distinction this writer draws between form and content, sound and sense, is allegorized onto Cambridge and Oxford, and youth and age. Mastering poetic form could signify maturity as a poet, but overinvesting in poetic form could also signify immaturity.

Likewise, two years before publishing “Winnie-the-Pooh,” in the introduction to *The Granta and its Contributors: 1889-1914* (1924), the Cambridge alumnus and former editor of the *Granta*, A. A. Milne, recirculated the popular stereotype that Oxonians grow up, while Cantabridgians never do:

We were very young in those days, and young, it still seems to me, in the right sort of way; not with the portentous youth of our rival University; not scornful, not cynical, not superior; but youthfully light-hearted; light-headed, perhaps;

laughing too easily, if you like, too loudly, if you will have it so; but laughing. What if we laughed sometimes to show you that you had had the joke? Better do this, we felt, than clear the throat in the Oxford manner to show you that an epigram was coming. Life, for us, was not “rather a problem,” to be solved by a phrase at twenty, but “rather a rag,” and at twenty most to be enjoyed. Do we blush as we read again our old contributions [of witty verse to *The Granta*], thinking, “How immature they were”? Not we! We think proudly, “How expressive of our immaturity they were. How much they were ourselves. Does any of that divine youth hang over us still? If it be so, let us thank Cambridge and the *Granta* for casting the spell on us (xxi).

Like the writer of “The Literary Week,” Milne fashions the Cantabridgian as joyfully stuck in a state of suspended adolescence, achieved through the performance of wit. Rather than a term of derision, immaturity was valued—a sense he shared with many Cantabridgians, as their nostalgic verse evinces. For Milne, of whom a critic said that he was “metaphorically locked in the nursery,” Calverley exemplified this ideal. “Calverley was our hero. What chance had he at Oxford of indulging his glorious irresponsibility? He had come to Cambridge to keep truly young. We, who followed him from afar, picked up his youth, if nothing else.” Indeed, in *Some Literary Recollections* (1884), the Cambridge alum, novelist, and journal editor James Payn described Calverley as an eternal prankster whose “spirits were always those of a schoolboy” and whose “youth” was along with “health” and “strength,” a defining characteristic no matter what Calverley’s age was (181). Calverley, like his Cantabridgian peers, found the secret to eternal youth: the practice of witty rhyme.

What this allows us to see is that the antagonism between practices of rhyme affiliated with the university and practices of rhyme affiliated with the nursery was an antagonism between two different ways of using rhyme to return to the past. In both cases, childishness was performed. But University poets used artifice to produce a sense of mastery and irony; nursery rhymers used artifice to produce a sense of simplicity and spontaneity: two forms of mastery that wanted to make the hard work of rhyming seem like play, only the university wanted to display that mastery while the nursery wanted to cloak it.

Nursery Rhyme Over University Rhyme

Over the course of the nineteenth century, nursery rhyme became an increasingly popular genre, not only among parents reading to children, but also among adults reading to themselves. In the second half of the century, nursery rhymes were not only children's verse; they were also adult verse. What made the genre so pleasurable to adult readers was that rhyme drew the mind back: through reading nursery rhyme, one could return to one's childhood and relive being a kid again. In his edited anthology *The Nursery Rhyme Book* (1897), the Oxford wit Andrew Lang directed the pleasure of reading nursery rhymes at but also at adults. "To read the old Nursery Rhymes brings back queer lost memories of a man's own childhood," writes Lang, speaking of himself in the third person to make himself the type of his readers. Lang, stimulated by his nursery rhymes, briefly goes on to nostalgically recount his childhood pleasures of reading them (7). Lastly, in "Nursery Rhymes" in the 1907 *Academy*, "A. D." misquotes Sir Walter Scott's 1805 *Lay of the Last Minstrel* to make the same point: "'Lives there a man with a soul so dead,' that he has never felt a slight thrill of gratified and grateful emotion when the words of 'Baa baa Black Sheep' or 'Mary, Mary, quite contrary' were suddenly brought before his eyes or wafted

to his ears? I trow not” (341). Reading nursery rhymes was for adults a means of pleurably returning to and recovering one’s childhood past.⁸⁶

While nursery rhyme offered adults the pleasure of imaginatively returning to their childhoods, it also offered the nascent disciplines of anthropology and child psychology material for study. Like the emerging discipline of English language and literature, which emerged in part through putting rhyme play to work, the disciplines of the social sciences emerged in part through the work of studying rhyme play, particularly the study of nursery rhymes and the rhyming practices of children and the childlike (“primitive” cultures). In *Studies of Childhood* (1896), the fin-de-siecle philosopher and child psychologist James Sully notes, “It is commonly recognized that our pleasure in regularly recurring sounds is instinctive, being a result of our whole nervous organization.... The infant shows us this in his well-known liking for well-marked rhythms in tunes which he accompanies with suitable movements of the arms, head, etc.” (308).

Likewise, in *Primitive Culture* (1871), the founder of modern anthropology, Edward Tylor, applies evolutionary theory and natural history to the history of human culture to offer a stagist history of culture. For Tylor, all cultures progressively develop along the same pathway or order, from savage to barbarian to civilized. Mankind is homogenous, but different cultures are at different stages of civilization. Tylor saw in nursery rhyme a “survival” of primitive cultures in the present: nursery rhymes were not intended as nonsense rhymes but made sense in their original contexts; over time, however, as they circulated beyond their original contexts they lost their sense and started to seem as nonsense. As was a common understanding at the time, Tylor argues that nursery rhymes originally made sense but became nonsense, though their buried sense is recoverable. These emerging disciplines used nursery rhyme to establish themselves

even as they helped construct the valences of rhyme by displacing rhyme to the primitive past. In the second half of the century, the relationship of rhyme with the past, the primitive, and the primal was given the status of scientific fact. Indeed, in “Rhyme,” published in the 1900 *Longman’s Magazine*, the classicist Frank Ritchie summed up the trend: “[R]hyme now appears to appeal to an almost primitive sense” (114).

In “Rhyming as Resurrection” (2000), Gillian Beer notes that rhyme, for the Victorians, bore a “hint of the primitive—whether it be tribal past or nursery past.”

Rhyming ... is not reminiscence only; it performs the primitive now, bearing a freight of communal memory from early human history into the present. Rhyme is thus dangerously close to magic lore. And, with the Victorian tendency to identify the development of cultures with the development of the individual, rhyme’s childhood familiarity may make it also seem literally “puerile”—not fully adult (191).

While this puerility was the very source of rhyme’s pleasure for many Victorians—the pleasure of stimulating one’s memory, experiencing nostalgia, and indulging in return—in what follows, I argue that the growing associations of rhyme with childishness and babyish babble at the fin de siècle helped disassociate rhyme from University youth culture. Rhyme play decreasingly bore the sense of intellectual labor and of difficulty overcome by the technically gifted, university-trained poet. At the fin de siècle, the connotations of witty rhyme as intellectual, a sign of mastery, and a form of maturity as a poet and as a man, gradually began to give way to the connotations of witty rhyme as play, empty babble, and a form of immaturity. Rhyme now seemed increasingly trivial: not the sign of youth but of the child.

Outgrowing Rhyme

At the fin de siècle, a change started to occur in the status and functions of rhyme at Cambridge. As rhyme started to signify childishness, rhyme decreasingly was how Cantabridgians fashioned their manhood, or even their frozen youth; it was what one could, even should outgrow. As witty rhyming became increasingly associated with university youth culture, one might seem too old to rhyme when one left the university. More than that, the “age” of rhyme was shifting from youth to childhood. As rhyme’s associations shifted from the university to the nursery, difficulty to puerility, versifiers started to lose confidence in rhyme’s work and even to grow suspicious of rhyme. Rather than help Cambridge men produce and ratify their maturity and masculinity as elite Victorians, the production and consumption of witty rhyme instead started to seem like something that university men could, even should, outgrow. Indeed, at century’s end, rhyme’s value as a means of self-fashioning had so diminished that Cambridge itself seemed to be outgrowing rhyme. In what follows, I consider the verse of two fin-de-siècle Oxbridge poets, Herbert Arthur Morrah (1870-1939) of St. John’s College, Oxford, and Owen Seaman (1861-1936), an alumnus of Clare College, Cambridge, who began to rhyme about outgrowing rhyme. Morrah, who was elected president of the Oxford Union, would go on to be a novelist and poet, while Owen Seaman would edit *Punch* from 1906-32.

Rhyme at late-century Cambridge began to seem unseemly to its readers and writers because rhyme became burdened with overdeterminations. Cambridge in the second half of the century was undergoing change with ever increasing rapidity. With Cambridge’s extension of education to women beginning with Girton College in 1869 and Newnham in 1871, and with the gradual replacement of a classical curriculum with more utilitarian subjects, at the end of the century Cambridge could no longer comfortably be a boys club of classically educated, idle

youth. Instead, it seemed to be growing up, becoming serious. As classics departments were increasingly marginalized, a structure that had heretofore legitimized the association of polished form with polished manhood now began to fray. That women as well as men could now be imagined as Cambridge classicists and wits caused both gender anxiety and erotic interest among men. The 1871 dialogue poems, “Ad Chloen, M.A. (Fresh from her Cambridge Examination)” and “Chloe, M.A., Ad Amantem Suum,” by the novelist and journalist Mortimer Collins (who had no affiliation to Oxbridge) fantasize about and fear women beating men at what was formerly their own game: the deft employment of cunning, punning rhymes. In Calverley’s Horatian Sapphics, Chloe’s sharp reply to her jilted suitor begins,

But am I

To be made a victim, sir,

If to puddings I prefer

Cambridge π ?

Condensed in the uncommon rhyme “I ... Cambridge π ” were three university domains formerly occupied solely by men but which could now, as the rhyme suggests, define the identity of women: classics, mathematics, and the practice of witty, uncommon rhymes. By rejecting her suitor, Collins imagines Chloe displacing male undergraduates from the social structures and institutional practices that ratified their masculinity. As the new female student could be the new Cambridge wit, rhyme at the University could no longer easily be a prop for masculinity.⁸⁷

These changes in the ideological valences of rhyme in and outside Cambridge emerge as symptoms in the verse of the Oxbridge poets Morrah and Seaman. Morrah was twenty-two when the February 11, 1892 *Cambridge Review* published his remarkably odd dirge, “*Whom the Gods*

Love,” for the recently deceased Cambridge scholar and wit, James Kenneth Stephen, who had died at the young age of thirty-three a week before.

How chill the breath, how cold the long lament—
“Promise new-born, new-shrouded in the grave;
In vain, in vain the midnight oil was spent;
Too frail life’s bark on time’s storm-beaten wave.”

And we who wove for him the laurel crown,
A poet’s garland, that forecast the time
When he should lay his jester’s bauble down
And rise above the littleness of rhyme;

“He should achieve,” we said, “what they achieve
Who lead the busy forum of the world,
Teaching the thoughtless what they should believe,
Bearing aloft the flag of truth, unfurl’d”:—

And then pale Death silenced the silvern tongue,
And now we mourn a spirit wayward, strong.

“*Alas!*” we cry, “*whom the gods love die young:*
Whom the gods love are not remember’d long!”

Despite its clichés and recognizable conventions, “*Whom the Gods Love*” is a strange poem. Not only is it a memorial that ends with anticipation of being forgotten, but it is also

written in rhymes about the need to outgrow rhyme, about the writing of end rhyme as an incipient stage that should, with youth, end. In his dirge, Morrah argues that Stephen's pursuit as a writer of witty rhymes was antithetical to his development as an intellectual and a man. Stephen was expected "to do great things" had he not died young, as his obituary in the *Cambridge Review* notes (193). For Morrah, however, Stephen never lived up to his "Promise" because he never "la[id] his jester's bauble down [to] rise above the littleness of rhyme." Rather than the rhyming contributing to Stephen's identity, rhyme—and Cambridge's youth culture of rhyme—is precisely what Stephen must outgrow in order to become a teacher and a man. Morrah's association of witty rhyme with "littleness" that Stephen must "rise above," like Morrah's association of rhyme with a "jester's bauble" and thus not far from both a child's trinket and even babyish babble, suggests that Stephen must outgrow Cambridge's youth culture of rhyme play to become a teacher of the world. It also suggests that the production of witty rhymes is appropriate for university youths, not men. According to Morrah, Stephen chose to be a "jester" when he should have been a teacher; he chose to play with rhyme when he should have taught the "thoughtless;" he chose to participate in Cambridge's verse culture when he should have "lead...the world," he chose to be a boy when he should have been a man. Rhyme interfered with Seaman's growth; Stephen is "a spirit wayward" because rather than smoothly transitioning into adulthood and fulfilling his promise as a scholar, he veered off course into a state of suspended adolescence, a consequence of his persistence in writing witty rhymes after graduating Cambridge's youth culture. The keywords of this poem are the thrice-repeated "should" and its opposing term, "wayward," as well as "rhyme" and its enemy "time." In their antithesis is the thesis of the elegy.

One must of course note the irony of Morrah's rhyming about outgrowing rhyme. On the one hand, an ironic dirge is an apt memorial for Stephen, a Cambridge wit, since Stephen's verse similarly employed incongruity to humorous effect. In the irony of rhyming about outgrowing rhyme, Morrah risks producing the strangest of nineteenth-century genres: the witty lament. On the other hand, the twenty-two-year-old Morrah was still a student when he wrote "*Whom the Gods Love.*" Morrah suggests that as Stephen had graduated, he had outgrown a university youth culture of witty rhyme. As witty rhyme became associated with university youth culture, the less its production and consumption seemed an age-appropriate activity for alumni to do. The University ratified the practice of witty rhyming for those within its confines, but to graduate from the school was to graduate from that legitimacy. Stephen, in other words, needed to grow up and get a real job. Morrah suggests that he may write witty rhymes because he is a student, whereas Stephen, who had graduated from the youth culture of the university, was therefore engaging in behavior that was not quite age appropriate. The irony even greater than rhyming about outgrowing rhyme is that the very popularity of rhyme among students made it a problem for alumni.

If Morrah suggests rhyme should be outgrown, then the Cambridge alumnus, classicist, and wit, Owen Seaman suggests that rhyme can be outgrown. In 1893, a year after Morrah published his dirge for Seaman's schoolmate, J. K. Stephen, Seaman began to publish a series of twenty semi-autobiographical travesties of Horatian odes in the *Granta*; in 1895, Seaman collected and reprinted this series as the successful *Horace at Cambridge*. These travesties invert Horace's elevated interests (ex. the Roman navy) into mundane ones (ex. boat racing) in order to both gently mock and pay nostalgic homage to Cambridge life. Seaman also exploits Horace's well-known concern with the passage of time ("carpe diem," etc.) to express nostalgia. Seaman's

imitations of Horatian odes and revisions of the *memento mori* motif into a reminder of the “doom” of graduation were at once conventional for Cambridge verse and personal to him.

When Seaman wrote these Horatian travesties, he was already becoming famous for his “ability to rhyme from dawn till dark,” as a reviewer in the January 12, 1900 *Literary World* put it (qtd. in Adlard 68). That Seaman in his *Granta* series nervously jokes about being too old to rhyme is therefore intensely ironic—the very basis of the verses’ wit. These jokes are worth considering, however, because that humor is symptomatic of growing concerns that witty versifying was decreasing in acceptability when practiced by adults; rhyme play no longer displayed mastery but immaturity.

In “XI: Of Middle-Age in Motley,” Seaman humorously alludes to Horace’s 4.1: *Intermissa, Venus, diu* to mock his own “intermitted” travesties. They are past due to the *Granta* because Seaman, due to his “age and anguish,” jokes that he is no longer quick witted. Seaman was only thirty-two when he made these ironies, but in purporting to be no longer quick-witted, he playfully suggests that there is no “middle” in middle age. His references to his senescence lead him to suggest that the production of wittily rhymed verse is the domain of youth, not of adults, of students, not of alumni:

And there’s a younger, smarter race
All blowin’ and a-growin’
Should ply the pen and push the pace
To keep the type a-flowin’.

Here, his clipped “g’s” ape the informality of youth that he ironically laments having outgrown.

While Seaman quips that students, not adults like himself, should be writing wittily rhymed verses for the *Granta*, Seaman also looks for contemporaries who, like himself, also left

behind academic jobs in order to write witty rhymes in middle age. He does so in order to prove to himself that witty rhyming is an activity that not only university students can or should undertake and that rhyme and adulthood are not antithetical. Seaman points to his Cambridge schoolmate Arthur Reed Ropes, who in his middle age gave up his career as a Fellow at King's College in order to write witty rhymes under the pseudonym Adrian Ross. Ropes is the "Prometheus of a hundred tropes," as well as the only

one of riper age
Who bore from Cambridge portals
The sacred flame of persiflage
To London's palsied mortals.

In his peer, however, Seaman only finds "Exceptions [that] prove the rule, no doubt, / Of rhymes with age abating." Rather than prove an exemplary figure for post-graduate rhyme, Ropes can only offer Seaman further evidence that Seaman is outgrowing Cambridge's youth culture of rhyme. Nor can Seaman think on it more: after accepting that rhymes abate with age, Seaman cuts his travesty short. He performs running out of time to rhyme: "I haven't time to work it out, / Because the printer's waiting."

Running out of time and growing out of rhyme are recurring tropes in Seaman's *Granta* series. At the very end of "XVIII: Of Making Hay in Sunshine" Seaman half-humorously, half-anxiously reiterates the belatedness of his rhymes,

Youth flies—I'd give a lot to learn
Who first conceived that trenchant trope;--
This blessed hour my urgent rhyme
Is half a week behind the time.

What seems like nonsense (Seaman's assertion that, at thirty-two, he is too old to rhyme) or senescence (Seaman's quick wit slowing down, thus preventing him from meeting his deadlines) is in fact the humorous metaphorization of an underlying anxiety. What Seaman describes as what he could not do anymore is an allegory for what his culture suggested he should not do anymore: write wittily rhymed verse as an adult after Cambridge. This produces ambivalence in Seaman. He clearly takes pleasure in rhyme, but his manhood is in question, so he laughs off his embarrassment about the inappropriateness of his vocation.

Yet aging out of Cambridge's youth culture of rhyme makes rhyming seem "urgent" to Seaman. For many Cambridge poets, mastery of poetic form was a sign of maturity; for Seaman, maturity is the antithesis of poetic mastery. He knotted his increasing age to the trope of a decreasing facility with form because he associated witty rhyme play with Cambridge youth culture. Thus, Seaman's verse so often expresses nostalgia for Cambridge and for youth, and so often feels threatened by the passage of time. Seaman's nostalgia for youth was also nostalgia for rhyme.

When Seaman writes about his rhyme being "behind the time" and therefore needing to be "urgent," he was doing more than merely expressing his embarrassment at persisting in a practice of University youth culture as an adult. "Urgent rhyme" is also a way of reading the work of his rhymes. When Seaman concludes "XVIII: Of Making Hay in Sunshine," the sound play becomes frantic and frenetic—"urgent"—when the poem is literally running out of time.

Trust not the morrow, lest it turn
Traitor and trump your cherished hope;
Youth flies—I'd give a lot to learn
Who first conceived that trenchant trope;—

This blessed hour my urgent rhyme
Is half a week behind the time.

Seaman, rushing to meet his deadline, performs the “urgency” of rhyme. The interminable alliteration (“**T**r**u**st ... **T**raitor ... **t**rump ... **t**renchant **t**rope”) and the consonantal play (“**l**est it turn ... **l**ot to **l**earn,” where $l \rightarrow t \rightarrow t \rightarrow \text{turn}$ becomes $l \rightarrow t \rightarrow t \rightarrow \text{learn}$) intensifies the rhyme, making it seem pressing, vital, before rhyme, like the poem, has to end.

Moreover, rhyme in these poems never seems to come when it should. Rather, rhyme comes unexpectedly, late and early, always untimely, never on time. Indeed, when Seaman writes, “my urgent rhyme / Is half a week behind the time,” he rhymes earlier than expected. In addition to the anticipated end rhyme “rhyme ... time” is the more excessive “rhyme ... **hind** ... time.” Seaman’s rhymes come before (behind) end of the line; his “urgent rhymes” are “behind the time” of the line. We see this “urgent,” late rhyme elsewhere in Seaman’s verse: in the untimely rhymed “**h**eathenish **C**haldee ... **t**heology” and in “XI: Of Middle Age in Motley” where Seaman polysyllabically rhymes “**l**ecture-**d**esk ... **b**urlesque.” (The rhyme scheme in which these rhymes appear is monosyllabic followed by polysyllabic rhyme; given their position in the stanza, these lines should rhyme off one syllable, but instead they surprisingly rhyme off two.) The additional, early, “urgent rhyme” falls on what should be the unstressed syllable rather than on the stressed syllable, thus making the syllable distressed: Seaman’s urgent rhymes never rest.

On the one hand, Seaman’s surprising rhymes are the very soul of wit. On the other hand, that Seaman’s rhymes come either too soon or too late (and usually both) is a way that Seaman performs the loss of control over his medium (which he knows is ironically a form of mastery) that he anxiously jokes is the result of being too old to rhyme. When Seaman rhymes, “Full well

they know, who know the Ropes ... Prometheus of a hundred tropes,” he doesn’t just rhyme “Ropes ... tropes,” he also (off-)rhymes “**know the Ropes ... Prometheus**”: “know” with “Pro-,” “the” (slightly) with “-the-,” and “Ropes” (slightly) with “-us.” This additional rhyme is “urgent” in that it is excessive, extra, and early; and it is “belated” in that Seaman extends the rhyme, prolongs it, and thus in a sense makes the lingering, protracted rhyme seem delayed. Like Seaman’s age—at once too old and too young, senescent and immature—Seaman’s rhymes come both late and early, never entirely on time.

From one perspective, Morrah’s 1892 dirge “*Whom the Gods Love*” and Seaman’s 1893 *Granta* series of Horatian travesties make opposing statements. Morrah suggests that Stephen is immature because he rhymes, while Seaman claims that he is aged and therefore cannot rhyme. By suggesting that both Stephen and Seaman are too old to rhyme, however, both poets do more than associate witty rhyme with university youth culture—they turn rhyme into a figure for youth. What was once an activity frequently practiced by university youths now became a metaphor for youth itself. When these poets suggest that rhyme could (Seaman), even should (Morrah) be outgrown, they express a loss of confidence in rhyme, which, as a figure for youth, now seemed immature, not sustaining, when practiced by adult alumni. At fin-de-siècle Cambridge, the traumatic beginning of adulthood meant the tragic end of rhyme.

The End of Rhyme

Rhyme at the fin de siècle was made to seem like it could and should be outgrown in order to allegorize the suspicion that Cambridge’s verse culture was itself outgrowing rhyme, as its verse culture of wit and rhyme play decreased in popularity. When Seaman joked about “rhymes with age abating,” he also feared that rhyme at Cambridge was *abating with the age* as

the century ended. By the 1890s, Cambridge's verse culture of wit may have been fading away. Just before Morrah and Seaman suggested that rhyme could or should be outgrown, the "Ballad of Dead Wit" in the March 12, 1891 *Cambridge Review* lamented that Cambridge itself had outgrown wit and rhyme. "What has become of our Cambridge wit?," the ballad's refrain cries over and over, elegizing a dying verse culture. Wit and rhyme appeared so "dead," the ballad argues, that Cambridge wits now struggle "to eke three stanzas out." Cambridge seemed to be becoming serious and scholarly—"The pasquinade and the epigram ... Are now replaced by a cold exam"—the university seemed to be growing up, outgrowing rhyme. So when Seaman wrote that rhyme was "urgent," he was expressing the nascent anxiety that rhyme itself seemed "behind the time," on its way out of Cambridge. Seaman was not just ironically "mourning" his personal loss of rhyme; he was also "mourning" the perceived loss of an entire verse culture at Cambridge. At the fin de siècle, rhyme had become more urgent than ever for these men to pursue, perpetuate, and preserve. Time, it seemed, was running out for rhyme in the verse culture of Cambridge wit.

The "Ballad of Dead Wit" references Charles Whibley's anthology of Cambridge verse, *In Cap and Gown: Three Centuries of Cambridge Wit*, which was published two years before in 1889: "But as for the humor once clear and bright, / And the smart lampoons which our fathers lit, / 'Three centuries' seem to exhaust the light." The anthology, according to the ballad, marks the end point of the production of witty verse at Cambridge. Indeed, between 1889-1912, a number of anthologies of Cambridge verse in addition to Whibley's were produced: *A Book of Cambridge Verse* (1911) ed. E. E. Kellett and *In Praise of Cambridge: An Anthology in Prose and Verse* (1912) ed. Sydney Waterlow. These anthologies were part of the founding of a memory industry that attempted to preserve Cambridge's verse culture of man-made rhyme and

Cambridge's culture rhyme-made men—to preserve styles of verse and lifestyles of manhood—which, at the fin de siècle, were felt to be dying.

But were these anthologies an attempt to preserve both a dying Cambridge culture of rhyme and a dying Cambridge culture of manhood? Or were they a sign of that verse culture's popularity and strength? As a last word, I want to briefly consider the irony of all this. The irony of rhyming about being too old to rhyme and of rhyming about wit and rhyme being “dead” suggests that this “crisis” of rhyme may have been as much a manufactured crisis as a real one. The fin-de-siècle tropes that one could (Seaman) or that one should (Morrah) outgrow rhyme, like the trope of Cambridge wit being “dead,” may have been *tropes* and ironic poses as well as expressions of concern. The open secret of wit was that, at its seeming “death,” wit and rhyme were never quite so alive. Belief and doubt, conviction and suspicion, vitality and age seemed to coexist at this pivot point of the status of rhyme. The “death” of rhyme was as much a trope as it was trauma. At fin-de-siècle Cambridge, rhyme seemed dead and alive, as liminal as youth.

Early twentieth-century historians of Cambridge, however, claimed that this verse culture was dead by the early decades of the twentieth century. As Cambridge seemed to “outgrow” its rhymes, Richard B. Ince's *Calverley and Some Cambridge Wits of the Nineteenth Century* (1929) capitalized on the nostalgia of its readers for that rhyme culture. Ince discursively constructs nineteenth-century Cambridge as having matured out of Victorian play into modern seriousness, or serious Modernism: “Gone are the good old, or the bad old days ... of prolonged college feasts, gaudies, and dons who did little but play whist and drink port” (21). By “outgrowing” witty rhyme play, the dinner exchange of epigrammatic squibs, Cambridge seemingly had become serious, grown up. In the era of Modernism and free verse, rhyme was made to seem old fashioned, the mark of an earlier age. Even as Ince's history dismisses the “bad

old days” of Victorian Cambridge, however, it also offers itself as an opportunity for readers to relive those days and to renew “their second youth.” Like the poets of Victorian Cambridge, early twentieth-century readers, Ince hoped, would revisit Cambridge’s lost youth culture of “Varsity Wits,” which, like rhyme, was made to seem as if it had come to an end.

Conclusion A Brief History of Rhyme

While the use of imperfect rhyme was increasingly condemned over the course of the nineteenth century, at the fin de siècle more and more arguments justified imperfect rhyme as “allowable,” even aesthetically valuable. The prescriptivism of the second half of the nineteenth century began to give way to the descriptivism that would characterize the first half of the twentieth, in part due to the influence of A. J. Ellis, who helped scientize orthoepy. For example, while Carpenter, Hood, and Matthews argued that rhyme must either be perfect or fail, in his immensely successful versification manual and rhyming dictionary, *Orthometry* (1893), R. F. Brewer returned to Walker’s tripartite categorization—“Perfect Rhymes,” “Imperfect Rhymes,” and “Bad Rhymes”—to once again legitimate imperfect (near) rhyme. Brewer’s arguments for license in rhyme were supported in a series of articles in the American journal *Nation* at the fin de siècle. The poet G. M. Whicher’s 1898 “Rhymes to Eye and Ear” argued that prescriptivists “are upholding their provincialism.” To rhyme “dawn” and “morn” is acceptable because it is “genuine London English” (241). In the 1899 “License in English Rhyme.—I. and II.,” Stanford professor Alphonso G. Newcomer argued for the legitimacy and value of imperfect rhyme because pronunciation was always in a state of flux and therefore should not determine the legitimacy of rhyme.⁸⁸ Likewise, in the 1899 “Philosophy of Rhyme,” Trinity College (Connecticut) Professor of English Charles F. Johnson argued for imperfect rhymes, claiming, “lack of perfection is part of their charm” (109).⁸⁹ Andrew Loring (a pseudonym for Lorin Andrews Lathrop, the American Consul at Bristol), in his 1905 rhyming dictionary, *The Rhymers’*

Lexicon, argued poetic practice, not prosodic principle, determined legitimate rhyme. Rather than attempting to standardize pronunciations under a single law, Loring promoted diverse pronunciations: “It is outside the province of a rhyming dictionary to attempt to be an authority upon the use of words, or to discriminate as to which is the better pronunciation.” Loring continues, “Its modest duty is to register what people say, in the manner in which dictionaries record that they say it. The dictionary assumes the right of judging between two pronunciations; the Rhymers’ *Lexicon* inserts the two without comment” (xxxvi). Hood would have found this anathema.

As rhyme’s associations with sound changed, so too did rhyme’s associations with sense. Alexander Pope’s argument in Part Two of *An Essay on Criticism* (1709-11)—“The sound [of a poem’s versification] must seem an echo to the sense [of the poem’s meaning]”—continued to deeply influence the aesthetic functions of rhyme through much of the nineteenth century. The sound of a line should reiterate (perform) and therefore support a line’s meaning. Pope’s argument that the sound of rhyme must echo the sense made versification performative; put another way, Pope put the form in performance.

But at the start of the twentieth century, scholars began to argue that a poem’s sound contributed to its sense in an entirely different way. Rhyme was beginning to be understood not simply as performing the content of the poem, but as producing semantic meaning. In “A Philosophy of Rhyme,” published in the 1895 *Poet-Lore*, the Anglo-American journalist and philosopher Edmund Noble argued that rhyme was a mode of metaphorical thinking: “the sets of rhymed words seem to convey a sense of some closer connection between the things for which those words stand than any which is indicated to the cold reason by the mere resemblance of sound.... [L]ikenesses in sound ... suggest relativities in things” (585). Soon after, the 1901

Academy asked, “Does Rhyme Connect Ideas?” and answered, emphatically, Yes. “In conclusion ... rhyme has far too long been regarded as a mere musical device. It is in point of fact one of the most potent instruments of language in establishing and riveting association of ideas” (390). If Pope treated rhyme as performance, claiming that the sound of the verse should “echo” (perform sonically) the sense of the line, then these fin-de-siècle scholars treat rhyme as metaphor, claiming that relations of sound imply relations of sense. At the start of the twentieth century, sound moved from performance to metaphor: readers now understood rhyme as linking sense and sound, as analogic as it was sonic.

The argument that relations of sound imply relations of sense, over the course of the twentieth century, became one of the orthodoxies of rhyme theory. In “Rhyme” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*, T. V. F. Brogan argues,

[Rhyme] therefore figures meaning.... Of such semantic figuration there are two possibilities: either sound similarity can imply semantic similarity in words otherwise so unrelated that, in prose, no relation would have ever been noticed; or sound similarity can emphasize contrast in two words that echo.... In this way, study of the semantic effects of the phonic coupling in the r[hyme] augments the hermeneutic process, directing us toward a deeper and more powerful interp[retation]. (1056).

But when this argument was first made, it seemed less evident than dangerous to readers: to conceive of similarities in sound intimating similarities in sense threatened to habituate troubling associations of ideas in the mind, socially constructing a horrifying “normal.” *The Academy* concludes that rhyme may be “occasionally dangerous” by naturalizing the association of ideas better kept apart, such as “in the constant rhyming of ‘God’ and ‘rod’” (390). This idea is argued

more fully in the schoolmaster and literary critic Ernest Edward Kellett's article "Rhyme and Reason" published in the 1935 *Spectator*. Kellett argued, half-seriously and half-tongue-in-cheek, that rhymes "have had their effect upon our national character. Words associated in rhyme become inextricably associated in thought. We think in a certain way because our poets have been compelled to rhyme in a certain way, and our ideas follow a course determined by the exigencies of bards at their wits' end to clinch a couplet.... There is in truth no limit to the influence for good but far more for evil, of rhyme.... It is hard to exaggerate the fatal influence of the indissoluble bond of might and right" (544-45).

Despite these half humorous, half serious anxieties, the assumption that sound makes sense was soon canonized by twentieth-century formalism. The New Critic W. K. Wimsatt Jr. (1944), and continuing through the structuralist linguist Roman Jakobson (1960), the Russian semiotician Jurij Lotman (1970, 1972; trans. 1976, 1977), and the scholar of modernist poetry Hugh Kenner (1974), argued that words linked sonically also established a relationship of sense.⁹⁰ For Wimsatt, rhyme joins words that are often quite different grammatically and semantically to establish "an ingenious affinity in meaning" (336). Wimsatt echoes Noble and *The Academy* a half-century later, but no one remembers Noble and *The Academy*, while everyone remembers Wimsatt.

While formalists between 1940-90 argued that rhyme makes meaning, post-structuralist scholars between 1990-2013—the poetics scholar Debra Fried, the Victorianist-formalist Garrett Stewart, the Victorianist Gillian Beer (1994), the medievalist James I. Wimsatt,⁹¹ and the Romanticist Simon Jarvis—argue that rhyme *exceeds*, even *undoes*, the semantic meaning of a poem.⁹² For these scholars, sound does not serve the poem's meaning but is either independent of a poem's systems of meaning (Fried, Stewart, Beer, J. Wimsatt), and even antagonistic to the

poem's overt meaning (Fried, Stewart, Jarvis). In short, they separate sound from sense, or explore how sound resists sense, or consider how sound makes its own sense in contradistinction to the explicit argument of a poem.⁹³

These twentieth- and twenty-first-century assumptions about rhyme, however, are often entirely different from how nineteenth-century readers and writers assumed rhyme worked. To impose twentieth- and twenty-first-century assumptions about rhyme on nineteenth-century poems, therefore, risks treating rhyme as an ahistorical abstraction and results in ahistorical misreadings. But even as contemporary assumptions differ from those of the past, the terms contemporary scholars use (sound, sense) are the same as their predecessors. Rather than break away from Alexander Pope, contemporary rhyme scholarship merely reproduces his assumptions in alien form.

What my dissertation offers is a history of some of the different ways rhyme was thought about in the nineteenth century: not as sound making or unmaking the sense of a poem, but as sound fashioning or unfashioning senses of selves. Rhyme, in other words, was as much a commentary on the poet as it was a commentary on the poem. As a form of social work, rhyme play was not only a mode of display, but also helped produce verse cultures. What rhyme displayed was the poet's pronunciation and technique and therefore various fantasies of class status and class mobility. These class fantasies that emerged through rhyme produced various senses of popular and elite culture that were at once antagonistic (*vers de société* as a genre only the elite could write) and mutually supporting (Christina Rossetti's mining of a popular riddle culture for her aestheticized guessing games). Indeed, this dissertation destabilizes traditional notions of "major" and "minor" poets by offering nineteenth-century perspectives as to who or what counts as "major" and "minor;" C. S. Calverley, for example, was far more central to the

Victorian culture of rhyme than was Tennyson, who was considered a poet of blank verse. Lastly, my dissertation offers a rejoinder to those who might dismiss Victorian verse as just empty sound, for, as I have shown, sound in the nineteenth century was never empty of sense or meaning.

¹ Henry Lanz (1931): “Rime is concerned not with the meaning of verse but only with its form, which is emotional” (qtd. in W. K. Wimsatt 337).

James Wimsatt (1994): “[O]rganized in the self-referential music of a poem, like notes in a melody ... phonemes may well combine to express the poet’s musical ideas, which might, *speaking synesthetically*, evoke feelings of brightness, meditateness, and / or decisiveness” (29).

Simon Jarvis (2011), “these quick and unfixd rhymes might turn out to be the very melody of bliss” (43).

² W. K. Wimsatt (1944), rhyme joins words that are often quite different grammatically and semantically to establish “an ingenious affinity in meaning” (336).

Roman Jakobson (1960), “[E]quivalence in sound ... inevitably involves semantic equivalence, and ... any constituent ... prompts one of the two correlative experiences ... ‘comparison for likeness’ sake’ and ‘comparison for unlikeness’ sake” (83).

Jurij Lotman (1970, 1972; trans. 1976, 1977), “The sound of a rhyme ... is not acoustic or phonetic but rather semantic” (58-59)

Hugh Kenner (1974), “rhyme validates ... meaning which other orders of cogency have produced” (78).

³ The other rhyming dictionaries published in England were:

- 1) The Oxford-educated schoolmaster, Thomas Willis’ 1651 *Vestibulum Linguae Latinae* (~4000 words), a Latin dictionary for children arranged by rhymes.
- 2) The Cambridge-educated schoolmaster Joshua Poole’s 1657 *The English Parnassus* (~3500 words)
- 3) The psalmodist William Tans’ur’s 1776 *The Beauties of Poetry* (~6000 words).
- 4) The Church of England clergyman and author John Trussler’s 1783 *Poetic Endings: or a Dictionary of Rhymes* (12,000 words).
- 5) The poet and writer Thomas Smibert’s (anonymous) 1852 *Rhyming Dictionary for the use of Young Poets*.

⁴ qtd. in McConchie online.

⁵ The numbers of rhyme words are taken from Henry Wheatley’s “Preface” to his reissue of *Manipulus Vocabulorum*.

⁶ John Longmuir’s *Rhythmical Index to the English Language: An Index to All the Perfect Rhymes of a Different Orthography, and Allowable Rhymes of a Different Sound, Throughout the Language; with Authorities for the Usage of Them from our Best Poets* (1877) was one of many copies of or variations on Walker’s *Rhyming Dictionary*, which Longmuir also edited.

In America, the Rev. Samuel W. Barnum wrote *A Vocabulary of English Rhymes* (1876).

⁷ Likewise, the end of the 1860s, and 1869 in particular, were banner years for the publication of versification manuals and prosodic studies. While many prosodic works had been published in England prior to the 1860s, the late-1860s saw a remarkable proliferation of texts debating the rules of versification. As George Saintsbury argues in “The Prosody of the Nineteenth Century: Later Prosodists” in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21). Vol. XIII. The Victorian Age, Part One*, “Towards the close of the sixties—perhaps owing to the great developments of actual poetry during that decade, perhaps not—a remarkable number of prosodic works appeared” (online). Not only did Carpenter (1868) and Hood (1869) publish their versification manuals, but in 1869 alone, Brewer published *A Manual of English Prosody* (which he would reprint in expanded form a quarter century later as *Orthometry*), the high school headmaster Edwin Abbott published *A Shakespearian Grammar*, Edward Wadham published *English Versification*, and the phonetician and mathematician Alexander John Ellis published the first volume of his monumental multivolume *On Early English Pronunciation* (1869-89).

⁸ Professional poets owned rhyming dictionaries. William Blake owned a copy of Bysshe, despite also claiming, in *Jerusalem*, “Poetry Fetter’d, Fetters the Human Race!” Byron owned Walker’s *Dictionary*, ironically joking in *Beppo* (1817) that he “take[s] for rhyme, to hook my rambling verse on, / The first that Walker’s Lexicon unravels” (Stanza LII), and Tennyson owned the 1800 edition of Walker’s *Dictionary*, which he used early in his poetic career. Christopher Ricks points out, “Tennyson wrote “The Skipping Rope” (pub. 1842) in the end of his [1800 edition] of John Walker’s *Rhyming Dictionary*, and ... he took his rhymes in “ope” from its index.” A skipping-rope rhyme is a form of nonsense verse chanted by children when skipping rope.

⁹ Peter Levins’ 1570 *Manipulus Vocabulorum* was admittedly written for an audience of commoners. In response to the lexicographer Richard Howlet’s 1552 *Abcedarium Anglico-Latinum*, which was written for a gentle audience, and was therefore “great and costly,” Levins’ dictionary was low priced so that “the poorer sorte may be able to bie it” (“Preface: to the Reader”).

But more often than not, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rhyming dictionaries were written for gentle, educated audiences:

Poole (1657), a schoolmaster, produced his verse manual for “the hopeful young Gentlemen ... in that private School at [Monken] Hadley.”

While Bysshe (1702) writes not for schoolboys but for poets, he also has a gentle audience in mind; he explicitly associates versifiers with the laboring classes, shunning them. In his preface to the fourth edition, Bysshe makes who is not his audience clear: “I am very unwilling it should be laid to my Charge, that I have furnished Tools, and given a Temptation of Versifying, to such as in spight [sic] of Art and Nature undertake to be Poets.... Such Debasers of Rhyme and Dablers [sic] in Poetry would do well to consider, that a Man would justly deserve a higher Esteem in the World by being a good Mason or Shoo-maker [sic] ... than by being an indifferent or second-Rate poet.” Versifiers, like masons and cobblers, must work; poets, like the gentle, “are born to be so.”

“I pretend not therefore ... to teach a Man to be a Poet in spight [sic] of Fate and Nature, but only to the few who are born to be so, and whom *audit vocatus Apollo*.” Rather than a broad audience of versifiers, Bysshe writes for a narrow audience of poets-to-be; the Latin suggests Bysshe’s intended audience is classically educated and gentle, not popular.

Walker (1775), however, marks a transition point. Walker introduces his rhyming dictionary expressing some ambivalence regarding the validity of a dictionary of rhymes. On the one hand, “A rhyming dictionary ... for the purposes of poetry, seems no very unnatural or useless production.” On the other hand, Walker’s explicit purpose in producing his rhyming dictionary was decidedly not to produce an aid to versification, which he associates with “either as a bauble for school-boys, or a resource for poetasters.” He therefore repudiates “the insignificancy and puerility” of a mere rhyming dictionary. Instead, Walker frames his dictionary’s “nobler ends” as a dictionary of “orthography and pronunciation” (v). Walker writes primarily neither for poets or versifiers but as an elocutionist.

¹⁰ Entirely the antithesis of Poole’s, Bysshe’s, and Walker’s intended audience, Carpenter directs his “Clear and Easy Guide” to a popular audience of “purely uninitiated” amateur versifiers inside and outside the classroom:

At a time when ‘Handbooks of History,’ ‘Handbooks of Chemistry,’ ‘Handy Books of the Law,’ and other short cuts to general knowledge or useful information, find a ready acceptance on the part of the public, the little treatise contained in the following pages may not be without its utility, or unacceptable to that large class who now, in the thousand-and-one periodicals of the day, cultivate the Muses for pleasure and recreation, if with no higher aim and object (2, v).

The subtitle of his manual, *A Handbook of Poetry: Being a Clear and Easy Guide, Divested of Technicalities, to the Art of Making English Verse*, intimates its accessibility to a mass, rather than scholarly, readership.

Twenty-five years later, the same audience as Carpenter is sought by Brewer (1893), who offers “early training upon the tastes and recreative pleasures of young England of the twentieth century” (vii). In addition to training students in the classroom, Brewer’s *Orthometry* was “fitted to direct and facilitate home studies,” as one reviewer put it in *The North-eastern Daily Gazette*.

¹¹ Girton College, Cambridge was founded in 1869; Newnham College, Cambridge in 1871 (by the Cambridge Professor Henry Sidgwick), and in the early 1870s, Professors Sidgwick and James Stuart began a program of direct teaching in which university Fellows, for whom teaching in the University was unavailable, were dispatched to

towns where they offered extra-mural lectures (cf. Oscar Browning's "The University Extension Movement at Cambridge" in the 1887 *Science*).

¹² "Metrical discourse ... intensified toward the 1880s" because "[w]ithin a changing religious and political climate, poets and prosodists turned to meter as an organizing principle—a possible means to order and stabilize their relationship to the changing nation state," Martin argues. "*The Rise and Fall of Meter* reveals the lost history of metrical debate and, via metrical debate, national definition" (1-2).

¹³ See, for instance, Yopie Prins, "Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and the Science of English Verse," "Victorian Meters," and "Voice Inverse"; Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*; Jason Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*; Jason Hall, ed., *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*; Meredith Martin and Yisrael Levin, eds., "Victorian Prosody": special issue of *Victorian Poetry*; and Joseph Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry*.

¹⁴ See e.g. Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* (1999), J. Paul Hunter, "Sleeping Beauties: Are Historical Aesthetics Worth Recovering?" (2000), and Simon Jarvis, "The melodics of long poems" (2010) and "Why rhyme pleases." (2011).

¹⁵ In "Rhyming as comedy: body, ghost, and banquet" (1994), Beer contributes to a discourse that considers the alogical aspects of rhyme, how rhyme in general troubles sense making and reason: "The comedy of rhyme lies in its refusal of established categories" (195). Rhyme contributes to reason but also "outgoes reason in that it disturbs semantic categories and refuses the hierarchies implicit in those groupings" (193).

¹⁶ "Rhyme and repetition ... mark points of intersection between the composing will and its linguistic medium, at which what feels like an autonomous identity must make contact with facts of language and sound which are not entirely under its control. Rhyme involves choice, but it brings with it the limitation of choice; repetition employs likeness, but it can never achieve complete identity. In this sense, self-aware poems are aware of both their own will, and the sound that will is making. In nineteenth-century poetry, this equivocal sound of intention is especially audible, and for a number of poets it becomes inseparable from whatever shapes their kinds of meanings assume" (58-59).

¹⁷ In her essay, "Rhyming as Comedy: Body, Ghost, and Banquet," from *English Comedy* (1994), Gillian Beer notes, "Rhyme can conjure not only its elected pair but deflected others" (183) and "Rhyme has the tendency to emphasise either the fortuitous or wilful in composition" (184). While Beer has a different idea in mind than I do (Chance = "sounds intervene and challenge the dominance of syntactical order, threading unforeseen words together in patterns that suggest a new taxonomy framed by sounds alone"), her concern with "unforeseen words" and the role of chance in composition is the leaping off point of this chapter

¹⁸ In *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866), Swinburne gives his own account of "Faustine's" history, responding to the critiques of *Poems and Ballads* (1866):

I have heard that even the little poem of *Faustine* has been to some readers a thing to make the scalp creep and the blood freeze. It was issued with no such intent. Nor do I remember that any man's voice or heel was lifted against it when it first appeared, a new-born and virgin poem, in the *Spectator* newspaper for 1862. Virtue, it would seem, has shot up surprisingly in the space of four years of less—a rank and rapid growth, barren of blossom and rotten at root. *Faustine* is the reverie of a man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face as common and as cheap as the morality of reviewers, and dreaming of past lives in which this fair face may have held a nobler or fitter station; the imperial profile may have been Faustina's, the thirsty lips of a Maenad's, when first she learnt to drink blood or wine, to waste the loves and ruin the lives of men; through Greece and again through Rome she may have passed with the same face which now comes before us dishonored and disrowned. Whatever merit or demerit there may be in the verses, the ideas that gives them such life as they have is simple enough; the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty. The chance which suggested to me this poem was one which may happen any day to any man—the sudden sight of a living face which recalled the well-known likeness of another dead for centuries: in this instance, the noble and faultless type of the elder Faustina, as seen in coin and bust. Out of that casual glimpse and sudden recollection these verses sprang and grew (15-16).

Swinburne's "doomed as though by accident"—the interplay of both fixed destiny and random luck—offers a way of thinking of Swinburne's rhymes.

¹⁹ “Faustine” therefore shares much in common with *Atalanta in Calydon*, whose frequent references to “burn” pun on Swinburne’s name, and its pendant poem, “Félise,” which is similarly fascinated by the proper name “Félise,” “that sweetest name,” though “Félise,” rhymes less off the proper name:

I loved you for that name of yours
Long ere we met, and long enough.
Now that one thing of all endures—
The sweetest name that ever love
Waxed weary of.

Like colours in the sea, like flowers,
Like a cat’s splendid circled eyes
That wax and wane with love for hours,
Green as green flame, blue-grey like skies,
And soft like sighs —

And all these only like your name,
And your name full of all of these.
I say it, and it sounds the same —
Save that I say it now at ease,
Your name, Félise.

(“Faustine” is also in the lineage of Tennyson’s early “Ballad of Oriana” (1830), which also obsessively repeats the eponymous proper name.)

²⁰ The repeated references to weaving in the poem’s description of Faustine’s history stresses her textuality, its self-reflection:

For in the time we know not of
Did fate begin
Weaving the web of days that wove
Your doom, Faustine.

The threads were wet with wine, and all
Were smooth to spin;
They wove you like a Bacchanal,
The first Faustine. (ll. 93-100)

As “The first Faustine” soon becomes “A New Faustine” (l. 112), we might imagine Swinburne alluding to his own revision process, redrafting the poem so that “You seem a thing that hinges hold . . . No more, Faustine” (ll. 141-4).

²¹ “Faustine” emerged from a rhyme game codified and popular among the Victorians: “We were also fond of what are now called ‘Limericks,’” Gordon recounts, remembering her flirtation with Swinburne, “and he had a way of finding the most ridiculous and expressive rhymes to names of all sorts. I recollect one evening he said of a name casually mentioned, ‘I wonder if one could find a rhyme to Atkinson,’ and then immediately spouted: ‘A tree with all its catkins on / Was planted by Miss Atkinson!’” (21). Swinburne’s flirtatious attempt to find a rhyme for the proper name “Atkinson” was no different from his playful attempt to find rhymes for the proper name “Faustine.” Through the playful linking of sound, sonic friction generated erotic heat.

²² For Tennyson, repeating what made him an individual--his name--undid his individuality:

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro’ repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but only true life (*Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir By His Son Vol. 2*, 116-17).

Rhyming for Tennyson was hypnotic; while repeating his name suspended Tennyson’s will, his seeming loss of self only expanded Tennyson’s self into the infinite.

²³ Closure is resisted in the considerable deferral between the two halves of the closing “if...then” conditional statement at the end of the poem (13 lines of narrative-resisting description separate “If” from the implied “then”) and the open ended question rather than a conclusive answer that concludes the poem.

²⁴ In an untitled review in the 1883 *Academy*, the aesthete and critic James Ashcroft Noble also concluded, “Mr. Swinburne has never produced anything more fully satisfying, more flawlessly beautiful, than these hundred swallow-flights of song” (430).

²⁵ In “Swinburne’s ‘Century of Roundels’” in the 1883 *Critic*, the reviewer praises Swinburne’s mastery of sound, he laments the volume’s “artificial nature” rather than real feeling, and that while not nonsense, the “thought is subordinate to expression,” more sound than sense. In “Mr. Swinburne’s Century of Roundels,” in the 1883 *Spectator*, the reviewer laments that rather than a poet attempting express emotions that might master him, here “man is evidently master of what he deals with. He sports with language, twists it and turns it at his pleasure, and so stirs no deeper feeling than the satisfaction with which we regard the skillful exercise of art. . . . There was a time, perhaps, when genuine feeling may have expressed itself in these highly artificial forms. It can scarcely so express itself now” (970). “Specimens of French Prose and Verse” in the 1883 *Critic* called Swinburne’s invention of the Roundel a “self-made and bastard mixture” and a “feebler form” than the rondeau and rondel (328).

²⁶ Kerry McSweeney argues that only four of Swinburne’s late poems—“By the North Sea,” *Tristram of Lyonesse*, “A Nympholept,” and “The Lake of Gaube”—are “complex and difficult texts demanding sustained attention” (154). David Riede, while he lists among other late works “many poems of the lovely *A Century of Roundels*” as “exquisite,” he also avers, “the poems of baby worship . . . may be dismissed without extended comment—and without disdain” (190, 187).

²⁷ As an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford, Swinburne became interested in the French fixed forms that François Villon perfected (the ballade, the rondel, and the rondeau), and since his withdrawal from Balliol in 1859, he had been translating Villon. Swinburne and his friend D. G. Rossetti even proposed translating Villon’s entire oeuvre into English: On February 5, 1876 Algernon Charles Swinburne admitted the following in a letter to Stéphane Mallarmé: “Rossetti et moi nous avions autrefois l’idée de traduire en entier l’œuvre de ce grand poète, qui complete selon moi la trinité poétique du moyen âge où se trouvent représentées trois nations et trois couches sociales” (Lang vol. 3 132). My rough translation: “Rossetti and I once had the idea of translating the complete works of this great poet, who in my opinion completed the poetic trinity of the Middle Ages, in which are represented three nations and three walks of life.”

While this plan never materialized, the poems that they did translate and the fixed forms of the Villon circle with which they experimented helped generate England’s late nineteenth-century fascination with rhyme and the recovery of French fixed forms. (The title of Swinburne’s 1866 *Poems and Ballads* for instance does not refer to the English ballad but the French *ballade* of which the volume contains three variations, as well as two imperfect rondels and a series of imperfect triolets (“A Match”); he had written these poems as early as 1862.)

By the 1870s, Rossetti and Swinburne had so popularized Medieval *poèmes à forme fixe* in England that one could speak of what the literary historian James K. Robinson called “English Parnassianism” and the “vogue of Villon” in England (For the history of English Aestheticism’s revival of French Fixed Forms, see Helen Louise Cohen, *Lyric Forms from France: Their History and Their Use*; James K. Robinson, “A Neglected Phase of the Aesthetic Movement: English Parnassianism.” and “Austin Dobson and the Rondeliers”; Clive Scott, “The Revival of the Rondel in France and England 1860-1920: a comparative study.”)

²⁸ “In “Knowledge and Sense Experience in Swinburne’s Late Poetry,” Stephanie Kuduk Weiner points to the theme of chance in *A Century of Roundels* only in passing, “[T]he result of form is still also the product of chance,” as Shapiro writes of the sestina (29), and Swinburne would surely have agreed, as the theme of chance in *A Century of Roundels* testifies” (26).

²⁹ The centrifuge was invented in 1864.

³⁰ My rough translation:

I will practice my fantastic fencing alone,
Smelling in every corner the chance of a rhyme,
Stumbling over words as on the cobblestones
Colliding sometimes with verses dreamed of long ago.

³¹ A reference to Michael Ford Rossetti, the twin son of William and Lucy Rossetti, who was born in 1881 but suddenly died in 1883, and whom Swinburne would mourn in the series of dead twin elegies in *A Century*: “A Baby’s Death,” “One of Twain,” “Death and Birth,” “Birth and Death,” and “Benediction.”

³² A few days later (2/17/83), Christina did accept Swinburne’s dedication, writing to William, “Also have accepted (contingent) *dedication*.”

³³ In addition to Packer, see also Catherine Maxwell's "Swinburne's Friendships with Women Writers" in *A. C. Swinburne and the Singing Word* ed. Levin 2010 and Dianne D'Amico, "Christina Rossetti's Last Poem: 'Sleeping at Last' or 'Heaven Overarches'?" *Victorian Newsletter* 103 (2003): 10-16.

In the 1877 *Athenaeum*, six years before publishing *A Century of Roundels*, Swinburne published the article "Victor Hugo: 'La Sieste de Jeanne.'" It celebrates Hugo as the pinnacle of the tripartite babyolatry "tradition": "Blake, Hugo, or your sister—the triad of perfect baby-poets" (10/19/1875 letter to William Rossetti):

For once even the high priest and even the high priestess of baby-worship who have made their names immortal among our own by this especial and most gracious attribute—even William Blake and Christina Rossetti for once are distanced in the race of child-consecrated song... Not even in the pastures that heard his pipe keep time to the 'Songs of Innocence,' or on the 'wet-bird-haunted English lawn' set ringing as from nursery windows ... to the faultless joyous music and pealing bird-like laughter of her divine 'Sing-Song,' has there sounded quite such as note as this from the heaven of heavens in which little babies are adored by great poets, the frailest by the most potent of divine and human kind (257).

³⁴ Isobel Armstrong notes, "Through the movement of flirtation [in "Winter: My Secret] the ironies work" (358). Angela Leighton argues that the "essence" of Rossetti's poetry is in its noncommittal evasions, its "fun": "To determine that the secret is a rival lover, a hidden self-sufficiency, or a sexual strategy is to fix a literal commitment in the verse against the grain of its poetic effects: its surprises, its playfulness, its 'perhaps'.... This macabre and provoking sense of 'fun' is the very essence of Rossetti's poetry" (388).

³⁵ Jerome McGann calls Rossetti's "Memory," "a riddle we are asked to solve," in order to argue that "the 'secret' of Rossetti's poetry of secrecy" resides in loss and incapacity: "Lost experience, lost expression," McGann concludes, "such is the poetry of Christina Rossetti" (Kent 15-16). David Shaw calls Rossetti's "Mirrors of Life and Death" a "riddling lyric" and her poem "A life's parallels" "another enigmatic lyric": both exemplify Rossetti combining "a disturbing sense of what is incomplete, unlimited, or boundless with a comforting sense of the limits imposed by simple stanzaic forms, by strict anaphora, and even by the promise of some last or final word, which is then withheld" (40).

³⁶ See, for instance, Raymond Chapman, *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (1970); G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (1981); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993); Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* (1999); Emma Mason, "Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve" (2002); Mary Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics* (2004); and Krista Lysack, "The Productions of Time: Keble, Rossetti, and Victorian Devotional Reading" (2013)

³⁷ In "Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation" (1980), Jerome McGann argues, "Many of Rossetti's poems ... test and trouble the reader by manipulating sets of ambiguous symbols and linguistic structures" (215). In *Christina Rossetti in Context* (1988), Antony Harrison argues, "Like many of Rossetti's poems, 'Winter: My Secret' skillfully indulges in linguistic, formal, and metaphorical play" (18). In "'When I Am Dead, My Dearest': The Secret of Christina Rossetti" (1990), Angela Leighton argues that Rossetti's aesthetics of secrecy might also be understood as a teasing strategy of "fun," her secrecy a figure for her game of reference. In *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* (2005), Constance Hassett argues that "Winter: My Secret" ends "with a fantasy that holds the probabilities of disclosure and nondisclosure in ambiguous suspension" and "It enacts ... the paradox of her own authorial desire" (62-63). In *Poetics en Passant* (2009) Anne Jamison claims, "Like a number of Rossetti's poems, ["Winter: My Secret"] centers on the radical ambiguity of its own questionable center and takes as its occasion a refusal to express any core truth or emotion or even to confirm or deny that such a core exists" (195). See also Steven Connor, "'Speaking Likenesses': Language and Repetition in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'" (1984) and Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (1994).

³⁸ The phenomenon of "Miss Seward's Enigma" was not soon forgotten. Teresa Barnard, in her critical biography, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life* (2009), notes, "In its own time and for several years afterwards, [Seward's will] was accorded an almost mythical status, with rumors of an 'enigma' designed by its author and secreted among the pages, with a supposed substantial reward for solving it." In a footnote, Barnard points out that the Lichfield Record Office holds a letter dated January 23, 1818 from a Londoner, Peter Tennion, "enquiring whether the reward for a solution to the enigma by Anna Seward had been given yet" (146). On October 30, 1816, *The Morning Post* published the following poem, entitled "On Reading the Names of the Different Cities Given by the Enigma Candidates," that attests to the phenomenon of "Miss Seward's Enigma":

Miss Seward's grand Enigma farce,

Has prov'd that cash is very scarce,
Since scores of Bards have been all round
The Universe, for *Fifty Pound*.

Sixty years after the fact, the phenomenon was wryly recounted (with some parodic embellishment) in “Enigmas” in *All the Year Round*: “Many enigmas have been put forth with an announcement that the author would give a prize of a sum of money to any person who would find out the correct solution.... There is one which was attributed sometimes to Lord Chesterfield, sometimes to Miss Seward and for a correct solution of which a thousand pounds was offered. We should be sorry to guarantee either the attribution or the author (321). Thomas Byerley, writing under the pseudonym Stephen Collet, also details it in his 1823 *Relics of Literature*: “The unmeaning puzzle [of “Miss Seward’s Enigma”] immediately set the small wits, who indulge in such trifles, at work, and the periodical journals and newspapers teemed with answers” (115).

³⁹ “A Rebus” from the March 1757 *Gentleman’s Magazine* and later attributed to Lord Chesterfield. The answer was never printed.

The noblest object in the works of art,
The brightest scene that nature can impart;
The well known signal in the time of peace,
The point essential in a tenant’s lease;
The farmer’s comfort as he drives the plough,
A soldier’s duty, and a lover’s vow;
A contract made before the nuptial tye,
A blessing riches never can supply;
A spot that adds new charms to pretty faces,
An engine us’d in fundamental cases;
A planet seen between the earth and sun,
A prize that merit never yet has won;
A loss, which prudence seldom can retrieve,
The death of Judas, and the fall of Eve;
A part between the ancle and the knee,
A Papist’s toast, and a physician’s fee;
A wife’s ambition and a parson’s dues,
A miser’s idol, and the badge of Jews.

If now your happy genius can divine,
The correspondent words in ev’ry line;
By the first letter plainly may be found
An ancient city that is much renown’d.

⁴⁰ GoogleLabs Ngram viewer shows a steady increase in the use of the term “enigma” in “English” from 1780-1900: a sharp spike and just as rapid decline in the mid 1790s, and then a steady rise from 1820 on with a peak in 1870. “Riddle” shows the same trend: a steady incline as the century moved forward, and a more rapid increase around 1860. While the periodical *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post* in 1816 described enigma writing and reading as a “literary pastime ... become nearly obsolete,” enigmatography in fact only had a brief lull after the frenzy for the form in the 1790s (perhaps leading to the sense among a number of contemporary commentators that the fashion for riddling was outré by the Regency period).

⁴¹ In the mid-eighteenth century, *Aenigmatography*—‘the making or collecting of enigmas’—and its variants, *Aenigmatographer* and *Aenigmatology*, were all coined (1753 *Chambers’s Cyclopaedia*). By the late 1780s, collections of riddles were being published annually; at least eleven collections of enigmas were published from 1797-1800. *The Riddle Book* by Reverend Patrick Delany was printed four times from 1817 to 1825 (Cook 236). Some enigmas were set to music (cf. Augustus Voight).

⁴² According to Alistair Duckworth, Jane Austen aestheticized in her novels her real-life interest in riddling word games: while in real life word games gave Austen pleasure, in her novels they usually connote moral failure. Anthony Hecht argues that through riddling verse, Emily Dickinson expressed her “profound sense that neither life itself not the holy text by which we interpret it is altogether intelligible, and both require a riddling mind and interpretive skill” (162). In his 1802 appendix to *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth listed the enigma genre as a particularly pernicious fashioning of metaphorical diction (i.e. “artificial” rather than “natural” speech). Wordsworth claimed, “a motley *masquerade* of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and *enigmas*” thrust “out of sight the plain humanities of nature” from the language of verse, making poetic diction rhetorical, rather than “natural” (427, my

italics). His reference to “masquerade” may respond to the popularity of one of the most successful riddle anthologies to be published during the fin-de-siècle riddle fever. Titled *The Masquerade: A Collection of new Enigmas, Logogriphs, Charades, Rebuses, Queries and Transpositions*, it was published annually in four volumes from 1797-1800; by 1800, the first volume had gone through three editions; by 1812, it had gone through four editions; and it was reprinted frequently after that. The poets William Cowper, George Crabbe, Tom Hood, Theodore Hook, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Winthrop Mackworth Praed were also fascinated with the form.

⁴³ Hecimovich and Eleanor Cook point out that riddle books, advertised as “amusement with exercise” or “innocent merriment,” appealed to middle class readerships interested in self-improvement and seeking more legitimate forms of diversion than gin palaces, theatres, and other low forms of recreation. Hecimovich writes, “[Middle-class] values included a taste for entertainment that provided self-improvement. . . . The same forces that gave rise to Samuel Smiles . . . gave rise to the print riddle” (7-8). Eleanor Cook writes, “‘Innocent merriment,’ ‘innocent amusement,’ ‘innocent whatever’ is the repeated aim of numerous riddle collections” (239).

⁴⁴ With one difference: published right below the riddle was a verse solution (an anagram for “Persepolis,” perhaps to further encourage readers to compose their own.

⁴⁵ The solution is a pin and needle.

⁴⁶ Mr. Trumbull’s auctioning of “‘a book of riddles!’” in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* offers insight into the status and circulation of the genre:

No less than five hundred printed in a beautiful red. Gentleman, if I had less of a conscience, I should not wish you to bid high for this lot—I have a longing for it myself. What can promote innocent mirth, and I may say virtue, more than a good riddle?—it hinders profane language, and attaches a man to a society of refined females. This ingenious article itself, without the elegant domino-box, card-basket, &c., ought alone to give a high price to the lot. Carried in the pocket it might make an individual welcome in any society. Four shillings, sir?—four shillings for this remarkable collection of riddles with the et caeteras. Here is a sample: ‘How must you spell honey to make it catch lady-birds? Answer—money.’ You hear?—lady-birds—honey-money. This is an amusement to sharpen the intellect; it has a sting—it has what we call satire, and wit without indecency. Four-and-sixpence—five shillings’ (60. 478-89).

In this deeply ironized description of a riddle anthology, in which the traditional tag of “innocent mirth” occludes the riddle’s encouragement of prostitution, the auctioned riddle anthology circulates as an aesthetic object (the “beautiful red” ink, its supplements of elegant domino-box, card-basket, &c.) and as a “pocket” book.

⁴⁷ In a December 3, 1813 letter to William Elford that in part thanks him for an enigma that he sent her, Mary Russell Mitford offers an informal commentary on the enigma genre that starts to recuperate how some female readers may have understood the genre: “it is just what an enigma should be—short, graceful, and witty; and, to say everything at once—one of those rare things, a happy trifle.” She goes on to write that she “never found out any in my whole life before—except one that I discovered with a friend, who being famous for such things claimed the whole merit of it. Now it is impossible that I should be so much more dull than the dullest of the human species as never to have found out a good riddle, I take it for granted that all which have puzzled me were bad” (344).

⁴⁸ Her riddle style was so admired that writers sought to reproduce it as a way of paying homage: we see publications of riddle forms bearing the subtitle “After the manner of Mrs. Barbauld” (50)

⁴⁹ As RW Crump notes, William Rossetti reprinted “Name any gentleman you spy” together with another enigma, “Me you often meet,” under the title, “Two Enigmas” in the volume of Christina’s poems that he edited and published in 1896 shortly after her death: *New Poems, Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected*. Here is Rossetti’s Charade, “My *first* is no proof of my *second*”:

My *first* is no proof of my *second*,
Though my *second*’s a proof of my *first*:
If I were my *whole* I should tell you
Quite freely my best and my worst.

One clue more: if you fail to discover
My meaning; you’re as blind as a mole;
But if you will frankly confess it,
You show yourself clearly my *whole*.
The answer is “Candid.”

⁵⁰ The enigma may work us harder than it did its Victorian audiences. Most of the clues reference figures of speech now obsolete.

⁵¹ Constance Hassett discusses Rossetti's employment of traditional riddles as children's verse in *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872): the volume "includes many poems closer to the traditional riddle, which offers a proposition and instructs the riddlee to 'find the answer.' By mixing paradoxes, puns, and strange metaphors, these poems sportively exploit language for its egregious unpredictability" (122). Mary Arseneau briefly suggests that Rossetti's interest in the form derived from her mother, who also wrote riddles and charades (50-51).

⁵² "A Cockney or Cockny, applied only to one borne within the sound of Bow-bell, that is, within the City of London, which tearme came first out of this tale: That a Cittizens sonne riding with his father... into the Country... asked, when he heard a horse neigh, what the horse did. His father answered, the horse doth neigh; riding farther he heard a cocke crow, and said doth the cocke neigh too? and therfore Cockney or Cocknie, by inuersion thus: incock, q. incoctus i. raw or vnripe in Country-mens affaires" (John Minsheu, *Ductor in Linguas* (1617) qtd. in *OED* (online))

⁵³ William Keach's "Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style" (1986) and "Chapter 3: The Politics of Rhyme" from *Arbitrary Power* (2004) explores the intersection of Keats' poetics and politics, but what Keach understands as "cockney rhyme" is Keats' enjambed couplets, not his non-rhotic rhymes, which are what is usually understood as cockney rhymes.

⁵⁴ Mugglestone claims that poets since the 1770s, from Blake to Swinburne, had been using "Cockney rhymes" without condemnation, which "perhaps most effectively disproves the validity of the appellation 'Cockney' for the use [of rhymes that elide the *r*]" (64). In other words, "the loss of *r* [was] a development which is by no means restricted to 'Cockney' or otherwise 'vulgar' usage" (65). Condemnation was fallacious because "the loss of *r* had been acknowledged as a prestige marker" (66). In other words, given the long tradition of such rhymes being used, the "theoretical nature of the 'vulgarity' popularly associated with the loss of *r* on which such rhymes rest is perhaps dismissed" (65).

⁵⁵ Censure was "reinforced by visual rather than aural means" (65). "The condemnation directed at Keats [is] the result of a prejudice which is rather visual and linguistic" (66). "In an age in which prestige is vested in the written word rather than the spoken, the 'Cockney rhyme' is resisted ... because it chimes to the ear and not to the eye, and because ... the language of poetry ... comes near to the language of the age" (66). "Keats's use of aural rather than visual authority in his poetry was," Mugglestone points out, "typically to bring censure rather than praise" (88). "[R]hymes such as *born* : *faun* which traded on the use of aural rather than visual correspondence in this context were as a result often proscribed as 'Cockney rhymes'—in spite of their evident validity to the ear if not to eye" (88).

This "led to an increased emphasis on the correctness of spelling pronunciations, and indeed eye-rhymes" (57?).

⁵⁶ In "The History of the Poem," his preface to his 1831 poem, "The Last Leaf," the American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. expressed consternation about his youthful, naïve mistake of having used a "cockney rhyme" when rhyming "forlorn ... gone":

The Poem as first written had one of those false rhymes which produce a shudder in all educated persons, even in the Poems of Keats and others who ought to have known better than to admit them.... A little more experience, to say nothing of the sneer of an American critic in an English periodical, showed me that this would never do. Here was what is called a "cockney rhyme,"--one in which the sound of the letter *r* is neglected,--maltreated as the letter *h* is insulted by the average Briton by leaving it out everywhere except where it should be silent. Such an ill-mated pair as "forlorn" and "gone" could not possibly pass current in good rhyming society (online).

But more than signifying the association of inexperience and bad technique, Holmes's statement shows that a decade after Keats, Cockney rhyming had become an international concern. What was formerly a question of northern dialect versus southern dialect, rural versus urban, had a decade later become a question of English dialect versus American and thus involved in the transatlantic politics of pronunciation, in which an American critic in an English periodical critiques an American poet for his pronunciation, who then, stung to national pride, critiques the British for theirs. Holmes changed his verse, settling on "wan ... gone." The irony is that while the revised rhyme avoids a Cockney accent, it only works with a Boston accent, which apparently was acceptable pronunciation. Holmes's opposition to cockney rhyme became frequently referenced by Victorian British and American critics.

⁵⁷ Lynda Mugglestone mentions, "manuals of linguistic etiquette throughout the century ... commonly stress the social unacceptability of the non-realization of *r*" (60). While Mugglestone does claim that that the condemnation of "Cockney rhyme" continued into the early twentieth century, her focus is the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ "The delicate ears of a Pope or an Addison, would scarcely have acquiesced in the usage of imperfect rhymes, and sanctioned them so often by their practice, if such rhymes had been really a blemish," Walker writes in his "Preface

to the Index of Perfect and Allowable Rhymes,” “Nay so far from a defect, that there seems to be sometimes a beauty in departing from a perfect exactness of rhyme, as it agreeably breaks that sameness of returning sounds on the expecting ear, which in poetry ... requires something like an occasional discord to make even harmony itself more agreeable” (np).

⁵⁹ Walker concludes his “Preface” defending his openness to poetic license in rhyme:

It may perhaps be objected that a work of this kind contributes to extend poetic blemishes, by furnishing imperfect materials and apologies for using them. But it may be answered, that if these imperfect rhymes were allowed to be blemishes, it would still be better to tolerate them, than cramp the imagination by the too narrow boundaries of exactly similar sounds (np).

⁶⁰ Tom Hood claimed, “The absurdity of talking of perfect and imperfect rhymes is only equaled by that of speaking of good grammar and bad grammar. A shilling is a shilling—what the vulgar call a ‘bad shilling’ is no shilling at all” (155). In perfect rhyme, Hood noted, “the consonant preceding the rhyming vowel varies in each pair of words, all being alike after it” (155). Imperfect or “bad” rhyme “merely repeat the same sounds, whether the words spell alike or not” (155).

“Poetical license” was a sign of “incompetent workmen” and “in reality does not exist,” Gosse argued (70).

Sidney Lanier’s 1880 *The Science of English Verse* claimed, “no rhyme but a perfect rhyme is ever worth a poet’s while” (299).

⁶¹ “[P]erfect rhyme ... should not be held binding over such as may desire to emancipate themselves a little from such fetters. The code of the rhymester ... a perfect rhyme or none at all. This we emphatically impugn,” Wadham claimed. “It is, perhaps, owing to the public opinion created by small pedants [who argue a perfect rhyme or none at all] that no modifications of rhyme have ever been received in use among us” (115-16). Wadham was less prescriptive than Carpenter and Hood, however, because Wadham’s intended audience was entirely different than theirs. Rather than write to educate a broad culture of uneducated versifiers, his goal was to rethink the principles of English prosody. Carpenter and Hood published in response to a cultural problem: the popularizing of verse to a broad range of social groups.

⁶² On the one hand, descriptivists described, supposedly free from social values, poetic practice at a given time. For descriptivists, poetic practice, not pronunciation, should determine proper rhyme. On the other hand, prescriptivists erected a system of prosodic rules as a standard to which rhyming practice had to conform in order to be acceptable. These rules of rhyme were often based on two principles: one, that the only legitimate rhyme was perfect rhyme, and two, that the legitimacy of a rhyme would be judged on the basis of a norm or standard of proper pronunciation, to which that rhyme had to sonically conform. For prescriptivists, proper pronunciation, not poetic practice, determined proper rhyme.

⁶³ The *OED* defines Received Pronunciation as “The most commonly accepted or standard form of pronunciation; spec. the standard, most regionally neutral form of spoken British English, traditionally based on educated speech in southern England” (online). Ellis was one of the first to use the term “Received Pronunciation”: “Received pronunciation, or that of pronouncing dictionaries and educated people” (V. v. 6).

⁶⁴ Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* is the explicit root of Walker’s 1775 Dictionary. Rather than organize words by their beginnings as in Johnson’s *Dictionary* (and any standard dictionary) (“aardvark” precedes “abacus”), Walker explicitly turns Johnson’s dictionary upside down by organizing his dictionary by the terminations—and therefore the rhymes—of words (“plea” precedes “guinea”). Walker’s assumption, exemplary of neoclassical systematics, is that reorganizing language based a new system of categorizing (not on beginnings but on terminations) will offer a new perspective on their language and in so doing reveal hidden orders of structure that would otherwise go unseen: “[I]t may naturally be presumed, that an arrangement, which is perfectly new, may possibly produce advantages which were entirely unnoticed before this arrangement was drawn out” (vi). In so doing, Walker made rhyme into an aid for pronunciation.

⁶⁵ “Thus, without arguing in a vicious circle, we find that as a division of the generality of words as they are actually pronounced, gives us the general laws of syllabification, so these laws once understood, direct us in the division of such words as we have never heard actually pronounced, and consequently to the true pronunciation of them.... [B]y nicely observing the path which custom in language has once taken, we can more than guess at the line she must keep in a similar case, where her footsteps are not quite so discernable” (xx).

⁶⁶ Hare argues:

Nobody who has a due reverence for his ancestors or even for his own spiritual being, which has been mainly trained and fashioned by his native language,—nobody who rightly appreciates what a momentous thing it is to keep the unity of a people entire and unbroken, to preserve and foster all its national recollections, what a glorious and inestimable blessing it is to “speak the tongue that

Shakespeare spake,” will ever wish to trim that tongue according to any arbitrary theory (qtd. in Ellis 22).

⁶⁷ Mugglestone is right to point out that Victorians were aware that pronunciation had changed. “Morn” and “dawn” now sounded the same in English speech, and therefore could be considered perfect rhymes, except in Scotland, where the [r] is always pronounced. And Mugglestone is also right to point out that while the Victorians were aware of the realities of speech, principles persisted that made legitimate speech seem illegitimate when written. Mugglestone argues, “the combined claims of education, and the associated fictions of literate speech, were to suggest to many that they still heard, or at least that they thought they ought to hear, the retention of [r] in good speech, even though theory and practice in this respect were usually to be at odds” (89).

⁶⁸ Edmund Gosse recounts that Robert Browning gave the sequence its name in order to both veil Elizabeth’s authorship and allude to it by referencing both his nickname for her and her earlier love poem, “Catarina to Camoens,” about the sixteenth-century Portuguese poet and his love. But I suggest that “Portuguese” in Browning’s nickname and the title of “Sonnets from the Portuguese” also alludes to the Iberian “rima asonante” that so fascinated her, that she frequently experimented with, and that she “translated” into English.

⁶⁹ The Dorset dialect poet, schoolmaster, and philologist William Barnes contributed to this cultural fascination in the second half of the century with linguistic purity, returning English to its Anglo-Saxon roots, and de-Latinizing the English language. Returning English to its authentic Anglo-Saxon roots went hand in hand with recovering and preserving local dialects, which were seen as being less modern than Standard English and exemplary of early Anglo-Saxon and essential Englishness. He published the well-received *Poems in the Dorset Dialect* (1844); *Poems, Partly of Rural Life (in National English)* (1846); *Homely Rhymes: a Second Collection of Dorset Poems* (1850); *A Philological Grammar* (1854), which compared English with ‘more than sixty languages’; *Notes on Ancient Britain and the Britons* (1858); *TIW, or, A View of the Roots and Stems of the English as a Teutonic Tongue* (1862); *A Grammar and Glossary of the Dorset Dialect* (1863); *Third Collection of Poems in Dorset Dialect* (1863); *Poems of Rural Life in Common English* (1868); *Early England and the Saxon English* (1869); *An Outline of English Speech-Craft* (1878); and *An Outline of Rede-Craft (Logic) with English Wording* (1880).

⁷⁰ Other instances of the “Cambridge re-visited” poem include the sonnet (by a Wrangler of Trinity College) “To the Cloisters, Trinity College, Cambridge: On Revisiting Them at Midnight” (1851), C. S. Calverley’s parodic “Hic Vir, Hic Est” (1861), Richard Wilton’s “Cambridge Memories” (1873), (Anonymous) “Changes” (1888), Arthur Reed Ropes’ (aka Adrian Ross) “Cambridge Revisited” (1895), Owen Seaman’s jovial “Cambridge Re-Visited” (1895), and Rudolph Chambers Lehman’s “January: *Ad Redeuntes*” (c. 1896).

Thomas Gray was an alumnus of Peterhouse, Cambridge. His “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” in which an Eton alumnus revisits his alma mater, bears some similarity to the “Cambridge Revisited” poem.

⁷¹ In “A Great Multiplication of Meters,” the introduction to *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (2011), Jason Hall notes, “For many aspiring nineteenth-century men, meters . . . represented a passport to worldly advancement, scholarly achievement, or simply gentlemanliness” (15).

⁷² I eschew the genre “light verse” to categorize the Cambridge verse I am discussing, though, by the turn of the century, Cambridge verse became associated with light verse: “The Universities seem to be the natural homes of light verse,” the fin-de-siècle Cambridge alumnus A. C. Deane claimed in his 1902 anthology, *A Little Book of Light Verse* (xvii). While “light” has been applied to literature since the late sixteenth century to mean “Requiring little mental effort; amusing, entertaining” (*OED* online), using “light verse” to describe the witty verse of nineteenth-century Cambridge is somewhat anachronistic. Only late in the nineteenth century did “light verse” describe the witty verse of Cambridge; for most of the century, Victorian readers and writers called these Cambridge productions “wit” and later *vers de société*, following the 1867 publication of Frederick Locker’s *Lyra Elegantiarum*. *Vers de société* or “society verse” is considered a progenitor of light verse, although Locker did not use the term “light verse” in his theorization of *Vers de société*. Cf. “Light Verse” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics* (692).

In addition, light verse has a pejorative sense now that does not align with the reception of Cambridge verse.

⁷³ An anonymous review of *The Complete Works of Charles Stuart Calverley* in the 1901 *Academy* called Calverley “the first of parodists” and “the founder of a new dynasty in parody” (29). His parodies did more than just exaggerate “some obvious feature” as most parodies did; instead, they “catch and reflect *all* the elements of a writer’s style” (my italics): i.e. Calverley reveals those “less notable features” or subtle elements of style in the original poem that “a common parodist would ignore” (29). His art is more “delicate” (29). They can barely be called parodies, “so close and refined is the imitation” (29).

⁷⁴ Rhyme is a form of wit, Leigh Hunt notes in “An Illustrative Essay on Wit and Humor” (1846?), because rhyme, like wit, is based on juxtaposition, in this case, the juxtaposition of pleasant “ideas . . . depending on Sound.” (John

Locke somewhat derisively defined wit as a form of metaphorical thinking, an “assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity.”)

Uncommon rhymes also fit the incongruity theory of humor, which arose in the eighteenth century (cf. James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, William Hazlitt, et al.) and was popular in the nineteenth. The incongruity theory suggests that laughter is a product of violated expectations, and these ingenious rhymes exploited surprise. Like Byron, “Butler is so profuse of good and astounding rhymes,” Hunt notes, “that they become a part of his wit, by the increase and gaiety of the surprise” (32).

⁷⁵ In *American Wits: An Anthology of Light Verse* (2003), John Hollander makes a similar point: “Light verse provides a perfect occasion for the display of such control,” by the poet, over the formal features of verse; “in pointed light verse,” Hollander goes on to argue, “the verse form seems, so to speak, exoskeletal: foregrounded, not merely to display skill, but to express the pleasure taken in employing it” (xx-xxi).

⁷⁶ Classical verse is unrhymed because Greek and Latin are inflected languages. But in a remarkable series of essays from the late 1860s (“On Metrical Translation,” *London Student*, 1868; “The *Aeneid* of Virgil,” his review of John Connington’s 1866 *The Aeneid of Virgil Translated into English Verse*; “Horæ Tennysonianæ,” his anonymous 1870 review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of A. J. Church’s 1869 “Horæ Tennysonianæ;” and “Preface” to *Theocritus: Translated into English Verse*, 1869), Calverley argued in part that when translating classical verse into English, adding rhyme was necessary in order to reproduce the classical stanza. While meter was sufficient to produce the classical sense of stanza, English verse requires meter and rhyme.

⁷⁷ Calverley translated the Horatian Sapphic stanza into an ABAB heterometrical quatrain whose curtailed, dimeter final line Calverley exploited to produce the bathos for which he became so famous.

⁷⁸ In his parody “V: Of Saul Among the Prophets,” Speaking of the new female university student, Seaman admits borrowing a joke from the American RG Moulton, the popular fellow lecturer at the Cambridge University Extension School:

She’ll oscillate like Israel of old
Exchanging Moses for a Moulton idol;
The joke is not my own, I wish it were;
I also wish I were the Lecturer!

A few stanzas earlier, Seaman admits more borrowing: after rhyming “knowledge” with the nonce word “abolidge” he immediately begs forgiveness: “(I cull the form from Mrs. Gamp’s anthology, / And tender to the same my frank apology.)”

⁷⁹ Tom Hood noted how “effective” the “trick” of “affording a rhyme to a word which at first glance the reader thinks it is impossible to rhyme” was at producing “great comical effect,” though cautioned against using it frequently.

⁸⁰ “Chilver,” according to the OED, in fact means “A ewe-lamb: commonly **chilver-lamb** n. Also **chilver-hog**. (Found in Old English, and still common in southern dialects, though not evidenced in the intervening period)” (online) and it was in use through the nineteenth century.

⁸¹ In 1843, Halliwell wrote that this rhyme was, “Written on occasion of the marriage of Mary, the daughter of James Duke of York, afterwards James II, with the young Prince of Orange. The song from which these lines are taken may be seen in ‘The Jacobite Minstrelsy,’ 12mo, Glasgow, 1828, p. 28.”

⁸² What makes Hilton’s parody “Ding-Dong” so remarkable is that it is a double parody, mocking at once both Christina Rossetti’s *Sing-Song* and the Anglo-French aesthete poet Theo. Marzials’ “The Sun of My Songs,” published in the 1871 *Dark Blue* (the first volume), and which contained such lines as:

Yet all your song
Is—‘Ding Dong,
Summer is dead,
Spring is dead—
O my heart, and O my head!

⁸³ Critics debate whether CSC’s parody of Ingelow’s rhymes is more homage (King, “There is nothing in Calverley’s poem which is in any way malicious” (386)) or critique (Kitchin, “a triumph of male wit over feminine sentimentality” (303)). Calverley and Ingelow later became correspondents; Ingelow was said to have parodied Calverley right back.

⁸⁴ Writing of the rules of rhyme, the secondary school teacher and prosodist R. F. Brewer writes in his immensely successful verse manual *Orthometry* (1893), “[The falling back on imperfect rhymes that give false ideas] arises when a is wanted for a word that has but few rhymes to it in the language. The term *world* is one of these; there are

not above five that will pair with it; two if which are *furled* and *hurled*, and these being more pliable than the others, are therefore often worked up into some distorted phrase to furnish a rhyme” (168).

⁸⁵ Oxford boasted the prominent wits Lewis Carroll (Christ Church '54), AC Swinburne (Balliol '58), HD Traill (St. John's '65), Andrew Lang (Balliol '68), WH Mallock (Balliol '72), AD Godley (Balliol '78?), Oscar Wilde (Magdalen '79), Arthur Quiller-Couch (Trinity '86), and St. John Hankin (Merton '90).

Cambridge boasted the prominent wits Lord Byron (Trinity '08), W. M. Thackeray (Trinity '29-'30), F. C. Burnand (Trinity '58), G. O. Trevelyan (Trinity '58?), A. C. Hilton (St. John's '72), J. K. Stephen (King's '82?), Owen Seaman (Clare BA, '84, MA, '87), Barry Pain (Corpus Christi '85?), A. C. Deane (Clare '91?), and J. C. Squire (St. John's '05).

⁸⁶ For example, in “The Nursery and Popular Rhymes and Tales of England and Scotland,” published in the 1843 *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, the journalist and novelist Christian Johnstone opens, “The works enumerated below are made up of things which must be ever welcome and delightful, were it but for the memory of the time when the child drank them from the lips of love” (114). While Johnstone mainly argues why nursery rhymes are valuable for children, she also suggests why adults might also take pleasure in nursery rhymes: when read, they trigger the pleasurable memories of one's childhood. Likewise, in “Nursery Classics” published in the 1863 *Temple Bar*, the critic and poet Edward Dowden opens, “The subject I have been thinking on ... is pleasant to me, because it is old, and because it is also new.... [I]t is old ... for none of us ... have travelled so long or so far from the land of childhood as to have forgotten that it was once our own country.... We are not so self-contained that we can afford to forget our *past* selves; they often come to us and give us strength and encouragement, as when Wordsworth looked up and saw a rainbow in the sky” (494). Again, the returns of nursery rhyme were in the pleasure of returning to one's childhood through rhyme. Much of the pleasure Victorian adults experienced when reading nursery rhymes came from the pleasure of recovering their lost past. In “The Humor of Nursery Rhymes” in the 1894 *Spectator*, the anonymous writer asks, referring to nursery rhymes, “But what shall we say of this love of fun and nonsense...?” “In later life,” s/he answers, “we need the hand of a little child to lead us back into that wonderland; but with his or her help we ‘can in a moment travel thither;’ and we know that it is, in fact, half for our own sake, and half for that of the child that we respond to its ‘Do tell me a story’” (53).

⁸⁷ Cambridge first admitted women in 1869. Newly admitted women began to write the conventional forms of Cambridge poetry, such as the Cambridge Revisited poem, that had heretofore been written only by men. Amy Levy's (1861-89, Newnham '81) Cambridge verse, for instance, is marked by ambivalence for Cambridge that ultimately concludes with love for alma mater. “A Farewell (After Heine)” (1881) anticipates her impending graduation; while one Cambridge man “gets friends, and another / Gets honour, and one gets both,” Levy concludes, “I have neither a friend nor honour, / Yet I am sorry to go.” “Cambridge in the Long” (1889) is an instance of the “Cambridge Revisited” genre:

Alas, in vain I turned away [from Cambridge],
I fled the town in vain;
The strenuous life of yesterday
Calleth me back again.

Her 1887 “Alma Mater” concludes, “And this strange truth must be confessed; / That city [Cambridge] do I love the best / Wherein my heart was heaviest!”

⁸⁸ Newcomer pointed to Swinburne's “The Triumph of Time” and “Faustine” as evidence that “[i]mperfect rhymes may be in themselves musical” and that “variety” is the best cure for the “monotony” of correct rhyme (84). Indeed, Newcomer even argued for the value the controversial “eye rhyme”: “And if similarity of spelling adds to perfection of rhyme, may it not be held also to detract from imperfection, to atone ... for a fault of sound?” (64). Newcomer points to “the elusive and unstable character of pronunciation” to object, “The narrowness of Dr. [Oliver Wendell] Holmes [Sr.]'s view lay only in his regarding the suppressed *r* as Yankee or Cockney, therefore provincial, therefore outcast. If *morn* and *dawn* are perfect rhymes to the Londoner's ear ... there is no more to say. Londoner's and ... New Yorkers will use them, and there is no longer any hypercritical Dr. Holmes to object” (64).

⁸⁹ In “About Rhyme,” in the 1899 *Lippencott's Monthly Magazine*, the American poet Joel Benton claimed, “The truth is, [imperfect rhyme] ... often excludes tameness from the melody, and adds positive strength to the thought” to “furnish ... an exquisite delight” (903).

⁹⁰ Prior to Wimsatt, scholars often assumed rhyme was “concerned not with meaning but [with] form, which is emotional” (Lanz qtd. in Wimsatt 337).

William K. Wimsatt's classic essay "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason: Alexander Pope" (1944) argues that while rhyme may be alogical sound, it supports a poem's logical sense making: "In literary art only the wedding of the alogical with the logical gives the former an aesthetic value. The words of a rhyme, with their curious harmony of sound and distinction of sense, are an amalgam of the sensory and the logical, or an arrest and precipitation of the logical in sensory form; they are the ikon in which the idea is caught" (337).

Roman Jakobson's classic essay "Linguistics and Poetics" (1960) claims rhyme as a privileged site of the "poetic function of language"—the function where "*the principle of equivalence* [is projected] *from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*" (71). Language becomes poetic when words that usually are combined into sequences to form a sentence now become equivalent in some way, say on the level of shared sound, or repeated stress, or some other form of repetition or patterning. Rhyme therefore is of importance to Jakobson, who echoes Wimsatt when arguing that "to treat rhyme merely from the standpoint of sound [is] an unsound oversimplification" because "Rhyme necessarily involves a semantic relationship between rhyming units" (81). For Jakobson, "[E]quivalence in sound ... inevitably involves semantic equivalence, and ... any constituent ... prompts one of the two correlative experiences ... 'comparison for likeness' sake' and 'comparison for unlikeness' sake'" (83).

Jurij Lotman's *Analysis of the Poetic Text* (1972, Trans. 1976) and *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1970, Trans. 1977) argues that sound makes sense just as sense makes sound. Sound and sense, for Lotman, are neither antithetical nor can they be separated, but that sound serves sense. "The sound of a rhyme ... is not acoustic or phonetic but rather semantic"; by linking "words, which have nothing in common outside of a given text," rhyme "gives rise to unexpected sense effects" (*Analysis* 58-59). "The musical sound of speech," Lotman claims, "is also a means of transmitting information" (120). Meaning is produced by the comparison of different words established by the similarity of sound (123). Echoing Wimsatt, Lotman argues that the greater the difference in meaning of the terms that rhyme unifies, the richer the sound of the rhyme: "Phonic coincidence combined with semantic difference produced a rich sound" (121); "rhyme resounds richly only given non-coincidence and remoteness of meanings" thus, "the musicality of rhyme is produced not only by phonetics, but also by the semantics of words" (123).

Hugh Kenner's "Pope's Reasonable Rhymes" (1974) applies these theoretical assumptions of rhyme's sense making to show how two types of rhyming in Pope's "Rape of the Lock"—"normal" and "abnormal" rhymes—contribute to the poem's sense. Rhyme words which a warrant enable to go together (say, "light" and "bright")—normal rhymes—are tacit ratifications of the worldview they describe, while rhymes that pair incongruous words (say "loves" and "gloves")—abnormal rhymes—tacitly satirize the grotesque values they deride: "Incongruous rhymes for satiric observation, normal rhymes for the realm of law" (82). Pope's ideology of rhyming, however, was produced by and therefore limited to his era because it was based on a neoclassical understanding of language as an ordered system in that could mirror an ordered world. For Kenner, "rhyme validates ... meaning which other orders of cogency have produced" (78).

⁹¹ No relationship to W. K. Wimsatt.

⁹² The poet and rhetorical-critic John Hollander (1975) breaks with the Formalist tradition in ways that are distinct from the post-1990 understanding of rhyme. Rather than consider how rhyme contributes to a poem's meaning (formalist criticism), Hollander considers how the reader's experience of rhyme affects the reader (rhetorical criticism): "features of rhyming are always turned on the reader, contributing to a total effect" i.e. "the power to compel notice, to attune and even orchestrate ... the attention of the ... reader" (127, 134).

⁹³ In "Rhyme Puns," published in the 1988 edited collection, *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, Debra Fried explores the relationship of rhyme and pun to argue that rhyme and pun do not support the poem's sense, but exceed it. "Like the Augustan poetic of sound as echo to the sense," Fried concludes, "this tendency toward making puns serve meaning robs them of some of their wildness and shimmering contingency." While Pope argued, "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance," Fried revalues chance: "the weird accidents, amazing flukes, and lucky hits that the one-armed bandit of language dishes up.... By testing how puns fit or fight other poetic orders of equivalence, correlation, or cogency, we make keep the door ajar to renewed attention to poetic form in the light of current theoretical concerns with overdetermination, indeterminacy, and phonemic play" (99). In other words, the sonic equivalences of rhyme amplify other contingencies of poetic sound, thus training the reader's ear to pick up unintended sonic coincidences, like puns, or suggesting other like-sounding words that are unspecified explicitly in the poem but intimated implicitly by it. Rhyme is an echo-chamber. In short, we hear more than we see when we read.

In *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (1990), Garrett Stewart similarly argues that rhyme works against the intentions of the author and the sense of the poem. Rather than consider “normal” rhyme, by crossing the lexical and metrical borders between words and lines, Stewart reads into being irrational, unintended, non-normative rhymes. Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “leeward / ... drew her / Dead” rhymes “ward” with “-w-her-D-” (66). This excessive, accidental, destabilizing “rhyme” expands the range of rhyme beyond the regularities of meter and line and intention; it gets past the word as a stylistic unit; and, as in Fried, it reveals an antagonism between eye and ear. These excessive rhymes trouble reason and do not serve (and may even work against) the poem’s meaning; poetic sound, for Stewart, resists normative sense.

In her essay, “Rhyming as Comedy: Body, Ghost, and Banquet,” from the 1994 edited collection, *English Comedy*, Gillian Beer similarly stresses the alogical aspects of rhyme. Rhyme is “comedic” in that it operates in excess of reason; sound operates in excess of sense. Rhyme transfigures words. While words are normally autonomous and discrete, when words are rhymed, then words double, dissolve, deform. Rhyme disturbs established categories and hierarchies of sense (rational standards of syntax and organization): rhyme is both argument and resolution: rhymes may produce simultaneous sonic accords and visual discords (rhyme words sound the same but look different) (185-86). “Sounds intervene and challenge the dominance of syntactical order,” Rhyme “outgoes reason in that it disturbs established semantic categories and refuses the hierarchies implicit in those groupings” “The comedy of rhyme lies in its refusal of established categories” (184, 193, 195). Therefore, rhyme troubles reason.

In his essays, “Rhyme / Reason, Chaucer / Pope, Icon / Symbol” (1994) and “Rhyme, the Icons of Sound, and the Middle English *Pearl*” (1996), James Wimsatt employs the semiotics of C. S. Peirce and statistical analysis to argue that sound does not serve a poem’s sense; rather, sound and sense are two separate and independent signifying systems, the former being emotive. “I posit that separate, independent sign systems underlie the sound and the sense in poetry.... The notion that two separate sound systems operate in poetry is contrary ... to [W. K.] Wimsatt.... My claim is precisely that we can separate systems of verbal sound from those of meaning.... The ‘musical sound of poetic speech’ indeed transmits semiotic content, but this content is not necessarily linked to the verbal message; it primarily serves musical rather than verbal sense.... One must allow the possibility that the sound patterns of poetry and the verbal meaning have a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence and independent semiotic value.... But organized in the self-referential music of a poem, like notes in a melody, these phonemes may well combine to express the poet’s musical ideas, which might, *speaking synesthetically*, evoke feelings of brightness, meditateness, and / or decisiveness” (19-29). In essence, Wimsatt argues against his namesake to show that rhyme does not produce logos so much as pathos.

In his essay, “Why Rhyme Pleases,” Simon Jarvis similarly argues against the New Critical logicization of rhyme to argue instead that rhyme produces not logos but pathos: what Jarvis calls readerly “bliss.” He deconstructs the binary of “serious rhyme which does work” and mere ornamental “tinkling and jingling” rhyme play in order to argue “how deeply serious” seemingly “trivial” sound is (). Rather than argue that sound serves logic (the poem’s ostensible meaning) and order (the poem’s stanzaic organization), Jarvis is the latest critic to revalue disorderly, irrational poetic sound. He deconstructs the sound / sense binary to shift the terms of the debate from sound / sense to sound / *thinking* in order to argue for “a musical or prosodic thinking” (24). “Musical thinking” is “perverse thinking”: more esoteric, sonic, and emotive than standard thinking or sense making; poetic sound does not contribute to the poem’s ostensible meaning but rather “interfer[es] with ... complicat[es], and compet[es] with the poet’s explicit thinking,” often producing “meaning” directly antagonistic to the more readily available significance of a poem’s content (934). Rhyme and other sonic elements, for Jarvis, do not serve the sense of a poem, but rather undo it; poetic sound is illogical, emotive, phenomenological, productive of pathos.

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