

**“THE AIR ITSELF IS ONE VAST LIBRARY”:  
READING THE INFLUENCE OF MOTIVE EXPRESSION  
IN THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to John Jordan and the Dickens Universe community. I am so thankful for their invaluable help and support throughout various stages of this project. The positive and collaborative environment they've created is truly unique and inspirational.

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## ABSTRACT

Mathematician Charles Babbage famously wrote that “The air itself is one vast library on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered.” His theory in *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* (1837) that words and actions survive eternally by circulating in the atmosphere had a profound impact on Victorian authors of fiction that has not been sufficiently explored. This dissertation looks at the impact of his ideas on works by Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and Margaret Oliphant. There is an ongoing critical trend in Victorian Studies of highlighting the efforts of Victorian writers to portray complex interconnection and influence in their fiction using scientific and technological discourses. This dissertation intervenes in such conversations by identifying a Babbagean discursive tradition of depicting human agency – e.g. speech, action, will, and emotion – as physical matter that moves, interacts, and exerts influence upon the material world and those who occupy it. This project analyzes the ways in which Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant wrote fiction reflecting and reshaping Babbage’s ideas into imaginary ecological systems of exchange and influence in which individuals have the power to affect – or be influenced by – natural spaces and the beings that occupy them. In doing so, they also model new ways of reading affect and causal relations that reflect how Victorians saw the individual’s capacity to exert and understand influence in an increasingly interconnected nineteenth-century world. The central claim of this dissertation is that Victorian writers saw the imaginative opportunities implicit in Babbage’s sound theory and created narrative Babbagean ecologies attuned to those living, reading, and listening in the nineteenth century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nothing that has happened or existed has left no trace, no material consequence. We may not have the tools or the skills to find these consequences, or the wit to know them when we see them; we are always mistaking signs for things, stories for objects, processes for their products.

-Kitty Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain* (2008)

The Victorian era is often characterized as a period of rapid and immense change. Many felt overwhelmed and unsteady as their world sped up and expanded in unprecedented ways. New science and technology radically altered how individuals related to each other, their surroundings, and the very idea of time and space. Even those writing shortly before its official start felt the enormity of what was to come. In 1833, Edward Bulwer Lytton wrote *England and the English* – two volumes worth of commentary on what he deemed to be the most important concerns, ideas, and people across the nation’s history. In a reflection on his current time, Bulwer Lytton writes that while “[e]very age may be called an age of transition – the passing on, as it were, from one state to another never ceases; but in our age the transition is *visible*” (II.165). Although Bulwer Lytton is specifically referencing what he sees as the spreading influence of utilitarianism and its various philosophical incarnations, his statement captures how many Victorians were thinking about almost every aspect of the ever-changing world of the nineteenth century. In their characterization of this “progressive age (progressing to what?),” Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert similarly note how “[i]t was an age shaped... by the forces of transition,” but add that it contained “the shadow of change falling across virtually every area of life” (ix).<sup>1</sup> What Bulwer Lytton viewed as clearly visible in 1833, scholars have retrospectively classified as more

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<sup>1</sup> In their introduction to *The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, Cox and Gilbert argue that the era’s ghost stories best “reflect” the anxieties, tensions, and murky understandings of the world by those living within it (ix). This is also the genre to which the texts featured in the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation tentatively belong. Bulwer Lytton’s and Margaret Oliphant’s short stories are both equally known for their departure from the generic conventions of the Victorian ghost story, primarily because they add elements of realism to portray a world their readers would find recognizable and relatable.

uncannily perceptible to Victorians, or as simultaneously recognizable and entirely unfamiliar in ways that were unsettling and difficult to understand.

Evidence of the uncanny relationship many Victorians had with their age often appears at the heart of conflicting discourses and debates, particularly in popular scientific and fictional writing. This dissertation explores such writings, with a focus on those that imagine the potential for a single individual to have expansive, enduring influence in a world now considered infinite in time and space. The works of fiction featured in the final three chapters, I argue, also model forms of reading affective exchange, often figured as types of listening. Such models make individual influence traceable and comprehensible for a Victorian readership and enable access to a complex network of human and environmental relations that often exist at the limits of human senses – uncannily felt yet unseen.

The specific texts examined in this project change in form, scale, and overall message from the late 1830s to the early 1880s; they remain consistent in their primary focus and expression of what might be called a Babbagean imaginary. In May of 1837 – mere weeks before Victoria began her reign – mathematician and philosopher Charles Babbage wrote a controversial work entitled *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*. Amid the religious, philosophical, and mathematical arguments that inundate most of the work, is an unexpected chapter that reflects on the possibility that human words and actions may be permanently recorded on the environment throughout all of time and space. In this ninth chapter of his *Treatise*, entitled “On the Permanent Impressions of Our Words and Actions on the Globe We Inhabit,” Babbage draws from established and developing laws in the physical sciences to expound a theory about the preservation and motive power of individual expression. More



specifically, he describes words and actions as imprinting upon sound particles with the moral force of their movements. As a result, Babbage imagines the “earth, air, and ocean” as a “vast library” of moral records, forever archiving “all that man has ever said” or done (*Treatise* 113). Babbage’s sonic theory had a profound impact on those who read his *Treatise* chapter as well as those more indirectly exposed to his ideas as they permeated throughout Victorian culture. This dissertation contends that he inspired numerous prominent authors of the age to expand upon his theory in their fiction and explore its implications related to the potential power and moral influence of expression for Victorian individuals living in an affectively complex, interconnected world.

Babbage’s theory, therefore, is the focus of the first chapter, to establish the foundation upon which fiction writers built their own creative adaptations of his ideas in their work. The subsequent chapters chronologically explore the various Babbagean incarnations in the fiction of Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and Margaret Oliphant.<sup>2</sup> In particular, these chapters examine how each author creates a world in which lingering traces of past expressions of human agency – imagined variously as speech, action, will, and emotion – are recorded upon the natural environment and transformed into motive forces capable of exerting influence on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of living Victorians. Overall, this dissertation examines Victorian writers who imagine expressions of human agency as behaving similarly to physical phenomena in the material world, and thus having the same lingering influence throughout time and space as the ever-moving, changing, and conserved matter, energy, and force of the natural world.

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<sup>2</sup> George Eliot’s fiction also appear frequently throughout this dissertation in connection with Babbagean ideas, and her interest in, and engagement with, similar discourse is a topic for further study.

Certain works of these writers, I contend, were so invested in navigating the mysteries of an intangible, yet material age, that they imagine narrative forms, or systems of movement and influence, that depict transmissions and exchanges between the Victorian individual and a physical environment imbued by past individuals with the power to affect and be affected. In addition to reflecting the era's wider interest in materializing affect, as I discuss later in this introduction, they also spatiotemporally dislocate the individual from their actions. In other words, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant present ideas as preserved through the process of expression and converted into independent forms of material, motive forces of change, capable of affecting both the natural world and the people in it. They depict expressed ideas as distinct entities integral to a complex ecological network that extends across time and space. The central claim of this dissertation is that these Victorian writers saw the imaginative opportunities implicit in Babbage's sound theory and created narrative Babbagean ecologies attuned to the individuals who were living, reading, and listening in the nineteenth century.

### **A History of Thinking About Agency, Expression, and Influence**

There is a long history of discourse about the nature of human agency, often featuring theories and philosophies about the origin and transmission of thoughts and ideas. In the Victorian era, agency became something deeply tied to the individual in its formation and was often described as morality, character, will, and feeling. Expressions of agency, on the other hand, – namely speech, actions, exertions of will, and emotion affect – were often considered externalized traces of the individual and depicted as physical matter capable of exerting influence on others. For much of epistemological history, however, human thoughts were inextricably linked to the divine. For such early philosophers as Plato, for example, ideas were

divine notions made manifest and people were merely filters through which the divine passed. Rather than critiquing ideas themselves, since they were divine in nature, Plato focused primarily on people's ability to adequately articulate and interpret the divine; in other words, the output of the human-filter through which divine ideas pass (or mimesis) and the human-reception or comprehension of those ideas, both of which are processes that could potentially distort divine messages. Enlightenment scholars frequently distanced their definition of "idea" from the divine and primarily concerned themselves with processes of the mind and knowledge-formation, i.e. thinking, reasoning, and understanding.<sup>3</sup> Ideas, in this period, were considered to be specific types of thoughts, formed through the brain's interpretation of individual experience, that inform an individual's understanding of information. Therefore, while classical scholars primarily thought of ideas as external manifestations of the divine and humans as unreliable conduits with the capacity to disrupt entire communities through misinterpreted messages, Enlightenment thinkers considered ideas as internal, experience-based components of individual thought-formation and therefore confined within the human body. In epistemological terms, classical scholars thought of ideas as *a priori* forms of knowledge, derived directly from the divine, while in the Enlightenment, ideas were conceived of as forms of *a posteriori* knowledge, derived from individual, sensory experience and observations of the external world.

Although Romanticism is notorious for its push against Enlightenment ideology and return to Greco-Roman ideals from the past, the way many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century authors were thinking about ideas is as a hybridized form of both epistemological

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<sup>3</sup> In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738-49), David Hume describes ideas as "faint images" in a single mind that influence "thinking and reasoning" (1). He contrasts ideas with "impressions," or the other types of "perception" that "enter" the mind "with most force and violence" and "make their first appearance in the soul" as "sensations, passions, and emotions."

traditions. Romantics, particularly Romantic poets, returned to the Platonic conceptualization of ideas as divine in nature, but instead of being pre-formed by the divine, with people serving as mere conduits, ideas were seen as the offspring of the imagination. The Romantic concept of inspiration and imagination is also linked to a more Enlightenment conception of ideas because of its focus on the internal workings of thought-formation; however, Romantics often downplayed the role of the social or external input in this process, describing the imagination as tapping into a form of collective energy that exists within each individual, then manifesting it externally through artistic expressions such as poetry.<sup>4</sup> Instead of ideas as a form of mimesis – a subjective attempt to represent the objective – they were often thought of by Romantics as expressing subjectivity and objectivity simultaneously. Thus, ideas, particularly those in the realm of creative expression, were both collective and individual, shaped by both the external, objective world and an internal, subjective one.<sup>5</sup> At the end of “A Defense of Poetry” (1821), Percy Bysshe Shelley describes the impact of great poets’ words, or expressed ideas, as “the influence which is moved not, but moves,” and great poets themselves as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world” (613). In other words, poets transmit ideas that have been internally shaped but, once expressed and if worthy enough, can dictate the ideal way to live to entire

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<sup>4</sup> This process is often described through water imagery, particularly well and spring metaphors.

<sup>5</sup> Romantic poets often distinguished poetry from other forms of writing, communication, and even artistic expression more generally; many also felt that only the best poetry had been divinely inspired. According to Christoph Loreck in *Endymion and the “Labyrinthian Path to Eminence in Art”* (2005), John Keats considered invention to be a key component of quality poetry. He is also known to have thought of the “power of invention” not as a skill “obtained by effort” and refined by practice, but as a “divine gift which shows that the person in question belongs to a great line of true poets” (176). Thus, the Romantic ideal of “poetic excellence,” Loreck argues, relies upon the poet’s inherent capacity “[t]o possess and exercise the power of invention, alongside the powers of fancy and imagination.” While invention, for Keats, was divine, fancy and the imagination were not; thus, in an 1817 letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey, Keats describes “invention” as the “Polar Star of Poetry,” fixed and therefore objective; “Fancy” and “Imagination,” on the other hand, are the “Sails” and the “Rudder,” respectively – the more movable, subjective components in his maritime metaphor for the poetic imagination (“To Benjamin Bailey” 34).

global populations. This idea exemplifies what James E. Marlow, in *Charles Dickens: The Uses of Time* (1994), identifies as “commonplace” in the nineteenth century: “the idea that the words or actions of ‘good’ men are eternal as matter itself” (226). Also turning to Shelley, Marlow references a passage from “Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats” (1821), in which Shelley writes, “transmitted effluence cannot die” (“Adonais” 833). While these lines express a reciprocal meeting and exchange of two spirits that make no distinction between that which is dead and that which is alive. In this nineteenth-century tradition of which Marlow discusses, however, *good* men were often narrowly defined, almost always excluding women and the working-class men.

Victorians further re-conceptualized idea formation by challenging not only the Romantics’ description of the source of ideas, but also their focus on the mobility, transmission, and global influence of great ideas from great poets.<sup>6</sup> Particularly in the realm of literature, rather than ideation, or the forming of ideas, Victorians focused more on ideas post-expression – the sensory and physiological experience of people’s reception or perception of others’ ideas. They were particularly interested in the capacity of negative ideas to provoke strong, even violent, mental and physical responses.<sup>7</sup> In this dissertation, I analyze how certain works highlight the ways in which Victorians were conceptualizing agency formation as a result of external influences in an ecological system of influence and exchange. Specifically, negatively expressed

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<sup>6</sup> Many Victorians often held on to Romantic ideals and ways of thinking, however. For more on this overlap, see Richard Cronin’s *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (2002) and Thomas Pfau’s *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (2005).

<sup>7</sup> The very *idea* of something was often described as seizing hold of people and impacting them physically or causing strong feelings such as terror or disgust. In fact, the nineteenth century popularized concepts such as putting an idea into another’s head or suddenly receiving an idea that seems to have been transmitted from an unknown source. For more on how these notions contributed to the era’s interest in telepathy and mesmerism, see Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell’s *The Victorian Supernatural* (2009); Roger Luckhurst’s *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002); and Alison Winters’ *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (1998).

agencies were often described as tangible, if not material, forces with the capacity to transmit and circulate throughout the world, influencing and being influenced by people and even physical environments.

Many of the ideas expressed by the Victorian writers in this dissertation are remarkably similar to concepts found in today's conversations in ecology, media theory, affect studies, posthumanism, and sound studies; writers of both times often blend discourses related to human identity, agency, and influence with those of the natural and psychological sciences.<sup>8</sup> The Victorians frequently expressed concerns about industrialism's impact on cycles of human-environment influence and exchange, for example, creating what many critics have labeled a "Victorian ecology."<sup>9</sup> In his essay "Darwin and the Art of Paradox" (2014), George Levine metaphorically defines the Victorian "ecological imagination" as "the recognition that the head-bone is connected to the neck bone, and one can't affect any one part without affecting all the other" (Levine 130). In regard to literature, John Parham, in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (2002), argues that Victorian ecology in certain nineteenth-century works is facilitated through a "detailed analysis of how social organization, through the urban environment, shapes both the non-human and human components of the ecosystem" (170).

"[L]iterary figures, like Victorian scientists," he claims, "display[ed] at least an intuition of both

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<sup>8</sup> For discussions of contemporary ecocriticism, see Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004) and Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetic* (2007).

<sup>9</sup> According to Carolyn Elizabeth Miller in her examination of studies in nineteenth-century literary ecology, the "ecocritical tradition" in Victorian literary criticism typically features three distinct qualities: "(1) a focus on social and anthropogenic natures; (2) a global, imperial, and systematic work; and (3) an ethical investment in revealing the connections between 19th-century environmental transformations and environmental crises today" (Miller para. 1). Elizabeth Chang, in "Killer Plants of the Late Nineteenth Century" (2017), makes a similar connection between ecology and empire: "the expansion of the British empire was inextricably combined with environmental change, and the final years of the nineteenth century marked the strongest alignment yet between imperial expansion and ecological alteration" (84). The essays in Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer's collection *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* (2019) similarly consider nineteenth century literature, ecology, and empire.

ecosystems' theory and sustainability," focusing on the "emergence, evolution and impact of natural or...ecologically destructive processes" (Parham 158, 24).

Victorian novels specifically, Parham argues, exemplify how this ecological awareness was used to facilitate "questions about human agency both in relation to the presentation of human/nonhuman relationships and in terms of responding to fictionalized environmental issues" (24).<sup>10</sup> I will push this idea further to argue that the authors I discuss do, in fact, explore such questions by imagining expressed agencies as permanently staining the environment with morality (for Babbage), emotional affect (for Dickens), malignant willpower (for Bulwer Lytton), and suffering (for Oliphant). Such narrations feature speculations about the potential motive power and influence such preserved human traces could have on Victorian individuals and their environment in this globalizing age.

In the nineteenth century, the vast amounts of tangible, material things being exchanged throughout the globe created a dynamic media culture for which information access became of utmost importance. As Richard Menke writes in *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (2008), the nineteenth century was increasingly overwhelmed by

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<sup>10</sup> For relevant research in Victorian ecology, geography, landscape, and literature, see Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991); Roger Ebbatson's *Imaginary England: Nation, Landscape and Literature, 1840-1920* and *Landscape and Literature 1830-1914: Nature, Text, Aura* (2013); Barri J. Gold's *Energy, Ecocriticism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* (2021); Lauren M. E. Goodlad's *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (2015); Jen Hill's *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (2009); Kevin Hutchings and John Miller's *Transatlantic Literary Ecologies: Nature and Culture in the Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Atlantic World* (2017); U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson's *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (1977); David N. Livingston's *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (2003); Livingston and W. J. Withers' *Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Science* (2011); Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison's *Victorian Writers and the Environment. Ecocritical Perspectives* (2017); Robert Mighall's *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (2003); Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno's *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (2016); Jamieson Ridenhour's *In Darkest London: The Gothic Cityscape in Victorian Literature* (2012); and Heidi C. M. Scott's *Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century* (2015).

information: “a primitive accumulation permitted by developments such as imperial expansion, a rapidly growing and increasing literate populace, the professionalization of science and other knowledge-work, an immense acceleration in invention, and a transport revolution” (9).<sup>11</sup> One of the ways in which the “new media ecology of the nineteenth century,” as Menke describes it, intersects with the Victorian reconceptualization of human agency as physical matter, is that the preserved information thought to be stored within and throughout the universe eventually required someone capable of both retrieving and interpreting the data they encountered.

Throughout the Victorian era, the unknown was frequently understood as not only unseen, but also useless in its current form. Therefore, the goal became not simply to lift the veil or shine a light on mysteries of the universe – those methods merely enabled an awareness of the existence of knowledge, but not the comprehension of it – but to develop a method to retrieve data already available in the universe. While some saw this data as corrupted and fragmented, others believed it merely required the right processes and abilities to convert or translate the data into a more useful form.

The story that best exemplifies this concept is Eliot’s “The Lifted Veil,” published in July of 1859. In this short story, the literal veil as a piece of religiously-connotated clothing becomes the more figurative veil of the material body and the brain. While Eliot imagines a protagonist with the ability to lift that veil and access thoughts inside people’s minds, this super-human power crucially involves being able to convert that which is hidden beneath the veil into a knowable form – simply seeing beyond one’s skeletal structure and into one’s brain does not

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the media culture in the nineteenth century, see Collette Colligan and Margarette Linley’s *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch* (2011) and Aaron Worth’s *Imperial Media: Colonial Networks and Information Technologies in the British Literary Imagination, 1857-1918* (2014).



enable someone to read a person's thoughts. Eliot's protagonist both hears underneath the veil and comprehends the unseen, immaterial matter to which he gains access – an ability similar to that which Oliphant's narrator, Mortimer, develops by the end of her story "The Open Door" – the central text of the last chapter of this dissertation. As I discuss in the first chapter, Babbage differed in that he did not believe humanity would ever be able to fully access or comprehend environmental records of human agency – this is something reserved for God and Judgment Day; many Victorians writers were subsequently inspired, however, to portray in fiction what Babbage deems impossible in the real world: a living person with the capacity to hear and understand human agency preserved in nature.

One of the concepts featured prominently in Victorian fiction with Babbagean language, such as "The Lifted Veil" and the texts featured in this dissertation's chapters, is affect. In many ways, even contemporary affect studies might also be seen as attempting to find ways of reading intangible influences, as it often explores sensory and relational experiences and phenomena that often elude easy description.<sup>12</sup> Even the term "affect" has a somewhat unstable definition. In his work on media technologies of the nineteenth century, Jay Clayton describes affect as "generally define[d]" by "literary theorists" "as the bodily or physiological dimension of feelings" (21). He adds that affect is frequently defined by how it differs from "emotion," which typically describes "more psychological aspects" of human experience (21). Throughout his chapter in *Dickens and Modernity* entitled "The Dickens Tape: Affect and Sound Reproduction in *The Chimes*" (2012), Clayton attempts to articulate his own understanding of the nature of affect. He describes affect

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the recent interest in affectivity in the humanities, see Richard C. Sha's essay on "The Turn to Affect: Emotions Without Subjects, Causality Without Demonstrable Cause" in *The Palgrave Handbook to Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017).

as “indicat[ing] comparatively unstructured, non-narrative and free-floating bodily intensities, unmoored to the subject’s desires and intentions” (22). Clayton’s specific language highlights why understandings of affect are so inconsistent and challenging to articulate.

This frustration with consistent definitions and lack of clarity can also be seen in the growing field of posthumanism, which overlaps and parallels affect studies, particularly in Victorian literary scholarship. Like affect, posthumanism is associated with a reconceptualization of the individual self as extending beyond the material boundaries of the human body. There is currently no single field of posthumanism, however, nor a consensus about its definition or application, making generalized assessments impossible.<sup>13</sup> Even in the growing field of Victorian posthumanism, there is a diverse array of discourses – highlighting the interdisciplinarity of its interconnected concepts. Scholars have linked posthumanist thinking, for example, with both nineteenth-century spiritualism, as does Jill Gavin, in her essay on “The Victorian Post-Human: Transmission, Information and the Séance” (2012), and scientific advancement; Lara Karpenko and Shalyn Claggett, in their introduction to *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of*

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<sup>13</sup> In *Posthumanism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2017), for example, Peter Mahon defines posthumanism as inextricably linked to science and technology. Although he also attempts to discuss posthumanism in a more general way, his definition maintains this bias: “Posthumanism is a concrete techno-scientific reality, and it takes the distributed cognition of humans + tools as its object of study, where ‘tools’ includes all forms of technology” (Mahon 139). Although he claims there are various types of posthumanisms, in his mind all are simply variations of “techno-scientific posthumanism,” or examinations of the increasingly complex relationship between humans and advancements in science and technology (25). This is perhaps why Mahon privileges scientific knowledge over that of the humanities; he insists that “interdisciplinary knowledge” is a requirement of posthumanist studies “simply because the competencies found in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are essential to it” (24). The representation of posthumanist concepts in the humanities, for Mahon, are of lesser value, although he does allow that genres such as science fiction make posthumanist concepts more accessible to those without the relevant specialized knowledge he believes is required. Mahon’s techno-scientific leanings are representative of the field’s larger trend, which limits imaginative opportunities for posthumanist exploration and makes disciplinary cohesion currently unobtainable.

Posthumanism is also not to be confused with other twenty-first century concepts such as transhumanism – a cultural movement that aims to improve humanity through scientific and technological means, or through what Cary Wolfe calls “engineered evolution” (xiii). Transhumanism is typically less theoretical and more practical, including elective body enhancement procedures that introduce inorganic technology into the human body as a means of surpassing normal human capabilities.

*Knowledge in the Victorian Age* (2017), even make the claim that “Victorian scientists anticipated, if not helped to invent, the notion of the ‘posthuman’” (6).<sup>14</sup> The field of Victorian posthumanism is primarily concerned with what Tamara Ketabgian, in *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2011), calls the “Victorian industrial imaginary,” described as a “prefigur[ation]” of the “postmodern...through its emphasis on prosthetic feelings and communities, on collective flows of force and influence, and on the uncertain limits of bodies, minds, and subjects” (3). In another work entitled “‘Is Victoria Actually Human?’: Posthuman (Pre)histories” (2022), Karpenko similarly describes the Victorian era as offering a type of prehistory for contemporary notions of posthumanism. In her article, Karpenko sees parallels to how Victorians drew connections between humans and science, particularly in the ways they viewed physical bodies: “Marked by scientific advancements that destabilized categories once thought inviolable as well as by literature that often featured boundless, pliable bodies, the nineteenth century oversaw a radical reimagining of the very category of the human” (Karpenko 45).

A text that perhaps exemplifies Victorian posthumanist thought, or the “industrialist imaginary” identified by Ketabgian, is Eliot’s chapter “Shadows of the Coming Race,” from her

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<sup>14</sup> Many of the essays in *Strange Science* demonstrate how nineteenth-century scientific fields contained the roots of contemporary posthumanism and affect studies. The editors of the collection, Karpenko and Claggett, position the essays in this volume between two critical traditions: Mary Poovey’s challenge to the societal privileging of numerical and scientific analysis deemed to be more objective; and Mel Y. Chen’s study of animacy, an affective gray area of sorts that mediates and disrupts rigid binaries and rhetorical hierarchies. At its heart, this volume seems to be a transhistorical exploration of that which is simultaneously affective, uncanny, and scientific: “[w]e use the phrase ‘strange science’ to characterize the diverse subjects addressed” they explain, “in order to evoke a sense of the curious felt from two different perspectives: that which was strange for the Victorians, and that which may seem strange to us” (Karpenko and Claggett 3). Shalyn Claggett’s recently published monograph, entitled *Equal Natures: Popular Brain Science and Victorian Women’s Writing* (2023), looks specifically at women and phrenology.

experimental final work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879).<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, Eliot's narrator – a representative of the Victorian everyman – reflects on the future mechanization of labor and its impact on humanity, leading to the depiction of a competitive human-machine relationship that develops over time. In its portrayal of the evolutionary process through which machines become self-sufficient and humans gradually die off, being the least fit of the two, Eliot's narrator describes a survival of the fittest narrative in the wake of the industrial revolution.<sup>16</sup> The narrator imagines a future machine society, in which machines work and live independent of humans. Although these machines are “blind and deaf as the inmost rock,” the narrator imagines that their superior intellects would enable them to develop their own government, codes of conduct, education, and even “descendant[s]” and a respect for their own ancestry and heritage (17:142, 139).<sup>17</sup> Eliot's chapter title and its concerns with human evolution, technological advancement, and the increased energy needs of a future age places it in direct discourse with Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) – another work easily classed as embodying the “Victorian industrialist imaginary.” Bulwer Lytton's satirical novel, however, is generally much more optimistic about the future, envisioning a scientifically advanced race of

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<sup>15</sup> Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (1985) provides an in-depth discussion of the relationship between Victorian literature and industrialization.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot's direct engagement with the popular evolutionary notion of survival of the fittest – Herbert Spencer's revision of Charles Darwin's idea of natural selection – is explicit throughout, with her narrator even asking, “who shall say that those fittest existences will not be found along the track of what we call inorganic combinations,” or rather, machines (17:141).

<sup>17</sup> Elisa Cohn reads this chapter as articulating a “molecular imaginary,” arguing that Eliot “imagines living robots able to work at a “molecular” level but “lacking any affective vitality” (“Materializing Feeling” 588). The narrator does not consider “affective vitality” to be a strength of humanity, but rather the opposite; while evolved machines are described as an “immensely more powerful unconscious race,” the narrator characterizes the human consciousness as an impediment to productivity and progress instead of vital to it, making humanity “the feebler race” (Eliot, “Shadows” 17:141). The narrator's friend Trost, however, with whom he is conversing, views humanity as forever necessary to the survival of machines, describing machines as “limbs” and “extensions of the human organism,” and humans as the vital “nervous centre” of “mechanical processes” (17:138, 139). Trost's opinion provides a comforting contrast to the narrator's argument, despite its being less convincing.

humans that have evolved into bio-technological hybrids capable of producing their own forms of sustainable energy; the universal accessibility of that energy has transformed the world into a place of peace and social equality.

Departing somewhat from the “Victorian industrial imaginary,” even more recent scholars exploring the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and science have turned to the era’s frequent exploration of the nature of human character and influence through the use of material sciences. Elisha Cohn, for example, similarly identifies a type of prehistory in the Victorian era, but in relation to a materialization of affect. In her article entitled “Materializing Feeling and the Limits of Metaphor” (2022), Cohn begins by describing what she sees as the “divided investment” of the “affective turn” by contemporary “literary scholars”: they “take seriously neuroscientific and philosophical approaches to the materiality of bodyminds,” she says, “even while often insisting on the fleeting and immaterial qualitiveness of feeling” (586). This same conflict of ideas, she claims, has a “prehistory” in the Victorian era, particularly in the ways in which Victorian authors “scaled down affect,” often “reinscribing affect into the atom, the cell, the fiber, and the molecule.” Cohn calls this nineteenth-century trend of borrowing language from the physical sciences as a means of materializing human affect the “Victorian materialist imaginary” (587).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The growing field of New Materialism decenters the human and reconsiders the nature of concepts such as matter, materiality, connectivity, influence, individuality, and agency. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s collection of essays entitled *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics* (2010) provides a foundational discussion of the field. Many new materialisms, or its related or subfields, build upon works associated with thing theory. See, for example, Katharina Boehm’s *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (2012); Bill Brown’s *Other Things* (2015); Peter J. Capuano’s *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (2015); Elaine Freedgood’s *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006); and Laura Christine Otis’ *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (2001).

In her recent book *The Science of Character: Human Objecthood and the Ends of Victorian* (2022), – published the same year as Cohn’s article – S. Pearl Brilmyer joins this current critical trend by looking at late-nineteenth-century fiction’s engagement in a similar discourse to what Cohn describes. Brilmyer looks specifically at how at the end of the century, writers from across the British Empire imagined human character in materialist terms, “emphasiz[ing] the role of physical encounters and bodily impulses in character formation, transforming character from the hidden kernel of an individual personality into an impersonal phenomenon that formed through corporeal interactions” (6).<sup>19</sup> In doing so, she claims, they hoped to highlight “the power of the literary to offer insight into the workings of nature, in addition to culture.” Brilmyer’s concentration, in fact, is on a literary movement that followed many of the earlier Victorian ideas on which this dissertation is focused. She argues that late-nineteenth-century writers “built upon the foundational work” of earlier writers like Eliot, “whose late fiction represents character not as a special feature of the human psyche, but rather as something humans share with nonhumans and things.” In the specific “Victorian materialist imaginary” of note for this dissertation, – ranging from the late 1830s to the early 1880s – the writers I discuss seem positioned between the two earlier traditions Brilmyer describes. Victorians such as Babbage, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant, I argue, simultaneously view character as inextricably linked to the individual in its origination, while also representing its expression – in the form of agencies such as words, actions, will, and emotion – as something

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<sup>19</sup> For more on depictions of Victorian character, individual and social bodies, physiology, and psychology in nineteenth-century literature, see Nicholas Dames’s *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (2007); Tina Young Choi’s *Anonymous Connections: The Body and Narratives of the Social in Victorian Britain* (2016); Catherine Gallagher’s *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (2006); Anna Kornbluh’s *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (2014); and Mary Poovey’s *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (1995).

intimately interconnected with and exerting mutually affecting influence upon other people and the environment across time and space.

Victorian scholarship related to the era's representations of individual agency and human-nonhuman influence and connectivity often requires an interdisciplinary focus that reflects the necessary overlap between ecology, media theory, affect studies, and posthumanism. Lisa Blackman's *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (2012), in particular, forms an important critical bridge between these fields – a bridge that I think is particularly important to my dissertation topic as it relates to Victorian affect and posthumanism. In *Immaterial Bodies*, Blackman argues that affect is not a concept limited to human beings in isolation, but rather a congregate of entities and processes – what she describes as the brain-body-world assemblage. In this assemblage, permeable and overlapping are determining features of “the boundaries between the self and other, inside and outside, material and immaterial, human and non-human, and even dead and alive” (xii-xiv). Thinking of the human experience in this way is not as simple as it may at first appear, particularly in relation to what are often considered as uniquely human emotions such as empathy, guilt, or regret. Understanding individual experience as an experience of permeability that is distinctly not individualized, therefore, requires a focus on what Blackman describes as “those trans-subjective processes that connect bodies, that collapse common distinctions between space and time, and even the human and non-human” (172). Thinking of the human experience as mobile and illimitable, Blackman concludes, will “disclose our fundamental connectedness to each other, to our pasts, and even to past histories that cannot be known” (20).

Blackman's discussion of affective assemblage is remarkably similar in its description and its hopes to many of the Victorians I discuss in this dissertation. These Victorians also envision phenomena that could be said to resemble the twenty-first century concept of "animacy," which Mel Y Chen, in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012), describes as "a quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (2). "Animacy," Chen argues, "activates new theoretical formations that trouble and undo stubborn binary systems of difference, including dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object, speech/nonspeech, human/animal, natural body/cyborg" (3). Animacy "reside[s]" in the "richly affective territory of mediation between life and death, positivity and negativity, impulse and substance" (4).<sup>20</sup> For Babbage, an individual's words and deeds are motive and illimitable in time and space, imprinting upon the natural environment as an eternal record of morality that remains forever tied to the past, present, and future. The three fiction writers I discuss take this idea further by imagining various forms of human agency beyond words and action. They apply a type of animacy to the movement and affective residue of their forms of disembodied forces which reverberate out from expressions of agency, mobilizing ecologically throughout minds, bodies, and environmental elements in an endless circularity that often breaks down boundaries by interconnecting and overlapping humans, expressions of agency, natural environments, time, and space. In other words, the Victorian writers at the heart of this dissertation envision the world as mind-body-world assemblages through which animacies permeate and mobilize as forms of indefinable influence and transitory permanence.

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<sup>20</sup> Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), and Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) are also important texts in this growing field.



## **The Victorian Individual in Time and Space**

This dissertation is focused on certain Victorian writers who portray human expressions of agency as powerful forces capable of exerting influence on global ecosystems and the people and environments that shaped and were shaped by them. Such efforts to make visible the imperceptible transmissions, influences, and exchanges that would come to define the age, I argue, can often be read as attempts to make the world more comprehensible to those who lived in it.<sup>21</sup> The nineteenth century was an era of imperial, technological, and scientific expansion that necessitated a reconceptualization even of people's relationships to the once-thought stable concepts of time and space. As a response to, or perhaps a result of, this reconceptualization, writers often used recognizable language related to literature, emotion, the environment, technology, and sympathy when describing the ways agencies could be mobilized and exert influence in their narrative systems of exchange. These authors also simultaneously draw from conventional and emerging scientific and technological concepts to add realism and depth to the fictional universes they create.

The nineteenth century's increase in both population and manufacturing growth throughout Britain's major cities and its empire inspired literary efforts to represent urban toxicity and restriction, particularly the ways in which industrialization and over-population were poisoning people and their environment. The Romantics wrote primarily of the dialectic relationship between people and nature, developing the foundation for the environmental awareness and conservationist efforts of later writers. Many Victorians combined tropes and

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<sup>21</sup> According to the *OED*, an "ecosystem" is a "biological system composed of all the organisms found in a particular physical environment, interacting with it and each other." As the Victorian's physical environment dramatically changed in large-scale ways, many writers began to reconceive causal relations as part of larger complex system rather than as localized exchanges of action and reaction.

sentiments inherited by their Romantic predecessors with scientific rhetoric and social and environmental activism to explore the interconnectedness of people and their physical environments. Victorian writers such as Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, frequently used their fiction as forums for environmental and social reform by portraying decaying landscapes and human-environment causalities of corruption: human progress corrupts the natural environment and the perverted product in turn stifles human progress.<sup>22</sup> Such authors highlight the era's increasing conceptualization of the environmental landscape in the Anthropocene as the degenerate Frankensteinian monster of industrial and technological advancement that was choking the countryside and its inhabitants.

The term "Anthropocene" denotes the point in history at which humans became capable of radically altering the earth's geologic and atmospheric landscape and increasingly aware of this capacity. While the term has only come into use in the latter part of the twentieth century, it is not anachronistic to think of the nineteenth century as the beginning of the Anthropocene due, in part, to its rapid industrial and population growth. Their burgeoning awareness of humanity's capacity for large-scale environmental impact also became central to their ecological awareness. In thinking of the early nineteenth century as ushering in the Anthropocene, I adhere to Jeremy Davies's definition of the age. In *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (2016), Davies describes the Anthropocene as a geologic epoch that gets its name not "because nature is now completely subordinated to human agency," but rather "because human societies exert a novel and distinctive degree of sway in the physical world" (7). Davies asserts that the Anthropocene is an important epoch to recognize because it features a dramatic shift in thought: "it redistributes

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<sup>22</sup> Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) are often noted for their engagement with industrialism's effects on the Victorian working classes.

agencies, reconfigures systems, and reorders the loops of consequence and assimilation out of which the workings of the earth are made” (8).<sup>23</sup> In other words, almost everything about the nineteenth century world needed to be reimagined.

Groups of scientists across a variety of fields were inspired by this changing geographic, societal, and economic landscape, and frequently found new ways to describe matter and phenomena that existed beyond human senses.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of abstract scientific concepts such as thermodynamics and energy distribution, new technological innovations such as the electric telegraph, and intertwined, imperial economic networks, combined with the era’s rapid industrialization and population growth, radically changed the ways people understood the world and Britain’s – as well as humanity’s – position in it.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century,

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<sup>23</sup> The “idea of the Anthropocene epoch,” adds Davies, “lets us understand the ecological crisis of the present day in the context of the past” and “provides both a motive and a means for taking a very, very long view of the environmental crisis” (2). For discussions of Victorian literary engagements with the anthropocenic concepts more specifically, see Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor’s *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (2017) and Taylor’s *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (2016).

<sup>24</sup> For further discussion of intertextual connections between Victorian literature and science, see Paul Alkon’s *Science Fiction before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology* (2002); Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983, 2009); Daniel Brown’s *The Poetry of Victorian Scientists: Style, Science and Nonsense* (2015); Barri J. Gold’s *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (2010); Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth’s *Science Serialized: Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (2004); Alice Jenkins’s *Space and the “March of Mind”: Literature and the Physical Sciences in Britain, 1815-1850* (2007); Márcia Lemos and Miguel Ramalheite Gomes’ *Exchanges Between Literature and Science from the 1800s to the 2000s: Converging Realms* (2017); George Levine’s *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (1988) and *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (2002); Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh’s *Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (2002); Gregory Tate’s *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and the Physical Sciences: Poetical Matter* (2020); and Virginia Zimmerman’s *Excavating Victorians* (2008).

<sup>25</sup> By “Britain,” “British,” and “Briton,” I mean that which pertains to the United Kingdom, or its inhabitants, as it was classified during most of the nineteenth century, which included England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Although many of the concerns I discuss pertain to the English most explicitly, as Russell Deacon notes in *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (2012), during the nineteenth century, “in many areas of cultural life, the various nations within Britain...absorbed culture and values from each other” (17). I also include the Irish in this category for, as Eric Richards argues in *Britannia’s Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland Since 1600* (2004), the “mixing of the British and Irish peoples over many centuries of invasion...created a long tradition of heterogeneity” which challenged Victorian notions of Britishness that excluded the Irish (21). Catherine Hall, in her chapter investigating the definitions of both Britishness and the British World in the edited collection *Rediscovering the British World* (2005), similarly includes the Scottish and Irish in her description of the British

Victorians were therefore increasingly confronted with questions about intangible connectedness and relationality because of these major paradigm shifts, even in this age of materialism. The new, complex understandings of the world offered by increasingly specialized experts did not demystify much for the general population; rather, emerging ideas in science, technology, mathematics, and economics exposed a complex, interdisciplinary world filled with invisible, mysterious forces that seemed, for many Victorians, to threaten the very survival of Britain and its empire. The era's greater grasp of complex systems was also accompanied by an increased fascination with the unknown and the unseen, as well as an interest in accounting for uncanny sensory experiences. Ultimately, many Victorians seemed to be plagued by a feeling that the more they discovered about the world, the more unknown, intangible, untraceable forces of influence they discovered.

The immense expansion of conceptions of time, in particular, is due in part to geologist Charles Lyell's popularization of the concept of "deep time" at the beginning of the nineteenth century, formalized in his volumes of *The Principles of Geology*, published between 1830-1833.<sup>26</sup> Inspired by his geological discoveries, deep time is the notion that the earth's age is vastly older than was previously thought and was substantiated by increasingly discovered

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because "they may or may not have thought about themselves as Britons, but they were certainly heavily implicated in and may have been committed to the idea of the British Empire" (23). Lastly, regarding notions of Britishness in particular, Linda Colley describes, in her seminal book *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1992, 2005), how "Britishness" came about due to imperial expansion, and therefore national differences between the British were often "superimposed over...in response to contact" and "conflict with the Other" (6). For more on the complexities of British identity as depicted in nineteenth-century literature specifically, see Ian Baucom's *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Location of Identity* (1999); Cannon Schmitt's *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (1997); and Tamara S. Wagner's *Victorian Narratives of Failed Emigration: Settlers, Returnees, and Nineteenth-Century Literature in English* (2016).

<sup>26</sup> In 1838, Lyell published an abridged, more accessible edition of his text entitled *The Elements of Geology*, which was intended as a resource for students hoping to learn about the newest theories of geology – namely Lyell's uniformitarianism.

geological evidence. Like the evolution debates triggered by Charles Darwin's 1859 publication *The Origin of the Species*, decades earlier Lyell's findings sparked controversy between Biblical and geological understandings of historical time. In their 2018 article "Slow Causality: The Function of Narrative in an Age of Climate Change," Tina Young Choi and Barbara Leckie more specifically describe the impetus for these debates as due to the way "earth sciences shifted popular understanding...to a conception of time that extended well beyond the limits of biblical accounts and even of human existence" (567). Lyell's influential alterations to understandings of earth's timescale also popularized a theory of historical process he called "uniformitarianism." As Gillian Beer describes in her seminal work *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983; 2009), Lyell's uniformitarian view of the earth was as undergoing not alternating "periods of catastrophe" and "period[s] of repose," as was commonly believed, but a continuous "congruity of cause" featuring "incessant change" over time (Beer 38). Lyell's depiction of the earth's history as a gradual, unbroken process of causality and change became arguably more popular than "deep time," frequently permeating works concerned with historical and fictional narratives of human beings. These attempts to portray uniformitarian human history adopt a view of connected history that Choi and Leckie call "slow causality" – an idea I explore further in the next chapter.

While advancements in earth sciences radically changed conceptions of time in the nineteenth century, new discoveries in astronomy, on the other hand, expanded notions of space, contributing greatly to an overwhelming sense of the vastness of the universe. Anna Henchman, in her book *The Starry Sky Within: Astronomy & the Reach of the Mind in Victorian Literature* (2014), differentiates between deep time in geology and astronomy. Geology "spatialize[es]

time,” she explains, depicting it as “compressed, rich,” with “mysterious layers, each of which represents a different moment or period” (39). Astronomy, on the other hand, presents time as relational: “the vertiginous movement of light over spatial distance – the way that matter is arranged in space. The circling orbits, and the gradual shifts in those orbits over time.” This emphasis on the temporal as spatially relational, Henschman argues, is why for many in the nineteenth century, astronomy was associated with the mind – an individual’s subjective perspective.<sup>27</sup> Henschman’s descriptions of astrological conceptions of time as associated with subjectivity explains why it was against geology that many Bible adherents seem to be positioned; its version of deep time was perceived as the more objective of the two.

In the nineteenth century, the universe also began to be understood, for the first time, as consisting solely of matter and energy. As Bruce J. Hunt says, in *Pursuing Power and Light: Technology and Physics From James Watt to Albert Einstein* (2010), “the physical sciences made great strides” in the nineteenth century, “particularly in the study of energy, atoms, and electromagnetism” (1). J.A.V. Chapple similarly argues, in *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1986), that the eighteenth century’s fascination with astronomy shifted in the early nineteenth century to chemistry – a field believed to have “revolutionary” “implications,” as its “significant advances reinforced the growing belief that there was a unity of forces in the natural world” (25). As a means of putting these new sciences into forms that Victorians could more easily understand, writers often relied upon analogies of literature and language. In what Jussi Parikka, in *A Geology of Media* (2015), calls the nineteenth-century

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<sup>27</sup> Henschman extends this idea even further by claiming that “[a]stronomy provides a psychic container, or a cosmological conception of things, because it describes what the cosmos is like as a spatial whole,” thus accounting for its use in various understandings of the universe by scientists, philosophers, and authors alike (39).

“trope” of the “readability of the earth,” many writers of the age across disciplines viewed the earth as “a script” waiting to be “read” and “interpreted” (138). In discourse related to physics and energy conversion, for example, the environment was often metaphorically compared by scientists and artists alike to linguistic and informatic translation. The universe of available knowledge was compared to a library or archive, specific knowledge to a book or volume, and the forms of matter – namely atoms and particles – to fragmented thoughts, ideas, words, and even syllables.

Viewing nature and the universe as a book is not new, however, and such metaphors can be found throughout much of written history. The concept of divine authorship of the universal book, in particular, can be traced back to religious texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as scientific discourses of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.<sup>28</sup> For many Enlightenment thinkers, the natural world was conceptualized as a divine book with pages that could be read given enough scientific progress. In the nineteenth-century, the ever-amassing amount of available knowledge that proliferated throughout the information age – exacerbated by frequent advancements in printing and recording technologies – made the idea that such a book of nature could ever be read or understood in full seem increasingly improbable.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, many Victorians searched for the words and pages with which they could read records of the past inscribed upon and throughout the earth.

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<sup>28</sup> Media historian John Durham Peters traces this tradition back even further to Ancient Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman traditions that were then borrowed by later religions (*Marvelous Clouds* 340-41).

<sup>29</sup> Opinions were a bit more nuanced than this in the early nineteenth century, and natural theologians largely fell into two competing groups: those who believed that nature was a book to which God never intended humanity to have unrestricted access; and those who insisted that developments in mathematics, science, and technology were the keys to increased knowledge of the divinely programmed universe, and that every new discovery took humanity one step closer to understanding God’s design.

Recent scholarship has found evidence of such discourse in discussions of fossils. Parikka connects the “fossil enthusiasm” of nineteenth-century earth scientists with the era’s conceptions of media in this “information age” (116). She describes how in nineteenth-century works by scientists like Lyell and Darwin, fossils are portrayed “as an object of analysis that opened up a book of fragments” or “the data that geology processes.” Fossils were also seen as containing the capacity to make visible the motive histories of natural phenomena, reinforcing the view of “the earth as a secret treasury of the past.” Parikka even connects such views of fossils as imprinted records of the earth’s history to what she calls Babbage’s “elemental imagination” (138). In her chapter on the sonic audibility of the earth’s minerals in *Animism in Art and Performance* (2017), Amelia Barikin similarly discusses Babbage’s *Treatise* theory of human permanence in the context of fossils. Barikin looks more specifically at what she calls “sound fossils,” or “an ancient record of an acoustic activity: a sound trapped or indexed in material form” (254). For Barikin, Babbage’s sound theory provides an apt historical example of sound fossils: “Indelibly imprinted with the vestiges of oral testimony, the air itself becomes a material witness to history” (261).<sup>30</sup> The linguistic *matter* of the universe was increasingly imagined as being dispersed throughout time and space, dislocated from its origin and context, yet still indelibly stamped with moral, affective, or other traces of humanity.

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<sup>30</sup> She argues that not only is this a “a beautiful concept,” but also that, “from a contemporary scientific perspective, Babbage was closer to the mark than even he might have imagined” (261). For Barikin, sound fossils – and Babbage’s illustration of them – ultimately highlight the “tension between non-human time—the telluric time of the stones, the glacial slowness of the Earth—and the time of history, conceived of as the human time of stories, transmitted and embodied by objects and things” (260). “But the idea that environments and artefacts can unintentionally act as imprints of sonic activity also radically shifts the balance of agency,” she continues, “foregrounding that double ontology of materiality in which the material itself operates beyond and outside its deployment within zones of signification.” It is with this idea specifically that Barikin points to Babbage as exemplar.



Communication technologies such as the electric telegraph also allowed people to conceive of their words, or thoughts, as traveling faster than, and outside of, the physical body.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, literary minds were also using their writing to reinforce these conceptions as well as imagining their reverse: that human expressions and actions operated in the same ways as the physical forces in the universe. Thomas Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus*, for example, describes how, “Books, like invisible scouts, permeate the whole habitable globe” (bk. 2, ch. 1, p. 54). He also poses the existential question: “Who am I; what is ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; – some embodied, visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind? *Cogito, ergo sum*” (bk. 1, ch. 8, p. 31). As he views the mental efforts of his friend Hartley from across the room, Samuel Taylor Coleridge considers the nature of active agency as opposed to its complete form: “*thinking as pure Action & Energy*” – “*Thinking as distinguished from Thoughts*” (*Anima Poetæ* 16). Of this statement, Adela Pinch, in *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (2010), describes Coleridge as defining “thinking as an affectively, spiritually, and ethically charged act” (48). In her 1865 poem satirizing modern trends of thought, “A Minor Prophet,” George Eliot even references “Thought-atmosphere” as “thoughts, like light, that bind the world in one” (194). While fossils became readable pages in the vast book of nature in the nineteenth century imagination, human agency became charged atoms, motive forces and active energies, globally connected in an atmosphere of individual expressions of will and thoughts, and forever existing in a closed system in which all matter is preserved.

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<sup>31</sup> While the steam engine – and its relationship to the study of heat and energy – and the electric telegraph – and the advances in the science of electric currents which resulted in field theory and the electromagnetic theory of light – are examples of successful advances in science and technology, not all of the influential techno-scientific speculations came to fruition. For more on the Victorian’s relationship to advancements in technology as represented in the era’s literature, see Claire Pettitt’s *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (2004).

In her article entitled “‘The Weird Message from the Past’: Material Epistemologies of Past, Present, and Future in the *Nineteenth Century*” (2009), Virginia Zimmerman identifies what she calls the “preservationist intent” of Victorian culture. She writes specifically of the “profound signification of material remains and the urgent need to preserve them” that pervaded nineteenth-century thought; very simply, “The Victorians worried about what they would leave behind” (114, 115). Within the category of “material remains,” Zimmerman includes written texts as powerful “traces” that “are not only vestiges of the past; they have a continued life in the present, and in their endurance they function to connect past and present” (115). She specifically describes how the “Victorian impulse to preserve material remains” was, in part, motivated by the idea that “the past may convey its message” to the future, and thus preservation became a concerted “effort to preserve for the future a material record of the present.” Foundational to such efforts, it seems, was the idea of material immortality – that traces of individuals could survive if properly preserved.

Nineteenth-century discourses related to the preservation of human affect or material trace, therefore, often intersect with those related to death as well as past life.<sup>32</sup> Death was an integral part of everyday Victorian life and culture. Nineteenth century death culture is commonly referred to as the “Victorian cult of death” because of its extravagant mourning rituals and grief fashion such as hair jewelry starkly contrasting the fraught sociopolitical landscape of the time. As Victorians were turning funeral services into garish public displays of wealth, they were also living through a time of disease epidemics, wars across the empire, violent riots and protests, transformative new communication technologies, and radically shifting religious beliefs

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<sup>32</sup> Exemplifying the liminality of this trend, such discourse often simultaneously draws from the prominent death culture of the Victorian era and the lingering Romantic desire for an immortality of voice.

in the wake of scientific theories that challenged the very notion of life after death.<sup>33</sup> In other words, death was everywhere in the nineteenth century, and the Victorian relationship with death was not a simple one.<sup>34</sup> In *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015), Deborah Lutz traces the historical tradition of the glorification of the dead's material possessions, starting with those of saints in the medieval era. The tradition became secularized in the Romantic period, she notes, "when the personal effects and remains of nonreligious individuals began, in a broad fashion, to be treated as glowing with fetishistic value" (Lutz 11).<sup>35</sup> Lutz argues that "[c]orporeality, for many Victorians, lent the resonance of subjectivity to objects, laded them with leavings of the self" (2).

Jolene Zigarovich, in her essay on "Death, Literature, and the Victorian Era" (2021), relates these ideas to the way death was depicted in writing of the era. In her exploration of the depiction of death in Victorian literature, she claims that "[u]nderlying this embrace of death was an uneasiness about the rapidity of change, where anxieties regarding the moral, physical, and spiritual decay of a people and culture were inevitably personified and figured in poetry and narrative" (288). While Zigarovich argues that such "anxieties" resulted in literature becoming

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<sup>33</sup> Such religious changes throughout the century also impacted the way in which Victorians thought about and discussed human agency and its motive power. Thomas R. C. Gibson-Brydon, in *Moral Mapping of Victorian and Edwardian London: Charles Booth, Christian Charity, and the Poor-but-Respectable* (2016), describes what he sees as the conceptual changes that occurred by the end of the nineteenth century due to Evangelicalism: "It was the language that changed: Victorians referred to 'character' rather than sin and redemption, they described 'morality' rather than religion" (30). The writers I discuss throughout this dissertation challenge Brydon's conception of this linguistic change through their use of an amalgamation of terms, reinforcing the notion that this nineteenth-century thought-trend is often found in spaces of transition between two different ways of viewing the world.

<sup>34</sup> For more on Victorian mourning and death culture, see James Stevens Curl's *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (2000); Carolyn Dever's *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (1998); Mary Elizabeth Hotz's *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (2009); Deborah Lutz's *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015); and Michael Wheeler's *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (1990) and *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* (1994).

<sup>35</sup> Lutz explains this change to "secular relic love" as being due, in part, to the "celebrity or hero cult of the time, which contributed to, and emerged from, the radical individualism of Romanticism" (11).

“a necessary form of consolation,” I argue that some nineteenth-century writers attempted much more with their literature than simply providing comfort to their readers. Writers such as those upon which the chapters of this dissertation focus place human death within a fictional ecological system wherein fragments or traces of the dead remain within a closed system of affective, moral – at times even physical – exchange with the living. These traces are often depicted as originating from an individual’s words or actions, then subsequently converting into ever-moving, intangible, mechanical forces that impact physical spaces and the people in them.<sup>36</sup> In such narrative systems, the past collides with the present, the dead with the living, nature with humanity, in a world that is not only haunted by intangible forms of human agency – the invisible yet motive and influential traces of past thoughts expressed, words written down, actions performed, even emotions felt – but in a very real sense, moved by them.

Victorian thinking about human permanence goes beyond conversations about death and immortality as well. As Lindsay Chappell describes in her article on “Dickensian Dimensions of Time” (2016), “The question of what, if anything, truly passes from existence puzzled nineteenth-century thinkers across disciplines” (59). Victorians often relied upon emerging theories in the physical sciences and new communication technologies such as thermodynamics, undulatory wave theory, or the electric telegraph, to imagine thought and action once expressed and externalized from the body. In doing so, many conceptualized such imagined immaterial human remnants in a variety of ways – thought-particles, thought-waves, and thought-forces, for example. Pinch describes the Victorian era as a time in which certain “forms of thinking [were]

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<sup>36</sup> I use the term “mechanical forces” in the context of mechanical science: “[r]elating to or caused by movement, physical forces, properties, or agents” (*OED* II.6.a).

conceived of as forms of action, which produce not knowledge about but real effects on others” (2).<sup>37</sup>

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, in *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2002), similarly argues that such beliefs were foundational – whether explicitly or implicitly – to the period’s conceptualization of the nature of influence. He claims that the mixed rhetoric related to materiality that was prevalent in Victorian discourse about influence “creat[es] a hovering question mark over whether our impact on one another is insubstantial (like a tone), or leaves evidence of its form and pressure (like a stone)” (125). Scientific advancements in fields such as physics, geology, chemistry, microbiology, astronomy, and many others increasingly demonstrated the invisible interactions of matter, and the undetectable yet spatiotemporal infinitude of nature. Increasingly established ways in which matter was proven to exert influence through invisible forces became something many Victorians began to apply to their own everyday lives, imaging the potential impact that a single individual – a single voice, thought, action, or emotion – could have on others throughout space and time.

Sound was essential to, and strongly interconnected with, Victorian ideas about intangible influence.<sup>38</sup> In his 2010 article on Dickens’s representation of the urban sensory experience, Michael Hollington notes how “the nineteenth century generated an explosive

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<sup>37</sup> Pinch’s study identifies two important trends in the way people were writing about the influence of thinking: “a tenacious pattern in nineteenth-century writing which could be described as a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from belief in the belief that thinking about someone can affect him or her; and a persistent embedding of that ambivalence about thinking within the very forms of writing” (5).

<sup>38</sup> For more on the prominent vision culture that persisted alongside the era’s auditory imagination, see Gillian Beer’s chapter entitled “‘Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things’: Vision and the Invisible in the Later Nineteenth Century” in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (1996). Scholarship related to vision and the era’s interest in supernaturalism include Shane McCorristine’s *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (2010) and Smajić Srdjan’s *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (2010).

consciousness, not just of new sights but equally of new sounds, and in particular of a massive increase in cities in stimulus to the ear, both noxious and benign, both on the streets outdoor and in predominantly bourgeois interiors” (32). Although Hollington focuses on the urban soundscape of the nineteenth century, a new sonic sensibility pervaded all aspects of the era. Victorians frequently contemplated sound, and their writing reveals a recognition of its multifaceted nature akin to scholarship in interdisciplinary sound studies of the modern era.<sup>39</sup> Thinking about sound often requires thinking about relationships between people, various forms of media, environments, affects, sciences, and technologies. Victorians had a particular interest in sound’s immeasurable and at times unaccountable affective qualities and the impact of subsonic sounds on individuals despite their inability to hear them.

The concept of soundscape is a central aspect of Victorian sound studies.<sup>40</sup> John O. Jordan, in his article on “Dickens and Soundscape” (2016), describes soundscape as a term that unites sound studies with the study of ecology which, although simply “[f]ormed by analogy with more familiar English words such as ‘landscape’ and ‘cityscape,’” is not easy to define – a struggle Clayton similarly faced in defining affect (par. 2). Jordan explains how “Soundscapes can be perceived, recorded, invented, reconstructed or represented. They can be found in natural or made environments; they can be created by engineers and sound artists; they can be analyzed

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<sup>39</sup> In the last few decades, sound studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary field that often combines literary analysis, media studies, cultural studies, and various other concentrations across the humanities. Sound studies scholars come from many different types of critical backgrounds and have produced interdisciplinary work investigating, for example, the way sound, voice, and print media were understood throughout history. Much attention has been paid to the radically shifting paradigms over the last two centuries due to groundbreaking media technologies such as the electric telegraph, phonograph, telephone, radio, film, computer, internet, and more. Included in such scholarship is also a discourse on disability and sound; see Jennifer Esmail’s *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2013).

<sup>40</sup> The term “soundscape” was coined by R. Murray Schafer in his foundational book entitled *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977), which remains vital to sound studies today.

by historians and cultural critics” (par. 2).<sup>41</sup> Hearing soundscapes in literature, he argues, “requires a...kind of reorientation, a shifting of attention not entirely away from voice but onto the broader acoustic field in which voice is one of many elements” (par. 8). In fact, Jordan’s call for a shift in thinking about soundscapes mirrors Blackman’s need to rethink affect as a combination of elements, or an assemblage. In the context of affective assemblages, I argue that Victorian soundscapes can be thought of as sonic ecologies of causal relationships and networks of influence. When Victorians describe the sonic ecologies of their own world, they often draw connections between sound and new conceptions of space and time, as well as the aurality, expression, and influence in their global media culture.

In *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (2005), Ivan Kreilkamp writes extensively of the era’s ideas about human expressions of sound – or writing – in what he calls Victorian “vocal culture” (29). He distinguishes “vocal culture” from the era’s often discussed “print culture,”

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<sup>41</sup> Clayton positions writers like Babbage and Dickens – I would add Bulwer Lytton to his list – amidst advancing nineteenth-century sound theories and technologies. He specifically places them in the context of what he views as a transitional moment in Victorian sound culture: after the emergence of “acoustic wave theory” and advancements in sound reproduction and transmission technologies – namely the electric telegraph – in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, but before the invention of the phonograph and other late-nineteenth-century sound recording and playback devices. He argues that at this time in history, “sound was primarily a medium for communication, not for the preservation of the past” or “recording [of the present], despite the paradoxical fact that sound was often believed to trigger memories more powerfully even than sight” (“Dickens Tape” 20). Clayton speculates that this was perhaps because “[s]ound shared with memory a transitory, evanescent quality” with a “power to haunt.” “In the absence of recording” technologies that would, by the end of the century, “change...everything,” Clayton advocates for a “different kind of tape to tie up the bundle of meanings and memories that sounds in [Victorian] texts evoke.” He argues that the key to understanding “acoustic experience in the nineteenth century” is to “take the measure” of “early sound-reproduction technologies” such as church bells and chimes and industrial whistles from trains and factories, rather than only focusing on the influence of sound recording technologies that would later reshape the Victorian aural world.

Although Clayton only briefly discusses the period after the advent of recording technologies, I believe that Oliphant could easily fit within this underdeveloped aspect of his argument. In her late-Victorian short story “The Open Door,” sound circulates within a defined space rather than transmitting out into a vast expanse, and sonic scenes from the past are described as having been stamped onto the natural world – recorded, you might say – then played back much like a pre-recorded tape, even appearing to re-enact a mechanical style of repetition. In this way, although only Bulwer Lytton’s text most explicitly makes a connection to sound technology of his day, most notably through his telegraph wire analogies, all the writers featured in this dissertation engage with sound theories and technologies through the various patterns and movements of sound within their fictional soundscapes.

arguing that the latter reinforces “the mythology of the storyteller” by representing “voice” as “a single thing we have lost and must attempt to resuscitate.” With his concept of “vocal culture,” Kreilkamp attempts to dispel this nostalgic “fantasy of speech’s murder and displacement at the hands of print” by insisting that “Victorian print culture was also a vocal culture” (29, 3). His work illuminates the complex and interconnected relationship between voice and print in the nineteenth century. This interrelation of speech and writing is also at the forefront of the language used to portray the universe as a network of archived expressions of human agency, as expression can come in the form of speaking, writing, or acting.

Alongside vocal culture, auditory culture is as prevalent and diverse in the digital information age as it was in the Victorian “age of ‘auscultation,’” as John M. Picker describes it in *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003).<sup>42</sup> Studies of nineteenth-century auditory culture focus not only on the increased awareness of, and interest in, the sounds of the era, but also on their investment in thinking about the nature of listening – an interest that mirrors today’s listening studies. In his 2015 essay exploring the relationship between listening, exchange, and subjective trauma, Sander van Maas writes of the complexities of listening:

Listening seems to leave the world intact. It leaves no marks on the objects of its address or on the subjects who perform it. There is little or no real telling if someone listens.

Neither is it possible, in any direct way, to tell if an aural object has ever been listened to.

Listening intervenes in and departs the world without touching it. Yet no realm is more

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<sup>42</sup> Important works on auditory culture more generally include Don Ihde’s *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (1976); Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past* (2003); Michael Bull and Les Back’s edited collection *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003); and Lawrence Kramer’s *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening* (2018).



strongly connected with experiences of devastation than the aural. Less able to destroy the external world than inner worlds, listening is a conductor of inner devastation. (35)

van Maas' description not only highlights the intangibility of listening, but also hints at the nature of sound itself. Despite its similar immateriality, sound can nonetheless be a powerful force that exerts influence upon its listeners, manipulating thoughts, emotions, and even experiences of the body. For many in the nineteenth century, listening and reading were synonymous with being acted upon – a receiving of expressed thoughts and feeling. The nineteenth-century auditory imagination was therefore inextricably tied to the era's vocal and print culture described by Kreilkamp.

The nineteenth-century figure at the heart of this dissertation, Charles Babbage, had a complicated place within the era's assemblage of vocal, print, and auditory cultures. Even today, many fail to recognize the importance of his ideas about sound permanence to the nineteenth century. In *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (2010), for example, David Toop discusses Babbage's notion "that the air is a vast library, inscribed with the sonic impressions of every sound ever uttered" – one of the components of his theory of human permanence that is foundational to this dissertation. More specifically, he places Babbage's ideas in the context of the era's auditory culture by arguing that it was more niche than mainstream, with many Victorians regarding it as "eccentric" (34). In the first chapter on Babbage's sonic theory, and throughout this dissertation as a whole, I examine the various meanings and significance his text had for those who read or were influenced by it. In doing so, I dispel Toop's and other similar misconceptions about its place in the Victorian imagination by highlighting the many writers who saw the importance of his ideas and their powerful implications. For writers

such as Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant, Babbage's ideas helped them make sense of complex nineteenth-century causal relationships. Within the fictional texts of these three authors, as I discuss in chapters two, three, and four, I identify what I call Babbagean ecologies, or affective transmission systems adapted from Babbage's ideas about the permanence of human expression, that model the ways in which individuals – specifically their words, actions, exertions of will, and emotions – have the power to move, record onto, and influence the people and environments of the nineteenth century.

### **Overall Structure and Chapter Summaries**

The chapters that follow are structured chronologically and aim to describe the implications Victorians saw in Babbage's sound theory for those living in the nineteenth-century world. I also examine the fictional adaptations of his ideas in the form of Babbagean ecologies, which attempt to describe complex networks of affective transmission and influence that shaped the lived experience of Victorians themselves. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I discuss mathematician Charles Babbage's controversial *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* (1837), with a focus on his most enduring chapter outlining a theory of moral permanence. I demonstrate how he powerfully impacted fellow Victorians through his portrayal of human agency as morally-stained motive force that becomes preserved forever in the atmosphere. Babbage depicts the preserved records of human expression as moving throughout time and space until Judgment day, when the moral records imposed upon and dispersed throughout the earth's elements could be read and judged. Not only was Babbage one of the first to articulate the ideas upon which the subsequent fiction writers build their own narrative systems, this chapter argues that his theory of

elemental preservation inspired people throughout the nineteenth century to reimagine his ideas in order to explore their implications for the Victorian world.

In the subsequent chapters, I turn to Victorian fiction writers whose texts feature Babbagean ecologies that portray causal relations of human expression, natural environments, and receptivity of influence. The second chapter focuses on the Babbagean ecological justice system of Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), in which cycles of violence and victimization perpetuate and intensify in a transatlantic system of emotive natural elements imprinted upon by human expression and action. In this chapter, I trace the direct influence Babbage's theory had on Dickens's novel, highlighting its depiction of sounds of human expression that cast out into a motive environment filled with perpetuating voices and movements representative of its elemental archives of humanity's past. Through this analysis, I argue that the novel reveals a complex linguistic and causal system of exchange, action, and reaction that combine to form a Dickensian expansion of Babbagean principles. As this chapter demonstrates, Dickens's Babbagean ecology contains a model for reading global networks of influence through environmental emotion capable of enacting a slow, causal justice on the characters whose violent words and actions cause the most suffering.

The third chapter analyzes Edward Bulwer Lytton's "The Haunted and the Haunters; Or, The House and the Brain" (1859), arguing that his Babbagean ecology envisions the slow causality of global thought transmission. I place the story within the context of his preoccupation with global relations, imperial power, and the potential of a single individual to influence the Victorian world. Such context highlights the ways Bulwer Lytton's interest in invisible, forcible, forms of power and influence can be seen throughout "The Haunters," and demonstrates how

this preoccupation eventually culminates into his Babbagean ecology. More specifically, Bulwer Lytton explores the extent to which an individual's will, when exerted with enough force – in the form of physical, verbal, and written expression upon those receptive to its impact – is capable of reverberating its influence across time and space. In this chapter, I propose that the text contains its own explicit and suggestive Babbagean system that Bulwer Lytton uses to model the power of one individual's expressed thoughts, or exertions of will, to influence entire populations over time. In doing so, Bulwer Lytton highlights the dangers of a global communication network, warning his readers of the harmful impact that immoral writing could have on people and nations throughout time and space.

In the final chapter I turn to Margaret Oliphant's "The Open Door" (1882), in which the ruins of an old doorway of a Scottish estate are haunted by a voice in pain that emotionally and physiologically affects members of the family living there. In this late-Victorian short story, Oliphant creates a microcosmic Babbagean ecology in which the emotive power of vocalized suffering has been recorded upon a space of individual past trauma. The voice's repetition and circulation of movement within that space aurally influences the Victorians living within hearing range. In contrast to the models of permanence imagined by Babbage, Dickens, and Bulwer Lytton, Oliphant's Babbagean system can be read by a normal individual with a healthy imagination and an ability to listen empathically, but it also allows for the transfer of imprinted affect. In other words, while pain is vocally transmitted and preserved in the place of its expression, once received by an empathic listener, the environmental record can be moved onto another recording medium capable of hearing and understanding the emotive articulations. This chapter tracks the means by which the story's narrator is transformed into an affective receiver of

the Babbagean soundscape – becoming himself a Babbagean space – through his interactions with both the archive-filled environment and the expressions of past suffering repeatedly sounding there. It also examines the story’s depiction of a network of (e)motive transmission and reception that enact a form of affective, historical listening that acknowledges the pain of the past while changing the cycle of suffering in the present. This chapter argues that Oliphant transforms Babbage’s theory into a positive model for change that hears hope, rather than immorality, echoing throughout the Victorian world. The story simultaneously portrays reading and writing as forms of affective exchange, implicating the reader in the story’s emotive Babbagean ecology.

The conclusion looks forward in time to modern adaptations of Babbage’s ideas, particularly their formation of a Babbagean internet ecology. Although Babbage’s *Treatise* chapter on sonic permanence has seen increased interest in academic fields across the humanities, it has become of utmost importance – even foundational – to media and sounds studies within the last decade. In fact, contemporary media studies often goes beyond thinking about his sound theory in the context of nineteenth-century acoustic sciences, communication technologies, and media inscriptions, by viewing it as prescient of the current digital age. I contend that these contemporary critics imaginatively adapt Babbage’s theory for the twenty-first century world much like Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant do in their fiction for the nineteenth-century. As a whole, I argue that such scholarship constructs a Babbagean ecology of digital relations that both reinforces the adaptability and imaginative potential of his chapter to writers throughout time and space and highlights just how Babbagean our own internet culture is in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Eternal Influence of Words and Deeds: Reading Charles Babbage Across Time and Space

“The air itself is one vast library,” writes nineteenth-century mathematician Charles Babbage, “on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered” (*Treatise* 112).<sup>43</sup> “Whilst the atmosphere we breathe is the ever living witness of the sentiments we have uttered,” he says, “the waters, and the more solid materials of the globe, bear equally enduring testimony of the acts we have committed” (115).<sup>44</sup> These poetic statements come from Babbage’s *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment* – an unofficial addition to the eight commissioned Bridgewater Treatises, published between 1833 and 1836, in which natural theologians argue for the use of advancing sciences to investigate the divinely-designed universe.<sup>45</sup> Originally published in May of 1837, – mere weeks before Victoria began her reign –

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<sup>43</sup> Babbage is most known for his attempts to build calculating engines to perform complex mathematical and analytical tasks. While Babbage’s first machine, the Difference Engine, was meant to perform calculations then print the results, his proto-computer designs for the Analytical Engine are most remembered today. Inspired by the revolutionary Jacquard loom, which used punch cards to program engines found throughout British textile mills in the early nineteenth century, Babbage intended his Analytical Engine to use a similar method to program a more complex machine that could factor in variations presented when performing mathematical functions and adjust calculations accordingly. Doron Swade explains how the engine was designed to be a “general-purpose programmable computing machine,” that “featured a separate ‘store’ and ‘mill,’ equivalent to the memory and processor of a modern computer” (“Redeeming Charles Babbage” 88). It is for this reason that Babbage is credited for designing the first programmable computer, although he ultimately failed to finish the engine itself.

Babbage was not alone in this work and collaborated with fellow mathematician Ada Lovelace – a figure frequently romanticized in contemporary steampunk media, as I discuss in this dissertation’s conclusion. While Lovelace’s contributions to the programming plans for the engine were less extensive than Babbage’s, her detailed, written descriptions of Babbage’s designs played a vital role in explaining the engines to fellow Victorians and preserving their ideas for future generations. For more on Babbage, Lovelace, and their work, see Swade’s *The Cogwheel Brain: Charles Babbage and the Quest to Build the First Computer* (2000) and Lawrence Goldman’s *Victorians and Numbers: Statistics and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain* (2022).

<sup>44</sup> I follow the critical tradition of citing passages from the second edition of Babbage’s *Treatise*, despite many Victorians like Dickens owning the first edition. Those in Babbage’s intellectual circle, however, including Dickens, were likely at least aware of, if not themselves influencing, the significant changes he made to the second edition, including the added abolitionist sentiments I discuss later in this chapter. Unless otherwise indicated, all cited passages from Babbage’s *Treatise* will be to the second edition.

<sup>45</sup> The controversial stances Babbage took in his own *Treatise*, in relation to the other Bridgewater texts as well as more general nineteenth-century views on topics including religion, science, history, and culture, will be discussed throughout this chapter.

and subsequently edited for a revised second edition in early 1838, Babbage's *Treatise* heralds the coming Victorian era. While Babbage's work became widely known in the nineteenth century, one chapter in particular – in which appear the passages above – exceeded the fame of not only the *Treatise* as a whole, but all of Babbage's writings throughout his lifetime. This renowned ninth chapter of his ninth treatise, entitled "On the Permanent Impressions of Our Words and Actions on the Globe We Inhabit," I argue, had a profound impact on both those who read it and those more indirectly exposed to his ideas as they permeated throughout Victorian culture. The nineteenth century was in many ways an age concerned with the past and the future, featuring a drive to both discover and interpret past human and environmental records and invent new technologies that could better preserve those records for future generations.<sup>46</sup> Babbage's ideas resonated with this investment in finding new ways to systematically collect, catalogue, and understand the world, and use knowledge about the past for future progress. What was of equal if not greater importance to many Victorians, however, particularly literary figures like Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and Margaret Oliphant, was the lives of the Victorians themselves – namely intangible forces from the past, pressures about the future, and unseen powers influencing the present that were unknowingly impacting their lives, changing them for better or worse. The relevance of Babbage's theory for the Victorian individual, I argue, became of utmost importance to writers across the nineteenth century.

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<sup>46</sup> The vast number of museums built and collections developed throughout the century is, in itself, testament to this tendency, with even fiction writers like Eliot becoming amateur collectors of the natural world. Arthur MacGregor's edited collection entitled *Naturalists in the Field: Collecting, Recording and Preserving the Natural World From the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (2018) provides a thorough overview of this naturalist tradition over time and the nineteenth century's place within its development.

In this influential *Treatise* chapter on the permanence of human words and actions, Babbage applies principles of Newtonian mechanics to the idea that human morality, expressed through agency, follows the same gravitational laws as the material world. Babbage specifically imagines sound particles as being morally imprinted upon and moved by an individual's speech and actions. Once set into motion by human agency, these particles then emanate out from the body in waves that disperse throughout the earth's atmosphere and other impressible elements, where they "act" and "react" – or "transmit," "communicate" and "retain" "motion," as Babbage also describes it – with other moral matter recorded throughout human history (*Treatise* 108, 113, 115). In accordance with the laws of conservation which dictate that matter can only be changed, never destroyed, – a principle that would eventually formalize into the first law of thermodynamics a few decades later – Babbage describes these motive particles as reverberating throughout all of time and space, forever interacting with, and influencing the path of other moving particles. Babbage, therefore, depicts the earth as a "strange chaos" of natural elements that forever retain motive evidence of human morality permanently recorded onto them (111).

These ideas of Babbage's held a sustained fascination for Victorians throughout the nineteenth century across countless intellectual, cultural, and national boundaries. For example, an American professor of English literature Henry Hope Reed writes of a chance encounter with Babbage at a social gathering while visiting England in 1854. Having admired Babbage's *Treatise* chapter for years – often quoting "that startling passage on the perpetuity of sound" during his lectures – Reed recalls telling Babbage of the impact of his ideas on his University of Pennsylvania students: "some of my students used to say that it almost made them afraid for some days to speak, from the dread that the sounds were to last and mayhap come back to them



in the hereafter” (qtd in William Bradley Reed 264).<sup>47</sup> In Reed’s telling of this conversation with Babbage, it appears as though such audience reactions to his sound theory were as frequent for Babbage as they were for Reed. Babbage seems much more interested in discussing the reason for Reed’s inclusion of his *Treatise* chapter in a lecture on early English literature. The connection Reed had made “surprise[d]” and fascinated Babbage, who urged him to speak more about it: it was to a passage from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The House of Fame*, which poetically describes strikingly similar ideas in strikingly similar ways.<sup>48</sup> Reed recounts how Babbage was “duly impressed” by the “force and fitness” of Chaucer’s writing “as a means of illustration” of his theory; in fact, Babbage viewed these parallels as further evidence of his own theory’s accuracy.

Their conversation eventually led to “some brilliant talking” by Babbage, according to Reed, who opened up to Reed about why he had chosen to only use sound in his *Treatise* chapter and not light as well, as apparently many of his contemporaries had recommended. Babbage explained that he believed that sound alone would be more “effective with the general reader” – an explanation I have not seen him give anywhere else (qtd in W. Reed 264). Although told from Reed’s perspective, this interaction between an American professor of literature and Babbage, is extremely telling of both the Victorian fascination with, and often strong reactions to, the idea that even their worst moments of secret immorality were being recorded by the earth around

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<sup>47</sup> Tragically, Henry Reed never returned from this trip to England, instead dying on his way home aboard the S.S. Arctic, when the transatlantic ship sank after colliding with a French ship on a foggy night. Reed had written letters home of his meeting with Babbage, however, and wrote at length about their conversation, including some secrets Babbage had divulged to him about Byron’s death and his colleague Ada Lovelace’s scandalous married life. The letters were later collected by his brother, William Bradford Reed, who included excerpts in his essay on Henry Reed published in *Among My Books* (1871).

<sup>48</sup> Reed’s lecture on “Early English Literature,” in which he quotes from Babbage and explains the Chaucer connection, was published posthumously in a collection of his lectures entitled *Lectures on English Literature, From Chaucer to Tennyson* (1855).

them, and subject to replay at a future date – the means by which such replay might occur, however, became a point of contention, as the final section of this chapter will address. Babbage also appears to have been correct in his belief that sound was a much more effective vehicle than light for his Victorian readership, with both Reed’s lecture hall experiences and Babbage’s lack of surprise suggesting that his distinctly sonic theory of permanence was impactfully received on both sides of the Atlantic.

Modern criticism on Babbage’s famous sound chapter has largely neglected the strong intellectual, emotional, and at times even physical responses of the Victorians to his ideas. Scholars of the last fifty years have primarily focused on how Babbage’s theories engage with, or anticipate, developments in the physical sciences and communication technologies, as well as debates about religion, the environment, and the developing communication culture in this globally connected society. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the context surrounding Babbage’s *Treatise*, specifically the reasons he chose to write such a controversial text and general responses to his overall project. The next section addresses the scientific duality underpinning Babbage’s theory due to his simultaneous use of eighteenth- and emerging nineteenth-century physical sciences: Newtonian mechanics and early thermodynamics. This duality, I contend, also underpins the varying ways both Victorian reviewers and contemporary scholars attempt to understand and evaluate the efficacy of the working components of Babbage’s physical system. Within his system, readers tend to focus most on the types of human agencies that could be environmentally preserved and the extent to which such records could retain coherency within the established natural laws he sets forth.

The third section features an examination of how Victorians and today's scholars attempt to expand Babbage's ideas, such as through the inclusion of other forms of human agency beyond words and actions that might have the same motive capacity or spatio-temporal extensions of the phenomena beyond the earthly limits he sets. I turn to what I hope will become a new avenue of critical discourse about Babbage's *Treatise* chapter: the very powerful implications Victorians read in his theory for themselves, the nineteenth-century global world, and the future of humanity. This discussion will culminate in an analysis of a powerful speech Charles Dickens delivered over thirty years after he first read Babbage's *Treatise* in which, I argue, his reappropriation of Babbage's ideas toward topics of great importance to the immediate present and future of his Victorian audience exemplifies the ever-increasing relevance of Babbage's words for the people of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to a new conversation about the nineteenth-century repurposing of Babbage's ideas related to the impact and permanence of individual influence. An understanding of such ideas provides important insights into the changing ways Victorians were thinking, feeling, and writing about invisible forms of communication, influence, and connectivity that were becoming a vital part of their global culture.

### ***The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: Historical Contexts, Motivations, and Reactions***

The early nineteenth century is often referred to as the "march of intellect" or "march of mind" because of the popular interest in the power and uses of education for (and on) the increasingly learned middle and working classes. Alan Rauch, in *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and the March of Intellect* (2001), describes the nineteenth century's "obsession with knowledge": "Driven by remarkable changes in technology and science,

knowledge was both inspirational and irresistible in terms of its potential for social and cultural transformation” (1). In this “era marked by an increase in both literacy and scientific interest,” Rauch argues, the “value” of knowledge, “particularly ‘useful’ knowledge,” became “a new kind of social and cultural currency” (1-2). This led to the formation of what he calls “the knowledge industry” and the publication of countless “*knowledge texts*,” or “encyclopedias, instruction manuals, and didactic works for children” (2).<sup>49</sup>

One of the period’s most notable set of “*knowledge texts*,” particularly in the fields of science and natural theology, was the Bridgewater Treatises. Commissioned in 1829 by Francis Henry Egerton, the Earl of Bridgewater, the Treatises, published between 1833 and 1840, were written by eight natural theologians as a means of discussing the relationship between religion and science. Natural theologians of the nineteenth century believed that the existence of God and his degree of involvement in the universe could be demonstrated using scientific data and observation rather than divine revelation.<sup>50</sup> These specific works of natural theology were intended for a much more specific purpose, articulated in the extensive subtitle of the project:

On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God as manifested in the Creation illustrating such work by all reasonable arguments as, for instance, the variety and formation of God’s creatures, in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms; the effect of digestion

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<sup>49</sup> This commodification of knowledge, and distinction between useful and non-useful knowledge, was a common subject of satire; Dickens often mocked the era’s “march of intellect” through his fictional characters – for example, *Hard Times*’ Thomas Gradgrind’s irrational rationalism and *Pickwick*’s criticisms aimed at both the British Association and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

<sup>50</sup> One of the most notable names associated with natural theology is William Paley, likely due to his publication of an aptly titled book *Natural Theology* in 1802. This text, which argued in support of intelligent design or providence, became a canonical scientific text of the period and was extremely influential to major scientific figures throughout the nineteenth century, including Charles Darwin. Particularly in the 1830s and 40s, natural theologians were often entrenched in debates with those who adhered to “revealed religion,” which sought evidence of the divine in the natural world.

and thereby of conversion; the construction of the hand of man and an infinite variety of other arguments; as also by discoveries ancient and modern in arts, sciences, and the whole extent of modern literature. (qtd in William Whewell, *Astronomy* ix-xi)

Anna Henschman, in *The Starry Sky Within* (2014), summarizes “the central project of the Bridgewater Treatises” as being “to incorporate new scientific discoveries into an intelligently designed universe” (59). Jonathan Topham, in “Science and Popular Education in the 1830s: The Role of the ‘Bridgewater Treatises’” (1992), describes how the Treatises’ primary goal – “to demonstrate the higher meaning of the order of nature and, in [Reverend Adam] Sedgwick’s phrase, to ‘enoble’ empirical discovery into morality” – ultimately failed, for the volumes were more often regarded as “scientific encyclopaedia” than interdisciplinary works of natural theology (398). Regardless of their common classification the Treatises were extremely popular because of how accessible they were to the middle classes, both in language and availability.<sup>51</sup> Topham claims that the Bridgewater Treatises “attracted extraordinary contemporary interest and ‘celebrity’” – “by the landed, mercantile, and professional classes” in particular – because of “[t]heir varied blend of natural theology and popular science” (397).<sup>52</sup> “[T]hey presented the pious middle classes with a largely non-technical and religiously conservative compendium of contemporary science,” Topham continues, and were “written by men whose scientific and

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<sup>51</sup> The Treatises were also heavily used in educational aims by both scientific and religious groups, and Topham’s article describes their uses by three notable organizations: 1) the “Broughamite educationalists” in their “Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge” and “loose network of mechanics’ institutes”; 2) the “High Church Party” and their “Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge”; and 3) the “evangelicals – both within the Church and without” and their “Sunday School Union” and “Religious Tract Society” (399).

<sup>52</sup> Topham also remarks on the continuing popularity of the Treatises throughout the nineteenth century, citing the “political economist William Stanley Jevons[’s] plans to “write an unofficial *Bridgewater Treatise*” “[a]s late as 1882” and Edward Bulwer Lytton’s 1838 description of author and statesman Lord Brougham’s *Discourse of Natural Theology* (1835) as “the *tenth* Bridgewater Treatise” (397-98).

religious credentials had been vetted by...the Royal Society and the Archbishop of Canterbury” (398).

Responses to the Treatises were not always positive and they were a frequent target of critique from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, criticized Egerton’s very commissioning of the Bridgewater Treatises for such a specific purpose. In “Roget’s Physiology” (1836), a review of natural theologian and physicist Peter Mark Roget’s *Animal and Vegetable Physiology, Considered with Reference to Natural Theology*, the fifth Bridgewater Treatise published in 1846, Poe argues that the “wording of [Egerton’s] bequest” limited the types of arguments that the commissioned writers could make and “offered a very serious impediment to the fulfillment of the spirit of his design” (202). Poe describes Roget’s specific treatise as overly biased because of how much he had to “exclude...from the Treatise” to make his argument conform to the larger purposes of the Bridgewater project; in doing so, Poe claims, he problematically “admitted such facts alone as afford palpable evidence of Almighty design.” The most famous and influential response to the Bridgewater Treatises, however, came from Babbage.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Babbage’s issue with the Treatises’ arguments, particularly that of William Whewell, prompted him to write an entire book he boldly proclaimed to be the ninth text in the eight-part series.<sup>54</sup>

*The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment* is a direct response to claims made in the Bridgewater Treatises about mankind’s ultimate inability to access knowledge about divine

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<sup>53</sup> In “Darwin’s Technology of Life” (2019), Giuliano Pancaldi describes Babbage as both a “wealthy ‘gentleman of science’ with interests ranging from mathematics to geology to the economy of manufactures” and a “well-known public figure” who was, “on occasion, controversial as well” (686). Babbage also considered himself a philosopher, even titling his 1864 autobiography *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher*.

<sup>54</sup> Whewell is most known for *History of the Inductive Sciences* (1837) and *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences: Founded Upon Their History* (1840). In these volumes, Whewell outlines his contribution to the scientific method – his inductive steps for experimentation – that would become a vital part of scientific inquiry.

processes and the secret workings of the universe. Babbage was specifically opposed to Whewell's critique of mathematics in *Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference to Natural Theology*, published in 1833 as the third of Egerton's eight commissioned Treatises. In this treatise, Whewell argues that mathematics, philosophy, and other such fields are insufficient tools for understanding the divine, capable only of "adding to our knowledge of effects, but not to our knowledge of causes" (333). Babbage took issue with the claims that modern science and philosophy cannot be used to understand the divine design of the universe.<sup>55</sup> Whewell was an anti-empiricist and well known for his interest in epistemology. Specifically, he sided with Immanuel Kant and criticized John Stuart Mill, believing in *a priori* over *a posteriori* knowledge; in other words, Whewell was of the belief that the laws of the universe were independent of sensory experience.<sup>56</sup> At its foundation, Babbage's issue with Whewell's argument is epistemological; Babbage is an empiricist while Whewell is not.

Mathematics utilizes deductive reasoning, which starts from a place of established truth or rules, then finds evidence to prove that truth (proofs); but Whewell says only through inductive reasoning can one better understand the divine, because no truths can be known, one only can look at things like miracles to find evidence of the divine and God's plan for and intervention in the workings of the universe. Babbage saw no conflict or incongruity between science and religion. Babbage's essay, therefore, attempts to demonstrate the opposite: that

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<sup>55</sup> Although some of Babbage's contemporaries considered his work as borderline heretical, it was in fact, as Douglas Kahn in *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (1999) points out, Babbage's "attempt to shore up religion against the onrush of science," not the other way around (210).

<sup>56</sup> Kant popularized the terms *a priori* and *a posteriori* in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Robert O. Preyer, in "The Language of Discovery: William Whewell and George Eliot" (1988), classifies Whewell and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as "philosophical Idealists – Kantians, admiring commentators of Plato, and both of them powerful defenders of the Anglican Church and Tory traditionalism" (123). See Preyer for more on idealism in the nineteenth century.

science and philosophy are in fact tools with which to gain critical insights into God's construction of the universe. Miracles are not evidence of divine intervention, as Whewell suggests, but merely not yet fully understood aspects of the complex system of the Universe, the workings of which only God fully comprehends. Babbage's primary goal in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* is to argue that mathematics, specifically, holds the keys to better understanding and revealing the intelligently designed universe.<sup>57</sup> In fact, he claims that his own calculating engine—known today as the first programmable computer—serves as an apt metaphor for God's role as the divine programmer of all creation.<sup>58</sup>

Robert Maxwell MacBrair,<sup>59</sup> in his scathing critique of Babbage's *Treatise in Geology and Geologists; Or, Visions of Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century* (1843), succinctly summarizes Babbage's overall argument: "Mr. Babbage's work acknowledges the necessity of an Infinite Creator; but its whole tendency is to exclude the interpositions of a presiding Providence, and to deny the common grounds of belief in a divine revelation" (77).<sup>60</sup> MacBrair

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Ruse describes how the view that God designed a perfectly working universe at the start of creation, without the need of periodic intervention in the form of miracles, is precisely in line with industrialists of the day. The industrial revolution was all about valuing the work of "machine over hands," according to Ruse; thus, the natural theologian's image of God as engineer, designer, or programmer, rather than manual laborer, helped to reinforce the belief that further industrializing was almost a sacred mission (Ruse 405). Ruse briefly contextualizes Babbage's *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* within this belief, stating that he "devoted much effort to showing how his machines...could do the most wonderful things purely by working through their motions, that is by law."

<sup>58</sup> Babbage is most famous for his calculating engine, formally named the "Difference Engine," which was meant to simulate both human mental action (through calculation) and human physical action (through mechanical motion). In John M. Picker's words, Babbage's *Treatise* "attempt[s] to show by way of analogy to his calculating machine," "that miracles...could be rationally interpreted, if changes in organic life over time were seen as an elaborate equation series designed by the Creator" (*Victorian Soundscapes* 15).

<sup>59</sup> MacBrair (1775-1866) was a Scottish Methodist missionary and Arabic scholar who traveled to Africa, learning local languages to translate the Bible in hopes of evangelizing the populations; he later wrote on these foreign languages and customs for English speaking audiences – work that in the twentieth century might qualify as anthropology.

<sup>60</sup> MacBrair begins his critique with the following passage: "Perhaps there has not been a more objectionable writer on philosophic subjects, in our own country and times, than Mr. Charles Babbage. His 'fragment,' which he has chosen to term 'the Ninth Bridgewater Treatise,' is replete with erroneous views of the Divine Government. Having embraced the wildest theories of modern Geology, and reconciled them (in his own mind) with astronomical speculations of a similar cast, he would fain bring both reason and religion down to the level of his puerile fancies"



describes Babbage as disagreeing with Whewell – the latter of whom holds the majority stance, according to MacBrair – and reveals his strong opinion of Babbage in the following passage:

Mr. Babbage wishes to show that the current opinion is incorrect; and, like the maniac who strove to prove that he was not mad, by arguments of so fantastic a nature as to convince every one of his actual derangement, he only furnishes an additional proof that the world is not far wrong in its belief. Mr. Whewell could not have a better example of his doctrine than that furnished by ‘the Ninth Bridgewater Treatise,’ the very title and introduction to which prepare the mind for something peculiarly strange. (74)

MacBrair further describes Babbage as “perfectly ignorant of logic, and of any kind of evidence save that of figures,” particularly in his “tak[ing]...for granted” the as yet “[un]substantiated” claims of cosmogonists about the origins of the universe (75). He argues that Babbage fails to account for “any difference between a belief in the existence of certain facts, and the reason of their production, – between a perception of the *effect*, and an admission of an adequate *cause*.” MacBrair concludes that Babbage’s *Treatise* is so illogical that it cannot be “the production of a sane mind, since it contains so many points which mitigate against the dictates of common sense” (77). He even concludes his derisive critique of Babbage’s *Treatise* with the following insult to his credibility and esteem in the scientific community: “[b]esides, according to Laplace’s theory,” – the very theory upon which Babbage’s own rests, according to MacBrair – “we certainly ought to renounce [Babbage’s] views of Nature’s laws, because there are names on the other side of the question for which we have a higher veneration, and which are consequently

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(MacBrair 73). He even equates Babbage’s siding with “Hume’s main argument against miracles” to both men being “against scripture,” suggesting that they border on heretical in their attempts to reconcile scientific methods with religious doctrine (76).

more deserving of credit.”<sup>61</sup> For MacBrair and others that take similar views of the overall arguments of his *Treatise*, – although there were many who spoke out in support – Babbage’s claims seem to overreach both theology and science, appearing as unsupported and unsupportable to his nineteenth-century readers as they appear to many today.

Although writing in response to Babbage’s sound chapter specifically, rather than his overall *Treatise*, Horatio G. Gibson defends the rational, scientific foundations for Babbage’s theory in an essay entitled “A Word That Hath Been – A Sound Which Ever Lingers” (1903), in which he positions Babbage within a larger nineteenth-century critical and literary tradition of the immortality of voice. Gibson describes Babbage’s ideas as not only the result of “scientific reasoning,” but almost divinely inspired: “[i]n this age of miracles in revelation, invention, and discovery, when in all the realms of Nature no secrets are hid...who can say that this theory is not a revelation as real in fact as startling in expression” (687, 684). Furthermore, while MacBrair seeks to minimize the import of Babbage’s reputation, Gibson takes his reputation as “an eminent mathematician” as reason to believe that his ideas were therefore not mere “fancies,” but built upon “facts”; he even goes so far as to correct the type of language I have used throughout this chapter in my discussion of Babbage’s “theory.” Gibson argues that it is rather a “condition not a theory – by fact not a fancy, we are not compelled to receive it implicitly” (688). In the end, Gibson describes what he views as a “remarkable” and “incredible” explanation of the “projection, perpetuation, or preservation of the waves of sound in the realm of air, ether and space.”

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<sup>61</sup> One such “name” MacBrair values above Babbage’s is, unsurprisingly, Newton; this is insinuated by the next paragraph beginning with a discussion of Newton’s contrasting views on miracles and divine intervention.

Perhaps it is the sixty years separating their reviews that influences their polarly opposite readings of Babbage's text. It could also be that MacBrair is speaking from the perspective of a Biblical scholar, while Gibson is neither an academic nor a religious or scientific authority, but an American General with an interest in the traditions of nineteenth-century writing. Regardless of the reason, these reviews exemplify the diversity of voices out there about Babbage's theory, and the numbers continue to grow throughout the twenty-first century as increasingly interdisciplinary interests bring scholars across academia to his suggestive ideas so poetically articulated. The blending of science with relatable metaphors similarly ensures its continued relevance almost two hundred years later.

#### **A “Startling” Chapter on Sound Transmission and Moral Permanence**

Although Babbage's famous sound chapter from his *Treatise* – the ninth chapter entitled “On the Permanent Impressions of Our Words and Actions on the Globe We Inhabit” – appears at first glance to be disconnected from the aim of his overall work, I contend that it reinforces his *Treatise* argument in important ways. As discussed earlier, Babbage's primary goal in his *Treatise* is to argue that mathematics could hold the key to finding rational explanations for the puzzling laws of nature currently mislabeled as miracles and could even enable a greater understanding of God's plan for the universe. In his sound chapter specifically, Babbage follows the logical thread offered by Newtonian action and reaction – a well-established feature of the law of gravitation accepted by the scientific community – by applying this mechanical principle to the effect of human words and actions. By starting with a known natural law, and extending it to something as of yet unknown, Babbage uses his chapter to provide a practical model for how logic, reason, and knowledge of established physical laws can open up new avenues of

exploration with the hope of gaining greater knowledge of the divine workings of the universe. He argues for the potential of further mathematical study and invention, proposing that a mechanical calculating engine of some sort may one day be capable of reading and translating the encoded data stored within the earth's natural elements, enabling humanity to gain a little more insight into the secrets of the universe to which only divine beings have full access.

While Babbage's science in this chapter seems to rely primarily upon Newtonian mechanics in his descriptions of the process of transmission and movement of particles, there is a less overt undercurrent to his ideas suggestive of the thermodynamic law of conservation: his described particles conserve moral matter by converting it into movement, and his natural elements – most often the atmosphere – conserve those moving particles by “communicat[ing]” that “motion” to other parts of the earth, leaving “impression[s]” even on the “more solid materials of the globe” (*Treatise* 115). This simultaneous use of mechanics and early thermodynamics exemplifies how Babbage was writing at a time of immense transition in the physical sciences. In the nineteenth century, the universe was increasingly being understood, for the first time, as consisting solely of matter and energy. A discussion of these two physical sciences and the way they developed and clashed during Babbage's time provide a foundation for understanding the contrasting ways Victorians and modern scholars have interpreted the science upon which his theory is built. As the field of physics continued to develop throughout the century, ideas about the nature and forms of matter and capacity for change, influence, and preservation also altered within the shifting understanding of the laws of the natural world. Babbage's theory occupies a particularly generative place amidst these discussions through its speculations on such topics through the unique proposition that human agency not only initiates

invisible, causal forces of motion, but that such motion has a material influence on the physical world – both of which were ideas that resonated strongly with his contemporaries and continue to fascinate scholars today.

For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Enlightenment’s mechanistic worldview dominated the way in which natural philosophers and literary authors alike saw the universe.<sup>62</sup> In the mechanical view of nature, the basis of all physical phenomena is matter in motion; heat, light and electricity, along with mechanics, form the single conceptual structure in this worldview. Sophie Roux, in her 2018 chapter on mechanical thought systems from the Enlightenment onward, describes mechanical philosophy as a broad “ontological program” which “gave mechanical explanations for all kinds of phenomena” (26).<sup>63</sup> In other words, mechanical philosophy largely describes the workings of the universe in terms of matter and motion – the two aspects that Babbage focuses on as well in his ninth chapter. The last few decades of the eighteenth century, however, would see the effects of the Age of Enlightenment’s openness to new ideas and emphasis on individual rights and freedom manifest into world-altering scientific and political revolutions – starting in the 1770s with the chemical revolution in science, the American Revolution, and then the French Revolution – that would shake the very foundations of the Enlightenment sense of a well-ordered, predictable, mechanistic universe.

While at the beginning of the nineteenth century much emphasis was still placed on Newtonian concepts of action and reaction in mechanical terms, the 1830s and 1840s in which

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<sup>62</sup> This period is when the science of gases, for example, was made possible through game-changing inventions such as the vacuum pump in the seventeenth century, with which gases could finally be weighed and measured.

<sup>63</sup> These phenomena include “gravity, magnetism, the colors of the rainbow, the circulation of blood, the motion of the heart, and the development of animals” (Roux 26). Although mechanistic principles have ancient origins, the philosophical system is largely traced to Enlightenment chemist Robert Boyle for his popularizing of it. Newton and Descartes are also typically associated with mechanical philosophy.

Babbage was writing experienced a growing tension between old and new conceptions of the universe. Friedel Weinert, in *The Scientist as Philosopher: Philosophical Consequences of Great Scientific Discoveries* (2005), describes the difference between the Newtonian and thermodynamic worldviews. The Newtonian worldview, he writes, “is based on a system of mechanical principles and the fundamental notions of matter, motion, time, and space. But it assumes ‘action-at-a-distance’ between the material atoms” (46). The thermodynamic worldview, on the other hand, “replaces the concept of force by the concept of energy. It is based on the concepts of energy, mass, space and time.”<sup>64</sup> Action-at-a-distance became increasingly problematic with the discovery of oxygen and other gases as filling spaces previously believed to be empty, voids, or filled with ether. This previous assumption could no longer hold, however, birthing new concepts such as fields, waves, and more which saw both continuity and instability in a universe which was no longer seen as working like clockwork.

In fact, even natural theologists in the early nineteenth century such as Babbage – many of which had been ardent supporters of the Newtonian universe – began to challenge previously held ideas about the physical workings of the natural world. Joan L. Richards, in an essay titled “God, Truth, and Mathematics in Nineteenth-Century England,” describes “English natural theology” as a “post-Newtonian tradition,” emphasizing the break from mechanical philosophy that occurred slowly throughout the century (51). Henchman contextualizes this break in terms of astronomical discoveries: “the Newtonian eighteenth-century universe” was seen by some in the

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<sup>64</sup> Weinert derives these distinctions between the scientific models from the famous German physicist Heinrich Hertz’s *Prinzipien der Mechanik* (1894), after whom the measurement unit of frequency “hertz” was named. Weinert adds that “Hertz favors a third picture, which only postulates three independent concepts: time, space and mass. Only local action is admitted. Nature is seen as a system of systems. It shifts the focus of physics from particles to fields” (47).

nineteenth century as “dreadfully predictable in its smooth-working motions. Astronomers in Isaac Newton’s (1642-1727) day dealt with a clocklike universe,” and “eighteenth-century astronomers did on the whole conceive of the cosmos as static, stable systems surrounded by fixed stars” (Henchman 56-57). “[T]he nineteenth-century astronomer,” on the other hand, due to radical advances in space-viewing technology, “contends with new data and perceptual problems,” transforming their view of the universe into vast, unfathomable complexities and infinitudes of space and time with which the tidy Enlightenment models could not keep up (67).

Before the science of thermodynamics was more formally recognized in the middle of the century, many still relied upon mechanical philosophy to describe the complex universe, leading many of Babbage’s nineteenth-century readers to only see the mechanical workings of his layered theory. An 1837 review of *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* published in the American journal *The Albion*, for example, offers a telling insight into the more traditional ways in which Babbage’s *Treatise* was received and interpreted by readers on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>65</sup> Quoting the passage from Whewell’s *Treatise* with which Babbage took such exception, the reviewer describes how in his response, “Mr. Babbage steps forward as the ardent champion of the mechanical and mathematical philosophers” (265). The author describes how Babbage uses “several distinct illustrations, deduced from his own immediate discoveries in his calculating machine,” to “demonstrate that the powers of mechanism, when put forth to their higher capabilities, become themselves accessories toward” gaining a greater understanding of the

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<sup>65</sup> The reviewer begins by criticizing Babbage’s choice of title for his treatise: “[t]he title prefixed to this book is...very objectionable. It is not a Bridgewater Treatise, nor like one, except in form and title...No remarks coming from Mr. Babbage needed any tricks of the trade to push them into popularity; his own high scientific reputation would...have attracted attention, and ensured respect, without the irregular appropriation of vicarious notoriety” (265). After taking note of this small “transgression,” as they call it, the reviewer continues with praise for the remainder of the piece.

currently unexplainable – and thereby, mistakenly labeled as miraculous – changes in the known laws of the universe. The reviewer feels that in his *Treatise*, Babbage convincingly advocates for the “philosophy of mechanics” as a future pathway through which humans could, using the “practical illustrations” provided by mechanical philosophy, eventually gain insight into the “more secret working of the machinery of the universe.”<sup>66</sup> Scottish Episcopalian reverend Malcolm MacColl, in 1866, similarly describes Babbage’s chapter as “ably and eloquently” outlining “the theory of Mechanical Reaction” (442n5).

The start of the Victorian era features a growing scientific and public awareness of what Allen MacDuffie, in *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (2014), calls the “thermodynamic imaginary,” or the idea that “energy could change from one form to another – from chemical bonds to heat to mechanical motion – but it was indestructible” (33). The early thermodynamic consciousness was related to the first law of thermodynamics, or what is commonly known as the law of conservation. In her 2007 article entitled “Forms of Closure: The First Law of Thermodynamics and Victorian Narrative,” Tina Young Choi describes the law as “posit[ing] that systems experience neither gain nor loss of energy” (301). Ingo Müller, in A

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<sup>66</sup> For the remainder of the review, the author focuses primarily on Babbage’s discussion of two major concepts: “Time” and “Motion” (265). He describes Babbage’s seventh chapter “On Time” as a “sublime” “approach” to the topic of Time. It is his ninth chapter on sound permanence, however, quoted in its entirety, that takes up the vast majority of this short review. The review’s structure and subtitles demonstrate how for this reader, the importance of Babbage’s ninth chapter lies not in its discussion of sound, permanence, or even morality, but in its “beautifully carried out” discussion of the mechanics of “motion.” Such an emphasis exemplifies some contemporary and more modern readers of Babbage’s in their interpretation of the chapter; it simultaneously contrasts others across the nearly two hundred years since its publication, who see its relevance to sound studies, ecological studies, and more. The review ends with the following emphasis on Babbage’s take on criminal punishment: “We take our leave by expressing our hope, that the framers of our criminal code will weigh the subjoined aphorism, which Mr. Babbage put forth while speaking of punishments, ‘Make but the offender better, and he is already severely punished.’ This is well worth the price of the volume.” Importantly, it is Babbage’s remark on reforming criminals in this life, rather than divine judgment in the next, that strikes a chord – an emphasis placed on the present that exemplifies many nineteenth-century readings of his text. Their choice to target such remarks at American lawmakers in charge of penal reform, rather than criminals themselves, is also telling of the various ways that Babbage’s words resonated with, and could be interpreted variously by, people across the English-speaking Western world.



*History of Thermodynamics: The Doctrine of Energy and Entropy* (2007), more specifically claims that the law “states that the *total* sum is conserved: the sum of mechanical, thermodynamic, electro-magnetic, and nuclear energies” (9). Although the concept of conservation had appeared as early as the seventeenth century in the works of Enlightenment figures such as Newton, it would take until the nineteenth century for a conservation law to be formalized. Choi describes how the 1830s and 1840s saw the simultaneous discovery of various forms of the first law of thermodynamics by “a number of scientists working independently across the Continent and in Europe” (301). In its early iterations, however, this law of conservation was not associated with energy specifically. As Müller describes, “In the early days of thermodynamics nobody spoke of energy; it was either heat or force. And nobody really knew what heat was” (9). He notes how all the major early nineteenth-century proponents “of the first law of thermodynamics used the word force rather than energy” (26).<sup>67</sup>

It could be argued, however, that many scientists of the early Victorian era saw force as problematic when discussing conservation; thus, the law is variously described instead using words such as mass, motion, and momentum, as well as force. This perhaps accounts for why so many scholars in recent years have struggled to describe what type of conservation principle Babbage uses to support his ninth chapter’s argument, with many appearing to draw from a similar mix of terms. While James E. Marlow emphasizes “the conservation of momentum and matter” expressed in what he calls “Babbage’s physics,” Terence Whalen argues that “[i]n ‘The Permanent Impression of Our Words,’ Babbage first describes the conservation of force (the equality of action and reaction) and then offers his theory as an extension of this principle”

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<sup>67</sup> He adds that in these early days, “[t]he conservation of mechanical energy – kinetic energy, gravitational potential energy, and elastic energy was firmly believed in” but “could not be proved” (Müller 25).

(Marlow 231; Whalen 258).<sup>68</sup> Whalen's words echo views held by some Victorians; for example, American professor Daniel Seely Gregory, in his textbook *Christian Ethics* (1875), describes the "principle" Babbage draws from as the "doctrine of the correlation and conservation of forces" (154). Others, like Babbage's youngest surviving son, Henry P. Babbage, describe his chapter as ahead of its time, expressing ideas that would later be formalized as the conservation of energy.<sup>69</sup> After his death, Henry wrote in the margins of his first edition copy of the *Treatise* that it "contains the earliest statement that [he had] seen on the principles of the 'conservation of energy' ... it is distinct and clear as to simple force and sets it forth in a way that startled many and was not long in being followed up" (qtd in John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* 16). In other words, Henry saw Babbage as breaking from mechanical philosophy's emphasis on matter and motion, and pre-emptive of thermodynamics' focus on energy. His son was not alone in this belief, and scholars today share similar views, with some identifying Babbage's ideas as anticipating modern academic discourses such as sound and media studies, posthumanism, and affect theory, as well as developments in wireless technology and forms of connectivity in the age of social media, as I discuss in this dissertation's conclusion.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Marlow also emphasizes the "materialistic principles" Babbage expresses, describing his theological science as articulating a type of "materialistic omniscience" (229, 226). Alternately, G. N. Cantor, in his essay on William Robert Grove's ideas of force and energy, in which he discusses Babbage's influence on Grove, challenges the idea that Babbage expresses the conservation of force: "Babbage argued that the particles of matter set in vibratory motion by an impulse will continue for ever impressed with that motion, but at a subliminal level. Babbage's concept of continuity implies that even if the absolute quantity of force was conserved, the principle of conservation of force need not necessarily apply at the phenomenal level" (285).

<sup>69</sup> Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, however, in his groundbreaking *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2002), identifies the origins of some of Babbage's ideas in his ninth chapter elsewhere. He argues that "Babbage's images of a particle's 'pulsations' draw on Pierre de Laplace's *Théorie analytique des probabilités*" and that "the idea that each atom *retains* its 'impressions' mixes two emerging fields of enquiry—fluid mechanics and germ theory—in a 'strange chaos' of his own" (Douglas-Fairhurst 98).

<sup>70</sup> Anthony Hyman even claims that both the "theology" and the "science" of Babbage's *Treatise* "foreshadows the evolution controversy" that would sweep across the western world a few decades later (139).

Babbage's infamous *Treatise* chapter, therefore, presents a problem for the narrative that there was a clean break between eighteenth-century mechanics and nineteenth-century thermodynamics, and the varying readings of the kind of science he employs, I argue, exemplify the conflicts and tensions in the physical sciences during this period. Even today's scholars view Babbage's science in different ways, with some seeing it as contradictory and problematic, with others viewing it as models for more specific scientific trends of the time. MacDuffie argues that Babbage often oscillates between "two different understandings of energy" in his writings: "energy as a pervasive, indestructible agency that moves freely between industry and nature" and "energy understood as a resource, limited in quantity, subject to irreversible dissipation, and potentially toxic in its after-effects" (32). Although MacDuffie's argument applies to Babbage's texts more generally, his *Treatise* chapter is much more representative of the first type of unlimited energy that MacDuffie describes. Babbage was not alone in making such contradictions during this time, however, for MacDuffie claims that these oscillations and often conflicting views of energy exemplify the period's "growing conflict" regarding how to classify, imagine, and discuss energy.<sup>71</sup>

Ultimately, the transitional position of Babbage's theory between mechanical and thermodynamic sciences demonstrates that even in relation to the physical sciences, Babbage was writing at a time of immense change, the traces of which his contemporaries and today's scholars continue to interpret in a variety of ways. The differing scientific concepts used to classify Babbage's ideas also reflects how many in the nineteenth century were understanding the way matter moves, interacts, and changes throughout space and time in dramatically different

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<sup>71</sup> MacDuffie does note that Babbage manages to balance a more traditional view of energy than later scientists with a skepticism about certain aspects of Newtonian force.

ways, at times even using interconnected components of the physical sciences interchangeably. Even within modern criticism there remains mixed understandings of the types of motive and preservation processes Babbage describes, leaving just enough room for the imagination of individual readers to read what they want to in his words.

In addition to linking Babbage's chapter with eighteenth-century mechanics and early nineteenth-century proto-thermodynamics, many nineteenth-century and contemporary critics tend to view his theory in relation to developments in acoustics and modern sound and media studies. As John Durham Peters notes, Babbage's theory is "now widely known in media theory" (341). Twenty-first century critics who repeatedly return to Babbage throughout their writings tend to come from sound and media studies. Peters is an example of a media theorist who frequently discusses Babbage's *Treatise* chapter throughout his works. In *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (2015), Peters describes what he calls "inscription media," the definition of which he draws from German media theorist Friedrich Kittler's concept of *Aufschreibesysteme*, or "literally, inscription or writing-down system" (24). Peters focuses specifically on elemental media as it applies to "nineteenth-century ideas" "of terrestrial and celestial databases for housing the living and the dead" to claim that Babbage "gave the greatest statement of the dream of an infinite database" (341). In his sound chapter, Peters claims, Babbage "argued for total cosmic storage," seeing "the universe as an infinite library, a complete cosmic memory" in which all aspects of nature, not just the air, serve as a vast "repository" (341, 342). He also contextualizes Babbage's desire to read the atmospheric record he imagines – his depiction of "[t]he right kind of infinite intelligence [that] could hear it all" – within a "post-Laplacean lineage" that was "centrally concerned with chaotic atmospheric

systems” and how to measure, analyze, and predict them (342).<sup>72</sup> Peters’ argument here exemplifies why Babbage’s ideas have been so pervasive and productive for contemporary theories of media: Babbage not only depicts a “cosmic storage” system that resembles modern, database versions of the Babel library, but also prioritizes the legibility of his media, implying that its value comes not from its being recorded, but from one day being retrieved and read.

In an earlier published talk on “Space, Time, and Communication Theory” (2003), Peters considers Babbage’s text within a slightly different context. While still in the realm of “media inscription,” this time Peters looks historically at two distinct ways that nineteenth-century scientists thought about preserved history within a geological record and the form in which it might be discovered.<sup>73</sup> On one side of the conversation in the nineteenth century was, for Peters, Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin, for both of whom the “earth is a library in which the books have been pillaged, scattered, censored, and burnt” (402). Peters describes “their conviction that history can be memorialized only in fragments”:

For Darwin and Lyell, the earth is a recording medium – a profoundly fallible one. At best it inscribes ruins, enigmas, and hieroglyphics; at worst, blank stretches of oblivion...They find a certain melancholy edification in the spectacle of life’s wreckage...Forgetfulness and loss are the way of the universe.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Examples of environmental reading systems that stemmed from this lineage, according to Peters, include meteorology, climatology, and dendrochronology.

<sup>73</sup> Peters’ essay was originally a plenary address delivered at a conference entitled “Revisioning Boundaries: New Directions in Communication Studies in Canada,” held at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada on April 11, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Peters’ wording here is strikingly like Eliot’s portrayal of Dorothea’s experience of Rome in *Middlemarch*, suggesting that perhaps Eliot also adhered to a more geological view of preserved history, at least when encountered by a naïve and sheltered Victorian young woman. In this text, Rome is described as a “city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar” (Eliot bk. II, 183). The “stupendous fragmentariness” of Rome, however, only adds to the “dreamlike strangeness” of Dorothea’s honeymoon experience. The immensity of the cityscape – its assemblage of

As scientists who based their findings upon physical, empirical evidence, past failures of discovery likely inform their view. As Tina Young Choi and Barbara Leckie also note, both men realized that “making geological history legible” equated to “making it convincing,” for their scientific field required tangible and substantial material evidence (568). Peters describes how Babbage’s contrasting theory of media inscription, on the other hand, “insisted on the preservation of all that has ever occurred” (402). Babbage’s conception of the earth’s preservation capacity as being flawless and complete, seems similarly informed by the evidence required by his specific field.<sup>75</sup> As mathematicians like Babbage often use tools such as reason and logic when they explore topics outside of numerical calculations, his theory is therefore supported due to its being founded upon pre-established laws of nature, with his subsequent conclusions having “traced through all [the law’s] consequences” and thus requiring only the application of deduction for his ideas to be convincing (*Treatise* 108).

Such an idealistic image of the earth’s capacity for perfect, infinite storage is problematic even for today’s scholars. James Emmott, for example, in an article entitled “Parameters of Vibration, Technologies of Capture, and the Layering of Voices and Faces in the Nineteenth Century” (2011), positions Babbage’s theory within a time in which thermodynamics, specifically the conservation of energy, was “starting to become very influential” (471). Emmott describes Babbage’s theory as adhering to a “‘conservation’ model of persistence” that insists on

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sights, knowledge, religion, and history – becomes an abject force to Dorothea, and the “weight of unintelligible Rome” is transformed through her experiences into an “oppressive masquerade of all ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes” (183-84). Rather than a Babbagean record catalogued with clarity and logic, as I will discuss, Eliot depicts Rome, in Dorothea’s experience, as a “vast wreck” of “confused ideas” “mixed confusedly” without order or wholeness (184). The passage from Eliot’s novel thereby provides an apt example of how Darwin’s and Lyell’s view of recorded history was adopted in Victorian fiction.

<sup>75</sup> Despite Lyell and Babbage differing in this respect, Geoffrey C. Bowkers claims that the two “developed a similar, machinic view of human and natural time, with the difference engine for Babbage being at the center of his conception” (1).

the preservation of everything, and the destruction of nothing (472). Emmott suggests that such a model, although drawn from scientific principles, does not allow for the inevitable natural processes such as decomposition and degradation over time.

Despite its problems, Babbage's articulation of a larger implication for his theory has been particularly engaging for critics. In fact, what stuck out to many nineteenth century writers about Babbage's theory, particularly in the ways in which some writers imagined it in their fiction such as Dickens, was Babbage's argument that such elemental records could later be used for the exposure and punishment of crimes – particularly those that remained secret to all but his imagined environmental witnesses. "[E]very atom" of these sound particles, Babbage writes, is stained with the moral character of the "movement...by which the crime itself was perpetuated" (*Treatise* 116). In this way, the elements of the earth serve not only as imprints of the wisdom and depravity of every time, place, and individual, but also as the "eternal witnesses of the acts we have done" (112). Whalen writes that in such moments, "it is clear that Babbage wanted to emphasize the moral consequences of his theory of matter" (261). Babbage even attempts to support his argument by combining natural law and the Bible, arguing that the physical processes of nature mimic God's actions in the Bible, as he is the great programmer in the universe. In this way, his marking of the murderous Cain in Genesis would thereby deem that a similar mark would be placed on all committers of heinous deeds; unlike God's power, the natural world is more limited, and therefore its marks appear as invisible impressions. Such invisible impressions will be read and judged on Judgment Day, according to Babbage, demonstrating how invested his argument remains in religion, despite this chapter not appearing so until the end. In the meantime, although man does not yet have the required reading capacity, Babbage urges support

for further study so one could more fully understand its mechanisms at work by “tracing” a “discordance back to its source,” then following its path (*Treatise* 111). With such information, reasons Babbage, one would be able to predict the path of a sound and develop a barometer with which to read the atmospheric, historical record of human actions.<sup>76</sup>

In general, Babbage’s sound chapter underwent relatively minor revisions between his first and second editions, including a gendered revision of the line “all that man has ever said or whispered” (*Treatise*, 1st ed., 113) to include a “woman whispere[r]” (2nd ed., 112). There is one exception, and this revision constitutes a major change to the overall chapter. In the second edition, there is an additional paragraph added to the end, accompanied by an extremely lengthy footnote, which details the atrocities that occurred during what many scholars have identified as the Zong massacre. This situation involved enslavers throwing enslaved people overboard, letting them drown in the ocean, and then attempting to collect insurance money for the loss of their so-called property. This addition, for many, significantly changed the implications and importance of Babbage’s theory. With the inclusion of the second edition’s final paragraph, Tim Armstrong, for example, in *The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature* (2012), situates Babbage’s sound theory within a larger tradition of representing “the residue of slavery” “in sonic terms” (141). Armstrong argues that within Babbage’s theory, as it appears from the second edition onward, is a “fantasy” that the “recovery” of “slave memory” from the depths of the pain-filled Atlantic might one day be possible (143). Naomi Greyser, in *On Sympathetic Grounds: Race, Gender, and Affective Geologies in Nineteenth-Century North America* (2018), similarly relates his ideas to slavery, describing him writing “in an Abolitionist

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<sup>76</sup> It is precisely this pursuit that, I argue in the next chapter, Dickens takes on in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.



ferver,” and arguing that he “emphasizes the weight that affects leave on the planet’s surface,” and presents an atmosphere that, “for Babbage, is not empty, but, rather, charged by the cruelty of chattel slavery” (23). Both Armstrong’s and Greyser’s analysis of Babbage’s investment in using his theory to present environments saturated by the pain, suffering, and violence of slavery in the Atlantic Ocean is particularly provocative for the topic of my next chapter on Dickens, for his Atlantic similarly contains vestiges of slavery amongst the roaring, shrieking, raging waves.

Even in the nineteenth century, Babbage’s ideas were often borrowed to describe emerging forms of inscription media technologies. Peters observes how nineteenth-century discourse on the nature of photography often utilized “Babbage-like language” (*Marvelous Clouds* 342). In fact, American reviewer Nathaniel Willis included Babbage in his 1839 editorial, entitled “The Pencil of Nature,” on the relatively new printing technology “Lithography” – a rival of the Daguerreotype.<sup>77</sup> In his essay, Willis describes Babbage’s ideas in connection with new photographic technology:

Mr. Babbage...announces the astounding fact, as a very sublime truth, that every word uttered from the creation of the world has registered itself, and is still speaking, and will speak for ever in vibration. In fact, there is a great album of Babel. But what too, if the great business of the sun be to act as registrar likewise, and to give out impressions of our looks, and pictures of our actions...for aught we know to the contrary, other worlds of the system may be peopled and conducted with the images of persons and transactions thrown off from this and from each other; the whole universal nature being nothing more than phonetic and photogenic structures. (71)

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<sup>77</sup> A few years later, the famous inventor of early photographic technology, William Henry Fox Talbot, wrote a book also titled *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), but he does not mention Babbage.

Willis' discussion of Babbage here is both typical and atypical of the way many nineteenth-century writers spoke of his theory. In one sense, his depiction of Babbage's atmospheric archive as "a great album of Babel" is not uncommon, serving as an apt reference when one imagines how much matter might already be contained within environmental pages. His application of Babbagean principles of sound to those of light in relation to the photograph is also not unique. What is striking about this passage is its final, entertaining extension of his theory using a playful sort of Babbagean logic, imagining worlds existing in an alternate universe in which they exist on photographic negatives taken from our side.

In a famous series lecture entitled "The Telegraphic System of the Universe" (1851), American geologist and natural theologian Edward Hitchcock describes Babbage as providing "the first moral application of this mechanical principle" in his famous ninth *Treatise* chapter – "this mechanical principle" being "the doctrine of reaction" (332, 331).<sup>78</sup> Hitchcock applies Babbage's ideas in a similar way to Willis that reinforces the notion that such comparisons were common. In a notable combination of scientific and literary language not unusual in the Victorian era, Hitchcock goes on to include the following verse to rephrase this statement in "a poetic form," claiming that "this principle converts creation

Into a vast sounding gallery;

Into a vast picture gallery;

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<sup>78</sup> Hitchcock [1793-1864] was from Boston with interests in chemistry, natural history, and religion. Like Babbage, Hitchcock aimed to reconcile Christian beliefs with emerging scientific discoveries and methods. Hitchcock defines "the doctrine of reaction" as "the mutual or reciprocal action of different things upon one another," but he claims that "it is not every kind of reaction that will prove a permanent impression to be made upon the universe by our conduct. Hence we must be more specific" (331-2). He therefore breaks his lecture up into eight sets of principles of reaction: 1) "mechanical reaction" (332); 2) "optical reactions," which he further describes as "the reaction of light and the substances on which it impinges" (335); 3) "electric reactions" (338); 4) "odylic reaction" (341); 5) "chemical reaction" (342); 6) "organic reaction" (347); 7) "mental reaction" (349); and 8) "geological reaction" (351).

And into a universal telegraph. (Hitchcock 331)

Paul Gilmore, in *Aesthetic Materialism: Electricity and American Romanticism* (2009), describes this seemingly strange moment in Hitchcock's text: "[i]nstitutively, it seems, leaping into poetic voice, Hitchcock describes how new technologies make visible the mysterious forces underlying the moral order of the universe" (51). As Gilmore highlights, even non-literary authors such as Hitchcock could not help but turn to literary language when applying Babbagean ideas to explanations of the vast changes occurring in the Victorian world.

A passage from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) bears a striking resemblance to Hitchcock's writing here, suggesting that such language pervaded the Victorian era toward the end of the century – an argument that also supports my fourth chapter's reading of Margaret Oliphant's Babbage-like language and fictionalized system of exchange in "The Open Door" (1882), as she was likely only indirectly exposed to ideas such as Babbage's that were circulating at the time. Eliot's narration echoes Hitchcock's poetic diversion with comparative preservation technologies. In this *Middlemarch* passage, Eliot reflects upon the significance of a single moment during which a man finds a scrap of paper – on which is written a single word – that puts into motion a vast chain reaction, the effect of which ripples outward and alters many of the lives of the novel's characters:

Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing? If it happens to have been cut in stone...it may end by letting us into the secret of usurpations and other scandals gossiped about long empires ago: – this world being apparently a huge whispering-gallery. Such conditions are often minutely represented in our petty lifetimes. As the stone which has been kicked by generations of clowns may come by curious little links of effect under the

eyes of a scholar...so a bit of ink and paper...may at last be laid open under the one pair of eyes which have knowledge enough to turn it into the opening of a catastrophe. (bk. IV, 392-93)

Rather than using the moment of discovery as a simple plot device, here Eliot reflects upon its larger significance: the potential power of writing; the importance of context and interpretive understanding in reading the preserved fragments of history; and the capacity of discovery and knowledge of the written past – even that of a single word – to forever alter lives in a vast causal network.

Like Hitchcock's "vast sounding gallery," Eliot also imagines the world as a "huge whispering-gallery" in this passage, echoing with the "secrets" of human history. By "sounding gallery" and "whispering-gallery," both writers are referring to large spaces notorious for having an amplifying and echoing effect on even the quietest of sounds. Polymath Sir John Frederick William Herschel, a friend and colleague of Babbage's, wrote of England's most famous whispering gallery in his 1845 "Treatise on Sound": "In the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's, London, the faintest Sound is faithfully conveyed from one side to the other of the dome, but is not heard at any intermediate point" (752). Herschel's description demonstrates why such a space made an apt analogy for Babbage's view of the universe. Like a whispering gallery, in which those in the midst of actively speaking voices are incapable of hearing the sounds they produce, while those on the outside hear the echoing resonance, Babbage suggests that the atmosphere – and natural elements more generally – contain similarly reverberating records of human speech that, although beyond human senses at present, may one day be retrievable by a future being capable of receiving it.

### **Adapting Babbage's Theory for the Victorian World**

In relation to such a future receiver of Babbagean recorded history, Babbage differed from many Victorians writers who subsequently interpreted his ideas, whether they explicitly read his *Treatise* chapter or more indirectly received its concepts as it permeated throughout Victorian culture for the remainder of the nineteenth century. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, Babbage and his contemporaries variously conceive of what type of being, ability, or capacity would be required to access, comprehend, and translate such dispersed human records; they also differ, as I discuss in subsequent chapters, on what types and forms of human agency might be preserved and the potential impact of their enduring preservation and retrieval on Victorian individuals or future humanity. Babbage champions “mathematical analysis” as the tool which, “[i]f man enjoyed a larger command over,” could one day permit “more extensive” “knowledge”; he simultaneously suggests that such knowledge gained by humanity would forever be limited, and only beings with superior or divine intellects – namely angels and God – would ever be able to read environmental records of “man’s changeful will” (*Treatise* 110, 112).

The more poetic passages with which he ends his chapter, however, seem to suggest otherwise. In the first edition of his *Treatise*, the chapter ends with the implication that only God would be able to read the motive testimony of past humanity. The second edition adds a paragraph limiting access to the “still quivering movements” of “every particle” and “every corporeal atom” dispersed and recorded to Judgment Day (117-19). At this time, Babbage suggests, the earth’s elements, rather than any “living witness[es],” would gain the ability to “give evidence” on behalf of the “soul[s]” of the victims of past crimes – namely former enslaved people, for Babbage. Whether God directly reads elemental testimony, or the elements themselves speak to God of what they have witnessed, Babbage implies in both chapter endings

that no non-divine “being” would ever be capable of reading these human records. He goes even further to suggest that other than God and nature, a reading entity is entirely unnecessary, as divine judgment is the only future relevance Babbage values.

When his conceptions about types of readers and record retrievals are viewed simultaneously, I contend that they point to an important void in Babbage’s argument that, although largely overlooked by modern scholars today, much like Babbage did himself, was extremely evident to many Victorians. He implies that while greater scientific knowledge could improve man’s ability to analyze the influence of human agency on motive forces and elemental motion, he fails to acknowledge the potential impact those recorded words and acts perpetually moving throughout the earth might have on people living alongside them; he only discusses their afterlives. Additionally, he does not consider the more indirect influence that such traces of humanity might have on people through environmental impact, such as their potential to affect weather patterns or other natural phenomena through elemental motility. Underpinning this sound chapter’s reinforcement of his larger *Treatise* argument that his contemporaries should view scientific advancement as the key to improving man’s ability to read the divinely programmed universe, is a silence about the lives of the Victorians themselves. Babbage neglects to address the possible impact that such divine programming – making the earth humanity’s permanent recording device – might have on the everyday lives of people in the nineteenth century, and this silence is one that, I argue, many writers of the time sought to fill. In fact, when considered beyond her use of the “whispering-gallery” metaphor, Eliot seems most invested in the *Middlemarch* passage in imagining the impact of past written records on those living in the present. More specifically, she places an emphasis on the person who discovers those records,

stipulating that they must possess certain abilities and knowledge in order to read and understand their importance – a concern found throughout nineteenth-century fiction. While she acknowledges that the reading of past writing often requires context to understand significance, her depiction of ancient, engraved stones demonstrates that for Eliot, given enough time, even uncontextualized gossip has value for its historical significance. Her description of the causal chain that had to occur for the letter to be found – the “curious little links of effect” – more explicitly highlights the influence of past human records, preserved in nature, on the living Victorians of her novel. This causal chain also narrates the type of slow causality that Choi and Leckie discuss as increasingly used in the nineteenth century to connect human impact across time and space.

One of the most important aspects of Babbage’s ideas for many Victorians, therefore, as for Eliot, was what they could add to it regarding the potential for a single individual to impact all of humanity across time and space in impossibly complex and untraceable ways. Such an idea was made possible through a concept related to geologist Charles Lyell’s “deep time” and “uniformitarianism” discussed in my introduction: what Choi and Leckie call “slow causality,” or causal relations viewed across a much wider expanse of time and space than was typically known. In the Victorian era, they argue, writers across disciplinary and generic boundaries faced crises of representation amid increasingly complex “disparities between geological and human histories, industrial and agricultural temporalities, and providential and secular belief-systems” (567). A simplistic explanation of cause and effect – with “cause as a fixed principle” – was no longer adequate for explanations of causal relationships; explorations of the more indirect concept of “causality” required more imaginative styles of writing than the more straightforward

tradition associated with science writing (although it was common for Victorian scientists to employ literary techniques in their texts as well).<sup>79</sup> For Babbage specifically, Choi and Leckie argue that “natural theology offered a means of repositioning humanity and, importantly, even human agency, within the long histories of deep time” (573).<sup>80</sup>

Some of Babbage’s contemporaries believed he did not go far enough in situating humanity within the greater conception of space and time or discussing the causal, deep time implications of his theory in terms of what it could mean for the lasting, pervasive power of the Victorian individual. One of Babbage’s most avid supporters, Thomas Hill, expressed such a view in his supporting fragment to Babbage’s fragmentary text, entitled *Geometry and Faith: A Fragmentary Supplement to the Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, originally published in 1849 but subsequently revised by Hill for two additional editions published in 1874 and 1882. In this complimentary text, Hill first describes Babbage’s sound theory as “a chapter which none have ever read without a thrill of mingled admiration and fear” – a description which often appears in reactions to Babbage’s ideas (46). He argues for an extension of Babbage’s theory beyond the limits of the earth, claiming that the “law of gravitation” connects the entire universe through the various influences of force and movement: “[t]hus may every deed on earth be instantly known

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<sup>79</sup> Choi and Leckie claim that such need led writers of the physical sciences, mathematics, social theory, and literature alike to explore “how narrative might allow for the convergence of these disparate temporalities, how it might reflect in human terms the slow causalities – the geologically or generationally slow unfolding of processes – in which that ‘operation or relation’ was often attenuated to the point of invisibility over a period of centuries, millennia, even eons” (567).

<sup>80</sup> Jerome McGann, however, in *The Poet Edgar Allan Poe: Alien Angel* (2014), sees Babbage as relying upon a less complex depiction of causal relations. He describes Babbage’s *Treatise* – being representative of the Bridgewater Treatises more generally, despite its unofficial status – as adopting a traditional “account of action in the world” he calls “the transactional model of cause and effect” (118). In this view of causality, events are depicted as occurring in a succession – a sequential chain of linked cause and effect – that began with the ultimate primal cause: God. McGann’s main focus, however, is on the ways Poe refused the traditional model in his writing in favor of a more “dynamic form,” the “decisive feature” of which is “reciprocity” (44).



in the farthest star...Thus considered, how strange a record does the star-gemmed vesture of the night present!...in whose mazy track is written the record of all the motions that ever men or nature made” (48-49). Such an extension, for Hill, means that men should feel even more of a responsibility to act with morality and goodness, for not only does the whole “universe” serve as a “witness” to the deeds of man, but one “deed of wickedness” has the power to “move” “every star in the remotest heavens” because of the intricately interconnectedness of all things, no matter how separated they are by time, space, or size (49).

Hill also exemplifies the reactions that many Victorians experienced to Babbage’s ideas by emphasizing their implications for the lives of everyday people of the nineteenth century. He writes that one individual’s “influence,” whether in the form of action, thoughts, or feelings, “even in solitude, has an effect upon the world” and all those who live in it. He uses Babbage’s analogy of “ever-widening circles” to argue that even “the spirit and tone of the age is the sum of the individual thoughts” of the living combined with all those of “preceding ages of the race” (51-52). Hill’s application of Babbage’s theory toward an argument about the influence of a single individual upon all people living across the interconnected nineteenth-century world is representative of many such readings and uses of Babbage’s chapter that have been largely overlooked by today’s scholars. For Victorians, I argue, Babbage’s ideas tapped into pre-existing concerns about invisible forms of influence in such an increasingly global society. For Hill and many others, the nineteenth century’s transportation and communication technologies made it possible for a single individual to have the type of limitless influence throughout space and time that Babbage describes. An even more famous and influential text of the Victorian period makes a similar argument using Babbage’s theory. In Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help; With Illustrations of*

*Character and Conduct* (1859), Babbage's "noble passage" which makes up his ninth chapter brings forth the "momentous and solemn fact" in which "the great peril and responsibility of human existence lies": that "[n]o man's acts die utterly," but rather influence all those who live and will live – for "good" or for "bad" – in complex, imperceptible, and untraceable ways (295-6). Smiles, therefore, uses Babbage's ideas to stress to Victorians the "great significance of setting forth a good example" not just for themselves, but for all of humanity around the world for "generations of men for all time to come" (296-97).<sup>81</sup>

Fiction writers of the nineteenth century were also directly inspired by Babbage's sound theory and contemplated his ideas and their implications in their works.<sup>82</sup> Poe, for example, wrote a direct response to Babbage's chapter in a short story entitled "The Power of Words," published in 1845. This story is written as a Socratic-style dialogue between two angels, with one having just become an angel and the other being wiser and more experienced. The story begins with the newest angel, Oinos, expressing disappointment at his lack of omniscience in his divine afterlife, for he had expected he would "be at once cognizant of all things, and thus at once happy in being cognizant of all" (Poe 602). The older angel named Agathos, on the other hand, insists that such omniscience is "the curse of a fiend," arguing instead that the key to happiness is the quest for and acquisition of knowledge, not the total possession of it. For Agathos, eternal curiosity and learning is the goal of those living both on earth and in the spiritual realm – an opinion shared by Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant, as my chapters

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<sup>81</sup> Smiles's phrasing here evokes the ending of *Middlemarch*, when Eliot writes of the past and future impact of Dorothea in the context of the "daily words and acts" of "we insignificant people," the "many Dorothea's" of the world: "the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (bk. VIII, 794).

<sup>82</sup> There is no direct evidence that Bulwer Lytton or Oliphant were directly inspired by Babbage; however, my chapters demonstrate that they were very much influenced by his ideas, even if indirectly.

demonstrate. It is at this early point in the story that Poe turns to Babbage's theory through Agathos as he provides the novice angel with some insight into how the universe works:

We moved our hands, for example, when we were dwellers on the earth, and, in so doing, we gave vibration to the atmosphere which engirdled it. This vibration was indefinitely extended, till it gave impulse to every particle of the earth's air, which thenceforward, *and for ever*, was actuated by the one movement of the hand. (603)

Poe's conception of the world as a space of Babbagean transmitted motion – particularly in relation to the slow causality of human words and actions – is clear. In fact, as John Tresch notes in “‘Matter No More’: Edgar Allan Poe and the Paradoxes of Materialism” (2016), Poe “took literally” Babbage's “claim...that words and emotional expressions leave a material trace on the ether that, in principle, records all of human history” (887).<sup>83</sup> An often overlooked aspect of Poe's story, I argue, is the specific way in which it challenges Babbage's suggestion that higher beings – such as angels – would be capable of accessing and comprehending those records in their totality. Even as the opinion about omniscience held by the experienced angel is positioned in a more positive light, there is a sense of disappointment and disillusionment that permeates the story. Poe, it seems, like other Victorians, found Babbage's conception of archival readership problematic. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Poe's story merely serves to endorse Babbage's depiction of the universe as a complete archive of human words and deeds as it problematizes the limitations of its retrieval. In other words, he does not attempt to create his own type of reader, as do the writers at the heart of this project.

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<sup>83</sup> Whalen, in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (1999), and Jerome McGann, in *The Poet Edgar Allan Poe: Alien Angel* (2014), similarly claim that Babbage's *Treatise* chapter inspired Poe's “The Power Words.”

While Poe's engagement with Babbage's sound chapter has been explored by a handful of critics, the author whose interest in Babbage is, by far, most commonly discussed by scholars in the last few decades is Dickens. Although Dickens is not often associated with nineteenth-century mathematics, he is known to have had a keen interest in this work of his friend Babbage.<sup>84</sup> Dickens was particularly interested in Babbage's theory of sound permanence and even owned a copy of *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*.<sup>85</sup> More than thirty years after its publication, Dickens famously referenced Babbage's theory in an inaugural address to the Birmingham and Midland Institute<sup>86</sup>:

It was suggested by Mr. Babbage, in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, that a mere spoken word—a mere syllable thrown into the air—may go on reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever, seeing that there is no rim against which it can strike: no boundary at which it can possibly arrive. ("Birmingham, September 27, 1869" 299)

In this speech, Dickens outlines his educational ideals, and uses Babbage's theory as a powerful expression of those ideals. Inextricably linked to his belief in democratic educational institutions

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<sup>84</sup> Babbage and Dickens corresponded regularly starting in the early 1840s, or perhaps earlier. From Dickens's letters to Babbage, it is evident that they met regularly at social functions, exchanged writings, and even shared opinions that they requested remain private. See *The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1820-1870*, vols. 2-4; especially "To Charles Babbage, 17 June 1841," p. 306; "To Charles Babbage, 27 Apr. 1843," pp. 478-79; and "To Charles Babbage, 28 May 1844," p. 135.

<sup>85</sup> Numerous scholars have confirmed his ownership of Babbage's *Treatise*. See, for example, Gary Colledge's *Dickens, Christianity and 'The Life of Our Lord': Humble Veneration, Profound Conviction*, p. 158n.8.

<sup>86</sup> Dickens was chosen to serve as the Institute's president the previous year, and he was initially inclined to reject the offer, feeling it would be too much in light of his health issues and busy schedule of writing and public readings. Dickens eventually accepted the position because of his "old association with [the] Institute, and [his] old strong regard for the Birmingham people" ("To Arthur Ryland. 12 Dec. 1868" 408). The Birmingham and Midland Institute was founded in 1854 through the merger of the Philosophical Institute, Midlands Institute, Mechanics' Institution, and Birmingham Society of Arts. In an Act of Parliament that same year, the "purpose" of the institute was described as follows: "the Diffusion and Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art amongst all Classes of Persons resident in Birmingham and the Midland Counties" (qtd in "About the Birmingham & Midland Institute"). In addition to serving as its president, Dickens supported this "practical science, literature and the arts"-focused school until his death in 1870 by helping to raise money through public readings.

that are free from politic pressures and open to all, Dickens's educational philosophy centers on his desire for more people coming from working-class backgrounds to be granted the opportunity to have a positive and wide-reaching impact on the nineteenth-century world – a cause with which Dickens personally connected.<sup>87</sup> Dickens reads in Babbage's ideas an emphasis on the power of the individual, regardless of background, birthplace, class, or gender, that his audience of working-class students, faculty, and families would likely find inspiring.<sup>88</sup> His explicit message, therefore, seems to be that the institute's students can utilize their democratic education through moral speech and actions once they graduate, and become forces for truth and wisdom in a materialistic world in much need of them.

Critical discourse related to Dickens's reference to Babbage in his 1869 speech typically focuses on the final words he spoke during his address to the Institute and their meaning for Dickens himself. Those influenced by John M. Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* relate his words

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<sup>87</sup> Sarah Winter, in *The Pleasures of Memory: Learning to Read with Charles Dickens* (2011), links Dickens's comments on education in this speech to his ideas about art and society; "[w]ithout a role for art and culture that is at once independent of the state but also not transcendent over or separate from civil society," Winter explains, Dickens believed that "literature loses its ability to carve out an extra-institutional influence, and thus its potentially democratizing agency" (252). She argues that Dickens believed that it was through "democratic education" – which he envisioned as "nonpartisan, independent, and inclusive" – that literary influence and agency could best be cultivated, maintained, and utilized for good.

<sup>88</sup> Despite Dickens's emphasis on the importance for education to be inclusive, his speech has moments that suggest he may not have been thinking as progressively about race as he was about class or gender. His opening remarks, for example, although meant in jest, compare his being selected as the Institute's new president to the nonsensical physical trials he describes as required by "some savage African tribes" when selecting their new king (186-87). The negative generalizations he makes later in his speech of Chinese society as a whole are even more problematic: "The true material age is the stupid Chinese age, in which no new or grand revelations of nature are granted, because they are ignorantly and insolently repelled, instead of being diligently and humbly sought. The difference between the ancient fiction of the mad braggart defying the lightning and the modern historical picture of Franklin drawing it towards his kite, in order that he might the more profoundly study that which was set before him to be studied (or it would not have been there), happily expresses to my mind the distinction between the much-maligned material sages—material in one sense, I suppose, but in another very immaterial sages—of the Celestial Empire school" (194). Despite Dickens having been an avid abolitionist throughout his life, such remarks suggest that he still maintained many of the same racial biases as his nineteenth-century contemporaries – a bias shared by Bulwer Lytton about the Chinese, although his issues with the country's worldviews were more related to egoism than materialism, as I discuss in the third chapter.

to Dickens's reflections on the power and permanence of his own authorial voice, while others like Douglas Kahn connect his words to his opinions about "self-improvement," arguing that "Dickens cited Babbage's text to invoke the figure of the necessary diffusion of knowledge (not a knowledge of the diffusion)" (212).<sup>89</sup> Few, if any, have considered Dickens's use of Babbage's ideas in the context of his speech writing process that began months before his actual address. In his extensive correspondence with the founder of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Arthur Ryland, Dickens requests and receives details from Ryland about the student population and their everyday lives and struggles.<sup>90</sup> In one particular letter written to Ryland after finally receiving these notes, Dickens describes his underlying goal for the speech, which does not relate to himself, his own voice, or his ideas about knowledge diffusion. He writes, "The great point is to be suggestive, and leave them the pleasure and interest of some working out on their own part"

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<sup>89</sup> Céline Prest's discussion of Dickens's speech exemplifies those heavily influenced by Picker. In "'Walls of Words': Paperscape in Charles Dickens's Novels" (2016), she regards his reference to Babbage as indicative of how "[t]he infinity and immateriality of air appears as a promise of eternity for the writer" (par. 47). Her later article, entitled "Echo as Writing in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens: Lady Dedlock's Testament" (2018), similarly frames Dickens's speech and overall interest in Babbage's ideas. Emily Heady, in "Lost on the Map: Distant Reading in the Travel Writings of Harriet Martineau and Charles Dickens" (2012), also considers Dickens's interest in Babbage's sound theories within the context of his personal preoccupation with the power of voice, arguing that Dickens saw the positive and negative potential of such power. Dickens considered plagiarism specifically to be an example of bad authorial power, with the period's "culture of copying" including countless "unauthorized reproductions" of Dickens's work across the Atlantic; or its uses for good, with his realization that performing oral readings of his fiction gave him "extraordinary power ...over his audiences" (Heady 109). As his speech makes clear, Dickens saw opportunities for good for the Institute's student population.

<sup>90</sup> He requests these details in his letter on 13 August 1869, but does not receive them until a month later, about two weeks before his address. In the interim, Dickens writes repeated reminders to Ryland to send his notes on the students as he anxiously awaits their arrival. In these letters, Dickens also updates Ryland on his frustrated speech writing process as a result of not having the details he wants. Dickens describes himself as having "very strong opinions on the subject of speechification," believing that "there is, everywhere, a vast amount too much of it" ("To Arthur Ryland. 6 Sept. 1869" 395). By speechification, Dickens seems to be describing speeches that are both overly general so as to be irrelevant for the audience and overly focused on the concerns and ego of the one giving the speech. Dickens feels that Ryland's notes would help him avoid delivering such an address. A few weeks later, when his notes had still not arrived, Dickens writes to Ryland with a similar progress update, reporting that he "continue[s] in the irreverent condition in which [he] last reported [himself] on the subject of Speech Making" ("To Arthur Ryland. 6 Sept. 1869" 408). It is clear from these letters that Dickens felt it was an absolute necessity for him to personalize his speech for the specific individuals that would hear it.

(“*To Arthur Ryland*. 14 Sept. 1869” 411).<sup>91</sup> His letter reveals how Dickens did not intend his speech to be a mere articulation of a generalized philosophy of education or demonstration of his own expressive power akin to his popular public readings.<sup>92</sup> Instead, he made great efforts to appeal to his specific audience, making his speech relevant to their own lives and providing opportunities for every listener to interpret his words for themselves. When viewed in the context of this statement, I argue that Dickens’s non-fictional repurposing of Babbage’s *Treatise* chapter exemplifies the type of imaginative adaptation that forms the central claim of this dissertation: Victorian writers saw the imaginative opportunities implicit in Babbage’s ideas and created forms of Babbagean ecologies in their fiction attuned to those individuals living, reading, and listening in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>91</sup> Dickens conveys an understanding similar to that of Oliphant’s views on popular scientific writing addressed in the last chapter of this dissertation. Both writers do not wish themselves or their readers and audience members to “be wearied...by minute details,” as Dickens puts it, but instead leave room for the imagination and opportunities for reflection and learning (“*To Arthur Ryland*. 14 Sept. 1869” 411).

<sup>92</sup> As his discussion of “speechification” in his letters to Ryland makes clear, Dickens despised the types of speeches that feature aspects that many contemporary scholars identify in his address – its concern with the power of his own authorial voice or the articulation of his own theory about the diffusion of knowledge. For Dickens, such speechification on his own part would make the experience of listening to his address “hideous,” just as he says of listening to the pompous “Orati[ons]” of British parliamentary sessions (“*To Arthur Ryland*. 6 Sept. 1869” 408).

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Environmental Testimony of Guilty Deeds: Ecological Justice in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*

[S]ublime forces of change that make humans feel small within the shadow of rioting nature are...now projecting our own activities onto the canvas. *Homo sapiens* have gone from being the observers of sublime chaos in nature to being co-authors of it.

Heidi C. M. Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos* (2014)<sup>93</sup>

[A]ll...who coddle themselves are selfish and slothful, – that they charge upon every wind that blows, every rain that falls, and every vapour that hangs in the air, the evils which arise from their own imprudence or the gloom which is engendered in their own tempers, – and that all men and women...who fall into exclusive habits of self-indulgence, and forget their natural sympathy and close connexion with everybody and everything in the world around them, not only neglect the first duty of life, but, by a happy retributive justice, deprive themselves of its truest and best enjoyment.

Charles Dickens, *Sketches of Young Couples* (1840)<sup>94</sup>

Sound is everywhere in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.<sup>95</sup> It echoes around the novel, from Seth Pecksniff's meaningless words and speaking appearance, to the roaring, shrieking environmental spaces, to Jonas Chuzzlewit's paranoid hearing of bells, footsteps, and the oncoming cries of the natural elements declaring aloud his guilt for all to hear. As Nancy Aycock Metz once said, *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a noisy novel.<sup>96</sup> The novel's emphasis on sound, it turns out, was quite intentional. Nearing the completion of *Martin Chuzzlewit* in June of 1844, Dickens wrote to illustrator Hablôt K. Browne of his unconventional plan for the novel's ending:

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<sup>93</sup> Scott, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Dickens's piece, "The Couple Who Coddle Themselves," was published anonymously a year before he set sail for America in 1842 – a trip that inspired him to write *Martin Chuzzlewit* (p. 315).

<sup>95</sup> The full title of the novel, which was serialized between January 1843 and July 1844, is *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens contemplated various other titles as well, and his documented brainstorming about the central family's name has been much noted by Dickens scholars.

<sup>96</sup> This statement comes from a paper Metz presented at the 2007 Dickens Society Symposium; I could not locate a copy and therefore did not cite it as a direct quote. Her statement about *Martin Chuzzlewit*, however, has been referenced by those who attended or sat on her panel, including Leslie S. Simon, who writes: "Nancy Metz has called *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844) a noisy novel. Tuned in to the sonic dimensions of the text, she claims that Dickens was sensitive to the sounds of the modernizing city and found the urban landscape of America to be particularly, and ominously, cacophonous" (193). Simon adds to Metz's argument, claiming that "if the novel is noisy...it is blurry. The sharp, almost crystalized detail that critics mark as the cornerstone of Dickensian writing goes out of focus with haunting frequency in this book. Lines of connection between characters, and between places and events, blur into myopic phantasms...creating visual static that limits readerly access to narrative matter...in this novel he keeps us at a troubling distance."



I have a notion of finishing the book, with an apostrophe to Tom Pinch, playing the organ. I shall break off the last Chapter suddenly, and find Tom at his organ, a few years afterwards. And instead of saying what became of the people, as usual, I shall suppose it to be all expressed in the sounds; making the last swell of the Instrument a kind of expression of Tom's heart...So the Frontispiece is Tom at his organ with a pensive face; and any little indications of his history rising out of it, and floating about it, that you please. (*Letters* 4.140)

What is most compelling about Dickens's described plan for these final paragraphs and the novel's Frontispiece is his emphasis on sound as a form of storytelling. "[I]nstead of saying what became of the people, as usual," Dickens writes, he ends the present action of the novel's plot suddenly and rather insignificantly: with Pecksniff's daughter fainting in response to being jilted on her wedding day. The final pages of the novel, however, are indeed in accordance with Dickens unusual "notion," as a sort of coda with Tom Pinch – perhaps the novel's most naïve character – playing his organ with changes in tone, speed, and other musical notations matching the telling of character endings summarized in brief mentions. Dickens's desires to narrate the remainder of the characters' stories as they would be "expressed" through the medium of "sounds" effectively end the novel with a unique tone of its own, for Dickens's sonic storytelling in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, even in his own view, a departure from his previous novels. And indeed, sounds do tell quite a story not just to the readers, but to the characters and the environments within the novel itself.

In this chapter, however, while I discuss the novel's ending and Frontispiece in greater detail, my overall focus is not on the many instances of musical sound in the novel, such as Tom

Pinch's organ playing and hearing of everyday sounds as forms of music. As William Kumbier writes in "Dickens's Three-Part Invention: Tom Pinch and Musical Play in *Martin Chuzzlewit*" (2013), for Tom, "music leads him into an inner life, the life of his own memories and impressions" and "distills a medium for human sympathy" (104).<sup>97</sup> My concern is not with the types of sounds that lead inward; rather, this chapter explores the types of sounds that appear as motive forces in their transmission, moving perpetually throughout the time and space of the novel as uncanny resurrected voices heard only by those who have developed the capacity to actively listen for and hear them; in other words, I focus on the Babbagean sounds of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at Babbagean sounds more generally, finding even within the more musical bookends of the novel – the ending and the Frontispiece mentioned in Dickens's letter – hints of the Babbagean-style sounds that, I argue, pervade the novel. I also discuss recent criticism related to Babbage's influence on Dickens's fiction, highlighting the only three scholars that include even the slightest reference to *Martin Chuzzlewit* in connection with Babbage. I then turn toward the three aspects of the novel that comprise my argument: the Babbagean speaker which transmits sounds, the Babbagean environmental spaces throughout which sounds move and interact, and a Dickensian incarnation of Babbage's imagined being capable of hearing the recorded testimony of immorality from the elemental voices. Specifically, I first discuss Seth Pecksniff's various forms of expression that float out into the impressive atmosphere. I then provide close-readings of the most prominent and Babbagean environmental

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<sup>97</sup> Tom Pinch is undoubtedly the most explicitly musical character of the novel, and some critics even argue that he is its central character. See Michael Steig's "'Martin Chuzzlewit': Pinch and Pecksniff" (1969) for a sustained reading of Tom's pivotal role in the novel.

spaces – England’s Wiltshire, the Atlantic Ocean, and America’s Eden – that, I argue, use emotive sound and motion to narrate the circulation of recorded sound throughout the Chuzzlewitian natural elements. Lastly, I discuss Jonas Pecksniff as a character who develops the ability to hear the environmental records resulting from his paranoid and guilty active listening following the attempted murder and eventual death of his father, and the actual murder of corrupt business partner Tigg Montague. In this section I also look at both Pecksniff’s and Jonas’ eventual downfall in the novel. All of these aforementioned aspects of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, I argue, combine to form Dickens’s re-imagined Babbagean ecological justice system.

### **Babbage, Dickens, and *Chuzzlewit*: Sounds and Forms of Motive Expression**

*Martin Chuzzlewit* is haunted by the notion of “self.” From its portrayal of the perpetual cycle of selfishness – with a few exceptions – and repeated chorus of “self, self, self,” the novel demands an examination of the individual and collective self. For example, as the elder Martin burns the latest copy of his will at the end of the first serial installment – “[a]nother will made and destroyed” – he denounces what he sees as the pervading selfishness of all those around him (MC 3.51).<sup>98</sup> He lies in bed muttering to himself: ““Oh self, self, self! At every turn, nothing but self!””; ““Oh self, self, self! Every man for himself, and no creature for me!”” The number ends not with these self-pitying proclamations, however, but with a condemnation of Martin himself: “Universal self! Was there nothing of its shadow in these reflections, and in the history of Martin Chuzzlewit, on his own showing?” Selfishness, in Dickens’s Chuzzlewitian world, is universal, with even those able to see it in others possessing the same character flaws. The text is devoid of

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<sup>98</sup> I will refer to *Martin Chuzzlewit* as MC in this chapter’s in-text citations.

any characters with clearly demarcated selves independent from others, with physical objects, spaces, and natural environments overlapping with human characters so as to make them indistinguishable at times.

For a novel so concerned with human nature and the self, however, Dickens's intention for the novel, as dictated to Browne, was to begin and end with images of Tom Pinch, the most selfless and self-less character of the novel. But it is not Tom that Dickens seems most interested in describing during these moments, as I discuss; rather, Tom becomes a vehicle for Dickens to sonically depict the other characters, environments, and references that permeate throughout the novel. In accordance with Dickens's expressed plan for the novel's ending, the novel's final paragraphs depict Tom playing music on an organ and thinking about his life. "[t]ime has passed" since the ending of the novel's action; "in those sounds" of Tom's organ, which "fall so grandly on the ear!," "the music of thy heart speaks out: the story of thy life relates itself" (*MC* 54.781). In the narrator's description of the parts of Tom's melodious story, he depicts the "soft strain which ever and again comes stealing back upon the ear" as his remembered love for Mary. His love can only "find a voice," however, in "a pleasant, softened, whispering memory, like that in which we sometimes hold the dead, and does not pain or grieve thee."

Despite the beautiful, flowing language of the last pages of the book, there are dark undertones that tinge the happiness of each "measure" of Tom's history: his lost love Mary, who married the young Martin Chuzzlewit; the persistent presence of his previous master Pecksniff, who has turned into a "drunken, begging, squalid, letter-writing" vagabond and now "haunts" Tom with his beggary; the loss of his "devoted" "friend" old Martin; and finally, his sister Ruth's

death, although she lives on in Tom (*MC* 54.782). Dickens's depiction of his sister's death is particularly reminiscent of the "future history" of Babbage's theory:

From the Present, and the Past, with which she is so tenderly entwined in all thy thoughts, thy strain soars onward to the Future. As it resounds within thee and without, thy kindling face looks on her with a Love and Trust, that knows it cannot die. The noble music, rolling round her in a cloud of melody, shuts out the grosser prospect of an earthly parting, and uplifts her, Tom, to Heaven!<sup>99</sup>

This entire passage sounds like a poetic reimagining of Babbage's sound theory. Dickens describes Tom's memory of his sister after her death as existing simultaneously in the past, present, and future both "within" Tom's "thoughts" and "without" – outside of his mind. The "Love" and "Trust" with which Tom "looks" on such surviving remnants is granted not only immortality by Dickens, but also knowledge of its own eternity. While Ruth is described as being sheltered from life's pains and raised up to heaven by the "noble music, rolling round her in a cloud of melody," the passage suggests that the "noble music" – or the remnant traces of her which live on in Tom's memory and in the world itself – will continue "rolling" around for all eternity throughout the Chuzzlewitian atmosphere.

Browne's artistic rendering of Dickens's vision – the Frontispiece – similarly attempts to tell the stories of the novel by visually imagining sounds, even going so far as to weave humanoid musical notes throughout the various scenes. The Frontispiece, which features Tom playing his organ as he dreamily gazes up at memories from the novel, is also far from

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<sup>99</sup> Ruth's death, however, was edited out of the book starting in 1850, and the last stanza instead depicts them as dying at the same time. Metz speculates that the original ending was perhaps "another of Dickens's gestures in memory of the early death of his beloved sister-in-law," but that Dickens later "changed his mind – perhaps to omit any note of sadness" (*Companion* 494).

harmonious, just as is the novel itself (see Figure 1). These scenes are not arranged chronologically or in any discernable pattern; rather, they appear as chaotic assemblages pushing against one another, crossing boundaries of time and space, literal and figurative, realistic and fantastical. It appears as if the “swells” of Tom’s organ-playing, stained with “his history,” have become fragmented and jumbled up in the atmosphere, as if in their “floating about” they repeatedly get heaped together, then scattered back around again in strange forms. In this Frontispiece’s Babbagean space, devoid of any sense of order or causality, the sounds vibrating throughout its atmosphere have breathed life into some of the novel’s referenced mythical creatures, as if the text’s speaking of animal analogies, gothic figures, and animated material objects have cast them into the air. Rather than lingering harmlessly in the movements of earth’s elements, however, as Babbage imagined, the novel’s referenced non-human things are transformed by the Dickensian environment. They are figured in the Frontispiece as having been given monstrous, material forms that enable them to actively participate in the novel’s scenes, interacting with and even inflicting individual and mob violence upon the guilty characters themselves.<sup>100</sup> Most prominently, personified music notes pervade the atmosphere, taking on roles that include actively witnessing, participating in, influencing, and even at times, driving the violent action in this sonic history.<sup>101</sup> It is these moments, I argue, that Dickens’s version of

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<sup>100</sup> Perhaps the most important, or at least enduring, critical examination of the relationship between places, things, and people in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is Dorothy Van Ghent’s “The Dickens World: A View from Todgers’s” (1950). Although written over seventy years ago, this famous essay foreshadows contemporary literary theories such as thing theory, affect theory, and posthumanism – to name a few – as well as ecological discussions about animacy and the interconnectedness, as well as discrete, dynamic existences of, traditionally “non-living” things. Although Van Ghent does not mention the Frontispiece specifically, the various images throughout the drawing evoke the types of dynamic, post-human animacies she describes.

<sup>101</sup> The Frontispiece seems to speak to the novel’s larger concern with the unending, perpetual cycles of violent oppression and mob justice that often fragmented and destabilized English society. Completing the novel’s own sense of circularity, *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s opening chapter begins with the telling of personal history: this time that of the Chuzzlewit family. Perhaps not quite as comfortably far from the “rich swelling of the mellow harmony” of

Babbagean moral permanence in *Martin Chuzzlewit* can be glimpsed in fragments. Ultimately, the whole vision of the Babbage-inspired Chuzzlewitian system, however, is more easily viewed in its entirety. The environments become not simply a library or archive of the words and actions of the characters, preserving their moral motion for all eternity, but an active part of an interconnected, ecological system in which immorality imprinted upon the natural world returns as elemental voices which testify of the guilt of whose wrongdoings to which they bore witness.

Over the last few decades, an increasing number of critics have investigated the ways Dickens's fascination with Babbage's sound theory influenced his own conception of sound permanence in his fiction.<sup>102</sup> The majority, however, base their arguments upon what is universally considered to be the seminal work on the topic: John M. Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003).<sup>103</sup> In what is perhaps the most extensive critical study of Dickens's creative use of Babbage's theory, Picker focuses primarily on the way Babbage's ideas about the permanence of voice influenced Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (serialized from Oct. 1846 to Apr. 1848), pointing to a specific allusion to the mathematician in a seemingly trivial passage in the

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Tom's final organ-playing, families like the Chuzzlewits are described as "swell[ing]" from self-congratulatory "boasting" of their ancestry's "enormous amount of bravery, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, gentle birth and true nobility" (MC 1.14).

<sup>102</sup> For discussions of the types of influence that Babbage's other works had on Dickens, particularly as it relates to Dickensian science and Victorian posthumanism, see Tamara Ketabgian's "Prosthetic Divinity: Babbage's Engine, Spiritual Intelligence, and the Senses" (2009); Jessica Kuskey's "Math and the Mechanical Mind: Charles Babbage, Charles Dickens, and Mental Labor in *Little Dorrit*" (2014); Herbert Sussman and Gerhard Joseph's "Prefiguring the Posthuman: Dickens and Prosthesis" (2004); and Ben Winyard and Holly Furneaux's "Dickens, Science and the Victorian Literary Imagination" (2010).

<sup>103</sup> Melissa McLeod, for example, in her article "Hearing Ghosts in Dickens's *David Copperfield*" (2021), uses Picker's book as a foundation for her argument that "Dickens uses the gothic elements of ghosts and haunting in *David Copperfield*" by "drawing on Babbage's theory of 'aural permanence'" (392, Picker qtd in 17). McLeod repeatedly borrows Picker's phrase "aural permanence" to describe Babbage's ideas, as well as Pickers' connection between Babbage and nineteenth-century sound technology: "Babbage conceived of the earth's atmosphere as an aural archive to be read and heard repeatedly, or as Picker puts it, as a 'phonograph' and 'repository for the voices from all time'" (McLeod 391). Lanya Lamouria similarly draws from Picker's work in her articles on Dickens's use of Babbage in *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield*. See Lamouria's "Democracy, Terror, and Utopia in *A Tale of Two Cities*" (2022) and "Charles Dickens, Charles Babbage, Richard Babley: Material Memory in *David Copperfield*" (2023).

novel.<sup>104</sup> While finding many other rich passages through which to read Babbagean ideas in *Dombey*, Picker's main argument is about Dickens himself – how his creative experimentation with Babbage's ideas helped to shape thoughts about his own writing and the long-term impact of his works. “*Dombey* and Dickens's career from this juncture on became an echo chamber” writes Picker, “for the ideas that [Babbage] expressed about the diffusion of voice” (17).

Picker's emphatic 1846 dating of the start of Dickens's investment in Babbage's theory, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. Dickens owned a first edition copy of Babbage's *Treatise*, published in May of 1837, suggesting that Dickens bought the text in the months before Babbage published his second edition at the start of 1838. Other critics after Picker have also since found compelling evidence of Babbage's influence on his fiction such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, published a few years before *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which John O. Jordan considers in connection to Babbage, as I discuss later in this chapter. Lastly, Dickens and Babbage were in frequent contact with one another throughout Dickens's writing of *Martin*

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<sup>104</sup> Although the title of the *Dombey* chapter that references Babbage promises a “Study of a Loving Heart,” Dickens begins by describing the life goal of London social climber Sir Barnet Skettles – a man who “imposing[ly]” and “force[fully]” “expresse[s] his personal consequence...through an antique gold snuffbox, and a ponderous silk pocket-kerchief”:

Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water...it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system. (*Dombey* 375)

F. S. Schwarzbach, in *Dickens and the City* (2014), argues that such “casual asides” in his novels, despite their excessive use of environmental analogy, reinforce Dickens's portrayal of how “it is society itself that has become unnatural” (103). Picker reads this passage as more than a “casual aside” and a commentary on social systems; rather, he argues that this passage is critical to understanding the “surprising imprint” Babbage's *Treatise* “left...on *Dombey and Son*,” – “a novel dominated by and absorbed with the effects and intelligibility of sounds and voices” (17). Picker also draws from Dickens's biography to reflect on *Dombey*'s engagement in debates concerning London's increasing street noise and intellectual property theft – both about which Dickens felt passionate.



*Chuzzlewit*, even attending soirees at this house during which the various distinguished men of letters were known to have discussed their latest projects.

There are only three critical studies that specifically talk about Dickens, Babbage, and *Martin Chuzzlewit* – albeit not in any depth; my analyses of their arguments about Babbage’s influence on that novel specifically, therefore, are largely inferred from their larger arguments about Dickens’s use of Babbage in his fiction alongside their brief references to *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Nathalie Jaëck, for example, in her 2021 article on Dickens’s literary depiction of sound, looks at the way Dickens incorporates noises – particularly noise that “haunt the characters” and “reverberate long after they were heard” – into an epistemological “network” of knowledge and meaning. (97). In this ghostly Dickensian network, Jaëck describes, noises lose “their clarity and their origin,” but gain a sense of ontological simultaneity that presents an alternate “repository” of knowledge to which his readers – and at times Dickens’s characters themselves – have access. Of *Martin Chuzzlewit* specifically, Jaëck focuses on the urban, yet secluded house of the undertaker Mr. Mould as a “deaf, mouldering” space, labeling the property itself as “hard of hearing” (92). Such spaces, Jaëck argues, reject the potential new knowledge gained from access to the novel’s dynamic and noisy network, instead embracing the “static archives of a bygone past” from which nothing new can be derived. Despite Jaëck’s identification of a Babbagean network containing sound and knowledge, her analysis neglects the spaces of *Chuzzlewit* that are rich with both, most notably, the novel’s Atlantic Ocean, as I discuss later in this chapter. Instead, Jaëck can only see the space which cannot hear in the novel, despite its other environments roaring and shrieking about the information they contain.

While Jaëck connects Babbagean manifestations in Dickens's works, with the exception of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, to their presentation of noise as the medium through which knowledge is gathered, preserved, and accessed in the form of a sonic network of meaning, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, in *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2002), views "Dickens's cautious use of Babbage" as more related to a "significant current of the Victorian atmosphere which they shared: the web of affinities joining material and moral influence" (100). Douglas-Fairhurst more explicitly recognizes some of *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s Babbagean qualities, arguing that the novel exemplifies "Dickens's enthusiasm for Babbage's notion that the mind can be physically 'impressed' with – and so for – good or evil," and the novel "draws particularly upon the idea that the consequences of past actions last longer than the body which acted," particularly regarding "the tainting afterlife of others' crimes" (141-42). For Douglas-Fairhurst, then, it is the characters themselves, and the rippling impact of their actions on the minds and bodies of others over time, that links the novel with Dickens's interest in Babbage's theory. In this, Douglas-Fairhurst acknowledges the rich layers of Babbagean inspiration to be found in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; as I demonstrate throughout this chapter, the "crimes" of the characters themselves do in fact have "consequences" during the action of the plot, not just for a time that exists beyond the novel's temporal scope.

Lastly, James E. Marlow, in *Charles Dickens: The Uses of Time* (1994), provides the most sustained reading of Babbage-inspired content in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In a way, Marlow's analysis seems to bridge the gap between Jaëck's emphasis on sonic space and Douglas-Fairhurst's focus on character influence through what he calls Dickens's Babbagean, "interlinked," "moral universe" (225). Marlow's chapter on "Transcending Time" is one of the

first – and largely forgotten – critical examinations of Babbage’s influence on Dickens’s works, predating Picker’s *Victorian Soundscapes* by almost a decade. In this chapter, Marlow finds Babbage’s ideas manifested in Dickens’s novels as expressions of “the physics of mechanical motion – and its corollaries of the conservation of momentum and matter.”<sup>105</sup> Marlow argues that Babbage’s theory – that all motion is preserved and impressed upon the natural world – “amounts to materialistic omniscience” because “[b]y retaining an impression, matter gives action permanence.”<sup>106</sup> This idea – and the movement and flow of recorded affective matter – was “appropriated” by Dickens, according to Marlow, for his own literary “moral universe.” He argues that “Babbage’s notion of atoms preserving human actions” was particularly vital to Dickens’s “commentaries that time necessarily exposes criminal action” (226).<sup>107</sup>

Ultimately, what contemporary critics see of Babbage’s ideas in Dickens’s fiction relates to his construction of a universe filled with and propelled by materialized movements and sounds that provide the reader with access to alternate forms of knowledge and the ability to trace the

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<sup>105</sup> Marlow identifies two further scientific “corollaries” in Babbage that Dickens may have also noticed, but his arguments here are a bit tenuous and less convincing. One such corollary is “physiognomy,” but not “phrenology,” as Babbage’s ideas specify that humans possess physical forms capable of being imprinted upon by “physical and social action” (227-28). Babbage’s example of the stamped guilt on the brow of the murderer exemplifies this, according to Marlow, and he connects this idea with *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s murderer Jonas Chuzzlewit and Dickens’s frequent associations of the character with the Biblical Cain. The other corollary that Marlow points to is the “shadow of determinism,” since determinism itself “does rise from these theories of inertia and conservation of matter” (228). Many would dispute this claim, however, and Marlow might have been more accurate had he argued this point using the concept of causality, rather than determinism, since his goal here seems to be to show how such theories suggest a causally related universe, without going so far as to say that all causal relationships within such a universe are inevitable.

<sup>106</sup> Marlow claims that Babbage “take[s] a strange turn” when he extends his ideas to afterlife justice – his “suggesti[on] that perhaps punishment after death consists simply of having to make contact with the atoms carrying one’s inhumane words and actions from life” (226).

<sup>107</sup> For Marlow, *Martin Chuzzlewit* exemplifies this strand of influence, noting how in the novel “Dickens has spoken of ‘the truth, which nothing would keep down, which blood would not smother and earth would not hide’” and “even used the problematic Nadgett as one of the ‘phantom forms of this terrific Truth!’” (226-27). Of Nadgett, Marlow further claims that the metropolitan character’s investigative assumptions – “that all human intentions have taken material form” – “imply the version of Babbage’s universe” (227). This passage also parallels Eliot’s description of the found scape of paper in *Middlemarch* that leads to the exposure of Nicholas Bulstrode’s secret past, which I discussed at length in the first chapter.

moral consequences of specific words and actions. In relation to *Martin Chuzzlewit* specifically, when they do consider the novel, most critics view Dickens's interest in Babbage's depiction of the surviving imprint of crimes and wrong-doings on natural spaces and the characters themselves. While these readings help to show the way that Dickens uses Babbage's theory in various ways throughout *Martin Chuzzlewit*, I demonstrate in this chapter that they all fall short of seeing how all of the aspects they discuss work together. The combined Babbagean content of the novel, I argue, merges and disperses, roars and whispers, throughout time, space, environmental elements, and the characters themselves, creating an ecological justice system in which the characters and natural forces all act and are acted upon, speak and are spoken to, in ways that record wrongdoings and convert them into testimony that brings the truth to light and imposes justice on the individual characters deemed most guilty.

*Martin Chuzzlewit*'s notorious hypocrite Seth Pecksniff – the pretentious architect who exerts tyrannical power over his revolving-door of pupils – is one such wrongdoer, and, I argue, Dickens's most explicitly Babbagean character. The novel's descriptions of his speech and movements – and even physical appearance – are often multi-layered and suggestive of affective communication and transmission beyond that of a typical character. The main setting of the novel, Pecksniff's hometown of Wiltshire, is where the affective residue of his words and physical motions are most forcefully cast into the atmosphere. For example, in the chapter of Pecksniff's introduction, his recently dismissed pupil John Westlock arrives to request a reimbursement of the exorbitant amount of money Pecksniff had extorted from him while John had been under his architectural tutelage. Pecksniff, however, acts the role of the innocent victim to John's implied greed; while Pecksniff says he will forgive John's "misguided" "conduct," the

narration describes Pecksniff's tone as voicing something else simultaneously: "and here, although he spoke like one at peace with all the world, he used an emphasis that plainly said 'I have my eye upon the rascal now'" (*MC* 2.30-31).

The Babbagean qualities of Pecksniff's speech are expressed more explicitly in the description that follows directly after: "The voice of Mr Pecksniff trembled as he spoke, and sobs were heard from his daughters. Sounds floated on the air, moreover, as if two spirit voices had exclaimed: one, 'Beast!' the other, 'Savage!' (*MC* 2.31). In this moment, Pecksniff's "trembl[ing]" "voice," like Babbage's vibrating atoms, combined with the added force of his daughters' "sobs," is so powerful as to create "two spirit voices" in the atmosphere stained with accusatorial expressions of disgust and hate: "Beast!" and "Savage!" This moment reflects on a smaller scale what the novel portrays in its larger environmental spaces: the way sounds cast into the air, move and combine with other expressed affects of the past, and combine to form more powerful elemental voices capable of vocalizing accusations against those deemed guilty by the cacophonous masses.

Not only is the expressive duality of Pecksniff's words reinforced here, but also the physical materiality of the sounds and vibrational qualities of his speech. The fact that Dickens describes how the Pecksniffian "[s]ounds floated on the air," rather than in or through the air, and the way in which they move and combine, is suggestive of a Babbagean sound permanence and causality of movement. Dickens's use of the term "moreover" also suggests the idea of the floating sounds as atmospheric emissions of Pecksniff's speech. This passage emphasizes the text's dislocation of direct cause and effect between two people. Instead of Pecksniff's words impacting John, the text describes a sort of Babbagean arrangement of the universe: Pecksniff's

words imprint upon the air around them, not only floating but also expressing an abstraction of Pecksniff's original statement. In other words, the air is imprinted with the base sentiments of Pecksniff's words, boiling them down to the two hateful judgments "Beast" and "Savage." The power of John's voice in this moment, on the other hand, is restricted in such an environment: "'Bah!' cried John Westlock, with the utmost disgust and disdain the monosyllable is capable of expressing" (*MC* 2.31). In such an acoustic space, John's "monosyllable" is limited in what it is "capable of expressing," which invites a comparison between the varying amounts of force the verbal energies of Pecksniff and John can project into the Wiltshirean atmospheric record.<sup>108</sup>

Just as Pecksniff imagines himself the victim of John, despite him being in the wrong, he also views himself as constantly besieged by "enemies," who, according to the Pecksniffian-stained narration, make false statements about his character (*MC* 2.25). For example, the narrator explains, "[h]is enemies asserted...that a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms was the master-key to Mr Pecksniff's character." The novel's descriptions of the sounds and forms of Pecksniff's speaking continually reinforce the truthfulness of Pecksniff's "enemies" claims. His reliance on the aesthetic qualities of language, rather than on meaning, is evident in a passage which explains to the reader why he calls his daughter a "playful warbler":

It may be observed...that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.

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<sup>108</sup> Pecksniff's speech has a similar impact on his current pupil in this scene, the naïve Tom Pinch, who, when he "appeared about to speak," is cut off by Pecksniff's strategic cry and "rais[e]d...voice" (*MC* 2.31).

The truth of Pecksniff's character, therefore, does not lie in the meaning of his words, but in the ornamentation of their sound and form. Despite his words lacking depth of meaning, the "imposing manner" and force with which he delivers his speech has an impact on others, again reinforcing the affective residue of his voice.<sup>109</sup>

Victorian writers frequently depicted characters who struggle with language to varying degrees. The problems with language experienced by *Middlemarch*'s Caleb Garth, for example, are described as a "quaintness" of his character: "in his difficulty of finding speech for his thought, he caught, as it were, snatches of diction which he associated with various points of view or states of mind; and whenever he had a feeling of awe, he was haunted by a sense of Biblical phraseology, though he could hardly have given a strict quotation" (Eliot bk. IV, 391). Caleb's struggle with articulation seems to derive from a genuine desire to communicate effectively despite his limited vocabulary due to his working-class education. Dickens's Pecksniff, alternately, seems much less interested in using language as a means of deepening social connections; rather, his linguistic struggles arise out of a search for aesthetically pleasing words, not those with apt meanings, to make him *sound* a certain way to others. Pecksniff's use of language actually goes so far as to create a social disconnection by employing meaningless rhetoric that nonetheless makes him appear honest and virtuous due to its tonal, aesthetic sounds. Language, therefore, is transformed by Pecksniff into a weapon of manipulation through which

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<sup>109</sup> Allan Conrad Christensen, in *Nineteenth Century Narratives of Contagion: 'Our Feverish Contact'*, argues that Babbage's theory reflects his – and the era's – emphasis on the durability of spoken words: "while all the unexpressed thoughts and intentions of humanity and all of those expressed in merely written words may be doomed sooner or later to perish, the spoken words will last forever" (249). He adds, however, that "[a]s Babbage's reference to 'vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled' suggests, the issue of the endurance of the spoken word acquires most interest with respect to weighty, performative utterances" (Christensen 250). *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s Pecksniff is the embodiment of performative communication that lacks intent and substance, reinforcing his other Babbagean qualities.

he can reinforce his desired social power dynamics by *sounding* morally superior, despite his underlying superficial, materialistic nature.

Pecksniff even converts his physical appearance, movements, and gestures into voices crafted to speak of his benevolence. Pecksniff is repeatedly characterized as a “moral man” by the acolytic narrator of his early passages, for example; Pecksniff is so moral, the narrator explains, that even parts of his physical body are moral:

His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat...and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar...It seemed to say, on the part of Mr Pecksniff, ‘There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace: a holy calm pervades me.’ So did his hair...So did his person...So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, ‘Behold the moral Pecksniff!’ (MC 2.23-24)

It becomes clear, in narrative moments such as these, that it is merely the external aesthetics of his carefully fashioned appearance that makes him *sound* moral. Dickens’s depiction of the materiality and causality of Pecksniff’s speech and appearance on others and the environment around him – regardless of their superficiality – demonstrates the Babbagean qualities of his sound aesthetics and their forceful affect. While Babbage describes aerial atoms in his “vast” atmospheric “library” as “impressed with” a mixture of “good” and “ill” – words and deeds of wisdom and moral insight “mixed and combined...with all that is worthless and base” – Pecksniff, in the meaninglessness that his words and body project, seems to embody the “worthless” recorded impressions that Babbage describes (*Treatise* 112). Jonas Chuzzlewit, I



argue later in this chapter, represents the latter of what Babbage sees as “ill” through his violent actions: that which is “base.” This passage also exemplifies Dickens’s dislocation of speaking from literal utterances of sound and actual words spoken as conveyors of meaning, as well as the ways in which he mixes the rhetoric of voice and the environment. It is such narrative techniques that transform his fictional landscapes into Babbagean soundscapes, which, I argue, depict flow of movement and affective resonance that converge and disperse throughout the novel’s characters and transatlantic spaces.

The other Babbagean villain in the novel, Jonas, does not initially have a Babbagean impact on the world around him. While exuding a sense of threatening violence throughout his speech and actions, his connection to Babbage’s theory does not occur until later in the novel. Rather than embody an origin point for Babbagean transmitted speech and action, as Pecksniff does, I argue that Jonas instead develops the ability to hear the sounds of *Chuzzlewit*’s Babbagean landscape as a result of his increasing paranoia and degeneration following his attempted murder of his father, and his actual murder of his corrupt business associate, Tigg Montague. It is after these deaths, as I later demonstrate, that Jonas begins obsessively listening to the soundscape around him. In the end, he is even able to hear the approaching environmental voices returning from throughout the globe to enact a form of ecological justice by testifying about his guilty deeds. It is *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s Babbagean landscapes, however, to which I will first turn in order to explain the processes of movement and exchange these ecological witnesses undergo before returning for Jonas’s personal Judgment Day.

### A Babbagean Environment of Transmitted Motion

*Martin Chuzzlewit*, I argue, explores Babbage's "strange chao[ti]" "wide atmosphere we breathe" as an emotive, active space (*Treatise* 111). Dickensian air is more than just a "never-failing historian" and "vast library," and the "earth, air, and ocean," are more than "eternal witnesses" that wait until Judgment Day to give their testimony; the elements are agents that actively participate in the Chuzzlewitian world as they both "communicate and retain" morally-impressed energies throughout the transatlantic ecosystem (*Treatise* 112, 115). The novel's environments, in fact, are capable of as much tyranny, suffering, revenge, and malignity as the living beings that move throughout them. Changes to this ecosystem – particularly in the form of rearranging or migrating of populations – create imbalances; with change, however, comes opportunity for good, but also for bad. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s natural spaces, Dickens portrays sounds as having a similar morality-stained permanence; however, he also narrates what happens when sounds interact with matter – organic and inorganic – in different types of spaces. Adhering to the Newtonian law so frequently repeated in Babbage's *Treatise*, "action and reaction," Dickens' novel imagines sounds as forces of energy that actively participate in a transatlantic ecological system (*Treatise* 108). This system, in true Dickensian fashion, is a gothic, uncanny one: constantly imbalanced, unstable, and toxic, filled with unexpectedly returning figures and forms and frequently threatening to self-destruct.

One such uncanny space within the novel's ecological system is the rural village of Wiltshire in the west of England.<sup>110</sup> First introduced in the opening passages of the novel's

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<sup>110</sup> In her study of *Dickens and Landscape Discourse* (2007), Jane Helen Berard provides the most in-depth analysis of the sociopolitical subtext in *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s landscape passages, particularly Dickens's descriptions of Wiltshire and other locations in England. Berard writes that "[t]he landscape...was more than an element in his fiction; it was a sign system embedded in differing ideologies" (9). Berard argues that in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens

second chapter – in which the action of the story begins following the first chapter’s prelude about the Chuzzlewit family’s ancestry – Wiltshire is depicted as a space filled with environmental elements engaged in an endless power struggle. In language evocative of the end of a revolt or revolutionary battle, the description begins by positioning an autumn evening’s “declining sun” against the oncoming forces of winter, as if the sun were leading an army in a final, doomed charge against this oppositional power (MC 2.18). The sun “shed[s] glory upon the scene” of Wiltshire when it suddenly breaks free from the agents of the impending winter’s oppression such as the “mist which had obscured it all day.” The autumn sun’s bravery inspires its injured soldiers – “a few green twigs” standing amongst “the scanty patches of verdure in the hedges” – to “resist...to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts.”<sup>111</sup> While initially seeming “bright” and hopeful, this passage is pervaded by a sense of its own ephemerality and inevitable failure to persevere against the natural forces of time – the sun will set, autumn will end, and winter will prevail.

The next paragraph is fittingly filled with images of death and decay, but there is an animated quality to the environmental elements that creates the impression of an uncanny

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utilizes the rhetoric of an “altered, diseased, and divided landscape” to “challenge...the ideologies that created and shaped it.” “In doing so,” Berard continues, “Dickens created in *Martin Chuzzlewit* numerous ‘landscapes’ as cultural constructs to shape his narrative and his characters and to validate the importance of place, of physical settings, in his novels.” Metz, however, argues that at times, Dickens adheres to the very mythologizing of place that he attempts to subvert. Writing over thirty years ago, Paul Schacht, in “Dickens and the Uses of Nature” (1990), argues against Dickens scholars who had, he felt, minimized Dickens’s engagement with nature in his novels, claiming instead that “Dickens cared deeply about the laws of nature” (78). Dickens scholarship has changed dramatically since then, and Dickensian ecocriticism is now a vast and growing area of study. This explosion of critical interest, however, has led to countless readings of his environmental imagination. Diana Rose Newby analyzes Dickens’s engagement with meteorology, chemistry, and biopolitics in novels such as *Bleak House*, claiming that he cultivates what she calls an “environmental epistemology”; by “attempt[ing] to imagine systemic weathering from a more global point of view,” she explains, “Dickens gives hazy shape to a new way of knowing: atmospherically” (199).

<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, Dickens depicts the “vane upon the tapering spire of the old church,” symbolic of religious institutions, as staying out of the fray – or being metaphorically and physically above it all – although it does “glisten...from its lofty station in sympathy” with autumn’s doomed plight (MC 2.19).

simultaneity of life and death, growth and decay. For example, the “tokens of the season” – the overpowering mist and tyrannous wind – are described as having the power to “tinge” the “air” with “oppressive...sadness” when they “emphatically whispered of the coming winter,” yet the wind, in particular, is the most motive and animated environmental force of the novel (*MC* 2.19). With the fight lost and autumn finally conquered, Dickens again uses the language of a lost battle when he describes how the sun “went down beneath” “the long dark lines of hill and cloud which piled up in the west an airy city, wall heaped on wall, and battlement on battlement” – an image evocative of bodies strewn across a battlefield. Despite the sun’s figurative death, and the landscape now covered in a sort of despair as “the gloom of winter dwelt on everything,” it is at this moment that the environment of Wiltshire seems most alive. Although Dickens soon abandons the season-specific oppositional language of winter and autumn, the power dynamics presented in this opening passage repeat and reverberate throughout the novel’s natural environments.

The narrator then takes the reader “Out upon the angry wind!” – the powerful “evening wind” depicted as an angry, petty, oppressive force that violently subjugates those most vulnerable to its actions and delights in its victims’ reactions of despair and fear (*MC* 2.20). The wind is initially impotent, however, in its attempt to exert its power on much of its Wiltshirean surroundings. For example, when it tries to break the “slighter branches” of trees, this only creates “moaning music” to which the branches “crack” and “rattle” “in skeleton dances” (2.19). The wind similarly tries to “bull[y]” the town’s “merry forge,” but is rendered “an impotent swaggerer...for all its noise” as its effect is merely “to make him roar his cheerful song the louder, and by consequence to make the fire burn the brighter, and the sparks to dance more

gaily yet,” “whizz[ing] so madly round and round, that it was too much for a surly wind to bear: so off it flew with a howl” (2.20). The so-called “respectable wind” finally succeeds in enacting a “small tyranny” by “wreaking its vengeance on such poor creatures as the fallen leaves”: the objects most vulnerable to the wind in this rural, autumnal-winter landscape. The images of a snuffed-out uprising that begin the chapter, by this time, have transformed into one of complete authoritarian rule. The tyrannous wind is now in full control of its weakest subjects, the vagabond class of nature, “withering leaves,” that are described as “no longer quiet” as they “hurried to and fro in search of shelter from its chill pursuit” (2.19). What begins as a “small tyranny” by “a respectable wind” escalates after the wind gets a taste of the power it has on them:

[T]his wind happening to come up with a great heap of them just after venting its humour...did so disperse and scatter them that they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress. Nor was this enough for its malicious fury; for not content with driving them abroad, it charged small parties of them and hunted them...and when it did meet with any, whew! how it drove them on and followed at their heels!

The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was; for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure; and they...went anywhere for safety. (MC 2.20)

This wind's "small tyranny" becomes an all-out pursuit as the oppressive force finds pleasure in the leaves' desperation and fear. These images and words describe power dynamics through elemental motion that reverberate throughout the time and space of the entire novel; pursuit and flight, the convergence and scattering of heaps, cycles of oppression and despair, all repeat throughout various depictions of the perpetual, threatening circularity of motive nature.

The two forces of anger and despair – represented in Wiltshire by the wind and leaves – are the main driving powers of the ecological system, despite taking different forms and shapes in different environmental settings or with different characters. The novel demonstrates how when both forces are combined through the centripetal force of repetitious cycles, they create a powerful form of madness that can lead to desperate and even violent words or actions – such as what happens in the Atlantic Ocean and to the guilty murderer Jonas. This language and motion represent various environmental and interpersonal causal chains that impel the novel's ecological system. The Wiltshire scene of action and reaction at the start of the novel, therefore, expands beyond the boundaries of the realms of the village. The characters themselves travel to other locations, imprinting their words and actions upon the environment, and elemental forces also move and repeat in various forms as if sound waves, changing speed and shape over time as they encounter different mediums of matter, space, and human agency. As I demonstrate, it is this perpetual repetition and movement of elemental – and character – power dynamics and causal relationships – narrated in the form of vocalized expression and physical action, that shapes the novel's ecological justice system; it is also where Dickens's reimagining of Babbagean ideas is most explicit.

The reader is taken “Out upon the angry wind!” in Wiltshire after the wind enacts its “malicious fury” on the vulnerable “fallen leaves” and successfully causes a chain reaction that violently knocks Pecksniff to the ground – a foreshadowing of Pecksniff’s eventual downfall, as I explain later in this chapter. The “evening wind” then leaves Wiltshire and heads to the Atlantic Ocean: “the boisterous rover hurried away rejoicing, roaring over moor and meadow, hill and flat, until it got out to sea, where it met with other winds similarly disposed, and made a night of it” (*MC* 2.19-21). It is not until chapter fifteen, when the young Martin Chuzzlewit – grandson of the family’s patriarch, also named Martin – and his faithful, optimistic companion Mark Tapley, set sail for America, that the narrative catches up with that same wind from Wiltshire. The beginning of the chapter titled “The Burden whereof, is Hail Columbia,” I argue, is the focal point of Dickens’s Babbagean ecology: the ocean is the novel’s loudest soundscape and serves as an intermediary transmission system through which sounds and movements travel from the English shoreline, across the ocean to the American riverbanks, until finally returning to England in a changed form of vocalizing expression.

Dickens’s Atlantic Ocean is depicted as an emotive space of perpetual motion expressed through various forms of voice. The chapter starts in England on a “dark and dreary night,” where the “people nestling in their beds or circling late about the fire” are contrasted with those who “Want,” the neglected poor who are “colder than Charity, shivering at the street corners” (*MC* 15.240).<sup>112</sup> This passage initially seems like a typical Dickensian critique of the era’s growing indifference to the suffering of the poor. As the narrative continues, however, the critique becomes more Babbagean. The sounds of the warm church-goers, imagined as “church-

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<sup>112</sup> The location described here is most likely Liverpool, as that is where Martin and Mark stay before they sail to America.

towers humming with the faint vibration of their own tongues,” are set into motion and reverberate into the air. The hypocritical humming and the shivering sounds of the poor are overshadowed by the church bell signaling the time as one in the morning. The “guilty spirit” – the Wiltshirean wind – is described as passing by such scenes in its continuing hunt for vulnerable prey. In this landscape now fully immersed in winter, however, there are no more leaves on which the wind can wreak havoc, so it heads toward the ocean instead, seeking “some dread conference with powers like themselves.” During this scene, the narrative gets swept up with the wind to pan across a British landscape that is both shrouded in and marked by death. “Like a savage on the trail” – echoing the word “Savage” which was earlier cast into the air by Pecksniff – the guilt-imprinted wind searches for signs of life but in this winter landscape, sounds are “all hushed, all noiseless, and in deep repose” in such dead land.<sup>113</sup> The sounds of the English landscape this wind finds are choked, decaying, and quiet.<sup>114</sup>

Once the wind reaches the Atlantic Ocean, it enters a cacophonous storm that loudly vocalizes its violent assemblage of powerful emotions and chaotic motion, contrasting the silent, sleeping, quietly suffering English soundscape.<sup>115</sup> The text, or perhaps guilty spirit, asks, “in

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<sup>113</sup> Dickens’s description here is like that of the London storehouses and the streets surrounding Todgers’s. In this nearly abandoned space in the middle of London, “mansions” with “ancient doorway[s] from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came” have now been converted into “dark and dull” “storehouses” (*MC* 9.132). This neighborhood is being suffocated by the expanding industrial landscape of London, and although there are “churches...by dozens,” they are all “ghostly” and “overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish.” In its description of this London space, *Martin Chuzzlewit* envisions a modern ruin that resembles a graveyard and is haunted by echoes of the long-perished energies of life.  
<sup>114</sup> This silence seems less threatening than the stifled sound of America’s Eden, suggesting that Dickens viewed England as declining in a natural aging process, and America as exerting a more active, violent toxicity that posed a more urgent and dangerous threat.

<sup>115</sup> Just as Dickens reads the Atlantic Ocean as a space of madness and chaos, there is a long critical tradition of reading Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* as a chaotic and disorganized novel. Susanne K. Langer writes, “*Martin Chuzzlewit* lacks wholeness and order” (90), while Ruth Livesy calls it “Dickens’s problematic, transitional novel” (122). Berard similarly notes how scholars tend to label the novel as “‘confused,’ suggesting that Dickens missed the mark in his artistic achievement and purpose or lost reader control” (3). Others have tried to defend what they see as the work of an inferior Dickens. Adam Grener, for example, remarks on the “common belief that *Martin Chuzzlewit*



what wild region do the elements hold council, or where unbend in terrible disport?" to which a narrative voice answers "Here!" from the sound-infused chaos of the Atlantic Ocean:

Here! Free from that cramped prison called the earth, and out upon the waste of waters.  
 Here, roaring, raging, shrieking, howling, all night long. Hither come the sounding voices  
 from the caverns on the coast of that small island, sleeping a thousand miles away so  
 quietly in the midst of angry waves; and hither, to meet them, rush the blasts from  
 unknown desert places of the world. Here in the fury of their unchecked liberty, they  
 storm and buffet with each other, until the sea, lashed into passion like their own, leaps  
 up, in ravings mightier than theirs, and the whole scene is whirling madness. (*MC*  
 15.240)<sup>116</sup>

The sounds of the Atlantic are all ones previously heard dispersed throughout Wiltshire's environmental elements, but they have converged and concentrated, and are thus more powerful in the ocean. The Wiltshirean pronouncement of "[o]ut upon the angry wind" has also changed in

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shows Dickens transitioning between the episodic form of his early works and the more deliberate and planned design that began to emerge with *Dombey and Son*," but defends him by saying, "this important juncture in his career" allows him to utilize "coincidental encounters...by foregrounding their improbability" ("Coincidence" 323).

Despite its problems, Livesy regards Dickens's position at the time of writing as creatively freeing for the author attempting to distance himself from his more journalistic reputation. This freedom, she argues, allows him to experiment with "anachronis[ti]c" time and "narrative collapse of space between the 'just' past stage coach nation and the threatening future that is steam-powered America," and "purposeful[ly] play upon what fiction can do to awake the present to itself" (122, 125). Livesy claims that this novel's play with the instabilities and agencies of time, space, and motion "is crucial to the increasing affective charge of place as actor in Dickens's fiction from this novel and onwards" (152). Elaborating on some of the novel's chaotic elements, Stuart Curran describes how "[n]ew characters and plans of action seem to hatch sporadically; the scene shifts from England to America and back again; characters disappear for hundreds of pages, then slip back so reupholstered as to be barely recognizable" (52). Other comments about the novel's sense of disorder include George Gissing's harsh critique of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, insisting that "a novel more shapeless, a story less coherent...will not easily be found in any literature" (50) and Barbara Hardy's more simply stated assessment that "Martin Chuzzlewit is a badly organized novel" (107).

<sup>116</sup> Dickens's use of imagery evocative of slavery in this Atlantic passage mirrors that which he uses to describe the American railway: "How the wheels clank and rattle, and the tram-road shakes, as the train rushes on! And now the engine yells, as it were lashed and tortured like a living labourer, and writhed in agony" (*MC* 21.327). These similarities reinforce the idea that for Dickens, just as for Babbage, the Atlantic was a space upon which the violence of slavery was forever imprinted.

the Atlantic to “out upon the waste of waters,” creating a repetition of language that highlights their similarities and differences. It is also in such passages that Dickens turns, as Babbage does, to ocean waves to illustrate the transmitted motion of sound; however, Dickens adds winds of varying temperatures – coming from both chilly England and hot, foreign deserts – into a more realistic depiction of an oceanic storm. It is the combination of these varying winds that transmit motion to the waves of the water: once the winds combine, they succeed in “lash[ing]” the “sea” into “passions” that are not only stronger than those of the winds, but expressed in the form of “ravings” as opposed to the wind’s yelling noises. The forced emotive movements of the ocean by the winds result in vocalizations of rage tinged with a sense of perpetual, unending madness. Thus, “the whole scene” of the Atlantic is one of “whirling madness,” with “countless miles of angry space”; this description represents an increase in intensity of movement and volume of sound from Wiltshire’s “scene,” in which only the wind is angry and its transmitted motion results in “scared leaves” that are forced to “whirl” and “eddy” “round and round,” but only as long as the wind exerts its solitary force (15.240-41; 2.20).

The power dynamics and action and reaction of the Wiltshire wind and leaves is also repeated, but presented in a different form in the Atlantic:

On, on, on, over the countless miles of angry space roll the long heaving billows...then all is but a boiling heap of rushing water. Pursuit, and flight, and mad return of wave on wave, and savage struggle...incessant change of place, and form, and hue; constancy in nothing, but eternal strife; on, on, on, they roll, and...louder howl the winds, and more clamorous and fierce become the million voices in the sea. (*MC* 15.241)

In Wiltshire, the “great heap” of “fallen leaves” take “frantic flights into the air” and “roll...over each other” in their attempts to evade the “malicious fury” of their “pursuer,” the “angry wind” (2.20). In the Atlantic, the language of the Wiltshire scene repeats but again, demonstrates the amplification of the conflict, the space over which it occurs, and the volume with which it is expressed. Although *Martin Chuzzlewit* is filled with examples of what Babbage describes as “transmitted motion,” nowhere is that more apparent than in these oceanic passages; Dickens, like Babbage, finds water to be the best medium through which to demonstrate this concept (*Treatise* 113).

Finally, the wind and water end their struggle against one another when a “wild cry goes forth upon the storm” – although it is unknown whether this cry comes from the wind or the ocean – and announces the presence of a ship travelling amongst these elements (*MC* 15.241). The appearance of this outsider, it seems, unites the two natural forces together against a common enemy, with the solitary “wild cry” “spreading” throughout the “multitude crowd” of elements, and the ship becoming something that “every storm-voice in the air and water” is determined to destroy and sink. Like the Wiltshire wind against the tree branches and forge, however, the storm fails in its attempted destruction despite the “untiring train” of wind and water that are caught in a cycle in which they “dash themselves to fragments in their baffled anger,” then “moaningly depart,” “giving place to others” who repeat the same. Ultimately, the “deadly element[s]” of the storm can only “press upon her” and “peer...in at every seam and chink” of the ship, but cannot force it down into “the unfathomable depths below.”

Just as the Atlantic Ocean passage catches up with the Wiltshirean wind, the Eden passages continue from the violent waters of the Atlantic to the rivers and flooded swamps of

America. Instead of directly showing the movement of the water to this frontier land, the novel depicts the floods of the Atlantic as having already swept over the space. The American settlement at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers where Martin and Mark attempt to start their architectural business, called Eden in the novel, is described as post-diluvian, – “the waters of the Deluge might have left it but a week before: so choked with slime and matted growth was the hideous swamp which bore that name” – connecting the space to the stormy Atlantic which resembles a hurricane with enough force to cause such a flood (MC 23.360).<sup>117</sup> In fact, Dickens explicitly encourages his readers to connect Eden with the Atlantic Ocean and Wiltshire when he describes Martin as sitting by the river, “gazing at the current as it rolled swiftly by, thinking...how fast it moved towards the open sea, the high road to home” (23.364).

Despite claims about Eden’s growing prosperity, Martin and Mark discover that such places of promise at the American frontier are, in reality, spaces of “monotonous desolation” (MC 23.360).<sup>118</sup> Eden is horrific, a slimy, rotting place of nightmares where buildings sink into

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<sup>117</sup> Such descriptions add to the endless temporal contradictions Dickens depicts in America. This landscape passage also suggests that even Biblical history does not contain adequate origin points from which to trace the ripple-effect that is America. Although *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s Eden is fictional, Nick Yablon’s *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology in American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919* (2009) and other recent scholarship have drawn connections between Eden and the real American frontier town Cairo, Illinois, which Dickens visited and refers to in his 1842 travelogue *American Notes* in strikingly similar gothic and grotesque terms. Dickens describes Cairo as “a breeding-place of fever...and death...[a] dismal swamp...a hotbed of disease...a grave uncheered by any gleam of promise: a place without one single quality, in earth or air or water, to commend it: such is this dismal Cairo” (AN 190). Although Eden’s river remains unnamed in the novel, if this town was indeed inspired by his trip to Cairo, Eden’s nearby river is most likely the Mississippi River, which flows down to New Orleans, “the world’s busiest cotton trading port,” as Giorgio Riello notes in his extensive study of the cotton industry, which many have connected with the novel’s overly subtle abolitionist sentiments (Riello 246).

<sup>118</sup> Scholars such as Antonello Gerbi in *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (2010) and Ella Dzelzainis in “Dickens, Democracy, and Spit” (2013) have noted Dickens’s descriptions of the American landscape both in *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, arguing that those descriptions parallel his portrayal of the whole of America itself—its people, government, and culture. Dickens’s depiction of *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s Eden specifically have garnered much critical attention throughout the past few decades. In *Lost in the American City: Dickens, James, and Kafka* (2001), for example, Jeremy Tambling focuses on the architecture of *Martin Chuzzlewit*’s physical spaces and argues that the novel’s America has “no infrastructure” (81). He interprets Eden as a metaphor for the country’s overall emptiness and says “[i]t is clear that America means not the regeneration of man but death” (82).

the “black ooze” of the “marshy ground” and “vile and ugly things” arise from the “decomposing ashes” of “good growth” (23.363, 360). The “night air” of this region is described by an Eden settler as “deadly poison” and the only sound there is a “deep silence” (23.362). Although the environment is threatening to humans and healthy vegetation, there does seem to be one form of life thriving in this wilderness – that of infectious disease:

[W]here fatal maladies, seeking whom they might infect, came forth at night in misty shapes, and creeping out upon the water, hunted them like spectres until day; where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror; this was the realm of Hope through which they moved.

Like Wiltshire, Eden is filled with forces that hunt for something over which to exert power. Unlike Wiltshire’s wind that seeks to vent its anger and frustration, or the Atlantic’s combined elements that urge each other on in increasing violence and madness, Eden is the quietest, calmest, yet deadliest space of them all. In Eden’s uncanny form of nature, “Rain, heat, foul slime, and noxious vapour, with all the ills and filthy things they bred, prevailed. The earth, the air, the vegetation, and the water they drank, all teemed with deadly properties” (33.501). Eden is a space of environmental assemblage more complexly interconnected than that of Wiltshire and the Atlantic; all the elements of this “putrid swamp” are inextricable and work to create its extreme toxicity (33.499). The elements are also neither angry, scared, nor mad like those of Wiltshire and the Atlantic; they are corrupt, disfigured, deadly, and steeped in a “deep silence” that seems to choke the life sounds of those attempting – mostly unsuccessfully – to build their lives there (23.362). Despite being told the contrary by American swindlers before their arrival, Martin and Mark find that Eden is not an environment in which healthy life can thrive.

Rather than descriptions of this environmental space appearing in the opening passages of the chapter or its first introduction, these descriptions of the American riverbanks are scattered throughout Martin and Mark's experiences in Eden. Such dissemination of spatial description in many ways mirrors the oozing, seeping environment itself. Just as "foot-prints s[i]nk into the marshy ground" and "a black ooze start[s] forth to blot them out," Eden's descriptions sink into the novel's chapters, forcing the reader to sift through its "putrid matter," only to find that it is "tangled all together in a heap; a jungle deep and dark, with neither earth nor water at its root," but a "pulpy offal of the two" that has become "[in]divisible" in "their own corruption" (*MC* 23.363). Sound in this space is similarly difficult to discern. Eden's environment is not stifled and choked like the storehouses or winter landscape of London, but rather actively chokes—or contaminates—all signs of life and energy. Sound, in this place, has already been consumed by the stagnant, marshy abyss, or was never capable of expression in the first place; all that is left is "deep silence." It is significant that despite the expansive Babbagean description of corrupt, guilty British sound transmitting across the angry ocean toward America, there is no description of Martin and Mark's journey back to England. The narrative skips over that, as if no sound can even transmit from America through their return trip home, for it has already sunk into the slime of the desolated, diseased swamplands. Sound and the toxic natural elements of Eden do eventually travel indirectly from America to England by way of a violent thunderstorm that occurs, uncoincidentally, on the night of Mark and Martin's return to Wiltshire. In countless ways, the storm impresses the reader with the sense that trouble is returning from America with Mark and Martin, just as the emotive ripple effects of the tyrannous Wiltshire wind and its despairing, environmental victims cross the Atlantic to Eden with the two young men.

### **“A Murderer and a Vagabond”: Causality as Environmental Justice**

The novel’s opening chapter is a historical account of the Chuzzlewit family written, as if by a Chuzzlewit family member, for the sole purpose of establishing the prestige of their lineage. Within this account, however, the narrator acknowledges a rather repetitive pattern that appears generation after generation within the family line: the appearance of “a murderer and a vagabond” (*MC* 1.13). These words come to characterize Jonas and Pecksniff, respectively, by the end of the novel, and the inevitability of their adherence to the family pattern is reinforced in the ecological circularity of the novel. The most heinous deeds of Pecksniff and Jonas, in fact, both occur in the same Wiltshirean woods with which the action of the story began, and these moments draw even more connections through the use of language evocative of the other main environmental spaces of the Atlantic Ocean and America’s Eden.

Pecksniff’s most immoral deed, it can be argued, is his physical violation of the vulnerable Mary – the orphan under old Martin’s care and the love interest of the young Martin, who is at this time still in America trying to regain his fortune after Pecksniff casted him out. “The outlet from the wood in which these tender passages occurred,” the Pecksniffian narration tells the reader of the disturbing scene between Pecksniff and Mary, “was close to Mr. Pecksniff’s house” (*MC* 30.459). Earlier, while Pecksniff is in the Wiltshire woods right before his discovery of the solitary Mary, the environment where Pecksniff will commit the malicious deed is described in detail. It is a summer morning:

Through deep green vistas where the boughs arched over-head, and showed the sunlight flashing in the beautiful perspective; through dewy fern from which the startled hares leaped up, and led at his approach; by mantled pools, and fallen trees, and down in

hollow places, rustling among last year's leaves whose scent was Memory; the placid Pecksniff strolled. (30.455)

Although Pecksniff reads the landscape's qualities as coming from him, as he regards all things – “[t]he summer weather in his bosom was reflected in the breast of Nature” – the environmental description borrows language that evokes the novel's other landscapes. While in Wiltshire during Pecksniff's walk he encounters “mantled pools, and fallen trees,” in Eden, there seems to be “no end to the water” so as to appear post-Delugian, and parts of the land are “a flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber” (17.274; 23.360). As Pecksniff travels “down in hollow places,” the ship in the Atlantic moves “low down in the hollows of the sea, as hiding for the moment from” the “fury” of the oceanic storm (15.241). And of course, the presence of “last year's leaves” that are within this hollow place directly connect to the introductory Wiltshire chapter that takes place the autumn before, or last year, in which those leaves were described as attempting to settle into places hidden from the wind, such as this very hollow. These parallels with the novel's various environments in this scene add a causal weight and connectivity to the scene, placing Pecksniff's deed within a Babbagean atmosphere in which everything is connected and interacting.

In the first half of the novel, Pecksniff's immoral acts are primarily forms of communication and expression. He repeatedly exerts negative power and influence through his intentional manipulation of words, tones, inflections, and gestures as a means of harming and controlling others, and he uses excessive expressions of moral righteousness and superiority that both elevate his own social status and hide the hypocrisy and malice behind these acts of expression. Midway through the novel, however, he finally crosses a physical boundary of harm in a chapter titled “Proves that Changes may be rung in the best-regulated Families, and that Mr



Pecksniff was a special hand at a Triple-Bob-Major.” In the second half of this chapter, which was the opening of the twelfth serialized number, Pecksniff encounters Mary alone while walking in the woods. Instead of leaving her to her solitude, Pecksniff follows his “impulse” and “advance[s]” on her “at a brisk pace” to forcibly join her on her walk, despite her physical and verbal protestations (*MC* 30.455). Although written with Pecksniffian narration, the dark threat of Pecksniff’s continued unwanted verbal and physical advances, and Mary’s repeated pleas for him to stop touching her and leave her alone, result in a scene even more terrifying than the one in which Jonas commits murder a bit later in the novel. While the narration of Tigg Montague’s murder by Jonas is brief and hidden from the reader by a veil of thick vegetation and vague language, the interaction between Pecksniff and Mary is described in lengthy detail and made painfully open to the reader to witness and experience Mary’s violation through Pecksniff’s persistent physical touch. As she repeatedly pleads for him to “release [her]” and “leave [her],” he continues to forcibly hold and kiss her hand, going so far as to walk “with his arm round her waist...as contentedly as if they had been all in all to each other, and were joined together in the bonds of truest love” (30.456-57). Mary’s distress has little effect on Pecksniff, and at times even seems to arouse him; in response to one of Mary’s pleas to be left alone, for example, the narrator describes how Pecksniff “smiled a greasy smile: and drew her closer to him” (30.457). There is a sadistic, sexual undertone to Pecksniff’s responses to Mary’s protestations that cover the scene with a sinister atmosphere that even his most pleasant-sounding words cannot disrupt. The depiction of Pecksniff’s predatory silencing of Mary’s voice and physical entangling of his arms around her body connects Pecksniff in this moment with the choking, oozing, putrid matter

of Eden, “tangled all together in a heap” (*MC* 23.363). Through his words and deeds, he becomes the human expression of the corrupt, Eden environment.

Mary continues to resist his advances but finds that her “words had not the least effect upon him” and that she cannot “disengage” from his physical touch – the force of which Pecksniff so powerfully exerts upon her that he is likened to an “affectionate boa constrictor” (*MC* 30.457). In her desperation, fear, and anger, Mary eventually threatens to expose Pecksniff’s immoral behavior to her guardian and the patriarch of the Chuzzlewit family, the elder Martin Chuzzlewit, if he refuses to release her. In a surprisingly self-empowered moment, Mary states that despite Pecksniff’s ability to “force [her] by [his] superior strength,” he cannot control “the expression of [her] thoughts.” To Mary, her voice is her own source of power that no one can silence. Pecksniff’s response to Mary’s statement is simultaneously cold and insidious, verbal and physical. He answers her “with perfect coolness,” looking at her “with a placid leer,” and further applying physical force “with a playful tightening of his grasp” (30.457-58).<sup>119</sup>

Dickens’s depiction of Pecksniff’s tonal and physical expressions and use of force here exemplify the ways in which Dickens effectively heightens the sense of danger and horror of the scene by combining detailed descriptions of Pecksniff’s violations of Mary with biased Pecksniffian descriptors, repeatedly adding manipulative adjectives such as “playful,” “placid”

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<sup>119</sup> Pecksniff also responds to Mary’s threat by employing his alternate source of power – his words – as a means of establishing further control over her. In language somehow both vague and direct, Pecksniff also threatens to “hurt” the younger Martin Chuzzlewit whom Mary actually loves – to further “blight” the “already blighted prospects” of this “disinherited young man” – by exerting his considerable “influence” over his grandfather and Pecksniff’s distant cousin, the elder Martin Chuzzlewit (*MC* 30.458). “[H]ow easy to do it. Ah, how easy!” Pecksniff threatens hypocritically after commenting on how “sad” such a thing would be to do. It is not until chapter 52 of the novel, however, that Pecksniff discovers the elder Martin was only pretending to be under his influence and control as a means of exposing the truth of his villainous character hidden beneath his honorable pretense.

or “perfect” to mask, yet effectively emphasize, the insidiousness of Pecksniff’s behavior. Although these forms of expression are portrayed earlier in the novel as part of Pecksniff’s humorous effort to appear above the earthly drama of his relations and acquaintances, his attempts in this scene to use the same types of expressions take on a much more sinister tone. Dickens’s writing in such moments most explicitly reinforces the novel’s theme of selfishness by amplifying Pecksniff’s obvious hypocrisy; less overtly, however, it makes clear that Pecksniff is not only acting in disturbing and immoral ways, but like a budding psychopath, he enjoys both inflicting harm on others and manipulating those around him into thinking he would never be capable of such depravity. This scene, therefore, firmly establishes Pecksniff as the novel’s most dangerous and devious character – much like Eden is the most threatening and toxic environmental space – despite Jonas committing actual murder a few serial numbers later. Additionally, Jonas feels the mental and physical weight of the crime he commits, as I discuss in greater detail; Pecksniff, on the other hand, despite being physically and socially knocked down, remains as light as the feathers of the birds with which he is frequently compared, and as morally high as the “ether” to which he is repeatedly described as ascending (*MC* 5.86).

The location of Jonas’s murder of Tigg Montague presents even more linguistic parallels with the other natural spaces, as well as with the site of Pecksniff’s deed. Seeming as if occurring at a similar, if not the same, place as Pecksniff’s insidious walk, the murder also occurs on a Wiltshire footpath through the woods, “down into a hollow place...down, down, down, into the dell” (*MC* 47.679). Occurring just after dark, at the murder site there are “[v]istas of silence opened everywhere” rather than “deep green vistas” filled with the sounds of nature in Pecksniff’s daylight walk. The description of the last rays of the setting sun as “[t]he glory of the

departing sun” before the murder occurs echoes the language of Wiltshire’s first introduction, in which “the declining sun” “shed a glory upon the scene” just prior to setting beneath the hills and clouds (47.679; 2.18). In fact, evidence of the earlier Wiltshire description weaves its way throughout the murder setting, such as the appearance of “trees which were subdued by blasts of wind in winter time” that “lay all bare and scathed across their leafy arms,” which, in the autumn, had just started to lose their battle with the coming winter winds. The most striking connection between these two environmental descriptions is that the very “body of a murdered man,” Tigg Montague, actually falls down and “lay[s] among the last year’s leaves that formed its pillow” (47.679-80). The way in which the dead body and its blood interacts with the Wiltshire ground, however, as well as the depiction of Jonas’s escape from the scene of the crime, draw from language and imagery not of the declining Wiltshire, but of the angry Atlantic Ocean and the corrupt, vile Eden. This switch, I argue, signals the infusive and ecologically interdependent nature of the novel’s nature-scape as well as the characters whose deeds impact and are impacted by them.

Throughout the chapter in which Jonas kills Montague, the narrative perspective repeatedly shifts. It starts with Jonas as he travels from London to Wiltshire to commit the crime. While hiding just off the road, the arrival of Pecksniff and Montague shifts the perspective to that of the future victim, Montague. As Montague bids goodnight to Pecksniff and travels down the footpath through the woods, which Pecksniff had recommended to him and about which Jonas had overheard them speaking, the narration stays with Montague until just before the murder. The actual crime is told from neither perspective, but rather from that of a distanced observer. The transition is gradual, with Montague being described as “slowly disappear[ing]”

after entering the woods, with only the noise of his steps signaling his location: “the sharp crackling of some tender branch denoted where he went” (*MC* 47.679). This creation of a slowly increasing narrative distance from Montague encourages the reader to consider who or what is doing the witnessing and listening. As the actual murder takes place, the narrative perspective becomes even more distanced from the characters, with the dead Montague being referred to as the “body of a murdered man” and Jonas as “that man” and the “doer of this deed” (47.679-80).<sup>120</sup> As no actual person is ever revealed to have directly witnessed the crime by the end of the novel, I argue that this distanced, anonymous narration style reinforces the reflections with which the chapter began: the natural elements do indeed serve as “sentinels of God,” witnessing the crimes of the living. As I discuss later in this chapter, the scene in which Jonas’s crime is finally exposed further supports the Babbagean idea that environmental elements are also capable of providing testimony about the harmful words and deeds to which they bear witness. At the same time, Jonas’s increasing awareness of the environmental elements listening and witnessing his actions makes Jonas more than a Pecksniffian source of sound and influence; he is also transformed into a Babbagean listener and reader of the environmental records voiced throughout the natural elements – a transformation that occurs following his attempted murder of his father and his actual murder of Tigg Montague in the Wiltshire woods.

Jonas’s change between these two pivotal moments, as well as afterwards, occurs slowly over time – “[i]nch by inch, in his grudging and ill-conditioned way...inch by inch, and bit by bit” – as if enacting the slow causality narrative described by Choi and Leckie (*MC* 44.639). This process begins after the death of his father, when he is forced to remain in the house with his

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<sup>120</sup> After the murder, the narration ends where it began, with Jonas and his internal thoughts as he travels away from the scene of the crime back to London.

father's dead body for a week, "without relief or occupation" (19.308). It is then that he imagines his father's body – "stretched out stiff and stark, in the awful chamber above stairs" – and feels it as a "weight" that "so crushed and bore down Jonas, that he bent beneath the load." The language here suggests that Jonas's upbringing in the manufacturing city of Manchester is converted through his fear and paranoia into a force that physically presses down on him. Importantly, Jonas's experience before the funeral is not of grief, but of the supernatural. Throughout the week-long vigil, he continually feels "oppressed and haunted by a dreadful sense of Its presence in the house" – *It* being his father corpse (19.308).<sup>121</sup> In this scene, and for the remainder of Jonas's life in the novel, Dickens describes Jonas's slow process of psychological and physical degeneration with language reminiscent of what David Punter describes as the "Paranoid Gothic," or a narration that "enact[s] a classic psychology of paranoia whereby the self is threatened and pursued by its own unaccommodated residues" (215). In such a state, Punter explains, wherein the "individual" feels "helpless in the grip of powerful forces," the "self" is often "represent[ed]...as dissolved in a web of uncomprehended power structures"; in other words, "the self experiences itself as at the mercy of forces beyond its control."

It is in this state of paranoia, oppression, and the feeling of being trapped under the weight of something unexplainable, I contend, that Jonas becomes particularly sensitive to sounds and begins actively listening to the environment around him; "the lightest noise disturb[s] him" and the "howling of a dog before the house" "fill[s] him with a terror he could not

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<sup>121</sup> To add to the uncanniness and gothic imagery of the scene, Dickens contrasts Jonas' experience with the rest of the funeral party: "the whole of that strange week was a round of dismal joviality and grim enjoyment; and every one...who came within the shadow of Anthony Chuzzlewit's grave, feasted like a Ghoul" (MC 19.309). As if a foreshadowing of Anthony's death, the "feathers sadly waving to and fro" in the transatlantic passage are similarly described here as part of the expensive funeral accoutrements.

disguise” (MC 19.308). He even imagines he hears “the sound of a footstep over-head,” and believing it to be that of his dead father “crie[s] out that the dead man was walking – tramp, tramp, tramp – about his coffin.” Bells become a particularly resonant sound to Jonas, as he imagines them as witnesses and forces of judgment to his every immoral act and thought. Jay Clayton argues that bells “occupy a special place in Dickens’s auditory world” (“Dickens Tape” 22). For example, *The Chimes*, he claims, “develops a powerful account of the confused affective response caused by the sound of pealing bells.” He further describes the bell’s “articulate and verbose” “voice,” as “sound technology” “full of wisdom and good cheer” and constantly speaking to the main character Toby Veck, “explaining things, telling him what to do, reminding him of his past, and exhorting him for the future” (25). In the passage Clayton highlights, Toby feels a sense of kinship with the “voices” of the bells because he identifies with the suffering they have been forced to endure; in their perpetual isolation, forced moments, and being “beat[en] upon” by “hammers,” Toby finds “points of resemblance between themselves and him” (Dickens qtd in Clayton 25).

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, alternately, the bells are a force of intrusion that vocalize their judgment of Jonas. During the storm that coincides with Martin and Mark’s return to Wiltshire from America, Jonas, himself heading back to Wiltshire from London, sees in “every gleam” of the lightning’s “flashing light” “a multitude of objects,” including “[b]ells in steeples, with the rope and wheel that moved them” (MC 42.606). In a “trembling, vivid, flickering instant,” the lightning’s revealing light makes “everything...clear and plain”; it is in this moment, that Montague “thought he saw Jonas with his hand lifted, and the bottle clenched in it like a hammer, making as if he would aim a blow at his head” (42.607). Jonas does not hear in the bells

a fellow sufferer; he, as the one who holds the hammer, waiting to strike, is the force that deals the blow. The voices of bells become, for Jonas, those of witnesses, testifying of his wrongdoings, just as Babbage imagines the earth's elements as testifying on Judgment Day of the abuses committed by enslavers upon enslaved people.

On the night of the murder, the significance Jonas attaches to the bells is heightened the closer he comes to committing the deed. When attempting to stealthily sneak out of his residence to murder Montague, Jonas finds “the clashing of the bells” sounding from “ringers...practicing in a neighboring church” “almost maddening” (*MC* 46.674). In his continued annoyance with them, however, the ringers fade from view, and to Jonas, the “clamouring bells” themselves “seemed to know that he was listening at the door, and to proclaim it in a crowd of voices to all the town! Would they never be still?” (46.674-75). Not even their “ceas[ing]” is a comfort to Jonas, for when they stop, in contrast, “the silence was so new and terrible that it seemed the prelude to some dreadful noise” (46.675). He similarly imagines hearing an ominous “knocking” that, “as if by some design and order of circumstances,” repeatedly sounds “like a warning echo of the dread reality he had conjured up” (47.681). Jonas’s paranoid, active listening causes him to “bec[o]me in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man.” Later in the evening, after falling asleep on the ride from London to Wiltshire, Jonas dreams of “the noise of wheels” as if they signaled the arrival of the authorities come to arrest Jonas, and envisions “ropes that moved deep bells, and swung and swayed as they were clung to,” evocative of his likely death after his arrest at the end of a hangman’s noose (47.676).

Although for Jonas the sounds of the bells often signal exposure, justice, and punishment, for Pecksniff, the bell sounds impede his own judgmental capacities. While “loiter[ing] to and



fro” amongst the “idle heaps of dust among the busiest stirs of life” in London, Pecksniff’s footsteps are described as “awakening the echoes as he paced up and down” (*MC* 10.157-58). In this state, Pecksniff is able to reflect on the “grains of hesitation in his mind” that suggested that perhaps he was misreading the older Martin’s character. He is “roused from his meditation,” however, by “the church clock, striking the quarters for the second time since he had been there”; he subsequently “[s]hake[s] off his incertitude as the air parted with the sound of the bells” and ceases a reflection that, with more time, might have prevented Pecksniff’s eventual downfall (10.157). Pecksniff cannot hear what the parted air and the sounds of the bells are telling him; Jonas, on the other hand, can. Neither, however, are capable of preventing the consequences they eventually face, making it seem as though their endings are the inevitable consequences of the environmental justice system in which they are a part.

After Jonas commits the murder, his subsequent madness is depicted as being due to his experience of vastly conflicting emotions: fear of himself, fear for his safety, lack of remorse, and most importantly, his continuing rage, despite having murdered its assumed source:

Still he was not sorry. No. He had hated the man too much, and had been bent, too desperately and too long, on setting himself free. If the thing could have come over again, he would have done it again. His malignant and revengeful passions were not so easily laid. There was no more penitence or remorse within him now than there had been while the deed was brewing. (*MC* 47.681)

The murder, then, acts neither as a vent for his fury nor a catalyst for moral change; instead, he experiences an overload of anxious, paranoid energy, and ultimately bursts or erupts and

physically sinks lower and lower to the ground, acting out with his body the “weight” of his father’s dead body that had earlier psychologically “crush[ed]” him under its “load” (19.308).

When he eventually abandons his relentless defense of his actions in his own mind, although still not explicitly feeling guilty, Jonas finally regrets murdering Montague because of the resulting “agonies of mind” and “innumerable fears” of his paranoia (*MC* 51.730). In this moment, Dickens once again borrows from Babbage’s chapter on sound permanence:

He had hidden his secret in the wood; pressed and stamped it down into the bloody ground; and here it started up when least expected, miles upon miles away; known to many; proclaiming itself from the lips of an old man who had renewed his strength and vigour as by a miracle, to give it voice against him!

The language here denotes Babbagean processes of immoral action being impressed upon the environment. This moment also contains the uniquely Dickensian expression of Babbage’s theory with the idea that the secret does not remain impressed upon the ground; instead, it undergoes ecological processes of change through which it is transformed into a motive force such as the wind, then, as if having swept through the body of the “old man,” the same secret stamped through blood has become an actual voice capable of testifying of his crimes. In other words, this paragraph alone exemplifies the Babbagean ecological system in miniature as it presents itself throughout the novel.

Later, he similarly imagines someone’s detailing of his crimes to be “as if every drop of blood in the wood had found a voice to jeer him with” (*MC* 51.732). Before this, Jonas sees his own violent actions in another’s attempt to “explain or illustrate some action by his gesture”: “Horror! How like the blow he had struck in the wood!” (51.728). It is not only the testifying

“voice” of the “pressed and stamped,” “bloody ground” that is empowered against him. Later, his focus shifts to the door itself to the room from which he snuck to commit the murder, viewing it as a “[f]atal, ill-omened, blighted threshold, cursed by his father’s footsteps in his dying hour, cursed by his young wife’s sorrowing tread, cursed by the daily shadow of the old clerk’s figure, cursed by the crossing of his murderer’s feet” (51.736). Just as Jordan claims that Master Humphrey’s “house is a repository of memories that take the form of ghostly sounds,” Jonas’s room eventually stores up, then expresses, sounds that voice the pain and suffering Jonas has inflicted upon others through his violent acts – sounds that his own pacing footsteps uncannily and uncomfortably resemble (Jordan par. 31).

Under the weight of such immense pressure exerted upon him by the elemental forces he hears testifying of his crimes, Jonas once again feels haunted by the bells, as if they too are sounding the impending judgment and violent punishment that will be heaped upon him by the London multitudes. When the door once again opens to admit Nadgett, the bells reappear amongst the sounds that forcibly enter the house from the London street:

Hark! It came on, roaring like a sea! Hawkers burst into the street, crying it up and down; windows were thrown open that the inhabitants might hear it; people stopped to listen in the road and on the pavement; the bells, the same bells began to ring: tumbling over one another in a dance of boisterous joy at the discovery (that was the sound they had in his distempered thoughts), and making their airy playground rock. (MC 51.736)

This moment that Jonas experiences as the oncoming roar of testimony to be used against him is eerily foreshadowed just before Jonas commits murder, in the form of an apocalyptic dream of Judgment Day. This similarity transforms the significance of this description for Jonas and the

reader, “[h]ark[ing]” not of street noises, but of the coming of Jonas’s own personal day of judgment.

During this scene of testimony and judgment, Jonas begins to lose control over his own emitted sounds:

An irrepressible exclamation burst from the lips of Jonas...It was not a groan, or a shriek, or a word, but was wholly unlike any sound that had ever fallen on the ears of those who heard it, while at the same time it was the most sharp and terrible expression of what was working in his guilty breast, that nature could have invented. (*MC* 51.730)

This depiction of Jonas’s inability to speak intelligibly is strikingly similar to what happens to Jonas’s father Anthony Chuzzlewit before his death – a transformation to which Jonas reacts apathetically, and almost impatiently, at the time. This parallel presents another instance of a cycle in sonic terms, this time in the form of degeneration and death that occurs in a family line.

Anthony Chuzzlewit is in many ways a foil to his older brother Martin. While Martin appears the epitome of selfishness, despite his paranoia about the selfish motives of others, Jane Helen Berard, in *Dickens and Landscape Discourse* (2007), argues that Anthony “serves as a ‘seer’” in the novel: “Not only does Anthony ‘know’ that he was responsible for raising the despicable Jonas and reaping what he sowed, but he also seems to ‘know’ what all the other characters desire as well” (174). Anthony is unable to clearly articulate his thoughts before death, however, which is typically a moment of profundity in Victorian literature; one has only to think of Dickens’s own famous deathbed scenes of *The Old Curiosity Shop*’s Little Nell Trent and *Dombey and Son*’s Paul Dombey.<sup>122</sup> As Claire Wood writes of such famous Dickensian scenes:

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<sup>122</sup> *The Old Curiosity Shop* was published in 1841, shortly before Dickens’s trip to America in 1842, and *Dombey and Son* was serialized from 1846-48, only a few years after Dickens completed *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

“Death is used to impart moral wisdom” (74).<sup>123</sup> If Anthony is a “seer,” his son Jonas becomes a hearer of sorts after his death – a point which has been critically overlooked.

Anthony’s final moments, however, are devoid of any such wisdom or insight. In fact, Dickens depicts Anthony as attempting, but failing, to know or even speak at all:

He had fallen from his chair in a fit, and lay there, battling for each gasp of breath, with every shrivelled vein and sinew starting in its place, as if it were bent on bearing witness to his age, and sternly pleading with Nature against his recovery. It was frightful to see how the principle of life, shut up within his withered frame, fought like a strong devil, mad to be released, and rent its ancient prison-house. A young man in the fullness of his vigour, struggling with so much strength of desperation, would have been a dismal sight; but an old, old, shrunken body, endowed with preternatural might, and giving the lie in every motion of its every limb and joint to its enfeebled aspect, was a hideous spectacle indeed. (*MC* 18.296)

Anthony’s legacy is not immortalized at his death through the articulation of final, meaningful words; instead, his dying body is scrutinized in such great detail that his fight for life becomes even more abject and dehumanized than the usual sad, sympathetic, or “dismal sight” of a dying man.<sup>124</sup> Ultimately his death becomes nothing but “a hideous spectacle indeed.”

His process of dying also begins and ends with failed articulation. Before falling from his chair, he repeatedly makes a “strange noise” that both Jonas and Pecksniff believe is coming from the nearby clock, signaling “[s]omething wrong in [it], I suppose,” as Jonas says (*MC*

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<sup>123</sup> Wood does note that despite Dickens’s own criticism of the capitalistic Victorian death industry, he simultaneously participated in it through such deathbed scenes, knowing they would increase book sales.

<sup>124</sup> John Kucich, in *Excess and Restraint in the Novels of Charles Dickens* (1981), argues that this passage’s analogy of prison-release exemplifies Dickens’s tendency to draw a “connection between death and liberation” (14).

18.295-96). It is only when Anthony's body physically manifests evidence that he is dying that anyone realizes that, as Dickens describes, "another kind of time-piece was fast running down, and from that the sound proceeded" (18.296). Later, in his very final moment, Anthony temporarily arises from his deathbed, and appears to Pecksniff and Jonas – who were already talking with the assumption of his death – as "an apparition...so ghastly to the view that Jonas shrieked aloud, and both recoiled in horror" (18.298). This final moment is similarly hyper-focused on his physical state:

Old Anthony...was in the room—beside the table....and on his livid face, and on his horny hands, and in his glassy eyes, and traced by an eternal finger in the very drops of sweat upon his brow, was one word—Death.

He spoke to them—in something of his own voice too, but sharpened and made hollow, like a dead man's face. What he would have said, God knows. He seemed to utter words, but they were such as man had never heard. And this was the most fearful circumstance of all, to see him standing there, gabbling in an unearthly tongue.

Anthony's deathbed scene is neither in bed, nor sentimental or heart-wrenching; in fact, it is grotesquely embodied. His physical body is once again scrutinized, and it is only his body that the novel allows its readers to read as speaking, and even in that, only as communicating the obvious: "one word—Death." When the narrative does shift to describing his attempts to speak, he is unable to articulate anything, let alone "impart" the "moral wisdom" that Wood describes. As with the novel's earlier focus on Anthony's dying body rather than his audible attempts to signal his distress, in this final moment even his vocal sounds are converted into a materialized body part, being "like a dead man's face."

While waiting for his father to die – an event Jonas eagerly anticipates – Jonas thinks only of Pecksniff’s likely low opinion of him due to his own class insecurities, as well as how the public will perceive him after his father’s death. This preoccupation also continues after his father dies. The opening of the very next chapter is similarly unconcerned with grief or sentimentality. Instead, it begins by describing how Jonas “had said ‘Spare no expense’” for the funeral to Pecksniff, who had taken full advantage of the pageantry by riding “in a hackney cabriolet” (*MC* 19.299). Jonas’s motive in such excessive spending is not to honor his father, but to prevent the public gossip if he had spent less.<sup>125</sup> With the narrator adopting the pessimistic worldview of Jonas himself, Dickens elaborates on Jonas’s thought process: “Mankind is evil in its thoughts and in its base constructions, and Jonas was resolved it should not have an inch to stretch into an ell against him. It never should be charged upon his father’s son that he had grudged the money for his father’s funeral.”

After his crimes are eventually exposed much later in the novel, Jonas cannot handle his personal Judgment Day and the societal judgment with which he is faced; he not only loses himself but his very humanity in the eyes of those around him. He is transformed into a pitiful animal, as his “words were almost unintelligible; as his face, in its pallor and agony, was scarcely human” (*MC* 51.741). Eventually, Jonas is rendered abject, voiceless, and immobile, mirroring his own father’s monstrous, inarticulate state before his death, for “his tongue would not move” and “his limbs would as little answer to his will as his stark, stiff, staring face” (*MC* 51.732). In his essay on Dickens, George Orwell wrote, “he is on the side of the underdog,

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<sup>125</sup> Jonas’s preoccupation with how his display of grief will be judged by the public is both a comment on his character and a Dickensian critique of the increasingly materialistic and commodifying Victorian culture of mourning, as I discussed in this dissertation’s introduction.

always and everywhere. To carry this to its logical conclusion one has got to change sides when the underdog becomes an upperdog, and in fact Dickens does tend to do so” (458). While Dickens presents, like Montague in the woods before his death, a “narrow opening” through which the reader could briefly and fleetingly see a path for Jonas’s redemption, his education which emphasized self-serving and greed, while ignoring foundations on which to build a sense of morality, prevents Jonas from being able to recognize a moral path:

His base triumph, struggling with his cowardice, and shame, and guilt, was so detestable, that they turned away from him, as if he were some obscene and filthy animal, repugnant to the sight. And here that last black crime was busy with him too; working within him to his perdition. But for that, the old clerk’s story might have touched him, though never so lightly; but for that, the sudden removal of so great a load might have brought about some wholesome change even in him. With that deed done, however; with that unnecessary wasteful danger haunting him; despair was in his very triumph and relief; wild, ungovernable, raging despair, for the uselessness of the peril into which he had plunged; despair that hardened him and maddened him, and set his teeth a-grinding in a moment of his exultation. (51.735)

The language Dickens uses here positions Jonas as an assemblage of other forms of despairing nature depicted throughout the novel – the Wiltshire leaves that become frantic in their despair against the powerful force of the oncoming winter wind; the Atlantic waves that struggle and rage in their wild, anarchic, wasteful space; and the Eden vegetation that hideously contorts and oozes a blackness that erases everything else around it – and like his environmental counterparts, he sinks beneath the pressure applied upon him by external forces.



The final characterizations of Jonas, in which he is converted into a repulsive non-human as he attempts to learn and embrace more of what it means to be human, echo Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which became a popular Victorian metaphor for man's potential to warp others and the environment in an era of rapid technological and scientific advancement, as well as the era's heartless, almost machine-like capacity to lambaste and shun the very monster it built.<sup>126</sup> Frankenstein became vaguer the more it was referenced, and by the late nineteenth-century, it could mean creator or creation, and was most often used as a symbol of warped modernity created by man's progress. Here, Jonas appears as Anthony's monster, created from an education built upon greed, industrialism, and violence. He is like the Wiltshire leaves and the Atlantic waves – full of despair and rage, rendered “wild” and “ungovernable” by both external forces and the circumstances of his own making.

Pecksniff's downfall, on the other hand, is not as psychologically and physically degenerative as Jonas's. It is described, rather, as the final instance of a reoccurring sequence of events surrounding Pecksniff from his first scene to his last. In one of the final chapters, entitled “In Which the Tables are Turned, Completely Upside Down,” the patriarch Martin Chuzzlewit physically strikes Pecksniff with a “blow” of his walking stick that causes him to literally fall, physically representing the blow to his reputation and societal fall that Pecksniff will experience by the novel's final pages (*MC* 52.750). Although this scene serves as Pecksniff's official downfall of the novel, the motion of this described chain of events is not unique to Pecksniff's end fate; in fact, the novel *pre-enacts* this sequence of motions – a blow then a fall – when Pecksniff is first introduced, bookending the character's experience of causality.

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<sup>126</sup> As I note in the next chapter, Bulwer Lytton draws from similar Frankensteinian imagery in “The Haunted and the Haunters.”

Directly after the initial description of the Wiltshirean landscape at the start of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the natural and human worlds collide through a violent physical encounter. Before heading out to the Atlantic Ocean, the angry wind enters Pecksniff's house – chasing the leaves fleeing from its tyranny – and this sets off a chain of reactions by the Pecksniff family members. “[T]ak[ing] advantage of the sudden opening of Mr Pecksniff's front door,” the leaves are described as “dash[ing] wildly into his passage” (MC 2.20-21). The wind, as their “pursuer,” then “follow[s]...close upon them” with such energy and force that it “slam[s] the front-door against Mr Pecksniff” (2.21). The door is described as having been blown open by the wind “with such violence” that Pecksniff receives “that sort of knock on the head” which produces illusions, causing him to lay senselessly and speechlessly on the bottom step where he fell. The blow to his head and subsequent fall have such an impact on Pecksniff, that he can only communicate with a “sneeze,” which his daughters interpret as a form of speech: “[t]hat voice!...my parent!”<sup>127</sup> His daughters then proceed to “drag” their father “into an upright posture” where they demand that he “[s]peak” and “not look so wild”; both of which he finds impossible (2.21-22). Pecksniff is still incapacitated by the “violence” of his physical and mental take-down and remains so for longer than seems appropriate given the very minor injuries they later discover he has acquired.

It is at this moment that the Pecksniffian narrator – the hypocritical, pretentious voice of bourgeois society – begins the process of asserting control over the narrative, although he is largely unsuccessful in this specific case. By way of excusing Pecksniff's persisting inability to

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<sup>127</sup> When Mercy, his daughter, initially hears the commotion and “inquire[s]” who it is “through the key-hole,” she is described as speaking “in a shrill voice, which might have belonged to a wind in its teens” (MC 2.21). Just as the natural environments of the novel resemble humans in their vocalizations, characters in *Martin Chuzzlewit* similarly mimic the voices of natural elements as well.

alter his “wild” “look,” the narrator explains that “in such a case,” “a gentleman’s looks...are by no means under his control” – a statement repeatedly proved to be false given the novel’s relentless narration of Pecksniff’s ability to control and manipulate what his face communicates to others (*MC* 2.22). In his incapacitated state, however, he is described as appearing uncannily like “a toy nut-cracker,” presenting such a “spectacle” through his appearance “so very doleful, that neither of the Miss Pecksniffs could repress an involuntary screech.” Through this encounter, the violent blow of the wind against the door and his subsequent fall strips Pecksniff of the ways in which he asserts his gentility – through pretenses of clothing, language, and demeanor used strategically to speak of his moral superiority. The experience of this unexpected physical force transforms him into such a grotesque “spectacle” that even his daughters cannot “repress” their horrified reaction – a moment strikingly similar to the decline of both Anthony and Jonas Chuzzlewit later in the novel.

Pecksniff’s entrance into the novel, therefore, is by way of a literal downfall precipitated by the Wiltshirean environment’s transmitted motion of systemic oppression. After this point, Pecksniff seems to take on the tyrannous qualities of the Wiltshire wind, as if its (e)motion and desire to exert power and control over others were also transmitted to Pecksniff himself.<sup>128</sup> He is constantly associated with images of tyranny and abuses of power, even being connected to the tyrants overthrown during the French Revolution when his head is described as “[l]ooking like the small end of a guillotined man” (*MC* 31.463). The blows Pecksniff receives to his head at the beginning and end of the novel similarly reinforce this association. He also frequently “casts”

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<sup>128</sup> Since this is Pecksniff’s first appearance in the novel, it is unclear whether this is the beginning of Pecksniff’s tyrannical behavior, although the exposition later provided by his former pupil, John Westlock, suggests not. It would also be fair to argue, then, that Pecksniff’s tyranny precedes this encounter with the wind, just as the narrative suggests of the seasonal cycles of the meteorological system of environmental oppression in the Wiltshire landscape.

people out of his sphere of control like a ruler banishing dissenters from his kingdom.<sup>129</sup> This most often occurs when Pecksniff expels his architectural pupils from his house at a moment's notice in a similar fashion to the wind's exertion of sudden force upon the vulnerable leaves. Pecksniff "disperse[s] and scatter[s]" these young men under his care away from his house, causing some to risk "all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress," "driving" some "abroad," such as Martin to America, and some to venture "into unfrequented places," like Tom Pinch when he finds work in London in a dusty old space (2.20).

Although Pecksniff's architectural pupil Tom Pinch is the most brainwashed character under Pecksniff's oppressive regime, even he has temporary moments in which he sees his own unhappiness living under his master's control. One such example is when Tom, after only having access to the "narrow shelf" of carefully selected books at Pecksniff's house, feels a sense of freedom and liberation when he gets the opportunity to read stories at a children's bookstore in the nearby town of Salisbury that stir his imagination and memory. At this moment, the narrator describes how Tom "lived again, with new delight, the happy days before the Pecksniff era" (*MC* 5.78). Despite Tom's naïve respect for and belief in Pecksniff at this early point in the novel, viewing him as almost a deity who can do no wrong, such language implies that Tom's current situation is stifling and repressive under a ruler with his own distinct "era," such is his power.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> There are countless examples of such moments. In one, Pecksniff expresses a desire to "cast...off" Tigg Montague "as Saint George might have repudiated the Dragon in that animal's last moments," after Montague discovers Pecksniff eavesdropping outside the door of old Martin Chuzzlewit and calls him a "vagabond" (*MC* 4.53). Another instance, perhaps the most significant casting off action Pecksniff performs for the novel's plot, is when he succeeds in "casting out" the younger Martin Chuzzlewit, one of his current pupils, who he describes as "that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods" (11.189). This latter example is a distinct moment in the novel's complex causality, for it precipitates Martin's attempt to make his fortune in America and much of the novel's subsequent events, including Pecksniff's own eventual demise.

<sup>130</sup> This reference to the pre-Pecksniffian era is vitally important and largely overlooked by critics. If in this Pecksniff era Tom dogmatically and blindly follows Pecksniff, his pre-Pecksniff era was one of freedom and

When Tom finally learns of Pecksniff's true, selfish character later in the novel, it is earth-shattering, and the transformation of Pecksniff in Tom's mind is depicted as if located in the environmental spaces of Eden and the Atlantic Ocean:

The star of his whole life from boyhood, had become, in a moment, putrid vapour...From the lofty height on which poor Tom had placed his idol it was tumbled down headlong, and...Legions of Titans couldn't have got him out of the mud...His compass was broken, his chart destroyed...his anchor was adrift, ten thousand leagues away. (31.467)

Pecksniff, having been secretly eavesdropping from a church pew, witnesses this moment with the cold indifference of a ruler with too many subjects to care about the loss of one. After Tom departs, he is described as walking "with a pleasant countenance into the vestry" and pilfering through the cupboard for "a port-wine bottle and some biscuits" without a care in the world, knowing that he could easily manipulate the situation to his advantage upon his arrival home, as he eventually does (31.468).

By the scene in which Pecksniff receives his final blow that leads to his physical and societal downfall, the reader feels the impact of the justice being enacted: it is the deserved fall of a malicious tyrant down to the same social depths of the idle vagabonds he so despises. Although Pecksniff is also verbally confronted by the novel's main characters as they expose his previous wrongdoings, his well-established ability to manipulate his own words and those of others makes these moments less impactful to him. It is the physical violence he experiences that

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imagination. His "heart-break" at these stores, rather than feelings of nostalgia or fond remembrance, reinforces the view that the Pecksniffian regime is one of tyranny and censorship, and these books symbolize freedom from tyranny. These children's stories become his link to the past, but rather than causing him to live in that past – to be frozen in time, in a sense – these stories kindle new life in him. His imagination is described as not just having restorative powers, but the powers of creation and rebirth. Tom "live[s] again," which both interjects the past into the present and creates a causal link to the future proceedings of the novel.

weakens his effect on others, leaving him both speechless and not in control of his facial expressions – both of which are his usual sources of power. His physical confrontation with the patriarch Martin Chuzzlewit, therefore, more thoroughly denotes Pecksniff's figurative fall in social standing through blows to his reputation.

In Dickens's narration of Old Martin's effectual knocking down and overthrow of Pecksniff, he draws from the language of heat and energy, depicted almost like the embodiment of a storm returning to enact violent ecological justice on Pecksniff. Anticipating a kind reception from Martin, Pecksniff is shocked when he is confronted, instead, with his forceful anger; in response to the physical force of Martin's "mere" "look," "Pecksniff started back as if he had received the charge of an electric battery" (MC 52.749).<sup>131</sup> Later in the scene, Martin hits Pecksniff with another "charge," this time of a more violent and physical nature:

[O]ld Martin, with his burning indignation crowded into one vehement burst, and flashing out of every line and wrinkle in his face, rose up, and struck him down upon the ground.

With such a well-directed nervous blow, that down he went...he did not offer to get up again; but lay there, looking about him, with a disconcerted meekness in his face so enormously ridiculous, that neither Mark Tapley nor John Westlock could repress a smile. (52.750)

The violence of Old Martin's look is equated in force to that of an electrical shock from a battery and the impact of his fist to that of an electrical storm. The chain of events surrounding Martin's

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<sup>131</sup> Metz provides historical context for this description, explaining that "[e]xperimentation with the principles of the electric battery dated back to the invention of the Leyden jar (1747), a device for storing static electricity which could then be discharged all at once" (*Companion* 486). Subsequent experiments conducted by scientists "led to a better understanding of electrical current and conductivity and electromagnetic induction"; by the 1840s, the "human body" was thought to be "a good conductor of electricity" (*Companion* 52).

blow and Pecksniff's fall, however, eerily mirror Pecksniff's introductory fall precipitated by the violent Wiltshire wind. Both causal chains begin with an open door, just as in Oliphant's story that I discuss in the fourth chapter, with the door being left open in anticipation of Pecksniff in his final scene, and Pecksniff himself opening it with his entrance into the novel. In response to Old Martin's blows, which knock him to the ground, just as when he is knocked down by the wind-blown door, Pecksniff does not "rise" back up, but can only "stare at" the patriarch, "for the triumph in his face and speech and figure was a sight to stare at" (52.750). Just as his face becomes such a grotesque "spectacle" after his fall from the wind that his daughters cannot "repress" their reaction, here also his look of "disconcerted meekness" is rendered so "enormously ridiculous" that some cannot "repress a smile" in response. The parallels between these repetitive scenes and the interchangeable language between environmental and human characters ultimately positions Pecksniff's downfall as the inevitable effect of the environmental interaction with which his story began. Here too, just as with Jonas, the novel depicts a Babbagean style transmission of motion that presents the novel's environmental-human ecological causality as vehicle for the exposure of truth and the enactment of justice.

Jonas's justice, I argue, is a form of pressurized crushing down, mirroring his stamping and pressing down of Montague's blood in the woods. Pecksniff's, on the other hand, is more like a revolutionary overthrow of a tyrannical ruler, echoing the oppressive acts and words he uses against those under his control. For example, not only do his sanctimonious, hypocritical words have an oppressive effect on others, he also has a pattern of "casting out" those living within "the Pecksniffian halls" as a means of stealing their money or their ideas (*MC* 11.189; 12.190). Pecksniff's pre-figured downfall at the start of the novel makes his end seem inevitable

and reinforces the cycle of oppression and uprising that repeats throughout the natural spaces of the novel. The end's poetic passage describing Pecksniff's fate and continuing relationship with Tom, described at the beginning of this chapter, tells of the way in which the novel's environmental justice system deals with Pecksniff. Pecksniff cannot recognize the repetition and cyclical nature of the world in which he lives; he only listens in the form of eavesdropping to gather information to help him better manipulate others and bend them to his linguistic will. Jonas, on the other hand, can hear the environmental forces stained with the testimony of his foul deeds, and yet he cannot escape his own personal form of Judgment Day. His sins will be read aloud, and he will be held accountable for them.<sup>132</sup>

Dickens's chaotic, comedic transatlantic novel has yet to be fully explored for its Babbagean vision, partly due, perhaps, to the overly narrow lens through which critics have hitherto viewed Babbage's influence on Dickens's writing, with them looking primarily at the paraphrased *Treatise* passage in Dickens's 1869 speech and his more direct references to Babbage himself in his later novels. As I have argued, however, *Martin Chuzzlewit*'s sonic landscape, environmental-human affective ecology, and, most importantly, the novel's system of repetition and exchange which witnesses, – or hears – records, transmits, as well as gives voice to truth, outlines a fictional world which operates both physically and judicially in a way Babbage only hinted at, but that Dickens creatively imagined through his Chuzzlewitian world.

In looking at the ways in which Dickens depicts the novel's primary natural environments – Wiltshire, the Atlantic Ocean, and Eden – and its two villainous characters punished at the end – Pecksniff and Jonas – the novel reveals these motive forces as embroiled

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<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note that Dickens does not tie up Jonas's ending in a simple way. Instead of facing societal justice, Jonas takes his own life, preventing the cycle of oppression then mob retribution to continue in this instance.



within a complex linguistic, emotive, and causal system of exchange, action, and reaction. I argue that this aspect of *Martin Chuzzlewit* was not only directly inspired by Babbage's theory of moral permanence, but that Dickens expanded upon Babbage's ideas: *Chuzzlewit*'s natural elements are more than the static Babbagean archives that collect evidence of human morality so that one day in the distant future, humanity may be divinely judged for their sins; rather, they are dynamic, anthropomorphic forces that are physically and emotionally *moved* by the injustices they witness, commit themselves, or by which they themselves are victimized.

These emotional, motive, natural forces propel and are propelled by the words and actions of the novel's primary villains and the means through which they are finally brought to justice. This system, however, is an ecologically reciprocal one, and the villains are simultaneously affected and moved by these same natural elements that already contain archives of transmitted motion imprinted upon them by a conglomerate of sins committed throughout the environment's human history. Ultimately, I argue that in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens crafts a Babbagean ecological justice system in which violent words and acts are cycled through its fictional environments and converted into truth-voices capable of testifying against the oppression and crimes committed by Pecksniff and Jonas, leading to their eventual downfall. The novel simultaneously reinforces this system's cyclical, transhistorical, and universal facets by depicting *Chuzzlewit*'s environments as already filled with masses of injustices from across time and space, which expands their relevance and impact beyond the scope of the novel and encourages reflection upon perpetually repeating cycles of systemic oppression throughout the world's history.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Motive Force of Will and Global Thought Transmission in Bulwer Lytton's "The Haunted and the Haunters"

Just days away from the start of the nineteenth century, distinguished chemist Sir Humphry Davy awoke from a laughing gas-induced trance to exclaim: "Nothing exists but thoughts! – the universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!" (*Researches* 489).<sup>133</sup> While Davy frequently experimented with nitrous oxide, this time he had inhaled a dose stronger than anyone before him, causing him to first experience an overwhelming sensory overload, followed by a complete sensory deprivation in which state he felt as though he "lost all connections with external things" (488). He was left to exist solely within a mind teeming with new words, images, ideas, and theories – none of which he could recall afterwards. Despite Davy's famous psychological cosmology having been articulated in the wake of a severely inhibited state, his words nonetheless resonated in powerful ways with writers throughout the nineteenth century. Victorian writer and politician Edward Bulwer Lytton was particularly intrigued by Davy's words, even narrating an in-depth analysis of this moment many decades later in his novel *A Strange Story* (1862). The short story that had been the inspiration for that novel, "The Haunted and the Haunters; Or, The House and the Brain," is the primary focus of this chapter.<sup>134</sup> During the analytical scene of *A Strange Story*, two men discuss Davy's

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<sup>133</sup> Davy frequently experimented on himself with various forms of gases. In this experiment with nitrous oxide that Davy conducted on the 26th of December in 1799, he was under the supervision of Dr. Robert Kinglake, although he was still taking an extremely high risk by experimenting with a dose of such quantity that its effects could be lethal.

<sup>134</sup> *A Strange Story* was first serialized in Dickens's *All the Year Round* between August 1861 and March 1862. Bulwer Lytton's most famous novels include *Zanoni* (1842), an occult historical romance, and his pre-science fiction take on the future evolution of the human race, *The Coming Race* (1871). For an in-depth analysis of the philosophical and occult themes in *Zanoni*, see Jeffrey J. Franklin's chapter "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the Representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Victorian Supernaturalism and the Occult* (2016). For more on *The Coming Race*'s engagement with nineteenth-century science and technology, see Iwan Rhys Morus' article "No Mere Dream: Material Culture and Electrical

experiment and subsequent revelation, and make the claim that the drug's psychological effects caused "one of the healthiest of human brains" to turn in on itself and render Davy incapacitated and cut-off from the external world – a state they describe as a "suspension of that reason which comprehends accuracy of judgment" (*Strange* 71.243).<sup>135</sup> The same effect, one of the men argues, could be achieved with more permanent results through "moral causes operating on the blood, or on the nerves," – perhaps the effect of terror when confronted with grotesque, unexplainable images, feelings and sounds like those experienced by the beings within the house of "The Haunters." Their discussion eventually leads to a final "argument" which seems the likely purpose of this narrated analysis of Davy's experience: understanding the way in which ideas are formed is of far lesser importance than the way in which "the capacities to receive ideas are formed" (73.265). After all, it is the ability to receive ideas that both enables one to learn new things and leaves them vulnerable to the effects of outside forces acting upon a susceptible, receiving mind, such as is the case with the impact of the operation of the aforementioned "moral causes." Davy's statement on thought and the universe appears more physiologically suggestive than epistemologically revealing for Bulwer Lytton – a view, I argue, that informs many of his works, including "The Haunted and the Haunters." While this scene from *A Strange Story* is wrapped up in the events of the plot, it is Davy's drug experience and provocative statement which Bulwer Lytton uses to outline an opinion that seems strikingly poignant and reflective of Bulwer Lytton's own beliefs and concerns, most explicitly when viewed in the context of the

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Imagination in Late Victorian Britain" (2015).

<sup>135</sup> The characters in this discussion of *A Strange Story* include the novel's imperfect hero Allen Fenwick, whose intellect is slightly darkened by his adherence to "philosophical materialism," as James L. Campbell describes, and thus a "spiritual reeducation" is required before Fenwick can defeat the villainous Margrave (Campbell 124, 121). The other character in this scene, and the primary speaker, is Fenwick's mentor, Dr. Julius Faber, who, according to Joseph I. Fradin, is the novel's "voice of intelligent, reasoning faith" (Fradin 5).

concerns featured in “The Haunted and the Haunters,” which I discuss at length throughout this chapter.

Published in August of 1859 – just a few months after Bulwer Lytton retired from his position as the United Kingdom’s Secretary of State for the Colonies and a few months before Charles Darwin published his groundbreaking *The Origin of the Species* – “The Haunted and the Haunters” was written at a time in Bulwer Lytton’s life when he was actively thinking about global relations, imperial power, and the potential of a single individual to influence the entirety of the Victorian world through his fictional writing. More specifically, I argue that the story can be read as a staging ground in which Bulwer Lytton acts out concerns related to colonial rule and British foreign policy enforced through the written word. Bulwer Lytton’s preoccupation at this time with invisible, forcible, forms of power and influence can be seen through “The Haunters,” I contend, and my chapter demonstrates how his preoccupation eventually culminates in the creation of a narrative system within this short story. In this system, I argue, Bulwer Lytton explores the extent to which an individual’s will – when exerted with enough force in the form of physical, verbal, and written expression upon those receptive to its impact – is capable of reverberating its influence across time and space throughout the interconnected Victorian world like the ever-widening circle of Babbage’s transmitted motion. Rather than conceiving of this short story, as many other critics do, as a mere prototype or inspiration for *A Strange Story*, I demonstrate how this text contains its own explicit and suggestive narrative system that enables Bulwer Lytton’s Babbagean contemplations about the power of one individual, given enough time, to alter the state of the entire world and those living in it.

I do not wish to argue in this chapter that Bulwer Lytton was directly influenced by Babbage, nor that he intentionally explores the implications of Babbage's ideas in "The Haunted and the Haunters." While there is no evidence to suggest that Bulwer Lytton ever read Babbage's *Treatise*, he most certainly knew of its existence, for in 1838 – the year Babbage published his second edition – he describes *Discourses of Natural Theology* (1835), written by Lord Brougham, as "the *tenth* Bridgewater Treatise," despite its having been published years before Babbage's *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* (Topham 398). In this chapter, I assert that Bulwer Lytton engages in questions that many others were asking by this time, and that in "The Haunters" specifically, Bulwer Lytton imagines a Babbagean-style universe of lingering thoughts that certain individuals with strength of will and scientific knowledge have the power to access. These individuals are not readers of this thought-universe, as Babbage conceived, but rather manipulators of it, with the power to transform remnant thought-matter, through the projection of their immense will, into forces with the power to influence, even physically harm, others from a distance.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the form and controlling mechanism of the haunting in "The Haunted and the Haunters," primarily through the narrator's first-person investigation of it. I describe how Bulwer Lytton's unique haunted house is controlled by a sort of cerebral machine by which an individual human brain possesses the power to transform dormant ideas that remain in the world, dislocated from the people who thought them, into forms of potential and mechanical energy that cause the haunting phenomena. I engage with the text as well as contemporary criticism to demonstrate how Bulwer Lytton combines scientific,

technological, occult, and spiritualist theories, as well as gothic and ghost story generic tropes, to help the reader conceive of such a mechanism.

In the second half of this chapter, I use this discussion of the nature and language of the haunting as a foundation through which to read the story's original, longer ending, which extends beyond the space of the haunted house. In my focus on the final five pages of the original story, which do not appear in the anthologized, shortened version most often published, I highlight Bulwer Lytton's more explicit and direct discussion of the potential power of a single expressed thought on an increasingly interconnected globe. In the original ending of "The Haunted and the Haunters," I assert, Bulwer Lytton crafts a Babbage-like world that actualizes the spatiotemporal transmission, influence, permanence, and malleability of expressed thoughts in a new era of global communication and thought-proliferation. I demonstrate how, following his resignation from the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies, Bulwer Lytton was particularly invested in questions of imperial exchange, colonial governance, and global power when writing "The Haunters." Ultimately, I argue that his original story is about more than a simple haunted house; it provides its Victorian readers with a means through which to imagine the implications of imperceptible influence on a global-scale, challenging them to consider the morality and power of ideas being transmitted throughout Britain, its global empire, and its ever-expanding trade network.

### **A Haunted Transmission System**

The initial plot of "The Haunted and the Haunters" is a typical one. Told through first-person narration, the story opens with the line, "I have discovered a haunted house in the midst

of London.”<sup>136</sup> This unnamed protagonist is a scientifically-minded rationalist motivated by “curiosity” and a “strong desire to examine a house” with a reputation for being haunted, regarding his investigation as an “experiment” (“Haunters” 225, 226).<sup>137</sup> This is not his first paranormal investigation, however, as this man of letters has made a hobby of travelling around the world investigating haunted properties with his trusted manservant.<sup>138</sup> Rather than seeking proof of the existence of the paranormal, the narrator’s goal with these investigations is to debunk the supernatural using physical evidence, scientific explanation, and reason to prove that occurrences thought to be supernatural are simply natural phenomena that humans do not yet have the capacity to explain in the present age.<sup>139</sup> In case of danger, the narrator arms himself with a variety of weapons: a revolver, dagger, and a volume of “Macaulay’s Essays.”<sup>140</sup> The last weapon, in particular, he hopes will “serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy” because it has so much “healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects” (226).<sup>141</sup> He also brings with him a bull-terrier – “a dog of dogs for a ghost” – that is “fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats” (227). Bulwer

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<sup>136</sup> Although there is shortened, revised version of the story, which I will discuss later, all quoted passages will be from the original 1859 version of “The Haunted and the Haunters; Or, the House and the Brain” published in *Blackwood’s Magazine*.

<sup>137</sup> When citing passages from “The Haunted and the Haunters,” I use an abbreviated form of the story’s name, “Haunters.”

<sup>138</sup> His servant seems to have a similar investment in these investigations, given the narrator’s remark to him: “you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition?”; as well as the servant being described as “grinning with delight” after being told of their newest venture (“Haunters” 226).

<sup>139</sup> This concept would not be foreign to Victorian readers; in fact, both Bulwer Lytton and Dickens sought rational explanations for the phenomenon of ghost-seeing and haunted houses in their personal and professional lives.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay was a famous Victorian historian known for writing histories of England in the style of Whig history, or a progressive narrative of English history that glorifies the present over the past. His writing was also well-known for its lucid and clear style.

<sup>141</sup> Indeed, reading this so-called antidote seems to calm the protagonist multiple times throughout the story.

Lytton's choice of a dog here is a revealing one; just as the narrator opts to bring an English book, he also brings an English dog breed to protect him.

Once in the house, the men encounter the usual evidence indicative of a haunting: unexplained footprints that appear out of nowhere, furniture and doors moving without having been touched, and physical sensations of having been struck by an unknown source. In the spirit of a thorough investigation, however, the two men check the house in various ways to make sure they are alone. When they finish their search of the house, they conclude that there is "no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden"; in other words, that no human agency is causing the spectral phenomena ("Haunters" 228). In this conclusion, as the narrator will soon discover, they are wrong; it is in fact a very powerful individual who, although he is physically absent from the house, is remotely powering the haunting through his malignant will and the mediation of an occult device hidden in a secret room beneath the floor.

Throughout the protagonist's stay in the house, he continually feels the "creep of undefinable horror" that he knows will disrupt his "presence of mind," which he repeatedly insists is vital to remain calm in any such investigation ("Haunters" 228, 226). He also makes an important distinction here between horror and fear. Horror, he suggests, is externally imposed although physically and mentally felt; fear, on the other hand, is internally created and thus the greater threat. "[U]nless I fear," he says, "I cannot be harmed," for "my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear" (232). He therefore directly links fear to "bodily peril" (233). This fear is not depicted as an internal emotion, but as "atmospher[ic]"; it is a "venomous influence hostile to human life" that feels to the protagonist as if it were "some strange and ghastly exhalation...rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor" (228). This coldness, he



clarifies later, is “not the cold caused by fear” but experienced and felt as “more purely physical”; in other words, affective (231). In addition to temperature, the atmospheric force also manifests presence through alternating darkness with various colors of moving lights as well as by “sensibly” vibrating the entire room (232). Various human-like forms also appear that blur life-death boundaries, described as being “distinct as a shape of life—ghastly as a shape of death.”<sup>142</sup> Bulwer Lytton’s version of spectrality, as evidenced in such a passage, is vague and indefinable in its language and form – a technique I discuss in further detail. At the beginning of the haunting events of “The Haunted and the Haunters,” Bulwer Lytton uses clichés of the Victorian ghost story genre, which seem oddly tied to specific locations in the house. For example, the footprints of a child suddenly appear, which seem to be walking, along the “damp” pathway in the enclosed backyard, but stop when the characters themselves moved off the pavement (227).<sup>143</sup> In the drawing room on the ground floor of the house, a chair moves by itself, and the narrator catches a vague glimpse of a “pale blue misty outline of a human figure” seated on it. The phenomena again cease when the characters move upstairs to the bedrooms.

Critics who focus primarily on the gothic elements of the story typically read the physical setting of the novel as the haunting’s source – interpretations supported by its location-specific

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<sup>142</sup> Bruce Wyse argues that in this scene, Bulwer Lytton “forges a rather hallucinogenic horror” “[b]y insisting on the mutable and metamorphic nature of the manifestations, and the interplay of the indefinite and the tangible, the uncertain and the unavoidable, and by synesthetically rendering the protagonist’s experience, interweaving visual, aural, and tactile impressions, physical sensations, and what is referred to as the ‘moral’ dimension of experience” (38). Wyse’s language here describes the destabilizing, disorienting effect of the uncanny transmission system that Bulwer Lytton constructs in this story, the human force behind which I discuss later in this section.

<sup>143</sup> The ground-floor drawing rooms are similarly described as “so damp and so chilly” (“Haunters” 228). In her argument about the influence of setting on Dickens’s “The Signalman,” Betsy van Schlun describes how “[d]ampness, it has been noted in Bulwer-Lytton’s ‘The Haunted and the Haunters,’ is a good conductor and often implied an electrically charged atmosphere, necessary for the ghostly phenomena that will occur” (280-81). Schlun further notes the important connection Victorians made between “dampness” and “an unfriendly” and ‘unhealthy’ climate” (281).

phenomena as well as the story's subtitle: "The House and the Brain."<sup>144</sup> Ilse M. Bussing, for example, in "The Victorian Haunted House as a Space of Seduction" (2012), describes how in the nineteenth century, "domesticity and family life" were increasingly seen "as the building blocks of British industrialist and imperialist society"; thus, the Victorian ghost story's relocation of gothic hauntings from the isolated castle of the traditional Gothic to the center of domestic life, Bussing argues, transforms the "Victorian home" into more than "merely a setting for supernatural activity – it is the protagonist" (119).<sup>145</sup> Given this context, she reads the house of Bulwer Lytton's short story as the haunter – the antihero – that actively seduces its inhabitants.<sup>146</sup> Mark Knight, in his article "'The Haunted and the Haunters': Bulwer Lytton's Philosophical Ghost Story" (2006), reads the haunted house through the lens of materialism and idealism, subject and object. He identifies subtle alterations in the language of Bulwer Lytton's story that challenge Bussing's interpretation of the house as a protagonist. He notes that initially, the "narrator...begins with the assumption that the house is an object," but "after hearing about the experiences of the owner, his understanding changes, which is why he shifts the focus of his questions, asking: 'How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character'" (251). While

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<sup>144</sup> Marie Mulvey-Roberts, however, in her article "Fame, Notoriety and Madness: Edward Bulwer-Lytton Paying the Price of Greatness" (2001), links Bulwer's interest in haunted houses at this specific time in his life to his relationship with his wife. "[W]ritten a year after Rosina had been released from the asylum," Mulvey-Roberts notes the "[un]surprising" parallels between the "terror" in "The Haunted and the Haunters" "generated by a haunted house, which guards a criminal secret" and his own domestic nightmare (126-27). She further argues that "[f]or the Victorians, [madness] represented the most private of inner terrors and usually remained the most concealed of domestic secrets," and for "both Bulwer and Rosina," specifically, "[m]adness became a fulcrum for fame and notoriety" – "a miasma, which infected fame with notoriety" (122-23).

<sup>145</sup> Bussing primarily views nineteenth-century haunted house stories in the context of eighteenth-century Gothic conventions, noting how in the traditional Gothic, "medieval architectural sites were crucial elements of setting" and typically highlighted "issues of excess and transgression" (119). In the Victorian Gothic, she argues that the "house...replaces the castle." Bussing claims that such a "choice" for haunted settings demands "new aesthetic and theoretical considerations."

<sup>146</sup> Ultimately, Bussing claims the more active role of the nineteenth-century gothic setting "reflects anxieties" about the increasing extent to which what happened inside the home could impact the world outside of it (119).

this would suggest that the narrator, too, begins to think of the character as an anthropomorphic subject, Knight argues that this opinion changes the longer he remains in the house. The narrator, he contends, eventually discovers that, “it is not so much that an object (i.e. the house) has acquired a personality, but that the narrator has begun to recognize how all perception is rooted in and relates to the mind.”<sup>147</sup> While Bussing interprets the haunted house as an active subject, Knight reads it as an object perceived as a subject by those who inhabit it; both exemplify the type of scholarship surrounding the nature of the physical house in “The Haunters.”

While readings of the story such as Bussing’s and Knight’s effectively highlight the complex power dynamics and subjectivity at play in the novel, even between animate and traditionally inanimate entities, they neglect to account for Bulwer Lytton’s active resistance to the haunted house genre and even to characterizing the house itself as haunted, despite the story’s title implicitly reinforcing this association. The narrator does begin the story by excitedly saying, “I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London,” and shortly thereafter he explains that he knew of the house because of its “haunted” reputation (“Haunters” 224, 225). From the moment the protagonist enters the house, however, it is never again referred to as haunted, nor are any of its internal features. Both Bussing and Knight do acknowledge the complications that arise once the narrator discovers that the spectral phenomena are occurring within the house because of a human volition controlling the events from a distance using a combination of science and force of will. The house is simply a space within which intangible

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<sup>147</sup> This reading connects Bulwer Lytton’s story with the psychological ghost story genre often associated with Charles Dickens. Others such as Mulvey-Roberts, due to such aspects as the nature of this haunted house, categorize the story as a hybrid form of both the “domestic Gothic,” which featured what Bulwer Lytton “regarded as the absorbing tyranny of everyday life” and his “more transcendent, metaphysical Gothic” which “looked forward to a time when the paranormal becomes explainable” (“Edward Bulwer-Lytton” 88).

entities move, interact, and transform at the behest of a distant malicious will whose power is nevertheless always felt, much like an imperial ruler or tyrant. The house is neutral and appears like a Babbagean atmosphere filled with residual thoughts of the past put in motion by human agency, or like one of Dickens's Chuzzlewitian environments filled with motive forces caught in perpetual power struggles and cycles of oppression. These intertextual parallels become more pronounced in Bulwer Lytton's depiction of the phenomena that occur within the house.

The haunting entities themselves do appear to linger somewhere between subject and object due to their vague appearance to the protagonist. For example, Bulwer Lytton stresses the ambiguity of the first signs of the supernatural by describing how the "impression" of the footprint, which "suddenly formed itself" in front of them, "was too faint" for the narrator to "thoroughly...distinguish the shape" ("Haunters" 227); and the "pale blue misty outline of a human figure" seen in the drawing room is similarly described by the narrator as "an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision." These presences do become clearer and more tangible to the narrator, but even then they remain within the liminal space between subject and objects, becoming uncanny or grotesque in ways that are conducive to the gothic and haunted house genres.

It is at this time in the text that the haunting phenomena also become more abundant, chaotic, and unconventional. After the chair moves and the faint spectral presence appears on it, the servant attempts to move the chair back to its original spot, and he feels as though he has been "struck sharply on the shoulder" ("Haunters" 227). The chair, the misty figure, and the shoulder injury, the narrator later learns, – when the phantoms appear more distinctly and comprehensibly to play out scenes from their lives and deaths – that they are the "mistress" and

“rival” of a jealous eighteenth-century “charlatan” who had committed this “double murder within his own house” – the same London house of the story (239). When the misty figure “gr[o]ws” “as forth from the chair” and more fully materializes, becoming “distinct as a shape of life – ghastly as a shape of death,” she is revealed to be the mistress with “a strange mournful beauty” and “long yellow hair” who regards the door expectantly, “listening, watching, waiting” (232-23). “As if from the door, though it did not open,” the rival grows into an “equally distinct, equally ghastly” shape (233). In a moment that utilizes gothic, uncanny terms, the narrator finds in the figures “something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between” their material yet immaterial presence – the anachronistic “finery” of their eighteenth-century “courtly” dress, and their “corpse-like aspect and ghost-like stillness.”<sup>148</sup>

While the narrator finds the presence of these phantasms uncomfortable, it is their lack of materiality and tangibility that he finds most unsettling; his attempt to describe the immateriality of their form is what many modern scholars of the story have found highly evocative. Bulwer Lytton depicts the nature of their spectral form as highly disturbing to the narrator in a passage

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<sup>148</sup> Despite the story’s use of certain gothic and Victorian ghost story tropes, many critics emphasize the ways in which it departs from such genres. Wyse, for example, argues that Bulwer Lytton shows “an exasperating indifference to conventional narrative concerns” typically featured in “a fictional rendering...of an investigation into site-specific supernatural phenomena” such as the “key narrative elements (the ‘who’ as well as the ‘what’ and ‘where’) and a meaningful, causal relation of those elements (the ‘why’ as well as the ‘how’)” (33). For Wyse, the story’s supernatural investigation lacks the discovery of the meaningful causality and connection typical of the Victorian ghost story genre. The past of the ghostly human figures, for example, – an aspect typically of great importance to works in this genre – is of little importance to the overall story, and Bulwer Lytton’s protagonist does not need to reveal any secrets of their history or communicate with them in any way to remove their presence from the house.

Wyse simultaneously uses a post-structuralist lens to examine the story’s emphasis on the “processes” of “spectral manifestation,” rather than the manifestations themselves (38). To do this, Wyse draws from twentieth-century theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard as well as the socio-psychological concept of “construal,” defined by *OED* as the “act of construing or interpreting” (“Construal, *N*”). For Wyse, therefore, interprets the ghostly figures are mere byproducts of the haunting, not the root cause of them: “The narrator in Bulwer-Lytton’s story not only devalues the referential past of the recycled phantom traces, but stresses the randomness and the inconsequentiality of the epiphenomena (or texts)” (53).

frequently quoted by contemporary critics: “both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable—simulacra—phantasms” (“Haunters” 233). Bulwer Lytton’s use of the word “simulacra” in describing the form of the figures that appear during the haunting phenomena has led critics such as Bruce Wyse to read the story as not only departing from narrative conventions, but ahead of its time, even postmodern, in various ways.<sup>149</sup> In one of the most extensive examinations of the story, entitled “Mesmeric Machinery, Textual Production and Simulacra in Bulwer-Lytton’s ‘The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain’” (2004), Wyse argues that the language Bulwer Lytton uses to describe the spectral forms – namely the word “simulacra” – signals his “encoding” of “a reflection on the production of mass culture” that “anticipates the coming order of simulation and consumerism” that would come to define the postmodern era” (52).<sup>150</sup> In other words, Wyse reads the story as commentary not only on commodity culture more generally, but also on its own artificial construction – a carefully crafted literary haunting that reflects on its own fictionality. I add that Bulwer Lytton further engages in the type of self-aware, constructed discourse that Wyse describes through the actual force behind the phenomena – a human being who intentionally manipulates the action within the house to best suit his own purposes. This person also does not seem to produce any spectacles without active witnesses who, upon entering the property, perform a buying in to the facade rather than trying to understand the mechanisms at work behind the products with which they are presented. It is the story’s protagonist, it seems, that is the only one who succeeds in

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<sup>149</sup> Although simulacrum can be material in nature, Bulwer Lytton is most likely using the term to mean “[s]omething having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities” (“Simulacrum, *N*,” *OED*).

<sup>150</sup> Wyse also reads the story’s author figure – the villain behind the haunting – as simulacra for numerous other Victorian metaphors, including the increasingly middle-class readership. He ultimately argues for “a reading of the text as meta-gothic, meta-fictional, and ultimately self-reflexive” (33).

opting out of the story's forced commodity culture to discover that behind the finished products – the spectres – are laboring forces that direct their production – the human agent that controls the entire operation from afar, and the occult device hidden within the house that, like a foreman, helps to facilitate the haunting's day-to-day activities.

More important and unique than the haunting in the story, therefore, as the narrator discovers, are the mechanisms which power them. Rather than the ghosts themselves being the driving force of the haunting, as is typical of the Victorian ghost story genre, instead, the specters are propelled by an outside force: a living individual's will. As the narrator increasingly discovers throughout the story, the haunting is controlled by a distant individual's powerful will that transmits its force remotely – a type of ability that Neil Cornwell describes as “remote telepathy” (74).<sup>151</sup> With the help of the occult device located in a hidden room, the human will is able to “set matter into movement” “by Will and by Science,” or put into motion the malignant thought matter once expressed by the now-deceased occupants of the house, which linger throughout the enclosed atmosphere of the house and become transform into immaterial forms of power capable of remotely connecting with the type of impressionable, corruptible, receiving mind that Bulwer Lytton describes in his discussion of Davy in *A Strange Story* (“Haunters” 236, 243).

The villain's remote, disembodied will-force is not something that appears clearly to the narrator. He was able to watch and hear the haunting specters with relative ease; it is only when the narrator feels a mysterious, yet powerful force attempting to overpower his own will that he

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<sup>151</sup> Wyse, however, remaining consistent with his argument about commodity culture, describes the haunting mechanism as a “house-brain-machine” that “serially produces spectral objects which, thought different in detail, are equivalent in over-all function or effect: haunting” (52).

feels mentally and physically threatened. When he first senses this force, he describes it according to how it makes him feel:

I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition; – that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond men’s, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting...the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of man. (“Haunters” 232)

This passage signals Bulwer Lytton’s concern with toxic moral influence and the importance of maintaining strength of character, rather than on physical threats. The fact that the narrator loses his ability to speak during the several encounters with this power, – variously described as the “shadow,” the “darkness,” the “Thing,” and similarly non-descript names – yet maintains his “pride” in the face of this “horror,” reinforces this element of Bulwer Lytton’s story as emphasizing moral fortitude.<sup>152</sup> With its emphasis on an oppositional moral force acting upon another, this passage connects with Bulwer Lytton’s discussion of Davy’s nitrous-oxide experience, with its focus on the effects of a moral threat on the mind and body of the

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<sup>152</sup> In his description of the “impression” that the shadowy “Power” has on his will, David Punter, in *The Literature of Terror*, argues that Bulwer Lytton “does not make the mistake of trying to describe the form itself; he chooses rather to heighten its impact by leaving it vague and amorphous while closely specifying the developing feelings which it arouses” (148). Maria Teresa Chialant, in an essay on uncanny, monstrous objects in Victorian literature, argues that by having this vague force take on “so many different shapes that the narrator cannot define it by any other term but ‘the Thing,’” Bulwer Lytton “gives the monster as a formless thing its most uncanny representation” in this story (220). Although, like Bussing, Chialant similarly examines gothic elements of the text; her focus, however, is on the uncanny, monstrous “Thing” in the story. In this, she joins the cultural studies turn to Thing Theory and Object Studies of recent years. Thing theory, most famously detailed by Bill Brown in *Thing Theory* (2001), has become of interest to Victorian scholars, most notably in their interest in nineteenth-century commodity culture, and what Elaine Freedgood in *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006) calls “thing culture” (8). Prominent works in Victorian thing culture include Asa Briggs’s *Victorian Things* (1988) and Katharina Boehm’s *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (2012).



protagonist. The terrifying abstractness of the will force behind the specters is also in stark contrast with the clarity of the ending of the original version of the story. As Wyse notes, “the final section of the original text brings into view a gothic villain who is only postulated in the first section of the story” (34). The fascinating meeting and conversation of the narrator with the man whose will manifests as the shadowy power is a topic I discuss at length in the final section.

After the willful shadow appears in the room, the specters transform into non-human shapes that we later learn are the immoral thoughts of the living – who are now deceased – that have been imprinted on the haunted space. David Huckvale, in his book *A Dark and Stormy Oeuvre: Crime, Magic and Power in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (2016), argues that in its depiction of thought permanence, “The Haunters” anticipates twentieth-century theories related to sound recording and the supernatural – specifically the “stone tape theory” of the 1970s – by “suggesting that echoes of the past, somehow imprinted onto the fabric of the house, are triggered by this controlling intelligence” (191). Although the “stone tape theory” to which Huckvale refers, or “the notion that physical objects acquire a psychic or electromagnetic residue,” was not formalized until over a hundred years after Bulwer Lytton wrote “The Haunters,” Jeb J. Card explains, in *Spooky Archaeology: Myth and the Science of the Past* (2018), that such a concept would not have been entirely unfamiliar to earlier Victorian spiritualists and occultists, and therefore the association is not entirely anachronistic (64).<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> According to Card, “The phrase [‘stone tape’] derives from the 1972 television film *The Stone Tape*, which features archaeological imagery and is likely based on the writings of T. C. Lethbridge” (64). This theory also maintained “that materials such as rock could store and replay energy or ‘hauntings’ for those with psychic sensitivity” (Card 69). These rocks were sometimes specified as quartz and limestone, likely due to the mystical properties associated with quartz, and the soft, impressionable physical quality of limestone.

To describe these new shapes, Bulwer Lytton does not draw from occult science or spiritualism; rather, he utilizes contemporary scientific language with which his Victorian readers would have been familiar. He tinges science, I argue, with a gothic uncanniness in his descriptions of the strange forms, changes, and motions that the residual thought matter – having been put into motion by the shadowy will – undergoes throughout the atmosphere of the house. Amidst the narrator's experience of the eerie phenomenon in the house, for example, Bulwer Lytton has the protagonist describe how the "bubbles of light" he sees moving about the room – presumably the form of the original thought matter – transforms as new forms grow out of them, as if more monstrous, chaotic, toxic thoughts have grown out of the original immoral thoughts remaining in the space ("Haunters" 233). He does this not through vague language, but by using a direct appeal to his readers, encouraging them to imagine what the narrator sees with scientific analogy:

from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them; larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water – things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other – forms like nought ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings.

Bulwer Lytton's description of chaotic, reproductive, and uncanny nature in this passage resembles Dickens's environments of *Chuzzlewit*: the grotesque growth of the globules' offspring is reminiscent of the "vile and ugly things" that spring from Eden's "hideous swamp" "teem[ing] with deadly properties" (*MC* 23.360; 33.501); the larvae's circularity of movement resembles Wiltshire's leaves which are continually forced by the wind to "whirl" and "eddy" "round and round," even resorting to "rolling over each other" (*MC* 2.20); and, finally, the general lack of order of movement and symmetry of form could easily be described like the Dickensian Atlantic, for its "incessant change of place, and form, and hue; constancy in nothing but eternal strife," makes the "whole scene" an image of "whirling madness" (*MC* 15.241, 240). The similarities in these two writers' depictions of environmental chaos, therefore, suggests that such images were powerfully provocative, relatable, and precisely *unnatural* for their Victorian readers.

In this passage, I argue, Bulwer Lytton also explicitly draws from language evocative of the Victorian science of microbiology as a means of providing readers with a more tangible, sensory image amidst all the vagueness and impalpability of his earlier specters.<sup>154</sup> This more descriptive, clearer scientific description highlights the breeding and degenerative processes occurring, growing from immoral thought matter that was made motive and influential by an external individual will. Bulwer Lytton's reference to the "solar microscope" is fitting for his popular readership of the time, for it was known to reveal that which was previously unseeable for Victorians; it also stimulated their imaginations about what else could exist in the world just beyond the senses, and what kinds of unseen reproductive processes immorality could engender

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<sup>154</sup> Although Punter offers a different reading, claiming that here Bulwer Lytton "locates his image by suggesting the analogy with the bloodstream," he does not offer additional support for his observation (45).

– something Bulwer Lytton seems eager to highlight with his story.<sup>155</sup> A related aspect of Bulwer Lytton’s appeal to science here and elsewhere also has an important narrative function, for it is often used to help reinforce the story’s demonstration of the power of reason and logic over superstition and irrationality – after all, the narrator’s servant flees and his dog actually dies because both allow their fear to overtake them.<sup>156</sup> Bussing argues that the narrator’s rational

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<sup>155</sup> As Barbara Maria Stafford describes in *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (2001), “during the latter part of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century the solar microscope was a visual tool that helped to educate the public at large about scientific principles such as cellular structure, microorganisms, and the circulation of blood” (219). She explains the power of this microscope for a nineteenth-century audience by describing how its ability to create “enlarged – and sometimes animated – projections” of that which was previously unseen by the human eye “encouraged the thinking mind to form new and much more detailed images of the world.” Stafford further speculates that due to this specific impact, “this device and the shows it inspired are partially responsible for the dominant place now held by visual communication.” Despite his readers’ probable familiarity with that specific microscope, however, Bulwer Lytton’s reference to it was likely an outdated one; as Stafford notes, even by the early nineteenth century, “the popularity of the solar microscope [had] waned.” Bulwer Lytton’s interest in science and his attempts at using scientific explanation in his fiction have been well-documented.

<sup>156</sup> The correlations between the narrator’s and Bulwer Lytton’s beliefs are undeniable, leading critics such as Wyse to describe the protagonist as “Bulwer-Lytton’s surrogate” (38). Countless critics, therefore, have read the story in relation to Bulwer Lytton’s support of rationalism. Andrew Brown, for example, claims that “one of Bulwer’s most strongly held convictions” was “[t]hat natural science might, if properly directed, explain phenomena which were generally thought of as supernatural” (180n67). The importance of rational, logical thinking to Bulwer Lytton is also stressed by other critics such as Richard Kelly, who, in his article on “The Haunted House of Bulwer Lytton” (1971), who describes this unique story as coming “within the boundaries of the believable” due to Bulwer Lytton’s effort, via his narrator, “to rationalize” the “supernatural phenomena of the house...in terms of animal magnetism and the new science of electricity” (587). Charles E. May, in his entry on “Short Fiction in the Late Nineteenth Century: 1840-1880” in *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Literature* (2022), similarly describes “The Haunted and the Haunters” as “a ghost story with a ratiocinative twist” (May sect. 5, par. 7).

Most critics, however, contextualize Bulwer Lytton’s scientific explanations within the growing arena of mid-nineteenth-century occult pseudo-science. Huckvale, for example, echoes Brown’s description of Bulwer Lytton as a proponent of naturalizing the supernatural, however, he frames it with the occult: Bulwer Lytton argued that “the occult was not supernatural, but the unknown-natural,” Huckvale claims, adding that “[t]he word ‘occult,’ after all, merely means ‘hidden’” (3). Huckvale ultimately argues the story’s rationalizing of the supernatural actually “takes the traditional ghost story to a new level of what one might term occult reasoning” in its explanation that the spectral phenomena “are, in fact, psychic emanations from a controlling and still living Will” (190). Jessica Webb also describes “The Haunted” within the context of occult science, claiming that the “focus” of the story is “what [Bulwer Lytton] considered to be the scientific magnetic spheres of the spirit world” (186). Webb briefly compares “The Haunted and the Haunters” to Dickens’s “The Haunted House,” – published a few months after Bulwer Lytton’s story – noting how Dickens’s tale similarly “documents the narrator’s experiences in a reputedly ghostly home” and “concludes with the triumph of rational thinking over superstition” (98). While Webb comments on “Bulwer Lytton’s repeated emphasis on scientific explanation,” particularly in “The Haunted and the Haunters,” however, she seems to contradict herself shortly afterwards by describing Bulwer Lytton’s “attempt at pseudo-scientific reasoning” in the story as merely “half-hearted” (67, 82). Robert Lee Wolff’s *Strange Stories: Explorations in Victorian Fiction – The Occult and the Neurotic* (1971) is also a rich resource for criticism on Bulwer Lytton’s scientific approach to the occult.

thinking and interest in discovery ultimately prevents him from taking the darker path of that the semi-immortal villain – the actual human behind the controlling will – had to take in his quest for control, even when it came to delaying his own death. Bussing writes: “In ‘The Haunted,’ the protagonist is undoubtedly fascinated by his double’s mental abilities, and is only able to resist the desire to become this gifted but evil double because of his interest in ‘solving’ the haunted mystery of the house” (127). Although countless scholars have criticized the story’s lack of concern with conventional components of storytelling, Bulwer Lytton’s emphasis on his protagonist’s fight to retain control over his mind and body, even in the face of supernatural-seeming spectacles and powerful pressures exerted upon him by a disembodied moral force, suggests that Bulwer Lytton never intended this to be a traditional Victorian ghost story. Instead, I propose that “The Haunters” is precisely what it was intended to be: a narrative portrayal of the successful use of reason, logic, will, and volition when presented with sights, sounds, sensations and external forces that appear beyond the laws of nature; in other words, it is a Babbage-like treatise that uses the generic guise of the Victorian ghost story to present an argument in favor of rationalism over empiricism for a fiction-reading Victorian public.

Later in the story, the narrator again encounters the powerful will-force, but this time he actively fights against its influence, leading to a brief battle of wills in the middle of the chaotic matter moving about the room. The narrator describes how he simultaneously “concentred all [his] faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will” and “turned [his] sight from the shadow” from which “strange,” “malignant, serpent eyes” had grown (“Haunters” 233).<sup>157</sup> It is in those eyes that the narrator “was aware that there was a WILL, and a will of intense, creative,

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<sup>157</sup> By “concentred,” Bulwer Lytton appears to mean “[t]o cause to be concentrated (*in* a person, thing, or place), esp. with a resultant increase in intensity or power” (“Concentre | Concenter, V,” *OED*).

working evil, which might crush down [his] own.” With this combination of focused resistance against an opposing will and the ending of all eye contact with the shadow’s manifested “serpent eyes,” the narrator is finally able to end the spectral phenomena and send the shadow back into the darkness. The chaotic haunting phenomena do not end at once, however; instead, they repeat in reverse order before being consumed by darkness:

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvae grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks: and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned. (233-34)

The day after the strange phenomena disappear, the narrator theorizes that they are controlled by a “remote originator,” or “that they originate in some brain now far distant” that is “malignant and destructive,” and possesses an “immense power” to “set matter into movement” (236).

Bulwer Lytton’s story, in other words, presents imprinted thought-matter similar to Babbage’s morally stained atoms that are preserved and mobile in the atmosphere; in Bulwer Lytton’s fictional version of a Babbagean system, the movement and influence of the agency-stained atoms are controlled by an active, working will which direct their operations from a distance. Importantly, the narrator believes that this remote brain is not conscious of the specific ways he is impacting this London house, and has “no distinct volition in anything that occurred”; rather, the haunting is simply a byproduct of the brain’s power and malignancy – “its devious, motley, every-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance.” This is the theory that sustains the later,

shortened version of the story, but, as I discuss in the next section, the original, longer ending eventually problematizes the narrator's speculations about the degree of intention and action of this disembodied, malignant will when he meets the man behind it in person and finds that his lust for power and desire for destruction suggests otherwise.

### **A Babbagean Global Transmission System**

In a preface to an 1864 publication of *A Strange Story* that also included "The Haunted and the Hunters" after the lengthy novel, Bulwer Lytton announces that he has made alterations to his original short story, which include his deletion of the final five pages.<sup>158</sup> His explanation for this revision is brief and vague: "A portion of it then published is now suppressed, because encroaching too much on the main plot of the 'Strange Story'" (325). Bulwer Lytton does not specify what aspects of the story's ending he felt were overly similar, leaving readers and critics alike to speculate as to what he might have meant.<sup>159</sup> In this final section of the chapter, I focus on the original 1859 ending, highlighting how its removal drastically changes the message, focus, and Babbagean vision of the story as a whole.<sup>160</sup>

In both versions of the ending, the narrator finally discovers the cause of the mysterious haunting – an occult compass hidden within a secret room beneath the floorboards that utilizes various chemical and geological materials to activate a device capable of disturbing the

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<sup>158</sup> In preparation for this publication, Bulwer Lytton had already published the shortened version of "The Hunters" in *Tales from Blackwood's* in 1861, and it is this version that he and countless others would republish and anthologize from that point forward.

<sup>159</sup> The villains of "The Hunters" and *A Strange Story* are vaguely similar, being both semi-immortal and driven by ego and power, but drastically different in most other ways. Most critics assign this as the motivation behind Bulwer Lytton's deletion of the 1859 ending, perhaps because of he worried that their similarities would be on display when included in the same publication.

<sup>160</sup> Ultimately, Bulwer Lytton cut out one-fourth of the story for the later version when he deleted five and a half of the original's twenty-one pages.

inhabitants of the house. On it, is written a command “inscribed in old monkish Latin”: “On all that it can reach within these walls – sentient or inanimate, living or dead – as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein” (“Haunters” 239). The narrator and the landlord of the house proceed to exorcise, in a sense, the specters and moving thought matter by breaking the compass, thereby neutralizing the toxic chemical compound, and demolishing the hidden room. The shorter, anthologized version of the story ends with the complete destruction of the hidden room and its malignant instrument, and the readers are left with a happy image of restoration and peace: the landlord is able to “let” the house “to advantage” and “his tenants have made no complaints,” for “a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London” (240). The lasting message of the revised version is the importance of eradicating the sins of the past through the physical and psychological destruction of matter or property that still retains their faint imprints, suggesting that present and future stability depends upon a removal of the past.

The original ending continues on, extending beyond the confines of the haunted house to explore the global dimensions of Bulwer Lytton’s Babbagean ecology that have powerful implications for his Victorian readers. It in no way offers an image of resolution or stability; in fact, it implies that there is no way to escape the past, even through the destruction of property that retains a residual connection to it – an idea more fully explored in Margaret Oliphant’s “The Open Door” (1882), as I discuss in the next chapter. The final pages of the original “The Haunters” generate more questions than answers, and even the villain escapes in the end to an unknown place after defeating the narrator in one final battle of wills, leaving open the possibility for the villain to spread his toxic influence throughout the nineteenth-century world.



In the original 1859 ending of “The Haunters,” the villain – who we learn currently goes by the name Mr. Richards – and the still-unnamed narrator unexpectedly meet at a London club and have a compelling conversation about will-power, thought transmission, and an individual’s potential to gradually change entire populations throughout time and space with just the power of their thoughts. Throughout this encounter, Mr. Richards – confirmed to be the source of the haunting – is described as a man of ambiguous ethnicity and nationality with “serpent eyes” who belongs to a Rosicrucian society and, presumably, has discovered the secret to eternal life. The conversation between the narrator and Mr. Richards is not about the key to immortality, as one might expect; rather, they discuss the global diffusion, influence, and permanence of thoughts. This conversation, which takes up most of the original story’s final pages, is extremely evocative and telling of the story’s more explicit focus not on the powers at work in and mechanisms behind the isolated haunted London house, but on the larger implications and potential of such a power to proliferate immortality throughout the ever-expanding British world in the form of the written word. The first question the narrator asks Richards is “[t]o what extent human will in certain temperaments can extend” (“Haunters” 240). Richards responds to the narrator by alternately asking, “[t]o what extent can thought extend? Think, and before you draw breath you are in China!” (241). Richards’s revision of the question, his replacing “will” with “thought,” redirects the reader’s association from occult science and super-human abilities such as mesmerism, to the imagination and its ability to powerfully extend the mind. Mr. Richard’s restatement also equates the human will with imaginative thought – an association that, I argue, imbues thought with power and agency – a notion that the narrator has thus far rejected in his earlier theories.

The narrator does not want to discuss the transportive capacity of imaginative thought; rather, he desires to know about the power of transmitted thoughts to influence those across national – even continental – boundaries. He thus responds to Mr. Richards by arguing, “True. But my thought has no power in China” (“Haunters” 241). Acquiescing to the narrator’s implied wishes, to know about thought power, rather than the power of the imagination, Mr. Richards’s response redirects the conversation from the power of a global imagination to the global power of expressed thought – a direction that the story maintains until the end:

Give it expression, and it may have: you may write down a thought which, sooner or later, may alter the whole condition of China. What is a law but a thought? Therefore thought is infinite – therefore thought has power; not in proportion to its value – a bad thought may make a bad law as potent as a good thought can make a good one.

Here Richards considers the impact of a single thought on the entirety of a nation with one of the largest populations in the world. This passage is vital to Bulwer Lytton’s original message of his 1859 story. It is not necessarily the thought itself which has power, as in telepathy, but the written “expression” of a thought, which can echo throughout space and time, “alter[ing]” and shaping the minds of entire nations, even on the opposite side of the globe. Bulwer Lytton’s depiction of thought transmission and slow causality bears a striking resemblance to Babbage’s sound permanence – and Dickens’s reiteration of Babbage’s theory in his 1869 speech. It could also be read as an embodiment of the slow causation discussed in this dissertation’s introduction: that a single expressed thought can ripple outward and echo throughout “infinite” space and time.

It is also significant that Richards's focus here is not on literary thought, as one might expect in Bulwer Lytton, but on law; the epistemological question is, for Richards, simultaneously one of global jurisprudence. With his choice of China specifically, Bulwer Lytton strongly evokes ideas associated with the British Empire and colonial law due to the conflict with China at this time – the Arrow War or the Second Opium War (1857-60) – which, on the surface, had begun because of a trivial dispute over naval law and “an alleged insult to the British flag,” as J. Y Wong puts it, but would end with immense economic, political, and imperial consequences for nations across the world. Bulwer Lytton's thoughts about this colonial war were relatively unique among his fellow Victorians. In a letter written in April of 1857 to the editors of *Blackwood's Magazine* updating them on his writing progress for the novel *What Will He Do With It?* (1858), Bulwer Lytton makes the following statement before concluding the letter: “China is to be a prolonged & mighty business – with the intent of opening that empire to Europe: – I doubt at present the alternate success and benefit of such enterprise” (*Letters* 164).<sup>161</sup>

In regards to Bulwer Lytton's imperial philosophy more generally, Leslie Mitchell argues, in *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (2003), that he believed that “a severe pragmatism had to govern colonial policy. New colonies should not be established unless the consequences were clear and beneficial” (211). He was for that reason against the government's aggressive attempts to open China to foreign trade because he believed them to be

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<sup>161</sup> Although Bulwer Lytton held China in higher regard than many other nations around the world, he was not without his own biases. In fact, an image he repeatedly returns to is the Chinese version of a world map, in which China was central and took up an overwhelming majority of the space, while everything else merely lays insignificantly on its edges. In texts throughout his life – including letters, novels, and speeches – Bulwer Lytton uses the Chinese map as a symbol of egoism, conceit, close-mindedness, self-centeredness, and backwardness.

both recklessly short-sighted and the result of the prime minister's underhanded agenda to further colonize the region.

The concept presented in "The Haunted and the Haunters," – that a single thought of a single person can be crystalized into international laws leading to global conflicts with long-lasting, unpredictable consequences – is one Bulwer Lytton took seriously when considering Britain's imperial actions even before he was asked to become an official cabinet member. The same passage in the conversation between the narrator and Mr. Richards also brings up the notion of colonial law, which Britain had much more command over, and the way in which laws empowered a heavy-handed style of colonial rule – resembling a despotic, authoritarian mode of governing. Such tyrannical imperial control could impact an entire population and foment hatred that could grow into uprisings and mutinies, which, for Bulwer Lytton, the violence in India in 1857 exemplified.<sup>162</sup> In this intellectual exchange, Bulwer Lytton most explicitly reveals how his theory of thought-forms is deeply connected with his ideas about global jurisprudence and his philosophy of imperial law.

Bulwer Lytton's own relationship to colonial governance at the time is significant as well in this regard. At the beginning of the summer of 1859, Bulwer Lytton had just stepped down as the Secretary of State for the Colonies of the United Kingdom, then began work on "The Haunted and the Haunters," which was published the following August. Critics have yet to ask why Bulwer Lytton chose to write this short story immediately after retiring from a position in which his primary job was to concern himself with Britain's productive, positive communication

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<sup>162</sup> Here I am referring to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which the British government dates from 10 May 1857 to 8 July 1859 – a month before the publication of "The Haunted and the Haunters." This conflict has various names even today, from the Sepoy Mutiny to the First Indian War of Independence, highlighting that imperial tensions continue to persist into the twenty-first century.

with and governance of the colonies of the British Empire. Although he primarily concerned himself with the colonies of British North America during his time as Secretary of the Colonies, his outspokenness about his own philosophy of colonization applied to all of Britain's colonies around the world.<sup>163</sup> In regards to his eleven month term as a cabinet minister, Mitchell describes Bulwer Lytton's "approach" as "half that of the accountant, half that of the moral philosopher," but ultimately he "saw the imperial purpose in moral rather than economic terms" (212, 211).<sup>164</sup> Bulwer Lytton was very much in support of the empire and its colonizing mission, but believed reckless, immoral expansionism would lead to chaotic, immoral, and eventually resentful, colonies; he applied this moral-focused view to his implementation of colonial management policies while in his government position.<sup>165</sup>

In "The Haunted and the Haunters," even aspects of the story that are seemingly unrelated to empire have connections to Bulwer Lytton's views on colonial governance. For example, there are striking parallels between Bulwer Lytton's description of an immorally governed colony in his 1848-49 novel *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* and this narrator's

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<sup>163</sup> Bulwer Lytton's philosophy of colonization was based on a meritocracy, not nepotism or class; importantly, however, as an avid supporter of the English aristocracy, he often viewed merit as largely a quality of the elite class.

<sup>164</sup> Mitchell adds that "It was no coincidence that, within months of taking office, Lytton had asked for a balance sheet to be drawn up on all existing colonies. Profit and loss, moral, financial and strategic, would be set out" (211). He also describes Bulwer Lytton's view on colonial government as a "catechism that mixes prudence in financial matters with injunctions to foster aristocratic virtues," adding that "Classical models were probably more influential on his thinking than the nineteenth-century emphasis on racial destiny or economic power" (212).

<sup>165</sup> The demands of the position eventually proved too much for Bulwer Lytton, who repeatedly asked to resign until he was finally able to at the beginning of the summer of 1859. In late April or 1859, at the end of his term as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Bulwer Lytton found himself gearing up for one of his last speeches to the House of Commons – something he abhorred and had not mastered – and he wrote to Thomas Babington Macaulay to inquire about whether he would be at there to cast his vote. In response, Macaulay wrote a letter that contained more than his regrets for not being able to attend. He also offered Bulwer Lytton some advice in the face of his increasing paranoia about his health, which had even been reported about in the news; Macaulay told his friend: "For God's sake take care of yourself. A colonial Secretary, in the House of Commons, should have a constitution of iron" ("Letter to Edward Bulwer Lytton" 210). Macaulay's advice is interesting considering Bulwer Lytton's inclusion of references to Macaulay's *Essays* in "The Haunted and the Haunters," as well as the story's emphasis on having a strong will to combat external, malicious forces.

description of the immoral thought matter permeating throughout the atmosphere that is controlled, set in motion, and transformed into powerful forces by the villain's "crush[ing]" will ("Haunters" 233). *The Caxtons* – a novel overtly invested in questions of imperial emigration to Australia – features a character named Albert Trevanion whose "philosophy of colonising" includes the following (*Caxtons* II.107):

For my part, in my ideal of colonisation, I should like that each exportation of human beings had...men to whom a certain degree of education should give promptitude, quickness, *adaptability*...as the colony makes progress....a *polis*...needs a polity...draw it more closely into connection with the parent state, and render the passage of spare intellect, education, and *civility*, to and fro, more facile...And when the day shall come...in which the settlement has grown an independent state, we may thereby have laid the seeds of a constitution and a civilization similar to our own, with self-developed forms of monarchy and aristocracy....and not left a strange, motley chaos of struggling democracy—an uncouth livid giant, at which the Frankenstein may well tremble – not because it is a giant, but because it is a giant half completed. Depend on it, the New World will be friendly or hostile to the Old, *not in proportion to the kinship of race, but in proportion to the similarity of manners and institutions* – a mighty truth to which we colonisers have been blind. (II. 108-9; emphasis original)

In this passage from *Caxtons*, Bulwer Lytton makes clear that healthy colonies require a merging of the native culture with the influence of the educated, morally good parts of the British population – not, as was often the case, exiles and prisoners. His description here of the Frankensteinian colony produced by the immoral outcasts of British society bears a striking

similarity to the language Bulwer Lytton uses in “The Haunted and the Haunters” to describe the disembodied immoral thoughts and the creatures they beget. In his 1859 story, he depicts the matter that is put into motion as “devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts,” and later as “ghastly monstrous renewals of what have been in this world itself, set into malignant play by a malignant mortal” (“Haunters” 236, 242). He also depicts transmitted thoughts as having “power...not in proportion to its value – a bad thought may make a bad law as potent as a good thought can make a good one” (241). When compared with the language of Bulwer Lytton’s imperial philosophy, then, the Babbagean thought-matter he describes seems like unhealthy colonies granted power through a projected will – or distant Empire. It is such a Frankensteinian creation that Bulwer Lytton fears Britain will continually produce if they do not concern themselves with the morality of the people and messages exported or transmitted to them.<sup>166</sup>

Despite Mr. Richard’s discussion of global thought transmission over time, the narrator’s focus is more techno-Babbagean in nature – on more rapid forms of thought transmission that evoke the image of a type of neural electric telegraph:

Yes; what you say confirms my own theory. Through invisible currents one human brain may transmit its ideas to other human brains with the same rapidity as a thought promulgated by visible means. And as thought is imperishable – as it leaves its stamp behind it in the natural world even when the thinker has passed out of this world – so the thought of the living may have power to rouse up and revive the thoughts of the dead – such as those thoughts *were in life* – though the thought of the living cannot reach the thoughts which the dead *now* may entertain. (“Haunters” 241-42)

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<sup>166</sup> For more on Bulwer Lytton’s views on colonialism, see Charles W. Snyder’s chapter on “Bulwer Lytton and ‘The Cult of the Colonies’” in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections* (2004).

While Richards's early statement reflects a theory of slow causality, with an individual's expressed thought being able, over time, to influence an entire foreign population, namely in the form of written laws, here the narrator speculates about an individual's ability to broadcast their thoughts more rapidly to individuals from afar and resurrect and mobilize those already expressed. The narrator specifies that far from being able to communicate with the dead-as-present-thinker, the living can access the thoughts of the dead that were expressed while they were still alive, as expressed thoughts are "imperishable" and have left their "stamp behind" in the physical world. The language in this part of the discussion evokes two Victorian metaphors running throughout the story: the new capacity of developing communication technologies – namely the electric telegraph – to act as mediums through which to more directly and rapidly transmit thoughts from a distance; and the increasingly understood and formalized Thermodynamics law of the conservation of energy – which conceptualizes energy as never created or destroyed, but merely changing in form. Just as Babbage and Dickens imagined words and deeds as following a similar conservation law, Bulwer Lytton applies the same principle to expressed thoughts.

Given the context of the ongoing global conflicts and Bulwer Lytton's inclusion of scientific and technological language his readers would recognize, Bulwer Lytton seems to be expressing anxieties about the increasingly global and two-way reach of communication. If a single individual from England can so profoundly change all of China, the story asks implicitly, so too could one Chinese citizen alter the entire British Empire. The imagined transmission system of the story, therefore, operates independent of the value or morality of thoughts and ideas and without national censorship, making ideas take on mobility and agency if powerfully



expressed. Bulwer Lytton was not alone in thinking about the new, more powerful, and more global potential of thoughts and ideas in the telecommunication age. Many westerners were excited about the prospect of a global telecommunication system because they believed it would allow them to better exert world-wide influence. American president James Buchanan in 1858, for example, was excited about the coming of the Atlantic telegraph, for he claimed it would not only solidify the relationship between England and America, but allow the two countries to “diffuse [their] religion, civilization, liberty, and law throughout the world” (qtd. in Morus 177). Similarly, at the Institute of Electrical Engineers in 1889, Lord Salisbury, the then-prime minister, saw the transnational telegraph as an agent that “intervened ‘immediately on the moral and intellectual nature and action of mankind,” according to Iwan Rhys Morus, and “assembled all mankind upon one great plane” because it provided immediate access to information throughout the world (177).

The end of Bulwer Lytton’s story is not so optimistic and conveys a deep sense of concern about global telecommunication, specifically the potentially dangerous ramifications of globally transmitted ideas on the minds and bodies of English citizens. Despite the narrator’s specific questions about the extent to which his thoughts could impact China, the villain of the story is a foreigner of unknown origins, as I discuss in this section. This reminds the reader that the electric telegraph works both ways; ideas could be transmitted to England and exert great influence, just as easily as they could be transmitted from England to the rest of the world. Inspired by the era’s new electrical information transmission systems, I argue that Bulwer Lytton’s short story proposes a unique way for Victorians to think about thoughts and ideas, now globally transmittable, as the most powerful weapons for and against England in the modern

age.<sup>167</sup> After all, Bulwer Lytton is the writer who wrote one of the most famous statements in the English language: “The pen is mightier than the sword.”<sup>168</sup>

While this Socratic-style intellectual conversation about the potentially world-wide power of an individual’s expressed thought dominates the original final pages of Bulwer Lytton’s short story, there is another aspect to this section that has been largely overlooked: its explicit evocation of foreignness and empire alongside its engagement in questions of global influence. The original ending begins with the statement, “But my story is not yet done,” announcing to the reader that the pages that follow are necessary to understand the entire story (“Haunters” 240). And indeed, the story takes on another life after this point, leaving the confines of the haunted house setting – as well as the haunted house genre itself. The final section features several encounters between the narrator and the so-called Mr. Richards. These interactions take place in public arenas across the city that all function as spaces where strangers interact and communicate, including several London streets, the Trafalgar Hotel, and, most importantly, the “Cosmopolitan Club” – a London gentlemen’s club Bulwer Lytton describes as “a place open to men of all countries, all opinions, all degrees. One orders one’s coffee, smokes one’s cigar. One is always sure to meet agreeable, sometimes remarkable persons.”

It is at this club that the narrator is officially introduced by a mutual friend to Mr. Richards, who he is told is a native Englishman and mesmerist recently returned after years of living abroad. The narrator immediately makes observations about Mr. Richards that challenges

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<sup>167</sup> For more historical context about the power of global communications technologies, see Daniel R. Headrick’s books entitled *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and National Politics, 1851-1945* (1991) and *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (1981).

<sup>168</sup> The first part of this often-referenced passage from Bulwer Lytton’s 1839 play entitled *Richelieu: Or, The Conspiracy*, also comes with the qualifier that it must be a “great” pen wielder for it to have influence. Bulwer Lytton leaves open his definition of the word, however, whether he means “great” in a moral, Babbagean way, or as another way of saying immensely powerful.

the validity of his claims to English nationality. He describes his demeanor as having “a dignity akin to that which invests some prince of the East – conveying the idea of supreme indifference and habitual, indisputable, indolent, but resistless power” (“Haunters” 240).<sup>169</sup> The narrator also remarks on his way of speaking, remarking that his “accent was slightly foreign” (241). In this scene, Richards is also described as reading “a scientific journal, which seemed to absorb his attention” while the narrator takes his mutual friend, “G—,” aside to interrogate him about the stranger. In this aside conversation at the Cosmopolitan Club, the reader is bombarded with explicit references to the East in connection with Richards. After asking his friend, “Who and what is that gentleman?” (240), the narrator is told that Mr. Richards is an acclaimed “Oriental scholar” whom “G—” had met abroad “amidst the caves of Petra – the scriptural Edom” (240-41). The two men had gotten to know each other when they “joined company, had an adventure with robbers,” during which Richards “showed a coolness that saved [their] lives” (241). The narrator’s friend then tells of how, after that ordeal, he had convalesced at Mr. Richards’ home in Damascus – “a house buried amongst almond-blossoms and roses – the most beautiful thing!” Mr. Richards had been living “for some years, quite as an Oriental, in grand style,” the narrator is told by his friend.

Mr. Richards’s mesmerism, while still connected with the East, is also strongly associated with a control over the written word as well as the atmosphere. The mutual acquaintance tells the narrator that while at his house in Damascus, Richards demonstrated his mesmerist abilities: “I have seen him with my own eyes produce an effect on inanimate things. If

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<sup>169</sup> This dignity appears “more striking” to the narrator than it appeared when the narrator had first spotted Richards in the street outside the London house at the beginning of this end section, perhaps because of its contrast to the proper English gentlemen of the London club.

you take a letter from your pocket and throw it to the other end of the room, he will order it to come to his feet, and you will see the letter wriggle itself along the floor till it has obeyed his command” (“Haunters” 241). The narrator is also told of his ability to “affect even the weather, disperse or collect clouds, by means of a glass tube or wand” – an image associated with both meteorology and the occult magician. Although the narrator is warned that “he does not like talking of these matters to strangers” – implying that Mr. Richards and the mutual acquaintance had established some type of bond of kinship while abroad – the narrator is eventually able to interrogate Richards when, once alone, he whispers to him of his “right to speak to [him] thus,” on account of his having been “a student in the mysteries of life and nature; of those mysteries [he has] known the occult professors” and proving this membership by “utter[ing] a certain password.” These associations of Mr. Richards with the East all occur within a short space of the original ending, leaving the reader in no doubt, before the two are left alone to converse, of Mr. Richards’s foreignness as opposed to the narrator’s well-established Englishness.

Toward the end of these original pages, the two-way power dynamic of the conversation troublingly shifts and is knocked off-balance; with a mere “whisper so musical, so potentially musical,” Richards establishes a more than hypnotic command over the narrator (“Haunters” 243). Richards’s words – disembodied and re-figured as a single, independent, thing-like entity with descriptions like “[t]here answered” and “it said” – are so powerful as to penetrate and establish absolute rule over the narrator: “it seemed to enter into my whole being, and subdue me despite myself.” Although this moment could be read as Richards putting the narrator into a sort of trance, his words have a power beyond that of mere mind-control; he seems to obtain a command over his very material matter – figured, perhaps, as material agency. Richards’s speech

has the power to dislocate and mobilize the narrator's own consciousness: "As he spoke I felt as if I rose out of myself upon eagle wings. All the weight seemed gone from the air, – roofless the room, roofless the dome of space. I was not in the body – where I knew not – but aloft over time, over earth." The narrator's consciousness, as if himself having been transformed into a "ghastly monstrous renewal" – one of the "monstrous things" that "burst out," "as from the shell of an egg," into "the air" from earlier in the story – is propagated throughout a Babbagean illimitable, eternal space (233). In this state, the narrator obtains knowledge about the individual past and future of the semi-immortal Mr. Richards: of the past, the narrator can see Richards' corruption of "the cities and homes of healthful men," retreat to "the ruins of departed empires," and exploration of "the deserts of nature unredeemed"; of the future, the narrator can see Richards's inevitable death – through a combination of "famine," the slow process of cellular degeneration, the experience of "terror" so strong as to "swallow" his "will" – in the unexplored Arctic "region of ice" (243, 244).

Far from the narrator's earlier speculation about the haunting phenomena being the product of a perpetrator's brain with "no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts" – the thoughts in "the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance" ("Haunters" 236). Richards's power here is more like the will *felt* by the narrator during his experience in the haunted house while staring into the shadow's "strange serpent eyes" towering above him: "For there, though in nought else around me," the narrator describes, "I was aware that there was a WILL, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own" (233). Rather than the fragmented, disorganized, unintentional, agency-less dream-thoughts speculated

about afterwards to the landlord as a part of the narrator's rational theory, Richards's power here reflects a conscious, focused, intentional power over the thoughts of the living.

The narrator's previous description of the powerful will during the haunting as "creative" and "working," in connection with the depiction that follows of the consequences of Richard's will power, as well as the depiction of his eventual degeneration, is suggestive of Bulwer Lytton's exploration in this story of more than just conservation, but the first two laws of thermodynamics: the law of conservation and the law of entropy. When under the mental and material control of Richards, viewing the impact of Richards's actions throughout space and time, the narrator describes the villain's past and future according to his "designs" of complete destruction ("Haunters" 244). Richards asks, "shall I...mix with the world of men as I did ere I learned these secrets, resume eager interest in their strife and their trouble – battle with ambition, and use the power of the sage to win the power that belongs to kings?" The narrator responds by describing the narrator's past and future attempts at destruction:

You will yet play a part on the earth that will fill earth with commotion and amaze...All the secrets you have stored will then have their uses – all that now makes you a stranger amidst the generations will contribute then to make you their lord. As the trees and the straws are drawn into a whirlpool – as they spin round, are sucked to the deep, and again tossed aloft by the eddies, so shall races and thrones be plucked into the charm of your vortex.

"[S]ecret," here, takes on qualities associated with potential energy, being stored then eventually used as kinetic energy resembling that of a tornado, to destroy and consume the earth. Richards's "charm" is figured as a vortex," equating affect with effect. Although Richards here is figured as

a force of destruction, the prophet-narrator has a warning for the villain: “Awful Destroyer – but in destroying, made, against your own will, a Constructor!” In accordance with the first law of thermodynamics, Richards’s repeated attempts at destruction have also served to create; it is the creatures of his creation, then, that will ultimately destroy him, with those creatures having degenerated through entropic processes. As discussed previously, the monstrous microscopic creatures that grow out of each new iteration of the original thought forms become increasingly chaotic and grotesque. Much of the language of these monstrous larvae hatched from the malicious thought-remains put in motion by Richards’ will power repeats here, but in an altered form, as if enacting a Frankensteinian revenge against their maker – a warning that immoral thoughts put out into the world can eventually come back around to impact the ones who expressed them. In the end, the story leaves open the threat that Richard will create more harmful hauntings around the world. As he has achieved a state of semi-immortality, this threat will also linger on for generations to come, making him a figure whose toxic, powerful will can spread its malignancy throughout time and space.

The original version of Bulwer Lytton’s much-anthologized story has garnered surprisingly little critical attention given the enduring popularity of the revised edition. Both versions have seen an increase in scholarly interest in the twenty-first century, however, with contemporary critics examining the short story’s gothic elements, connection to Victorian science and the occult, engagement in debates concerning materialism and the imagination, and its anticipation of postmodernist concepts of simulacra, wireless transmission, remote control, and mass production, as discussed previously. The story’s explicit and implicit engagement with issues of global power and the expanding British Empire, nonetheless, has been overlooked. Part

of this critical silence is likely due to critical focus on the revised version of the story, rather than the original. Although the shortened edition is certainly the one most often reprinted since the nineteenth century, I argue that by not taking these final original pages into account, critics have missed the story's deep engagement with issues related to the proliferation ideas in the context of colonization, global power, and imperial law.

The story merges mid-Victorian discourses and Bulwer Lytton's views on the expanding British Empire, – healthy versus toxic governance from afar and the potentially global power of thought expression and control from a distance –and emerging scientific concepts in microbiology, biochemistry, and physics, with the new opportunities for thought-transmission and exchange throughout space and time offered by developing telecommunication technologies – namely the electric telegraph. Through this hybrid discourse, the story itself becomes a simulation of the negative consequences of the power of immoral or malicious given written expression; the house becomes a haunted space where phantoms play out mistakes in Britain's past and present global relations, as well as the increasing threats posed by foreign powers. The monstrous creatures currently hatching and taking shape in the present out of those past and the continuing abuses at home and abroad, once evolved and fully grown, could be the eventual destruction of England by the very monsters of their creation.

The final, "suppressed" pages of the original story, to use Bulwer Lytton's phrase, envisions a Babbagean ecology of thought transmission underpinned by a slow causality of global influence. Bulwer Lytton's fictional thought transmission mechanism transforms into his own uniquely imagined Babbagean system – a global, perpetual telecommunication system with a closed circuit not dissimilar to a neural electric telegraph. In Bulwer Lytton's design, expressed



thoughts are put into motion and transmitted throughout the global atmosphere through the force of individual will. In this narrative system, intangible human remnants do not remain eternally motive, altering the direction and speed of other thought-remnants as they interact in the air like Babbage's atmospheric library of words and deeds, or cycling throughout the earth's elements, eventually returning in the form of truth-voices to testify against the harmful words or deeds of the narrative's guilty parties, as in Dickens's morally retributive ecosystem. Rather, Bulwer Lytton's will-propelled thought forms are similar to Dickens's in that increased time, space, and force can convert their motive matter into more powerful agents of change; unlike in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in "The Haunted and the Haunters" this change is depicted by Bulwer Lytton as vaster in its reach and more dangerous in its potential effects. Given enough time, space, and motive force, the story suggests, a powerful will expressed in the form of written thoughts, can transmit across time and space, circulating throughout the minds and bodies of countless generations around the world. Embedded within Bulwer Lytton's conceptualized system is also a warning to those seeking such immense power and influence without spatiotemporal limitations; when expressed thought is imbued with that amount of will and volition – force and power – the willed thought matter will not remain the same as it began in the mind of the "remote originator" as it extends beyond the individual's mental reach. Instead, these thought-forms will spread and change in unpredictable ways, breeding more crystallized and monstrous forms of thought with even greater power to harm those it influences in a potentially uncontrollable, unending cycle.

It would be easy to argue that the mental telecommunication system Bulwer Lytton imagines in "The Haunted and the Haunters" resulted from his investment in occult sciences, specifically an individual's untapped mental potential to influence others from a distance; or his

interest in scientific and technological advancements in electro-biology, chemistry, and the electric telegraph; or even his troubled position amid ontological and epistemological debates of the time, as he remained skeptical of any thought-system which maintained established, rigid beliefs and closed itself off from other possibility. While all these topics could have strongly influenced Bulwer Lytton in his creation of this fictional communication system, the ending's emphasis on global influence and the transmission of harmful thoughts, I argue, can be read as an expression of concern for the way in which "bad," or immoral British or foreign writing was being circulated throughout the world.

The various forms of the hauntings in the story, therefore, given its investment in global transmission, could be read in relation to what Bulwer Lytton and others considered to be "bad" writing circulating at the time. For example, the overbearing shadow compares to the written laws that granted Britain too much global power, leading to countless wars. Similarly, the increasingly popularity of literature written for pure entertainment, containing little to no redeeming moral value, in Bulwer Lytton's view, like the chaotic, multi-colored lights darting around the haunted room, could be read by impressionable minds in unpredictable, troublesome ways. Lastly, the irresponsibly translated or plagiarized literature being shipped en masse around the world greatly resembles Bulwer Lytton's monstrous larvae, which, although growing out of the original source material, often misrepresented the moral message of its British writers to foreigners.<sup>170</sup> Regardless of whether Bulwer Lytton intended these specific metaphors when

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<sup>170</sup> Bulwer Lytton was often reflecting on issues of translation throughout his career. Many of his works were translated into different languages, and he was the first to translate Friedrich Schiller's entire collection of poems and ballads from German to English. In letters to the editors of *Blackwood's Magazine* in the early 1840s, Bulwer Lytton writes of his struggles to convey the same level of "thought & sentiment" expressed in the original poems, although he feels a moral obligation to try (*Letters* 4). Bulwer Lytton believed that by making a faithful English translation available to his fellow countrymen, Schiller's "earnest simplicity & genuine feeling may perhaps serve as a counterpoise to the affectation & Euphemism...which has rendered so much of the poetry of our very young

writing the story, I argue that “The Haunted and the Haunters” follows the Babbagean tradition, albeit indirectly, by portraying a Babbagean system of thought permanence and will transmission to model for its Victorian readers the causal dynamics of the global Victorian world. This system makes comprehensible a complex network of global communication and information proliferation to warn against the potentially dangerous impact of immoral, harmful writing on people and nations throughout time and space.

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writers sickly & distorted.” As evidenced through these letters, accurate translation, particularly of literary texts, was for Bulwer Lytton very much a moral imperative.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Pathos Power of Vocal Expression in Margaret Oliphant's "The Open Door"

Unlike Charles Babbage and Edward Bulwer Lytton, Scottish writer Margaret Oliphant had a complicated relationship with scientific rationalism and has often been characterized as a staunch opponent of both science and the scientists of her age as a result. Jenni Calder, for example, in her essay on "Science and the Supernatural in the Stories of Margaret Oliphant" (1993), articulates a view that exemplifies scholarship on Oliphant's relationship to science throughout her life: "[t]hirty years had not moderated [Oliphant's] hostility" toward science, "or her view that whatever scientific inquiry might explain, its illumination of human life and the human spirit was insignificant" (177).<sup>171</sup> Even relatively early in her career, however, Oliphant's views of science seem more nuanced than often acknowledged. In an 1855 review of the latest scientific literature published for popular readership, for example, Oliphant depicts the natural scientists of the nineteenth century as, at best, "something of a bore," and at worst, utterly removing the beauty from "Nature" ("Science" 229). While similar criticisms about Victorian scientists can be found throughout her prolific and diverse body of work, her much less critical portrayal of science is a subtle yet important distinction that has only gained recent critical attention. In this same 1855 article, Oliphant argues against what she views as the over-explanatory tendency in science while making sure to acknowledge its immense value:

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<sup>171</sup> Calder elaborates on this claim by adding that it was not so much science itself that Oliphant opposed so vehemently; rather, "her experience and doubt combined to resist neat, and especially theoretical, explanations" (184). Elsewhere, in her introduction to *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and Unseen* (2000), Calder describes how "Oliphant did not believe that the scientific or the mechanistic could provide an adequate description of life" (xi). Calder continues: "she held out against what she called 'the pretensions of science', that were claiming the possibility of classifying and explaining the whole of life on earth. Science, she believed, was the enemy of the imagination as well as of religion."

“[s]cience is good, but science has its drawbacks...We do not want to know how every thing is made, and we do not care for a very intimate acquaintance with the great ant-eater or the hippopotamus, important as their pretensions are.” Her criticism of scientific writing, specifically its attempts to explain even the smallest of details, seems rooted not in the accuracy or value of the explanations themselves, but rather in the presumption scientists make in them about the Victorian popular readership. For Oliphant, not everyone wants to know everything about the world around them.

This opinion is also not limited to science, for she reiterates a similar view when speaking of philosophical writing, but more overtly addresses why such a view matters beyond reader disinterest. She speaks more directly to the philosophers themselves:

Knowledge, even if it were power, is very far from being superiority...though our thoughts are not your thoughts, we have our cogitations—and many a simple soul marvelled with love and thankfulness over the works of God, before there ever was a work on popular science...We are learning every one of us; and certain grand lessons lie before us all to learn, before we reach the ending of our way...therefore let us learn our lessons humbly, and never take the trouble to conclude upon our neighbour’s. (“Science” 230)

Ultimately, these passages from this specific *Blackwood’s* review illustrate that Oliphant was more receptive to the advanced ideas of her day than it may initially appear; what she opposes are not the ideas themselves, but the imposition of those ideas onto the public. For Oliphant, the notion that the more explanation and information provided, the better, is a false one, for she believes in the value of learning by interacting with the world itself, not acquiring knowledge

solely from books. As she pleads with men of science and philosophy: “if you love us, let us have no explanations. To speak seriously, this is the greatest danger in the present universal diffusion of knowledge...to improve a mind is quite a different process from improving a man” (216). It is the over-saturation and availability of knowledge, as well as the belief that self-improvement consists of obtaining greater amounts of scientific and philosophical knowledge, that Oliphant believes has the most potential to degrade society. In stark contrast to such popular views, she believes the opposite is true: that too much of this type of knowledge and not enough learning through experience will degrade the self through the elimination of what she considers to be one of man’s most valuable qualities: imaginative thought. It is this message, I argue, that Oliphant features throughout her 1882 short story “The Open Door”: too much reliance upon science, philosophy, and rationalism in general can lead to the cultivation of a man who is biased, detached, unsympathetic and closed-minded, incapable of seeing beyond their own concerns and thus must learn how to access the power of their imagination to perceive the unseen world and those who live within it.

“The Open Door” is a late-Victorian ghost story about a middle-class family who leases an estate in Scotland that turns out to have a spectral presence which haunts the nearby ruins of the former manor.<sup>172</sup> The story is narrated by a father, Colonel Henry Mortimer, who has just returned to Britain with his family from India where he presumably helped to keep the Empire’s

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<sup>172</sup> The specific genre to which Oliphant’s “The Open Door” belongs, however, has been a topic of discussion in contemporary criticism. James Machin, in *Weird Fiction in Britain, 1880-1939* (2018), argues that Oliphant’s text is more of a “Victorian Ghost Story” than what he calls “weird fiction” due to its undercurrent of “moral didacticism” and attachment of “historical injustice” to the “locale” of the haunting (17-18). While Oliphant explicitly connects the haunted ruins to “some past trauma for the former inhabitants,” as Melissa Edmundson Makala puts it in *Women’s Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, there is only a vague, impersonal suggestion of an “historical injustice” attached to the old property’s servant quarters (99). This distinction is just one of the ways in which the story resists simple generic categorization.

colonial subjects in line – a connection to imperialism and Empire that is both similar to and vastly different from Bulwer Lytton’s story discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>173</sup> While known by the locals who work on the property that the Mortimer family leases, the supernatural entity manifests in the form of a disembodied voice that has detrimental effects on Mortimer’s only surviving son, Roland. Roland hears the voice as a being in pain, and begins rapidly declining in health, not due to fear, but because of his extreme sensitivity to the pain of others and great capacity for empathy even toward a being he can only hear.<sup>174</sup> He becomes deathly ill, not from the spirit directly, but due to his hearing such heart-wrenching cries of agony and being unable to help. In an unusual moment between father and son, Roland tells Mortimer: “‘it’s not an illness, – it’s a secret’” (“OD” 6). Roland then asks for his father’s help, not to simply investigate and eventually exorcise the being, as is typical in Victorian ghost stories; rather, he requests that his father take on a paternal role for the suffering voice, listening to its pain and providing comfort to ultimately help it move on, as a father would for his son. On the surface, the story describes the epistemological and metaphysical transformative process Mortimer must undergo – from rationalist non-believer in the supernatural to empathic father to a disembodied spirit voice – to both help the spirit move on and save his son’s life.

In this chapter, I take a more nuanced view of the story itself as well as the story’s protagonist, who initially appears as the very model of the overly rational man Oliphant

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<sup>173</sup> Jen Baker, in her essay on “The Spectral Child” (2021), classifies Mortimer as a “homodiegetic narrator,” or a narrator “that take[s] part in the plot,” as opposed to a “heterodiegetic narrator (i.e. one who does not take part in the plot),” the latter of which is much less common (716).

<sup>174</sup> Oliphant’s depiction of Roland is similar to how Eliot’s protagonist, Latimer, describes himself as a child in “The Lifted Veil” (1859). Latimer says he was a “very sensitive child” with a distant relationship with his father, much like Roland and Mortimer (Eliot 25). While Mortimer fears that his son’s sensitivity suggests a supernatural connection to the unseen, Latimer does, in fact, develop the capacity to access the beyond, or *hear* the thoughts normally hidden within another’s mind. These two short stories share other themes as well, including their titles that both suggest an opening into that which typically lies beyond the senses.

criticizes. In one sense, Mortimer's every interaction with people, places, and phenomena he cannot explain highlight his inability to relate to and connect with the world around him.

Oliphant takes such moments of disconnection in the text to also include subtle commentary on socioeconomic issues of her time through her depiction of problematic viewpoints related to Empire, class, industrialization, science, and religion.<sup>175</sup> In another sense, a close reading of Mortimer's narration of the story problematizes a simple, one-dimensional reading of this character through moments in which he expresses feelings, beliefs, and observations that suggest there is another, perhaps hidden, layer to Mortimer's character – something *unseen* by most who encounter him.

In the first half of this chapter, therefore, I focus primarily on highlighting the various aspects of Mortimer's character and his interactions with the people and environment around him. This analysis reveals how Mortimer's emotional responses – his emotivity – mimic the type of circular causality with which Babbage and Dickens structure their depiction of physical movement. I demonstrate the subtle aspects of Mortimer's character that he attempts to hide, namely his un-Britishness, sensitivity to pathos, feminine aestheticism, utter sense of helplessness, and an existential longing to find meaning in a world he views as devoid of it; in other words, his qualities that do not fit the ideal for the nineteenth-century British man. In the second half, I turn to Mortimer's encounters with the voice from the unseen. I argue that Roland's mysterious statement at the beginning of the story about the phenomenon – “it's not an

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<sup>175</sup> In *Women, Literature and Finance in Victorian Britain: Cultures of Investment* (2018), Nancy Henry writes extensively of Oliphant's investment throughout her long and prolific career on issues related to socioeconomics, finance, class, and gender. As a nineteenth-century woman who, after her husband's death in 1859, became the sole earner of her household, Oliphant was keenly aware of the precarious and complex nature of money, class, and finance capitalism, particularly for a Victorian woman.



illness, – it’s a secret” – is subtly revealed to be an emotive form of Babbagean expressed agency that reverberates across the threshold of a ruined doorway of the former manor house.<sup>176</sup>

In Oliphant’s emotive Babbagean ecology, pain is vocally transmitted and preserved in the place of its expression, and the space repeatedly voices that pain in a circularity of motion and repetition. The emotive record is not of a single word or action, but of a “scene” of suffering that has “impress[ed] itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature” (“OD” 29). Through depictions of their similar movements, I assert that Oliphant creates parallels between the voice and Mortimer as a means of positioning the living protagonist as a type of prodigal father, who, circulates throughout the physical spaces of the British Empire, detached from the people and places around him. While the disembodied voice, for Oliphant, operates within this Babbagean microcosm of elemental records, Mortimer himself becomes recorded upon the more he listens and connects to the voice in pain. I argue that Oliphant depicts both Mortimer and the voice as searching for answers and meaning within their void, empty spaces, and desiring to fulfill the wishes of their loved ones and reunite with them once again; it is only through the development of an empathic system of vocal and auditory connection that the emotive imprint can be unburdened and transferred to another medium.

### **Circulating Within a Void**

Storytelling is a vital aspect of Scottish cultural identity – a literary tradition and national character with which Oliphant strongly identifies. Few critics, however, have paid close attention

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<sup>176</sup> Although there is no evidence to suggest that Oliphant read or was aware of Babbage’s *Treatise* chapter, she is known to have read books in which it is referenced: most notably Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* (1859). Regardless, by the time Oliphant was writing, this idea had been circulating throughout various works of fiction and popular scientific texts – both genres of which she wrote extensively in her countless *Blackwood* reviews.

to the storytelling aspects of “The Open Door” – the way in which Mortimer tells the story from a future time upon reflection of past events – another common Scottish trope. In fact, the way in which the story is told is far more complex and subtly contradictory than it initially appears.

Throughout the opening pages of the story, for example, Mortimer repeatedly mentions India and their previous life there. He begins his narrative with, “I took the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18—, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them” (“OD” 1). Although the entire family has moved from India and now inhabits the house, from the story’s opening statement Mortimer places himself at a distance from his family: he rents the house for them; he will find a more permanent home for them. The language he uses here suggests that even though they have remained together throughout their imperial stay and return home, he sees himself as a provider for the family, but not a part of it.

Many scholars have connected the fictional Brentwood Manor, located just outside of Edinburgh, to places Oliphant used to visit growing up in that part of Scotland. As has been well documented, her nostalgia for her Scottish childhood and desire to connect to her Scottish roots can be seen expressed through many of her stories’ settings and characters. As Robert and Vineta Colby write, in their essay “Mrs. Oliphant’s Scotland: The Romance and Reality” (1979), “[i]n a literal sense Margaret Oliphant...was a ‘wandering Scot’” (89). Although she spent much of her life living outside her nation of birth, they describe Scotland as a source of inspiration for her, through its rich “sense of history,” “colourful personalities,” which Oliphant frequently depicts as “sympathetic” in her fiction, and “a spiritual appeal” through their storytelling tradition of “folklore and legends” (90). The depiction of Scottish characters in “The Open Door,” namely

the working-class Jarvises and the progressive Scottish minister Moncrieff, are certainly more sympathetic than many of the other characters of the story.

“The Open Door” is also subtly rooted in Scottish and imperial history. The ambiguous date of the family’s return to Britain from India and the present action of the story can only be gathered from the historical context clues provided by the story related to Scotland and India: it likely takes place before Fettes College – the “little Eton at Fettes” – was established in 1870, but after Simla, now called Shimla, became the “summer capital of the British Raj” in 1864 (“OD” 1; Michael Newton 395n2). While the specific dating of the story is not necessarily important, Mortimer’s reference to Simla – that his only surviving son Roland, the rest having died while abroad – “had never known anything more invigorating than Simla” suggests that the Mortimers were living in relative luxury, at least during the summers in Simla, for it had a reputation for its constant soirees and sources of entertainment. Mortimer’s descriptions of Scotland’s climate are almost always discussed in comparison with India’s, including Mortimer’s belief that the “mists” of Scotland had actually succeeded in “taking all the fever out of us,” which suggests that the “fever” from India lingered in their bodies, and emigrated with them to Scotland – a thought more terrifying and less scientific than deriving an illness while still in that specific place. For the Mortimer family, India does not only represent illness, but also great loss, as almost all of their children died while in India, of which Roland is “the only [son] left of many” (“OD” 1). This depiction of a foreign environment as threatening and toxic, even from afar, is one that resembles both Dickens’s deadly elements of America’s Eden, as well as the way in which Bulwer Lytton relates the threat of repeated colonial uprisings in India as teeming, uncontrollable forms of insect-like microbes.

Despite these negative associations Mortimer has with his time in the colonies, the colonel cannot help but maintain an imperial view of the world. He describes the coachman, Sandy Jarvis, as “a native of the district” and his role on the property as “the head of this little colony” of “stables” and workers – descriptions that evoke the language of Empire, or more specifically portraying Jarvis as a type of British Raj (“OD” 9). While away in London, the language Mortimer uses to describe himself and his movements are peculiar and seem explicitly purposeful in their connection to his association with the British colonies. For example, he describes himself as “circulating among” “old friends,” and depicts his activities as if he were a character in a story: “[i]n London an old Indian plunges back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated” (3). Although his feelings for London are home-like, as he still comes across friends “at every step,” the colonel straddles a threshold of being both English and Indian, and neither of them simultaneously.

Regardless of moments in which Mortimer appears insecure about his liminal sense of national identity and unsure position upon returning to his former life, he maintains an arrogance and apathy about what his family might be going through in his absence. He wrongly assumes that nothing bad will happen to his family, and becomes neglectful in reading his letters from home, firmly believing them to contain unimportant updates about the weather and long lists of things they want him to bring back from London. His family is characterized as an annoyance, even a burden, to him, preventing the freedom he desires – and likely had in his former days – to socialize and travel around the country to its various tourist spots. When he finally reads the numerous letters and telegrams informing him of his son’s illness, Mortimer’s trip is reframed in this moment. The simultaneity of Mortimer’s feeling of freedom from his family and his son’s

declining health toward his death bed transforms Mortimer's travels into an expression of selfish neglect. When he races back home and finds that his son "was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in the plains before we left India," there is a suggestion that Mortimer assumed his family would be safe from such maladies back on British soil ("OD" 6). These moments demonstrate how even the colonel's family life is disillusioning upon his return from the colonies, for it defies his earlier idealizing of Britain as a place of health and revival as opposed to India as a place of illness and death.

Despite the story's engagement with imperial discourse, there has been little scholarship related to the psychological ramifications of Empire the story presents, particularly not in any form of sustained critical analyses. Amongst the few critics who do make mention of the text's imperial engagement, there seems to be a consensus about the implications it has for explaining or informing Mortimer's negative attributes, although they differ in which attributes they attach to his imperial past. Judith van Oosterom-Pooley, for example, in her book *The Whirligig of Time: Margaret Oliphant in Her Later Years* (2010), argues that the "wealth of small references" throughout the story "relating to the narrator's colonial past," serve to "neatly characterize the man and explain his initial lack of empathy" (151). Melissa Edmundson, on the other hand, in her article on "The 'Uncomfortable Houses' of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant" (2010), views him as a "pompous British colonial" due to his physical distance from and apathy about his family at the start of the story (62). Finally, Elisabeth Jay, in *Mrs Oliphant: "A Fiction to Herself"* (1995), more explicitly comments on Mortimer's problematic parenting, but connects these problems with him being a "brusque military man," rather than more directly resulting from imperialist ideologies acquired while in military service (167). In other words, there is a

general critical consensus that Mortimer has been shaped by his imperial past, and transformed into someone who values manliness over empathy, and has even become an absentee husband and father. For critics, such moments exemplify the story's blending of imperial discourse and toxic masculinity, both of which are seen as contributing to Mortimer's emotional detachment.

His existence is full of contradictions, however, that suggest his emotional and parental issues may stem from hidden feelings of disconnection, rather than detachment; an important distinction that points to his distance from others as not an intentional choice, but a result of him feeling lost and alone in these changing circumstances. Oliphant's subtle depiction of Mortimer's disconnectedness can be seen throughout his narration of his trip to London at the start of the story. While his complicated issues with self-identity as both "an old Indian" and someone whose home to which he returns is England hints at Mortimer's emotional complexity, his depth of feeling, rather than absence of it, can be seen when he describes his experience upon returning to London compared to when he left for India: "I had been...enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside" ("OD" 3). In this statement, his leaving to go abroad takes on a material tangibility, while his return home is placed into "shadow," suggesting that while he has physically returned, he may still not feel completely present mentally – another way in which Mortimer is described as emotional detached from those around him. In such moments, Oliphant explicitly connects the experience of returning to England after imperial service abroad to that of a ghost returning "out of the unseen," feeling both absent and present, and unsure about how much of themselves remains (29).

Mortimer's actual activities in England also appear circumspect and what he does seems to contradict what he says he does. While he claims to be catching up with old friends while in London, and in fact that appears to have been the purpose given for his trip, he seems to spend most of his time alone, visiting places he has no personal attachment to, and even travelling alone to Hertfordshire, rather than staying amongst his circle of friends in London. Mortimer's trip to London, I argue, makes it clear that though he may seem intentionally detached from his family and friends, instead he is traveling around England alone, as if a ghostly spirit stuck in a circulation that is absent of connection, and revealing of his feelings of separation from the world around him and the people to which he used to feel close.

When the story picks up again in Scotland, Mortimer once again assumes a mask of cold detachment when he is initially told about the voice and shown its detrimental effects on his only son's health, before hearing the voice for himself. Mortimer begins his investigation of the phenomenon with skepticism of its existence, doubting that the voice is even real, let alone a communication of pain by some type of paranormal entity. He begins his investigation by first speaking with the coachman Sandy Jarvis – who he considered “the head of this little colony” of workers on the property – and his wife, reasoning that as he is “a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years” he therefore “must know everything that was going on, and all the traditions of the place” (“OD” 9). This conversation is not a friendly one, however, and Mortimer even admits that going into it his anger at them was foremost in his mind rather than concern for his son's health. In the tense exchange between Mortimer, Sandy Jarvis, and his wife, which might be more aptly categorized as an interrogation, Mortimer accuses the coachman of “trifling with [him]” when Sandy attempts to obfuscate the

questions with a description of the physical and psychological effects of “[d]ark November weather and lang nichts” (10). It is Mrs. Jarvis, however, not Mortimer, who finally exposes the truth of what they know. She initially threatens her husband that if he does not “[t]ell the Cornel straight out,” she will do it herself, for she reasons that “[i]t’s no a thing that will hide” given that its already known by the nearby townspeople. Her husband, Mortimer observes, although “ruddy and big,” finally “shrank to nothing before this decided woman.” The Jarvis’s then proceeded to tell Mortimer the “whole story”: their “certainty that the place was haunted”; how for approximately “the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house,” “the voice had been heard” every night but “only in the months of November and December” (10-11).<sup>177</sup> Mortimer explains to the reader that he did not trust the Jarvis’s words alone, and confirmed the particulars of their story afterwards by questioning other witnesses, as is standard in a thorough investigation.

The narrative comments Mortimer includes throughout his retelling of their explanation highlight his own skepticism about the supernatural as well as his class-related biases. For example, he refers to the mere decade span of the haunting as “a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated,” demonstrating his awareness of supernatural stories as typically dating further back to have no living witnesses capable of providing the real facts behind the made-up stories (“OD” 10). He also subtly insults the Jarvis’s way of telling the story: he first remarks how “it gradually developed as distinct a superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos,” then later describes Mrs. Jarvis specifically as speaking “with unconscious poetry” of how, although “[n]othing...had ever been seen – at least nothing that could be

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<sup>177</sup> Tereza Bambušlová describes how by having, for example, the “strange occurrences begin in the winter, when the light is scarce,” “Oliphant sets up the story in such a way as to allow for various possible explanations” (98).



identified,” a few who were “bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving” (10, 11). Although these comments are not overtly insulting, they suggest Mortimer’s opinion about these lower-class, Scottish people as being overly superstitious in their beliefs and overly imaginative in what was supposed to be a telling of facts, not fiction. Despite this, he can still hear the “poetry” and “pathos” with which they speak, suggesting a capacity for connection even with people with whom he sees himself as above. At this point in the story, he even feels a sense of pathos in his son’s expressions; however, his more physiological response to the “idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer” makes his “blood g[e]t a sort of chill in [his] veins” (9). While Mortimer will gradually reconnect with himself and the world around him throughout the story because of his efforts to communicate with, and understand the needs of, the voice ghost, even in moments when he appears his most cruel or superficial, Oliphant includes a contradicting emotional depth hiding just beneath the surface.

At this point in the story, unfortunately Mortimer’s biggest emotions are primarily negative ones; for example, despite his trivializing of the Jarvis’s beliefs and forms of expression, Mortimer’s anger boils over when Sandy Jarvis finally explains why he withheld his beliefs about the ruins until now. Jarvis states that “[n]obody believes in ghosts,” and they had already lost previous tenants who refused to believe them, but gave up the house anyway (“OD” 11). He therefore decided not to disclose their supernatural beliefs, reasoning, ““What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?”” When Mortimer learns of the reasons behind their withholding of their prior knowledge of the supernatural occurrences in the ruins of the old property, he reacts with extreme anger at the Jarvis’s for what he views as their selfish and greedy motives for not disclosing what they knew to him and his family before

renting the property. He responds, “[d]o you call my child’s life nothing?” and accuses them of being the reason for his son’s illness, arguing that they must have told Roland the same story and, being “a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature,” he believed them. Mortimer describes how in this moment, as he “walk[ed] about the room with an anger all the hotter that [he] felt it to be most likely quite unjust,” his “heart” was “full of bitterness” at the Jarvis’s, believing them to have callously prioritized themselves over the life of a child. He further adds how his anger only grew as he thought of his own helplessness in the face of his son’s declining health: “I paced about in high wrath, not seeing what I was to do.”

Edmundson argues that Mortimer’s reaction is due to his class-based ignorance of the Jarvis’s position. “Their decision to keep the ghost story a secret has more to do with economic and social reasons” Edmundson claims, “than with the fear they have regarding the ghost” (61). She explains that “To their points of view, keeping the ghost story a secret means keeping occupants (and thereby employers) at the house. If they scare away possible tenants, then their own existence at the house is in danger. However, this economic necessity is overlooked and misunderstood by Mortimer.” Although I agree with Edmundson’s reading of the Jarvis’s reasons for withholding their supernatural beliefs, the story does not necessarily support her argument about Mortimer’s anger being due to his lack of understanding about the economic imperatives involved in the situation. His exact explanation for his anger at the Jarvis’s is as follows: “My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people’s children and comfort rather than let a house be empty” (“OD” 11). Given the context of the conversation, which was about downgrading the value of the property, the

reader is given every reason to believe that Mortimer has heard and considered the fact that Sandy Jarvis's main motive in not telling his family was a financial one, not a decision made from fear, as Edmundson suggests Mortimer believes. Edmundson's claim that Mortimer does not fully comprehend the Jarvis's "economic need," however, does seem feasible, given Mortimer's own financial security and comfort allowing him not to consider the tenuous economic situation of others.

Regardless of the nature of Mortimer's misunderstanding, such cross-class interactions in the story draw attention to the detrimental effects of miscommunication resulting from class differences. Oliphant takes such a moment to highlight the importance of class consciousness again later in the story by making Mortimer's pre-disposed biases about and emotional detachment from those in a lower class one of the aspects of his problematic worldview that changes through his listening to the vocal pain of a lower-class boy from the past. Even in this same conversation with the Jarvis's, Mortimer finally overcomes his anger and begins to listen to their explanations. He eventually realizes that given his disbelief in the supernatural, had they warned him of the ghostly ruins beforehand, he likely would have dismissed them and rented the property anyway, possibly even spreading word of their irrational beliefs and superstitions at the expense of their reputations, as they had feared. Mortimer finally relents entirely in a moment reminiscent of Mrs. Rouncewell's belief in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) that "a family of such antiquity and importance has a right to a ghost," as "[s]he regards a ghost as one of the privileges of the upper classes; a genteel distinction to which the common people have no claim" (Dickens 7.112). Jarvis similarly tells the colonel that "some think it grand to have a ghost so long as

they're no in the way of coming across it" ("OD" 12). This causes Mortimer to admit to himself, but not aloud, that there is truth in Jarvis's words:

If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times...I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity...No; if we had been told...we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are.

This moment of realization, even before his first encounter with the voice, demonstrates Mortimer's capacity for change and self-reflection through active listening; at this point in the story, however; this is something that does not come naturally to him and is only accomplished with great effort and difficulty. Mortimer resolves to briefly investigate the ruins on his way back from the Jarvis's house, despite being alone and reluctant to do so. These are the very same ruins that in the daylight, he finds aesthetically pleasing, as I discuss in this section.

In Oliphant's landscape descriptions throughout the first part of the story – filtered through the narrative lens of Mortimer – she portrays two different perspective modes: a picturesque discourse and an affective history of place. As I demonstrate, Mortimer's picturesque view of the Scottish countryside is aesthetic and critical, and his descriptive language makes the environment devoid of any Babbagean qualities. In the haunted remains of the old property, however, Mortimer cannot help but read it as a Babbagean space, rich with historical affect recorded onto its ruins. His daytime descriptions of the ruins and the surrounding landscape occur at the start of the story, before the commencement of supernatural events, and rely heavily on the aesthetic descriptive mode of the picturesque. In these descriptions, Mortimer provides the

reader with an in-depth look at not only the distant hills, the nearby Brentwood village, and the ruins of the old manor within the estate's park, but also at the way in which Mortimer views the world around him. The narrator first describes the view of the distant Scottish Highlands he can see "[f]rom the lawn and drawing-room windows" ("OD" 2). Within this view, he describes what he sees using language indicating economic excess: Brentwood itself "stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland" and on a "clear" day, he can see the "wealthy fields and scattered houses" in the distance. He repeatedly describes the "cheery" and revivifying impact of such a view on "the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies" in India.

In his thorough examination of *The Imprint of the Picturesque on Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1986), Alexander M. Ross describes the picturesque as a mode or style of painting, writing, designing, or illustrating landscape that became a particularly "noticeable" "trend" "by the end of the eighteenth century" (26).<sup>178</sup> It was a method that one of Oliphant's favorite writers, Sir Walter Scott, employed when "in search of a method whereby his reader could visualize a scene" (4). Oliphant admired Scott for not only his literary talent, but also his crucial role in helping Scotland develop a national identity with which Oliphant closely connected.<sup>179</sup> What Scott employed successfully in his literature, however, is depicted as

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<sup>178</sup> The "characteristics of the picturesque," particularly for eighteenth-century landscape art, Ross explains, were often "irregularity, contrast, roughness, kinship to the real world, variety, use of light and shade, novelty, and pictorial organization" (4). In fact, Ross argues that "It was in the fiction of Scott and those who came after him that we find landscape described, not as set pieces, but particularized and integrated fully into the fabric of the novel" (24). Ross specifically points to the interconnectedness of "landscape art and fiction" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that "[b]ecause the conventions which defined a picturesque landscape were so widely known, novelists found it both reasonable and convenient to rely upon them frequently in order to gain their readers' acceptance of their fictional setting" (25-26).

<sup>179</sup> For more on Oliphant's relationship to Scott, his works, and Scottish national identity, see Elsie Michie's "History After Waterloo: Margaret Oliphant Reads Walter Scott" (2013) and Pam Perkins's "'We who have been bred upon Sir Walter': Margaret Oliphant, Sir Walter Scott, and Women's Literary History" (2004).

problematic in Oliphant's story as a perspective with which a person consistently views the world. Much like Mortimer himself, James A. W. Heffernan argues that the picturesque mode struggled with contradictions.<sup>180</sup> While characterizing a landscape that is natural in its disorder, to conform to the aesthetic standards of the picturesque, this same environment must also follow certain man-made rules and conventions of orderly beauty. The picturesque was simultaneously natural and artificial, disordered (but not chaotic) and ordered (but not arranged); in other words, a picturesque landscape was more of an idealized space to be imaginatively painted or written upon by artists and authors rather than an actual place in the real world. In fact, it seems as though the accurate portrayal of the natural world was never a goal at the heart of this descriptive aesthetic technique. Those who employed it rarely drew upon images of nature entirely untouched by humanity, with the staple sunset depiction being one of the exceptions.<sup>181</sup> Instead, it was often used to describe agriculturally shaped landscapes or castle ruins to evoke feelings of nostalgia for a bygone way of life in an increasingly industrializing society, while also eliciting feelings of pride and pleasure to be connected with such spaces of aesthetic importance. At its core, the picturesque was an artistic or literary method aimed at imagining traces of the past in the present.

The picturesque's version of tracing the past through the environment of the present is vastly different, however, from that imagined by Babbage, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant. This was not a search for human morality, retributive truth, individual willpower, or

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<sup>180</sup> Christine Battersby, in her essay on "Gender and the Picturesque: Recording Ruins in the Landscape of Patriarchy" (1994), similarly describes the picturesque as often "occup[ying] a precarious position" at its own type of threshold, attempting to maintain balance to avoid, on the one hand, "a beauty that is too perfect to stimulate mental play," and on the other, "a body that is deformed or ruined" (80).

<sup>181</sup> According to Heffernan, "[b]y 1798, the picturesque effects of sunset had been virtually canonized" (615).

affective expression; rather, the picturesque was most often a search for nostalgia, beauty, and calm simplicity in an ever-changing, increasingly industrialized Victorian world. In contrast to the incomprehensible version of nature that characterized the sublime, the picturesque demanded its landscape to be pleasing due to its ability to be understood and aesthetically judged.

Ultimately, the goal of the picturesque is not to learn anything about the past or even to improve the people of the present; it was meant to create an imaginary version of an idealized past that still lingers in some way in the present to be, for its viewers and readers, pleasing and agreeable – two adjectives that inevitably appear in most picturesque descriptions. As the nineteenth century progressed, and the popularity of realism steadily increased, however, the picturesque was often criticized and mocked precisely due to its departure from reality and its aesthetic goals.<sup>182</sup> It was at times accused of glossing over the harsh realities of the lives of the poor and lower classes who often worked, lived, and suffered on those very same landscapes; yet, their struggles are almost entirely ignored or sanitized in the picturesque mode, with descriptions of work being done but little mention of the laborers themselves.<sup>183</sup> This minimization of the labor

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<sup>182</sup> This would become complicated, however, by the fin-de-siècle's increasing aestheticist backlash against realism for its often reformist or didactic aims. The increasing popularity of anti-realist movements such as art for art's sake, of which Oscar Wilde is often regarded as representative, would help to shape many of the autotelic modes of literary criticism in the twentieth century such as New Criticism, Structuralism, and Formalism, which interpret literature as containing aesthetic value, structure, and/or form separate from historical, political, or intertextual contexts.

<sup>183</sup> Paul Fyfe, on the other hand, in an article entitled "Illustrating the Accident: Railways and the Catastrophic Picturesque in *The Illustrated London News*" (2013), describes a resurgence of the picturesque in the nineteenth century through what he calls the "industrial picturesque," which often featured "industrial sites, including collieries, factories, and railways" to adapt the picturesque to the increasingly industrializing Victorian Britain (61). "As an aesthetic category," Fyfe further explains, "the picturesque emphasized landscape irregularities" as a means of normalizing them, and "reimagine[d] the political, material, and ideological disruptions of industry in terms of pictorial harmony" (61). Fyfe also notes how this transformation of the picturesque was especially efficient with changing perceptions of the railroad from a symbol of industry's pollution and destruction of nature into a normal part of the British landscape by presenting the railroad as an integral part of the "natural surroundings" (61). An "uncanny" aspect of the industrial picturesque in its depiction of the railroad, to Fyfe, is what came shortly after: "how the *Illustrated London News* redeployed the pictorial conventions of eighteenth-century aesthetics to illustrate accident reportage" (63). In other words, Fyfe explains, shortly after the production of tranquil, picturesque landscapes naturalizing the railroad, those same techniques were used to depict railroad accidents: "the aesthetic

of the working class and its implications is precisely the detached aesthetic perspective that Mortimer uses in his description of the picturesque in relation to a more populated space, the village.

As Mortimer moves on to describing Brentwood village “on the other side of the deep little ravine,” Oliphant makes it clear that the value Mortimer sees in Scotland’s natural landscape is an aesthetic one, as if the environment is for his own viewing pleasure alone, serving no other purpose and the picturesque is the perfect mode in which to portray nature in such a way. He even repeatedly comments on the “picturesque” aspects of the view directly (“OD” 2). From his rented estate’s place on the other side of the dell, above the “village [that] lay in the hollow,” he criticizes the “blue slates and the grey stone” materials of the houses across the river, describing the materials as “foes to the picturesque.” He reasons that their visually unappealing housing materials are due to the fact that “Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland.” As Mortimer has just returned from the booming architectural developments of Simla in India, perhaps the Scottish village only appears disagreeable to Mortimer because of its stark contrast. Despite there being people in the village across the way, Mortimer mostly depicts the objects of their work rather than the workers themselves, describing the “clothes laid out to dry” and “the slow wagon lumbering along” the street as “giv[ing] a centre to the landscape,” adding that “It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways.”

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category of the industrial picturesque was paradoxically reinvigorated in depictions of industrial catastrophe,” “creat[ing] a different category, a hybrid of picturesque repose and industrial rupture that [Fyfe] calls the “catastrophic picturesque” (63).



Throughout this description, Mortimer views Scottish architecture and the local people from a distance, judging them aesthetically as objects that make up a part of a cheerful and “convenient” picture (“OD” 2). Scott Hess’s description of the picturesque mode of viewing landscape, in his book entitled *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2012), helps to explicate Mortimer’s emotional detachment from the scene on which he looks. As Hess explains, the observer in the picturesque is often “disembod[ied]”:

[L]ooking on and appropriating the word as image as if from outside the frame of a picture. This visually detached and possessive relationship to landscape creates a version of “photographic subjectivity”... Appropriating nature in this way as image defines the self as if independent of social and environmental contexts, as it collects and organizes the world from a visual distance. (12)

Oliphant establishes from the opening descriptions of the landscape that Mortimer’s perspective is one that maintains a detached, independent distance from the world he views around him as well as the people in it. I do not wish to argue, however, that Oliphant herself took issue with the picturesque as an aesthetic technique; instead, I contend that she uses the technique in this story to highlight Mortimer’s problematic use of it as a means of reinforcing the disconnectedness he already felt, as well as enabling him to overlook the socioeconomic implications of what he sees, preferring instead to view his surroundings through their effect on him – whether they are pleasing or cheerful to him. In his discussion of *Women as Public Moralists in Britain: From the Bluestockings to Virginia Woolf* (2017), Benjamin Dabby notes how “Oliphant argued that her fellow historians needed to situate and understand their subjects in their own time and on their

own terms” (84). Although not specifically discussing aesthetic modes of description such as the picturesque, Oliphant’s historical argument can be applied to Mortimer’s self-centered perspective: he needs to situate himself in relation to those around him to understand them on their own terms, not just his.

Oliphant’s opinion about historians needing to connect with, rather than distance themselves from, the times and people about whom they record could be applied to Babbage’s elemental historians, who merely record evidence of human agency from a place of emotional detachment and judgment; these same elements are required to be historically situated, however, and must hear and bear witness to the suffering and pain of people as they experience it, without the ability to intervene. Dickens’s human sufferers and witnessing environments, alternatively, blend into one another throughout *Martin Chuzzlewit*, becoming suffering historians that could never attempt such an emotional distance as they cannot disentangle themselves from each other or the past.

Despite his efforts, Mortimer cannot maintain his hold on this detached, idealized perspective for the entirety of his narrative descriptions, and his picturesque countryside breaks down in two distinct places: the polluted river and the ruins of the old manor house. When describing the river that runs between the estate and the village, he remarks how the “river, like so many in that district, had...in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper-making” (“OD” 2).<sup>184</sup> Mortimer attempts to put a positive spin on it by stating that the ruin

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<sup>184</sup> Adam W. Rome, in his article on the emerging understanding of environmental pollution from the late-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, describes how “the conjoined processes of urbanization and industrialization led to unprecedented contamination of water, air, and land”; in the wake of such unprecedented pollution of vital natural resources, Rome argues, “[a] new, complex vocabulary of pollution developed with the rise of the industrial city” (7). Although by the 1880s paper-milling was considered an “old industr[y],” the “increasingly concentrated by-products” of such industries polluted nearby water sources at unparalleled rates, sometimes even permanently changing the landscape. To give an indication of just how bad river pollution was by the 1880s, Rome details how

of the river “did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams,” speculating that “Perhaps our water was more rapid – perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse.” Oliphant’s depiction of the landscape here is layered: despite Mortimer’s best efforts to view the river as aesthetically pleasing, he repeatedly runs into visual obstacles that disrupt the orderly perfection of the picturesque Scottish land that he attempts to describe. In this case, the visual obstacle is the polluted river – a river with lingering contamination from the paper mills which used to produce toxic “chemical waste,” “adversely affect[ing] the communities in which the mills were situated” as well as those downstream, according to John Morris in his essay on the Edinburgh papermaking trade (23). In this moment, Oliphant makes sure to point out to readers the impact of industry on the Scottish environment she so enjoyed as a child, although her protagonist cannot evoke her feelings of nostalgia and protectiveness over the Scottish environment.<sup>185</sup> Even the surrounding village homes, made of “blue slates” and “grey stone,” are marked by industry, as that building style was common during the boom of the Welsh slate industry at the beginning of the century for planned industrial towns across Britain – a historical fact that Mortimer completely misses, instead assuming the buildings were the product of poor Scottish architectural taste (“OD” 2).

The next location in which Mortimer’s picturesque descriptions indicate a detached aesthetic judgment is at the ruins of the old estate house; here, however, he cannot help but recognize the environment’s evidence of the lives of the people who used to live and work there.

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The Massachusetts Board of Health warned that “[i]f the state did not act, the state’s streams eventually would become as fouled, as appalling, as the manufacturing rivers of England and Scotland” (11).

<sup>185</sup> For more on Oliphant’s early “industrial fiction” and her relationship to mid-Victorian views on success in the self-help culture of the 1850s, specifically the intellectual and religious influences that helped shape her views, see Clare Pettitt’s article entitled “‘Every Man for Himself, and God for us All!’ Mrs Oliphant, Self-Help, and Industrial Success Literature in *John Drayton* and *The Melvilles*” (1999).

At first, the colonel's view of the ruins is similarly aesthetic, and he values the ruins of the "former mansion of Brentwood" because of their aesthetic properties: "[t]he ruins were picturesque...and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon ourselves" ("OD" 3). There is another part of the ruins that Mortimer seems unable to classify as picturesque; in fact, the colonel continually reinforces how unremarkable they are: "[a]t a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed...in which was a common doorway." Oliphant's repetition of the word "common" explicitly connects this part to another later in the story, when the father frustratingly thinks about his situation: "here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a *banal*, commonplace ghost-story!" (11). Such moments reinforce Oliphant's overall point that even the common sufferings and plights of helpless people deserve to be heard, acknowledged, and helped, rather than classified as "commonplace" and regarded with indifference or simply ignored. Additionally, the ruins and the spirit that voices his pain in them are far from commonplace, as Mortimer will discover.

This point is further reinforced during his initial description of the commonplace part of the ruins, when he contemplates their past purpose compared to their present state, particularly the "common doorway":

Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back-door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered – pantry and kitchen had been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the

winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing – closed once, perhaps, with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me...from the first; so perhaps...my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance which nothing justified. (“OD” 3)

This passage, I argue, reveals a disruption of Mortimer’s attempt to maintain aesthetic distance from the world around him.<sup>186</sup> While he tries to focus on the vulnerability of the architecture, the lack of meaning within the space, and the artificial sense of nostalgia it attempts to conjure, he cannot help but recognize the meaning suggested by its lack of meaning, describing what he sees as simultaneously “void of any meaning” and “like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over.” In fact, the lack that this space emits seems to be what disturbs him most; “[i]t impressed [him]” with its feeling of absence, suggesting that Mortimer connects affectively to the loneliness of the space. He repeatedly uses language suggestive of the impact that the ruins have on him: the doorway “struck [his] eye” and “suggested a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed.” For the colonel, this space itself is more interesting than the individual and collective human history it represents. Rather than viewing the ruins as a type of archeological site containing residual traces of the individuals who used to live and work in it, Mortimer looks through the negative space of the ruins – into the threshold, the open door – in an earnest attempt to find meaning within the “void” that reflects his own search for individual identity and agency in this now foreign Britain. I also argue that his vulnerability, connectivity,

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<sup>186</sup> In her recent article on affective spaces in Oliphant’s supernatural fiction, Minna Vuohelainen argues that “Mortimer’s interpretation of this ruin as a ‘melancholy comment on a life that was over,’ a ‘door that led to nothing [...] void of any meaning,’ reveals much about his secular and proprietary mindset, which is only disturbed by the threat to the wellbeing of his family” (224).

and impressibility in relation to these ruins foreshadows his ultimate self-discovery and gaining of the ability to hear the hidden heart of nature in a way Babbage could only hope for.

Although the colonel is not overtly snobbish, Oliphant also repeatedly highlights in such moments Mortimer's attempts to place himself apart and above the lives of the Scottish lower classes: the most notable examples include his indignation at having to participate in this "*banal*, commonplace ghost-story," importantly described as such after having the story told to him by the Jarvis's; and the "pathos of commonness" he assigns to the ruins of Scottish servant spaces as opposed to the "picturesque" ruins of the aristocratic "former mansion," for which he feels pride in his temporary ownership ("OD" 11, 3). As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the colonel's aesthetic gaze and devaluing of what he deems "common" is, for Oliphant, part of his problematic perspective, and curing his son will require him to view the human beings in the past and the present with emotional investment and compassion. He must reform his character to place value on the individual – to see the individual before the collective, rather than an abstract collective in which the individual is lost or objectified. Mortimer ultimately sees the landscape as it appeals to him, but he does not feel anything for the human inhabitants of it. This makes the aesthetic values of the picturesque mode of seeing appear problematic in that the humanity of the past and present is lost in the attempt to find pleasure in the landscape, and its emphasis on charm and pleasantries masks the pain and suffering of the people in the background of the "cheery" picture painted by its observer (2). For Mortimer, however, it is within the empty void that he feels most connected, suggesting that the open door of the ruins serves as an echo chamber in which Mortimer is able to access his own emotions as it reflects back upon him; in

other words, it seems to function in a similar way for him as it does for the voice of the unseen, as I discuss later in this chapter.

### **“Bound to Re-Enact the Whole” Scene**

Despite Mortimer’s connection with the ruins during the daytime, he attempts to approach his first encounter with the voice with a forced sense of emotional distance. When he first hears the voice, which occurs on the same night as his conversation with the Jarvis’s, the narrator describes it as inchoate, not yet fully formed. The voice first aurally manifests in the form of a “sigh” coming from beside him at foot-level (“OD” 14). As if responding to a reader accustomed to conventional Gothic sounds, Mortimer explains: “[n]o, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible – a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh...a long, soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast.”

Oliphant’s depiction of this despairing voice is strikingly similar to Dicken’s portrayal of Jonas as a result of his paranoia and guilt. At the end of the novel, when Jonas’s crimes are publicly exposed, his vocal expression is also described as “not a groan,” but rather an inarticulate noise (*MC* 51.730). After the death of his father earlier in the story, Jonas “bend[s] beneath the load” of his guilty conscience (*MC* 19.308). Oliphant eventually reveals in “The Open Door” that the voice is suffering after the loss of a parent as well, and his expressions of grief are similarly heard by Mortimer as an “emptying out of a load of sadness” (“OD” 14). Mortimer’s elaboration on the form of the voice’s first appearance is also reminiscent of the “The Haunted and the Haunters” depiction of the narrator’s initial encounter with the story’s haunting: the overly “faint” footprints, the “indistinct” “outline of a human figure,” “the “shapeless and unsubstantial” lights (“Haunters” 227). While many of the haunting manifestations of Bulwer

Lytton's story are chaotic and meaningless: "[a]s the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order," the narrator observes ("Haunters" 233); in "The Open Door," the feeling being haunting the ruins is aurally distinct to Mortimer, even if its expressions are "faint."

Mortimer describes the still-affecting experience of listening to the voice for the first time: "I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak ... To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night... had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now" ("OD" 14). Although the sonic form of the voice first transmits as an "[in]tangible" exhalation, the emotive force behind its expression influences Mortimer psychologically and physiologically; despite Oliphant having established that Mortimer is narrating his experiences years later and has since moved away from the property, the impact of the voice's emotional resonance reverberates throughout the time and space of the story. Mortimer not only feels the emotions of the being who has expressed them in the past, he also reads meaning in them – a dramatic departure from his earlier reading of the ruins, in which the same door in the same space is described by Mortimer as "now void of any meaning" (3). Already, even in its most inarticulate form, the imprinted pathos of the voice has forced Mortimer to recognize the humanity still lingering in the space, attaching meaning to it rather than seeing the void of his own feelings of disconnection reflecting back upon him. In other words, Mortimer begins to hear the records contained within Oliphant's Babbagean space.

Although Mortimer is initially unconvinced that there was anything in the ruins at all, believing himself to be overreading the suggestive space, this encounter signals the start of a shift in the protagonist's connection to the world through his interactions with the voice. It is at this time, uncoincidentally, that Mortimer also begins to overlap with the environmental



processes of the space, which, I argue, reflect the physical change he also must undergo to connect to, then properly hear, Oliphant's Babbagean environmental records of past expressions of pain. After hearing the sigh, Mortimer describes: "in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My scepticism disappeared like a mist. I was as firmly determined that there was something as Roland was" ("OD" 14).<sup>187</sup> It is of note the way in which Oliphant again uses analogies of physical environmental states to describe Mortimer's change in emotions and beliefs. For example, Mortimer describes himself not as hot with anger and "walking about the room" as he was at Jarvis's house, but as "chilled," "cold," "shiver[ing]," "trembling," and physically frozen in place because of his encounter with the voice. While his loss of skepticism about the existence of the disembodied voice is described as "disappear[ing] like mist," his new belief in the haunting specter is described as "firmly determined," as if both his mind and body underwent an elemental change in state. Oliphant's language in this passage represents a general pattern throughout the story of using language associated with physical states and natural processes of change to represent the internal emotions, attitudes, and changing beliefs of the characters of the story. In this instance, in other words, changes in emotional states and conversion from skeptic to believer occur through transmutation processes of temperature – hot anger to cold fear and the transmutation processes of evaporation and solidification. Despite Mortimer's described change, the story hints at the need for more encounters and changes by the protagonist for him to fully comprehend the phenomenon, enact a solution, and save his dying son. One such hint, for example, is how Mortimer attempts to communicate with the entity during this first encounter: instead of trying to

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<sup>187</sup> The narrator's use of the word "thing" here to describe the sighing entity resembles Bulwer Lytton's repeated use of the same word to describe the invisible force behind the house's hauntings.

decipher the “meaning” he senses within the voice, or ascertain the reason for expressing the immense “sadness” he hears, Mortimer repeatedly asks “[w]ho is there?” to which he receives no response. Oliphant’s protagonist needs to communicate with much more than a mere question about identity.

Mortimer is not entirely ignorant of his deficiencies in the face of this paranormal phenomenon, however; when reflecting on this first encounter with the voice, he demonstrates his self-awareness when he contemplates on the difference between the mysterious sounds of nature and the mysterious voice:

I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understood all about, cracklings of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplex you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don’t affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. (“OD” 14)

In Mortimer’s further reflection on the sound he had heard, Oliphant makes clear his ability to read the emotive record imprinted upon the space, she also emphasizes Mortimer’s attempts to “understand” the record. Although Mortimer first hears the voice in the form of a simple “sigh,” Mortimer recognizes that this sigh was an articulation of something complex and meaningful; it is incongruent with the other types of “simple nature” on the estate. Mortimer deems the sigh to

be an expression of action, containing “meaning” he equates with “feeling.” Mortimer interprets the voice as an affective and affecting form of nature not only capable of experiencing “sensations” and “feelings,” but also imbued with a vocal force akin to the Dickensian landscapes of *Martin Chuzzlewit*: “a power somehow of expressing itself.” In this moment, therefore, I argue that Oliphant depicts a specifically Dickensian form of Babbagean nature, which expresses itself through force, voice, and feeling.<sup>188</sup>

Mortimer’s discomfort and fear at not being able to understand the spectral phenomenon causes him to seek out someone who possesses the physical strength, courage, and battle-experience that Mortimer believes is needed for his second investigation of the voice in the ruins: his butler named Bagley – a former soldier who served under the Colonel’s command in India before returning with him to Britain. When the soldier-turned butler, Bagley, and his former commanding officer, Mortimer, investigate the strange voice coming from the ruins, the way in which they communicate is reminiscent of a battle. Mortimer orders Bagley as if preparing for a fight, “keep your eyes open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see – anything, man or woman. Don’t hurt, but seize – anything you see” (“OD” 15). Despite some hesitation, having heard the ghost stories associated with the ruins, Bagley “fell in without a word, and saluted.” The men begin confidently, marching quietly to the ruins in the dark, one in front of the other, as if attempting to surprise an enemy combatant. This image of courage and

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<sup>188</sup> Tereza Bambušlová, in her article “The Role of Light and Vision in Two Victorian Ghost Stories” (2019), argues that this passage indicates that the invisibility of the being is what frightens Mortimer the most, “not because it might attack him, but because its existence threatens the foundations of his knowledge about the world” (116n49).<sup>188</sup> In other words, to Mortimer, Bambušlová claims, “[t]he invisibility is alarming because it suggests that there is something that cannot be known, observed, and described in a way that was customary for the science of the day” (100). “Additionally,” she continues, “it opens the possibility that the world as man knows it—through his sight—is not all there is, and that consequently the eyes are not a reliable instrument of acquiring knowledge.” The ineptitude of scientific explanation in the face of unexplainable phenomena is a reoccurring theme that I discuss later in this chapter in the context of Mortimer’s investigation of the voice with the obstinately science-minded doctor Simson.

military order turns into one of chaos and confusion, however, when the voice “broke forth...so near, so penetrating, so pitiful” (16). Mortimer continually fumbles in the dark for his light source, the two men repeatedly bump into each other, and scare one another with each other’s shadows. The investigation eventually unravels, with Mortimer almost spell-bound by the voice, becoming so engrossed in listening that he triggers his visual imagination, describing how “[i]t seemed to call up visibly a scene any one could understand – a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro” like the leaves of Dickens’s Wiltshire environment, hoping to me let inside (17). Bagley, on the other hand, “had fainted against the wall”; he would remain in a senseless, invalid state until the end of the story, at which point he leaves Mortimer’s service. In another moment of extreme, class-based arrogance, as Mortimer stands over Bagley’s “senseless” body, he thinks to himself: “[h]e was less sophisticated than I, – he had not been able to bear it any longer” (18). Mortimer resolves, then, that he needs a man wholly unsusceptible to a belief in the supernatural: Doctor Simson.<sup>189</sup>

In “The Open Door,” the British medical doctor, Simson, is almost a parody of the man of science Oliphant described in her review of contemporary science writing. He attempts to explain everything using scientific and medical theories and refuses to accept any explanations for the mysterious vocal phenomenon in the ruins, even when presented with evidence, that go

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<sup>189</sup> When “[p]hysical courage, embodied in his soldier-butler, gives way before the unseen,” Jay claims that Oliphant depicts how “[e]vents force him both to recognize the inadequacy of ‘manly’ fortitude as a code to life and accommodate previously denied or suppressed facets of life within his definition of ‘manliness’” (167). For Jay, that means embracing “those very irrational forces he most distrusts and dismisses” – his “feminine” side. Ultimately, Jay argues that in “The Open Door,” Oliphant “used the challenge to conventional assumptions afforded by the supernatural, to investigate Victorian middle-class constructions of gender.” Luke Thurston, in his essay “Stories Not Like Any Others: Ghosts and the Ethics of Literature” (2018), makes a similar argument about Oliphant’s engagement with Victorian patriarchal structures. In addition to issues of gender, Edmondson also describes how Mortimer transforms from the “pompous British colonial” he was at the start when he “becomes a believer in ghosts and changes into a more understanding person” (62).

beyond the bounds of his rationalist beliefs. For example, he diagnoses Roland's and Bagley's invalid states as “an epidemic” of “delusion” brought on by “some trick of the echoes or the winds – some phonetic disturbance” that made them believe there were ghosts in the woods (“OD” 18). By this time, we can see a drastic change from Mortimer himself, who had previously hoped to explain away the phenomenon to Roland with “a scientific explanation of refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced” (11). In this later conversation with Simson, however, Mortimer becomes frustrated with the arrogant, dismissive doctor: “[t]here it is...you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!” Simson's response is once again, trivializing: “[i]t's not science,—it's common-sense...The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe” (19). As Bambušlová explains, “Doctor Simson, when confronted with the story, has a clear idea of the cause – anything but a ghost” (100). Similar to Mortimer's picturesque mode of viewing the Scottish landscape, Simson's staunch rationalism prevents him from recognizing the existence of Babbagean recorded affect, let alone read the emotive meaning contained within this space.

Out of pure frustration and a determination to prove the doctor wrong, Mortimer invites him along on his third investigation of the spirit voice at the ruined door, which this time he suggestively describes as an “experiment” – a term that exemplifies Oliphant's overt engagement with many of the scientific viewpoints discussed at the beginning of this chapter (“OD” 19). Mortimer understands that both his paternal and personal stakes are high this time, knowing that

if nothing occurred, or some rational explanation could be found, that it would “g[i]ve the doctor such pull over [Mortimer] as nothing else could...all his morals, for years to come, and his materialism, his scepticism would be increased beyond endurance” (20). When they arrive at the ruins, the doctor, predictably, attempts every sort of explanation within his rationalist credo that he can conceive. Simson speculates at different times that the voice belongs to Mortimer, an animal caught in a trap, or possibly a lost child out late at night; with every new explanation, he reiterates, “I thought as much,” despite having failed to prove his latest theory. He even explains away the feeling of “someone” having “come up against him” as merely him touching the “confounded juniper-bush,” despite the bush in question being located on the other side of the space, far from where the doctor stood (21).

By the end of the experience, Mortimer describes the change in the doctor: “He scoffed no longer; his face was contracted and pale” (“OD” 21). Mortimer also undergoes a change this time as well. At the beginning of the night, Mortimer “confess[es] that [his] only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more,” and describes hearing the voice in a mode akin to his previous detached perspective: “I listened almost without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson” (20). By the end, however, he describes the spirit voice, although still referring to it as a “thing,” with a greater sense of compassion and emotional connection:

I was to help this weeping, sobbing thing, which was already to me as distinct a personality as anything I knew...It was on my heart that my boy would die if I could not find some way of helping this creature. You may be surprised that I should speak of it in this way. I did not know if it was man or woman; but I no more doubted that it was a soul

in pain than I doubted my own being; and it was my business to soothe this pain,—to deliver it, if that was possible...I felt in my heart, fantastic as it may appear, that I must fulfill this somehow, or part with my child; and you may conceive that rather than do that I was ready to die. But even my dying would not have advanced me, unless by bringing me into the same world with that seeker at the door. (21)

Although still motivated to help the voice by his fear of losing his son, Mortimer's language demonstrates a new emotional openness that has been largely absent from him thus far in the story. He repeatedly refers to feelings from his own heart, and even speculates on whether his own death would save his son. The passage's repeated emphasis on the immense impact the voice and his son have on his heart suggest that what is happening to him is exactly what, by the end of the story, has been the vocal scene's Babbagean force upon on the natural world: "a scene like that...impress[es] itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature" (29). Simson, on the other hand, has no such lasting transformation or impact resulting from his experience, choosing instead to cling on to the notion of the juniper-bush, but not mentioning anything else about the sounds they heard or the other mysteries of the night.<sup>190</sup> Later, Simson's denial seems complete when he attempts to explain the phenomenon as he had before the experience: "[o]ne thing is certain, you know; there must be some human agency...It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about" (24).<sup>191</sup> Simson, it seems is determined to remain one of the

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<sup>190</sup> As Bambušlová puts it, this third "investigation yields nothing except an altercation about the position of the juniper bush" (101).

<sup>191</sup> Jay describes Simson's refusal to accept anything that does not coincide with his "scientific materialism" as an "irritat[ing,]" form of "obstinate reductionism" (167). Jonathan Greenaway, in his essay "Theological Readings of the Victorian Ghost Story" (2021), goes even further, arguing that Oliphant presents Simson's relentless, even irrational rejection of "undeniable evidence," as "underscoring the way in which Oliphant positions scientific rationalism as being its own form of faith" (536). He even goes so far as to suggest that the Scottish minister Dr.

“bore[s]” Oliphant insults in her 1855 review who takes all of the beauty and mystery from nature by their repeated attempts to explain that which they cannot. In an interesting twist, Simson is correct about there being “some human agency” within the phenomena, but he lacks the capacity to hear the Babbagean form of its expression.

### **Reading Vocal Impressions “Upon the Hidden Heart of Nature”**

The old Scottish minister, Dr. Moncrieff, is Mortimer’s last remaining resource for help with the haunting voice. From the outset, Moncrieff is a figure representative of open-mindedness and open communication. When first told of the voice and Mortimer’s various experiences, the minister insists that he needs to “write it down for the ‘Children’s Record,’” which is likely a religious record or publication of some kind that aims at communicating religious experiences and messages to a wider congregation (“OD” 22-23).<sup>192</sup> Moncrieff then volunteers to come with Mortimer and Simson, saying: ‘I’m an old man; I’m less liable to be frightened than those that are further off the world unseen. It behoves me to think of my own journey there. I’ve no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I’ll come too: and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do’” (23). Moncrieff’s statement of openness to both the situation and God comforts Mortimer “more than Simson,” as unlike Simson, Mortimer’s goal is

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Moncrieff, who I discuss in the next section, “more properly embodies scientific rationality as the narrative seeks to bring together supernaturalism and religious office.”

<sup>192</sup> In a Freudian reading of this moment, Penny Fielding writes, in her book *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (1996), of how “the repression of desire itself stands in a metaphoric relation to the action of writing on speech. The story suggests, in one sense, the ghostly voice is exorcized by being written down” (223). Fielding further explains that “Roland’s story, subject to the imposed order of writing, will become instructional in the education of other children, whereas the oral Willie escapes the subversive union with his mother” (223-24).



not to “be clear about the cause of it,” but rather to help the suffering creature, and by so doing, help his son.

When the three men arrive at the ruins, the minister attempts to connect with the spirit voice by both listening to his pain and speaking to it with compassion, guidance, and even sternness at times – it is the minister who plays the role of father. While listening to the spirit, the minister identifies the voice as belonging to a deceased boy named Willie, who lived in real life and suffered the trauma that had been aurally reenacted. Willie is described as having been “a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and ‘led away,’ as people say,” choosing a life of beggary and homelessness (“OD” 29).<sup>193</sup> When he finally returned home, however, he discovered that his mother had died only a few days before, causing him such overwhelming pain and grief that his sorrow was sonically imprinted on the space of the ruins as an affective resonance of his expressed grief; in other words, Oliphant suggests that it is such powerful emissions of pain that contain enough motive force to record entire scenes of suffering upon a Babbagean environment – figured as a secret heart of nature – preserving the imprint as an emotive force moving in a perpetual circular motion. To open lines of communication with the spirit, Dr. Moncrieff asks questions that seemingly force Willie to consider the logic of his

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<sup>193</sup> In regards to Oliphant’s depiction of Willie as a prodigal son, Susan E. Colon notes in her book *Victorian Parables* (2012), the figure of the prodigal son is one Oliphant repeatedly uses “throughout her long career as a writer” (63).<sup>193</sup> She speculates her partiality to this trope was due to both literary and biographical reasons: in her fiction, the “parable” enabled her “to think through moral, relational, and existential dilemmas”; in her personal life, “Oliphant’s two surviving sons were perennial disappointments, remaining dependent on their mother until their deaths in their mid-thirties.”<sup>193</sup> Colon points to “The Open Door” as one of Oliphant’s later texts that reveal her increasingly fraught faith. The prodigal son of her 1882 short story, Colon argues, creates a “painful tension” between her “trust in divine justice” and her “raw experience” of grief, suffering, and unanswered prayers (67). Henry similarly notes how Oliphant frequently featured complicated mother-son relationships in her fiction, especially with her depiction of “the son who is ungrateful and dismissive of his mother” (247). Given her own fraught relationships with her two sons, as well as her alcoholic brother, also named Willie, the backstory of the voice from the unseen is rich with personal meaning for Oliphant. Particularly in relation to her brother Willie, she had witnessed first-hand the tragic downward trajectory of his life, from alcoholism to vagrancy and eventually death.

repeated actions: “‘Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!’” (26). With this exertion of force upon Willie, his own perpetual centripetal force is disrupted, knocking him out of the emotive loop in which he had been stuck.

In Moncreiff’s statement, Oliphant also subtly feminizes God by reasoning that just as Willie’s mom would never lock her son out of her house, God would similarly never lock him out of his divine house. This association of God with feminine sympathy, however, does not last long, for the minister demands that Willie “‘Go home to the Father—the Father!’” while also feeling the need to appeal to the Lord to unlock the door to enable Willie’s mom to let him inside: “‘Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations...Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!’” (“OD” 26, 27). In this latter dialogue, God is re-established in the position of benevolent landowner and the mother as a type of gravitational force which will pull Willie through the divine door to heaven.<sup>194</sup>

After the minister relieves the being’s suffering, and the trio walk back from the ruins, Moncrieff and Simson are again contrasted when the medical doctor enquires about the minister’s beliefs and experience. When asked by Dr. Simson, “‘Do you believe in Purgatory, Doctor? It’s not in the tenets of the Church, so far as I know,’” the minister responds: “‘an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God’” (“OD” 28). When pressed again about the precise

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<sup>194</sup> Jen Baker, in “Imprints: Forming and Tracing the Malevolent Ghost-Child” (2020), describes Moncrieff as a “father-figure” who “identifies (and so names/baptizes) the boy...and performs a pseudo-exorcism to lead the ‘wandering spirit’...to his mother in Heaven – fulfilling the rites of appeasement” (93).

theological tenets of his church, the minister insists that he had not been thinking about religious doctrine or the exact teachings of the Bible at the time; rather, he had simply recognized a friend and wanted to help. The minister finally refuses to answer when the relentless Simson presses him further as to how exactly he recognized his friend; specifically, whether he saw him. The minister's reaction to the doctor's question implies that his knowledge of the person in need was not because of sight, but something deeper and, in Oliphant's view, truer, and more reliable than an individual's ability to perceive using their eyes – as the doctor's mishap with the juniper bush illustrates. The implication is that the minister's perception was of an imaginative and affective kind.

Interestingly, Oliphant does not make Moncrieff's perception overtly spiritual in nature, or his open-mindedness a direct product of his religion or church position. Mortimer provides a lengthy introduction of the minister to the reader when he is first introduced, as if to explain his involvement to the reader:

The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience, – a man who had 'come across,' in the course of his life, most people of note that had ever been in Scotland – and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration to which old men, who are good men, so often come. He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions upon the Confession of Faith – but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. ("OD" 22)

As this passage makes clear, Moncrieff's understanding of "human nature" makes him fit for the task, not necessarily his specific religious beliefs, indeed, it is both his understanding and affective compassion for the suffering of a sonic remnant of a person from the past that allows him to connect to Willie and help him find his way home in the afterlife. This description of him also emphasizes that his defining characteristic is not his religious beliefs, but rather his Scottishness. It is also important that although Moncrieff is described as having associated with "most people of note that had ever been in Scotland," he still remembers this unremarkable son of the housekeeper at the former Brentwood mansion who had died at least a decade earlier. The descriptive passage about Moncrieff also contains a telling juxtaposition between this "old-fashioned" Scottish minister and "many of the young men" of Oliphant's time who dwelled incessantly on the "troublesome problems of theology."<sup>195</sup> Finally, this lengthy description highlights Moncrieff's lack of over-thinking about the "troublesome problems of theology" or the "questions upon the Confession of Faith," which is consistent with his vague responses to Simson's theological questions about whether their experience fit with the minister's specific religious creeds. Ultimately, the minister embodies Oliphant's idealized version of spirituality: his emphasis is on love and compassion for his fellow people, he does not get distracted by issues related to doctrine or class, and he maintains an openness to the ideas of others and of God. In this sense, Moncrieff is the story's symbolic open door; he serves as a medium through which ideas can be exchanged, pain can be communicated, emotions can be shared, and new, healthier perspectives can be cultivated.

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<sup>195</sup> Of course, the ones who dwelt most on this issue, were likely post-Darwinian naturalists.

Oliphant was always deeply religious, and at times wrote critically of the effect of scientific thoughts on eroding religious beliefs, just as she wrote of its potential limiting of the individual imagination, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. In the last few decades of her life, however, there seems to have been a slight shift. Oosterom-Pooley writes on this change:

There are sufficient references in Oliphant's work to confirm that she was no devotee of scientists or, for the greater part of her life at least, an admirer of their field of learning, which in her view was nudging out Christian values. When casting characters in the roles of scientists, her usual practice was to present them in such a manner that they appeared either ridiculous and pedantic, or singularly insensitive and superior, all of which we see traces of in ["The Open Door"]...By the end of her life, however, though still fostering a distinct dislike of science and a mistrust of scientists, Oliphant had come to respect their work, conceding that they had a different perspective on life. (149-50)

As Oosterom-Pooley suggests, Oliphant's later life saw her values shift toward an emphasis on listening to all perspectives and endeavoring to appreciate different views, including those of science. It is precisely this shift, I argue, that is at the crux of Oliphant's 1882 story, overshadowing, perhaps, even the tales' poignant comment on class, gender, empire, science, or religion. After all, "The Open Door" ends not with the exorcising of the spirit, or with the Scottish minister's comments on the incident, or even the narrator's reflections on the whole experience. Instead, it ends with the following paragraph:

I must add that when the doctor defies me, I can always bring back gravity to his countenance, and a pause in his railing, when I remind him of the juniper-bush. To me

that was a matter of little importance. I could believe I was mistaken. I did not care about it one way or other; but on his mind the effect was different. The miserable voice, the spirit in pain, he could think of as the result of ventriloquism, or reverberation, or—anything you please...But the juniper-bush staggered him. Things have effects so different on the minds of different men. (“OD” 30)

Oliphant ends her tale with a poignant statement about differences in perspective – even if she cannot resist the opportunity to take one more poke at the overly closed-minded man of science.

Mortimer becomes someone not only whose mind has drastically changed, but on whom things have different types of effects. He is not a man entirely without flaws, however, keeping with Oliphant’s desire for realism wherever she can include it. For example, when the minister eventually tells Mortimer of Willie’s “history” after the spirit has seemingly moved on, this history is communicated second-hand to the story’s readers by the narrator (“OD” 29). Rather than direct dialogue from Moncrieff, then, Willie’s history is passed along and retold in Mortimer’s own words. This is important given some of the language of his retelling, such as his description of Willie’s mother as “no more than the housekeeper in the old house.” Such statements undermine the notion that Mortimer has transformed into a figure of empathic receptivity and interpretation. Oliphant’s vision of a Babbagean listener is more nuanced and complex than that, reinforcing her attempts to bring realism into this imaginative story. Mortimer has undergone positive changes, however, and now has a greater capacity for empathic listening.

This improvement of character is illustrated through the altered way Oliphant portrays his connection to the Babbagean space. In the beginning, Mortimer describes the ruins as “picturesque,” which “gave importance to the place” and caused him and his family to feel “a

vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon” them, despite their only being “temporary tenants” (“OD” 3). By the end of the story, after his experiences with the voice in pain, Mortimer describes “the bit of wall” as “associated with so many emotions” (29). Far from “vague pride” about its aesthetic qualities and implications of class-based importance, Mortimer’s attitudes about the ruins of the open door become complexly affective and entangled with the actual experiences of the people who lived in the space before its ruined state. His change can similarly be read in his different description of the open door as well. In the beginning, this space was dehumanized, with a focus placed on the “meaning[less]” “door that led to nothing” “struck [his] eye” as being “like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over” (3). By the end, he describes them in the following way:

There was a strange suggestion in the open door,—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity: all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure,—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing, or be kept out—by nothing, you could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. (23)

This later description brings more life and humanity to the ruins, describing both his own ability to move through them – no longer being the detached observer – as well as considering Willie’s futile efforts given the impossibility of his desire. This passage also points to the ruins as having a greater impact on his imaginative mind – through their suggestiveness – even to the point of being overwhelming at times to ponder.

Oliphant’s story demonstrates, therefore, how for Mortimer, the ruins become a space that contains both affective traces of human pathos from the past as well as emotional

connectivity to beings in the present. I contend that he accesses a form of deep time in which deep refers to emotional depth rather than temporal length and detached separation. Oliphant's "The Open Door" thus continues the search for a type of reader wished for by Babbage in the 1830s, capable of reading human historical records impressed upon the natural world. Unlike Dickens's phantom figure of retributive judgment and Bulwer Lytton's semi-immortal man of extreme will power and global thought control, Oliphant's fictional world-reader begins the story without this capacity for active listening; it through the slow acceptance of his hidden self and his encounters not only with the voice in pain, but also his son's suffering, that Mortimer transforms into someone with the sympathetic capacity to read what has been "impress[ed] upon the hidden heart of nature" ("OD" 29). By sympathy, I mean the Humean definition of having the "propensity...to receive by communication [other's] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to, our own" (Hume 52). Scottish philosopher David Hume's further elaboration on sympathy is particularly provocative in the context of Oliphant's story. He writes, "sympathy...is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination" (180). Hume emphasizes that sympathy is an internal and imaginative process: one's imagination must be used as a force through which to enact the mental conversion of ideas into impressions (52).

Mortimer appears to have developed this imaginative reading capacity, although hints to its potential within him can be seen throughout the story. In the beginning of the narrative, he frequently sees the Scottish people and landscape as saturated with pathos, often identifies himself and the world around him in relation to his former home of India, and frequently breaks his rationalist composure in expressions of fear, sympathy, and helplessness. In each of these



moments, Mortimer seems to actively attempt to cover the femininity, foreignness, or sensitivity of these expressions of self with callous, detached, or specifically British statements, as they contradict Victorian ideals of masculinity, imperial strength, and rational thinking. In his attempts to correct his course, however, he overcorrects, dampening the imaginative capacity he had expressed and instead reverting to the worst version of himself in which he appears like the men of Oliphant's time she so reviled. Through interactions of various kinds featured throughout the novel, Oliphant's figure undergoes a transformative process which leads him to open himself up to new perspectives, experiences, and emotional connections, changing him into a Babbagean world-reader capable of seeing, at least in part, the way in which an individual's affective matter can linger on in time and space after the being has passed from this world. For when his transformation is complete, Mortimer reads the workings of the world he can now sense, even if he cannot understand them:

To me it seemed as if...a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical,—as if the unseen actor could not exceed or vary, but was bound to re-enact the whole...It was no “ghost,” as I fear we all vulgarly considered it ... This spirit in pain,—if it was a spirit,—this voice out of the unseen,—was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succored and helped out of his trouble. (“OD” 29)

Rather than changing solely through his encounters with the unseen voice, as the story is most often read; I argue that Mortimer learns how to hear the emotional suffering of others and understand the depth of meaning transmitted through vocal expressions of pain. He also develops

the capacity to hear, understand, and eventually embrace his own unseen voice that involuntarily emits and repeats throughout the pages of his narrative. The above passage, therefore, reflects Mortimer's fully formed Babbagean ability to read the impression on its hidden spaces.

Mortimer's unseen expressions of character also become seen as he crosses the threshold of self-acceptance and becomes the person he truly is, and now desires to be. It is at this point that he fulfills his potential as Oliphant's open-minded, receptive reader of affective resonances in the environment.

Oliphant's "The Open Door" depicts emotive force and sonic permanence – in the form of an affecting voice capable of moving people emotionally through its expression of pain – and a protagonist who becomes a being capable of reading the human remnants that have been pressed upon nature and linger in and across time and space. In Oliphant's Babbagean system, however, the movement of this trace is unnatural, described as a type of mechanical centripetal force bound by its trauma to the same space and temporal patterns until the tension of the force is released. The way in which Oliphant depicts a solution – in both preventing such unnatural occurrences and resolving them – is through modelling how to actively listen to the pain of others – not just to the sounds of their suffering, but to the meanings they convey. The story's ending reinforces that this model demonstrates the potential of this type of empathic listening to connect people of otherwise distinctly different backgrounds and ideologies, and enable them to feel compassion and sympathy for people ignored or shut out of society. In "The Open Door," such emotional connectivity provides an image of hope that crosses not only socioeconomic boundaries, but temporal and spatial dimensions as well.

Oliphant crafts an emotive Babbagean ecology that privileges the individuated voice as the most forcible form of human expression, and an empathic, auditory imagination as the most powerful means of positive change. Unlike Bulwer Lytton's transmission system, in which the person who transmits their expressions also has the most influence over others, Oliphant's emotive system distinguished the influence of forceful affective expression from a capacity to improve the lives of others. "The Open Door" suggests that Oliphant saw implications within Babbagean ideas neither Dickens nor Bulwer Lytton had. By the end of the story, Mortimer himself becomes a Babbagean space that bears the imprinted testimony of Willie's past pains. It is as if the emotive "scene" "impress[ed]...upon the hidden heart of nature" has transferred from the environment to Mortimer's own "hidden heart" through his empathic listening. Mortimer's narrating of his experiences, however, takes this idea even further. His act of writing implies an unburdening of own emotional weight through his written expression, converting the reader of his narrative into a Babbagean receiver of Mortimer's emotive imprint. Oliphant explores the reach of her Babbagean vision by imagining reading and writing as acts that pull Victorian – and contemporary – readers within her emotive Babbagean ecological system.

## CONCLUSION

### Babbage in the Twenty-First Century; Or, The Twenty-First Century in Babbage

Babbage, Dickens, and other nineteenth-century writers stand before a large machine that Babbage promises will analyze their works for spelling errors. George Eliot submits her manuscript only to have the machine convert her words into computer data.<sup>196</sup> Queen Victoria requests the use of Babbage and Lovelace's machine to help her take over the world, transforming the British Empire into a British globe. The two mathematicians become London crime fighters, with Lovelace taking on "POETRY" while Babbage battles "STREET MUSIC!!"<sup>197</sup>

These are all scenes from Sydney Padua's 2015 graphic novel, entitled *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage*. The novel is built upon a premise that Babbage sets up in a different chapter of *The Ninth Bridgwater Treatise*, which Padua reads as speculating on the possibility of alternate universes. In the various adventures that take place in what Padua calls a "Pocket Universe" within the "The Multiverse," Babbage and Lovelace interact with famous nineteenth-century political, literary, and scientific figures who request their help with problems ranging from spell-check to stabilizing the world economy – the latter request comes from a

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<sup>196</sup> Babbage's partner in this novel and in reality, Lady Ada Lovelace, was the daughter of famous poet Lord Byron, and is most remembered for her early computer programming abilities and poetic imagination, despite her notorious dislike of poetry itself. In fact, Lovelace is still actively recognized across the world for her contributions to the field of computer programming. Her name is frequently evoked in recognition of women's contributions to STEM fields, including the yearly celebration of women in science and technology known as Ada Lovelace Day, which is held every second Tuesday of October and internationally recognized. There are also numerous university scholarships named in her honor to help women in STEM, including the University of Southampton's Ada Lovelace Excellence Scholarship. The United States' Department of Defense even acknowledged her early programming work when they created "Ada" in the late 1970s, "a computer language for programming missiles, planes, and submarines" (Yount 127). For more on Lovelace's legacy in the twenty-first century, see Robert Hammerman and Andrew L. Russell's edited collection *Ada's Legacy: Cultures of Computing from the Victorian to the Digital Age* (2016).

<sup>197</sup> Their "idiosyncratic definitions of 'crime'" are inspired by problems that plagued the real-life Lovelace and Babbage (Padua 33)

uniform-clad Duke of Wellington who comes bursting in on a large horse (30).<sup>198</sup> Padua devotes a surprising amount of her story to the adventures of George Eliot in Babbage and Lovelace's pocket verse. In this section, Dickens refuses Babbage's request for him to enter one of his novels into the machine, covering his skepticism about its reliability with flattery and praise. He instead volunteers Eliot for the opportunity. When Eliot inserts her manuscript into the machine, however, she is left without operating instructions and ends up pulling random levers to activate its spell-check function. As time passes, Eliot becomes increasingly nervous about what the machine might be doing to her valuable novel, and in an attempted rescue, she physically enters the machine to retrieve it. Her journey through the maze-like internal hardware of the Analytical Engine is harrowing and bizarre, almost like Alice's experience in Wonderland after falling through the rabbit hole. Eliot ultimately loses her novel, finding that the machine had converted her words into a type of software language or "data" (Padua 192).<sup>199</sup> Padua's depiction of the fate of Eliot's written words, in fact, exemplifies how many in the twenty-first century conceive of

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<sup>198</sup> Babbage did indeed know the Duke of Wellington extremely well. In his autobiography, *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher* (1864), Babbage recalls when he tried to send the Duke a copy of his *Treatise*, but it was refused by the Duke's servant. Instead of interpreting this as a personal slight by his friend, as others told him it might be, Babbage knew it had to be a misunderstanding or a mistake. Babbage was indeed correct, and the Duke gladly received his *Treatise* once he knew it was from Babbage (*Passages* 183).

<sup>199</sup> More specifically, Eliot's writing is reformatted into the early computer language using punch-cards that had actually been conceived by Babbage and Lovelace in their real-life designs for the engine. These cards, which enabled them to program functions into their machine, as did the punch cards that were invented for the textile industry's Jacquard loom. For more on this connection between textile technology and Babbage and Lovelace's ideas about machine programming, see Herbert Sussman's "Cyberpunk Meets Charles Babbage: *The Difference Engine* as Alternative Victorian History" (1994). Sussman's article also discusses another literary work of Babbagean alternative history entitled *The Difference Engine* – a 1991 cyberpunk novel by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling that many consider foundational to the steampunk genre. Although Gibson and Sterling begin with a similar premise to Padua – imagining a Victorian world with a functioning proto-computer – their novel is more serious in tone and focus. As Sussman describes, the "central movement" of *The Difference Engine* "lies in the imagining of a nineteenth-century Britain where the information technology inherent in Babbage's Engines has been fully developed within a technoculture in which engineers, intellectuals, and scientists have come to hold power" (Sussman 2-3).

Babbage's theory of sound permanence in relation to today's internet culture: "her words have become data" that is now stored in "The Cloud" (192, 194).

Padua's steampunk graphic novel was placed on *The New York Times*' bestseller list in 2015 and even adapted for the stage as a steampunk opera in 2023. The opera was created through a collaboration of professors of computer science, rhetoric and composition, and media studies at Michigan Tech, and composers, directors, and performers from Guerilla Opera. Not only does such interdisciplinary work reflect the wide-ranging interest and appeal of Babbage in the twenty-first century, the Guerilla Opera – a punk opera theater ensemble – also has the stated mission of "[b]lasting opera into a realm of immediacy and newness," demonstrating how new, inspiring, and relevant Babbage's ideas continue to be two centuries later ("Mission").<sup>200</sup> While Padua's novel is not specifically about Babbage's sound chapter, it is representative of the modern resurgence of interest in Babbage's work throughout alternative artistic and literary art forms, as well as interdisciplinary scholarship in twenty-first-century humanities – the latter of which, I argue, in many ways reenact a modern version of the creative adaptations of Babbage's ideas by Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant. It is through an analysis of these parallel projects that I conclude my dissertation while simultaneously opening new opportunities for exploring the twenty-first century in the nineteenth, as well as the reverse.

Written almost two hundred years ago, Babbage's *Treatise* chapter on the atmospheric permanence of human agency is by far the most popular and commonly cited of not just his

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<sup>200</sup> The project has been performed at and funded through various American universities, including Michigan Tech and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, conveying the national reach of passion for Babbage's ideas, even with this single adaptation.

*Treatise*, but of all of Babbage's writings.<sup>201</sup> This short chapter was and has remained utterly striking and thought-provoking to nearly all its readers. It is speculative and almost literary in nature, – filled with the mix of straightforward and literal, and narrative and figurative language not uncommon in nineteenth-century scientific texts written for popular readerships – and has been read and reread in countless ways throughout the centuries. Often, these varying interpretations mirror personal, cultural, scientific, and technological changes over time, demonstrating not only the adaptability of Babbage's theory, but also the ways in which the central idea he presents is one that resonates with readers across the centuries in a strikingly similar way to that which he describes: that an individual's words and actions have the ability to transcend time and space, leaving an indelible mark on the world long after that person has left it. Babbage's ideas have become a kind of manifestation of the very phenomenon he imagined; much like his morally motive atoms, his words have continued to reverberate out through countless generations, transcending time and space, making impressions on readers that merge and interact with new ideas and changes throughout the centuries.

Babbage's sound theory's enduring relevance to the modern world has led many scholars to view his ideas as prescient models of twenty-first-century technologies and concepts. In the field of sound and media studies, specifically, Babbage's chapter is often read as describing a type of modern internet data ecosystem. In *Format Friction: Perspectives on the Shellac Disc* (2024), for example, Gavin Williams discusses Babbage's sonic theory in the context of what he

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<sup>201</sup> Not everyone agrees with this assessment, however; Shelley Trower, for example, in *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (2012), contends that Babbage's argument against miracles, which he makes in other *Treatise* chapters, "has tended to overshadow Chapter Nine" (112). In the twelve years since Trower made this observation, interest in Babbage's sound chapter has grown exponentially, suggesting that the focus of Babbage studies has shifted since then.

calls the “global [sound] format” (1).<sup>202</sup> Although Williams’s primary focus is on sound technology of the early twentieth century, his discussion of Babbage’s ideas includes claims about their relevance to the modern world. Williams reads Babbage’s “atmospheric archive” as anticipating “the digital twenty-first century,” and he conditionally relates his theory to today’s “climate breakdown,” “if we allow undying sounds to stand for carbon molecules” (15). For Williams and many other contemporary scholars, Babbage’s chapter is an “enduring gift to sound studies.”<sup>203</sup>

In *Creatures of the Air: Music, Atlantic Spirits, Breath, 1817-1913* (2023), James Q. Davies relates Babbage’s sound chapter to both contemporary internet culture and modern meteorology. He describes the Babbagean atmosphere as “an ever-gathering datacloud of world-historical knowledge” – the word “datacloud” evocative of both virtual infrastructure and an actual cloud in the sky that contains particulate data (106). Davies claims that Babbage was not alone amongst his contemporaries in viewing God as “a divine meteorologist,” he credits Babbage as providing the foundation for “the making of modern climate,” being “perhaps the first to recommend statistical and even computer modeling for analyzing complex weather systems.”<sup>204</sup> For Davies and many others, Babbage’s theory anticipates, and even provides an

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<sup>202</sup> Williams focuses specifically on the history of the shellac disc, which was a type of gramophone record – a predecessor of the vinyl LP – that circulated throughout the world in the first half of the twentieth century. In doing so, Williams argues that this sound technology’s history can be used to explore larger global issues and changes of the time, as well as how it helped to shape today’s global relationship to sound.

<sup>203</sup> Scholars such as Williams and Picker also include as part of this “gift” Babbage’s “1854 campaign against street nuisances” which featured “a notorious rant against the Italian organ grinders and German brass bands who toured his neighborhood in London’s Manchester Square” (Williams 15). This campaign, of which Dickens was also a part, feeling similarly plagued by the incessant sounds of the city, provides insight into the daily soundscapes of Victorians, particularly those living in London.

<sup>204</sup> Davies also stresses the “relational consequences” implicit in Babbage’s *Treatise* chapter: “[e]very sound...in Babbage’s reading, had global repercussions” (106). Although he briefly acknowledges Babbage’s reference to nineteenth-century injustices committed against enslaved people in the Atlantic Ocean and his insistence that enslavers will be punished for their crimes on Judgment Day, Davies does not delve further into this topic, as have



accurate model for, today's digital and meteorological technology simultaneously – once again exemplifying this current trend of thinking about Babbage's theory as a twenty-first-century data ecosystem.

The analytical depth of contemporary media scholarship related to Babbage and the twenty-first century varies greatly. Seán Street, for example, in *The Sound of a Room: Memory and the Auditory Presence of Place* (2020), briefly remarks that Babbage's ideas “may be read today on a number of levels, not least relating to radio waves, the internet, and even as a metaphor for collective conscience” (93). John Durham Peters, on the other hand, provides a thoughtful comparison of Babbage's unlimited archive of knowledge to Google in *The Marvelous Clouds* (2015), with his analysis doing more than simply noting similarities. While Babbage's “airy library” contains “a complete cosmic memory,” Peters argues, “Google doesn't index every data point, Babbage-style” due to limited “bandwidth” – a problem Babbage's “infinite database” of “total cosmic storage” does not have (344, 347, 344). Peters sees Google and today's digital infrastructure as approaching data collection somewhat “pragmatically”; the “ether,” on the other hand, or what Peters calls “the Victorian Internet,” as it was similarly regarded by many as “the medium of all media,” fulfills the era's “dream of an infinite database” due to the belief that it pervaded the entirety of the universe (347, 345, 341). Peters' consideration of the Victorian and modern internets highlights the dissimilar yet complimentary conceptions of data storage mediums and capacities between the two eras. Even Peters' classification of “ether” – or as many in the nineteenth century conceived it – as the “Victorian

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many other scholars. For examples of such scholarship, see my discussion of modern criticism about Babbage's abolitionist additions to his second *Treatise* edition in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Internet” reinforce the idea that the two centuries are connected by a similar media consciousness.<sup>205</sup>

Perhaps today’s scholars hear the twenty-first century reverberating out through Babbage’s words because of what Jay Clayton describes as the “odd parallels between the two times, conjunctions that share a weird, long-hidden logic” (8). In *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (2003), Clayton argues that “[s]ome of the most notable of these parallels include: the telegraph and the Internet; Babbage’s Analytical Engine and the digital computer; nineteenth-century sound technology and virtual reality; Frankenstein’s monster and genetic clones; automata and artificial-life research.” Clayton neglects Babbage’s sound chapter in this text, opting instead to focus on his unfinished proto-computer, the Analytical Engine – the completion of which is imagined in the alternative histories of Padua’s graphic novel. Of Clayton’s listed parallels, however, several are particularly relevant to modern reinterpretations of Babbage’s theory of sound permanence in interdisciplinary scholarship: the similar transmitted communication systems and technology that facilitates recorded or simulated sensory experiences. Peters claims that while there are similarities between the two periods, specifically related to “investment[s] in external storage media” to record and preserve knowledge, he argues that the “*Internet*” has surpassed the “*library*” as the representative “bank of knowledge” which “exceeds what any individual can know” (316).<sup>206</sup> I contend that it is in such recognizable similarities throughout the periods’

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<sup>205</sup> Tom Standage also published a book entitled *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers* (1998) which discusses the impact of the electric telegraph on nineteenth-century culture. Peters, however, argues that the ether was “much more” internet-like for Victorians “than the telegraph” (345).

<sup>206</sup> Despite this, Peters describes the internet in poetic terms resonant of Babbage’s description of his atmospheric library: “The internet is a vast inscription medium. It is hard to understand what the thing is, this labyrinth, library, world-brain...The internet is an ocean, a graveyard...a waste dump, and an archive” (Peters 315).

differences that the parallels between nineteenth- and twenty-first-century adaptations of Babbage's ideas are most explicit and suggestive.

Fiction writers like Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, and Oliphant found ways to reimagine Babbage's theory to better reflect the complexities of nineteenth-century affective relations in their globally interconnected world. Twenty-first-century scholars have similarly recontextualized Babbage's words to elucidate the intricate networks of influence of today's digitally mediated relations in a virtually connected cyberspace, often going so far as to conceptualize his language using internet terminology such as "bandwidth," "datacloud," and "database." The Babbagean systems of nineteenth-century fiction feature mediated ecologies in which acting agents influence others remotely by means of affective connections transmitted throughout physical spaces that include natural environments and architectural domains or homes with hidden rooms and open doors. Those of the twenty-first century, alternately, appear as moderated ecologies in which active users influence others remotely by means of internet connections transmitted throughout cyberspaces that include virtual environments and digital domains with home pages, chat rooms, and open forums. Despite the difference that two centuries bring, each era's Babbagean ecology attempts to illustrate, in the words of Bulwer Lytton's protagonist in "The Haunted and the Haunters," how "ideas [are] conveyed somehow or other...from one mortal brain to another," and "originate in some brain now far distant," or, "to what extent human will" or "thought" "can extend" across the globe once an individual "give[s] it expression" ("Haunters" 236, 241).

The twenty-first-century's revolution in global communication technology – the internet and social media platforms – has made the world seem just as Babbagean as it had to those living

in the nineteenth century. Such new technologies have allowed the individual and humanity to go beyond anything that Babbage, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, or Oliphant could have imagined. The internet has made Babbage's theory manifest, recording the thoughts, movements, and images of an individual's life – more than the residual traces of humanity these Victorians envisioned – into a cyber-atmospheric archive where they can be stored, transmitted, read, and felt by generations across time and space. The internet itself is one vast library on whose webpages are forever written all that we have ever said.

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## APPENDIX



Figure 1. Hablôt K. Browne's Frontispiece for *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844)

## VITA

Allison Lyn Clymer was born in Missouri and has lived in various places throughout the Midwest, New England, and the South. She attended Bucknell University in Pennsylvania with a Theater Arts Merit Scholarship in costume design. She received her B.A. in English Literature with a minor in Anthropology in 2011, graduating with honors with her thesis entitled “The Pressures of History: Shakespearean Performance and Interpretation.” In 2013, she received her M.A. in English Literature from Bucknell University with a master’s thesis entitled “*The Woman in White* as Narrative Asylum: Wilkie Collins’s Uncanny Construction of Female Subjectivity.”

Clymer’s research examines the efforts of Victorian writers to portray complex interconnectivity and influence using scientific and technological discourses. Her review of *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age* appeared in the *Victorians Institute Journal* in 2017. She also contributed a “Guide to Further Reading” to the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* published in 2019. She earned her PhD from the University of Tennessee in 2024.