
The Traffic in Poems



NINETEENTH-CENTURY POETRY
AND TRANSATLANTIC EXCHANGE

EDITED BY MEREDITH L. MCGILL

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 CHAPTER 10

 Robert Browning,
 Transported by Meter

Yopie Prins

OF ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY, and how it strikes a contemporary, Swinburne wrote: "He never thinks but at full speed; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a wagon or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway."¹ The rhythm of Swinburne's sentence accelerates into something like the triple meters preferred by Browning, whose technical innovations in prosody are associated here with new technologies of transportation and communication. Like traveling on a train in sudden stops and starts, or telegraphing messages in dots and dashes, Browning's poetry seems to move metrically with the times: he is a man who thinks "at full speed," and "the rate of his thought" is measured in the rapidity of his verse, speeding forward in time and space and into the future. Often Browning was criticized for this rapid style—the condensation of ideas and compression of grammar, the dense diction and pressing rhythms—but no matter how it struck Browning's contemporaries, it is easy to get carried away by the increasing momentum of his poetry. Hence Ezra Pound's affectionate epithet for Browning was "Old Hippety-hop o' the accents," a poet who takes his readers for a bumpy ride from Victorian verse into modern prosody.²

The rapid acceleration of Browning's poetry is structured by interruption and disruption rather than continuous flow. This discontinuous movement of stopping and starting is played out in a polyrhythmic counterpoint, in Browning's meters and as the very pattern of their historical transmission. Browning's metrical apparatus becomes increasingly evident in the reception of his poetry, mediated by new technologies that are also defined by discontinuity. To illustrate how a metrical reading of Browning's poetry might be one way of tracking the history of its reception, I follow several trains of thought. Not only was Browning figuratively associated with the rhythms of railway travel, but his poetry was also literally read on the train when it was reprinted for a railway timetable in nineteenth-century America. Modern transportation proved an occasion for

musical transport as well, when a train-ride inspired the American composer Amy Beach to create a rhythmic musical setting of a poem by Browning. Her song was transposed by D. W. Griffith into a cinematic revision of Browning in the early twentieth century, when silent film emerged as another metrical medium. The recycling of Browning's poetry at various historical moments and in various media repeats with a difference the reading of his poems in print, where meter already functions as a complex graphic phenomenon.

Although my focus is on the American modernization of Browning, my argument is not that Browning—an eminently Victorian poet—is inherently modern; rather, the remediation of his poetry tells us much about meter as a technology for poetic transmission and the interplay of old and new media in the nineteenth century and beyond. In "Victorian Poetry's Modernity," Ivan Kreilkamp urges us to read Victorian poetry "within a much broader modern culture of mechanical reproduction, mass visual experience, mediated print cultures," and he turns to Robert Browning in particular for "a provocative new vision of him as a prophet of the 'shocking encounters' produced within a technologically mediated nineteenth-century modernity."³ Although Browning may not have seen himself in these terms, Kreilkamp sees an allegorical anecdote in a recently recovered photograph of Browning. Here Browning seems to be looking straight into the eye of the camera, a self-conscious self-reflection on the production of his own image. Taken in Paris in 1856, the photograph was sent to Boston to serve as frontispiece of an American edition of Browning's poetry, but it was lost en route. For Kreilkamp, the loss of the photo in the nineteenth century and its recovery in the twentieth century is "emblematic of Victorian culture's ambivalent, sometimes disavowed relationship to a nineteenth-century modernity often coded as French, American, or German."⁴ The circuit of the photo shows us now, in retrospect, the international circulation of the poet in an age of mechanical reproduction, not only typographically and photographically but also phonographically and cinematographically.

Kreilkamp's article is written in response to the question "Whither Victorian Poetry?" posed by Linda Hughes as an invitation to critics to ponder future directions in this field of study.⁵ Responding to the same question, Margaret Linley meditates further on the relationship between Victorian poetry and technology. Although she agrees "there is much to be done by simply considering poetry in historical relation to the vast array of Victorian inventions such as the stereoscope, kaleidoscope, phonograph, computational machines, photography, and film," she also insists that "we need to conduct such studies with a theoretical awareness that takes us beyond the limited sense of technology as instrument and instrumentality" in order "to address Victorian poetry as itself a technology."⁶ With the nineteenth-century invention of new technologies for the mechanical mediation of voice, it is especially important to remember that Victorian poetry had already invented its own techniques for the mediation of voice by meter: this form of poetic transmission is especially visible, perhaps even more than audible, in

Browning's poetry. My own answer to the question "whither?" is to follow the surprising movement of one of his poems across the Atlantic and across different media, thus demonstrating that the traffic in poems goes in many directions, both spatially and temporally, defining new measures of and for transatlantic exchange.

RAILWAY RHYTHM

In 1856, when the photograph of Browning was lost in transit (on the train to Boston perhaps?), it seems that Browning was more widely read in America than in England. His early career in London as a dramatist had flopped, and his attempt to publish dramatic poetry in cheap pamphlets also failed: he had intended his *Bells and Pomegranates* series to appeal to a broader market in England, but it sold well only in America. The first in the series, his lyrical drama "Pippa Passes," was published in 1841 and favorably reviewed by Margaret Fuller as "a little book full of bold openings, motley with talent."⁷ The motley piece is composed of four discrete dramatic episodes, framed by two dramatic monologues, and interspersed with songs attributed to an orphan girl named Pippa: she performs the lyric interludes as well as the prologue and the epilogue, and thereby creates continuity for the otherwise abrupt and discontinuous structure of Browning's text. Pippa literally and figuratively "passes" through various dramatic scenes, unaware that in each mini-drama her song is heard at a critical turning point, causing its dramatic reversal: the effect of her passing is felt by others but unknown to herself. Thus "Pippa Passes" dramatizes simultaneously the embodiment of song and its reception; the lyric figure of Pippa turns into a self-conscious reflection on the unconscious and often unpredictable effect of a poem on its readers.

As a figure for lyric circulation, "Pippa Passes" circulated among American readers and soon became a favorite in antebellum literary circles, where Browning became almost as popular as the hugely popular Elizabeth Barrett Browning. American literati even took pride in claiming Browning as an American invention, as T. W. Higginson later wrote in "The Biography of Browning's Fame": "It is interesting to us, as Americans, to know that the shadow began to lift from Browning's fame a little earlier in this country than in his own."⁸ Higginson's paper was delivered at the Boston Browning Society in the 1890s, and in fact the first of these societies had been formed in the 1870s by an American professor, who exported the idea to London.⁹ Eventually Browning Societies on both sides of the Atlantic took over the task of reading and explicating Browning's poetry, and by the end of the century his fame had surpassed that of his wife. The American reception of Browning is recounted anecdotally by Elizabeth Porter Gould in *The Brownings and America*, a charming tribute to both poets published in 1904 for "The Poet-Lore Company" in Boston. Here we learn about an ill-informed "English lady of rank" who asked "whether Robert Browning was not an American" and was duly informed "there is not so poor a village in the United States where they would not tell you that Robert Browning was an Englishman, and that they were very sorry he is not an American."¹⁰

Railway reading created a new market for cheap publications and changed the way people read in nineteenth-century America. "The passenger train provided new contexts for reading," as Kevin Hayes points out: "The development of passenger railways combined with the widespread availability of inexpensively-produced books significantly influenced what people read, how they obtained what they read, and, indeed, how they read."¹⁸ Their changing perception of the reading process can be linked to a new experience of space and time on the train, described by Wolfgang Schivelbusch in *The Railway Journey*; he dedicates a chapter to "Railroad Space and Railroad Time" to show how the acceleration of travel annihilated the experience of spatial distance and how temporal diminution was expressed in terms of shrinking space.¹⁹ This transport technology altered the perception of space and time for not only nineteenth-century travelers, as Schivelbusch suggests, but also nineteenth-century readers, as Herbert Tucker further suggests in an article on "spacetime" in nineteenth-century poetry. Tucker thinks about the "interconvertibility" of space and time as a hermeneutic that can run in both directions, and he gives the example of train travel to demonstrate how it became possible in the nineteenth century to read space in terms of time as well as time in terms of space. "To think of a railway timetable, as Victorians in mounting numbers had to do daily, is to see how temporal succession might be laid out visibly as a spatial field translating minutes into miles," Tucker writes, and he suggests that the overdetermined verbal designs of Victorian poetry with its "parade of prosodic forms" might be another example of this conversion between spatial and temporal orders of reading.²⁰

Continuing on this track, I would like to ask: how did the train become a vehicle for reading Browning in particular? Reading his poetry between the stops of the C&A Railroad would allow transportation to be experienced as literary transport, as we see in an advertisement that depicts passengers in the "reclining seat car," especially designed to appeal to ladies and gentlemen with time to read during their travel (figure 10.2). How were passengers guided by the *C&A Railway Guide* to read Browning's poems, printed in columns and reduced type, not unlike the numerical charts and schedules in the first pages of each issue of the guide? If passengers were simultaneously translating miles into minutes and minutes into miles, did they also follow the patterns of Browning's prosody as a spatial representation of temporal sequence? Let us imagine Browning's men and women, reading his poetical works as they were traveling on the train, scanning lines in verse and columns of numbers printed side by side on the timetable as a visual grid: an experience of metrical spacing, measured in stops and starts, over space and in time. Through this reciprocal temporalization of space and spatialization of time, the railway edition created a different context for reading Browning's texts, turning the rhythms of the train into a rhythm of reading, and turning the rhythms of reading into a metrical form.

The typography of the railway timetable creates a visual counterpoint that departs from a continuous reading of Browning's lines in verse: in each "Table

Chicago and Alton Railroad
THE ONLY FIRST-CLASS ROAD IN THE WEST.
(See Classification of Railroads by Board of Railroad Commissioners.)

THE BOARD OF RAILROAD COMMISSIONERS
has appointed by the LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, to Classify the Railroads, has decided and reported that the

Chicago & Alton Railroad
IS THE
ONLY FIRST-CLASS ROAD IN THE STATE!
AND IS RATED BY IT
CLASS "A"

It is celebrated for the promptness of its Passenger Equipment, smooth and well built, without jolts, prompt time and easy connections. Its Engines are provided with Timoni's and other improvements. Its Day Coaches are furnished by some other fine Road or Street, they are light and low, elegantly furnished, have 18 seats, with extra seats, and are provided with Blackstone's celebrated Platform and Couplers, Goodale's patent Steam, and a patent Safety Brake, Smith & Henshaw's patent Ventilator, and all the modern improvements which make traveling a luxury, including Thomson's patent Best Shovel, the most effectively combined the best.

THE BLACKSTONE PATENT PLATFORM AND COUPLER,
Has all that is to be desired, prevents the possibility of Accident from Puller becoming slack, enables to the utmost shortness of Motion, and makes a "click" on the rail."
no pleasure and comfort to be so a road in a drawing room.

PASSENGERS SHOULD PROCURE TICKETS BY THIS FIRST-CLASS ROAD,
THE MOST EQUIPPED AND MOST CAREFULLY MANAGED ROAD IN AMERICA.

SECTION OF RECLINING SEAT CAR

CHICAGO, KANSAS CITY & DENVER
SHORT LINE,
Chicago & Alton R. R.
(See page 8.)

Commencing March 1st, 1874, these Cars will be run

Through Between Chicago and Kansas City,
WITHOUT CHANGE.

No Extra Charge will be made for Seats in these Cars.

10-2. "Section of Reclining Seat Car on Chicago, Kansas City and Denver Short." Advertisement in *Official Guide to the Chicago & Alton Railroad*, with announcement on facing page that "Chicago & Alton Road is the only first-class road in the state!" *Official Guide to the Chicago & Alton Railroad*, no. 1 (1872), 4-5. Courtesy Photographic Reproductions, British Library.

of Comparison, Showing the Difference in Time of Different Localities," the multiple columns indicate not only multiple time zones but also seem to suggest coexisting temporalities. Thus, after pages and pages of reading columns of numbers and place names, variously printed in italics and boldface and with variously patterned margins, the reader arrives at Browning's poetry, more conventionally printed in double columns: a familiar typographic arrangement for nineteenth-century editions of poetry, but now also strangely reminiscent of reading the fine print in the timetables. The rhythms of reading have been disrupted, or reoriented, by the preceding pages, so that it becomes possible to imagine the emergence of multiple temporalities in Browning's poetry—a polyrhythmic typography that makes even more visible the polyrhythms of his verse.

For example, the reprinting of "Pippa Passes" in number 11 of the *Official Guide to the Chicago & Alton Railroad* could prompt a reader to think differently about the spatialization of the page. We follow the lyrical drama in two columns with dialogue in longer pentameter lines, but when we come to Pippa's song, "The Year's at the spring," there is a visual as well as a rhythmic interruption. Moving from blank verse to lyric meter, the italicized text marks a shift in time

that is made visible in the typography. The generic shift from drama to lyric is indicated by italics, not unlike those many tables of comparison in the railway edition, "showing the difference in time of different localities." The voices represented in Browning's text are also associated with different localities and temporalities and continually dislocated in our reading of the text on the page. Thus, toward the end of Act I, the dialogue between the adulterous Ottima and Sebald ("speaking" in pentameter) is interrupted by Pippa ("singing" in dimeter):

*From without is heard the voice of Pippa, singing—
The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!*
[PIPPA passes.

Sebald. God's in his heaven! Do you hear this? Who spoke?²¹

In this lyrical interlude Pippa's song temporarily dislocates the speaking voices of the drama, but her singing voice is also curiously dislocated, bracketed by the stage directions as something that is heard "from without" and only in passing. "Who spoke?" asks Sebald after "PIPPA passes," unable to locate the origin of the voice because it is really a voice without origin.

Rather than representing a speaking subject, the song circulates outside Pippa and without expressing her subjectivity: there is no "I" in this lyric, and the verbs of being are all elided. It is a song of passing through the world, structured as a rapid succession of temporal and spatial locations (through the prepositions "at," "on," "in," and "with") and the parallel syntax of the end-stopped lines (punctuated by semi-colons, a dash, and a final exclamation point) adds to the acceleration of the poem, continually starting and stopping and starting again. Various critics have commented on its paratactic form and unusual rhyme scheme (abcd abcd), as an imitation Elizabethan song or troubadour lyric composed for impromptu performance.²² The meter is also rapid, repeating two feet per line: a pattern of iamb and anapest that is briefly reversed in the third and seventh lines ("Morning's at seven" and "God's in his heaven" are a metrical chiasmus, turning x / x x / into / x x / x) before the original pattern of the verse reasserts itself. What makes the song move (and moving) is this formal patterning of spatial and temporal relations, creating a sense of perpetual motion. What better poem to read on the train?

TRAINS OF VERSE

It is time now to change tracks, moving from Browning's poetry literally transported on the train to a more figurative reading of Browning's poetry, transported

by meter. In his *History of English Prosody*, George Saintsbury defends Browning from the common complaint of stretching poetry toward prose: according to Saintsbury, even in "presenting long trains of this verse," Browning "always kept the norm—enlarged to the utmost stretch, but never actually exceeded or broken."²³ It is true that Browning had a reputation for rough prosody, Saintsbury acknowledges: "He set his affected eccentricity of tongue against his native justness of ear, and made an unnecessary to-do between them. But even then the ear generally won, in spite of the outrageous gesticulations of the other member." The occasional unpronounceability of Browning's poems (forcing the tongue into strange contortions or "gesticulations") does not contradict his "justness of ear"; rather "these gesticulations (which are quite as often versicular as not) are only the result of his burning desire to get to the next thought, the next thing, the next suggestion, inference, comment," and "all this haste transforms and transfuses itself into the fashion of verse." Rather than lacking an ear for the musicality of English verse, Browning's versification creates a more abstract musical pattern corresponding to the momentum of Browning's thought.

The restless, rapid movement of the poetry was already noticed by Ruskin, who wrote a letter to Browning in 1855, complaining about abrupt leaps and gaps of thought in his poem, "Popularity." In response to the first line of that poem ("Stand still, true poet that you are") Ruskin asks, "Does this mean: literally—stand still? Or where was the poet figuratively going?" Unsure of where any of Browning's poetry is going, Ruskin reads the poem line by line to criticize its elliptical style. "Your Ellipses are quite Unconscionable: before one can get through ten lines, one has to patch you up in twenty places. . . . You are worse than the worst Alpine Glacier I ever crossed . . . so full of Clefs."²⁴ Browning's now famous reply to Ruskin is: "I cannot begin writing poetry till my imaginary reader has conceded licences to me which you demur at altogether. . . . You ought, I think, to keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge of my 'glaciers,' as you call them; not stand poking your alpenstock into the holes, and demonstrating that no foot could have stood there;—suppose it sprang over there?"²⁵ Browning imagines a reader who will understand that his poetry never stands still: "So much may be in 'stand still,'" he admonishes Ruskin. Keeping pace with the thought means following the multiple movements of his verse; rather than complaining that "no foot could have stood there," Ruskin should concede more licence to Browning, whose metrical feet are always in motion, "tripping" and "springing" from here to there.

But if Browning requires so much agility from a reader to follow his fancy footwork, how popular can a poem like "Popularity" be? In trying to write more popular poetry, Browning explained that *Bells and Pomegranates* was "an endeavour towards something like an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought."²⁶ But where was the "imaginary reader" who could hear the music and follow the poetry of his thought? Even Elizabeth Barrett, before she married Browning, found it difficult to make sense of his prosody.

Her initial response to "Pippa Passes" was "Pippa passes. . . comprehension!"²⁷ Although she later came to admire the poem, she complained that Browning's poetry was by no means easy listening: "And the verse . . . the lyrics . . . *where is the ear?*"²⁸

Early in their courtship correspondence, Elizabeth Barrett therefore took it upon herself to make Browning's prosody a little more appealing to the ear. She sent him various metrical notes on "The Flight of the Duchess" (another poem of passage, like "Pippa Passes"), written by Browning in a four-stress meter with variable number of syllables. She considered it "a striking poem . . . quite wonderful for the mechanism & rhyming power of it,"²⁹ and she especially liked the passages where "the lady prepares for her flight & flies" because "the very irregularity & looseness of the measure [have] a charm of music."³⁰ However, she also commented on his general tendency of "making lines difficult for the reader to read," insofar as "the uncertainty of the rhythm throws the reader's mind off the rail. . . and interrupts his progress."³¹ Derailed rather than transported by Browning's meter, she proposed to smooth out some of these interruptions by correcting his prosody in "The Flight of the Duchess." Browning adopted almost all of her corrections, as in the following three lines:

When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
By—was it singing, or was it saying,
Or a strange musical instrument playing?³²

Originally Browning had written, "Was it singing, was it saying," but Barrett supplied the conjunction "or" to avoid a metrical break. Later she changed her mind and agreed with him that there "should be and must be no 'or' to disturb the listening pause," perhaps because she had developed an ear, or rather an eye, for the patterns of interruption in Browning's verse. In Browning's original version, the ear is indeed arrested, and we are stopped in our tracks: we might even interpret the rhetorical question posed by these lines as an unspoken commentary on how to read the meter in which they are written: is it singing, is it saying, or do we hear a "strange musical instrument" that is neither spoken nor sung, a metrical mediation of voice perhaps? Barrett, who was no slacker when it came to prosody, must have figured this out in the course of correcting the poem, as she called the poem "speech half asleep, a song half awake."³³

Generations of critics after Barrett have similarly struggled to understand how Browning plays the strange musical instrument of his verse.³⁴ Browning himself claimed that his reinvention of meter was directly related to his interest in music: "I have given much attention to music proper—I believe to the detriment of what people take for 'music' in poetry. . . . For the first effect of apprehending real musicality was to make me abjure the sing-song."³⁵ Because the metrical mediation of voice in his poetry could not be heard as "sing-song," it was often not understood by his readers. For example, in his notorious polemic against "the poetry of the period," Alfred Austin criticized Browning because "he has no voice, and yet he wants to sing."³⁶ And yet Browning himself understood the

music of poetry not in terms of song, but as a complex interplay of metrical forms, as Donald Hair has argued: Browning's poems tend toward an abstraction from voice and into a silent reading that makes possible our awareness of meter, rhythm, and music all at the same time.³⁷

Browning's poems are far from lacking in music, then, but their musicality is to be found in polymetric effects that cannot be spoken all at once in the same voice. Often Browning juxtaposes and even superimposes two metrical systems: along with accentual syllabic verse based on iambs and naturalized as the alternating patterns of speech rhythm in English, Browning experiments with trisyllabic meters that permit more variation in the number of syllables between strong stresses. The mixed meters of Browning have been called "logaoedic" because they mix iambic and trisyllabic meters, allowing two different kinds of scansion simultaneously: accentual (counting accents in the spoken language) and musical (measuring time in isochronous intervals, like a bar of music).³⁸ Throughout Browning's poetry, music is invoked in both form and content, as in the "Parleying with Charles Avison," which concludes with several bars of music: presented in print, however, these musical notes seem to ask for silent reading and resist actual voicing. In "Pietro of Abano"—the one poem for which Browning composed a tune—the words are also transposed into musical notes that cannot really be sung: the final lines of the poem proclaim, "I have —oh, not sung, but lilted," which lead into a musical notation that demonstrates the "lilt" of the poem as a way of reading the metrical pattern without vocal articulation.

But if Browning's poems perform the disruption and interruption of voice, as I have suggested, what did they sound like when he read them aloud? Browning loved to recite his late poem, "Thamuris Marching," and he did so often upon request. The poem is written in Shelleyan terza rima, moving swiftly from stanza to stanza as Thamuris marches (like Pippa passing) through the world of nature at dawn, toward his fateful (and fatal) musical contest with the muses. The movement of Thamuris through the landscape is not unlike the railway journey as Schivelbusch describes it; Browning creates a new perception of space and time: "The motion of the train through the landscape appears as the motion of the landscape itself," and, as the motion of the train seems to shrink space, it displays "in immediate succession objects and pieces of scenery that in their original spatiality belonged to separate realms."³⁹ So also the experience of Thamuris marching is to perceive the landscape in immediate succession, by allowing space and time (the near and the far, the past and the future) to converge in a moment of sublime transport:

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much.⁴⁰

At this "interchange of function," transposing "near and far" into "far with near," the meter also becomes interchangeable: "I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange" can be scanned as iambs or anapests, as pentameter or tetrameter.

The polymetrical music of *Thamuris* marching is invoked at the end of the poem as “one consummate strain,” before his song abruptly breaks off: transported by meter, *Thamuris* is marching toward his own death, and the death of lyric voice his punishment for vying with the muses.

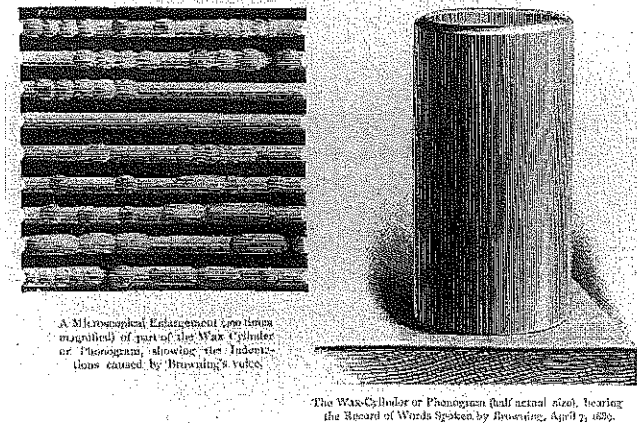
What kind of recitation could do justice to complex music of this poem? According to contemporary accounts, Browning had quite a loud voice when he recited his poems: “his utterance was flexible and dramatic, very different from that of Tennyson” and “his voice, virile above all things, was strong and inclining to the strident”; furthermore, he tended to read energetically, “his measures, duly stressed by his foot stamping vigorously in time.”⁴¹ It would seem that the polymetricity of Browning’s poetry was not so much heard in the speaking itself as in the interplay between his virile voice and his vigorous foot, creating a counterpoint between two kinds of sound, analogous to the superimposition of different metrical grids. In other words, Browning’s poetry performed the need for metrical feet as well as voicing, by demonstrating the excessiveness of the poem even to the poet’s own voice.

This metrical mediation can be heard in the only existing recording that we have of Browning, as he recites from memory the first stanza of another poem in perpetual motion, “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.” The poem is famous for anapests that seem to imitate the galloping horses, or perhaps the other way around, the horses that seem to imitate the galloping anapests:

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
‘Good speed!’ cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
‘Speed!’ echoed the wall to us galloping through.⁴²

Characteristically, Browning’s verse speeds up (especially with the contraction of “Good speed!” into “Speed!”), and the anapests contribute to this sense of acceleration. The meter seems to take over in Browning’s recording, where the thumping of the anapests is more audible than the words of the poem: what we hear is not the immediacy of Browning’s voice but its mediation, as the speaking voice is broken up by the very technology that seeks to preserve it. Indeed Browning forgets his own words, as the recitation fades into inaudibility, and all we hear is the whoosh of the revolving cylinder (sounds like a train, sort of). The recorded voice is then disrupted by a series of pauses, and Browning interrupts himself to apologize: “I am terribly sorry that I can’t remember me [sic] own verses: but one thing which I shall remember all my life is, the astonishing sensation produced upon me by your wonderful invention.”⁴³ Here Browning is less interested in the sound of his own voice than in the wonderful invention of yet another technology for its mediation: the phonograph as a mechanical device for mediating voice, like the metrical mechanism of his own verse (figure 10.3).

This remarkable recording was made for Thomas Edison in 1889 on wax cylinder, an object of fascination in England and America, illustrated in a carefully



10-3. The Browning Cylinder. *Black and White* (December 12, 1891).
Courtesy, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University.

patterned engraving for the journal *Black and White*.⁴⁴ Here “The Wax-Cylinder, or Phonogram . . . bearing the record of words spoken by Browning” is literally and figuratively reduced to the scale of print, making it easier to “read” the image as a graphic image of a sound recording. Furthermore, as if to amplify this reproduction of voice in print, the phonogram is magnified in a second illustration, identified as “a microscopical enlargement . . . showing the indentations caused by Browning’s voice.” Here we are asked to look even more closely at another kind of imprint, the magnification of marks indented on the cylinder. Although the technology is new, the logic for reading these inscriptions of voice is familiar enough; the marks can be scanned visually or aurally, like scanning the lines of meter in a poem. The grooves on the cylinder, repeated in the grooved lines of the engraving itself, thus invite the reader/viewer to see different forms of inscription in relation to each other. As Lisa Gitelman argues in *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines*, the invention of new inscription technologies during the age of Edison created a proliferation of inscriptive forms: “some were more textual, some more graphic,” but “many, like the grooved surfaces of phonograph records, provoked explicit questions about textuality, about how some inscriptions might or might not be like texts.”⁴⁵ In different ways, both the illustration of the wax cylinder and the recording itself provoke new questions about reading the “voice” of Browning’s text, as a figure generated by the printed word, the phonogram, the engraving, and, of course, the meter.

MUSICAL TRANSPORT

Ten years after the Browning cylinder crossed the Atlantic to become part of Edison’s “Library of Voices,” the American composer Amy Beach used music

as another medium for giving “voice” to Browning’s poetry. She was a young piano prodigy who turned to composition after her marriage; known as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, she composed some splendid orchestral and choral works, and numerous songs for performance in salons and recital halls. Among her best-sellers were “Three Browning Songs,” dedicated in 1900 to the Boston Browning Society. The first of these songs was commissioned by the Society for a performance of “Pippa Passes” in celebration of Browning’s birthday: a musical setting of “The Year’s at the Spring” (figures 10.4–10.6). It was not the first time that this lyric had been set to music; Browning himself imagined a musical version of all the songs in *Pippa Passes* (“the lyrics *want* your music,” he wrote to his musical friend Eliza Flower)⁴⁶, and there are more than fifty settings of “The Year’s at the Spring” in particular.

As it happens, Amy Beach composed her version of the song during a train journey. Beach recalled in an interview that she found herself on a train, saying the words over and over until the song sang itself into her consciousness against the persistent rhythm of the train wheels: “I listened to the melody—it was the only melody, after that, for that burst of joy and faith. I wrote it down as soon as I got home.”⁴⁷ Mrs. Beach is not unlike our imaginary passenger on the Chicago and Alton railway, as her ride on the train is associated with reading the rhythms of Browning, transposed into a metrical form and further transcribed in musical notation. We can see from the piano-vocal score how Beach’s musical setting repeats the persistent rhythm of the train wheels: the piano accompaniment starts with trainlike triplets that move relentlessly forward, in a continual crescendo and accelerando, while the vocal part has the momentum of an ascending melodic line. Although Pippa’s words suggest the rhythms and cycles of nature, the triplet rhythms of the music drive the song like a motor in a machine. Most of the song is written in 3/4 time, except two measures in 4/4 that break up the meter: the first time in measure 7 (“The hillside’s dewpearled”), where the vocal line moves momentarily out of the rhythm, with a pick up note on “The” that sets an eighth note against a triplet. This superimposition of double and triple rhythms happens again on the word “dew,” before returning in measure 8 (with the “a tempo” marking) to 3/4 time.

Beach’s song deviates from Browning’s text by creating a stanza form and returning to the beginning of the poem to repeat the first two lines like a refrain:

The year’s at the spring;
And day’s at the morn;
Morning’s at seven;
The hill-side’s dew-pearled;

The year’s at the spring;
And day’s at the morn;
The lark’s on the wing;
The snail’s on the thorn;

To the
BROWNING SOCIETY of BOSTON.

The Year’s at the Spring.

Words by
ROBERT BROWNING.
(from “Pippa Passes”)

Music by
Mrs. H. H. A. BEACH,
Op. 44, No. 1.

1 *Allegro di molto.* 2 3

VOICE. The year's at the spring, And day's at the

PIANO. *p*

4 5 *sfz* 6 *f*

morn; Morn - ing's at sev - en; The

7 *f poco rall* 8 *a tempo* 9 *rit*

hill - side's dew - pearled;

A. P. S. 5197-4

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Public Performance Permitted

Also published with Violin Obligato
and as a duet (Soprano and Alto)

10-4-10-6. Piano-vocal score for “The Year’s at the Spring,” in *Three Browning Songs, Set to Music* by Mrs. H.H.A. Beach (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1900). Opus 44, no. 1, dedicated by Amy Beach to the Browning Society of Boston. Courtesy, Photographic Services, University of Michigan.

God’s in his heaven—
God’s in his heaven—
All’s right . . .
All’s right with the world!

10 *p a tempo* 11 12 *poco cresc.*
The year's at the spring; And days at the

13 14 *sempre cresc.* 15
morn; The lark's on the wing; The

16 17 18 *f*
snails on the thorn; God's in his

A.P.S. 5137-A

10-5.

With each downbeat of the second stanza, starting with measure 10, the song modulates a step upward to create a line that ascends both harmonically and melodically toward "the lark's on the wing" and "God's in his heaven." Deviating again from the text, Beach repeats the words "God's in his heaven" in music ever ascending: God is in heaven on F in measure 18, God is in heaven on G-flat in measure 20, and then the song reaches its highest note: "All's right" on A-flat. What is interesting about this musical climax is that all is not right, harmonically

19 20 21 *ff*
heaven, Gods in his heaven, All's

22 23 24 25 *rit*
right, All's right with the

26 27 28 29 *a tempo*
world!

A.P.S. 5137-A

10-6.

and rhythmically: at measure 22, the song is momentarily suspended in a 1-6-4 chord that is leading toward the dominant V chord but not there yet, and the note sung in A-flat is sustained so long that it leads to a break in the rhythm. The triplets stop in measure 24, and in measure 25 we hear big block chords in 4/4 time: although these chords finally reach the dominant V chord in A-flat, a note sung on F by the voice creates a dissonance that momentarily postpones the triumphant conclusion, a return to triplets in the original key of D-flat.

Like the metrical patterning of Browning's poem, these musical interruptions contribute to the breathless movement of the song and make it a moving performance. "The Year's at the Spring" was a favorite among singers, both amateur and professional, and became a signature song for late Victorian divas like Emma Eames. She performed it as an encore around the world, with audiences "demanding its immediate repeat," and she wrote to Beach that "it has never failed to carry away [the audience] by storm"; she even traveled to Italy to perform the song for the son of Robert Browning, who said he too "was intensely moved by it."⁴⁸ Browning's poem, imported from England to America and exported from America to Italy, transported from the train to music parlors and concert halls, was thus made into a vehicle for musical transport, or what Amy Beach liked to call "the uplifting power of music"⁴⁹—simultaneously a horizontal and vertical movement, a movement across space and through time toward a transcendent moment.

This idealization of music, a late nineteenth-century ideology, assumes that the conversion of a poem into song makes poetry more expressive and that lyric voice can be made more immediate in the moment of a musical performance. In another essay on "Enjoyment of Song," Beach asserts: "This is an age of song. Even the air is full of song." She traces the history of "art or concert song," her special medium, by beginning with folk songs and gradually moving toward the perfection of musical form in "a complete and expressive communication to the world of an inner feeling." And yet, in narrating the transition from the makers of folk-song to song writers like herself, there is an interesting turn in her argument: "The development of the art of printing made song universal as was not possible when it could only be perpetuated orally," she writes.⁵⁰ It turns out that the transmission of song depends on print and, indeed, that song can only become "universal" as a "complete and expressive communication" when it is mediated by print.

At the turn of the century there was a commercially successful market for sheet music, and Beach's songs were aggressively marketed by the Boston music publisher Arthur P. Schmidt: in addition to the traffic in poems, this ballad industry brought "an increase in musical traffic between Britain and the United States."⁵¹ Although the wide circulation of her music in printed form could make a "universal" song out of Browning's verse, it also complicates the immediacy of voice attributed to that song and puts it in quotation marks. Furthermore, even in the performance of Beach's songs, whether in popular "ballad concerts" or salon recitals, in music halls or drawing rooms, the "voice" of the singer was heard as the reiteration of a song already published. This was especially true of "The Year's at the Spring," a best-seller in print and a favorite in concerts, where audiences would call again and again for its repeat, like a broken record. What audiences might have heard in Beach's song was the mechanical repetition of a voice in quotation marks: not the voice of Pippa, not the voice of the poet, not the voice of the composer, not the voice of the singer, but the performance of a polymetrical effect that exceeds any single voicing. Paradoxically, in her musical

transposition of Pippa's song, Beach makes it possible to read Browning's poetry by going beyond the singing voice.

CINEMATIC MEASURES

In the early twentieth century, Browning's poetry was transported into yet another medium—that of silent film. Like the rapid movement of Browning's prosody, moving pictures created the illusion of motion through the juxtaposition and syncopation of discontinuous elements; indeed, the first cinematic experiment of the Lumiere Brothers was a documentary, "Arrival of a Train," in which the movement of the train was both the content and the form of a new technology that worked by the sequencing and acceleration of different parts. Considering cinema as a metrical form, we can see why and how this new technology might be associated with the techniques of Browning's versification.

In 1909, a bulletin of the Biograph Company announced that "Pippa Passes, or, The Song of Conscience" had been made into a moving picture and was available for viewing in the nickelodeons of New York (figure 10.7). Instead of being measured in metrical feet, Browning's lyrical drama is measured out ("length 983 feet") as a sequence of scenes and carefully edited shots, directed by D. W. Griffith. The Biograph bulletin concedes in its first sentence that such an attempt to turn poetry into cinema, and cinema into poetry, might startle audiences: "The mere suggestion of portraying in motion pictures the poetic thoughts of that eminent English poet, Robert Browning, is indeed startling." But in the final sentence, the bulletin concludes that the movement of such "poetic thoughts" might be even better presented cinematically: "In this picture the Biograph presents a most artistic subject handled in a manner never before excelled, with keen appreciation of its poetic and dramatic value; photographically perfect, and comprising many novel effects never before attempted." To convey the photographic perfection of the film, the bulletin includes a still of Pippa, standing at her window at the break of day, basking in the light of the rising sun: a lyric figure, illuminated by the dawn of a new technology.

Given the popularity of "Pippa Passes" in America at the turn of the century, it is not surprising that D. W. Griffith turned to this poem for one of his earliest cinematic experiments. In directing the film, D. W. Griffith developed many of the techniques of cross-cutting, complex lighting effects, close-ups, and montage for which he later became famous. For example, the extraordinary effect of daybreak in the opening scenes of the film depended on "cutting a little rectangular place in the back wall of Pippa's room, about three feet by one, and arranging a sliding board to fit the aperture much like the cover of a box sliding in and out of grooves," as recalled by Mrs. Griffith: "The board was to be gradually lowered and beams of light from a powerful Kleig shining through would thus appear as the first rays of the rising sun striking the wall of the room."⁵² This contrivance recreates in slow motion the technology of early cinema, which also

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Pippa Passes

Or, THE SONG OF CONSCIENCE

Gertrude Brynson



The mere suggestion of portraying in motion pictures the poetic thoughts of that eminent English poet, Robert Browning, is indeed startling, and yet there never lived a writer whose dramatic force and psychological analysis was more pronounced than he, who was unquestionably among the greatest of English writers. In appreciation, the Biograph has taken for inspiration his masterpiece, "Pippa Passes". His great love for Italy induced many of his works being located there, for it was to him the clime of poetic romance. Our story opens with Pippa awakening in her little room, with the morning's light pouring through the window, for the "day's at the morn; morning's at seven; the hillside's dew-pearled; the lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn; God's in his Heaven—All's right with the world." To-day is a holiday in Asolo, the whir of the spindles of the silk-mill is silenced, and Pippa, the little silk-winder, saunters forth with her lute to brighten life's ordeal with song, little realizing what good she is doing. Her song of peace, "God's in His Heaven—All's right with the world!" induces Faith, Hope and Charity—Faith in God's Justice, Hope for our welfare, and Charity towards mankind. The workman goes to spend his time and earnings at the tavern, neglecting his despairing wife, with their little child, to grieve at home. In the midst of roasting at the tavern, Pippa passes, singing her song of peace. The words sink deep into the heart of the workman, and force him to return to his sorrowing wife, with a resolve never to err more. The next episode is that of the marrying of Jules to the Greek model, whom he believes an innocent young girl. Upon learning her true character, Jules would have struck her down, but at that moment Pippa passes, and her song induces him to be charitable, so he resolves to save and protect her. Wending her way through the lanes, Pippa approaches the shrub-house of Luca, wherein a terrible tragedy is impending. Luca sleeps, and his wife, Ottima, is persuading her lover, Sibald, to dispatch him. With upraised dagger, he approaches the coach, and the dagger is about to fall, when Pippa's song is heard. What a transformation! Conscience turns their eyes into their very souls and how black the aspect—"God's in His Heaven—All's right with the world!" How stand we in the sight of God? What mistaking angel art thou, who with song has stayed the hand that would have done irreparable wrong? Oh, God! What would I not do to efface the sable mantle that shrouds my soul—my life, my all, to thy disposition I yield! Thus has Pippa's song averted a tragedy. Returning to her little room, she retires. "Day's turn is over, now arrives the night's". The golden sunshine fades into silver moonbeams and Pippa sleeps, innocent of the good her peregrinations have worked. In this picture the Biograph presents a most artistic subject handled in a manner never before excelled, with keen appreciation of its poetic and dramatic value; photographically perfect, and comprising many novel effects never before attempted.

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10-7. Advertisement for silent film directed by D. W. Griffith, "Pippa Passes, Or, The Song of Conscience," *Biograph Bulletin*, October 1909. Courtesy, Museum of Modern Art.

depends on "cutting" and "arranging" the light in a sequence of rapidly accelerating images to create the illusion of moving pictures.

The interplay of slow and rapid lighting effects in the opening scene of "Pippa Passes" creates a polymetrical effect, superimposing longer lines of movement on the

mechanical flickering of the film. The film begins in darkness, but gradually the morning sunlight enters through a window on the right to reveal Pippa's bedroom and the face of Pippa, asleep in the lower left corner of the frame. As she is illuminated by the light, the images of the film begin to move; Pippa walks to the window, picks up a guitar and a slip of paper from the window sill. A sudden close-up reveals that this paper is a fragment of sheet music with musical notes, the very notes composed by Amy Beach for Pippa's song.⁵³ Pippa exits right with the slip of paper in her hand and in the next shot enters a garden bright with sunlight; she pauses to look at the sun and then walks toward the camera while she sings and plays the guitar. She sings and pauses four times, before passing out of the frame. The first and second shots of the film thus introduce Pippa as figure for song that can only be seen and not really heard: to understand her singing, we must read a musical notation. No doubt Amy Beach's song was familiar enough to the audience and might even be a cue for the piano accompaniment, but what is important in the scene is the vision of Pippa's song rather than its audibility: the song is illuminated by the rhythms of light, not sound.

The plot summary offered by the *Biograph Bulletin* goes to some lengths to quote, twice, the words of the song that are not heard in the film:

Our story opens with Pippa awakening in her little room, with the morning's light pouring through the window, for the "day's at the morn; morning's at seven; the hillside's dew-pearled; the lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn; God's in his Heaven—All's right with the world" . . . and Pippa, the little silk-winder, saunters forth with her lute to brighten life's ordeal with song, little realizing what good she's doing. Her song of peace, "God's in His Heaven—All's right with the world" induces Faith, Hope and Charity.

This interpretation of Pippa's song prepares the audience for "reading" the film and provides a moral to the story as well: this "song of peace" converts not only its listeners but also its viewers to the ideals of Faith and Hope and Charity. The uplifting power of music associated with Amy Beach's setting of the song is thus transferred to film as another medium for moral uplift: a way to transport the audience, who will be uplifted not by hearing but by seeing.

At a time when moving pictures at the nickelodeon were often criticized as a form of low-brow entertainment, "Pippa Passes, or, The Song of Conscience" was an obvious attempt to give moral authority and cultural prestige to early cinema. The film was well-received and occasioned the first film review ever published in the *New York Times*: "BROWNING NOW GIVEN IN MOVING PICTURES" ran the headline, and the article comments on "demand for the classics" in place of "cheap melodrama." According to the *Times*, "Not only the nickelodeons of New York but those of many less pretentious cities and towns are demanding Browning and other 'high-brow effects.'"⁵⁴ Mrs. Griffith wrote triumphantly about this review of her husband's film: "The newspapers were writing about us. A conservative New York daily was taking us seriously. . . . Now we could begin to lift up our heads, and perhaps invite our lit'ry friends to the movies!"⁵⁵

Of course any "lit'ry friends" could see that Griffith's film was not so far removed from melodrama. The film was substantially revised from Browning's text, freely reinterpreting two of the dramatic episodes, eliminating the other two, and inserting a new "drinking" episode of Griffith's own making (part of his temperance campaign); according to at least one literary critic, "he does much harm in many ways to the dramatic poetry of his source."⁵⁶ But there are melodramatic elements implicit in Browning's poem, not only thematically, in the moralization of good versus evil, but also structurally. In its alternation of dramatic action and lyrical interludes, in its discontinuous plot, in its pattern of interruption that produces moments verging on the tableau, "Pippa Passes" draws on many formal conventions of Victorian melodrama. Defined by sudden stasis and sudden movement, melodrama created a rhythmic oscillation between motion and arrest that made the shift itself critically important to the genre, as Carolyn Williams has argued in "Moving Pictures": prior to early cinema, melodrama already deployed the moving picture as a formal (and I would add, metrical) device.⁵⁷

The cinematic technique of "Pippa Passes" has been noted by critics, some of whom have even suggested we read Browning's text as we would a screenplay: "Griffith stumbled upon the fact that 'Pippa Passes' is very much a prototype screenplay written before a medium had been invented to accommodate it."⁵⁸ But even if this lyrical drama is not quite a screenplay, the first scene of Griffith's film does invite us to see the opening monologue of Browning's poem in a different light, as Pippa addresses the sunrise:

Day!
 Faster and more fast
 O'er night's brim day boils at last;
 Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
 Where spurting and supprest it lay—
 For not a froth-flake touched the rim
 Of yonder gap in the solid gray
 Of eastern cloud an hour away—
 But forth one wavelet then another curled,
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be supprest,
 Rose-reddened, and its seething breast
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.⁵⁹

Beginning with a monosyllable, the lines of this opening monologue grow longer with the lengthening sunbeams: "faster and more fast" the light enters into Pippa's room, crossing the line (note the enjambments after "brim" and "rim") from night into day, in an accelerating cadence of "one wavelet then another." Suddenly "the whole sunrise" seems to have "overflowed the world," even as the longest line of the speech is also overflowing.⁶⁰ In this way, Browning's poetry seems to recreate the rhythms of light in language. Griffith's film, in turn, transforms this poetic

imagination of light into another kind of rhythmic image, not only by means of the special lightning effects to recreate the sunrise that "flickered in bounds" but also in the "flickering" of the cinematic medium itself. Superimposed on the regular mechanical movement of each frame as it flickers by are the longer fluctuations of light and dark, which produce a polyrhythmic effect in Griffith's film. Rather than literalizing the words of Pippa's speech, the film has transposed its staccato movement into another medium that retains the metrical trace of Browning's poetry.

So Pippa passes from one medium to another, in a continual process of remediation that Friedrich Kittler has opened up for consideration in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.⁶¹ But before the nineteenth-century invention of these new technologies, Victorian poetry had already invented meter as its own technology for the mediation of voice: not a mechanized inscription, but nevertheless a form of inscription that made it possible to imagine other modes of reading. Consider once more the arresting moment in Griffith's film, when Pippa discovers a scrap of paper with Amy Beach's music on the windowsill. Pippa's mouth is moving, but we hear nothing: the only way to make her song audible is to make it visible, in a musical notation that flashes on the screen. Pippa sings because her song is already written, not only in Browning's poem but also in Beach's song; her song is spontaneous yet scripted, musical yet silent, in simultaneously overlapping or nested media where each figures the other. Although Browning himself could not have predicted how the lyric figure of Pippa would go into circulation—transported on the train, transcribed by the phonograph, transposed into song, transformed through film—the transfiguration of Pippa's song perpetuates the polymetrical effects of reading Browning's poetry in print. Encountering his text in various unpredictable contexts, what we learn to read each time is not an original lyric "voice" but rather the medium of its transmission: thus Browning is—has been, will be—transported by meter into the future of Victorian poetry.

NOTES

1. I owe much to the various audiences for this paper, which began as a multi-media presentation. Many thanks to the friends who heard the very first version at Rutgers for "The Traffic in Poems," and to the colleagues who heard later versions, presented at the University of Western Ontario for "Old Lamps, New-lit: The Future of Victorian Poetry," at the conference on "Print Culture and New Media" sponsored by the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada, and at the colloquia for nineteenth century studies at Yale University and at the University of Chicago. I also wish to thank Adrienne Fried Block for helpful conversation about Amy Beach, and I am deeply grateful to Meredith McGill for keeping me on track. Sarah Wood, *Robert Browning: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 4.
2. Ezra Pound, "Mesmerism," in *Personae: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), 13.
3. Ivan Kreilkamp, "Victorian Poetry's Modernity," *Victorian Poetry* 14, no. 4 (2003): 608.
4. *Ibid.*, 609. The photo of Browning is reproduced as frontispiece in John Woolford, ed., *Robert Browning in Contexts* (Winfield, Kan.: Wedgestone Press, 1998).

5. Linda Hughes, "Introduction: Whither Victorian Poetry?" *Victorian Poetry* 14, no. 4 (2003): 459–63.
6. Margaret Linley, "Conjuring the Spirit: Victorian Poetry, Culture, and Technology," *Victorian Poetry* 14, no. 4 (2003): 537.
7. Margaret Fuller, *Boston Dial* 3 (April 1843): 535; see also reviews of Browning in *Papers on Literature and Art* (London 1846).
8. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Biography of Browning's Fame," in *The Boston Browning Society Papers, Selected to Represent the Work of the Society from 1886 to 1897* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), 2.
9. Professor Hiram Corson started a Browning Club at Cornell University in the 1870s and then traveled to England, where the London Browning Society was founded in 1881. See William S. Peterson, *Interrogating the Oracle: A History of the London Browning Society* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), 10–11, and photo of Corson, 180–81.
10. Elizabeth Porter Gould, *The Brownings and America* (Boston: The Poet-Lore Publishers, 1904), 35.
11. See Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Browning was involved in signing petitions for the extension of copyright in England but (unlike Dickens) maintained cordial relations with American publishers. Browning's 1849 Poems were published in England by Chapman & Hall and reprinted without permission by Ticknor, Reed & Fields for distribution in the States; subsequently Browning contacted Ticknor for the simultaneous publication of *Men and Women* in America and was pleased to receive sixty pounds. See Wood, *Robert Browning*, 223.
12. Leslie Nathan Broughton, Clark Sutherland Northup, and Robert Pearsall, *Robert Browning: A Bibliography: 1830–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953), 32.
13. Richard D. Altick, "Robert Browning Rides the Chicago and Alton," *New Colophon* 3 (1950): 81. According to Altick, the Chicago and Alton railroad "achieved the distinction of being the first American publisher of Browning's collected poems," 78.
14. *Ibid.*, 79.
15. Newspaper reviews quoted in *ibid.*, 80.
16. The copy donated by Browning to the British Museum is reproduced here by permission of the British Library. The Greek inscription (not observed by Altick) is from the *Birds* of Aristophanes; Browning was reading the play in ancient Greek, in preparation for his poem "Aristophanes' Apology." Browning seems to have appreciated the irony of the passage in Greek, which may be roughly translated to apply either to the American publisher, or to himself, or both: "O Founder of the most glorious aetherial city, / don't you realize how greatly you're esteemed among mankind / and how many of them you can count on as lovers of this land."
17. Gould, *The Brownings and America*, 39–40.
18. Kevin Hayes, "Railway Reading," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 106, 2 (1997): 301.
19. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 34.
20. Herbert Tucker, "Of Monuments and Moments: Spacetime in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *Modern Language Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (September 1997): 271.
21. "Pippa Passes," *Official Guide to the Chicago & Alton Railroad*, no. 10 (1872), 148. For publication history and textual variants of "The Year's at the Spring," see *The Poems of Browning*, ed. John Woolford and Daniel Karlin 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1991), 2: 39–40.
22. For a syntactic analysis, see A. Hill, "Pippa's Song: Two Attempts at Structural Criticism," in *Browning's Mind and Art*, ed. C. Tracy (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), 75–81. Woolford and Karlin suggest that Browning may have derived the rhyme scheme "from the 'rimas dissolutas' of some troubadour lyrics," and note that Browning frequently inscribed this song for autographs as his lyric signature, 39.

23. George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody, from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, 2 ed., vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1923), 216 ff. Saintsbury's defense of Browning is recreated by Frederick Page in "Browning: A Conversation" and reprinted in *Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Drew (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 259–75.
24. Ruskin in a letter to Browning, December 2, 1855, reprinted in *Robert Browning*, ed. Adam Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 687.
25. Browning in a letter to Ruskin, December 10, 1855, reprinted in *ibid.*, 691–92.
26. Preface to *Bells and Pomegranates* 8, quoted in *Robert Browning, The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1: 1069.
27. Elizabeth Barrett in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford (July 15, 1841), quoted in Woolford and Karlin, *Poems*, 16.
28. Wood, *Robert Browning*, 212.
29. Woolford and Karlin, *Poems*, 2: 298.
30. *Ibid.*, 327.
31. Harlan Hatcher, *The Versification of Robert Browning* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1928), 29.
32. "The Flight of the Duchess," in Woolford and Karlin, *Poems*, 2: 318.
33. Hatcher, *Versification*, 18.
34. See, for example, Rowena Fowler, "Music and Metre: Browning's 'Pietro of Abano,'" *Music and Letters* 57 (1976): 47–54; John Hollander, "Browning: The Music of Music," in *Robert Browning: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986); John E. Schwiebert, "Meter, Form and Sound Patterning in Robert Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,'" *Studies in Browning and his Circle* 15 (1987): 11–23; Deborah Vlock-Kays, "Music and Dramatic Voice in Robert Browning and Robert Schumann," *Victorian Poetry* 29, no. 3 (1991): 227–39; Donald S. Hair, "A Note on Meter, Music and Meaning in Robert Browning's *Fifine at the Fair*," *Victorian Poetry* 39, 1 (2001): 25–35.
35. Quoted by Eleanor Cook, *Browning's Lyrics: An Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 14.
36. Alfred Austin, *The Poetry of the Period* (London: Strahan, 1870), 64.
37. Donald Hair, *Robert Browning's Language* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999), 6.
38. Russell Astley, "Browning's Logaedic Measures," *Victorian Poetry* 16, no. 4 (1978): 357–68.
39. Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 60.
40. "Thamuris Marching" from *Aristophanes' Apology*, in Pettigrew and Collins, *Robert Browning*, 2: 318.
41. Sidney Colvin, "Some Personal Recollections," *Scribner's Magazine* 67 (1920), 79.
42. "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," in Woolford and Karlin, *Poems*, vol. 2, 241.
43. Browning's apology is transcribed in Michael Hancher and Jerrold Moore, "'The Sound of a Voice That is Still': Browning's Edison Cylinder," *Browning Newsletter* 4 (1970): 25–26.
44. For further discussion of the Browning Cylinder, see John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122–24, and Yopie Prins, "Voice Inverse," *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 1 (2004): 47–51.
45. Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3.
46. Karlin and Woolford, *Poems*, 2: 8.
47. Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 150–51. Block is quoting from an interview with Amy Beach, "Why I Chose My Profession: The Autobiography of a Woman Composer," *Mother's Magazine* 11 (February 1914): 7–8.

48. Quoted by Block, *Amy Beach*, 151.
49. Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, "The Uplift of Music," *The Musiclovers Calendar* 1, no. 1 (December 1905): 27. She maintained this view throughout her life: "I shall always feel that the true mission of music is to uplift," she wrote again in "The Mission of the Present-Day Composer," *The Triangle of Mu Phi Epsilon* 36, no. 2 (1942): 72.
50. Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, "Enjoyment of Song," *Music On the Air*, ed. Hazel Gertrude Kinscella (New York: Viking Press, 1934), 24–25.
51. Wilma Reid Cipolla, "Marketing the American Song in Edwardian London," *American Music* 8, no. 1 (1990): p. 85.
52. Bernard Hanson, "D. W. Griffith: Some Sources," *The Art Bulletin* 54 no. 4 (1972): 493.
53. Referring to the Library of Congress version of the film, I am following the shot-by-shot transcription by Edward Guiliano and Richard C. Keenan in "Browning Without Words: D. W. Griffith and the Filming of Pippa Passes," *Browning Institute Studies* 14 (1976): 125–59. Among the stills reproduced in this article are "Pippa at her bedroom window" and "Pippa's Song," 133, although footnote 14 does not identify the musical insert as an excerpt from Amy Beach. Griffith's use of Beach was discussed by Adrienne Fried Block in "Amy Beach and Robert Browning: Two Artists of One Mind?," presented at the symposium on "Music and New York's Gilded Age," Mannes School of Music, October 5, 2002.
54. *New York Times*, October 10, 1909, part 1, 8.
55. Quoted by Robert A. Armour, "Effects of Censorship Pressure on the New York Nickelodeon Market, 1907–1909," *Film History* 4, no. 2 (1990).
56. F. A. Hilenski, "D. W. Griffith's Film Version of Pippa Passes: Some Problems in Early Literature to Film Adaptation," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 4 (1976): 76–82.
57. Carolyn Williams, "Moving Pictures: George Eliot and Melodrama," *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 105–44.
58. Guiliano and Keenan, "Browning without Words," 149.
59. "Pippa Passes," Woolford and Karlin, *Poems*, 17–18.
60. On movements of transformation and transition in the poem, see Jacob Korg, "A Reading of Pippa Passes," *Victorian Poetry* 61, no. 1 (1968): 5–19, and Michael Greenstein, "Pippa's Passage," *Studies in Browning and His Circle* 21 (1997): 23–32.
61. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

 CHAPTER 11

 No Coward Souls

 POETIC ENGAGEMENTS BETWEEN
 EMILY BRONTË AND EMILY DICKINSON

Michael Moon

CRITICS HAVE LONG BEEN AWARE of the importance of Emily Brontë's writings for Emily Dickinson. Until fairly recently, however, this awareness tended to take the form of acknowledging Dickinson's apparent interest in Brontë's life and writings while failing to discern any substantial "influence" of Dickinson's poetry on Brontë's part. Thanks in large part to the feminist project of recovering lines of poetic and intellectual genealogies among women writers that has now been ongoing for a generation, readers of both Brontë and Dickinson find ourselves increasingly well-equipped to recognize the ways in which the two may be said to have shared various commitments, ambitions, and ideals, as both readers and writers of poetry. Twenty years ago, Susan Howe forcefully stated: "A close reading of [Emily Brontë's] life and work is crucial for understanding Emily Dickinson. Out of Brontë's Self, out of her Myth, the younger woman chose to pull her purity of purpose. Metamorphosis of thought into corresponding vocation, Myself was as another, now 'I' dare to go farther."¹

To further her point, Howe quotes Dickinson's "Bereavement in their death to feel." This poem contemplates the meaning of mourning for persons unknown to us (as Brontë was to Dickinson) with whom we nonetheless feel "A Vital Kinsmanship"; their deaths may leave us feeling as though our own "Souls" have "Absconded—suddenly—."²

A more immediate sign of Dickinson's awareness of the powerful transferral of energy between Brontë's writing and her own was a request that she was said to have made during her last illness: that her chosen literary mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson read Brontë's most celebrated poem, "No coward soul is mine," at her funeral.³ The poem was so read. I intend the following reflections on the place of this poem between these two poets as a contribution to the kind