In 1895, American artist Edmund Garrett edited and illustrated a poetry anthology called *Victorian Songs: Lyrics of the Affections and Nature*, with an introduction by the quintessential Victorian man of letters, Edmund Gosse. This volume exemplifies the process of cultural transmission that bridged both the Victorian-modernist divide and the transatlantic gap between England and America. Published by Little, Brown in Boston, it must have been widely distributed across New England, for over 400 copies can still be found in libraries there. When it came out, Amy Lowell and Robert Frost were twenty-one, and T. S. Eliot was seven; they might well have seen it during their Massachusetts youths. It recalls the cultural milieu in which the American modernists grew up: with its picture of Queen Victoria and gold-embossed, leaf-decorated cover, *Victorian Songs* appealed to a genteel readership cautiously interested in the safer aspects of Aestheticism (Figure 1). While the poems are mainly mid-Victorian, the volume’s theme of song connects it with the Aesthetic—and modernist—alliance between poetry and music.

As literary study has ventured into other disciplines and media, both Victorian and modernist scholars have taken up music as an important context and interlocutor for literature. Although Lawrence Kramer’s *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (1984) crosses over the period divide, moving from Beethoven and Wordsworth to Ashbery and Elliott Carter, most subsequent interventions have specialized on one side of 1900 or the other. In Victorian studies, the conversation particularly developed around the representation of music-making in the Victorian novel (e.g. Gray, Da Sousa Correa, Weliver) and the Wagner craze (Sutton); in modernist studies, following Daniel Albright’s *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and the Other Arts* (2000), critics have investigated the intersections of literature with the musical avant-garde, jazz, and twentieth-century popular music (e.g. Chinitz, Wallace, Graham).\(^1\) This division dates back to public rejections of Victorian culture and mores.

\(^1\) An important exception to the Victorian/modernist divide in musico-literary studies is Brad Bucknell’s *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics*; his examination of the modernist
by T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf, although their literary and intellectual debts to this age have long been established (e.g. Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics*). Why not musical debts as well? Our musical habits are shaped earlier and remain more deep-seated than our tastes for images or books. The impress of Victorian musical practices and works on modernist writing remains to be examined from many angles; this essay will focus on the Victorian musical-genre poem, tracing it through its modernist transformation and concluding with a closer look at Eliot’s “Preludes.” His 1910 sequence belongs to a nineteenth-century tradition of poems titled after kinds of music, while also responding to contemporary discriminations about Chopin’s music and the performance of his works. “Preludes” combines quintessentially modern vignettes of urban, alienated existence with generic conventions and musical tastes that belong as much to the century before as to the era that followed.

The design, selection of poems, and illustrations of *Victorian Songs* convey a specifically musical conception of Victorian poetry to Garrett’s intended American audience. The frontispiece shows a moonlit ocean marked by the single white sail of a boat, presumably traversing the sea to bring us the poems contained within the volume. The following sequence of engravings printed in the front matter dramatizes its desired reception by American women readers (Fig. 2-5). First, above the table of contents, we see a young woman eagerly reading a book, with the caption “Where are the songs I used to know?” Second, above the index to first lines, a young woman is shown reading at a table, with the caption “Listen—Songs thou’lt hear/Through the wide world ringing.” Turning the page to the list of illustrations, we move to an open-air scene where one woman paints a picture while another looks over her shoulder, with the caption “Their songs wake singing echoes in my land.” Finally, above the Introduction, the engraving shows two young women seated, one singing from a sheet of music, the other playing a lute. The sequence of engravings suggests that the book will inspire readers to artistic activity, the highest form of which is music. In the first image, print is associated with forgetting and nostalgia, but soon reading leads to hearing, and then to painting and singing as “echoes” of the book are carried throughout the “land.”

While Garrett’s illustrations and captions connect printed poetry with sung music, Gosse’s introduction rejects this alliance, claiming that

relation of music to problems of expressing inwardness (in Joyce, Pound, and Stein) begins with Walter Pater.
Historians exaggerate, perhaps, the function of music in awakening and guiding the exercise of lyrical poetry . . . the truth is that these two arts, though sometimes happily allied, are, and always have been, independent. . . . When either poetry or music is adult, the presence of each is a distraction to the other, and each prefers, in the elaborate ages, to stand alone. . . . Most poets hate music; few musicians comprehend the nature of poetry; and the combination of these arts has probably, in all ages, been contrived, not for the satisfaction of artists, but for the convenience of their public. This divorce between poetry and music has been more frankly accepted in the present century than ever before, and is nowadays scarcely opposed in serious criticism. (xxiv-xxv)

Gosse seems embarrassed by the idea of “Victorian songs,” writing: “It was not to be expected that in an age of such complexity and self-consciousness as ours, the pure song, the simple trill of bird-like melody, should often or prominently be heard” (xxxi). He goes on to catalogue the different lyric genres of Victorian poetry, such as the sonnet, the Ode, philosophical verse, and the humorous lyric, none of which have a place in the anthology. Gosse’s view of the musical aspect of poetry is nostalgic and backward looking, in the sense that he sees no future for a true union of the two arts. Gosse’s own contribution to the volume, “Song for the Lute,” suggests precisely this nostalgia: only a historical fiction makes musical verse possible. Indeed, Gosse had published a volume of poems titled On Viol and Flute in 1890. Though sharing a taste for the musical lyric, then, Garrett and Gosse display opposing visions of its career: Gosse sees it primarily as a thing of the past, though capable of being revived as a historical fiction, whereas Garrett envisions his book of examples leading to a renaissance in the relationship between music and poetry, on his side of the Atlantic.

The contrast between Gosse and Garrett captures something of the tension, or paradox, in the relation of music to poetry in the Victorian era. It is a critical commonplace that the growing dominance of print in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries displaced orality as the medium of poetic transmission: “For Victorian poets, lyric appears as a genre newly totalized in print,” writes Matthew Rowlinson in his entry on “lyric” in the Blackwell Companion to Victorian Poetry; “the anthologies and critical editions of the period aimed in principle to incorporate into print the various lyrical modes that print itself superseded” (Rowlinson 60; see also Hoagwood). Perhaps to compensate for this loss of oral performance, Victorian lyric engaged with music in a multitude of ways, such as enclosing song texts within longer narrative
poems (think of the snatches of song that punctuate “Fra Lippo Lippi”), emphasizing musical and sonic aspects of verse (Swinburne, Lewis Carroll, Hopkins), describing or evoking music (such as Rossetti’s “Written During Music” or the fabulously popular “Lost Chord” by Adelaide Proctor, included in *Victorian Songs*); and identifying poems as themselves works of music by title (“song,” “ballad,” “hymn”). Yet even as print “totalized” lyric, songs themselves played an important part in Victorian culture, from home singing around the piano to music hall performance, all promoted by the ballad sellers who hawked the latest tunes on broadsides for a few pennies. Singing was encouraged as a form of social uplift through urban men’s choirs, and the “Tonic sol-fa” method of singing attracted tens of thousands of adult students and was taught in schools (Pearsall 111-122). Does Victorian print lyric gloat over its hegemony or pine in envy of the popular song? As the apparent difference of opinion between Garrett and Gosse shows, the poetic “song” might take either attitude.

The title of *Victorian Songs* and its table of contents testify to Garrett’s clear vision of the musical-genre poem. Of his 130 titles, 32 include the word “song,” and another 15 refer to some other musical form, such as “madrigal,” “serenade,” “lament,” “Rondel,” “symphony,” and so on. Thus over one-third of the poems assert an identity or analogy with works of music. The other poems in the volume exhibit characteristics of song such as short lines, pronounced rhyme schemes, metrical regularity, repetition, and simple ideas and vocabulary. The editor notes a number of texts that have been set to music.

The presence of instrumental-music genres in *Victorian Song* is of particular interest, for this was an emergent genre. The title “song” is practically ageless, and indeed the percentage of poems in English called “song” seems to have remained at about 3% in the one hundred years after Victoria’s ascension to the throne.\(^2\) No poems called “symphony” appear before 1840, however, and with good reason: the symphonic form developed only in the eighteenth century. Many free-form single-movement piano works entered the repertoire even later. Modern listening practices—the public performance attended in a concert hall—were nineteenth-century innovations. It is thus not surprising that the use of instrumental genres as titles and subject matter for poems belongs to the second half of the century, growing in popularity during the 1880’s and 1890’s. It is intrinsically forward-looking—both because it is new, and because it

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\(^2\) Based on a survey of 131,560 poems published from 1840 to 1940 by authors living at some time during those years, digitized in Proquest’s Literature Online database.
seeks to develop a relationship between two different arts rather than hoping to heal the breach between spoken and sung lyrics. Unlike “song,” which implies an identity between music and poetry, or at least the desire for it, the name of an instrumental piece of music taken as the title of a poem can only suggest an analogy. Obviously a poem called “symphony” is not a symphony, only like one in some respect. Such a title relieves the poet of sustaining the fiction of union between the arts and the conventions of song-lyric.

The instrumentally-themed poem seems to have originated in France. Here the vogue for musically-titled poems was established in the middle of the nineteenth century, fostered by a close relationship between poetry and the other arts. Theodore de Banville’s Les Cariatides (1843) contains several sequences of musical poems, such as his twenty-four “Caprices,” which allude to Paganini’s Caprices for violin (1819). Probably the most influential work for the development of the musical genre poem was Théophile Gautier’s Émaux et Camées (Enamels and Cameos, 1852), containing his “Symphonie en blanc majeur” (Symphony in White Major). This poem inspired Whistler to retitle his “White Girl” paintings as “Symphonies in White” and led to a vogue of paintings and poems called “symphonies,” including the “Love Symphony” of Arthur O’Shaughnessy (1874), printed in Victorian Songs, and Oscar Wilde’s “Symphony in Yellow” (1889). The French Parnassian poet Leconte de l’Isle included a poem entitled “Symphonie” in his 1864 Poèmes Antiques, which became the basis for a loose translation by Arthur Symons in his 1889 volume Days and Nights: “Symphony, After Leconte de L’Isle,” one of five parts of a sequence called “Wood-Notes: A Pastoral Interlude.”

This poem and sequence inaugurated Symons’s career-long practice of giving musical titles to groups of poems as well as individual works, especially in London Nights (1895), such as two “Intermezzo” sections and the poems “Caprice,” “The Prelude,” and “Variations Upon Love.” He continued this practice in Amoris Victima (1897) and Images of Good and Evil (1899), which includes “Airs for the Lute.” Though Symons might be the best known of the fin-de-siècle poets to use musical genres, he was certainly not alone. W. E. Henley’s 1893 collection London Voluntaries opens with a five-part untitled poem, in which each part bears a tempo marking (“Andante con moto,” “Allegro Maestoso,” etc.). Mary Alice Vialls’s A Music Fancy and Other Verses of 1899 makes extensive use of musical titles drawing on Wagner—“Prelude to ‘Lohengrin’”; “Overture to ‘Tannhauser’”; “Prize-Song from ‘Die Meistersinger’”—as well as the works of Chopin, including “Nocturne,” “Waltz,” “Some Mazurkas,” and “Barcarolle.” To
these we can add “A Spring Prelude” and “A Chopin Fantasy” by the American poet Robert Underwood Johnson (The Winter Hour and Other Poems, 1892, and Songs of Liberty and Other Poems, 1897).

This modest but persistent vogue continued in the early decades of the next century in both genteel American poetry and the avant-garde. The prolific Louisville poet Madison Julius Cawain and Imagist John Gould Fletcher both published “symphony” poems, such as the latter’s “Blue Symphony” in Poetry of September 1914. Conrad Aikin’s Jig of Forslin (1916) is composed “in roughly symphonic form,” as he explains on the table of contents above the five “movements” of the work. Ezra Pound preferred to title his works after genres of vocal music, from his Canzoni of 1911 (which include “Octave,” “Madrigale,” “Aria,” and “Ballata”), to the Cantos. Ford Madox Ford dedicated his “Canzone à la Sonata” of 1912 to Pound. In a related vein, Wallace Stevens titled his first collection of poems in 1923 after a popular Victorian keyboard instrument, the pump organ or harmonium. The musical-genre poem was one that Stevens paid homage to from time to time in his titles throughout his career, from “Sonatina to Hans Christian” in Harmonium to “Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz,” “The Bagatelles the Madrigals,” “Martial Cadenza,” and others in his later volumes. What these musical analogies mean in practice is not always clear, and varies from work to work. The titles simply indicate that musical, especially instrumental genres, continued to provide material for modernist poets just as they had for writers of the 1880’s and 1890’s.3

In this poetic context, the young T. S. Eliot composed a series of musical-genre poems that he inscribed into a notebook provisionally titled Inventions of the March Hare (the “invention” is also a musical form). From 1910 to 1912 Eliot wrote a “Curtain Raiser,” three “Caprices,” two “Interludes,” “Opera,” a “Suite,” two “Airs,” and several Songs—all of which remained unpublished until after his death—and the well-known “Preludes,” “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” This affinity for musical forms and analogies remained with Eliot throughout his career, continuing with the “Five Finger Exercises”

3 Calvin Brown’s Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts examines many examples of poems based on music, examples that unfortunately also testify to the low quality of much writing produced in this way.
and concluding with *Four Quartets*. He even intended to call his conversion poem “Ash-Wednesday Music” (*Letters* 4, 628). Indeed, it is safe to say that the musical-genre poem was the chief vessel of his creativity. Each of these works exhibits specific ties to nineteenth-century music; here I focus on “Preludes” to show Eliot’s synthesis of Victorian and 1890s elements in a poem often regarded as quintessentially modernist. Despite obvious differences in tone and subject matter, Eliot’s aim in this poem seems strangely similar to that of Edmund Garrett: to move beyond print (rather than returning to an idealized union of poetry and music) into a state of heightened sensory perception and aesthetic experience.

Apart from Eliot’s two “Songs,” the titles of his early poems evoke a well-known repertoire of short, improvisatory keyboard pieces, often combined in groups or sequences. Preludes, interludes, and rhapsodies by Chopin and Liszt were central to the nineteenth-century piano repertoire and were played widely in private homes as well as in concert halls. Preludes and interludes particularly signify an informal, even impromptu performance, and there is much to connect these short, free-form keyboard genres with Eliot’s own loosely rhymed free-verse poems. The classical practice of improvising at the piano as a way of warming up and testing the instrument remained common even in the nineteenth century, though it dropped out of style in the twentieth. Preluding gave the performer an opportunity to show off his improvisational skills, or he could memorize from published “cycles” of preludes in all twenty-four major and minor keys. The most famous prelude cycle of the nineteenth century was Chopin’s (1839); Debussy also composed a prelude cycle in Paris at the same time that Eliot was studying there in 1910-11, and it is possible, though unlikely, that he could have heard the performance of the first twelve on May 3, 1911.

The “Prelude” is a common poetic genre with a major Romantic precedent in Wordsworth’s epic by this name, but the few examples of literary “Preludes” (in the plural) seem to be associated with music. In Lamartine’s 1823 Ode “Les Préludes,” the poet instructs his

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4 John Xiros Cooper’s edited collection *T. S. Eliot’s Orchestra* provides the most comprehensive look at Eliot’s musical affinities. Cooper’s own contribution, “Thinking with Your Ears,” engages the question of Eliot’s relation to Romantic music in his early poems, claiming that Eliot “experienced the sound world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a regressive state of conventionalized sensations and a parallel sclerosis of musical thought. . . . In his early lyrics, it was necessary to vacate the musical habitus of decadence at any cost” (91, 93). This reading exemplifies the common assumption that modernist writers rejected the music of the nineteenth century, which I hope to dispel here.
muse, “viens, prélude à ton gré” (come, prelude to your heart’s desire) (Lamartine 95). Lamartine’s ode later became the inspiration for Liszt’s 1856 symphonic poem by the same name. In 1875, the Victorian writer, critic, and suffragist Alice Meynell, also an accomplished pianist, published a collection of poems entitled Preludes. Laforgue’s Préludes Autobiographiques followed in 1885 (a monologue sharing little thematically with Eliot’s four urban scenes). Apart from these musical and literary sources, including several poems about Chopin by Symons, Eliot most likely became familiar with contemporary discourse about Chopin through the writings of James Huneker.

Huneker was a New York music critic and prolific author of books about European cultural figures. In 1909, Eliot reviewed James Huneker’s Egoists: A Book of Supermen for the Harvard Advocate, referring to Huneker’s “interesting life of Chopin” and praising him for “considering subjects only of the most modern interest” (Prose I, 24). Eliot indicates here his familiarity with Huneker’s book Chopin: The Man and his Music (1900), and possibly his Mezzotints in Modern Music: Brahms, Tschaikowsky, Chopin, Richard Strauss, Liszt and Wagner (1899). Huneker was critical of the cheapening of Chopin’s music through overperformance. In Mezzotints, he writes, “There is something almost indecent in the way we rend our mental privacies, our heart sanctuaries... Poor Chopin! devoured by those ravening wolves, the concert pianists, tortured by stupid pupils and smeared with the kisses of sentimentalists, well may you cry aloud from the heights of Parnassus, ‘Great Jove, deliver me from my music!’” (Huneker, Mezzotints, 163). “The old Chopin is gone for most of us,” Huneker complains, “The barrel organ... now drives the D flat valse across its brassy gamut helter-skelter. The e flat nocturne is drummed by schoolgirls as a study in chord playing... Alas! the Chopin romance is vanished” (162-63). Here Huneker objects to the feminization of Chopin’s music and the way it has become a fixture of musical life, performed and experienced in an automatic, conventionalized way.

Huneker’s opinions may strike readers of “Portrait of a Lady” as strangely familiar:

We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole

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5 Eliot later wrote—in marginal notes to his 1955 essay “The Art of the Theatre: Gordon Craig’s Socratic Dialogue”—“at an impressionable age... I tried to get hold of all the works of contemporary European writers mentioned by a now forgotten critic of ‘the seven arts,’ James Huneker” (Kings College, Hayward Bequest, HB/H, part D). Thanks to John Morgenstern for drawing this note to my attention.
Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and fingertips.
“So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.” (Eliot, CPP 8)

The female speaker objects to the deadening of Chopin by public performance, while the male silently objects to her feminization of art; not long after, he finds himself losing his self-possession when “a street-piano, mechanical and tired / Reiterates some worn-out common song” (CPP 10). The street piano is similar to the barrel organ mentioned by Huneker; both are operated by a crank that turns a barrel mounted with pins (what Huneker calls a “brassy gamut”) arranged to play a single tune on the pipes or strings of the instrument. Before the age of the phonograph, the barrel organ and street piano allowed relatively unskilled musicians to disseminate popular works of music to a large audience, but without the element of spontaneity inherent in an individual performance. Indeed, these instruments were notoriously annoying, and customers often paid the players just to go away. Both speakers in Eliot’s poem, like Huneker, object to the mechanization of music, whether through the use of sound-producing machines or in performances that seem automatic rather than spontaneous and intimately felt.

Huneker complains about the sentimental, clichéd performances of Chopin’s music, but not about the music itself. He redirects the reader’s attention to Chopin’s later works in which “may be found the germ of the entire modern harmonic scheme,” especially praising the Préludes as “immortal” (Huneker, Mezzotints 164, 171). Of the second Prélude he writes: “with its almost brutal quality and enigmatic beginning, [it] is for a rainy day—a day when the soul is racked by doubts and defeats. It is shuddersome and sinister. About it hovers the grisly something which we all fear in the dark but dare not define” (171). In Chopin, Huneker calls various Préludes “ugly, forlorn, despairing, almost grotesque, and discordant”; as “morbid” (a word often used in connection with Chopin, linking him with 1890’s decadence); as suggesting a “self-induced hypnosis, a mental, an emotional atrophy,” or “a mental condition approaching anxiety,” and so on (Huneker, Chopin, 221, 222).

Thematically, Eliot’s “Preludes” correspond surprisingly with Huneker’s responses to Chopin’s Préludes. To begin with, the images are insistently masculine, dwelling on outdoor urban scenes and sensations of steaks, beer, sawdust-trampled streets, short square fingers
stuffing pipes, evening newspapers, and so on, including the woman in bed, probably a prostitute, viewed from above. The male-dominated world of “Preludes” contrasts with the emasculating women of “Prufrock” and the struggle of the male speaker in “Portrait” to free himself from the clutches of the Lady. There are also more specific correspondences. Huneker imagines Prélude No. 2 taking place on a rainy day when “the soul is racked by doubts and defeats”; the first section of Eliot’s “Preludes” features a “gusty shower” and the fourth begins “His soul stretched tight across the skies,” with “stretched” possibly echoing “racked” (CPP 12-13). Huneker’s “grisly something which we all fear in the dark but dare not define” evokes the prostitute’s vague nighttime reveries, “such a vision of the street/ as the street hardly understands,” and the “conscience of a blackened street.” Huneker’s atmospheric terms also apply to Eliot’s poem: “brutal,” “enigmatic,” “despairing,” “ugly,” and so on, including the “emotional atrophy” that Huneker diagnoses in Chopin (and which Eliot would also later identify in himself as “aboulia”). Although the correspondences are striking, I am less interested in claiming Huneker as a source for Eliot’s “Preludes” (there are already so many compelling ones, including Charles-Louis Philippe’s novel Bubu de Montparnasse) than simply in showing how likely it is that Eliot had the music of Chopin in mind. Specifically, Eliot seems to share Huneker’s project of reviving a spontaneous, deeply felt, and specifically masculine interpretation of Chopin’s music rather than the hackneyed and sentimental one delivered by schoolgirls and barrel organs. When we recall the female readership invoked by the illustrations of Victorian Songs, it is clear that both Huneker and Eliot sought to re-masculinize selected aspects of Aestheticism.

Some of the qualities that Huneker praises in Chopin’s Préludes are, in fact, cultivated qualities in all piano preludes. The prelude was meant to sound improvised, even if the performer had memorized it in advance. As an 1810 piano handbook explains, “In the performance of preludes, all formality or precision of time must be avoided: they must appear to be the birth of the moment, the effusion of the fancy” (Temperley 331). Another defining feature of the prelude was its tonal open-endedness: rather than concluding on the tonic, the key of the piece, it ended on a leading tone to be resolved by the opening notes of the next work played by the performer. Chopin’s Préludes emphasize these qualities, and the practice of performing the entire cycle together (rather than using individual preludes as the introduction to other pieces) was particularly jarring to the nineteenth-century ear. “The endings to the Préludes seldom give comfort,” musicologist Jeffrey Kallberg writes; they “often seem to stand somewhat apart from
the body of the prelude; their gestures at closure sound unrelated to what has passed before” (Kallberg 139-40).

Eliot’s poem loosely shares these features with the musical prelude. Like his “Caprices” and other poems in Inventions, his “Preludes” hover around the length of a sonnet without ever hitting the fourteen-line mark—the sections are thirteen, ten, fifteen, and sixteen lines long, respectively. To a sensibility accustomed to the sonnet, these varying stanza lengths give the poems a casual, even unfinished feel, as do the irregular line lengths and the intermittent rhymes. While all but two lines in the first section rhyme, this proportion diminishes to only six out of sixteen in the final Prelude. The freedom with which Eliot handles his verse form creates the feel of spontaneous, unstudied composition. Eliot also develops his themes unconventionally, without identifiable speakers, characters, or narratives. Rather, the eye moves across a cityscape cluttered with detritus, assailed by smells and “sordid images.”

The sections also avoid conventional methods of closure, such as drawing a moral or repeating a refrain. Instead they end by suggesting a new phase of the scene, such as in the first section: “A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps./And then the lighting of the lamps” (CPP 12). In the second, “One thinks of all the hands/That are raising dingy shades / In a thousand furnished rooms”; in the third, the female figure who has been lying in bed, sits up and takes the papers from her hair. The fourth ends by introducing an apparently unrelated subject, a device often employed by Chopin; here the inscrutable comment, “Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh; / The worlds revolve like ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots” (CPP 13). Indeed, this is the closest we get to a backward look that could place the poem in history.

The poems of the sequence are thus structurally and chronologically forward-looking insofar as they resist conventional poetic closure and simply turn to the next time of day. (The sequence seems to move in a twenty-four-hour cycle from six p.m. one day to six p.m. the next, passing through night and early morning in between, perhaps analogous to the twenty-four keys of the prelude cycle). The poems also resist nostalgia in many ways, from their realistic depiction of the modern city and the unsentimental representation of the prostitute in section three, to the powerful image of impatience in the “conscience of the blackened street / Impatient to assume the world”. The poems thus fulfill—in a way that Edmund Garrett couldn’t have imagined—his own proposal for a revival of American poetry through the influence of song.
The sequence also shares Garrett’s view of print as a medium to be transcended. Paper appears in several sections in the form of trash:

And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots; (CPP 12)

and in section three, the woman takes curling papers from her hair. “Preludes” figures print as the least likely medium for communication; instead, Eliot emphasizes immediate sensory perception: the smell of steaks, a gusty shower, muddy feet that press, soiled hands clasping yellow soles, and a thousand sordid images. Perceptions force or “press” themselves on the unidentified subjects of the poems. Thus while the song-poems in *Victorian Songs* attempt to transcend their print medium by imitating the prosody and themes of actual song lyrics, “Preludes” gestures towards the same goal by a kind of full-body address to the senses. The impulse to move beyond the medium of print is fundamentally the same, but at this later date, Eliot seems already imagining communication technologies that will transmit scenes and sounds directly to the audience without passing through print: sound recording, radio, and film. Whether he has these technologies in mind or not in 1910, the poems seem to yearn and point towards a future condition of immediate transmission of sensory experiences. The emergence of these technologies is perhaps the reason why music-poetry engagements are viewed so differently by scholars in Victorian and modernist studies. If it was the totalizing medium of the nineteenth century, print is already under pressure from sound recording, radio, and film by the nineteen-teens. Yet, in a sense, this technological shift only opens a new chapter in the history of the poetic ambition to transcend print, an aspiration deeply encoded in the Victorian “song” poem and its newer subgenre, the poem of instrumental music.
Figures

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4
Fig. 5

Introduction
Works Cited


