

Unveiling Charles Crocker: Textual Analysis of an Obscure Victorian Poet

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Abstract

Charles Crocker (1797–1861) and his poetry were once so well known in Chichester, Sussex, England in the mid 1800s that Crocker was simply called, ‘the Poet’. His life and work are now forgotten. Apprenticed to a shoemaker at the age of 12, young Crocker composed poems in his head. After the birth of a daughter and being widowed at 21, he was urged to publish. Crocker would go on to complete five editions of poetry and become a church sexton. Nearly all of his poems were composed in early life. When his beloved Chichester Cathedral’s spire famously collapsed in 1861, it killed no one; but Crocker soon died of grief. This paper introduces an obscure and lost voice in early Victorian literature. In addition, the method to discover such lost voices is described. Crocker’s work is also described, and some textual differences between the various editions of Crocker’s canon, a historical context and biography, using Ancestry.com, detailing the poet’s fall into obscurity, are also highlighted. Insightful biographical information that illuminates his development as a working-class poet is given. The author suggests that the benefits of uncovering lost 19th-century voices are unlimited. Twenty-first century educators and scholars must learn such valuable research skills in bibliography and textual studies in order to uncover obscure voices. Literature is thus enriched and diversity magnified. As the bicentennial of the release of Crocker’s first collection of poetry (1830–2030) approaches, it is hoped that this essay shall serve as a reintroduction of sorts to at least one lost Victorian voice.

Binfield and Christmas (2018), in their edited volume of teaching laboring-class poets, state that “literature itself is a socially constructed category, one that is forever in flux and should be taught as such” (p. 1). It is the purpose of this essay to not only introduce a lost poet that has likely never been formally researched or taught, but to inform others, specifically teachers, on how to find such lost voices so that we can teach them. The reason is that there are many lost voices from the past waiting to be heard again. When taking into account Binfield and Christmas’s notion that literature is always evolving, we would be remiss not to include those literary voices from the past who might seem dated or quaint compared to contemporary voices. In the early 1800s many people had moved to the city and regretted it. There was a feeling of nostalgia for the past. A movement of naturalist poetry started. Many laboring people became poets. They wrote about nature and the good ones could get patrons or subscribers to buy their books. One such poet was named Charles Crocker (1797–1861).¹

In this essay, the life and work of a once well-known poet who fell into obscurity in the 19th century are briefly described. Several volumes of his work are looked at through textual analysis. The biography of the poet, his history and family, his work and his demise, are all discussed. Furthermore, the process of uncovering the lost legacy of Charles Crocker has been detailed in order to give rise to “new” voices. It has been common knowledge that several poets from the early 19th century have fallen into obscurity, yet scholarship has increased since the 1980s (Binfield & Christmas, 2018). It is the hope of the author of this study that many more lost poets and writers can be rediscovered, their work brought into the light and out of depths of obscurity, their voices long since silent, finally heard again. There is so much that we can learn from them.

Introduction

*It has fall’n! it has fall’n! from its place on high!
And our pride in it now is a pleasure gone by;*

*Not the light-hearted child or the silver-haired sire
Will ever gaze more on our time-honored spire.
from "On the Fall of the Chichester Cathedral Spire"
by Eleanor F. Cobby²*

Eleanor Cobby was a 21-year-old woman who composed a poem after the fall of Chichester's most famous landmark, the Chichester Cathedral spire. One can see in the few lines of poetry written here that Cobby encapsulated the entire town's anguish. Line 1 is the call made when the spire falls. What is ominous is line 3. Crocker, a "silver-haired sire" himself, would soon die after the fall of the spire. He would then be known as the only person to have been killed by the cathedral spire's fall. And it was a death by heartbreak.

"CONTENT!" That's how Crocker's first title poem, "The Vale of Obscurity," opens, in all caps. Are we content, as in a feeling? We are entering a dark world of words, so how content will we be? What does the poet tell us? It is a jumble of sentences and words and other images that he fills our minds with:

"CONTENT! of all the blessings I possess,
And (thanks to heaven) my portion is not small,
None can more justly claim my thankfulness
Than thou, sweet maid, whose smile gives zest to all;
Therefore on thee with suppliant voice I call;
With thee would hide me from the world's rude strife;
For well I know, whatever may befall,
'Tis peace of mind that makes the bliss of life—
That thou sustain'st the soul 'mid scenes with misery rife.
(Crocker, 1830, p. 19, lines 1–9)

The first line of Crocker's poetry oeuvre does foreshadow his eventual peace. But before he can get there, before the spire falls destroying his peace and sending him heavenward, Crocker lived what must have been a difficult and sad life. It was misfortune that seemed to follow him. But with his apparent faith in God he

was able to endure his lot in life. Looking back at the poem, the “sweet maid” mentioned in line 4 is undoubtedly his daughter, Frances Crocker (1819–1891). He mentions his “strife” in line 6, and that “peace” (line 8) has “sustain’st the soul mid scenes with misery rife” (line 9). Later in the poem, “CONTENT” returns:

With that CONTENT, for she it was whose smile
And gracious words the sudden change had wrought
With gentleness that well might grief beguile,
And looks with cheerfulness and comfort fraught,
Held forth her hand to me; and then, methought
We wandered onward; and where’er we stray’d
New scenes of happiness appeared, unsought;
At every step new wonders were display’d—
And as I gaz’d, I turn’d and blest the heaven-sent maid.
(Crocker, 1830, p. 26, lines 118–126)

The stanza appears to mirror the earlier stanza. The “heaven-sent maid” (line 126) is his daughter. It is a beautiful ode to her. Frances, the oldest of Crocker’s children, would be one of the three surviving past their 6th birthday (see Appendix B). Three others had died young in what must have been a heartbreaking ordeal for the poet.

Charles Crocker wrote the “Vale of Obscurity” in his head when he was a teenager, so he stated. As seen above, Crocker provides enough mystery in his lines that we think of a “veil” when he is describing a lovely “vale” that is important to him. Crocker was a shoemaker-turned-poet, and then turned to church vester until 1861, when the Chichester Cathedral spire fell and he soon died. Crocker published three editions of *The Vale of Obscurity* (1830, 1834, and 1841). He also published a new edition of poems in 1837 and a complete edition in 1860, a year before his death. In addition to poetry, he published a non-fictional work of local information about the Chichester Cathedral.³ Crocker

was a working-class poet,⁴ and he was prolific early on in his life. After achieving some fame — so much that he was simply called “The Poet” in his native Chichester — his output tailed off abruptly. He has been mostly forgotten in the last hundred years. Crocker was a shoemaker who used his poetic vision to make a better life for himself and his family. He used it to get a better position in society. He suffered from tragedy, more tragedy than one simple man’s lifetime should ever expect to endure. But instead of writing about his own misfortunes, he found comfort in the family he had left, and he used his poetic voice to get closer to God. When reading Crocker’s poetry one can easily imagine that God, in his heavenly abode, has his ear turned toward Earth, toward Chichester, closer to The Poet.

Biography

Charles Crocker was a simple local hero in his small town of Chichester in the mid-1800s. He was born on the 22nd June 1797,⁵ to Henry Crocker (1770–1831) and an unknown first wife. Crocker was christened a week later at Phillimore Ecclesiastical Parish. It would be eight years before Crocker would have another sibling. During that span his father, Henry, remarried. Crocker’s stepmother was Elizabeth Cable.⁶ In total, Crocker was the second eldest of his siblings: Charlotte (b 1794), Elizabeth (b 1805), William (b 1806), George (b 1808), and Catherine (b 1809). Crocker’s family was poor. There is no record of what they did for a living, but they could not afford his schooling. Benefactors, through a charity school in Chichester (Harvey, 1999), stepped in to pay for his education. In this way Charles Crocker was very lucky.

The following is a brief biographical sketch of Crocker made in 1865, a few years after he died:

His parents being poor, he was sent to the Greycoat School in his native city, where he continued for four years, and learned reading, writing, and the rudimentary parts of arithmetic. There also, as he informs us,

he received the seeds of those religious principles which rendered his condition “more than commonly blest; supplying comfort and consolation amid trials and difficulties, and crowning the hours of health and industry with the highest and purest enjoyments.” His favourite books were the Bible, Robinson Crusoe, and the Pilgrim’s Progress — no bad and no limited library for an embryo poet. Before he was twelve years old he was apprenticed to a shoemaker — a circumstance which he considered rather favourable than otherwise to the improvement of his intellect. Perhaps he called to mind the many instances of men — philosophers, poets, preachers, and metaphysicians, who had hammered their genius into shape upon the ‘lapstone.’ At any rate, the simplicity of this employment — keeping the hands busy, but leaving the mind free to revel in the realms of speculation and imagination — is very favourable to the developement of faculties which in many other occupations would lie dormant and perish. (Lower, 1865, p. 87)

Lower’s notes were written just after Crocker’s death in 1861, while Crocker was still well-known in his native Chichester. Crocker’s early life as a shoemaker seemed happy. He married Phoebe Woolgar (b 1794) in 1818 and had a daughter, Frances, nicknamed “Fanny,” a year later. But when Fannie was just a year old, Phoebe Woolgar died. There is no record of how she died, but it has been said that her death “threw a shadow over his path” (87). Crocker continued to work as a shoemaker and compose poems in his head. He attended some lectures on Shakespeare and invested in a grammar book, according to his preface of the first edition (1830).⁷ In 1825, five years after the death of his first wife, Crocker remarried, and his second wife was Mary Heath (b 1792). Two years later a second daughter, also named Mary, was born, and in 1829, a year before the first edition came out, Crocker’s first son, John, was born. An acquaintance, John Forbes, M.D., encouraged Crocker to publish his poems. Mason published the first edition in 1830. Figure 1, below, shows the first edition title page.

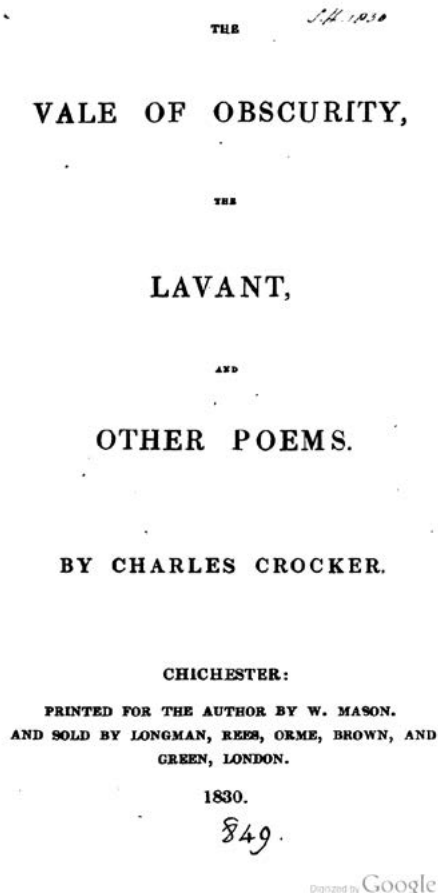


Figure 1. The first edition title page. Source: Google Books.

He had 338 subscribers. A “Forbes, J.M.D.F.R.S.” is listed as buying four copies himself (1830, 117). A dedicatory poem was included in the 2nd edition (1834) to Dr. Forbes.

Tragedy struck the Crocker’s in 1831. Their second son, Charles, was born and died soon after. His cause of death was not listed in any of the available records that could be found. The death of his second son must have had a

profound impact on Crocker. There appears to be no reference to this event, or the other tragic events to come, in Crocker's poetry. It seems he did not want to write about any of it. But Crocker's poetry was popular, and in 1834 a second edition of his poems was published (Figure 2).

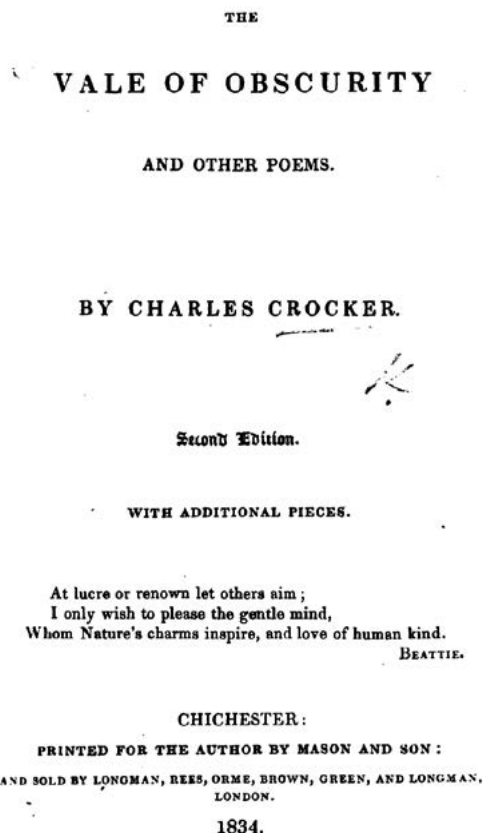


Figure 2. The second edition title page. Source: Google Books.

A third son, Charles William, was born to Crocker and his wife the same year the 2nd edition was published. But in 1835, his six-year-old son John died. There is no record of how he died. Losing two sons must have been tragic for Crocker. But some happiness was found with the birth of their fourth son, Henry, in 1837. It was the same year a new book of poems came out, *Kingley Vale and Other Poems*, also published by Mason. But happiness would be short lived. In 1840, the same year that Crocker's expanded third edition was published, Henry died. He was only three. By now, Crocker had lost three of his four sons. None of them lived old enough to enter primary school. He did not appear to publish poems about their deaths and the heart-breaking effect it must have had on him. He did publish a poem, "The Child's Grave," but it was written for another couple (1860, p. 250). This could explain why Crocker basically stopped publishing poetry. There is little record of any new work that came out between the 1840 third edition and the 1860 complete edition, beyond a handful of poems dedicated to others. As a poet, these should have been his most productive years. There is no clear answer as to why Crocker basically stopped composing poems.

He did have new job prospects though. Crocker joined the bookselling department of his publisher, Mason, around the time of the third edition and stayed for a short time before working for the Chichester Cathedral in 1845, first as a sexton and then a verger. There is not much information on what Crocker was doing during this time outside of work. His daughter, Fanny, married Thomas Benford in 1847. She gave birth to a daughter, Fanny (b 1849) and two sons, Charles (b 1851) and Thomas (b 1853). Having grandchildren must have given Crocker much happiness. We know that he was tour guide for the Chichester Cathedral, and he even published a book about it called *A Visit to Chichester Cathedral*, published over two editions (Figures 3 and 4).

When the Cathedral Spire collapsed in 1861, Charles Crocker was uninjured. He would welcome a new grandchild a month later, but Crocker would eventually die on October 6. There are no explanations in the records to the cause of

his death. Crocker would eventually have nine grandchildren in total who would carry his legacy with them.

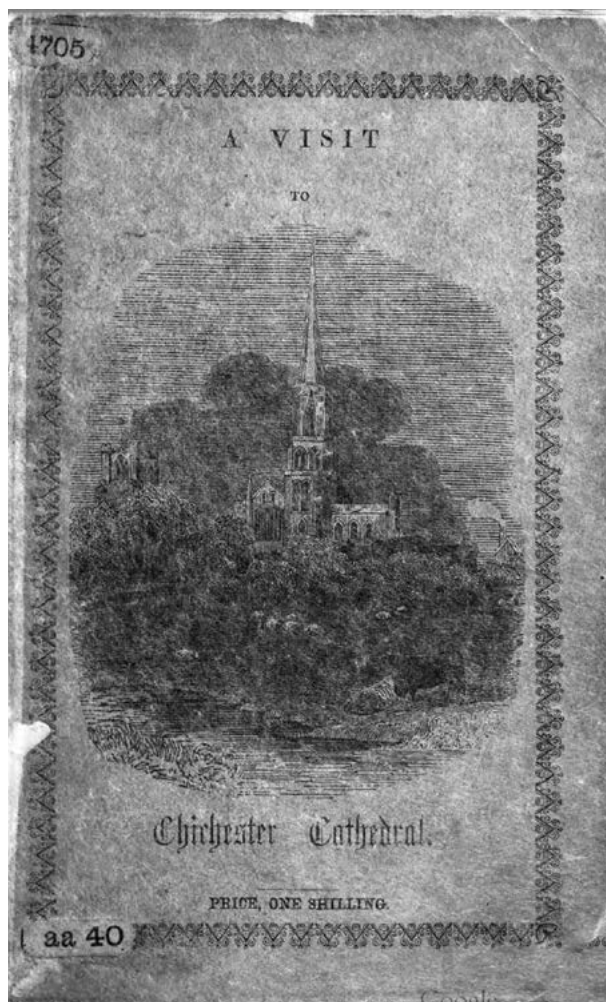


Figure 3. Cover of *A Visit to Chichester Cathedral*. Source: Google Books.

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A VISIT

TO

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL,



LIBER MONUMENTI CORAM EO.

BY CHARLES CROCKER,

Author of "Kingley Vale," "Vale of Obscurity," and other Poems.

Second Edition.

CHICHESTER:
WILLIAM HAYLEY MASON, EAST STREET.

MDCCCLXIX.

Figure 4. Title page of *A Visit to Chichester Cathedral*. Source: Google Books.

Textual Analysis

Here, Charles Crocker's lost poetry is examined through mostly a textual lens. Some of the methodology in locating the volumes and analyzing the text is presented. In addition, data is provided about variations in the texts published in Crocker's books but also collected elsewhere, in books or periodicals. Textual variations in some of his poems are investigated. Crocker was a very conserva-

tive poet; it could be considered that his work lacks much textual variation. He also did not publish later in life. But there are other points of interest regarding the variations in volumes presented here. In addition, a new poem that does not appear in any of Crocker's book-length editions is introduced.⁸ Lastly, it is concluded that Crocker's work shows he was a poet who was exacting in his manner and quite conservative about making changes after first publication. But it is left open to interpretation whether the regional fame Crocker achieved during his lifetime influenced his production, which is obvious looking at his canon. Further, his steadfast piousness and dedication to the church may have also influenced how his later poetry was received. Finally, regardless of the reasons for his shrinking output and absence of new poetry later in life, his last volume shows that he was mostly in control of how his work was edited.

As mentioned previously, he was encouraged to publish by John Forbes, a physician with many connections to London ("The Chichester Society," 2018). This is how he met Robert Southey.⁹ Southey wrote to his wife in December, 1830, that Crocker was

a very industrious, happy, and meritorious man, who is perhaps the best example of the good that may be done by education to persons in his rank of life. His poems are of very considerable merit. Then we went on the city walls, and lastly into the Bishop's palace; so that I saw all that could be shown me in Chichester, a cheerful, pleasant city. ("Robert Southey," n.d.)

His friendship with Robert Southey is noted. Southey published on 'uneducated' poets around the time of Crocker's first edition.¹⁰ Southey said that Crocker's "The British Oak" was the finest poem in English. Crocker then soon became a tour guide for the Chichester Cathedral.¹¹

The 1830 edition

Getting an exact publication date of the 1830 edition has been difficult. This is the true first edition of Charles Crocker's poetry. It appears that the collection was about to be published according to an announcement made in a newspaper¹² in April 1830:

A journeyman shoemaker, of Chichester, is about to publish, by subscription, a collection Poem, the production of his leisure hours; he is a pious simple minded man, in humble circumstances, and his verses are of a serious and moral cast; the object of the patrons of this undertaking is to shew how usefully and pleasantly a well stored and rightly ordered mind in the lower walks of life may employ its leisure hours.

Similar, but abbreviated, announcements were made in other newspapers in the following weeks.¹³ Looking at the text, it is noted for its lengthy preface, which is preserved, nearly word-for-word except for spelling variations or misspelled words, through four editions (1830, 1834, 1841, and 1860). The 1830 text itself contains 12 poems and 19 sonnets. There are two quotations, one by “Beattie” and one by “Bunyan.”¹⁴ The titles for each of the poems in the table of contents are also in all capitals which differs from all the later editions which employ mixed case. It is argued here that using all capitals could be a remnant of the printing process technology, the conventions of the time, or to keep costs low for a first edition by an unknown author.

The 1834 edition

The 1834 edition is the true 2nd edition of Charles Crocker’s 1830 edition. A favorable literary review was published in the year of its publication on the front page, center, with several stanzas of one of the poems excerpted and briefly discussed.¹⁵ This edition has 13 poems and 20 sonnets, with 26 additional poems, making it much larger than the 1st edition. Though there are few if any major textual variations between the 1830 edition and the 1834 edition, what is remarkable here is that there is no preface for the second edition even though it includes several new poems. One reason for this is that most of the additional pieces appear to be dedicated to people the author knew rather than poems inspired by the local scenery.

The 1837 edition

The 1837 book is a new edition of poetry by Charles Crocker. Although direct

advertising for the poet's new collection of 26 poems has been difficult to find, there are several instances of reportage by local newspapers of Charles Crocker around the time that this new book was released.¹⁶ Such instances show that the poet had already achieved fame in his community. Also of significance is that the 1837 edition includes celebratory poems by Thomas Agar Holland and Bernard Barton, both poets of renown back then. Holland was a clergyman and poet (Scott, 2004). He dedicated his poem to Crocker in July 1837 so we know when this edition was published. This is important when considering a new poem, "View from Bow-Hill," which has a connection to Holland and will be discussed later. One of the more controversial poems, though not discussed here, was "On the Conversion of the Jews" which appeared in the 1841 (3rd edition) but was left out of the 1860 (complete edition). A quick reading of the poem confirms that it is controversial, and it is not surprising that this poem was left out of the complete edition.¹⁷

The 1841 edition

The reader of the much varied 3rd edition of Crocker's poetry will be immediately impressed with the handsome engraving of the author's image. In addition, the font and overall design of the book seems to be more modern and professional than the previous two editions and the 1837 edition. The paper quality seems different, but it is impossible to tell digitally.¹⁸ The 3rd edition is massive. It contains 94 poems — 47 poems and 47 sonnets listed in the table of contents — with most of the 1837 (new edition) also collected here.¹⁹ A major difference is that there does not appear to be a dedication. Furthermore, the quote by Beattie, which has appeared in every edition, disappears in the 1841 edition only to reappear in the complete edition (1860). This edition also has an advertisement, similar to the 2nd edition. But the book has a different distributor, as noted by "SOLD BY HAMILTON AND ADAMS" (title page) rather than the previous sellers. Notifications in the newspapers are slim to nonexistent.²⁰ This could be because the poet was able to sell out his copies.

The 1860 edition

The only significant difference in the 1860, “complete edition,” upon first inspection is that the quote by Beattie returns. There are some favorable announcements in newspapers around this time of the 1860 release promoting the “Sussex Bard.”²¹ What should be noted is that it is marked as a “complete edition” but it is not. It contains exactly 100 poems or sonnets. Perhaps this was the poet’s own doing. Several poems are missing but it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into the reasons why. However, it is believed that the poet was busy with his new work in the church and was no longer writing poetry. Much of what had been written that was new in the later editions were dedications. It could be surmised that Charles Crocker’s apparent preference for dark poetry²² was falling out of favor, or that he just wrote less of it. It is not explained here, but it would be interesting for future studies into the more historical and personal aspects of his work. Still, Crocker was obviously seen as someone having talent. So why hardly any work was being done in the two decades leading up to his death in 1861 remains a mystery.

“A View from Bow-Hill”

There are references to “Bow-Hill” in the preface dedication from Thomas Agar Holland in the 1837 new edition of poems by Charles Crocker, as mentioned previously. The reason this is significant are the following lines:

Come, let us mount Bow-Hill! and there inhale
Health, freedom, rapture, which the breeze is bringing;
(1830, p. vi)

The mention of Bow-Hill is important. Crocker published a new poem in March 1837 in the Hampshire Advertiser.²³ This poem, “A View from Bow-Hill,” was not included in the 1837 edition. But Holland’s poem in the preface of the 1837 edition implies a strong friendship with Crocker. Perhaps the publishers would not allow Crocker to publish the poem. So he published it in the newspaper instead. But looking at the poem, it is one of his finer poems. It is an obvious

salute to the pastoral days that industrial England would bid farewell to. But its promise of a “realm along the horizon lies” (29) makes the poem visionary. Why Crocker did not include it in the 1841 expanded third edition is a mystery that deserves more attention. Perhaps it was too bright and radical compared to his usually dark, conservative work.

“Kingshame”

“Kingshame” is a poem in 12 stanzas that originally appeared in *The Sussex Express* on April 11, 1857. There are at least 12 textual variations between the 1857 newspaper version and the published 1860 version. It is suspected that the changes made in the 1860 edition are the ones favored by the author. But since this author does not have a version of the poem – one that could be considered a fair copy²⁴ other than the “complete” version in the 1860 edition – it is believed that the 1857 version contains several errors. An example is “begemmed” appearing as “begummed” in the newspaper. The 1860 edition of “Kingshame” contains “Historical Notes” on the historical place, “a royal house ... [which] for many centuries was held ... [by] the Crown” (Crocker “The Poetical” 67). One of the few things of textual significance in Kingshame that Crocker changed in the 1860 edition was the capitalization of the word “Invaders” (93). Since the poem deals with historical themes, his decision to capitalize the word indicates some xenophobia discussed later regarding another poem, “On the Conversion of the Jews,” which was introduced in the same volume as “Kingshame” but left out of the 1860 collection.

“The Lavant”

“The Lavant” is a poem with 18 stanzas. What is of incredible importance here is that there are hardly any textual differences between the 1830 (1st edition) text and the 1860 (complete edition). There is a case of what is called ‘overflow’ in this author’s notes, which is common in the 1860 version; where sentences of a poem were too long and thus ‘overflowed’ into new lines; this often occurred in older versions of the text, but not in the 1860 version: such lines are not over-

flowing into the next line but are maintained on one line of verse. This could be the result of improved technology in printing longer lines of poetry, or perhaps the author's own intention finally exercised, or both.

“New Year’s Eve”

The poem, “New Year’s Eve,” is printed in every version of Charles Crocker’s poetry collections except for the 1837 (new) text. Three instances of the poem were found in periodicals between the poem’s first publication in book form in 1830 and its second publication in book form in 1834. What is of importance to note is that there are no changes whatsoever found between the first two editions of four-stanza poems. And the only changes between the 3rd and complete, 1860 editions are how the lines of poetry are not extended into new lines of verse but are maintained on one longer line, as described previously (see “Notes on Kingshame”). There are alternate versions of the poem published outside the collected poems, especially the one printed in 1833 that is likely unauthorized (*Sketches* 106–108).²⁵ Textual differences in the other two periodicals indicate more error on the printer’s part. The fact that there are nearly no textual differences between the various versions of “New Year’s Eve,” a poem spanning the entire canon of Charles Crocker, is the greatest evidence yet that he was conservative in making any changes to poems once they were published. The reasons for such behavior require further bibliographical study.²⁶

“Stanzas”

“Stanzas” was first published in newspaper form in 1836. It is one of the poems in the new, 1837 edition that was introduced between the 2nd and 3rd editions. There are absolutely no significant textual differences between any of the versions beyond the title of the piece. The original title in 1837 was “On finding among some ruins the Remains of an Æolian Harp.” This was then changed to “Stanzas” as it appears in later editions. Perhaps the title of the piece is just too interesting which explains why it was not retained in later editions. This could be an indication of the conservative nature of Crocker’s behavior when it came

to his poetry: rather than by keeping text intact, as has already been seen, the title was changed from something a bit eccentric to something more ordinary.

“The Vale of Obscurity”

We end this textual analysis on the title poem of all but one of Crocker’s published books. One disclaimer is that only the 1830 and 1860 versions of the poem are looked at; and only the first 18 of the 50 stanzas were analyzed without any significant textual differences.

Crocker’s Oeuvre

The main questions about Charles Crocker involve why he would reduce the amount of poetry he was writing, and what major textual variations occur within his canon and why. Unfortunately, it has been found that just looking at the preliminary data, there really is no indication to answer the first question of why he would stop producing so much work, nor any interesting data to satisfy the second question, which is the purpose of this study. As one can see in the data, all of the textual differences are superficial: misspelled words, commas, capitalizations. It does appear that these changes were implemented by the printer. It just does not seem like Crocker was interested in poetry at this stage of his life, so much so that he would be adding commas or colons instead of periods, that he was worried about how long the reader would pause, or even if they would stop. By middle age he had already become established and was invested in the church.

Method

Although this study is limited to textual analysis, some information about bibliography is important. This is true especially if the reader would like more information about the author of any literary work, and more importantly to understand the text critically. Expounding on this idea, Williams and Abbot (2009) state that “we must always refer our views back to the texts [authors] have left us and to the physical forms that have embodied them.” They go on

to state that it is a prerequisite for proper criticism to have knowledge about bibliographical studies since it and critical studies are two “sides of the same coin” (p. 5). Regarding the works of Charles Crocker studied here, the author of this paper was limited, as mentioned previously, to digital copies of his original works. He was able to procure book-form reproductions of Crocker’s digital works for the 1830 and 1860 editions, his first and last work, respectively. This made for easier textual analysis since the physical manifestation of a book is much more agreeable to bibliographic study. Thus, the two reproduced books were used instead of the digital copies, especially since some pages were missing from the freely-available online versions, for the bulk of the textual analyses. The author incorporated use of the WorldCat database and Google books to locate the five editions of his works (1830, 1834, 1837, 1841, and 1860)²⁷ discussed here. The Findmypast.com website was used to locate biographical information about the author which is not discussed here in much detail; the website proved useful in locating author promotion in addition to newspaper versions of some of his poems. Furthermore, the author located several documents at the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester but could not retrieve any of these in time for discussion here. These documents consist of handwritten versions of some of his poetry. These will be looked at for future analysis. To analyze the textual differences, sight collation, defined as “looking at two texts with the naked eye, symbol for symbol, to discover how they differ” (Williams and Abbot, 2009, p. 93) was utilized. Since some of Crocker’s work spans four editions and also has appeared in periodicals or other collections, sight collation was often used for multiple texts. Microsoft Excel was used (a) to keep track of general variations between versions, (b) to shape a complete list of the poems in each volume with color-coding for quick reference and easy viewing, and (c) to keep track of textual differences between the five poems looked at here (“Kingshame,” 1857 and 1860; “The Lavant,” 1830, 1834, 1837, 1841, and 1860; “New Year’s Eve,” 1830, 10/25/30, 12/30/30, 1833, 1834, 1837, 1841, and 1860; “Stanzas,”²⁸ 1836,

1837, 1841, and 1860; and “The Vale of Obscurity,”²⁹ 1830 and 1860).

Literary Analysis

An extensive literary analysis, or explication, was not performed on many of the poems of Charles Crocker’s canon; thus, the literary merits regarding Charles Crocker’s contribution to English literature are mostly ignored in this study.

Conclusion

Even though the textual analysis of Charles Crocker’s work is far from complete and we have just scratched the surface here, it is firmly believed that there are not really many textual variations in the work of Charles Crocker to promote further analytical study in this area. However, this study of Charles Crocker could be used as a springboard for future literary studies of the author. In addition, a future analytical bibliographical study may be performed. The reasons for this is that the poet was very conservative and did not make many textual variants of his poems. But he wrote during a very dynamic and ever-changing landscape in publishing. Seeing how his work spans 40 years, he would be a good subject of future study in how publishing changed during the early to mid 1800s. In addition, critical studies of his work would also be interesting. As shown here, some of his work was controversial. For those interested in historical contexts, Charles Crocker would be a good subject. He was part of the working class and he also flashed talent. He used his poetic skills to secure a more promising future. In addition, he overcame many obstacles in life. And though a literary analysis is not really done here, it would certainly shed some light on Crocker’s contribution to English literature. “The fall of Chichester spire killed but one man and that man was Charles Crocker” (“The Chichester Society,” 2018, paragraph 7). Lastly, this study hopes to shed light on the process to discover more lost voices of English literature.

Notes

¹ At the time of writing the bulk of this essay in 2020, there was no known scholarship on Charles Crocker. The MLA (Modern Language Association) International Bibliography revealed no entries for the poet, Charles Crocker. A web search resulted in a few pages of biography from historical societies. Just before submission of this manuscript, a 33-page paper published by the Chichester Historical Society and the University of Chichester was obtained. There were only three known libraries in the world to have a copy according to WorldCat and this document was not available in literary databases or via Amazon. Although some of the information written in this essay may also be found in the document, I do not use the document for literary citation except for discussion of some of the poems, as will be seen later in this essay. I would like to personally thank Mr. Alan Green, of the Chichester Historical Society, for expediting a copy of this manuscript to Japan before publication.

² Printed in the *West Sussex Gazette*, 14 March 1861. Eleanor Fanny Cobby was 21 years old at the time. No other copy of this poem nor has any of her poetry been found elsewhere. The complete text of this poem can be found in Appendix A.

³ See Crocker, C. (1849). *A Visit to Chichester Cathedral*. William Hayley Mason.

⁴ Working class poets were prevalent in the 1700s and 1800s. They are also known as laboring class poets. Historically there has been very little scholarship on them, but Binfield and Christmas (2018) note that “scholarship on laboring-class subjects” has been increasing since the 1980s (p. 2).

⁵ The following biographical information is according to Ancestry.com. His date of birth comes from the *Dictionary of National Biography*. London, England: Oxford University Press; Volume: Vol 05; page: 102.

⁶ Henry Crocker (1770–1831); unable to find dates of birth and death of Elizabeth Cable, who was most likely Charles Crocker’s stepmother rather than his birth mother. Appendix B shows her as living, but this is not true. It is a bug in Ancestry.com for people without dates of death.

⁷ Similar biographical information is given by Crocker in an advertisement for the 2nd edition in *The Brighton Patriot*, 1 Nov. 1836.

⁸ See Appendix C.

⁹ Robert Southey (1774–1843) was a famous poet of the Romantic Movement and Poet Laureate of England.

¹⁰ *An Introductory Essay on the Lives and Works of Uneducated Poets* (1831).

¹¹ A first-hand account of an interaction with him in 1860, describes Crocker as “a very intelligent man, full of love for the old pile” (*Exeter Flying Post*, 5 September 1860).

¹² *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, April 19, 1830.

¹³ *The Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, April 26, 1830; *Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser*, May 4, 1830.

¹⁴ Research into the poet’s connection to the people quoted has yet to be done.

¹⁵ The “Literary Review” in the *Hampshire Advertiser and Salisbury Guardian*, March 29, 1834, compared Crocker to Burns, Bloomfield, Pope, Thompson and Cowper. The author states that he was able to sell all of the 1st edition and “that his chief object in reprinting the Poems is the desire to secure ... a continuance of those comforts which the sale has for the last three years produced.” A similar

message is produced nearly verbatim in an “ADVERTISEMENT/TO THE SECOND EDITION” after the table of contents in the 1834 edition (Crocker, *The Vale*, 1834)

¹⁶ As perhaps subtle advertising to his new edition of poetry, Charles Crocker’s poetry was read aloud by a distinguished lecturer during the Mechanics’ Institution “Lecture on the Progress of Civilization” and was reported on in both the *Hampshire Advertiser*, October 22, 1836, and the *Brighton Patriot*, October 25, 1836. Other news around the time of the publication of the poet’s new collection is mention of him by the *Hampshire Advertiser* on August 19, 1837, of reading his poem “Kingley Vale,” which was new to the 1837 collection; here he is referred to as the “city poet.” In addition, it was also reported that an “engraving of Charles Crocker” was completed, according to the *Hampshire Advertiser*, October 28, 1837; what is most significant here is that it could be the one which appears in the 3rd edition (1841).

¹⁷ It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze the poems in depth, but I believe that “On the Conversion of the Jews” states more about the poet’s increasing faith and dedication to his church than it does about antisemitism; however, this should be a topic for future analysis.

¹⁸ Books analyzed were either freely available on Google Books or reprinted facsimiles of original documents. There are no actual reprints of Crocker’s poetry currently available, though a contemporary edition of his collected poems is needed.

¹⁹ The author’s detailed notes on textual analyses of Crocker’s poems are not shown in this paper.

²⁰ The December 11, 1841 *Hampshire Advertiser* gives subtle publicity to the poet around the time of his 1841 edition by printing part of “The Lavant;” the paper goes on to say that “the springs in the neighbourhood of Chichester have broken unusually early this year,” and that the poem apparently describes the current state of the river.

²¹ A very long front page article appears in the September 22, 1860 *Atlas* which states the poet, “now in his sixty-fourth year, looking back over a struggling, yet well-spent life, is still able to say” that, through lines of his poetry, he is happy and carefree, and so on; the article does not mention which poem is quoted, but the lines are from “The Apology,” a poem that is traced to the 1830 1st edition; I suppose this would be an accusation of the paper using an anachronistic quote to contort their message. This shows how little the poet may have been invested in his later poetry, that he could not even provide a new quote for the paper.

²² Though this essay does not analyse the poetry of Charles Crocker in depth, the reader can see from the titles of his poems that the poet was obsessed with death, poverty, and other dark themes. This can be attributed to the poet’s experiences as a child and young adulthood, which may be discussed in a future essay.

²³ I have included the entire poem from the 1837 newspaper because of its historical significance in that it cannot be found in any of Crocker’s books of poetry.

²⁴ A “fair copy [is] a corrected and cleanly written manuscript, produced by its author or by a scribe” (Williams and Abbot, 2009, p. 152).

²⁵ Several of Crocker’s poems are included in this anonymous volume that does not even list a publisher or publication date (date listed in “Works Cited” was retrieved through an Internet search).

Crocker was known for being very conservative in print; thus, it is believed that more than a dozen textual differences between the 1833 *Sketches*' version of "New Year's Eve" and the authorized ones indicate that this was most likely an unauthorized forgery or plagiarism.

²⁶ This finding, in addition to the scarcity of later work produced, could also illustrate how Charles Crocker's poetry may have been considered not worthy of extensive scholarly pursuit in textual analysis.

²⁷ The 1830, 1834, and 1841 editions are the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions, respectively, of poems collected under the title poem, "The Vale of Obscurity." The 1837 edition was a new book of poems (Crocker *Kingley*), most of which were collected in the 1841 third edition. Confusion exists as the 1837 book is often incorrectly marked as a "3rd edition" in some databases, while the 1841 true 3rd edition is marked as a "4th edition." The 1860 edition was known as a "Complete Edition," but many of the recent editions to his canon were not included.

²⁸ "Stanzas" is also called "On finding among some ruins the Remains of an Æolian Harp" in the 1837 edition.

²⁹ "The Vale of Obscurity" was only looked at in the 1830 and 1860 editions because of time constraints to complete this study.

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Appendix A. “On the Fall of Chichester Cathedral Spire” by Eleanor Fanny Cobby, Birdham, 1861. (Printed in the *West Sussex Gazette*, 14 March 1861.)

It has fall’n! it has fall’n! from its place on high!
And our pride in it now is a pleasure gone by;
Not the light-hearted child or the silver-haired sire
Will ever gaze more on our time-honored spire.

We lov’d to behold it when morning was nigh,
Or with evening’s first star shining faint in the sky;
We lov’d to behold it when sunbeams were bright,
And to feel it was near in the dusk of the night.

O! how lovely looked City, and Minster, and Spire,
When the sun went down as in clouds of fire,
When a light played over it, golden and rare,
That we never again shall see glancing there!

Like a beacon it spoke to us sweetly of home
When distant and weary our footsteps might roam;
And ever arising majestic on high,
It pointed us on to our hopes in the sky.

We beheld it alike from the wood-covered steep,
And away far away, on the blue moaning deep;
It was clear to our hearts and beloved of our eyes,
Alas! that no more we shall see it arise.

We'll miss it when Summer shines far thro' the land,
And scatters her roses with bountiful hand;
We'll miss it when ruthless the Winter comes forth,
Like a conqueror armed with the winds of the North.

We'll miss it, our eyes will unconsciously turn
To that which of old they were wont to discern,
And gaze—but on space—on the sorrowful blank,
Whence the spire that they loved in its stateliness sank.

Still, the sunshine may play round the grey, ancient town,
And the turrets of Goodwood from haughtily down,
The bells of the minster still solemnly chime,
Still, the City rejoice in its festival time!

But something familiar hath passed from the spot,
And the loss of its presence will ne'er be forgot;
Not the light-hearted child or the silver-haired sire
Will ever gaze more on our time-honored Spire!

(Source: data compiled by ancestry.com)



Appendix C. “View from Bow-Hill,” by Charles Crocker. (Printed in the 18 March 1837 *Hampshire Advertiser*.)

Here spread the Downs upon whose slopes so green,
 And sunny knolls, with tufts of wild thyme crown'd,
 The peaceful flocks in scatter'd groups are seen,
 Whose plaintive bleat and small bell's tinkling sound
 Scarce break the hallow'd calm that reigns around. 5
 There Ceres gives (munificent display !)
 Her waving treasures to adorn the ground,
 And cheer the peasant, plodding on his way,
 With promise of reward for many a weary day.

Meadows and hamlets, interspers'd invite 10
 The grazer's eye o'er tracts of freshest green
 And white-wall'd cots, to wander with delight;
 While woods in solemn grandeur rise between,
 And throw their shadows to enrich the scene:—
 And here and there a simple village spire 15
 Kindling in meek Devotion's breast serene,
 The pure and hallow'd glow of heavenly fire,
 Points to the skies and bids the humble soul aspire.

Above the rest, amid the smiling vale,
Cicestria's Fane its graceful Spire uprears; 20
A sight that in my mind can never fail
To wake sweet thoughts of home and other years.
'Twas there the voice of Truth first charm'd mine ears,
And bade me hope for bliss beyond the tomb:—
And this it is that to my heart endears 25
That sacred Pile:—in sunlight or in gloom
I gaze upon its walls and think of Heaven and Home.

Lo far o'r all, from east to west extending,
Old Ocean's realm along the horizon lies;
On whose blue verge, that with the sky seems blending, 30
My utmost stretch of vision just descries
The gallant Ships that in succession rise—
Seem stationed there awhile, and then are gone.
There Veeta's Isle,* that winds and waves defies,
Girdled with rocks sits on her billowy throne, 35
Crown'd with whate'er is bright and fair to look upon.

*Isle of Wight.