

19th-century iPhone app

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This is the splash-screen cover for the Victorianator, an iPhone game created by Concordia Professor Jason Camlot. The game's steampunk-style illustration anachronistically ties the present to an earlier historical period. Credit: Jason Camlot, Concordia University

Modern technology has allowed us to communicate in ways that would have been unfathomable to Victorian-age English poets. Yet Alfred Tennyson, Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe — among others — would likely cringe if they heard most of us recite their work.

Help is on the way, thanks to the Victorianator. The iPhone game teaches users, through gestures, how to authentically deliver Carroll's Jaberwocky, Tennyson's The Charge of the Light Brigade and Poe's The Raven.

The app was created by Jason Camlot, chair of Concordia's Department

of English, and his LudicVoice (LuV) research team consisting of Concordia students. "The Victorianator explores the use of gesture to trigger synthetic effects on speech," Camlot explains. "Gesture was a significant part of Victorian elocutionary practice, and basically, to make this game work on the iPhone, we took specific gestures as they're prescribed in Victorian elocution manuals. And we put them at the core of our gameplay."

The user starts by voicing one of the three Victorian poems, in monotone, into the iPhone. The game's steampunk-style robot then shows you how gesture correctly along to the poem, such as sweeping an arm upwards, downwards or across. "If you hit the gesture correctly, it triggers a 'Victorian' (in quotation marks) elocutionary effects on the monotone speech that you already recorded. Thus it 'Victorianates' your voice. So the gestures are used to trigger speech actions," Camlot says.

"The Victorianator was a project that I pursued to explore the relationship [of] Victorian elocutionary practice to screen-based mobile devices," he continues. "We speak into [these devices], we read them, we touch them with our fingers to make apps work, and we even use gesture to, say, make the telephone keypad appear when we want to dial a number. So, with this project we thought it would be interesting to use adapt these features of iPhone to a remediation of the now strange practice of Victorian recitation."

The game, Camlot adds, "served as a way to think about how digital game design and the status of interface relates to my work as a literary and cultural historian."

Camlot's Victorianator research was conducted through Concordia's Centre for Technoculture, Art and Games (TAG). The centre is an interdisciplinary collaboration platform for research and creation in game studies and design, digital culture and interactive art and brings

together students and faculty members from computer science, software engineering, computation arts and design, studio arts, sociology, history, communication studies and English and creative writing.

He also participates on a large research project called GRAND (Graphics, Animation and New Media), which is funded by the Canadian Networks of Centre of Excellence Program.

Camlot has already presented his Victorianator research at several conferences, including the North American Victorian Studies Association Conference at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

"When I arrived at the conference, many of my colleagues who are Victorian literature professors had already downloaded and played the [game](#)," Camlot reports. "Several of them told me that they had used it in the classroom to demonstrate to their students this very strange way of reciting with your voice and your body that was typical of the way Victorians read poetry out loud."

And now, the same could be true for present-day poetry lovers, too.

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Concordia's Centre for Technoculture, Art and Games (TAG): www.tag.hexagram.ca

Victorianator: ludicvoice.concordia.ca/?page_id=1148

Provided by Concordia University

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