Sound Effects: The Object Voice in Fiction belongs to the broad field of Sound Studies. More specifically, it is located in the cultural half of this field, in the corner where a key interest in voice/s and vocality intersects with literary criticism on the one side, and psychoanalytic theory, on the other. 2012 saw the publication of two collective volumes, which through their very genres testify to the boom in this interdisciplinary area: The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies and The Sound Studies Reader.1 The voice is largely absent from the Handbook, a fact perhaps indicative of the voice’s ambiguous, indeterminate topology. At the same time, it occupies a place of prominence in the Reader, which devotes its whole final section to “voices”. Beginning with Jacques Derrida’s “The Voice That Keeps Silence”, from Speech and Phenomena (1967), it closes with “The Linguistics of the Voice” from Mladen Dolar’s A Voice and Nothing More (2006),2 a work that also informs most of the approaches to modern and contemporary fiction in English collected in the present volume.

Derrida’s and Dolar’s texts differ significantly, as far as their conceptions of the voice are concerned. Derrida’s program, here and elsewhere, is to dismantle the metaphysics of (self-)presence, auto-


affection, transcendence, identity, truth and ideality, which are traditionally attached to or conveyed by the voice (speech, phonē, or the spoken word). This is done in favour of writing/écriture/the trace, which, by virtue of its exteriority, introduces a breach of difference/ non-identity/deferral (in both the self and signification), and is considered by Derrida as primordial. Dolar’s approach, by contrast, can be taken as exemplary of the theoretical confrontation with what Garrett Stewart has called “a widespread (if only implicit) ‘phonophobia’ generated in the wake of the Derridean attack on the Logos”. Indeed, the impact of Derrida’s anti-phonologocentrism has been so profound and wide-ranging that it was considered by some to be “the constitutive philosophy of the voice”. Derrida himself cites a vast amount of evidence in support of his critique of the metaphysical bias in philosophical treatments of the voice. Yet, as Donald Wesling and Tadeusz Sławek put it in 1995, his “absolute dismissal of the sound stratum of writing, and the speech that is in writing, printed voice, seems now an overplayed hand”. His account of the voice as the medium through which the presence of both subject and meaning are immediately manifested is reductive. Voice, Derrida maintains, creates the illusion of presence by projecting difference onto signifiers, which are considered secondary, derivative and exterior to the constitution of meaning: “[a]ll signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself”. Derrida’s philosophical project is to deconstruct this self-


6 Ibid., 5.

7 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 11.