Abstract
George Du Maurier’s Trilby provides a “revelation” of the voice in the sublime singing of the diva known as La Svengali. The distinctive and immense voice of the innately tone-deaf Trilby has been moulded by the musical genius and mesmerist Svengali into something much more: an incomparable, universally maternal and irresistibly affecting singing voice. This paper connects the implicit genesis of this vocal wonder, in the unpropitious overlap of two lacking voices in the first half of the novel, to its “secret” only revealed at the close: that it is a voice that requires two people to produce and belongs to neither one alone, thus foregrounding the extimacy of the object voice. Analysing the romance between Little Billee and Trilby, this paper focuses on the crucial developments in the hero’s psychic life through his encounters with four qualitatively different manifestations of the voice, and argues that the object cause of his desire is initially displayed through the mediating example of the voice-obsessed Svengali. The paper juxtaposes the analeptic secret of the voice with the voice’s final and most uncanny manifestation to suggest how the voice functions to resist any totalizing or delimiting explanation of its mystery.

Introduction
At the climax and heart of George Du Maurier’s Trilby (1894), its utmost concentration of affective and aesthetic forces, is a voice – or rather a “new wonder, [a] revelation of what the human voice could achieve” (214-15).1 This wonder is the unprecedented and inimitable vocal performance

of La Svengali which induces “astonishment, enthusiasm, [and] ecstatic delight” (215) in all who hear it. It is a sublime voice but, as the text ultimately suggests, there is something unaccountable and uncanny about it as well. This voice has both a remarkable history and a peculiar constitution; it turns out to be not only weird but also paradoxical, as it is a voice composed of two voices and, at the same time, a voice that belongs to no one.²

In a fervid, impressionistic reverie, the sixth part of Du Maurier’s eight-part novel evokes one of La Svengali’s vocal performances. Inserting himself into the diegesis, the narrator, who claims to have attended this very performance, attests to the penetratingly, intimately affective force of the preternatural voice: “It is irresistible; it forces itself on you; no words, no pictures could ever do the like!” (218). La Svengali’s concert instantiates Mladen Dolar’s observation about the singing voice’s paradoxical promise to provide “[e]xpression beyond meaning, expression which is more than meaning, yet expression which functions only in tension with meaning”.³ Illustrating and yet also straining Dolar’s contention that the singing voice “needs a signifier as the limit to transcend and to reveal its beyond”,⁴ La Svengali’s performance culminates in a wordless vocalization of Chopin’s Impromptu in A flat, a composition for piano, in which her voice surpasses the possibilities of the instrument. Throughout the concert, La Svengali’s voice is repeatedly valorized as “surplus-meaning”,⁵ an expressive force beyond language, yet of course paradoxically brought into being by the performative power of the narrator’s words, although these are words which, he modestly claims, can never do justice to the voice’s rapture-inducing excess.

As importantly, Du Maurier thematizes the fantasmatic object dimension of the voice in La Svengali’s performance, the compelling but illusory potency of the “imaginary object ... to condense in itself the

² Fiona Coll nicely characterizes the description of the “other” Trilby as an “unnerving ... articulation of a subjectivity that is simultaneously non-singular and singularly non-existent” (Fiona Coll, “Just a singing-machine!: The Making of an Automaton in George du Maurier’s Trilby”, University of Toronto Quarterly, LXXXI/2 [Spring 2010], 743).
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.