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*Time, space and action in the dramatic monologue : Men, women and mice.*

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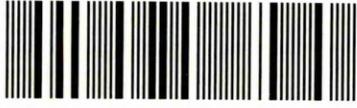
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**Time, Space and Action in the Dramatic Monologue**

*Men, Women and Mice*

Shelley Jane Roche-Jacques

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
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## **Candidate's Statement and Acknowledgements**

The main objective of this practice-based project is a contribution to knowledge in the field of dramatic monologue. The work builds on existing ideas and theories of dramatic monologue and lyric poetry, using the analytical tools of stylistics. The production of an original volume of poetry also forms part of the inquiry, and both the critical and creative components inform each other.

A full list acknowledging published and other sources of material consulted is provided under Works Cited.

I would like to thank my supervisors Steven Earnshaw and Chris Jones for their excellent guidance and support.

## Abstract

This thesis combines critical and creative writing in an inquiry into the presentation of time, space and action in the dramatic monologue, positing that the conventions surrounding the presentation of time and space in lyric poetry affect the interpretation of the communicative context of dramatic monologue. A critical discussion and analysis in five chapters is followed by a collection of original poetry, the production of which informed the critical investigation.

The first chapter gives an overview of the critical field and is concerned with definitions of the genre. A definition of the Browningsque dramatic monologue is offered, one which places the idea of 'action in the present' at the centre.

Chapter two outlines the methodology of the project; primarily that of deictic analysis. Keith Green's work on the occurrence and behaviour of deixis in lyric poetry (in particular his concepts of 'coding' and 'content' time and place) is used as a starting point to consider how deictic elements might operate differently in the context of the dramatic monologue.

The third and fourth chapters apply this methodology to specific texts. Chapter three provides original readings of Robert Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' and 'A Grammarian's Funeral'. These serve to highlight Browning's 'dramatic' approach. Chapter four offers new readings of poems from 'The World's Wife' by Carol Ann Duffy, revealing a lyric, rather than dramatic, employment of time and space. Finally, a reading of Julia Copus' poem 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süssmayr' enables further examination of dramatic devices and their effects in the context of contemporary poetry.

The fifth chapter offers an analysis of *Men, Women and Mice*, the accompanying volume of poetry. It is therefore suggested that the collection of poetry is read between chapters four and five. The collection of poetry and chapter five jointly address issues such as the status of the addressee, the border between the lyric and the dramatic, and problems surrounding the signalling of the dramatic in contemporary poetry. The discussion of these practice-related issues enables further conclusions to be reached regarding the operation and employment of deixis in the Browningsque dramatic monologue.

# Part 1: Time, Space and Action in the Dramatic Monologue

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1. An introduction to the dramatic monologue .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1. Definitions.....	2
2. The emergence of the term.....	10
3. Problems with the term .....	12
4. Platform action verses simulated spontaneity.....	14
5. The limits of action .....	17
<b>Chapter 2. Deixis and the Dramatic Monologue.....</b>	<b>20</b>
1. Deixis in lyric poetry.....	20
2. The construction of poetic voice .....	23
3. Deixis and imagined space .....	26
4. Temporal deixis and the dramatic .....	27
5. Identifying the dramatic .....	29
<b>Chapter 3. Deixis and Drama in Browning’s Dramatic Monologues</b>	<b>31</b>
1. Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister .....	31
2. A Grammarian’s Funeral.....	44
3. Some conclusions.....	57
<b>Chapter 4. Contemporary practice and the dramatic monologue....</b>	<b>59</b>
1. The World’s Wife .....	59
2. The Particella of Franz Xaver Süssmayr .....	68
3. Some conclusions.....	75
<b>Chapter 5. An analysis of my creative practice .....</b>	<b>78</b>
1. The status of the addressee and lyric-dramatic hybrids .....	78
2. Historical dramatic monologues.....	82
3. Dramatic monologue and contemporary settings .....	85
4. Some conclusions.....	90
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Part 2: Men, Women and Mice.....</b>	<b>95</b>

## Introduction

This project investigates the presentation of time, space and action in the dramatic monologue, comparing it to that in lyric poetry. I argue that the distinguishing feature of the traditional or Browningsque dramatic monologue is that some kind of action is seen to take place within the physical environment inhabited by the speaker. This environment is dramatically-realised and the action is presented as 'literal'. This stands in contrast to the simulated spontaneity associated with the dramatisation of situation and self in lyric poetry.

This difference in communicative context means that deictic elements in the dramatic monologue must be understood differently from those in lyric poetry. I suggest that the dominance of the lyric mode can, however, sometimes lead to the misinterpretation of deixis in the dramatic monologue; to the dramatic monologue being read through the prism of lyric poetry. I also argue that many contemporary poems labelled as dramatic monologue are actually written in the lyric mode, using deictic analysis to illustrate this.

I draw on Keith Green's work on the occurrence and behaviour of deixis in lyric poetry and consider how this might differ with regard to the context of dramatic monologue, appropriating Green's concept of coding and content time and place for use on the dramatic monologue. This approach provides me with the stylistic tools to explore the presentation of time, space and action in dramatic poetry, enabling me to produce original close readings of two of Browning's poems. The same approach also allows me to present original readings of a number of poems by Carol Ann Duffy, revealing the lyric rather than dramatic mode at work in poems usually labelled as dramatic monologue.

This investigation of deixis and the interpretive process extends to my creative practice. Here I experiment with ideas such as the way in which subtle shifts in tense can impact upon the perceived drama of a text. I employ various conceits and devices for signalling action in the coding environment and explore the pressure which the concept of literary genre may be seen to exert on the interpretive process.

Both strands of my research combine to enable me to make original observations about the operation and uses of deixis in the Browningsque dramatic monologue. This allows me to offer a new way of identifying 'the dramatic' in poetry and thereby make a fresh contribution to the debate surrounding the definition and categorisation of poems as dramatic monologue.

# Chapter 1. An introduction to the dramatic monologue

## 1. Definitions

### Cataloguing the features

Although its origins are generally considered to lie with Browning and Tennyson in the early Victorian period, Ina Beth Sessions' 1947 article 'The Dramatic Monologue' is usually seen as the first serious attempt to define and codify the genre. Sessions set out seven characteristics which she deemed necessary for a 'perfect' dramatic monologue; those of 'speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action and action which takes place in the present' (508). Citing Browning's 'My Last Duchess' as a 'perfect' specimen, Sessions led the reader through each feature to show how the poem 'splendidly illustrates' all seven:

The Duke is the speaker; the envoy is the audience; the arrival of the envoy to discuss wedding plans furnishes the occasion; interplay between speaker and audience is constant throughout the poem; the speaker reveals his own character at the same time he is sketching that of the Duchess; action is dramatic, involving the death of the Duchess and the Duke's plans for his next wedding; and, finally, the action unfolds as the poem develops, giving the reader the impression that this is the original occasion (508-509).

Remaining focused on the genre's formal features Sessions went on to identify and analyse its sub-classifications, laying out in chart form the various combinations of features she believed were required for Imperfect, Formal and Approximate examples of the genre. Considering the extremely prescriptive nature of Sessions' definition it is not surprising that the article met with opposition and that such an approach has been largely dismissed as overly taxonomic and ultimately reductive.

Sessions' seven categories are still, however, often referred to in contemporary discussions of the genre. This may be partly because they provide a useful starting point for setting some of the terms of debate, but also perhaps because, as critic Glennis Byron points out, Sessions' dogmatic identification of definite features is not necessarily the problem. It is rather that such taxonomy seems in itself of limited use, unhelpfully obscuring the genre's often striking similarities to the more dramatised types of lyric poetry (10). It is precisely because of the affinity of these two poetic modes (dramatic monologue and what is sometimes called 'dramatic lyric') that so much of the subsequent critical debate has concentrated on seeking more subtle distinctions. Sessions' work, while thorough in its cataloguing of the features and in its

attempt to analyse the effects achieved by their various permutations, does not seem to really get at the essence of the genre.

### **Sympathy and judgement**

A somewhat more nuanced and flexible approach is proposed by Robert Langbaum in his 1957 volume 'The Poetry of Experience: Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition'. Langbaum feels we must connect the dramatic monologue with that other, earlier manifestation of the 'poetry of experience': the 'greater Romantic lyric' (35). These two poetic types can indeed appear quite strikingly similar; both present a first-person speaker in a specific setting, whom the reader seems to overhear speaking, usually to some kind of listener, human or otherwise, present or absent. But rather than trying to define the dramatic monologue with a list of characteristics, Langbaum acknowledges the similarities and emphasises the need to understand how the dramatic monologue differs from the greater Romantic lyric through its *way of meaning* (76-77).

For Langbaum a distinguishing feature of the dramatic monologue is the tension created between the reader's sympathy for and judgement of the speaker. He posits that for a poem to be considered a dramatic monologue there must be a split between these two emotions and that 'the split is naturally most apparent when the speaker is in some way reprehensible, where sympathy is in conflict with judgement' (105).

Like Sessions, Langbaum finds Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess' a useful illustration of the genre. His discussion of sympathy for the speaker of the poem (the Duke) has, however, provoked some amount of disagreement. This seems largely due to the fact that Langbaum's attitude towards the Duke appears to go beyond 'sympathy'. With apparent admiration Langbaum insists that 'what interests us more than the Duke's wickedness is his immense attractiveness', his 'power and freedom' and his 'hard core of character fiercely loyal to itself' (83). He suggests that as readers we ultimately allow the Duke to 'have his way with us' (85). Glennis Byron, among others, has objected to Langbaum's reading of the poem, arguing that 'a woman reader's questioning of patriarchy might preclude any possibility of sympathising with the "freedom and power" which authorises turning a woman into a wall hanging' and that 'many of "us" – male *and* female - are not so easily seduced' (22). Byron's objection also highlights the wider problem connected with Langbaum's concept of sympathy and judgement; the tacit notion of a universalised reader.

What has tended to be overlooked by subsequent critics is that Langbaum does go some way to qualifying his raptures over the Duke. He discusses the power and pull

of first-person narrative, suggesting that because the entire poem is made up of the Duke's utterance the reader has no choice but to 'sympathise' to some degree with his viewpoint. Langbaum posits a kind of 'existential hierarchy' by which the speaker is 'justified not because he is more right – he seldom is – but because he is more alive' (202). Whether or not the charges of misogyny around his strangely sexualised description of the Duke have played a part in damaging his case, Langbaum's idea that sympathy for a first-person speaker inhibits the reader's judgement of him does not seem to have been generally accepted.

### **Disequilibrium and delusion**

Another important element of Langbaum's work is his suggestion that in dramatic monologue there is always a 'disequilibrium' between experience and idea. He argues that the origins of the genre lie in attempts by Victorian poets to develop the Romantic lyric of experience. By fusing the dramatic immediacy of the Romantic lyric with the adoption of a character or voice separate from their own, Langbaum thinks that Victorian poets were not only able to make use of 'a poetry which makes its statement not as an idea but as an experience' but also to exploit this to present an utterance from which 'one or more ideas can be abstracted as problematical rationalisations' (35-36). Langbaum believes that one way in which this 'disequilibrium' can be seen to manifest itself is in a disparity between the meaning of the speaker's utterance and the meaning of the poem. It is this aspect of his theory which seems to have been absorbed into today's notion of dramatic monologue in the idea that its speakers are made to reveal more, or at least something *other*, than they intend. It appears to be this element which makes the form an appealingly apposite vehicle for the portrayal of mentally unbalanced and villainous speakers; the deluded and those seeking to delude.

This idea of the dramatic monologue as concerned with the portrayal of 'abnormal mental states' is explored by Ekbert Faas in his 1988 volume *Retreat into the Mind. Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry*. Faas examines the relationship between the rise of the mental sciences and the emergence of 'the psychological school of poetry' in the mid nineteenth century. He sees the writers of the first dramatic monologues as drawing on two major precedents: Shakespeare's psychological realism (particularly in his soliloquies) and the Romantic 'science of feeling' embodied in the greater Romantic lyric (106). Faas cites Langbaum's identification of the structural kinship of the dramatic monologue and Romantic lyric approvingly and explores the main difference between the two. Using Wordsworth and Tennyson as examples, Faas

demonstrates how the former ‘invites us to share or even embrace the speaker’s emotions’, whereas the latter, while expecting to elicit some empathetic understanding for the speaker, invites the reader to ‘stand back, analyse, even judge the speaker in the way an alienist (or psychiatrist) might diagnose his patient’ (6). Although this brings to mind Langbaum’s notion of sympathy and judgement, it does not seem that Faas means to imply that the two types of poetry represent respectively these two poles. It is more that any analysis of the speaker’s character, whether sympathetic or otherwise, is simply not relevant to the lyric mode, whereas it is a primary concern of the dramatic monologue.

### **The feint**

In a separate line of enquiry the relationship between the speaker, the poet and the reader in dramatic monologue has been interestingly and influentially explored by Alan Sinfield in his 1977 monograph ‘The Dramatic Monologue’. Sinfield takes the broad, inclusive position that a dramatic monologue is any poem in which the speaker is indicated not to be the poet (21). Like Langbaum, Sinfield is interested in the disparity between the meaning of the speaker and the meaning of the poem. He believes, however, that this disparity springs from the reader’s awareness of the poet’s controlling hand and suggests that the dramatic monologue ‘feigns’ because it ‘pretends to be something other than it is’ (25). We are presented with a first-person speaker which, in poetry, usually signifies the poet’s voice. Thus Sinfield feels that the very mode of expression (poetry) acts to create a ‘divided consciousness’. This is because while we are aware that the speaker is a dramatic creation, the conventions of lyric poetry mean that we are ‘obliged to posit simultaneously the speaking “I” and the poet’s “I”’ (32). This leads Sinfield to conclude that the dramatic monologue is in some ways more ‘dialogic’ than monologic.

A related aspect of the ongoing debate which is also taken up and developed by Sinfield is the position the genre occupies in relation to lyric and narrative poetry. For Sinfield, narrative (or epic) poetry can often be roughly equated with ‘fiction’. This is because the speaker and the characters within such narratives do not engage the reader directly, as they often do in lyric poetry, but appear ‘sealed within the fictional world’ (24). Sinfield believes that the dramatic monologue ‘lurks provocatively’ between first-person lyric and narrative fiction (24). Drawing on Käthe Hamburger’s work on fictional narrators, he develops the concept of ‘the feint’; a mode of communication unique to the genre which he believes comes about when an ‘invented speaker masquerades in the

first person, which customarily signifies the poet's voice' (25). Sinfield seems to view the feint as something which can be placed on a spectrum, with first-person lyric at one end and a kind of third-person narrative fiction at the other. Various factors such as a poem's title and the presence or absence of an 'auditor' come into play to tilt the feint one way or the other. A key factor for Sinfield seems to be the degree of dramatic realisation employed. This has the effect of 'moving the feint either towards the poet's "I" or towards fiction'. Sinfield asserts that a 'heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail', which establishes the speaker in a world we know not to be the poet's, moves the feint towards fiction, while in the case of a speaker 'relatively unlocated in time and place', with little to remind us that it is not supposed to be the poet speaking, the feint is closer to the lyric 'I' (25). Yet a somewhat counter-intuitive effect may also be observed; Sinfield points out that the accumulation of specific dramatic detail has the opposite effect when the poem is spoken simply by the poet's 'I' figure. In such poems the 'concreteness of situation' seems to encourage the reader to believe in the speaker as a 'real-life person' (26). Sinfield sees the 'feint' and related effects as demonstrative of a kinship between all poems in which the speaker is explicitly indicated to be someone other than the poet, and therefore as providing justification for his wide definition of the genre.

### **Auditor, reader and rhetorical effect**

The prevalence of this broad, inclusive approach taken by Sinfield is highlighted in Glennis Byron's 2003 overview and re-assessment of the genre. Byron observes that what we now know as the dramatic monologue is a category that embraces a wide and diverse variety of forms. One aspect of the debate taken up by her is the presence or absence of a listener (or 'auditor') located within the fictional world of the poem, and the related issue of the position reserved for the reader. Examining contemporary monologues, Byron observes that poems by Carol Ann Duffy, Simon Armitage and others, although often appearing to address someone and 'marked by the signs of communication', frequently lack an auditor (143). This, combined with a direct address to an unspecified 'you', eliminates the auditor and gives the impression of the speaking 'I' directly addressing the reader. Byron sees this as working to pull the reader into the speaker's world and suggests that this effect is often exploited to make the reader confront the various social problems of modern society. Perhaps this technique can also be seen as a way in which contemporary poets have adapted the genre to eschew what they perceive as the somewhat unwieldy and artificial device of the silent auditor.

Byron asserts that the idea which has exerted most influence on approaches to the genre is that 'dramatic monologues primarily present unintentional and unconscious revelations [of character]' (24). For Byron, however, readings which emphasise revelation of character are outdated and problematical. In such readings 'language is seen to speak for some authentic character rather than the originating and authentic self being seen as an effect of language'. She concedes, however, that albeit a textual effect, the illusion of character does remain, and that we are 'offered a subject to be scrutinised but simultaneously see the subject in process' (25).

Byron also draws attention to changes taking place in the literary canon, in particular the ongoing re-assessment of female practitioners of the dramatic monologue such as the Victorian poets Augusta Webster and Amy Levy. She observes that such re-assessment is likely to impact on future analysis of the genre.

The relationship between auditor and reader in Browning's monologues is examined by Glenn S. Everett in his 1991 article "'You'll not let me speak": Engagement and detachment in Browning's monologues'. Everett argues that the general acceptance of Langbaum's view of the dramatic monologue as a continuation of the Romantic lyric has led to the neglect of key elements of the genre. Everett sees the reader, or 'player', as engaged in a 'game of imagination which the poem asks [him] to play before [he] can attain a detached, critical view of the whole work' (124). He observes that Browning frequently withholds the identity of the auditor until the latter part of the poem, seeing this as a strategy employed to dupe the reader into thinking that it is he who is being directly addressed, thereby engaging him more fully in the action. Everett believes that the disorientation experienced by the reader on discovering that he is not being directly addressed serves to provoke a more detached view of the work, as well as a recognition that 'an effort is being made to suggest that [he is] the silent partner in the conversation' (132). This idea leads Everett to conclude that the reader of dramatic monologue essentially takes on the role of the auditor, a role which is deliberately 'left blank' so that the reader can 'create' him or her (130). Several other critics view the relationship between reader and auditor in a similar way. W. David Shaw, for example, sees the auditor as functioning as the reader's surrogate or friend, sharing the same perspective of the speaker (*The Dialectical Temper* 60). This sort of approach provides a useful means of separating the dramatic monologue from the lyric by highlighting its kinship with stage drama.

For Dorothy Mermin, the idea of an 'auditor poem' is more useful than that of dramatic monologue. She uses the term to classify poems which present 'an auditor

from whom the speaker wants (and often gets) a response: not as a consequence of the completed utterance, but while he is speaking' (2). Mermin suggests that we ask different questions of the utterance depending on whether or not there is an auditor and notes the difference in effect between poems in which the monologist is constantly aware of his auditor and those which 'deviate into unrhetorical expressiveness' (47-58). She also distinguishes between two kinds of auditor poem: those in which 'speech is action', in which the utterance itself causes things to happen, and those which present 'habitual behaviour or recurrent or typical situations' (16). For Mermin both types of auditor poem are ultimately concerned with poetry as communication, speech in terms of its effect on an audience and the individual as part of society (8).

This approach is developed by Cornelia D. J. Pearsall who sees the dramatic monologue as a type of poem concerned with performance and performative and transformative effects, whereby the speaker 'seeks a host of transformations – of his or her circumstances, of the auditor, or of the self' (71). Pearsall suggests that a major feature of the dramatic monologue is its 'assumption of rhetorical efficacy' (68). This stands in contrast to Robert Langbaum's view of the superfluity of the utterance (183). The antithetical nature of Langbaum and Pearsall's theories can perhaps be said to highlight the genre's binary nature. Langbaum's idea of the utterance as largely gratuitous, seems to focus on the lyrical element, on what Pound called the character's 'moment of song' (cited in Howe 88), whereas it is the conversational or rhetorical aspect which Pearsall addresses. W. David Shaw captures this dual character very precisely in defining the dramatic monologue as a poem in which 'the swerve of lyric apostrophe away from rhetoric often deflects the speaker from his ostensible purpose of persuading or manipulating a silent auditor' (Lyric Displacement 303 (footnote)). I would suggest that this idea is also useful in considering dramatic monologues which lack an auditor. In such cases the 'swerve of lyric apostrophe' may be seen as deflecting the speaker from the activity of self-justification, or from the rehearsal of an argument.

### **Contemporary use of the term**

As Glennis Byron notes, the category today is wide and varied, encompassing many and disparate poems. The term is often used in Sinfield's broad and inclusive sense to describe any poem in which the speaker seems to be someone other than the poet. I would, however, question the usefulness of employing the term in this catch-all way. Such usage is unsatisfactory because of the implication that in cases where there is no explicit signal that the 'I' is a specific character, the speaker may be easily equated with

the poet. Although trends in literary critical thought may have moved away from the New Critical dogma of treating all first-person speakers in poetry as personae, it seems that the doctrine has left a legacy which at least still problematises the relationship between speaker and poet. The prevailing ethos seems to me to be that the sophisticated reader does not assume an autobiographical link; that her default position should be that the speaker is *not* the poet and that she should only diverge from this position in the light of substantial evidence to the contrary. Yet the persistent tendency to casually label poems in which the speaker is ‘not the poet’ as belonging to the special category of dramatic monologue is surely to proceed the other way round.

Although the term is often used in this loose sense, there do still seem to be certain tendencies and features associated with the genre today. I would suggest two main tendencies to be, firstly, the portrayal of the emotionally unbalanced or socially deviant speaker, and secondly, the idea of giving voice to a previously silent, misrepresented or neglected historical figure. Simon Armitage’s poem ‘Hitcher’ (1993) and Carol Ann Duffy’s ‘Psychopath’ (1987) are good examples of the former, by prominent exponents of the form, while Duffy’s volume *The World’s Wife* (1999) could be said to illustrate the latter. Poems in which a first-person speaker falls into one of these categories are especially likely to be termed ‘dramatic monologue’ regardless of whether they are presented ‘dramatically’ or not.

The idea that a dramatic monologue should be ‘dramatic’, in the sense of ‘relating to drama’, seems surprisingly irrelevant to contemporary definitions and expectations of the genre. Looking back to the seven features identified by Sessions, while the others seem to have been absorbed into the general idea of the genre, her identification of ‘action which unfolds in the present’, far from being an integral component, seems to have been lost almost completely, and is a feature seldom found in contemporary poems labelled as dramatic monologue. I believe, however, that it is this very unfolding of ‘action in the present’ which seems to have given the genre much of its original distinctiveness.

The only element of the ‘dramatic’ which is still associated with the genre today, and may be observed with any regularity as a feature of it, is that of a certain verbal or conversational quality; the impression that the words are being spoken aloud. So if not action, at least the speech itself appears to ‘unfold in the present’. Yet as Glennis Byron states, if the speakers in such pieces address anyone at all, it is most likely to be an unspecified ‘you’. I would suggest, therefore, that while the immediacy of this seemingly verbal utterance may work to root the speaker temporally, in terms of

dramatic realisation the speaker is unlikely to be located specifically in space; we will not usually find what Sinfield refers to as the ‘heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail’ (25) establishing and particularising the spatial context from which the utterance is made.

Poet Daljit Nagra seems to feel this loss in contemporary poetry and to lack a shorthand way of contrasting contemporary examples with the more traditional form of dramatic monologue. Setting the exercise of writing a dramatic monologue in *The Guardian*’s monthly ‘Poetry Workshop’ section, Nagra states that he does not just want participants to write a poem in which ‘a speaker communicates with an implied listener’. He wants them to attempt a ‘proper, full-on dramatic monologue as first attempted by Robert Browning...where one person is speaking to another person’. Nagra’s stress on the progressive (‘is speaking’) in his definition of the ‘proper, full-on’ dramatic monologue stands in contrast to the simple present tense and more nebulous ‘communicates’ in his definition of today’s more common type, reinforcing perhaps the idea that modern pieces are only partially temporally rooted. His insistence on a specific listener, located within the speaker’s fictional world, rather than the ambiguous status of the implied listener, also seems to reveal Nagra’s awareness that the development of spatial and temporal dimensions are important in rendering a poem dramatic.

It is this somewhat overlooked ‘dramatic’ element of the dramatic monologue that I wish to explore in the remaining part of this chapter. I will look first at how the term dramatic monologue came about and how it was initially used. I will then examine how the theories of critics relate to the dramatic elements of the genre and consider how the drama in what Nagra calls the ‘proper, full on’ dramatic monologue may be seen to differ from the dramatisation of situation and self often employed in lyric poetry.

## **2. The emergence of the term**

Although the term dramatic monologue came into common usage to describe some of the work of Browning and Tennyson, the first recorded use of the exact phrase, according to A. Dwight Culler, seems to have been by poet George W. Thornbury in 1857, to refer to a grouping of his own poems, which were heavily influenced by Browning (Culler 366). As critics started to recognise that Browning’s poetry was giving rise to a ‘school’, attempts began to be made to define its characteristics. Yet Browning does not seem to have used the actual term himself, repeatedly skirting round it with titles such as ‘Dramatic Lyrics’, ‘Dramatic Romances and Lyrics’ and ‘Dramatis

Personae', and famously stating his work to be 'always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of imaginary persons, not mine' (Preface to Dramatic Lyrics). It is not obvious what Browning actually meant by 'dramatic in principle'. He later says that the pieces in his volume 'Dramatic Idyls' may be called dramatic *because* 'the story is told by some actor in it, not by the poet himself'(cited in Culler 366). Yet this comment seems incongruous with his previous statement, in which the conjunction 'and' implies that 'dramatic in principle' means something different from the 'utterances of imaginary persons'. It also sits uncomfortably with the *Fortnightly Review*'s observation in 1869 that Browning's innovation was a '*dramatic* use of the monologue form' (cited in Culler 366, my emphasis), which would seem to imply something more dynamic than a speech by a character. In a time when the poet's insights and opinions, expressed through his poems, were held sacred by the public, it is perhaps possible that Browning's primary concern was to separate himself from his, often unsavoury, speakers. This would make sense of his emphatic use of the word in a seemingly fairly redundant sense. Yet his reference to the speaker or narrator of the story as the 'actor in it', could be said to reveal that his real interest lay in the drama the form allowed; using characters to tell a story seems only to be only one element of this.

The 'dramatic element', according to Stopford Brooke, one of the first critics to examine the genre, was that 'in the telling of a tale of the past or of the present...another person is supposed to be near at hand' (cited in Culler 366). Brooke's definition is interesting because it highlights the idea that these poems are to be read as utterances, located at a specific time and place. Whether or not another person need actually be 'near at hand' to hear the utterance for the 'dramatic element' to be realised is questionable and is an aspect which has been picked up by subsequent critics, as I shall discuss.

The first book-length exploration of the genre, *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue*, was written by elocutionist Samuel Silas Curry in 1908. Curry saw the dramatic monologue in relation to the stage play, as 'a new and parallel aspect of dramatic art' (11). For him the genre, as Browning exemplified it, was 'one end of a conversation [in which] a definite speaker is conceived in a definite dramatic situation' (7).

Curry was primarily interested in the dramatic monologue as a piece that could be rendered by voice and action, and implicit in his study was Stopford Brooke's notion that the poem must be spatially and temporally located in order to be dramatic. Curry dismissed as 'narratives' those pieces in which a speaker merely relates past action,

believing that in true examples of the genre ‘the word dramatic need hardly be added [to the term monologue] any more than to a play, because it is implied’ (127). In Curry’s view, specific attention should be given to what he called ‘platform action’; that is, the location and physical movement within the setting of the speaker and listener, as indicated or implied in the text. But it is in this discussion of performance that Curry’s ideas become confusing. As an elocutionist his chief interest was in the verbal rendering of the monologue, but in referring to the reader as ‘the interpreter’, who ‘speaks’ the piece, Curry seemed to assume that the poems he examined, including a number of Browning’s, were written to be *literally* performed. He also discussed his ideas about the performance of verse and prose monologues interchangeably, even though some of the prose monologues he examined differ widely from his verse examples, seeming to have been written specifically for performance. Curry, however, did not make any distinction, and did not take into account differences such as the complexity of the language, the density of the imagery, the metre and rhyme of his verse examples, and their implications for performance. This may partly explain why Curry’s work has been largely ignored by subsequent critics. While his theatrical approach remains entertaining, I believe his ideas are perhaps only relevant to modern literary criticism and practice if adapted to apply to an *imaginary* stage. Indeed, Browning stated that his play ‘Luria’ was written for just such a context (R. a. Browning). The idea of the imaginary stage suits the binary nature of the genre and makes sense of not only the dramatic and rhetorical, but the dense, complex and more ‘poetic’ uses of language in the dramatic monologue. The concept of writing for such a context is also reflected in Ezra Pound’s suggestion that the very compulsion to write dramatic monologues comes about because ‘the maximum charge of verbal meaning cannot be used on the stage’ (31).

### **3. Problems with the term**

The term ‘dramatic monologue’ then, while becoming widespread through attempts to describe a new type of poetry being written by Tennyson and Browning, seems to have been used somewhat ambiguously from its inception. The main source of confusion appears to lie in vague and differing notions of the word ‘dramatic’. For example, Sessions, otherwise the most transparent and methodical of critics, seems to have used the word ‘dramatic’ in two ways. In her term ‘dramatic action’ (one of her seven features of the genre) she used it to refer specifically to the narrative movement within the incident or history ‘unfolded’ by the speaker. In the application of her criteria to

Browning's 'My Last Duchess' she stated that the action is dramatic because it involves the death of the Duchess and the Duke's plans for his next wedding. The idea of dramatic action as narrative movement is reinforced by her creation of a separate criterion relating to 'action in the present'. For Sessions 'action in the present' requires that the reader must be witness to the original occasion, that at least some of the action must take place in the present of the poem or 'all dramatic effectiveness will be lost' (511). 'Dramatic action' is thus perhaps an ill-chosen and confusing term for the narrative element of the genre, with both words conjuring up the more dynamic element encapsulated by 'action in the present'.

Elisabeth Howe, in her 1996 volume 'The Dramatic Monologue', addresses this ambiguous use of the word 'dramatic', adding her belief that the speaker 'should be involved in a drama of some kind, so that both meanings of "dramatic" are relevant...Browning's sense of "objective" [ i.e. the speaker being other than the poet], as well as the suggestion of tension or conflict' (14). But in this second definition of 'drama', in the slightly more colloquial sense of 'tension or conflict', Howe seems only to further complicate and confuse the way in which the word applies to the genre. A dramatic monologue may or may not be full of 'tension and conflict' (an effective one probably will be) but 'dramatic' is surely best understood in the sense of 'relating to drama'.

Alan Sinfield takes this more logical sense of the word for granted when he addresses the problematic nature of the term. For Sinfield the word 'dramatic' is troublesome because it assumes an 'Ibsenite naturalism' (19). Sinfield finds it a problem that other dramatic modes (such as classical tragedy or modern absurdist plays, which often 'eschew the detail of daily life, reduce physical action to a minimum and allow a most fulsome heightening of language' (19)) when employed in poetry, are not likely to be interpreted as dramatic monologue. Sinfield feels that keeping a wider notion of drama in mind may help us to appreciate a greater number of poems as dramatic monologues. He states that he therefore uses 'dramatic' in a 'basic and clear-cut way' as 'distinguishing speech which is manifestly set up as a fiction from that actually spoken between people' (21). Sinfield's implicit assumption that 'dramatic' is used in the sense of 'relating to drama', is again revealed in the above statement, in the fact that he sees the genre as representing any kind of fictional 'speech'.

The other main area of confusion around the idea of drama in the dramatic monologue seems to arise because of its similarity to lyric poetry's tendency towards first-person dramatisation of situation and self. I would suggest that this seeming

affinity can sometimes cause confusion in the decoding of both types of poem. It is the debate surrounding this shared propensity for drama which I shall now address.

#### **4. Platform action verses simulated spontaneity**

Curry's interest in the element of performance in dramatic monologue led him to conclude that 'all dramatic art is related to time, but the only time we can act is in the present' (85). His notion of 'platform action' reinforces this idea; focusing on the physical movement of the speaker and auditor, within their setting, and so linking the spatial and temporal dimensions and highlighting their importance.

Critic Ralph Rader picks up this idea of physical movement and of action taking place within the present of the poem in his article 'The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms'. Rader examines the ways in which previous critics have attempted to classify the genre, ultimately offering his own four categories of first-person persona poems: the expressive lyric, the dramatic lyric, the dramatic monologue and the mask lyric. Rader defines the dramatic monologue as a poem in which 'the poet simulates the activity of a person imagined as virtually real, whom we understand as we would understand an 'other' natural person' (150). For him this type of poem is furthest removed from the undramatised 'expressive lyric'. It perhaps contrasts more directly with the 'mask lyric' in which the 'I' is distinctly *not* the poet, but 'the piece is not dramatically rendered – is otherwise a lyric piece' (133), and also with the 'dramatic lyric', in which the poet-speaker 'presents, as dramatically present...a significant experience of the real world, which is in its origin a memory' (150). It is Rader's distinction between dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric which is particularly illuminating in relation to what I see as the dramatic monologue's most distinctive feature; its use of 'drama'. The dramatised present tense 'experience' of the dramatic lyric may be seen as symbolic, or a conceit for the revivification of a memory, whereas, as Rader states, the 'activity of the dramatic monologue character is *literal*' (139). His definitions also serve to shift the emphasis of dramatic monologue back onto the 'dramatic' element, and it is interesting to consider the vast swathe of poems which are referred to as dramatic monologues today that cannot be counted as such by Rader's definition, which he observes 'does not accommodate many poems' (139).

In distinguishing the dramatic monologue from the dramatic lyric in this way, Rader examines Robert Langbaum's ideas on 'the poetry of experience'. Langbaum

emphasises the continuity of the 'greater Romantic lyric' in dramatic monologue, stressing the experiential nature of both, and examining how, like the dramatic monologue, the Romantic lyric presents an experience as 'really taking place...*seen* and not merely remembered' (43), and as making use of a 'located observer...seeing it in the present' (41). While disagreeing with the assertion that we perceive the speakers of the two forms in the same way, Rader utilises Langbaum's idea of a static observer to show how different the two forms are.

Rader proposes that in order to test if a poem is best viewed as a dramatic monologue we should transpose our imaginative experience of the poem into a cinematic image. He describes the effect he believes is created when a dramatic monologue is transposed in this way. Using the often cited 'My Last Duchess' as his example, Rader sees the Duke as an 'outward presence within the frame of the motion picture screen, speaking the words of the poem to the envoy' (134). He then compares this to a 'dramatic lyric': Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach'. Here Rader sees 'a moonlit seascape with the camera understood to be the actor's eyes through which we are looking' (134), with the words of the poem registered as emanating from a consciousness understood as attached to the eyes. A simple equivalent test, according to Rader, is to read the two poems aloud: 'the reader will discover that he projects the Duke's voice dramatically...but that the voice of the "Dover Beach" speaker will be an ideal extension of the reader's own voice' (134). Rader seems to imply that the presentation of a closed fictional world in which the reader takes the part of an observer or eavesdropper, essentially shut off from the action, somehow guides us in interpreting a piece as a dramatic monologue, and thus as 'live' or 'literal'. Rader sees the dramatic monologue as an 'artificial replication of interpersonal understanding', in which the reader encounters the speaker 'as at the turn of a path we might encounter one person speaking to another in some striking way...so that focusing our attention we begin to infer his inner purpose...and continue to follow the activity until our rapt curiosity is replaced by the satisfaction of insight' (135). Rader does not, however, address precisely how he believes these differing 'cinematic' effects are achieved, nor acknowledge the ultimately subjective nature of his proposed 'test'.

Another possible problem with Rader's definition of the dramatic monologue is the issue highlighted by Sinfield; that of having too narrow a definition of 'drama'. Rader's assertion that we experience the speaker 'naturally', 'just as we might another person' (139) seems to justify Sinfield's concern that inherent in most people's definition of drama is a kind of 'Ibsenite naturalism'. While these limitations must be

kept in mind, they do not entirely negate the usefulness of Rader's idea that the activity of characters in dramatic monologue is to be read as 'literal', in relation to the more simulated spontaneity of the dramatic lyric. This is something also touched on by Dorothy Mermin in her assertion that some poems 'mimic the gestures of auditor poems, but the gestures remain only mimicry' (109).

Glennis Byron's view of the speaker of the dramatic monologue as a 'subject in process' leads her to find value in Sessions' category of 'action in the present', but rather for the way it allows us to observe the self as both process and product, than for the sake of dramatic effectiveness. Byron sees this kind of monologue as a 'temporal fragment', which 'emphasises that what we observe is only part of a larger process: something has gone before and something will follow' (26). This creation of a speaker rooted in temporality is, I would suggest, one of the ways in which the writer of the dramatic monologue may convey that its action is to be read as 'literal'.

Elisabeth Howe notes that in dramatic monologue poets often attempt to imitate oral discourse. Of 'My Last Duchess' she observes that the Duke's speech, if not quite colloquial, at least displays some features of oral discourse, such as ellipsis, hesitations, disclaimers and interjections (2). This seems to be one way of reinforcing the sense of extemporality associated with conversational speech. Howe also briefly notes the necessity of setting the speaker of dramatic monologue in a 'well-defined spatial and temporal context' (3) and in passing mentions the idea of the poet employing deictic language to produce this 'feeling of actuality' (54). These are both aspects of the genre which I believe deserve further analysis.

Another tool for producing this 'feeling of actuality' may be said to be the presence of a well-defined auditor. For Curry the essence of the genre was the 'conflict of individual with individual' (44). He saw the dramatic monologue as one end of a conversation and believed that the thinking of the speaker must always be influenced by some type of hearer (58). Byron, however, in her examination of the modernist poets' use of setting as metaphor and fragmentation of voice, demonstrates that caution is needed in the analysis of what appears to be direct address to an auditor. She observes that in the case of poets such as Ezra Pound, such address is frequently just a verbal affectation (115).

While the presence of an auditor is a convenient device for establishing the text as a kind of sealed fictional world, and while it may be usefully employed as a conceit for prompting the speaker to 'speak', an auditor is not, in my view, essential for conveying the dramatic nature of a piece. Whether the dramatic monologue even need

represent the *spoken* word is something Elisabeth Howe considers in her discussion of internal monologues. Howe uses the example of T. S. Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' to argue that it is possible to present the internal monologue as the organised and communicated thought of dramatic monologue, rather than as the flow of consciousness often associated with modernist writers (and with the lyric genre). Howe contrasts the stream of consciousness technique, which includes 'apparently random thoughts without logical connection, that is, whatever happens to cross the speaker's (or thinker's) mind' with the 'deliberate choices of the dramatic monologue' (82). She argues that although internal dramatic monologues convey thought rather than speech, and although the verse might display some of the free associations typical of thought, these items are still part of the whole effect. Thus, for Howe, such pieces may be called dramatic monologues because rather than 'purport to give us all the protagonists thoughts over a given time span', they are aimed at an effect 'like speech in a dramatic scene' (83).

Howe's analysis is helpful in highlighting that it is not always easy to distinguish the 'literal' or 'platform' action of full dramatic monologue from the conceit of 'simulated spontaneity' or symbolic use of the present tense associated with much lyric poetry. The most promising approach, I would suggest, appears to be through the analysis of features relating to the temporal and spatial context of a piece.

## **5. The limits of action**

For a genre concerned with performance and social interaction, many examples seem to contain a surprising amount of narrative back-story. It therefore might seem odd to insist 'action in the present' to be a key feature of the genre, when very often nothing substantial really seems to *happen* in the 'real time' of the poem. Curry addressed this in his observation that dramatic monologues are often more about 'thinking in the present than acting' (91). Byron echoes this in noting how the 'moment of telling is usually relatively static' (92).

The tendency towards large sections of narrative may be partly explained by the idea that dramatic monologues, as critic Dorothy Mermin puts it, 'lack the resources to develop temporal dimensions' (10). Yet this does not seem entirely true; things, albeit small things, can and do happen before us, within the 'present' of the poem. It does, however, seem true that the dramatic monologue cannot bear very much action.

Ekbert Faas in his book, *Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychiatry* argues that too much action is inconsistent with the genre. He cites Browning's poem 'Cristina and Monoldeschi' as an example of a dramatic monologue which exceeds the limits of what is sustainable. Summarising the action, Faas notes that 'within eight lines, the Swedish Queen first has a priest confess her former lover and then has him murdered by hired assassins' (154). He suggests that action is most effectively employed when it is primarily suggestive, giving as an example, the handshake which reveals that Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi has successfully got himself out of a tight spot. Faas believes the action should serve to 'highlight an emotionally charged scene' and act as a device for enlivening a piece and its persona's psychological self-portrayal, rather than being introduced for its own sake (155). He draws a distinction between the dramatic monologue and the monodrama, which he believes is able to slip more easily into dramatic action, concluding that action in dramatic monologue is 'best reduced to its barest limits' (153). Perhaps the very fact that the medium of communication is poetry (bearing, as it arguably does, for the modern reader, a kind of tacit allegiance to lyric expression) makes full-blown drama feel awkward and inappropriate.

The unsuitability of too much action may explain why most successful dramatic monologues tend to be set during relatively static moments, before or after action has taken place. It is also why Sessions' criticism of Browning for setting his poem 'The Laboratory' at the 'wrong' moment seems misguided. Sessions suggests that the poem would have been more effectively rendered and more exciting if, rather than taking place as the speaker visits an apothecary to have a poison potion mixed, it had taken place in the moments surrounding the actual administering of the poison to the speaker's rival at the dance she is due to attend (515).

Instead of being set at the moment of action, there is usually a substantial narrative element in dramatic monologue; whether or not the speaker's 'story' is hinted at or explicitly related by them. The dramatic element is most often achieved, I would suggest, through the framing of such narratives within the 'present' of the poem. Within this 'present' (and perhaps in order to demonstrate or reinforce that it is indeed the present, or the 'original occasion' that we are witnessing) small pieces of action may be performed, that is, 'unfold' before us, in the 'real time' of the poem. In many cases, particularly in contemporary dramatic monologues, the majority of the text will be concerned with, what Sessions called, 'delayed narrative'. Yet perhaps it is not the quantity of this 'framing' in the present that counts, but rather the nature and

circumstance of it; whether the imparting of the narrative has, as Langbaum states, 'strategic significance within the present tense situation' (148). Here Langbaum (who generally stresses the dramatic monologue's affinity with lyric, seeing the utterance as largely gratuitous and akin to song) seems to acknowledge the rhetorical and pragmatic nature of the genre in his perception of the speaker's 'strategy'. From this perspective even the narrative element can be said to be 'performative', in that it is spoken to some immediate purpose. Thus, the narrative may be considered to form part of the action, in as far as it has some effect on, for example, the auditor's attitude, or in the sense that it constitutes the speaker's fulfilment of some intention.

In 'full' dramatic monologue the details are not just described and laid out as commentary; the poem is written as a 'live' event in which something is at stake. In view of the lack of substantial 'action' in most dramatic monologues, it seems Langbaum's idea of the narrative element having strategic significance in the present of the poem may be integral to an understanding of the use of drama in the genre.

## Chapter 2. Deixis and the Dramatic Monologue

### 1. Deixis in lyric poetry

In linguistics, the term deixis refers to the idea that an understanding of the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance is dependent upon contextual information. Although the semantic meaning of deictic language is fixed, its denotational meaning varies depending on a number of contextual factors. Classified by Levinson, Lyons, Fillmore and others, the main categories of deixis are usually considered to be time, place, person, social and discourse. Noting it as a fundamental element of human discourse, Keith Green defines deixis as ‘the encoding in an utterance of the spatio-temporal context and the subjective experience of the encoder’ (121-122). In his article ‘Deixis and the poetic persona’ Green examines the lyric poem as a ‘particular discursive site’ where deixis can be seen to operate in a particular way. He states, however, that his proposed methodology is applicable to any kind of text, literary or non-literary, and stresses that the main difference in the operation of deixis in lyric poetry is not in kind but in degree (121). Green also argues that deixis in lyric poetry should not be treated as ‘pseudo-deixis’, as some critics have previously viewed it, but rather as deixis framed by a particular genre (125). Re-printed in *The Language and Literature Reader*, Green’s article and the model for deictic analysis he provides are cited by the editors as having been highly productive in the field of stylistics. The study’s focus on lyric poetry, including some close readings of texts, make it particularly useful and relevant to my research. I believe that conventions surrounding the presentation of time and space in lyric poetry had an effect upon the initial reception of the dramatic monologue, as well as a continued impact on the interpretation (and in turn, the employment) of the form. Green’s work provides a useful framework for comparing the functioning of time and space in dramatic monologue with that in lyric poetry, as well as within different types of poems classified as dramatic monologue.

Green makes a useful distinction between deictic elements and deictic terms, stating that a deictic term is part of a ‘grammatically closed set’, whereas a deictic element is best understood as ‘some part of an utterance in which there is a syntactic or semantic element which might function deictically’ (122). This definition leads him to issue the caution that because deixis is distinguished by its use, having a ‘powerful pragmatic base’, there can be no taxonomy of use. He suggests a new categorisation of deixis in general is, however, possible, as well as desirable. The set of deictic categories

proposed by Green incorporates the more ‘traditional’ categories summed up by Stephen Levinson as time, place, person, social and discourse. Green modifies and expands on Levinson’s categories to come up with six categories. These are: reference, the origo, time and space, subjectivity, the text, and syntax (126-127).

In applying his six deictic categories to the lyric poem Green is obliged to make explicit certain assumptions about the genre. He acknowledges that these assumptions are somewhat problematic as they inevitably treat lyric poetry as a historical phenomenon. Green’s assumptions about lyric poetry centre around the mobilisation of an ‘I’ figure, an assumed addressee and decoder, referring expressions introduced on the basis of an assumed knowledge on the part of the reader, and an experiencing mode and observing mode expressed simultaneously (125). Interestingly, these elements all emphasise the dramatic nature of the lyric and could perhaps equally apply to a definition of the dramatic monologue. This serves to highlight how close the conceits used to achieve immediacy and the re-vivification of memory in lyric poetry are to strategies employed in dramatic monologue.

In his discussion of the indexical and symbolic meanings of deictic terms, Green notes that the line between the two is sometimes fuzzy. Examining Rauh’s notion of a cline of deictic activity, Green observes that in written texts the decoder usually has to ‘create a cognitive space in which the deictic elements and terms can be realised indexically’ (128). Yet as Green points out, in the discourse of a lyric poem it is unlikely that we can ascribe indexical meaning to the symbolic elements of deictic terms, because ‘the co-occurrence of symbolic and indexical meaning is only possible when we know what object is being “pointed to”’ (124). This may be one way in which the language of the dramatic monologue, and the communicative context it creates, can be seen as functioning differently from that of lyric poetry.

Green uses his deictic category of ‘time and place’ to examine the simulated spontaneity of lyric poetry. He suggests that although lyric poems implicitly present a ‘content time’ which is separate from ‘coding time’, it is frequently, through various linguistic strategies, dramatised as synchronous (126-127). Green’s coinage of such terms is extremely useful, drawing distinctions between the differing time frames as coding time, content time, and receiving time (as well as the analogous coding place, content place and receiving place). His concept of ‘receiving time and place’ is also interesting, being bound up with ideas surrounding the position reserved for the reader. This is an important issue in dramatic monologue with its tradition of the silent auditor. Green’s deictic category of ‘space and time’ may therefore prove useful in exploring the

ways in which the dramatic monologue is distinct from other types of poetry, particularly regarding how differences in the functioning of temporal deixis manifest themselves in the lexico-grammatical make-up of the utterance.

Green draws attention to the complex variables at work in the interpretive process in his observation that we process the deictic elements and terms according to our understanding of the speech genre and in noting that deixis interacts with genre (124). He also highlights the need for caution in 'seeking generic overviews of historical phenomena' (134), a point which is also pertinent to an analysis of the dramatic monologue.

Elena Semino's paper 'Building on Keith Green's 'Deixis and the poetic persona': further reflections on deixis in poetry', published alongside Green's 1992 article, aims to show how 'contexts that readers construct in order to realise the symbolic values of deictics in poetry may differ along a variety of dimensions' (135). Semino considers how numerous factors such as the interplay between deictic expressions in the text, the subject matter, the linguistic properties, and the reader's background knowledge of, and attitude towards, the text may all interact to affect the way in which the deictic elements are interpreted. Semino notes that speaking voices which function as the subjects of the fictional enunciations in poetry cannot be identified with real-life authors in any straight-forward way, that the extent to which readers assimilate or associate the two depends on the range of variables mentioned above (136).

Semino observes that the communicative situations evoked by different poems vary considerably. Using Green's idea of coding, content and receiving time and place, she examines several poems that differ in terms of the degree of overlap readers are likely to perceive between the 'evoked situations of utterance and the actual contexts of production and reception of the texts' (136). In an analysis of 'The Flea' by John Donne, Semino notes that there are two participants within the context created and that these participants view an object mutually visible at the time of the utterance. For Semino the 'communicative context' evoked by the text therefore corresponds to the canonical situation of utterance. Although many other factors, such as those connected with generic expectations, come into play to complicate the interpretive process, this idea of the communicative context corresponding to the canonical situation of utterance could perhaps be thought of as one of the prerequisites for the typical Browningsque dramatic monologue.

Semino goes on to note that a 'spoken quality' in an utterance constructed from written text 'emphasises the separation between real and fictional enunciations', making the personal pronouns in the text more likely to be perceived as fictive (136). This is similar to Alan Sinfield's idea of the 'impossible reading experience' created by the dramatic monologue, where the very fact that the action is presented as literally unfolding before us highlights the impossibility of its being 'real' (30). In Sinfield's view this pushes this type of dramatic poetry towards having more in common with prose fiction than lyric poetry in terms of the communicative context created. Semino does not directly relate such poetic contexts to fiction or drama, but rather considers how the mobilisation of a poetic persona may be achieved even when no explicit reference is made to a first-person speaker. She also draws on Green's idea of coding time and content time in noting that a shift in a temporal deictic centre, often marked by a shift from past to present tense, may reveal a shift from coding to content time (139). This insight helps to identify a further distinguishing feature of the dramatic monologue, with its tendency to move into narrative back story. I would suggest that in dramatic monologue a temporal shift is perhaps likely to work the opposite way round; with the shift from coding to content time being signified by a transition from present to past tense.

Semino states that the context for lyric poetry should not be seen as 'a physical setting that is fixed and given once and for all' but rather as a 'cognitive space actively constructed by the participants in the course of interaction' (140). The idea that the spatio-temporal setting in lyric poetry is to some extent mutable and unfixed certainly seems to be another way in which the dramatic monologue may be distinguished from lyric poetry; the communicative context of the dramatic monologue usually being more concrete or naturalistically portrayed (in the sense of theatre naturalism), and thus more firmly anchored in time and space.

## **2. The construction of poetic voice**

In her 1995 article 'Deixis and the dynamics of poetic voice' Semino furthers her investigation of the unfixed nature of deictic markers in lyric poetry, this time focusing on the creation of poetic voice or voices and drawing on ideas of personal deictic centres of orientation. Semino believes something which has not received adequate attention in the discussion of deixis in poetry is the idea that poems do not necessarily project 'unique and stable voices located within fixed deictic contexts' (Deixis and the dynamics 145) but rather may involve variation in deictic centre. Semino approaches

the idea of poetic voice as a dynamic rather than static phenomenon in order to demonstrate how deixis can be used to ‘signal changes in the position and mode of discourse of the speaking persona, as well as indicate the presence of multiple voices’ (Deixis and the dynamics 145). I would suggest that this is a phenomenon not commonly found in dramatic monologue, due to the more fixed or naturalistic context the genre tends to create.

As in her previous article, Semino is concerned with the variety of factors at work in the interpretation of texts. She sees voices and contexts of utterance in poetic texts as varying along two main dimensions; firstly the degree to which the speaker is likely to be identified with the author, and secondly the mode of discourse in which the persona is imagined to be engaged (for example, the impersonal observer, solitary muses, the interactive speaker). As regards this first variable, Semino believes that the perceived distance between a poetic persona and its author is determined by a combination of textual evidence and extra-textual information, such as knowledge of the author’s life and generic expectations. Regarding the second variable, Semino observes that in Robert Frost’s ‘Stopping by Woods’ and John Donne’s ‘The Flea’ the reader ‘experiences the discourse of an immediate participant in the fictional world’ (Deixis and the dynamics 148), even though in Frost’s poem we have a solitary muses and in Donne’s the utterance is of a dialogic nature. I would suggest that the communicative context in ‘The Flea’ perhaps also differs from that of ‘Stopping by Woods’ because some definite ‘action’ (the sucking of the blood by the flea) is presented as taking place during the unfolding of the speaker’s utterance. This is perhaps simply a paraphrasing of Ina Beth Sessions’ idea of ‘action in the present’ of the poem; one of her seven features of dramatic monologue. The fact that Donne’s poem is not usually considered a dramatic monologue serves to highlight the complicated nature of interpretation. Although it shares many, if not all, of the formal characteristics, Donne’s work, along with much other similarly dramatic poetry of the metaphysical poets, is usually seen as primarily concerned with playful semantic argument and rhetoric. Its use of drama may therefore be seen rather as a convenient vehicle for the enlivening of such argument, in the same way that the present tense is used to effect the re-vivification of memory in the Romantic lyric. In addition to this, these poems do not assume the voice of a distinct ‘character’, but rather present types of speaker, such as the poetically-typical lover. The speaker may therefore perhaps be most likely to be viewed as an extension of the poet. This is of course an example of how the pressures of genre affect interpretation. Semino’s analysis of various poems serves to highlight the fact that certain types of

dramatic poetry are either more or less likely to be read as lyric due to pressures of poetic convention and genre on the interpretive process.

In conclusion to her main discussion on the use of multiple and unstable voices in poetic discourse, Semino calls for a greater awareness of poetry's potential for the construction of complex discourse situations and the ways in which deixis can be used to achieve such complexity. Although this specific phenomenon may not be entirely relevant to the dramatic monologue (which I would argue tends to project a comparatively stable voice), the work highlights how just such an examination of the use of deixis in dramatic monologue may lead to a clearer understanding of the distinction between the projection of 'the present' used as a tool for immediacy and the different manipulation of the poetic persona employed in the dramatic monologue.

Alison Tate also examines the role of deixis in the communication of poetic voice in her essay 'Deictic markers and the creation of voice in Modernist poetry'. Tate studies the way in which the sense of fragmented viewpoint or referential indeterminacy often associated with Modernist writing may be examined through the functioning of deictic reference and in particular the extent to which manipulation or inconsistency of deictic reference may contribute to this effect.

In her analysis of Ezra Pound's 'Canto XVII' Tate identifies a phenomenon which she calls the 'continuous present'; a present which is largely conveyed 'not by indications of time, but by the presentation of successive visual impressions of changing scene' (136). She notes that in such poems we appear not so much to have access to the inner voice as the 'inner eye'. Dramatic monologues, on the other hand, seem primarily concerned with the presentation of *voice*, usually of an external nature, with all their subjective or value-laden commentary, and never primarily with the observation of, and feelings evoked by a visual landscape. This idea of the continued renewal of 'now', however, is something which may warrant further investigation regarding dramatic monologue. Although the technique appears to bring about the unfolding of action within the present of the poem (a collapsing of content and coding time in the utterance), I would suggest that this 'continuous present' usually has much more in common with the simulated spontaneity of lyric poetry. The style seems somewhat more boundless, allowing jumps forward in both time and space, something unsuited to the Browningsque dramatic monologue.

Tate's examination of deictic markers in Modernist writing points to 'one of the inherent paradoxes contained in the desire for a transparent language of the real'; the idea that modernist demands for 'presence' and 'immediacy' in writing required strong

deictic reference, while the pressure for objectivity and depersonalisation demanded that the writer should avoid such references (142). The complex nature of deictic reference is also apparent in more general discussion of the phenomenon; Tate notes that deictic reference has been viewed by some, such as Jakobson, as a means of freeing us from the present; allowing a spatio-temporal boundlessness not possible in the corporeal world (cited in Tate 134). In the case of dramatic monologue, however, deixis seems rather to function as Lyons describes it; as a way of anchoring language to context, to the immediate situation of speaking and for setting limits on the possibility of decontextualisation (Lyons 646).

### **3. Deixis and imagined space**

In his 2005 article 'Place deixis and the schematics of imagined space: Milton to Keats' Mark J. Bruhn attempts to chart developments in the use of place deixis in a poetry which he believes moves from being 'boundless' to becoming 'irrevocably placed'. In his examination of Keats' use of deictics, Bruhn coins the terms 'represented situation' and 'situation of discourse' to refer to and distinguish between the spatio-temporal setting which the poetic persona inhabits as he communicates (the 'situation of discourse') and the context in which the observations of the poem appear to take place (the 'represented situation') (389). Bruhn believes that Keats' use of deixis to foreground the 'situation of discourse' as the 'represented situation' serves to 'precipitate an unsettling recognition of the spatiotemporal and ontological asymmetries that structure the always operative but often well-masked interrelations between the two levels' (389). He also seems to imply that this type of lyric discourse can be seen to adopt techniques more associated with narrative fiction, typically by collapsing represented and discourse situations into a single level. However, Bruhn's 'situation of discourse' and 'represented situation' seems in essence to be a less clear and succinct articulation of Green's respective coding and content time and place.

Bruhn highlights the role played by the imperative mood in lyric expression (such as the frequent use of the imperative verb 'see') and notes that such constructions exert pressure on the reader to take on the role of the implied addressee. His assertion that such writing 'brings into view the conflict between our own situation and that of the addressee in the text' (389) leads him to arrive at a conclusion similar to Semino's idea that such writing creates ontological problems for the reader in relation to his position in

the text, and to Sinfield's related concept of the 'impossible reading experience' of dramatic monologue.

Bruhn's article is also of interest with regard to his application of the work of Roman Ingarden. Ingarden comments on the peculiar conceptualisation involved when one *reads* a dramatic text rather than seeing it performed, believing that in such a situation the reader's centre of orientation is that of a possible spectator who is 'neither really present in the dramatic work nor like one of the spectators present at its performance'. Ingarden concludes that in reading a play the reader is part of the 'represented world' but with the difference that he does not attain 'explicit representation' (cited in Bruhn 395). This idea of the peculiar status of the *reader* of drama seems one which deserves further investigation in relation to the dramatic monologue, which is perhaps best viewed as written for an imaginary stage.

Bruhn also identifies a particular structure which he believes is often employed by Wordsworth and Coleridge. In describing the 'sublime' mode which these and other Eighteenth-century poets frequently adopt, Bruhn observes an 'anti-spatio-temporal bias' and 'premium on boundlessness' (402). He suggests that the poems frequently follow a structure which could be described as 'spacetime – sublime – spacetime' (417). This structure could be seen as similar to a technique used in dramatic monologue which I have previously referred to as 'narrative framing'. Following Bruhn's model, a fairly common structure for dramatic monologue may perhaps be seen as spacetime – narrative – spacetime; the leap of the Romantic lyric from a situation with some spatio-temporal grounding into the sublime being replaced in dramatic monologue with a leap into the story a character wishes to tell.

#### **4. Temporal deixis and the dramatic**

There appears to have been relatively little work done on the function of deixis in dramatic monologue. One study which does address the subject however is Loy D. Martin's 'The inside of time: an essay on the dramatic monologue'. Martin sets out to demonstrate how the interaction between language and literary form can be traced in the case of Browning's dramatic monologue. He begins by observing that Victorian poets employ far more non-stative verbs than Romantic poets, noting that verbs with a non-stative aspect require a continually renewed input of energy for the given state to persist. Therefore, Martin posits, a poet or speaker chiefly interested in articulating temporal change and the creation of dynamic situations might tend to favour such verbs,

particularly given that a syntax 'rich in non-stative predication is, in a sense, already dramatic in structure' (59). Martin acknowledges that much caution is needed with such an approach as it could be seen to imply that a preference for non-stative verbs has direct implications at a level of complex discourse or indeed at the level of literary genre. He notes how misleading a method of inquiry which merely 'collects an assortment of traits and assigns them common conceptual implications' might be as an attempt to interpret the linguistic constituents of a literary type (60). Instead Martin investigates what kinds of syntactic norms can be associated with Browning's non-stative clauses, paying particular attention to verb aspect and methods of adverbial modification. He then expands this into a discussion of Browning's use of deixis and an analysis of his other characteristic strategies, with the ultimate aim of showing how the linguistic basis of the genre may have affected its interpretation.

Martin identifies the use of the progressive aspect of the verb as being one of the most important and subtle ways of establishing 'proximity time relations'. He believes that the reason the progressive verb form is so suited to the dramatic monologue is because when made progressive a verb's action is not whole but incomplete and 'viewed from inside the time sequence in which it occurs' (61). Martin states that in the progressive the moment of the verb and the moment of the action are identical and refer to no condition of temporal proximity. At the same time, however, he observes that this view from inside implies temporal extension beyond that moment. In a brief examination of Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto', Martin highlights how the situation's internal structure is the speaker's entire concern: 'as he begins his monologue he is inside the situation, he looks backward to a time when the quarrelling began, and he pleads for a future time when the process will end' (62). Martin points out that in such instances the verb taken by itself is often perfective rather than progressive in aspect. From this and similar examples he concludes (drawing on the terminology of Jerrold Katz) that it is necessary to recognise a number of predicate forms which signify 'indefinitely bounded dynamic processes viewed from within' (62).

Martin declares one of the principal functions of the dramatic monologue to be the creation of 'a poetic moment of a certain duration which is viewed internally and which is contiguous with an implied extra-textual past and future of indefinite extent'. He states that the 'present' of the dramatic monologue is thus an 'implicitly open-ended fragment in a succession of fragments which do not, even projectively, add up to a bounded whole' (65) and observes that Browning has many ways of 'indicating a relevant contiguous past as well as a relevant future' (67). This emphasis on the

absolute connectedness of the moment of utterance to the past and future brings to mind Robert Langbaum's idea of 'strategic significance in the present' as being of central importance to the genre.

## **5. Identifying the dramatic**

As the above discussion demonstrates, literary discourse, and perhaps poetry in particular, tends to be rather complex in its presentation of time and space. Viewing the emergence of the dramatic monologue in its historical context (between the English Romantic tradition and the linguistic innovations of Modernism) may help us to make sense of why the genre was initially misunderstood and charged with obscurity, and may also offer some explanation as to why this mode of poetry fell largely out of use and has never really returned to favour. Although Langbaum's view of the dramatic monologue as a continuation and extension and of the 'Romantic lyric of experience' has been widely accepted, I believe that critics' initial bafflement at Browning's work serves to highlight its differences. I would suggest that the root of such confusion lies in Browning's use of what Ralph Rader refers to as the 'literal' present' (139). Browning's innovation seems to have been a new portrayal of time and space in poetry, which necessitated a shift in position for the reader. The Browningsque dramatic monologue appears rather straightforward in its presentation of time and space, but wider poetic traditions may have contributed to its being misunderstood or perceived as clumsy or unsophisticated in its often naturalistic presentation of spatio-temporal context.

I suggested in the previous chapter that the supposed recent revival of the genre of dramatic monologue has actually just consisted of an increase in the number of poems which either adopt a specific character's voice to narrate a story or which simply employ a 'spoken' quality or conversational tone, without identifying a specific speaker, listener or context of utterance. As such, I argued, they are not 'dramatic' in the sense of the Browningsque monologue. I suggested that the only formal criterion necessary for a poem to be considered a dramatic monologue today is that of a speaker who is indicated in some way to be other than the poet. It is clear, however, that the dramatic monologue is still associated with some of the thematic features of the original or Browningsque monologue, such as madness and criminality, and the idea of the speaker revealing more or differently than they intend. The use of the genre to make historical characters speak could also be seen as a recurring theme. I have argued that the dramatic monologue as it exists today is not truly dramatic in the way that the

Victorian or Browningsque monologue was because it does not usually contain what Ina Beth Sessions refers to as ‘action which unfolds in the present of the poem’ (508) and also because the speaker’s utterance often lacks what Robert Langbaum describes as ‘strategic significance within the present tense situation’ (148) and is therefore not what Cornelia Pearsall has described as ‘performative’ (71).

In this chapter I have identified what I see as two fundamental and distinctive formal elements of the Browningsque dramatic monologue. The first is the presentation of a speaker who is spatio-temporally grounded, with the communicative context being that of the canonical situation of utterance. The scene we are presented with represents a continuous moment, unfolding in more or less ‘real time’. Unsignalled leaps in time or space are therefore unsuitable, and perhaps as a consequence, the genre cannot easily bear much action.

The second of these formal characteristics of the Browningsque dramatic monologue relates to both novelistic techniques and the idea of Naturalism in the theatre. It lies in the notion that, like the illusion of the fourth wall, the dramatic monologue constructs a sealed fictional world, of which the reader is essentially placed outside. Although the draw of the first person speaker and the sometimes seemingly direct address may give the reader a sense that they are playing a more interactive role, I believe the reader ultimately finds her role closer to that of a theatre audience member than that of speaker or silent auditor. This is similar to Ralph Rader’s analogy regarding point of view. Rader sees dramatic monologue as a scene in which all the characters involved are laid out before us as if in front of a camera. He contrasts this with the first person perspective of the lyric, in which we receive a speaker’s-eye view of the scene (134). Glenn Everett takes a similar approach but sees the camera angle as representing an auditor’s-eye view (130). Although I disagree with Everett’s view of the reader as auditor, I do not wish to dismiss his idea completely, and believe that further insights may be gained by following up his argument that the Browningsque monologue deliberately sets up a context whereby the reader is initially duped into thinking that she is being directly addressed. It seems, however, that further investigation of the strange status of the *reader* of drama may prove useful in my examination of the dramatic monologue. This comes back to my belief that the Browningsque dramatic monologue essentially exists because ‘the maximum charge of verbal meaning cannot be used on the stage’ (Pound 31). The act of reading drama, rather than hearing and watching it brings in a variety of new epistemological ambiguities which may be exploited by the writer.

## Chapter 3. Deixis and Drama in Browning's Dramatic Monologues

Drawing on Keith Green's work on deixis and the poetic persona, I shall now conduct a close analysis of two of Browning's dramatic monologues and attempt to say more precisely how the 'present' of the Browningsque dramatic monologue differs from that of the 'simulated spontaneity' of much lyric poetry. The two poems I will look at are 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' (1842) and 'A Grammarian's Funeral' (1855). I have chosen these particular pieces because of the contrasts they provide. The former lacks an auditor, presents a static speaker and has relatively little dramatic action unfolding within what Green calls the 'coding time and place' of the utterance. The latter is a piece with multiple auditors, a peripatetic speaker and significant dramatic action taking place within coding time and place. I hope, however, that these superficial differences will help to highlight the same underlying deictic mechanisms at work in Browning's dramatic monologues.

### 1. Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

Much of the critical work on 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' uses the text's obscure references as a starting point. A whole series of responses examines and contests the possible sources for and meaning of the italicised phrase '*Hy, Zy, Hine*' (Loucks (1974) gives a survey of the debate up to that point), several articles investigate the scrambled nature of the prayer '*Ave Virgo, Plena Gratia*' (For example Phipps (1969)) and others debate the identity of the 'great text in Galatians' (Cervo (2003) for example). In addition to this, a second line of enquiry exists which could broadly be said to focus on the imagery around the central opposition of the speaker and Brother Lawrence. This includes work such as Miriam K. Starkman's article 'The Manichee in the Cloister', Scott Gwara and John Nelson's 'Botanical Taxonomy and Buggery in Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'', as well as pieces focusing on the binary structure of the poem, such as David Sonstroem's ideas on animal and vegetable motifs.

The work most relevant to my study is largely that which explores the meaning of the final stanza, in which the speaker is interrupted in his plotting and becomes acutely aware of his surroundings. Of particular interest is the small body of work investigating to whom or what the speaker refers in the line 'blasted lay that rose acacia' (69). I shall examine the various interpretations of this line and their implications for the dramatic status of the piece in due course.

While the poem contains a number of features associated with Browning's dramatic monologues the fact that it lacks an auditor, a feature often seen as central to the genre, makes it a particularly interesting piece for an exploration of the devices employed by Browning to create the sense that we are witnessing the 'original occasion' (Sessions 509). Direct address to an 'other' often seems to work as a primary indicator of the dramatic quality of such texts. The absence of an auditor therefore demands somewhat more innovative means of revealing the poem's dramatic status. In this piece a great deal of that work is done by the title. The word 'soliloquy' obviously creates associations with stage drama and sets up certain expectations regarding the nature of the utterance, such as the idea that the speaker will be alone and will reveal private thoughts and emotions. The title seems to function on a pragmatic level as a permanent reminder to the reader that the speaker's spatio-temporal coordinates remain stable throughout his utterance. In a stage soliloquy the actor's physical presence on stage would serve to do this. Here the title, in making that connection with stage drama, leads us to interpret the speaker's utterance as anchored to one location and unfolding in real-time, rather than belonging to the spatio-temporally boundless realm we may expect to encounter in some poetry. The title also works to locate the piece in a precise spatial setting; 'cloister' in this context presumably refers specifically to the covered walkway running along an inner wall of a medieval monastery, enclosing a quadrangle garden, but also works to evoke the wider setting of the monastery. Although no auditor, there is a specific addressee, Brother Lawrence, who is present and whose actions are visible to the speaker throughout the period of utterance, but who is presumably located just out of earshot. The poem is structured as a typical Browningsque monologue; Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet in their note on the poem highlight this familiar structure in observing that 'the speaker moves from the present view of Brother Lawrence with his flowers to a past view of him at mealtime, to the sensual world outside the monastery, back to mealtime, to schemes for damning the good brother, and finally to an impotent and innocuous ejaculation' (88). Such a summary reveals Browning's characteristic 'framing' in the present, although it doesn't capture the frequent returns to the speaker's present situation which help to maintain the dramatic set-up.

The physicality evoked in the growl which opens the poem reinforces the idea, set up in the title, that the piece is uttered aloud by the speaker, rather than forming part of an internal monologue. The immediacy of the speaker's situation is then swiftly set up in an explicit encoding of the spatial relationship between speaker and addressee:

Gr-r-r-there go, my heart's abhorrence!  
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!  
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5  
 Oh, that rose has prior claims--  
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?  
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

The opening, seemingly imperative, phrase 'there go', presents the addressee in the act of moving away from, or moving about at some distance from, the speaker, who constitutes the 'origo' or deictic centre of the utterance. Although some ambiguity surrounds the exact nature of the addressee's movement in relation to the spatial coordinates of the speaker, by the second line we are to understand that Brother Lawrence is situated in the garden implicit in the poem's title, with the speaker observing him and soliloquising from the cloister. Yet this reference to physical activity within the spatio-temporal environment of the speaker, initiated in that opening phrase, only seems to fulfil its dramatic potential at line five, when we realise that the speaker continues to observe Brother Lawrence in the act of gardening as his utterance unfolds.

In his article 'Deixis and the poetic persona' Green notes that there are many discourses in which we 'lack clear referents for indexical meanings' and observes that within literary discourses 'lyric poetry seems the genre least likely to assist us' (124). In dramatic monologue, however, I would suggest that we can often ascribe more tangible referents to the symbolic meanings of deictic terms, and that a number of these referents are more likely to be stable, and to be reinforced as the text proceeds. In 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' the fact that the speaker's place of utterance is so immediately and specifically established helps us orient him in relation to the various parts of the garden. Deictic elements such as the opening phrase 'there go' and the use of the distal demonstrative 'that' in 'that rose has prior claims'(6), in referring to literal objects within the coding time and place of the speaker reinforce his spatial position on the sidelines. The dramatic set up of the utterance initiated by the phrase 'there go' also has significant impact on the deictic intensity of subsequent lines; most immediately, lines five and six, which, as I have noted, are therefore understood as commenting upon actions performed by Brother Lawrence as observed by the speaker during, or contiguous with, the moment of utterance, rather than as more general statements.

In his discussion of deixis and use, Green observes that there is no necessary link between tense and time. The present tense for example may be used generically to describe a general state of affairs or deictically to encode specific temporal relations with respect to the encoder (122-123). Further to this it seems then that present tense utterances may differ in deictic intensity. The activities listed by the speaker in the first stanza, such as the watering of flowers, the examination of a myrtle bush, the filling of a vase, are all highly deictic, encoding spatio-temporal relations with respect to the speaker. In other words it seems to make most sense to read lines such as ‘What? your myrtle bush wants trimming / Oh that rose has prior claims/Needs its leaden vase filled brimming’(5-7) as a kind of live-action commentary delivered from the seclusion of the cloister. Such lines might therefore be said to constitute what Samuel Curry terms ‘platform action’. This sense that the speaker witnesses Brother Lawrence’s activity as it unfolds is also aided by the grammar and punctuation of these lines. The sense of surprise (albeit a sarcastic feigning of surprise) conveyed by the interrogative mood of lines five and seven, and the exclamatory impact of the word ‘Oh’ in line six, work to heighten the immediacy of the activities described and stress the spontaneity of the speaker’s reaction. This is a technique which reappears in stanza six with the line ‘Oh, those Melons?’ (41), where its return is used to help signal an abrupt shift of attention back to the activity taking place in the immediate environment of the speaker.

In his deictic category of ‘time and place’ Green introduces the concept of ‘coding time’ and ‘content time’, with coding time being ‘the time at which the utterance is transmitted’ and content time being ‘the time (or times) to which the utterance refers’ (126-127). He observes that many lyric poems dramatise coding and content time as synchronous. I want to consider this idea in relation to the transition from the first stanza into the narrative back-story of the second and third stanzas:

## II

At the meal we sit together:	
<i>Salve tibi!</i> I must hear	10
Wise talk of the kind of weather,	
Sort of season, time of year:	
<i>Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely</i>	
<i>Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:</i>	
<i>What’s the Latin name for ‘parsley’?</i>	15
What’s the Greek name for Swine’s Snout?	

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,  
 Laid with care on our own shelf!  
 With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,  
 And a goblet for ourself, 20  
 Rinsed like something sacrificial  
 Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps —  
 Marked with L. for our initial!  
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

If this were lyric poetry it would perhaps at this point remain unclear whether or not we had leapt forward in time to a specific mealtime at which the two monks 'sit together'. This is partly because, if written in the lyric style, although *dramatized* as synchronous, the whole piece would be implicitly understood as having a 'coding time' distinct from all the action of the poem; that is, we would understand all the events described by the poetic persona as having already happened, and could perhaps expect to move forward in a fairly linear fashion through a re-telling of them (or at least move freely about within them without regard to the steady progression of 'real time') with the historical present being used as a device to enliven the narrative. We would understand the speaker not as situated in the garden of the initial stanza but as 'coding' from some unspecified time and location, which may or may not be explicitly referred to within the poem itself. In the typical Browningsque dramatic monologue however, with its foregrounding of a fully realised and spatio-temporally naturalistic coding time, such scene-shifting is not possible. Here the shift into the simple present tense signals the beginning of the back-story, in which we remain immersed right through to the penultimate line of stanza three. Thus the whole of stanza two and all but the last line of stanza three constitute a sarcastic and animated re-living of a *typical* meal in the monastery. The simple present tense here is used to convey the habitual nature of the scene; they *always* sit together, Brother Lawrence *always* goes through the same fury-inducing ritual regarding his plate and cup etc. The speaker's spatio-temporal coordinates, however, are still those of observing Brother Lawrence from the cloister, as is made clear by the abrupt return to 'the present' with the gleeful reporting of the activity before him with the line 'He-he! There his lily snaps!' (24) in the final line of stanza three.

After the initial commencement of the first section of the back-story, we get what appear to be snippets of conversation, presumably examples of the 'wise talk' the speaker must endure at mealtimes. Italics are used to indicate that the speaker is

quoting, or at least adopting Brother Lawrence's voice in a parody of him. The final line of stanza two, the echoing of the question 'What's the Latin name for parsley?'(15) with the retort 'What's the Greek name for swine snout?'(16), is interesting in its spatio-temporal ambiguity. Does the retort belong firmly within the back-story, as an immediate, presumably internal, response to the dinner conversation, or does it emanate from the coding time and place of the poem (i.e. the cloister) and function as a spontaneous outburst of renewed rage? If read as the latter, it may be seen as a rather subtle manifestation of a pattern employed in proceeding stanzas, (most obviously in stanza three) in which the focus shifts back to coding time and place for the final line. Perhaps more importantly, such ambiguity can be said to demonstrate an advantage of this type of dramatic form; as the piece is not written for literal performance both interpretations remain available and equally viable.

These regular shifts of focus back to coding time and place, varying in intensity, work to emphasise the fact that in a physical sense the speaker's deictic centre of utterance remains in the cloister on the edge of the garden. However, the various snatches of back-story, through their lively and dramatised re-telling, also create quite an impact imaginatively, and perhaps function similarly to the historical present of lyric poetry. Green sees an identifiable feature of lyric poetry as being the way in which an 'experiencing mode and observing mode are expressed simultaneously' (125). This could be applied to many of Browning's characters who, taking on a role akin to that of the lyric poet, tend to submerge themselves in animated and creative re-livings of their back-stories. Browning sometimes uses the back-stories of his speakers as a springboard into the more 'unbounded' universe of the lyric. The difference is that such episodes are framed within a highly dramatically realised and dramatically pertinent 'present', rather than in the spatio-temporal limbo characteristic of much lyric poetry. To put it another way, the Browningsque dramatic monologue is multi-layered; from the realm of the narrative back-story we can always go 'up a level' to a clearly defined fictional world inhabited by the speaker.

In dramatic monologue the sometimes complex relationship between the speaker's mental and physical spatio-temporal coordinates is highlighted by some readers and critics' confusion over setting and point of view. Early critics of Browning's work are not the only ones to have had difficulty with the dramatic set-up of his poetry. For example, Randa Abou-Bakr in his 2001 article 'Robert Browning's "Dramatic Lyrics": Contribution to a Genre' argues that the inclusion of other voices in 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' such as 'what seem to be parts of the conversation

Brother Laurence is having with his friends at dinner' weakens the poem's affinity to dramatic monologue (124). Unless he is referring to the necessarily static nature of the back-story in general, it is unclear why the speaker's mocking recollection of the conversation of Brother Lawrence should affect either the dramatic or monologic status of the piece. Abou-Bakr's alternative theory regarding lines 13 – 15, that they constitute the *internal* monologues of Brother Lawrence's dinner guests (124), is even more surprising, and seems to suggest that he interprets the second and third stanzas as a shift forward in the coding time and place of the piece, and the voices (external or internal) as belonging to the other monks at dinner. In such interpretations the behaviour of deixis seems to be viewed through the prism of lyric poetry. In addition to this, Abou-Bakr argues that 'the utterances of the speaker of "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" do not stem from an intensive dramatic situation' (123). This leads him to conclude that 'the speaker in the poem could be anybody, or indeed anything in that setting: a fellow priest, a dog, or simply part of the props of the scene' (124). Again he seems to have missed the dramatic cues of the poem, such as the 'coding time' activity of Brother Lawrence. His comment regarding the indistinct view-point of the poem is rather bewildering given the very definite and sustained character of the speaker. Such confusion can perhaps be avoided if the reader approaches the Browningsque dramatic monologue as he would a piece of drama. Such an approach provides a pleasingly straight-forward and intuitive way into this mode of poetry. We must understand that we overhear the musings or rhetoric of a specific speaker in a very definite real-world setting, in which time and place function naturalistically, regardless of the speaker's mental acrobatics. In this respect the representation of thought in dramatic monologue can also be seen as similar to the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique more often associated with certain types of novel. In addition to such novelistic representation of thought, Loucks and Stauffer in their introduction to 'The Ring and the Book' (1869) note Browning's deft fusion of devices from both the novel and the drama to create vivid portrayals of scenes with gesture and dialogue, instead of mere talk about events (315).

Another novelistic quality, which again distances the dramatic monologue from lyric poetry, is the importance of character. The notion of character seems to play a central role in the disambiguation of deixis in the genre. In this poem we have to understand the speaker's tone and idiom in order to fully ascribe indexical meaning to the variety of pronouns used, and to successfully ascribe referents. The first person plural 'we', initially used in stanza two in a straight-forward sense (to refer to the

speaker, Brother Lawrence and possibly the other monks), is differently employed throughout stanza three; referring *only* to Brother Lawrence, and helping to create the mocking and sarcastic tone which gives the poem so much of its vitality. In stanza four the speaker has mentally ‘stepped back’ from the scene before him and now refers to the Brother Lawrence of the back-story, distinguishing him from the Brother Lawrence of coding time and place by referring to him in the third person:

#### IV

<i>Saint</i> , forsooth! While brown Dolores Squats outside the Convent bank With Sanchicha, telling stories, Steeping tresses in the tank, Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs, — Can't I see his dead eye glow, Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's? (That is, if he'd let it show!)	25     30
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This change in pronoun also works to reflect the conversational or impromptu quality of the dramatic monologue. Like many of Browning's speakers the monk seems to be full to bursting with several ideas to express at once and in this case much of the humour of the piece arises from the incongruities brought about by his state of extreme and childish agitation. The speaker's psychological position varies moment by moment and so his use of pronominal labelling reflects his unstable perspective. It tracks his emotions and adds to the overall effect of a speaker immersed in the flow of 'real time'. From a dramatic or novelistic point of view this technique also helps establish character, as giving the speaker a distinctive speech pattern with particular verbal ticks and linguistic habits works to reveal aspects of his psyche in a more visceral manner than through the lexical content of his speech.

Stanza four sees the continuation of the back-story, in which another previous occasion is recalled when Brother Lawrence, and presumably the speaker, have observed women on the convent bank. This works in the same way as the recalling of the meal in that it is a reminiscence of an incident, or conflation of typical incidents, from the past, with the moment of telling remaining in the cloister. The (again novelistic) manner in which named characters (Dolores and Sanchicha) are dropped into the piece without introduction or explanation is characteristic of the genre and suited to a piece in which we 'overhear' a temporal fragment brimming with evidence of a contiguous past and future.

The back-story of mealtimes is then taken up again for stanza five, with the first half of stanza six drawing together observations from the speaker's present situation with past and future mealtimes:

V

When he finishes refection,  
Knife and fork he never lays  
Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35  
As I do, in Jesu's praise.  
I the Trinity illustrate,  
Drinking watered orange-pulp —  
In three sips the Arian frustrate  
While he drains his at one gulp. 40

VI

Oh, those melons? If he's able  
We're to have a feast! so nice!  
One goes to the Abbot's table,  
All of us each get a slice.  
How go on your flowers? None double? 45  
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?  
Strange! And I, too, at such trouble,  
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

Stanza six shifts the action back to the coding time and place with the distal demonstrative of the phrase 'Oh, those melons?' (41) seeming to refer to specific melons within the view of the speaker (perhaps Brother Lawrence has just begun tending to them) and prompting the speaker's shift of attention back to the scene unfolding before him. Again, in a lyric reading of the poem the focus would perhaps remain in the dining hall and the melons could be interpreted as objects observed within that scene. Instead, the speaker uses an object located in the material world from which his utterance emanates as a means to create an imagined future scenario. The spiteful, seemingly direct, address to Brother Lawrence which makes up the second half of this stanza (45-48) must be understood in this context as an imaginary, fantasised conversation with Brother Lawrence, while simultaneously serving as a running commentary on the action the speaker observes in the garden, as Brother Lawrence perhaps moves on to examining the disappointing state of his flowers.

The final three stanzas are largely composed of the speaker's mental plotting. He fantasises three distinct possible future scenarios, each of which contains an ingenious method of ensuring the damnation of Brother Lawrence:

## VII

There's a great text in Galatians,  
Once you trip on it, entails 50  
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,  
One sure, if another fails.  
If I trip him just a-dying,  
Sure of heaven as sure can be,  
Spin him round and send him flying 55  
Off to hell, a Manichee?

## VIII

Or, my scrofulous French novel,  
On grey paper with blunt type!  
Simply glance at it, you grovel  
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60  
If I double down its pages  
At the woeful sixteenth print,  
When he gathers his greengages,  
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

## IX

Or, there's Satan! — one might venture 65  
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
Such a flaw in the indenture  
As he'd miss, till, past retrieve,  
Blasted lay that rose-acacia  
We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine . . .* 70  
'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratia*  
*Ave, Virgo!* Gr-r-r — you swine!

The shift into imagined future scenarios in these stanzas is marked by a shift in the use of second person pronoun. The 'you' in 'if you trip on it' (50), rather than an address to Brother Lawrence, now becomes a universal or hypothetical 'you', similar to the 'one' employed in the final stanza in which the speaker considers his diabolical plans. This final stanza sees Browning's characteristic 'framing' device; the shifting of focus back to coding time and place for the end of the piece. Both the speaker's psychological manoeuvres and the spatio-temporal activity within his environment in this final stanza have been much debated. A large part of the discussion centres around the indexical meaning of 'that rose acacia' (69). Numerous critics have found it difficult to accept

that the aim of the speaker's hypothetical pact with the devil could really involve nothing more ambitious than killing Brother Lawrence's favourite shrub, concluding that the rose-acacia must stand for something greater, such as the damnation of Brother Lawrence's soul. Lucy Fryxell and Virginia Adair have both separately argued that the rose-acacia is not a literal flower at all but a sarcastic reference to Brother Lawrence himself. Adair concludes that the pronominal reference in the phrase 'we're so proud of' (70) therefore refers to the communal 'we' of the monastery (24). Roger L. Slakey offers an appealing interpretation of stanza nine with regard to the nature of deictic reference in dramatic monologue, seeing the stanza as portraying a 'dramatic shuffling in which the speaker [...] slides from one frame of reference to another' (42). In stanzas seven and eight the 'text in Galatians' and 'scrofulous French novel' are, according to Slakey, two means by which to assure Brother Lawrence's damnation. In stanza nine, Slakey suggests, the speaker intends a third means (a bargain with Satan) but fails to complete it due to an interruption from coding place at the end of line 68: 'at this moment Brother Lawrence tends the rose-acacia, and the speaker watching him loses track of his thought and curses the bush' (42). The identification of dramatic activity unfolding within the speaker's environment frequently helps make sense of Browning's dramatic monologues and often tends to be overlooked in the interpretation of them. However, while I agree that the speaker may be distracted from what Slakey calls the 'general condition' back to his immediate situation by the 'platform action' of Brother Lawrence at various points throughout the piece, I find Slakey's identification of a precise moment at which the speaker transfers the force of the hypothetical curse from Brother Lawrence himself to his prize shrub somewhat tenuous. Indeed Slakey seems to have been compelled to come up with such a specific dramatic interpretation in reaction to previous critics' suggestions that to damn only the flower would seem an absurdly anticlimactic ending (Adair 24). Yet given the extremely petty nature of the speaker, I would suggest the trivial aim of his elaborate pact is in fact quite fitting.

A less convoluted interpretation which does not seem to have been offered is the idea that the blasting of the rose-acacia serves as *an example* of the kind of evil the acquisition of satanic powers would allow the speaker to inflict on Brother Lawrence; one which I would suggest is at the forefront of the speaker's mind as he watches Brother Lawrence in the act of gardening. I see no reason why the stanza cannot be taken at face value, at least on a dramatic level, with the rose-acacia referring to a literal flower. Browning presumably had additional symbolic meanings in mind, but these are not the concern of the speaker.

I therefore see Browning's customary shift back to the speaker's coding time and place at the end of a dramatic monologue as beginning rather subtly with the distal demonstrative of 'that rose-acacia', which I read as referring to a specific rose in front of the speaker, probably the rose referred to as having 'prior claims' in the first stanza. Looking back to earlier references in the text also leads me to interpret the pronominal reference of the subsequent phrase 'we're so proud of' as a return to the bitterly sarcastic usage (referring only to Brother Lawrence) which dominates stanza three, rather than as 'we' the inhabitants of the monastery.

Further debate has surrounded the utterance '*Hy, Zy, Hine*' (70) and whether it should be interpreted as the speaker's imitation of the Vesper bells or the beginning of some sort of incantation relating to his pact with the devil. Regarding the temporal logistics of the piece the former interpretation is unsatisfactory. The speaker presumably breaks off and hushes himself ('St-'), exclaiming 'there's Vespers!' at the moment the bells start to ring. It would therefore make little sense for him to vocally imitate the ringing of the bells immediately prior to this. In addition to this, the exclamation 'There's Vespers' reinforces the dramatic status of the piece by indicating physical activity within the coding time and place of the speaker, customary to the genre, and could be seen as constituting unwritten 'sound effects'. If written as a stage drama there would most likely be a stage direction indicating the ringing of the vesper bells, which would make most sense if placed after line 70.

Regarding the second and more widely accepted interpretation of the phrase '*Hy, Zy, Hine*' (that of the incantation), it is worth considering the performative nature of the utterance. In the light of numerous articles on the possible sources for and incantatory nature of the phrase, James Anderson has offered a rather radical and appealingly dramatic reading of the final stanza. Anderson believes that the opening words of the last stanza ('Or, there's Satan!') contain a double reference, with 'there' functioning 'on one hand as expletive subject posing Satan as an idea, on the other hand as an adverb acknowledging the Devil's sudden presence in the garden' (322). The latter reading he likens to the dramatic use of the adverbial 'there' which points to Brother Lawrence in the first line of the poem. In understanding Satan as apparition rather than mere hypothesis, Anderson introduces a startling new element in terms of platform action. In such a reading the words 'there's' (65) and 'him' (66) acquire concrete referents within the speaker's coding environment. Even if we don't go along with such a startlingly dramatic interpretation, it is interesting to note that, due to the fully dramatically realised coding environment, such a reading is at least possible. This sort of

interpretation would seem far less workable in a piece of lyric poetry. Anderson goes on to suggest that the words '*Hy, Zy, Hine*', like the other italicised phrases in the piece, are not fully ascribable to the speaker, and that in this instance they are 'best read in literal Miltonic terms as a truly satanic utterance, the intrusion of the Devil's alien voice' (322), which having found entrance into the soliloquist is almost immediately 'driven off, as demons are in folk-belief, by the sound of the vespers bells' (324). Such a reading certainly highlights the genre's potential for dramatic action within the coding time and place of the speaker. Anderson's acknowledgement of the 'double reference' of the line also draws attention to the dramatic monologue's advantage over stage drama in 'having it both ways', in not having to select and fix on one meaning. Here no stage directions are required to clarify the matter and no director or actor is forced to make interpretive decisions.

Yet, even a less radical reading of this stanza reveals something of the poem's dramatic status. While taking into account the tentative and hypothetical nature of the diabolical pact, the speaker may be seen as so vividly involved in his daydream that he begins to vocalise an incantation, thus seeming to mentally inhabit a fantasised future scenario. Such deictic projection invites comparison between the speaker's hypothetical future and his present situation, as well as inviting comparison with the other italicised, performative utterance '*Plena Gratia / Ave, Virgo!*' (71 -72) with which it is juxtaposed. Without fixing on one particular dramatic interpretation, both phrases can be said to work to emphasise the dynamic nature of the poetic context; a fictional world in which speech-acts such as prayers and incantations may be performed, as well as more physical activities undertaken, such as gardening, bell ringing and demonic possession.

Through the above discussion I hope to have demonstrated that a satisfactory understanding of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' relies heavily on the reader decoding its use of space and time. We must correctly interpret the speaker's spatial coordinates as being stable (i.e. in the cloister throughout) and as temporally only moving forward in a naturalistic manner. We are presented with a continuous moment of musing, what Loy D. Martin calls an 'unbroken time-stream' (66), with all other times and locations within the poem being manifestations of memory or fantasy. Such emphasis on and high-stakes surrounding the activity of coding time and place is something not often found in the lyric mode.

## 2. A Grammarian's Funeral

In his 1963 essay Richard D. Altick introduces the idea that 'A Grammarian's Funeral' may not be what up until then it had 'virtually always been said to be', that is 'a paean of praise for the dead gerund-grinder' (449). Altick suggests that the poem might be better read as a mock encomium in the style of Erasmus' 'Praise of Folly'. Yet a number of subsequent critics have felt that, here too, such a straightforward reading does not get at the complex nature of Browning's characteristic irony. In response to Altick, Martin J. Svaglic argues for a more sympathetic interpretation of both the grammarian and his students, believing it doubtful that Browning would allow such an 'unsympathetic or at least half mocked-at chorus' to express itself in lines so exalted and climactic as those which close the poem and appealing to biographical information about Browning's own extensive knowledge of the intricacies of Greek grammar to argue that he meant the grammarian's seeming pedantry to be viewed with at least a measure of respect (102-103). Robert L. Kelly, criticising attempts to interpret the poem in the light of Browning's personal philosophy, calls for a closer examination of the textual evidence, and in particular for attention to the distinctive verse form. He points out that we must understand that the poem is a dramatic monologue, not an encomium, although he agrees it 'contains one' (105). Kelly believes the primary focus of interest should therefore be on the students who utter the poem, and that it is they, rather than the grammarian, who are the target of Browning's satire. More recently, and with a similar emphasis on the students, Arnd Bohm has explored the character of the speaker(s). He considers the idea of a 'main narrator' and the movement away from the disclosure of personal emotions created through the assumption of a voice speaking in the first-person plural (173). Bohm is one of the few critics to examine issues around the plurality of the voices which utter the poem, something which I will look into further as I consider the dramatic context of the piece. The poem provides ample opportunity to consider various aspects of deixis in relation to the dramatic monologue and is particularly interesting for being a piece in which the spatial coordinates of the speaker change as the poem progresses. The journey within the poem, however, is usually read as highly allegorical and the 'chorus' of voices which utter it as adding to the stylised nature of the piece. I will argue however that alongside an allegorical reading runs a more naturalistically dramatic one, which becomes particularly apparent when we consider the wider context of the poem and which can be illuminated through deictic analysis. In relation to this, and for the sake of clarity in the initial stages of my

discussion, it should be noted here that I am reading the poem as spoken by *one* of the students within the funeral procession, with the other members of the procession comprising the primary auditors.

The poem is prefaced with the phrase ‘Shortly after the revival of learning in Europe’, which locates it rather vaguely in both time and space. This sense of indefiniteness is compounded by the indefinite article of the title, which seems to emphasise the obscurity of the grammarian and his laboriously acquired knowledge. As the title and subtitle are the only pieces of text in which the reader receives information from anything like a direct authorial voice, they are of particular interest. Martin J. Svaglic sees the temporal aspect of the poem’s subtitle (in particular the word ‘shortly’) as evidence of Browning’s sincerity regarding the achievements of the grammarian, arguing that ‘the real abuses of a movement come after a time rather than in its pioneer stages’ and so finds it ‘hard to think of Browning satirising the revival of learning in its beginnings’ (100). I regard it more as a way of signalling the dramatic nature of the ensuing text; similar to the description of setting at the beginning of a scene in a play, with the vagueness here also working to set up an ironic distancing of poet and speaker, rather than a tacit endorsement of the speaker’s attitudes.

Titles and beginnings are of particular importance in poetry as there is usually no previous discourse to which we can refer for meaning. Here, as is typical of Browning, we are thrown straight into a world in which action is already unfolding, with the inchoative ‘Let us begin and carry up this corpse’ (1). On first appearances this line seems too much of a ‘beginning’ to be typical of Browning, whose monologues usually present a ‘poetic beginning which is not an experiential beginning’ (Martin 68). But as Loy D. Martin points out in his brief discussion of the poem ‘its beginning is in fact a continuation, and we know this because the object of the verb “carry” is “this corpse”. Although the act of carrying is only about to commence, a situation pre-dates it in which a corpse – *some corpse* – exists’ (68). Martin goes on to highlight the deictic function of this opening line, which works to give a ‘spatial dimension to a “world” which is experientially prior to the utterance and continuous with it temporally’, stating that the effect is fundamentally different to a hypothetical poem which begins ‘Let us begin and offer up a prayer’ (69). While Martin means to highlight the way in which Browning’s monologues begin *in medias res*, his example also serves to illustrate that such pieces create a sealed fictional world in which the reader is clearly distinct from the auditor. The reader could in theory be invited by the speaker of a poem to offer up a prayer (as this would not require the sharing of a spatio-temporal environment) but it



of the speaker which appears to enable our interpretation of the poetic text as unfolding drama.

The next section of the poem is packed with more of the same and similar techniques:

That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,  
Rarer, intenser, 10  
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,  
Chafes in the censer.  
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;  
Seek we sepulture  
On a tall mountain, citted to the top,  
Crowded with culture!  
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;  
Clouds overcome it;  
No! Yonder sparkle is the citadel's  
Circling its summit. 20  
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:  
Wait ye the warning?  
Our low life was the level's and the night's;  
He's for the morning.  
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,  
'Ware the beholders!  
This is our master, famous calm and dead,  
Borne on our shoulders.  
Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,  
Safe from the weather! 30  
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,  
Singing together,

The first four words of this section are of central importance in establishing the intensity of deictic activity at work here and illustrative of a feature which I believe is a defining element of the genre, that is the use of a certain type of exophoric reference; reference to the non-linguistic or extra-linguistic world shared by speaker and auditor, accompanied by a physical 'pointing out'. In the phrase 'That's the appropriate country' (9) a reference is made to a pre-existing object in the material world of the speaker (a mountain or range of mountains). However, due to the distal spatial location of the speaker to the mountain at the moment of utterance the reference makes most sense when read as accompanied by some sort of physical gesture. On the face of it this does not seem a device unique to dramatic monologue and it is certainly true that certain types of lyric poetry make extensive use of reference to the immediate context of utterance, to the physical landscape of 'coding place'. I would suggest however that when they do, it is usually in a way less integral to the disambiguation of the text. In

the above passage we see that extra-linguistic activity is very much embedded into the fabric of the poem.

The above example is typical of reference made to the non-linguistic world abundant in Browning's poetry, and similar to the famous opening of the poem 'My Last Duchess': 'That's my last duchess, painted on the wall'. In 'My Last Duchess', however, the qualifying prepositional phrase 'painted on the wall' weakens, or indeed eliminates, the demand for the reader to imagine a physical gesture in order to make sense of the text. Yet Browning frequently makes more startlingly definite use of this kind of exophoric reference. For instance in 'Mr Sludge the 'Medium' the speaker coughs and splutters as he is physically choked by an angry auditor. Although more low-key, my example from 'A Grammarian's Funeral' presents a situation which similarly demands some kind of non-verbal communication be read into the poem in order to fully realise the meaning of the utterance. It is worth stressing that subsequent examples of exophoric reference in the poem such as the line 'Thither our path lies' (21), although reinforcing the presence of the physical setting and precise spatial coordinates of the speaker, essentially serve as anaphora, rather than providing a further example of definite non-verbal activity. The fundamental difference is that the speaker has by this juncture indicated the destination of the procession (the appropriate country) as being the tallest peak of the mountains before them and so 'thither', at least in part, refers back to this.

Further evidence of action unfolding within the present of the poem is revealed through the line 'This is our master, famous, calm and dead / Borne on our shoulders' (27-28). This line foregrounds the physicality of the coding space and indicates that definite movement has taken place since the beginning of the poem, in which the students were instructed to 'begin' and had presumably not yet lifted the corpse, or at least not yet begun to bear it forth. This progression is reinforced in the next few lines in which the speaker reveals that the students are now in the process of 'convoying' the body. The grammarian's body continues to be referred to by the proximal demonstrative 'this' as they move through the landscape, as its position in relation to the procession remains stable; borne on their shoulders. However, the speaker's use of the first-person plural pronouns 'our' and 'we' is interesting. As well as helping to set the proclamatory tone of the eulogy, it perhaps functions as a device for the portrayal of the speaker's character. Through the first-person plural the speaker orients himself deictically as one of the bearers of the coffin, although he is most likely not one of the people doing the actual carrying. His position as 'director' rather than pole-bearer is reinforced as the

poem proceeds: 'Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head / 'Ware the beholders' (25-26). Not only do these commands serve as 'stage directions', providing a vivid image of the unfolding action for the reader, they also draw our attention to the auditors to which they are addressed, as well as to the possibility of additional text-world auditors who constitute an audience for the procession. After urging his fellow students to adopt an appropriately dignified bearing for such an audience, the speaker begins the first instalment of his rather idiosyncratic account of the grammarian's life. Because he is speaking on behalf of all the scholars of the procession, his distinctive narrative style works to call into question whether or not his perspective is wholly representative of the group. His fellow scholars are in no position to object to the particulars of the narrative, given the formality and gravity of the occasion. Thus Browning succeeds in creating a plausible situation in which silent and captive auditors must, for the most part, endure the speaker's rhetorical performance.

The final line of this passage ('singing together') is usually read as referring to the utterance itself, and seen as evidence of a plurality of voices and their mode of expression (song). At this point it is therefore necessary to address the fact that my reading of the poem so far has depended on an interpretation of the text as comprised of the utterance of a single speaker. As I have noted, most critics interpret the poem as spoken or 'sung' by more than one voice. Geoff Hall for example in his recent article 'A Grammarian's Funeral: On Browning, Post-Structuralism and the State of Stylistics', echoes the position taken by Richard Altick in reading the entire poem as delivered by a student chorus, or 'scholar choir' (39). Martin Svaglic, Robert Kelly and A. D. Nuttall also all refer to the voice in the plural. Arnd Bohm, however, in his article 'Increasing Suspicion about Browning's Grammarian' seems to view the speaker as a single voice speaking largely on behalf of the other students. Although never explicit on the matter, he mentions a 'main narrator' and at one point refers to 'the speaker and the other members of the funeral procession' (174). Even though Bohm does not go into detail regarding the choral or solo nature of the utterance, his reading departs from the standard view that the piece is uttered by a 'chorus'. It is unclear however whether Bohm sees this single voice as uttering the poem alone or joining and departing from the students' sung encomium.

I find both the idea of the poem as spoken by one collective choral voice and the idea of a main narrator who speaks certain portions of the text solo to be equally problematic. Regarding the former, it is interesting to note that previous critics, while allowing the plurality of the voice of the 'scholar-choir', have found difficulty in

accepting the whole piece as 'choral'. Robert Kelly finds it necessary to distinguish various modes of utterance, seeing only the middle portion as made up of the 'sung encomium', and even this as interspersed with 'a narrative of the dead man's life' (2). A. D. Nuttall also seems to find it hard to accept the idea of the whole text as 'chorus', noting that the tone is not continuously sustained and the 'sing-along' mode only re-asserted at intervals (87). Arnd Bohm also addresses this inconsistency of tone and sees the full emotions of the voice as being 'occluded by the assumption of a voice speaking in the first-person plural' (173). These problems seem to arise as a result of trying to square the nature of the eulogising chorus with the individuality exhibited by the speaker. I would suggest that the unsustainability of the choral voice is connected with the degree of naturalism in the text; that is, with the somewhat idiosyncratic speech pattern, tone and register of the speaker, as well as the seemingly extemporaneous manner in which he provides details relating to the processions' movement through the landscape of coding time and space. It is these features (as well as the wider context of the piece, i.e. that of its being a poem by Browning) which subtly interfere with a wholly allegorical reading of the poem, a reading in which the 'chorus' is more that of a homogeneous and highly stylised Greek chorus. The speaker's character is manifest in the elaborate and digressive detail of his narrative of the grammarian's life, the unwieldiness of which is noted by Bohm in his observation that the speaker 'lacks the skill to produce anything like a well-crafted eulogy' (172). It is also embedded in the very form of the poem with its strikingly unusual, intrinsically deflating, metre and sometimes comical multisyllabic rhymes, such as fabric/dab brick (70-72) and loosened/dew send (142-144). So although rich in allegorical meaning, Browning's presentation of an individualised speaker works to simultaneously provide us with a somewhat more personal journey through a literal landscape. In addition to this, I would suggest that a great part of the effect of the poem is achieved, in typical Browning fashion, through the irony, humour and interest created by the presentation of a specific character. As usual this is two-fold; we learn about the character of the grammarian (as presented by the speaker) while simultaneously taking in the character of the speaker. Robert Kelly sees the emotional range of the speakers as inhibited by the plurality of the voice. I believe that reading the voice as 'choral' has yet greater implications regarding emotion and character: it essentially removes the primary auditors (the other students of the procession) and thus diminishes the dramatic impact and potential for dramatic irony.

With regard to the idea of a main narrator whose voice joins and departs from the chorus, problems seem to lie in the graphology of the piece. Elsewhere in his poetry Browning was happy to adopt a script-like format to indicate individual speakers. Pieces such as 'The Heretic's Tragedy' (1855) contain specific passages spoken by a 'chorus', while 'In a Gondola' (1842) uses italicised directions such as 'he speaks', 'she speaks', 'he sings' to identify not only the speaker but the mode of utterance. In 'A Grammarian's Funeral' nothing of this sort is indicated. Neither do we find, in lieu of such script-like features, any sort of clear delineation regarding individual speakers, such as consistent use of parentheses to indicate directions or asides spoken by a solo voice or 'main narrator'. In addition to this, I find no evidence of shifts in either the physical or mental deictic centre or origo from which the utterance emanates; the speaker seems to remain at the head of the procession as they progress up the mountain, and his psychological view-point and narrative style seems consistent.

Given the problems with the above two interpretations, I would argue for a reading of the poem in which its dramatic nature is foregrounded. Rather than referring to the utterance itself, I believe the line 'singing together' is best read as referring to a separate activity within the coding time and place of the poem; that is, to a chorus uttered by other members of the funeral procession which is wholly distinct from, yet concurrent with, the utterance which makes up the poem, and the content of which we are not party to. The opening instruction to begin carrying up the corpse 'singing together' (2) as well as the later parenthetical command 'Hearten our chorus!' (76) seem to be the main reasons critics have interpreted the text *itself* as constituting that chorus. In relation to Green's deictic category of 'the text' the two commands are certainly interesting ways which 'orient the text to itself' (127). However, to make sufficient sense of the naturalistic aspects of the poem we must read these two lines as referring to, but not forming part of, the actual song or chorus itself. Browning establishes a tangible universe in which it is possible for action to take place as the text progresses and to which reference is frequently made. I think it therefore makes most sense to view the song of the 'scholar choir' as being referred to through exophoric reference. Just as we are to imagine the physical gesture to the mountain to make sense of the line 'that's the appropriate country', so we have to imagine the wholly extra-textual chorus to which the speaker refers.

The next section (33-132), comprising most of the poem, can be seen as a shift into the back-story:

He was a man born with thy face and throat,  
     Lyric Apollo!  
 Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note  
     Winter would follow?  
 Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!  
     Cramped and diminished,  
 Moaned he, 'New measures, other feet anon!  
     My dance is finished?' 40  
 No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,  
     Make for the city!)  
 He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride  
     Over men's pity;  
 Left play for work, and grappled with the world  
     Bent on escaping:  
 'What's in the scroll,' quoth he, 'thou keepest furled?  
     Show me their shaping  
 Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,  
     Give!'--So, he gowned him, 50  
 Straight got by heart that book to its last page:  
     Learned, we found him.  
 Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,  
     Accents uncertain:  
 'Time to taste life,' another would have said,  
     'Up with the curtain!'  
 This man said rather, 'Actual life comes next?  
     Patience a moment!....

As noted by Eckbert Faas, the transition to large sections of back-story is perhaps a strategic necessity in a genre that can't bear too much action (154). Working in a dramatic form which allows only one speaker and no stage directions, the writer of the Browningsque dramatic monologue has to continually devise ways of providing lexico-grammatical indicators of action. This is something which could become a laborious business for both writer and reader and so the back-story may be seen partly as a device for lessening this pressure. In 'A Grammarian's Funeral' the back-story begins thirty-three lines into the text with 'He was a man born with thy face and throat / Lyric Apollo!' and lasts for a hundred lines, ending sixteen lines from the end of the poem with 'Dead from the waist down' (132). It takes us in narrative terms from the youth of the grammarian to a point at which, so deeply immersed in his studies, he is essentially dead to the corporeal concerns of the material world. In this case, in a pragmatic sense, the back-story provides a chance for the speaker and his fellow students to complete their journey to the top of the mountain, in what could just about qualify, allowing some poetic licence, as 'real time'. With reference to Green's idea of coding and content time and place, the majority of content time can be seen as comprised of various pertinent temporal points in the grammarian's life, as perceived by

the speaker. The content place is made up of various non-specific locations. In contrast to the back-story of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister', which is heavy with what Alan Sinfield calls the 'apparatus of circumstantial detail' (25) (a specific dinner table, shelves, cups, plates and other props of the monastery), 'A Grammarian's Funeral' presents us with the grammarian in various hypothetical situations, conversations with hypothetical others and taking part in figurative activities such as stepping over men's pity to peer into furred scrolls. This stylised manner is maintained, albeit not quite so intensely, throughout most of the narrative episodes, such as the point at which the scholars first find the grammarian, the completion of his first stage of learning, further work and bad health, and the scholars' advice to the Grammarian to 'take a little rest' (89). These scenes, all relatively 'unlocated' spatially, contain a curious mixture of supposedly reported speech, indirect speech from the grammarian and dramatised rhetorical questions followed by paraphrased or imagined answers from the grammarian, as well the speaker's own comment. Thus snippets of conversations such as 'Wilt thou trust death or not?' He answered: / 'Yes! Hence with life's pale lure' (111-112) seem to constitute a kind of dramatising of the grammarian's philosophy, rather than being the manifestation of a specific memory. The awkwardness and inconsistency of such narrative episodes may be seen as working to illustrate the speaker's poor oratorical skills.

Within this hundred-line section which I have termed the back-story there are however four short interruptions; momentary shifts of focus back to coding time and place. The first of these is the parenthetical direction 'Keep the mountain-side, / Make for the city!' (41-42), which, coming at the beginning of the grammarian's path of learning, seems to symbolise his journey towards knowledge, from the low ground of the 'common crofts' (3) and 'unlettered plain' (13) towards the lofty, glittering peak 'crowded with culture' (16). The second interjection, again in parentheses, comes with the line 'Here's the town gate reached; there's the market place / Gaping before us' (74). This comes at a strategic point in the back-story; the procession reaches the town gates and is on the brink of the market place just as the grammarian of the back-story completes his first phase of learning. The three-dimensional nature of the landscape and the speaker's movement through it is once again reinforced by the proximal referring expression 'here', with the temporal dynamism emphasised not only through the progressive aspect of the verb 'gaping' but the signalling of the end of one activity through the past tense 'reached' and the implicit commencement of a the next phase of the journey. If the piece were written using the 'simulated spontaneity' of much lyric

poetry this line would perhaps be likely to lack such complex temporal relations and might read something like ‘We reach the town gate, the market-place gapes before us’.

The third of the four interjections is the direction ‘Hearten our chorus!’(76). This line provides further information about the environment of coding time and place; an environment filled with the sound of singing as well as the speaker’s eulogy. The final interruption is the line ‘Caution re-doubled! / Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!’(90-91). While again working on a symbolic level, I would suggest an equally important function of this line is similar to that of a stage direction, providing us once again with a vivid image of the speaker’s environment and the action taking place within it at that moment.

As I have mentioned, Richard Altick, in his essay “‘A Grammarian’s Funeral’: Browning’s Praise of Folly?’ puts forward the idea of the poem as a mock encomium in the tradition of Erasmus’s ‘The Praise of Folly’ (1511). Altick notes the allusion to Erasmus in the poem’s subtitle and views the character of the grammarian as a ‘woefully incomplete Erasmus, a man whose scholarship deteriorates into mere pedantry’ (457). Noting similarities such as the fact that ‘both are delivered on an academic occasion (of sorts)’ and that ‘Browning’s students, like Folly, may be presumed to be gowned’ (457), Altick goes on to quote passages from Erasmus’ text , to reveal strikingly similar sentiments to those expressed in Browning’s poem. He does not however compare the structure of the two pieces. Yet if we focus on how the ‘intrusions’ of coding time and place fit into the narrative back-story, I believe the idea of the poem structured as an encomium (albeit a mock-encomium) becomes clear. The piece, divided by these spatio-temporal markers, can be seen to consist of the traditional five sections associated with the genre of encomium as listed below:

1. Prologue: lines 1-32, with the activity of coding place foregrounded towards the end of the section (lines 23-32).
2. Birth and upbringing: a short passage (33-41), the end of which is marked with the parenthetical coding time instruction ‘Keep the mountain-side, / Make for the city!’ (41-42)
3. Acts of the subject’s life: lines 43–96. Reference to the treacherous nature of the literal path of coding place is made as this section draws to a close (90–91). This long section is also punctuated about half way through with the procession’s arrival at the town-gate, lines 73–74, and with this a reference to the students’ chorus at line 76.



Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:  
Hail to your purlieus,  
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,  
Swallows and curlews!  
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below  
Live, for they can, there:

This man decided not to Live but Know--  
Bury this man there? 140  
Here--here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,  
Lightnings are loosened,  
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,  
Peace let the dew send!  
Lofty designs must close in like effects:  
Loftily Iying,  
Leave him--still loftier than the world suspects,  
Living and dying.

At this point it is suddenly apparent that the heavily stressed 'there' of the beginning of the poem ('the appropriate country') has become 'here' ('the proper place'). This final view-point is again stressed through repetition; the first ten-line section containing five such uses of the word 'here' and two uses of 'there'. As the speaker is now in a different location to that in which he began (the place in which we last experienced any sustained utterance steeped in coding time and place) it is necessary to provide us once again with the 'apparatus of circumstantial detail' to help us get our bearings. As well as giving us the view downwards to the 'multitude below' (137), this scene-painting is achieved through the burst of apostrophe to the birds, to whom the procession is now physically closer to, and by a description of the atmospheric conditions (both meteorological and mental) of its current environment: the clouds, stars, lightning, shooting meteors, storms and dew.

The two verbs of progressive aspect in the final line 'living and dying' are particularly powerful regarding the temporally-charged nature of the poem and their dynamism maximised through syntactic ambiguity. Does 'living and dying' refer to the world, the grammarian or the lofty manner in which he did both? All three interpretations have a presence in the poem and their cumulative force creates a strong sense of on-going activity, both earthly and heavenly. Thus the use of these two rather nebulous progressives gives a final imperfective push, leaving us with the sense of time and activity extending beyond the end of the poem.

### 3. Some conclusions

In the light of the above discussion and with reference to the ideas of Gisa Rauh, whose work Green draws on in relation to lyric poetry, it is useful to consider the Browningsque dramatic monologue in terms of its operation along a cline of activity. As I have demonstrated, the particular manner in which the genre makes use of exophoric reference requires us to imagine the face-to-face interaction of the speaker and his auditors. In terms of a cline of deictic activity, the dramatic monologue, in one sense, functions right at one end of the scale, in the 'canonical situation of utterance'. In reality, of course, this is not so. It operates at two removes; the first shift away from the canonical situation being a context in which the 'centre of orientation (origo) but not the related objects are part of the canonical situation' and the second shift occurring when 'both the centre of orientation and the related objects are excluded from the canonical situation' (127-128). The latter is necessarily the context which occurs throughout written discourse. Such a mode as the dramatic monologue is in part distinguished then by its simulation of the canonical situation of utterance, as is evident in the two poems examined above. Both seem to operate as transcripts of a piece of communication fully immersed within the canonical situation of utterance, regardless of superficial differences from each other. Green states that in lyric poetry 'because of the absence of extra-linguistic elements, actual situation and emotional situation will be compounded' (125). Browning's innovation seems to have been that of a poetic form able to dispense with such lyric contrivances, because it is possible for the speaker's 'actual situation' to be played out within the coding time and place of the poem.

With further reference to Green's idea of coding and content time and place, the above textual analysis has helped to clarify these terms as regards their application to the discourse of dramatic monologue. Here the level at which the poet (or any manifestation of her) composes the poem remains essentially out of view. Coding time and place is therefore that in which the dramatic speaker transmits his utterance. It is usually highly dramatically-realised and reasonably naturalistically portrayed, providing a context in which it is possible for 'action' to take place; to unfold within the spatio-temporal window occupied by the utterance. Green's concept of 'content time and place' is best understood here as referring to the customary back-story (which sometimes also incorporates a hypothetical future), a context where past actions can be narrated (or future scenarios imagined) but not performed.

Browning's dramatic monologues often contain a strong lyrical element, as critics such as Herbert Tucker have stressed. I would suggest however that lyricism in Browning's dramatic monologues takes place within a rigorously cast and naturalistically dramatic framework. The naturalism of Browning's coding time and place is particularly, and perhaps surprisingly, apparent in the above reading of 'A Grammarian's Funeral', the allegorical elements of which usually form the basis of critical readings. My reading highlights the fact that the speaker does not travel as a lyric wanderer might, but is bound by the spatio-temporal limitations of reality, the particulars of which punctuate the utterance, despite the stylised and metaphorical nature of long passages. Although the dramatic monologue gives us a spatio-temporal *fragment*, the fragment at least is complete. We have the impression of witnessing the whole of the 'original occasion' and the spatio-temporal restrictions this brings with it.

My close reading of the texts in relation to Browning's handling of time, space and action has led me to some different conclusions to those of previous readers. By focusing firmly on its status as a dramatic monologue my reading of 'A Grammarian's Funeral' uncovers a typically flawed and thoroughly human speaker. The impact of his rhetoric is felt by the silent auditors, whose unseen reactions form part of the reader's experience. The fact that such startlingly different readings of this poem are possible emphasises just how highly context-sensitive deixis (and language in general) is. Putting the focus on Browning's naturalistic handling of coding time and place makes the idea of the poem being uttered by a 'scholar-choir' seem unlikely. In addition to this, my analysis of the shifts back and forth between coding and content time and place has resulted in a flagging up of the poem's various sections, allowing me to elaborate on Altick's reading of the poem as a mock encomium. My approach has also enabled me to refute Abou-Bakr's points regarding the absence of a dramatic situation, consistent voice and distinct view-point in 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. Such misreadings, (as I consider them to be) can, I believe, be largely attributed to the reading of dramatic monologue as though it were lyric poetry. The operation of deixis within dramatic monologue, however, as I hope to have shown, is usually quite different, and the exploration of such differences seems to be a useful way of analysing and understanding the genre.

## Chapter 4. Contemporary practice and the dramatic monologue

I shall now move on to consider some contemporary examples of dramatic monologue, making further use of deictic analysis to compare them to Browning's handling of the form. I will start by looking at *The World's Wife* (1999) by Carol Ann Duffy, considering the collection as a whole, as well as focussing on several of the poems in more detail. Duffy is a poet closely associated with the dramatic monologue, and cites Browning as an influence on her work (Rees-Jones 1). *The World's Wife* is her only collection given over exclusively to the genre, and is therefore of particular interest here. I shall then move on to examine an individual poem: 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süssmayr' by Julia Copus. This poem appears to contain many Browningsque features, both thematic and formal, and seems typical of a certain kind of contemporary appropriation of the genre, through which a more heavily-dramatised poetry is made stylistically acceptable. Alongside textual analysis it will therefore also be necessary to consider how its contemporary context affects the interpretation of this type of dramatic monologue.

### 1. The World's Wife

Carol Ann Duffy is a poet known for making characters speak, and in particular for giving voice to the disenfranchised, socially marginalised or previously silent, as she does in some of her best known poems, such as 'Psychopath', 'Education for leisure', 'Standing female nude' and 'Warming her pearls' (O'Brien 428 and Michelis and Rowland 9). She pursues this interest in *The World's Wife*; a whole collection devoted to historical monologues in which women connected with famous male figures tell their side of the story or set the record straight. The volume is widely and uncontentiously referred to as a collection of dramatic monologues (Byron 137) and indeed satisfies the loose modern definition of the term (discussed in chapter one) simply by having speakers who are indicated to be someone other than the poet. In terms of theme, the use of historical subjects is also typical of the genre, as is the rather dark and grisly nature of a number of the pieces. Formally, the poems all seem to be 'spoken'; that is, marked with the signs of verbal communication, and an addressee of some kind is usually referenced, albeit frequently an unspecified and ontologically ambiguous 'you'. However, as argued in chapter one, the adoption of a specific speaker is not in itself sufficient to make a poem dramatic. I have argued that the most important element in

rendering a poem 'dramatic' is that classified by Sessions as 'action in the present', and such action seems largely absent from *The World's Wife*. I would suggest that the use of named speakers and 'verbal' register of many of the poems leads us to interpret them as more 'dramatic' than they really are. Indeed Duffy herself, in an interview published on the website *Sheer Poetry*, remarks that she finds it interesting that these poems should have been so widely taken up and performed by theatre companies (Duffy 2005). It seems that the range of characters and representation of the spoken word have been enough to spark an interest in stage performance.

In the same interview, Duffy refers to the autobiographical nature of the collection, a feature usually more associated with lyric poetry. She states that the volume contains a personal narrative with many of the poems having intense autobiographical connections, without which she would not have been able to write them. She makes connections between her own poetic beginnings and the opening poem 'Little Red Cap' and flags up personal aspects of numerous other pieces, noting that the collection also closes on a personal note with the long-awaited arrival of Demeter's daughter. Duffy says this expresses her own experience of motherhood; the feeling that she had her daughter 'at the eleventh hour' and the sentiment that, just as with the collection, 'there the story ends, in a way'.

I shall now move on to examine several of the texts more closely in order to identify exactly how Duffy's lyric tendencies manifest themselves within these seemingly dramatic pieces. The autobiographical element, often bound up with the lyric mode, seems most apparent at the beginning and end of the collection, and so I shall begin by looking at its opening poem 'Little Red Cap', as well as briefly touching on the closing poem 'Demeter'.

In 'Little Red Cap' (the original title of 'Little Red Riding Hood') Duffy fuses elements of the fairytale with events from her own life. She states in interview that the girl in the poem is a version of herself and that the details of the landscape evoked in the first stanza are those of her home town of Stafford. As Duffy describes it, she has Little Red Cap 'fall in love with and have a relationship with the wolf. The wolf in [the] poem being an older male poet that Little Red Cap, a teenage female poet, learns from'. She goes on to explain that it becomes the opposite of the original fairytale, where Little Red Cap fears she will be consumed by the wolf, and states that the piece is based on her own first relationship (Duffy 2005). This autobiographical information is fairly widely known and therefore could be said to bring the 'I' of the poet into view for some readers. Yet even readers with no knowledge of the poet's personal life are likely to

become aware of the presence of some kind of modern poetic persona within the poem. It is interesting to consider this in relation to Alan Sinfield's idea of the 'the feint' (23-34). Following Sinfield's reasoning, the absence of a dramatically realised coding environment tilts the poem towards the lyric. The pronoun 'I' is dual; referring to both the poet (or poetic persona) and Little Red Cap, creating Sinfield's sense of a 'divided consciousness'. Yet in this case, given the permeating autobiographical allusions, the modern idiom and the heavily allegorical nature of the fairytale, the voice of the poet seems much more prominent and important than that of the character. The poet's 'I' seems to inhabit or make up a large part of the character, perhaps tilting the piece towards the lyric mode in a way not quite accounted for by Sinfield.

The opening of the poem takes us straight into the somewhat intangible world often associated with lyric poetry. This sense of oddness is initially created through the fusion of time and space. The opening line 'at childhood's end, the houses petered out / into playing fields' takes a temporal event (the end of childhood) and gives it qualities more usually associated with the spatial dimension. This synthesis of space and time, and the need thereby created for a more visceral interpretation of events, seems characteristic of the lyric mode. There is an absence of reference to the coding time and place of the speaker at the beginning of the piece (which would have made the utterance feel more dramatic), rather we are dropped directly into content time and place. This straight narration of past events, told in the past tense, continues until the third stanza where the first overt reference to any kind of addressee is made, with the phrase 'You might ask why' (3.1). It is interesting to note the implied lack of reciprocity in the communication between the speaker and auditor here. Although directly acknowledging some kind of addressee, the nature of the statement hints at a spatio-temporally isolated speaker and a closed-off relationship with the addressee (such as that of poet and reader). The poem does not seem to try to mimic the canonical situation of utterance, as we might expect from a dramatic monologue. Yet the phrase 'you might ask why', and the subsequent 'Here's why' (3.1), by making reference to the actual telling of the story, do work to somewhat dramatise the context, perhaps because they function as oblique references to the coding time and place of the poem. On hearing that the reason the speaker allows herself to be drawn in by the wolf is 'poetry' (3.1), we are again reminded of Duffy the poet as speaker, which in turn seems to reinforce the lyric universe of the writer rather than the dramatic, fairytale world of Little Red Cap. Allusions to the poet's own life (or at least to the life of some kind of modern-day poetic persona) are so abundant that in the course of the poem we come to think of the

speaker as quite obviously using both the character and story as metaphor. Yet the conceit is sustained and the piece continues to narrate past events in the past tense. This style continues until the beginning of stanza six where it is disrupted with the line 'but then I was young – and it took ten years' (6.1). By highlighting the 'then' of content time, attention is once again tacitly drawn to the 'now' of coding time. What Loy D. Martin refers to as 'proximity time relations' (61) are established as we discover that the time of the utterance is more than ten years distant from the narrative. The speaker goes on to conclude the narrative in the past tense; she learns various survival skills and eventually kills the wolf. It is the final line of the poem, as the speaker emerges from the woods, which is perhaps most interesting regarding the tensions between the lyric, narrative and dramatic.

Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone. (7.6)

The lyric power of this final line seems to be largely generated by the use of the simple present tense of the verb 'come'. Up until this point we (as readers/addressees) have been temporally 'located' with the poet/speaker at the point at which she narrates the story, years after the events have taken place. We therefore expect the narrative to conclude in the same fashion with 'out of the forest I came'. The sudden switch to the present tense is disorientating and has quite an impact. The change of tense itself brings to mind the spatio-temporal leaps characteristic of the lyric mode, while this sudden adoption of the present tense seems a direct attempt to present coding and content time as synchronous. Interestingly, however, this leap into what Ekbert Faas calls 'simulated spontaneity' is located right at the end of the piece and seems to function as a springboard into a different mode of expression. The moment at which this mode is adopted is highly apt, occurring at the point in the narrative at which the speaker, having slain the wolf/patriarchal poetic tradition, emerges as a fully-fledged poet. Duffy could therefore be said to embed this notion of the speaker's claim to lyric expression grammatically, as well as through the imagery of emerging from the woods with the lyrically-charged symbols of flowers and song.

In the Browningsque dramatic monologue we could expect to find reference to coding time and place at the end of the poem, something which does not seem to happen in 'Little Red Cap'. In order to read the poem in such a way we would have to imagine the speaker uttering the piece, or 'coding', from within the forest, and the change of tense in the last line as signifying a literal emergence from the forest. This reading

however feels ludicrously strained given the lack of any previous action within the coding time and space of the poem, the obvious conceit of the narrative and presence of the poet's voice. I would therefore suggest that 'Little Red Cap', while superficially possessing qualities central to the dramatic monologue, has, in its *way* of meaning, more in common with the lyric mode.

The closing poem of the collection, 'Demeter', also seems to be written more in the lyric than dramatic tradition. Again there is no explicit reference to coding time or place and we are dropped directly into a past tense narrative. Yet the use of the past tense seems deliberately pared down. Firstly by the ellipsis of the opening line: 'Where I lived – winter and hard earth'. The use of full sentences, with more markers of past tense, such as '*there was* winter and hard earth' would locate it more fully in the past. In addition to this, the consistent use of verbs of progressive aspect (such as 'choosing', 'walking', and 'bringing') makes the piece feel a little more temporally ambiguous, encouraging us to 'look at the situation from inside' (Martin 62). The line 'I swear / the air softened and warmed as she moved' (11-12) also aids the immediacy of the utterance, being a sentiment from coding time and thus adds to the increasingly vivid style of narration as Demeter arrives. Yet this effect is perhaps primarily achieved through the final stanza having no markers of past tense, combined with the tacit force of the present progressive in 'smiling' (13). It is interesting to note that other than the title, which attributes the utterance to a distinct character, there is really nothing dramatic about this poem at all. With a different title and placed in a different volume this piece could be read as purely lyrical; the rather timeless, spatio-temporally neutral setting and detail meaning it can be easily read as the utterance of a modern poet-speaker.

Yet several pieces in this collection do appear to possess significant elements of the more 'fully dramatic' or Browningsque dramatic monologue, presenting situations in which some sort of literal action seems to be synchronous with the utterance. The powerfully deictic opening of the poem 'Mrs Sisyphus' establishes a context of this nature, although its seemingly straightforward dramatic set-up is complicated in the second half of the piece.

The first line, indeed the first two words of 'Mrs Sisyphus', establish a strong deictic base, making reference to action unfolding within what appears to be the coding time and place of the utterance. The opening 'That's him, pushing the stone up the hill' is similar to Browning's well known opening line 'That's my last Duchess, painted on the wall'. Yet Duffy's line is even more dynamic in that the thing 'pointed to' is a

person engaged in a physical activity synchronous with the utterance, rather than an inanimate object. As with Browning's poem, however, it is the indexicalisation of the opening distal demonstrative (used to refer to a material object within the fictional world) which works to create a powerfully deictic context. This kind of opening creates certain assumptions about the communicative context of the poem. In this case we are presented with a speaker who is pointing out some activity within the fictional world. The speaker appears to be addressing a specific silent auditor within the text world (as the Duke of Browning's poem addresses the envoy). The auditor seems to share the spatio-temporal environment of the speaker and can thus be guided by the distal demonstrative to visually identify Mr. Sisyphus pushing the stone up the hill. The rest of the first stanza continues this natural sounding colloquial address to an apparently text-world auditor. Reference is made to the time when her husband 'first started out' (3) and to 'now' (4), the moment of utterance, as well as to the more general present.

The second of the three stanzas presents a further venting of the frustrations of the speaker, with the present tense here used to communicate the habitual nature of Mr. and Mrs. Sisyphus' disagreements. Such a use of the present tense is clear because of the initial set up and can perhaps be said to function a bit like the traditional back-story of dramatic monologue (as discussed in relation to 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister').

But it is the final stanza which calls into question the communicative context of the poem. The first line ('but I lie alone in the dark' [3.1]) is initially unproblematic, following on from the complaints of the previous stanza and therefore seeming to be a continuation of the habitual present tense. We assume the speaker is not lying in bed in the dark at the moment of utterance but rather located in view of the hill having just pointed out her husband. It is worth noting however that without the initial dramatic set-up the reader would presumably be more likely to interpret the final stanza as a kind of lyric compounding of content and coding time. The last two lines are particularly vivid and specific; the 'while' and 'up' of the penultimate line spatio-temporally orienting the activity taking place on the hill to the speaker as she lies in bed, and the progressive aspect of the subsequent phrases 'deepening murk'(3.7) and 'is giving'(3.8) adding to the dynamic feel of the setting. One interpretation of this final stanza, and perhaps the most obvious given the overtly dramatic opening, is that the speaker starts to re-live (and therefore re-vivify) the events of her back-story, remembering times when she lay in bed feeling disgruntled and deictically projecting herself back there, with the poem simply stopping short; ending without the form's characteristic return to content time and place, and without further direct address to the implied auditor of the opening line.

In addition to this, the dramatic and colloquial language of the piece appears to give way to a slightly more lyrical form of expression in the final stanza, becoming more overtly evocative and somewhat introspective, just as it does in 'Little Red Cap'. Elena Semino describes how the 'spoken quality' of a poem highlights its fictive nature (Semino, *Building on*, 136-137), and so here it could be said that as the verbal or colloquial register recedes, so a more typically lyric voice seems to take its place, almost by default.

In addition to this more traditionally poetic treatment of setting, the spatio-temporal ambiguity of the last stanza is in itself more characteristic of the lyric mode. One way of accounting for such ambiguity is that of 'deictic decay'. This is something defined by Mary Galbraith and one aspect of her larger 'deictic shift theory'. Galbraith uses the term to describe deictic fields which are not regularly 're-activated' after being introduced (47) (a deictic field being a set of deictic expressions which all relate to the same deictic centre (Stockwell 47)). In this case the deictic power of the initial phrase 'that's him' which 'activates' the dramatic status of the piece may be seen to fade in the reader's mind or 'decay' over the course of the poem as we are drawn into the particulars of the story and emotions of the speaker. I would suggest that this idea is particularly relevant to dramatic monologue, where the pull of lyric (as the dominant poetic mode) could be said to work to nullify early spatio-temporal anchoring. This phenomenon also occurs in the typical Browningsque dramatic monologue, except that in the Browningsque we would expect the 'deictic field' of coding time and place to be 're-activated' at intervals and most emphatically at the end of a piece, something which does not happen in Duffy's poem.

The spatio-temporal ambiguity of 'Mrs Sisyphus' also leaves room for a less obvious, but perhaps equally workable, interpretation of the piece, in which it functions as a soliloquy, in the style of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. This way of reading the poem has the speaker coding from the dark of her bedroom and the referent of the demonstrative 'that' in the opening line as the *sound* of the stone being pushed up the hill. The speaker therefore addresses the frustrated utterance to herself or an imagined auditor (in the same manner as the speaker of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'), with reference to the coding time and place of the utterance being made through the opening allusion to the sound of the stone and in the present progressive force of the final stanza. In this interpretation the simple present tense of the first line of the final stanza ('But I lie alone in the dark') becomes an explicit statement of the speaker's spatio-temporal

co-ordinates, rather than signifying either the habitual present tense (as addressed to a text-world auditor) or the historical present of the piece read as lyric.

In conclusion, the communicative context of 'Mrs Sisyphus' seems somewhat mutable. The mutability of the communicative context is something identified by Semino as characteristic of the lyric mode (Building on, 140), and certainly not something found in the Browningsque dramatic monologue which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is usually much more firmly anchored in space and time. In this poem the spatio-temporal transition from somewhere with a view of the hill to the dark of the bedroom is partly enabled by our expectations surrounding lyric poetry's tendency to engage in the re-vivification of memory, to the point where content and coding time and place are presented as synchronous. However, the seeming duality of context here might also have to do with the way in which Duffy uses language strongly marked by the signs of face-to-face communication to pull the reader into the speaker's world. Such language, often employed most emphatically at the beginning of her poems, in fact turns out to be more a 'verbal affectation' (Byron 115) than a device to signify the sealed fictional world of the fully dramatic.

I shall now briefly address some of the issues around the dramatic aspects of other poems in the collection, in particular the effect of using definite text-world auditors (in contrast to an unspecified 'you'). The poem which most clearly uses such auditors is 'Circe', in which the eponymous goddess addresses the 'nymphs and nereids' of her island. The speaker makes frequent references to objects within coding time and place, including specific auditors, and seems to undertake the physical task of a cookery demonstration in real-time as the utterance unfolds. The idea of a cookery demonstration may be seen as a convenient dramatic vehicle, and our interpretation of the action as 'literal' seems aided by the use a communicative context with which we are likely to be familiar. The physical setting and simultaneity of utterance and action is reinforced by the spatial and temporal deictic charge of lines such as 'look at that simmering lug' (3.3), and 'now let us baste that sizzling pig on the spit once again' (4.8). In addition to this, the regular address to specific named auditors (the 'nereids and nymphs') gives us a further sense of the utterance as 'event', while the way in which such address is employed at regular intervals works to keep the fictional world of coding time and place prominent, preventing deictic decay.

Yet while, at the level of the individual poem, Circe's address to the nereids and nymphs works to convey the effect of a sealed fictional world, in a volume-wide context the indexicalised meaning of such address seems to expand to include the reader (and

the female reader in particular). The same type of address appears in various pieces throughout the collection, perhaps most notably in 'Frau Freud' and 'Eurydice'. The spatio-temporal co-ordinates of coding time for both of these poems are ambiguous, with Frau Freud addressing unspecified 'ladies' and Eurydice's repeated address to 'girls'. In both poems it is unclear if the referents are text-world auditors or whether this is more of a collective address to female readers. Barry Wood in his interview with Duffy comments on the way in which, when performing 'Eurydice', she looks up and directly addresses the women in the room as the 'girls'. It is unclear however whether this is an attempt to make the live audience stand-in as text-world auditors in performance, or rather meant to highlight her intention of simultaneously addressing both the text-world auditor and the (female) reader through the voices of the poems.

The idea of the poems as narratives told from an unspecified time and place is repeatedly reinforced throughout the collection and made explicit in the 'nowhen' of 'Eurydice', perhaps revealing a general disregard for the high status afforded to the temporal aspects of more conventional dramatic monologue. In interview Duffy repeatedly draws our attention back to the autobiographical strand of the volume, explaining that Eurydice (like Little Red Cap) is 'quite happy not living with a male poet any more'. She also discusses the somewhat odd ending of this poem and, in response to the interviewer's uncertainty about whether the last stanza is even meant to be read as the voice of Eurydice, states that in a sense the final stanza marks the beginning of Eurydice's own poem (presumably as opposed to her *narrative*, which precedes it). It is this switch to a more distinctly lyrical register which disrupts a straightforward interpretation of the piece. As in 'Little Red Cap' and 'Mrs Sisyphus', Duffy has her speaker move, at the close of the poem, from the colloquial and narrative-driven into a more overtly lyrical mode.

Throughout the collection attention is repeatedly drawn to the fact that the coding time of the poems is distinct from the content time of the stories they tell, and indeed to their status as narratives. Delilah, for example, refers to her own story with 'That's the how and the why and the where' ('Delilah' 7.1) and Pilate's wife ends her back-story with the dismissive 'My maid knows all the rest' ('Pilate's Wife' 6.3). The latter example also works to imply a text-world auditor, seeming to suggest more information can be obtained by consulting another character within the fictional world, something we as readers are obviously unable to do. However, given the lack of dramatic-realisation of the coding environment of this poem, this technique seems more

a playful nod to the idea of the sealed fictional world of the Browningsque than a serious attempt to reproduce it.

In addition to these explicit references to their own narratives, many of the poems allude to themselves as verbal utterances, for example Pope Joan's use of the phrase 'so I'll tell you now' ('Pope Joan' 7.1) and Mrs Beast's 'Need I say more?' ('Mrs Beast' 4.1), as well as numerous other uses of colloquial phraseology suggestive of speech. Yet while on the surface this 'spoken quality' seems to push the pieces towards the Browningsque dramatic monologue, such language, as Glennis Byron has argued of Ezra Pound, is perhaps better viewed as an affectation (115). In this sense, Duffy seems to use the 'spoken' quality of the dramatic monologue as a vehicle to an ultimately lyric end, with seemingly direct address to an auditor functioning as a means of initially grabbing the attention of the reader.

I would suggest that the dominant poetic modes of this collection are the narrative and the lyric, with the typical speaker largely communicating through the former, and moving into the latter as she strives to accurately represent the emotional truths of her story. I would argue that on close inspection there is actually very little of the dramatic (as defined in chapter 1) in this collection. Loucks and Stauffer remark of Browning that his monologues fuse devices from the epic, the novel and the drama to create more than 'mere talk about events' (315). I would suggest that this collection, and indeed the majority of contemporary dramatic monologues, centre largely around such 'talk'.

## **2. The Particella of Franz Xaver Süßmayr**

I have suggested that Duffy's dramatic monologues are largely confined to 'talk about events', that they lack the unfolding of any significant action within the coding time and place of the poem, and that this is typical of contemporary examples of the form. There does, however, seem to be a separate, if somewhat minor, strand of on-going poetic practice within the Browningsque tradition. Some examples of modern poems which engage more fully with this tradition are 'Soliloquy at Potsdam' (1961) by Peter Porter, 'Johann Joachim Quantz's Five Lessons' (1978) by W. S. Graham, 'Quasimodo Says Goodnight' (1988) by Mick Imlah, 'The State of the Prisons' (2005) by Sinead Morrissey, and 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süßmayr' (2011) by Julia Copus. All of these poems deal with historical subjects, as Browning frequently did and, unlike the poems of *The World's Wife*, all adopt, to some degree, the vocabulary and idiom of their

respective periods. I will now consider Julia Copus' poem 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süßmayr' and examine the ways in which she makes use of Browningsque techniques to portray 'action in the present', as well as how the contemporary context of the poem may affect the interpretation of such action.

The poem is prefaced with a short introductory note giving the time, place and circumstance of the speaker. Such a note is useful for practical reasons; relieving the monologue itself of the burden of basic circumstantial detail. The usefulness of this additional information highlights the way in which the genre tends to be less free-standing than lyric poetry.

Like several other contemporary poems of this nature, 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süßmayr' is presented in sub-titled sections. In this case the poem charts the completion and collection of four packages containing the 'particella', or 'short score', for Mozart's opera 'The Magic Flute', as 'transliterated' by the speaker, Süßmayr. Not a technique employed by Browning in his dramatic monologues, the use of such 'instalments' seems to be a modification of the genre made by contemporary poets. A reason for this could be that it enables a sense of unfolding drama without the need for too much unwieldy 'on stage' action; dramatic events can take place in the temporal 'gaps'. Yet this approach does not necessarily move the piece away from the more fully dramatic. Indeed while she utilizes this technique, Copus also manages to orchestrate and convey a significant amount of action 'on stage'. My discussion shall focus largely on the 'First Packet', as examples of most of the relevant features and techniques can be found in this section.

The opening of the poem establishes a dramatic context primarily by means of direct address to a text-world auditor. An indication that the addressee is another character within the fictional realm, who interacts with the speaker within the canonical situation of utterance, is made in the first line of the poem, in the speaker's invitation to the auditor to perform a physical action within the coding environment (the giving of permission to 'stay' to 'catch your breath'). The second line makes reference to the speaker's activity in the moments immediately prior to the utterance, bolstering the sense that the scene we are witnessing is, as Loy D. Martin describes it, 'contiguous with an implied/extra-textual past' (65). Yet given the contemporary context of the poem, it is perhaps possible for the reader to feel that, regardless of such signals, it is she who is being directly addressed by the speaker. This interpretation seems feasible because of a kind of post-modern playfulness of address sometimes employed to dramatise poetry. In the light of this phenomenon, I would suggest that the preface and

the use of historical subject matter, which flag up the genre of the poem, are of huge importance in helping to establish the context as that of a sealed fictional world. The possibility of reader as addressee is subsequently made still less tenable by the use of the auditor's name (Anton) towards the end of the first section. For some readers the introduction of a named auditor, clearly present in the coding environment of the poem, may signal the point at which the poem fully establishes its communicative context as that of a sealed fictional world.

The second stanza (beginning just four lines into the poem) takes us straight into the pre-occupations of the speaker. The rapidity with which the speaker dispenses with scene-setting and small talk with his auditor seems in itself to reveal something of his character, and feels rather characteristic of the introspective nature of many of Browning's speakers. The terms in which the speaker considers his task of transliterating Mozart's shorthand notation are rather elevated and philosophical. He talks of 'translating direct from the silence' (1.3.1) and later of fixing to the page 'little skeletons of sound' (2.11.3). Many contemporary dramatic monologues of this kind take some sort of artist or connoisseur of the arts for their speaker ('Johann Joachim Quantz's Five Lessons' by W. S. Graham, for example, or many of the poems from Richard Howard's volume 'Untitled Subjects' (1969)). This is presumably because Browning frequently chose such subjects. Yet I would suggest that the choice of such a speaker is also driven by more pragmatic considerations; providing a suitable vehicle for lyric expression. A sensitive and artistic speaker can perhaps more comfortably make the leap from the conversational to the lofty or sublime, and be made to render everyday matters as high lyric in a more believable manner. Copus, for example, has Süßmayr describe the fountain outside his window as a 'queer, quicksilver creature / being made entirely from moment to moment' (2.4.11-12) Thus, rather elevated passages are able to comfortably take their place alongside the business of daily life.

The continued use of historical speakers in this kind of dramatic monologue also seems to provide a means of enabling passages of lyric expression within an everyday utterance. The somewhat formal and stylized social interaction of Copus' poem certainly seems more suited to eighteenth-century Vienna than a modern, more familiar, setting, and the rigid social hierarchy associated with such a period perhaps makes the silence of the auditor more plausible. The use of such settings seems to relieve the pressure to adopt a more colloquial register, and dramatic monologues set in familiar, modern-day settings must perhaps work harder to transform their representations of impromptu speech into lyric expression.

To return to the idea that the moment of telling is made more dramatic through being presented as ‘contiguous with an extra-textual past’ (Martin 65), I would suggest that an analogous point may be made with respect to the spatial setting of the poem. The world of the speaker appears to extend ‘off-stage’, beyond the room in which he addresses the auditor. Immediately prior to the commencement of the scene the speaker has been working at his desk by the window. A few stanzas later it is revealed that this affords a view of ‘the fountain, / the gnarled old Linden tree and the glitter of the river in the distance’ (1.5.2-3). Süßmayr also makes reference to his bed and bedroom, as well as to the landscape surrounding the house in Baden and the path which lies between it and Vienna, along which he and ‘Madame’ travelled ‘last Sunday’ (1.6.3). Just as references to the times before and after the monologue are helpful in creating a naturalistically dramatic rendering of the moment, so references to the surrounding physical landscape may be said to help to engage the reader by allowing her to visualise the fictional world of the poem.

Yet it is necessarily the speaker’s immediate setting, the objects which he is able to see and touch (as well as the sounds of his coding environment), which play the more important role in rendering the piece truly dramatic. I have described how Copus immediately draws our attention to the spatial dimension of coding time by alluding to it as a place where it is possible for the auditor to stay and catch his breath. Further overt reference to action (or the possibility of action) within the coding time and place of the poem is then reserved until the end of the first section, when our attention is brought back to the dramatic situation at hand through reference to sounds occurring within the coding environment. The speaker hears ‘the rattle of the mail coach’ (1.12.3) and the church bell ‘striking twelve’ (1.13.2), the latter being just the device employed by Browning in ‘Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister’ to cut short his speaker’s meditations. In addition to these signals we are again aware, within the last six lines, of the possibility of physical movement taking place alongside the utterance. Indeed, the ability to detect the presence of such ‘platform action’ seems essential in order to fully make sense of the utterance. The packet containing Süßmayr’s *particella*, which must have been physically handed to Anton either immediately prior to the commencement of the utterance or at some point during it (most plausibly somewhere around these final lines), is now explicitly referred to in the phrase ‘it is not heavy’ (1.13.4). Such indexicalisation of the pronoun to refer to a material object within coding time and place is, as I have previously discussed, characteristic of the Browningsque dramatic monologue. The phrase ‘Three kreutzer should suffice’ (1.13.4) may also be said to

accompany and refer to an action performed within coding time and place. From context it would seem possible that the money is being passed from Süßmayr to Anton with this line.

While the progression of time is reinforced by allusions to physical events within coding time, such as the rattle of the mail coach and the striking of the clock, we are also made aware of temporal movement within the present of the poem in a slightly more nebulous way; through the realisation that certain circumstances have changed since the commencement of the speaker's monologue. At the opening of this first section there is time for Anton to stop and catch his breath, yet by end of it he is urged by Süßmayr to 'hurry' (1.12.2). This command seems to be in the process of being obeyed, as signalled a few lines later with Süßmayr's satisfied bidding of farewell (1.13.3). During the final six lines of the 'First Packet' it seems Anton must be preparing to leave the room as instructed, and thus physical movement within coding time and place must be read into the speaker's utterance in order to 'complete the scene' (Everett 126).

Perhaps the one place where the activity of the auditor is most strikingly written into the poem is the line 'What do you make of that? Precisely' (1.7.3). The speaker is asking Anton what he thinks about Mozart's pregnant wife being sent to Baden, having already implied his own view on the matter. In order to make sense of this line, we have to recognise that Anton performs some action, whether verbal or non-verbal, which has the effect of demonstrating his agreement with the speaker. This line is particularly interesting as it not only makes vital the reading-in of auditor activity but, more unusually, pins down the action of the auditor to a specific moment in the text by making an unequivocal exophoric reference to his response. In this instance the device almost has the effect of rendering the piece a dialogue of which we only have access to one side. Although this kind of effect was sometimes employed by Browning, he usually favoured some amount of ambiguity regarding the precise moment and nature of auditor response, often preferring to refer to statements or actions made by the auditor prior to the commencement of the speaker's utterance. Such a blatant writing-in of the auditor's reaction seems particularly unusual and arresting in contemporary use of the Browningsque, which I would suggest usually tends to keep allusions to 'on-stage' events to a minimum.

The above example highlights the practical value of the auditor in the creation of a dramatic context. The entrances and exits of the auditor (as well as the anticipation of these) are also useful indicators of action and commonly employed in this kind of

poetry. The splitting of the poem into separate ‘scenes’ allows Copus to make repeated use of this device. The main action within the coding environment of the poem has to do with Anton’s arrivals. The fact that the act of arriving can be repeated at intervals provides a convenient means of preventing the ‘deictic decay’ of the speaker’s coding environment. It also provides easy opportunities for ‘platform action’ in the form of social rituals, such as the taking of a coat and offering of a drink, as well as affording fresh opportunities for the speaker to make reference to his current spatio-temporal circumstances in a natural-sounding manner. For example in the Third Packet Copus has Anton arrive ‘drenched’. Süßmayr observes this and instructs him to ‘take a seat by the fire’ (3.1.1). The line ‘Hand me your coat. There now’ (3.1.3) may be said to further illustrate the fact that the reader must imagine parallel physical activity within the coding environment in order to fully make sense of this type of discourse. The opening section of the Fourth Packet also capitalises on the dramatic potential of entrances: ‘Take care, Anton! You need your wits about you / to pick your way between the trunk and the wall’ (4.1.1-2). It also serves to reveal the changes which have occurred in the time-lapse between ‘packets’ and to present a vivid image of the coding environment.

The above discussion shows how the auditor works to spatio-temporally ground the piece. Yet, just as in Browning’s work, I would suggest that the silent auditor of Copus’ poem has a dual purpose; also working as a tool to reveal the character of the speaker. It seems a significant amount of the interest in this poem lies in the ambiguity surrounding the auditor’s reaction to the speaker, and that this serves to make us question the speaker’s wisdom and behaviour. The main way in which our attention is drawn to such ambiguity is through Süßmayr’s numerous, rather high-minded, semi-rhetorical questions. The first of these occurs towards the end of the first section (‘The soul is freest when we are in transit,/is it not?’ [1.12.1-2]). In this instance the issue of auditor response is somewhat diminished by the next line, with Süßmayr’s abrupt ‘but you must hurry now’ (1.12.2) removing the expectation or possibility of Anton’s response. Yet this kind of philosophical pondering is resumed in the next section, with Süßmayr asking if Anton has noticed how the fountain and the tree never touch. These questions seem to become more elaborate and metaphysically-charged as the poem progresses, reaching a crescendo with:

‘Now...tell me have you ever paused to consider

the many unforeseen moments of juncture -  
strangers united by joy or disaster, a person

paused at a rift, then joined to the land

by means of an improvised bridge, or again the  
gap between two hesitating souls  
broached by the thrown rope of a kiss? (3.2-4)

The opening of the question seems to frame it as other than rhetorical, raising the possibility of the auditor having actually 'paused to consider' the concept. The prospect of this is subsequently made ridiculous by Copus' decision to withhold the question mark, rather than placing it after 'juncture'. The extreme specificity of the question makes it highly unlikely that anyone else should ever have considered this precise set of ideas, and we wonder how the auditor responds. It is the cumulative effect of this sort of high-minded question, combined with Süßmayr's somewhat presumptuous claim to 'if / not friendship, something very like it' (3.2.1-2), as well as his rather dubious assertion of kinship with Anton on grounds of their being two people 'chiefly occupied / in manual work' (2.9.3-10.1), that creates a certain amount of dramatic irony. Bound up with this is a kind of understated comic pathos, brought about primarily by the speaker's lack of awareness of the social context of his utterance, and perhaps similar to that which we feel for the speaker of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'.

I have previously argued that lyric poetry's tendency to use 'simulated spontaneity' sometimes obscures the 'literal' action of the dramatic monologue. Likewise it is perhaps possible that the mode of elevated self-expression associated with the lyric can render the dramatic irony of the Browningsque less apparent than it might otherwise be. Here, Süßmayr's pontification over his work, the soul, and the nature of reality, taken in isolation could be said to function as passages of beautifully crafted lyrical expression, the imagery used throughout also serving to obliquely reveal the speaker's underlying pre-occupation with 'Madame'. It is the wider context of the poem (as a Browningsque dramatic monologue), and in particular Copus' use of a 'working man' as (possibly reluctant) auditor, which renders parts of Süßmayr's utterance inappropriate and pompous, resulting in the subtle comedy and dramatic irony of the piece. Dorothy Mermin suggests that it is the social contexts of poems with auditors and the pressure exerted by this 'world of other people' on a speaker's emotional and imaginative life which acts as the 'resistant medium in which the lyric impulse has to operate and which constantly threatens to make poetic utterance either impossible or absurd'(145). This is an interesting and useful way of accounting for those passages of

Süssmayr's monologue which are at once movingly eloquent, philosophically incisive, and absurd.

It is interesting to consider how the meaning of the poem is affected by our knowledge of Browning and the Browningsque tradition. Given the specific nature of Süssmayr's folly and the fact that he is no psychopath or villain, it would perhaps be possible to (mis)read the poem wholly through the prism of lyric poetry, empathising and enjoying the beauty and eloquence of Süssmayr's meditations on life and art, rather than approaching him as a character to be analysed. In this case knowledge of the Browningsque tradition, with its measures of sympathy and judgement, seems to add another dimension to the poem, allowing the reader to have it both ways.

### **3. Some conclusions**

Looking at *The World's Wife* in relation to deixis and the Browningsque dramatic monologue has enabled me to identify some of the ways in which Duffy appropriates the genre. I have previously suggested that one of the distinguishing features of the Browningsque dramatic monologue is its simulation of the canonical situation of utterance. My discussion of Duffy's poetry (and of 'Mrs Sisyphus' in particular), highlights the way in which she complicates just such a communicative context, seeming to fuse it with the simulated spontaneity and spatio-temporal boundlessness more often associated with lyric poetry. The autobiographical element of *The World's Wife* also interferes with our reading of the poems as dramatic monologues. I have previously suggested that in Browning's dramatic monologues the level at which the poet composes the poem remains essentially out of view. Yet the obviously autobiographical nature of pieces such as 'Little Red Cap' brings the 'I' of the poet, or some manifestation of the poet, into the poem. Duffy's dual 'I' complicates the dramatic monologue's characteristic presentation of a sealed fictional coding time and place in which a distinct character operates. This results in a blurring of the necessarily 'simulated' spontaneity of the 'poet's' action within the poem and the more literal or 'platform' action of the dramatic character.

In contrast to this, my discussion of Julia Copus' poem has served to emphasise how the ability to recognise such literal or 'platform' action is essential in order to successfully decode the more straightforwardly naturalistic communicative context of the contemporary Browningsque dramatic monologue. 'The Particella of Franz Xaver Süssmayr' is a poem fully immersed in the Browningsque tradition in terms of subject

matter and approach, as well as with regard to its presentation of time, space and action. The only modification seems to lie in the segmented nature of this relatively short poem, which Browning himself would surely have chosen to present as one continuous dramatic moment. Each of the four sections in Copus' poem is structured like a complete dramatic monologue, with reference to action within the coding environment being much more abundant at the beginning and end of each section. We experience the unfolding of action in 'real-time' within each section, but additional movement in space and time is enabled by the splitting of the poem into separate 'scenes'.

The use of such 'scenes' seems a relatively recent evolution of the genre and a particularly interesting innovation in that it seems to simultaneously heighten and diminish the genre's kinship with naturalistic stage drama: while the use of sections seems to give the impression of the unfolding of action throughout the scenes or acts of a play, the titles of the sections may be said to intermittently jolt the reader out of the fictional world, reminding him of the poet's controlling hand and the utterance as 'text'.

The time-jumps enabled by the use of separate scenes feels a highly pragmatic appropriation of the form for a number of reasons. In a genre which 'cannot bear too much action' (Faas 152-156) such a device, which enables action to take place within the time-frame of the poem but temporally 'off-stage', is hugely significant. This widening of the poem's time-scale also means that we have the chance to observe the speaker in different moods and circumstances, while retaining, within each section, the means to chart 'the mood itself in its rise and progress', as Browning famously attempted to do (noted in his foreword to *Paracelsus*). But perhaps the most important element of this innovation is the embedding into the poem's structure of regular opportunities for reference to coding time action. Such activity works to break up large chunks of meditation, back-story or argument, as well as preventing the deictic decay of the coding environment, thus emphasising and exploiting the dramatic qualities of the genre.

My close readings of texts by Browning, Duffy and Copus have also led me to some more general conclusions about the presentation of time, space and action in the genre. I would suggest that in the Browningsque dramatic monologue somewhat more tangible referents can be ascribed to the symbolic meanings of deictic terms. Indeed it could be said that the genre makes a kind of game of such inference; that the reader must ascribe these referents themselves from clues in the text, thus playing a particularly active, or at least more clearly defined, role in creating or completing the context of utterance. This relates to Glenn Everett's idea that one of the key elements of

the Browningsque monologue is that the reader must ‘complete the dramatic scene from within, by means of inference and imagination’ (Everett 126). Browning described his play *Luria* as written for a ‘purely imaginary stage’ (R. a. Browning). If we ascribe just such a context to the Browningsque dramatic monologue we can perhaps expect to find a difference in the functioning of reference from that typically found in lyric poetry. This difference seems to manifest itself most clearly in the functioning of exophoric reference, for example in the implicit ‘writing in’ of extralinguistic elements such as ostension. Such a context clearly places different demands on the reader regarding the disambiguation of the text, particularly in relation to spatial and temporal deixis.

## **Chapter 5. An analysis of my creative practice**

Through both my critical work and creative practice I have examined the various factors which govern the interpretation of poetry and affect whether or not, or to what degree, certain poems are read as 'dramatic'. With reference to the poems analysed in the previous chapters, I have suggested that the most important elements in rendering a poem dramatic are, firstly, the use of a dramatically-realised 'coding environment', into which some kind of exophoric action, synchronous to the utterance, is encoded, and secondly, the employment of a speaker who is manifestly 'other' than the poet. These elements combine to indicate something distinct from the 'simulated spontaneity' associated with the often present tense utterances of lyric poetry. Another, related, pre-occupation has been with the idea of the more fully dramatic or 'Browningesque' dramatic monologue itself and the various ways in which action is signified in this genre. I have been particularly interested in the issues and effects of setting this type of poem in a contemporary context.

I shall now discuss these ideas in relation my own creative practice. As it will not be possible to discuss every poem in the accompanying folder, I have organised the poems with regard to the general area of experimentation and will pick out what I consider to be the more interesting or representative pieces to discuss in depth. I would classify roughly half of the poems in this folder as dramatic monologues, with the other half broadly consisting of experiments with the boundaries between the lyric and the dramatic. It is these hybrid poems which I shall address first.

### **1. The status of the addressee and lyric-dramatic hybrids**

The use of a specific addressee is often the primary way in which the moment is dramatised and 'action in the present' encoded in the dramatic monologue. I therefore wanted to experiment with the status of the addressee and to consider this in relation to the deictic elements of a text. I have previously suggested that the dramatic status of a text often only becomes fully apparent when a specific, text-world auditor is revealed (as discussed in relation to Julia Copus' poem). In writing 'Bram Stoker's Boyhood' I considered whether or not to indicate the presence of a specific addressee (or group of addressees) at whom the first two lines are directed. The poem opens 'Let us take heart and say / that every beginning is opaque'. The mode of address and the plurality of the pronoun foregrounds the idea of some kind of addressee. I experimented with indicating

a somewhat more specific group of addressees, trying out lines such as ‘Let us take heart, my friends’. My initial idea for the situation of utterance was prompted by biographical information about Bram Stoker, the speaker of the poem. Stoker assisted the actor Henry Irving in his management of the Lyceum Theatre in London, and I imagined him addressing a group of actors at the beginning of a theatrical project. The phrase ‘every beginning’ seems to function deictically in this context, making reference to the speaker’s coding environment by indicating the quality of the beginning in question in relation to other beginnings. The speech may be interpreted as rhetorical in one sense; its opening sentiment serving as motivational and the ensuing speech functioning as an analogy for a certain kind of creative process. However, I also wanted to convey the sense that ‘the swerve of lyric apostrophe away from rhetoric [had deflected] the speaker from his ostensible purpose of persuading or manipulating a silent auditor’, a definition of the dramatic monologue offered by W. David Shaw (303, footnote). I also considered the dramatic framing of the utterance, and therefore the idea that the speaker should make further reference to his coding environment and current circumstances at the end of the poem. In the finished piece the speaker makes a rather oblique reference to the coding environment through his use of the proximal demonstrative adverb ‘here’. To what exactly ‘here’ refers is ambiguous as there is no obvious antecedent within the discourse. It can be read as relating to the state of ‘beginning’ at the opening of the piece, or as referencing the immediate point in space and time in which the utterance is made. It could also be read more generically as referring to the speaker’s life circumstances at the time of utterance, or as ‘adulthood’ in relation to the ‘boyhood’ of the title and narrative. In writing the poem I thought of it as containing all of these possibilities, as well as referring to the commencement of the theatrical project (a meaning which is absent from the finished poem). In the final draft the phrase ‘every beginning’ perhaps feels more like a reference to beginnings in general. This is because the coding environment is not dramatically realised and the addressees remain unparticularised. The reader is therefore not required to indexicalise the final ‘here’ exophorically, as referring to Stoker’s spatio-temporal environment: the Lyceum Theatre, London, in the late Nineteenth century.

Another poem which experiments with the use of the proximal demonstrative ‘here’ is ‘You are Charlotte at Roe Head’. In this poem I wanted to draw attention to the slippery nature and unstable identity of the pronoun ‘you’ and prevent the easy assignment of indexical meaning. The opening phrase ‘lying here’, the second-person pronoun of the title, and the sense of an addressee implicit in the imperative mood of the

first stanza, all enable the reader to begin to orient herself in relation to the speaker and coding environment. The fact that the addressee is lying *here* implies that he or she occupies the same spatio-temporal environment as the speaker and raises the possibility that the speaker is actually addressing herself.

Although the first two stanzas do not contain the second-person pronoun, the sense of this mode of address is encoded through the imperative mood, as well as through the poem's title. The title also provides the antecedent for the 'she' of line 3. The second-person address is more explicit in stanza three, but I wanted it to have expanded by this point to include both the initial addressee and Charlotte. This plurality of address seems to be partly enabled through the temporary move away from the imperative mood, placing the focus more fully on the narrative about Charlotte, and also through the process of deictic decay, as we move further away from the title of the poem and the initial reference to Charlotte as a separate entity ('she'). The detailed descriptions and omniscient nature of the narrative voice draw the reader further into the emotional and interior life of Charlotte. By the end of the fourth stanza the addressee is even implicated in tentative future actions of Charlotte, involving a character dropped in without explanation ('you might apologise years later in a letter / to Miss Woolner' 4.4-5). This lack of explanation regarding the identity of Miss Woolner assumes a shared knowledge on the part of the speaker and addressee, adding to the sense that the addressee is Charlotte, or that the speaker is musing to herself.

The final stanza opens with the dramatisation of what now seems to be both the content and coding environment ('But now keep still – the girls are on their way' 6.1). Reference is made back to the 'here' of the opening stanza, partly through the temporal equivalent 'now' and partly through the mention of 'the girls'. It is unclear whether the girls exist solely in Charlotte's world or whether there are two groups of girls; that is, whether or not 'the ornamental lispings of the girls below' (1.4-5) forms part of the action of the addressee's world, perhaps prompting the speaker's comparison with Charlotte's circumstances. In either case the piece is dramatised and the moment framed by the presence of the girls, and the present progressive of the final two lines works to convey action in the present of the poem. The final two lines are also important in terms of pronominal reference. Here the addressee and Charlotte are distinguished between for the first time since stanza one. At the opening of the poem the addressee is invited to imagine she is Charlotte. As the text progresses and Charlotte's situation is elaborated on, the textual markers reminding the addressee that this is simply what she is to 'conceive' disappear, and the addressee and Charlotte seem to be compounded. It is not

until the penultimate line that they split apart again ('you and she'). At this point the act of imagining seems to have caused either the addressee to become a character within Charlotte's world or the coding and content environments to have merged.

My intention in the above poem was to encode 'action in the present' in a poem which is not ostensibly a dramatic monologue. The poem functions differently depending on whether or not we interpret the speaker as addressing herself. If the speaker addresses herself, the piece may be thought of as an internal monologue, and the coding environment becomes dramatically realised (particularly if the 'ornamental lisp of the girls below' is interpreted as forming part of the action of the coding environment).

Of the other poems in this section 'With Roses and Locomotives' is another which plays on the ambiguity of the addressee. As with 'You are Charlotte at Roe Head' the speaker may be addressing herself, or someone who shares the same coding environment. The idea of an addressee within the poem is reinforced by the 'our' of line three and the dramatic-realisation of the coding environment, encoded through proximal demonstratives, and in particular the line 'Look up to the backs of these houses either side' (3.1). As usual, however, the conventions of lyric poetry mean that this kind of dramatisation may be read as 'simulated spontaneity', designed to enliven the description and allow the reader to immerse herself in the memory and emotional state of the speaker. The quotation from E. E. Cummings which prefaces the poem suggests further possibilities. The addressee could be the poem itself or, more generally, the poetry of the speaker, although these interpretations only really become apparent at the beginning of the fourth stanza.

To briefly address some of the other poems in this section, 'Speldhurst' also plays on ambiguity around the use of the present tense in poetry and with the complexities of modality. The piece describes an imagined journey, but the imaginary nature is unclear at first and the speaker could be interpreted as using either the habitual or the historical present. The differences between the lyric and dramatic present were my main pre-occupation when writing the sequence 'Somewhere to get to', which presents moments in the lives of some of the inhabitants of a city over the course of a day. The poems are intended to be read as dramatic fragments and most of them are in the form of internal monologue. However, I was aware that the deictic elements of the texts would function differently depending on the perceived mode of discourse. As these poems are not flagged up as dramatic monologue, the present-tense situations they

reveal are perhaps more likely to be read as a lyric compounding of coding and content time and place, and the 'I' more likely to equated with the poet.

## 2. Historical dramatic monologues

To turn now to the more overtly dramatic work; these poems fall into two categories, the historical and the modern. Of the historical pieces, nine are part of a sequence called 'Claims' about the Sheffield Flood of 1864 and the archive of compensation claims connected with it. The remaining six deal with art and artists, and it is one of these which I shall now look at in more depth.

As stated in its subtitle, 'In the Yellow House' is spoken by Vincent Van Gogh to fellow artist Paul Gauguin, in the French village of Arles, in December 1888. An additional note states that the picture Van Gogh makes reference to is his own painting 'La Berceuse'. The poem's title and my decision to include additional circumstantial detail prior to the commencement of the utterance work to establish the piece as dramatic in the looser sense commonly applied to contemporary dramatic monologues: a specific character (distinct from the poet or any manifestation of her) speaks from a particular spatio-temporal environment (distinct from the actual context of composition). The proximal demonstrative of the first line ('Madam Roulin in *this* picture holds the string') immediately bolsters the sense of a speaker in a three-dimensional setting; a deictic centre is mobilised and is oriented to an object (the painting) within the coding environment. Unlike deictic centres mobilised in much lyric poetry, which Green observes are often achieved without reference to an immediate situation (130), here, the reader is required to ascribe definite and fixed indexical referents to the symbolic meanings of certain deictic elements. In this case we must attach the demonstrative and noun ('this picture') to a specific material object within the speaker's coding environment. After establishing this initial mode of reference, however, the speaker's attention is focussed on the world represented in the painting, and the imagined actions and observations of Madam Roulin and the unseen occupants of the unseen cradle. Therefore, apart from the initial 'pointing out' of the painting itself, the action of the first two stanzas could be said to constitute the action of 'content time' rather than 'coding time', and perhaps to function in the same way as the common device of the speaker's 'back-story'; it being a narrative concerning a separate time and place.

The opening of the third stanza brings us back to the concerns of coding time and place by way of direct address to the auditor (already indicated in the poem's subtitle to be Paul Gauguin). The antagonistic tone ('You think Rousseau's mornings nothing' (3.1)), and the fact that this statement seems to be based on some earlier assertion or attitude of the auditor, reinforces the idea of a specific text-word addressee. The accusatory nature of the line 'How can you shrug at such sad majesty?' (3.3) introduces the idea of auditor reaction, although it remains unclear whether the shrug alluded to is a physical action, synchronous to the utterance, or if the line functions as a recrimination regarding a past action or attitude. The sense that the shrug is literal rather than figurative, and forms part of the action taking place within the coding time and place of the utterance, is made more feasible by the nature of the subsequent stanza. The possibility of a walk before bed (4.1) and brandy at 'old Ginoux's place' (4.2) are designed to aid the sense of a dramatically-realised coding environment. Loy D. Martin in his analysis of Browning's monologues notes the importance of 'proximity time relations' (61) and the sense of contiguous moments (65). Here the allusions made to possible activities to fill the immediate interval of time before sleep orient the moment of utterance in relation to impending moments extending beyond, but contiguous with, those of which the text is comprised. The mention of a visit to a specific drinking establishment is intended to perform the same function spatially, reinforcing the palpable nature of the world immediately outside the house.

In stanzas six and seven attention moves back to Madam Roulin and the cradle, juxtaposing the concerns of the speaker's present situation with the imaginary world he creates inside the painting. His attention, however, is drawn back to his present situation by definite action on the part of the auditor (8.1). Here, the identification of 'platform action', physical movement within the coding environment of the poem, is vital to an understanding of the utterance. The reader must deduce from Van Gogh's abrupt questioning that Gauguin is leaving the room, and from the subsequent pleading tone of the line 'At least say you won't go beyond the square' (8.3) that Gauguin is either ignoring him or not answering satisfactorily.

The final line reveals a change in the speaker's circumstances, with the shift in pronominal reference to Gauguin (from second to third-person) signifying that he has left the room or house. This shift in communicative context seems the most unequivocally dramatic element of the poem, perhaps giving the piece the feel of a speech from a play, but with the stage directions omitted. If this were a piece of drama the stage directions would read 'Exit Gauguin' and appear just before the final line of

the poem. It is perhaps because we are so unaccustomed to such clear-cut coding time action in contemporary poetry that its presence almost calls into question the status of the text as poetry, and certainly foregrounds the form's kinship with drama.

The use of terza rima, with its formal layout and intricate rhyme scheme also further inhibits a straight-forward reading of the piece in terms of genre. My reasoning behind this choice of form was two-fold. Firstly, the uniform stanzas and regular metre of terza rima seemed to suit the speaker's desire for clarity, connection and order, with the way the rhyme scheme threads the stanzas together signifying an underlying sense of unity; an intelligent and creative mind at work, playing against the agitation and mental turmoil signified by the abrupt shifts of focus and attention. However, I was also interested in the idea of using this form in a dramatic monologue, where the musicality of terza rima could be said to work against the idea of the utterance as 'speech'. Such highly-wrought forms are perhaps more usually thought of as vehicles for lyric expression and I wanted to demonstrate that the features which mark a poem as 'dramatic' are to do with the encoding of time, space and action in the text and function independently of form and 'mode of expression' in this sense.

The poem 'The Execution of Prado' is a partner piece to 'In the Yellow House' and is spoken by Paul Gauguin, giving the silent auditor of Van Gogh's monologue the opportunity to speak. In this poem I was interested in the possibility of conveying drama through 'proximity time relations' and in creating a sense of the contiguity of moments. It therefore opens with Gauguin stating that he hasn't yet slept since leaving Van Gogh in Arles and ends with him declaring the imminence of his departure from the bar where he is drinking and talking.

Four of the poems in this section are about the life of the Pre-Raphaelite artist and model Elizabeth Siddal. The two most dramatic are 'John Ruskin to Mrs. Acland' and 'Emma advises'. The former employs the device of a perambulating speaker to convey the idea of platform action (as Browning does in 'A Grammarian's Funeral') and the latter creates a sense of its taking place in 'real-time' by giving the speaker an allotted amount of time in which to perform certain actions, which runs out as the poem ends. This is a technique I first experimented with in 'Claims', a sequence written in response to an archive of Victorian flood compensation claims. The poems 'Warning at the Barrel Inn' and 'The Apothecary's Widow' from this sequence both take place at pivotal moments, both speakers have limited time to argue their case or explain their actions, and something is at stake within the moment of utterance. In this sequence I also took the opportunity to experiment in other ways. With 'The Ballad of Mrs. Kirk' I

wanted to produce a relatively long piece in strict ballad form, and to investigate ideas surrounding the re-vivification of the speaker's backstory. The piece is a sort of hybrid of ballad and dramatic monologue, with the verse form, narrative thrust and irreverent tone of the ballad combined with the dramatic monologue's interest in character and reference to coding environment, and with certain portions of the poem being evoked in what feels like 'real-time'. Perhaps the most experimental piece in this sequence is 'A Further Lamentation on the Late Inundation and Ensuing Claims for Compensation'. The piece is a pastiche of a bad poem and the speaker a caricature of a real person: Richard Nesbitt Ryan, 'poet and theatrical manager' and flood compensation claimant. I see the interest of the poem as lying in the ethics of the system set up for people to claim compensation and in the suspiciously self-serving sentiments of the speaker.

### **3. Dramatic monologue and contemporary settings**

I have previously suggested that dramatic monologues set in familiar, modern-day settings must work harder to transform their representations of extemporaneous speech and action into an acceptably poetic mode of expression. This was something I was keen to explore through my own practice and the accompanying folder contains three attempts at the 'fully dramatic' or Browningsque dramatic monologue set in the present day and dealing with contemporary issues. These are 'Monologue at an Upstairs Window', 'The Laboratory' and 'The Other Side'.

'Monologue at an Upstairs Window' is in some respects an updating of Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'; a speaker vents his petty irritations about someone with whom he is forced to live at close quarters, while observing that person's movements from a distance. The neighbour's relationship with mutual acquaintances, with religion and the natural world, as well as the excessive and violent nature of the downfall the speaker plots for him, all have their parallels in Browning's poem. My poem also mirrors Browning's in its temporal shifts; most notably perhaps in its employment of the simple present to indicate habitual behaviour of the neighbour in the second stanza. Browning's metre, however, is so distinctive (trochaic tetrameter, with every other line having a truncated final foot) that mirroring it exactly would have taken my poem too far into the territory of parody or pastiche. Instead I decided to use straight iambic tetrameter; the thinking behind this is that the line lengths serve to set the same sort of pace, creating echoes of Browning's poem, which are heightened by the use of octets. The prominence of the rhyme, although differently patterned, also aligns

the piece with Browning's text and works in both poems to emphasise a comic element.

As with Browning's piece, the title does some work in providing a dramatic context for the utterance. The word 'monologue' implies spoken discourse, rather than the often ontologically ambiguous musings associated with lyric poetry. Further information about the coding environment is transmitted via the phrase 'at an upstairs window'. The word 'upstairs' also implicitly locates the speaker in a domestic setting. However, I would suggest that the first six lines of this present-tense commentary on the neighbour's activity have the flow of many semi-dramatised contemporary poems (such as 'Self Portrait in a Broken Wing-mirror' by Colette Bryce or Ciaran Carson's 'Clearance', to pluck two poems from popular anthologies). It is not until line seven that the unusually dramatic portrayal of the moment is made clear. The speaker interrupts his own commentary to observe a piece of sudden action taking place outside the window. Therefore, as with Browning's poem, action in the coding environment impacts directly upon the course of the speaker's utterance. It is also at this point that the poem departs from its source; with line seven comes the first indication that the speaker is addressing a text-world auditor, rather than soliloquising. The presence of an auditor is a significant way in which the piece differs from Browning's poem, and has various implications for the dramatic-realisation of the coding environment and presentation of character. Yet the auditor in this poem is, in certain respects, not as important as in some dramatic monologues; the main purpose of the utterance is not to manipulate or persuade the auditor, but rather to 'let off steam', and I wanted to convey the sense that the speaker is only half talking to his auditor. This in itself, however, serves to create a point of interest in terms of character, by revealing the dynamics of the speaker-auditor relationship.

It should be noted that although for convenience I will refer to the speaker as male and auditor as female, I see the gender of both speaker and auditor as interchangeable and irrelevant to the interpretation of character in this poem. I wanted rather to communicate the intimacy of a long-term, co-habiting couple, and hoped to convey the sense that although the speaker is addressing another person, he is speaking in the completely unguarded and unselfconscious manner of a soliloquist. This level of familiarity is also conveyed through the casual and seemingly habitual irritation the speaker has for certain attitudes and behaviour of the auditor.

Another respect in which the presence of the text-world auditor is important in this poem is as a conceit to make the speaker describe out loud the action taking place outside the window. The idea that the auditor is positioned so as to be unable to view

the activities of the neighbour for herself is set up in line seven ('you won't believe') and provides an on-going reason for the speaker to give a verbal commentary on the neighbour's activity.

I also wanted to add another level of drama; so that it is not just the action outside the window (which could be considered as happening 'off-stage') but action in the speaker's immediate environment which forms part of the dramatic interest. There are two places in the text in which the utterance is affected by such activity, in the form of auditor reaction. The first is half way through stanza four, when the speaker seems to be interrupted:

and say no one can disagree -  
well, if it *is* analogy  
or clever banter, tell me then  
why is he cataloguing them? (4.3-6)

Here the dash is meant to emphasise some sort of interjection. The auditor has said something like 'He doesn't mean it literally' or 'It's an analogy'. The disruption of his train of thought, the indignant 'well' (4.4) and the particular stress indicated through the italics, are all intended to bolster the sense of interruption. The other instance of definite auditor reaction is with the question 'Will you laugh *then*?' (9.8). Again, the use of italics is useful in aiding the reader in the identification of action in the coding environment, with the stress on '*then*' hopefully working to indicate laughter in the 'now' of the coding environment.

This flagging-up of auditor reaction prompted me to consider the implications of exophoric reference. In the previous chapter I noted the way in which Julia Copus, while suggesting speech on the part of the auditor, ensures that the utterance still makes sense when only a non-verbal reaction is imagined. My poem is rather more reliant on the interpretation of a definite vocal reaction. As noted above, the fourth line of stanza four demands the identification of auditor-speech in order to make sense. This line perhaps technically changes the status of the poem, rendering it a duologue, in which we only hear one side of the exchange (although this effect is not exploited elsewhere in the piece). The unambiguous signalling of laughter, however, seems somewhat different. Rather than being related to unheard speech, laughter seems rather more like a 'sound effect' within the coding environment; equivalent to the commonly employed conceits of a bell ringing or clock chiming. Thinking of this in terms of stage drama seems to clarify the difference. It is perhaps helpful to consider whether each instance of

‘action in the present’ in a poem can be equated to the omission of stage directions or, rather more significantly, the omission of dialogue from a character on stage.

For the other two poems of this kind (‘The Laboratory’ and ‘The Other Side’) I chose to use blank verse. Less obtrusive than the rhymed tetrameter of the previous poem, this form seemed to give me a suitable balance of control and freedom. Although both poems contain ‘action in the present’, the action is more integral to ‘The Other Side’. Indeed, with this poem I set myself the task of conveying significant action in the coding environment. It should be noted that although the initial subject matter was inspired by Browning’s ‘Mr Sludge the ‘Medium’’, the dynamics and concerns of the piece are quite different.

The presence and importance of some kind of addressee is immediately established through the interrogative of the opening line (‘So everything I’ve told you is a lie?’). This question also works to draw attention to previous, possibly contiguous, discourse between the speaker and auditor, highlighting the possibility that the ‘you’ might be a specific auditor, rather than the reader of the poem. The idea of the addressee as a text-world auditor, sharing the coding environment of the speaker is swiftly established in line two (‘Get out then, or I’ll call security’). This line not only establishes a dramatically-realised coding environment, in which it is possible for action to be performed (such as the removal of the auditor) but, in relation to the first line, implies some kind of auditor response. The speaker has asked a question with line one and is provoked into speaking again by the auditor’s response to that question, whether verbal or non-verbal. This once again highlights the importance of ambiguity in the nature of auditor-response in the dramatic monologue. The subject matter of this poem seemed particularly suited to just such ambiguity. The last line of stanza one, in which the speaker breaks off from a description to observe ‘there’s that laugh again’ (1.16), is intended to suggest a derisory laugh from the auditor in reaction to the speaker’s portentous vision, but also to leave room for this to be interpreted as supernatural activity perceived only by the psychic.

The piece conforms to the definition of dramatic monologue in its rhetorical style; presenting a speaker who attempts to manipulate, convince and control her auditor. The line ‘Now wait, sit down again’ (4.4) is intended to show the speaker attempting to control the auditor’s physical movements within the coding environment and to remind the reader of the dramatic context. In order to fully make sense of this line we must interpret the utterance as taking place alongside and integrated with physical action in the coding environment. It is also intended to reveal something of the

auditor's reaction to the lines immediately preceding this. I wanted to imply that she had got up in anger or exasperation. The encoding of this kind of action is primarily intended to guide the reader in forming her own opinion of the speaker. The other moment in which recognition of some kind of auditor response is necessary is near the end of the poem, between stanzas five and six. Here I wished to show that the speaker's attempts to convince her auditor have failed, and that the auditor will not concede that 'there are different ways of knowing things' (5.16). This is indicated by the corresponding 'then' at the opening of the final stanza and the resumption of a more hostile attitude towards the auditor. The coding environment of the poem is thus foregrounded again towards the end of the poem and this is reinforced by the imperative mood and reference to a material object contained in the poem's penultimate line ('Go! There's the door!').

By comparison the 'action in the present' of 'The Laboratory' is minimal and subtle. In this poem I wanted to convey the sense of a definite, perhaps pivotal, at least poignant, moment in the speaker's life. As with the previous poem, the use of a case-making or self-justifying tone could be said to encourage the reader to interpret the poem as dramatic (although this is presumably only due to the nature of the precedent set by Browning). The fact that the utterance forms part of a telephone conversation does however provide the conceit which guides the reader to interpret the piece as dramatic, in as far as it is to be imagined spoken aloud. Yet the poem could be said to contain something of a twist with regard to its mode of utterance: the revelation in the last line of the auditor's absence. This raises the question of exactly when the auditor hung-up and whether he was even there at the beginning of the fragment with which we are presented. The matter-of-fact way in which the speaker concludes that his auditor is no longer listening and 'has been gone some time' (6.10) is also intended to be revelatory in terms of character. In the final six and a half lines of the poem I wanted to convey dark, possibly suicidal, thoughts, which would be reinforced by the revelation that the speaker has gone past the need to convince his auditor. The piece turns out to be more introspective than it first seems, and what is at stake in the present of the poem turns out to be more bound up with the inner turmoil of the speaker; the decision he will come to about his future, or the state of mind he will talk himself into, than with the persuasion or manipulation of an auditor.

#### 4. Some conclusions

I found the three 'modern-day' dramatic monologues particularly interesting in terms of creating a character and argument. In relation to Robert Langbaum's idea of sympathy and judgement, I considered whether readers might respond differently to contemporary speakers. Dorothy Mermin suggests of Browning's dramatic monologues that those with contemporary settings would have been met with a different reception from his historical pieces. This is because his readers' judgement in such pieces would not have been 'disarmed by historical distance' (58). Mermin's point implies that readers are able to relate more fully to a speaker's situation if it occurs within a social environment, the norms and mores of which they are familiar. Yet the idea that follows from this, that judgement is 'disarmed' in historical pieces, is somewhat problematic. In writing my historical dramatic monologues I found the use of unfamiliar settings sometimes worked to allow the reader to gain a clearer perspective on the speaker's attitudes and behaviour. Historical settings can feel less cluttered with unwanted signification and serve to throw the personality of the speaker into relief.

The importance of character and the idea of character-analysis as central to the meaning of the poem was something I found frustratingly difficult to highlight in some of the poems categorised as lyric-dramatic hybrids. As already discussed, many of these poems are intended to be read as dramatic fragments, yet in those where neither a definite character speaks nor a text-world auditor is established, the present tense seems more likely to be interpreted as a conceit for the revivification of a past event. The ideas of genre and precedent seem key here. Due to the lack of obvious signs to the contrary, a number of the hybrid poems seem likely to be read through the prism of lyric poetry, while the precedent set by Browning enables the dramatic elements of my historical dramatic monologues to be readily interpreted as such. The use of art and artists as subject matter places them even more firmly in the Browningsque tradition.

It is perhaps the fact that a connection with this precedent is less obvious in my 'present-day' dramatic monologues which creates a certain awkwardness or tension. In these poems a tension also seems to exist between the concerns and rhetoric of the social world and the more meditative lyric impulse. Mermin identifies the prominence and importance of this 'world of other people' in dramatic monologue and notes the effect it has on a speaker's emotional and imaginative life (145). She sees this 'world of other people' as the 'resistant medium in which the lyric impulse has to operate and which constantly threatens to make poetic utterance either impossible or absurd' (145).

This acknowledgement of the lyric impulse and its presence within the dramatic monologue seems to help make sense of the genre, and Mermin's observation regarding the associated difficulties of articulation feels particularly astute. In writing my modern-day dramatic monologues I strove to find devices and conceits to make the sustained articulation of the speaker's thoughts and emotions plausible. I was keenly aware of the threat of absurdity, which seemed to be brought about by a tension between the stylised and naturalistic elements in the presentation of speech and action. It was these difficulties, bound up with the rather obscure nature of the poetic precedent, which made these pieces more challenging to write and which makes them feel artistically risky.

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## Part 2: Men, Women and Mice

### Contents

<b>Bram Stoker's Boyhood .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>With Roses and Locomotives .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Mouse in a Government Building.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>You are Charlotte at Roe Head .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Somewhere to get to .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Building.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Cafe Absinthe .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Blueprint .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Civic Space.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Feast .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Standard Double.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Conkeror.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Commuter .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>We do not mention .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Cemetery View .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Before The Garden.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Speldhurst.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>A Game of Patience .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Galuppi's Ghost .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Creepers .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>The Act of Laughing.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>In The Yellow House .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>The Execution of Prado.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Our April At-Home .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Emma Advises .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>John Ruskin to Mrs. Acland .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>From the Memoir of Georgiana Burne-Jones.....</b>	<b>128</b>

<b>Claims .....</b>	<b>129</b>
1. Warning at the Barrel Inn.....	129
2. The Ballad of Mrs. Kirk.....	131
3. A Head Clerk’s House.....	135
4. The Sermon and <i>The Trail of Sin</i> .....	136
5. George.....	137
6. The Apothecary’s Widow – a Sensation Story.....	138
7. A Further Lamentation of the Late Inundation and Ensuing Claims for Compensation	140
8. The Particulars .....	142
9. Claim for Mary Ann Pickering, Aged 8 .....	143
<b>Monologue at an Upstairs Window .....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>The Other Side.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>The Laboratory .....</b>	<b>148</b>

## Bram Stoker's Boyhood

Let us take heart and say  
that every beginning is opaque.  
In a house set back on a crescent  
I was bolstered into shape to see  
my brothers disappear hotfoot  
to lessons or the lake beyond  
the mudflats stretching inland from Clontarf.

My head was turbid with the tales  
my mother gravely fed to me  
on darkening afternoons -  
topfull of murderous embroilments  
from the depths of castle feasting halls  
and desolate shipyard watchmen  
and the stalking forms their vigils brought.

When sanguine, I would let the words  
of our compunctious nurse.  
Her stock of sayings rattled biliously  
through my frame: *Most men, be sure,*  
*would do little for God if, Heaven forbid,*  
*the Devil were dead.* Night rushed silty hours in  
to string these dark pearls out - until

I felt the tidal rucking of my bed.  
I thought if I could raise myself enough  
the perilous rocks of Dollymount,  
the Bull Wall of the deep-cut causeway,  
the row of stranded cottages, steep steps  
scrubbed grey in the moonlight,  
would cast themselves fantastically before me.

But as I drifted farther out they would grow tiny,  
held beside the vessel of my thumb  
or entangled in the bristles of my lashes  
as again I fought to take their measure,  
failing then to discern where each stopped  
or began or why I must try to capture them  
or how they would ever bring me here.

## With Roses and Locomotives

'It is with roses and locomotives (not to mention acrobats Spring electricity Coney Island the 4th of July the eyes of mice and Niagara Falls) that my "poems" are competing. They are also competing with each other, with elephants, and with El Greco.'

E. E. Cummings.

You hear the *rosa banksiana's* perfect miniatures  
are blooming now in gardens further south,  
and even here in the long-row shadow of our terraced street  
backyards are again made durable, re-hung with spring and dusk.  
But hold still a while, breathe, try not to make a scene.

The spiders may be arch high-wire and spin;  
lavish acrobats, thinking nothing of autumn,  
vibrissal twitching behind the seedlings mean  
we're fixed a moment, weighed, then left to be,  
but not everything is such bewitched succession.

Look up to the backs of these houses either side.  
You know the slow stew of privacy,  
staid shapes obscured by bathroom glass.  
Further off an attic window's tilt  
lets out the mute electric of a train set.

You cannot be El Greco, a hot-dog eating contest  
or ticker-tape parade. These things are larger than you  
and met with suddener - will always cause more fuss  
among a certain type of scarf-wearer - Niagara Falls  
to the whinnying of the old stone water feature.  
Do not complain to your neighbours, nor of them,  
nor put on the hat of the plumed white elephant.

Instead return to that attic window, slip us through  
to the painstaking intimacy of the model railway:  
a countryside, a puddle-town of shops with awning,  
a market day and level crossing, where a figure,  
brusque as a rose and eyes picked out in sterling grey,  
stands, blunted hands thrown up, at the locomotive's dash  
for the null of the tunnel he cannot stop.

## **Mouse in a Government Building**

They've had their fingers burnt before  
pulling rabbits out of hats.  
We stay hushed in the seams  
supposing that's the reason  
they are demonstrating caution.

There is a rumour that somewhere  
in the future there'll be traps,  
that, going forward, they are planning  
to dismantle the architecture.

We hear decision dates spill by  
and cabinets bulge with problems  
awkward as the faces shelved inside.  
Morsels are brought to the table,  
seasoned talk of aims and agency.

We take stock, make fit our purpose.  
In the half-light we ply and fathom  
the building. We will never tell them  
which treaty right we are exercising.

## You are Charlotte at Roe Head

Lying here, hands folded in the coffin style,  
open-eyed and silent in the dying light,  
breath deep and refute, as she would,  
relentless prattle: the ornamental lisping  
of the girls below.

The dormitory is high and airy-wide but conceive  
a longing for the confinement of the parsonage.  
The spectre of Branwell uncanny in the hall.  
The narrow windows channelling the vastness  
of the moor.

At Roe Head, shrouded in the greyness of your dress,  
you brook the hours at your class-front desk,  
each day take the part of the stern church mouse,  
burying deep the exuberant ease and candour  
of your home character.

These evenings, mired, feel how you are  
a passenger in a waking nightmare.  
No better company than a stalking ghost,  
you might apologise years later in a letter  
to Miss Woolner.

Yet evenings are the only time you own:  
thoughts climb up, as from the dark walls of a well.  
Knocked back by day they fall and petrify.  
Swallowing your grief you lift your eyes up  
to the hills -

But now keep still - the girls are on their way  
to fetch their combs and curling papers,  
elbowing and prating purple versions of the day.  
So you, and she, in the growing gloom, remain unseen  
as they come clamouring in.

## Somewhere to get to

I open a window,  
watch someone walking dully along.

The day is wide and bright-cracked grey.  
The mail arrives:  
sharp-edged cellophane cascade.

Today  
I will go into the city.  
It will be enormous,  
someone always in my way.

I cram the heel of bread  
into the toaster's stiff  
and tarnished grate.

The feathered wax of butter melts.

I catch myself,  
drop the plate.

## Building

Crossing the ocean sealed in a tin can is no fun:  
the darkness and nausea – dread of it coming to an end.  
Everything piecemeal of the shuddering torchlight,  
blind trust in the bastards to remember something  
is breathing down in the hold. Thank Christ today  
I work the skyline, buffered by the noisy air.

When the lorry doors were levered open  
we arched and scrambled like cats from a sack.  
But from up here, looking back, better that  
we were uncovered – questioned for hours  
about home and why we left and why we came.  
For the first time someone writing it down.

I said to myself come Hell I was not going back.  
I would find a thing to do. Never frightened by heights,  
as a child from the top of the tallest tree  
I gazed down on the mischief of others:  
the sleights of women, lies of men,  
the pedlars' bells and curses rising up to me.

The date of my hearing slipped – kept sliding  
until one day someone with a suit and committee  
signed a treaty that changed things for me.  
Rules were translated to the language of my country.  
Since then I must have rendered half this city  
and the drills ring in my bones now like a charm.

## Cafe Absinthe

The drain's reek  
pushes us out of our building again.  
*He* says they are mulched to the rim  
with gulped-down dreams of the hopeless.  
I think something shuffled in, bedded-down  
and died in them.

And now we are here:  
backs to the wall with the mirror,  
ordering coffee, sitting like penitents  
over the dregs of it more than an hour. No one's  
complaining, no one demanding to face up  
to the international situation.

I am considering absinthe  
the green of city bridge sub terrain,  
how the nets at the window set a haze on the drizzle,  
the grimy mechanical churning of coins  
from the arcade next-door's gloom. We order drinks,  
will try to ride the downturn.

He says who can know  
we will not do something brave and spontaneous tomorrow?  
That we won't all suddenly throw down the reins  
and shaking our heads clear leap from the merry-go-round?  
But as the slurred and whirring tunes  
well up again next-door

I know that woman in the mirror behind  
has the eyes of the jacketed monkey and the soul  
as it crashes its cymbals to the organ's grind.

## Blueprint

Each day I wave the crusted lorries through  
from a cabin at the mouth of it  
and watch them shunt and tilt and spew  
their foul loads in the designated pit.

And picture filth already deepening  
in city bins – with last night's carcass gone,  
let's start afresh with coffee cups,  
dog ends, tickets wedged with chewing gum.

So someone in a kitchen cannot face  
the heat of toast, or finds a primal urge  
to scour the fridge, until, the weekly purge  
is done with, wheeled through gennels to the curb.

I keep this soiled outskirts of the town,  
the company of gulls through every day.  
They circle, pry and claw each reeking mound,  
unruffled by the five-year strategy:

the plan that sets out what is to become  
of this place when we've stuffed its gaping guts,  
the regulation treatment's calmed it down,  
they've monitored the gases, sewn it up.

The blueprints show apartment blocks that stare  
out at an innocent but strangely fenced-off heath,  
their surcharge-paying tenants unaware  
of the fetid city gizzards underneath.

## Civic Space

*after Katherine Mansfield*

The Casual Play Worker gathers them round:  
*These are plants the dinosaurs ate.*  
*We are going to paint them – wait!*

But they're bursting full of squawks  
and drop haphazardly in groups  
across the sunny glasshouse paths.

Above, in the arid, open space  
great blades cut time, cool and precise.  
Cameras on arched beams swivel and shine.

Next door they're building a hotel.  
A yellow crane robustly hoists,  
egg-yolk hardhats scoot below.

Back down here on the hothouse floor  
Soup of the Day is Organic Carrot.  
Lunch-breakers absentmindedly navigate.

A City Centre Ambassador  
stands blinking by the refreshment bar.  
Her City Council insignia

flaring now and then in the filtered sun.  
She waits, packed up with civic knowledge.  
The place will shut at 5 o'clock.

Meanwhile the pre-school pterodactyls  
squabble and swoop over yellows and greens.  
One of them squeals through the cycad leaves

seeing the glaring gold eye of a *big* dinosaur!  
Another stares upwards silently watching  
the crane swing its load like the meteor.

## Feast

Another wet lunch like this  
could finish me off.  
The rows of baguettes  
cling wretchedly to their iceberg,  
the pizzas weep their virgin oil

while you stew in your offices,  
scrabbling for change  
for the snack machine,  
nipping to the canteen,  
unwrapping something  
you've brought from home.

You know I'd make you welcome.

Why do you think this tank of pasties  
sadly turn their bed of paper clear?  
Because there is no one here  
to clutch them warm and eagerly away.  
I stare at the pin board of missing persons,  
trying to decipher their preferences.

Come home my friends – I have delicacies of every kind.

## Standard Double

The suite's sucked clean,  
prepared again,  
a welcome greeting  
programmed on its plasma screen,

the laundry trolley,  
harried with its dirty linen,  
deftly swept  
anonymous off left.

The next checked-in  
hasn't planned to sleep alone;  
flicks off the name  
unfaithful on the screen,

stares out at the cloud  
bunking up in the suburbs,  
turns back and is spited  
by the touches in the bathroom:

the spotlight, that soap-stack  
stuck up with a ribbon  
left perched by the mirror  
like a fucking valentine.

## Conkeror

My father had a mania for  
those implements of petty war.  
In my satchel they would lie, braced,  
extracted from a shock-blue sky.  
In the blazoned hall,  
tormented by Monday Assembly,  
I would recall

how he intercepted that slicing drop:  
hands rigged above his head,  
nostrils flared capillary red,  
sun-squinting through the leaves.  
A missile hurled into the tree -

a thorned case caught and handed solemnly to me.

A missile hurled into the tree.  
Sun squinting through the leaves,  
nostrils flared capillary red,  
hands rigged above his head,  
how he intercepted that slicing drop.

I cannot help recall,  
tormented by mundane assembly  
in this corporate hall,  
distracted by a shock-blue sky.  
In memory they lie, braced;  
those implements of petty war  
my father had a mania for.

## Commuter

He had considered moving to the city,  
but realised one day, or rather, evening,  
that all he really knew there was the station

and the girl – should he say woman?  
- with her latte and her muffin  
and just the time to sit and eat them  
in the lurid light of Café Pumpkin;

who draped her coat over the orange acrylic,  
buoyed up the hang-dog patter of the assistant,  
and in an instant, coat re-buttoned, could become  
Celia Johnson; prim, amid the crowd  
on the canopied platform.

He knew how the train would come,  
how everyone would edge jealously forward,  
hating Cityliving counterparts  
already home behind high windows  
square as post-it notes

or how, to their dismay, a disjointed voice might  
proclaim, quite unremorsefully,  
it was sorry to announce the delay...

## **We do not mention**

We do not mention that the meat was tough  
and rise before the streaky plates congeal  
to do the washing-up and then make love.

I show compassion that your day was rough  
and long. Not wanting to reach overkill  
we do not mention that the meat was tough.

Dessert was not what I'd been dreaming of:  
iced cream in see-through plastic tubs. Oh well,  
we'll do the washing-up and then make love.

At dinner, when I said I'd had enough,  
you looked like hell and asked if I was ill.  
I did not mention that the meat was tough.

Though, grimacing, you grip the scouring cloth,  
and marigolds don't add to your appeal,  
we'll do the washing-up and then make love.

You wash, I dry and put away the stuff,  
and in this squeaky, slippery silence still  
we do not mention that the meat was tough,  
just do the washing-up and then make love.

## Cemetery View

Whole day  
to change the bloody duvet.  
This carpeted floor's a state  
close-up: crevasse upon crevasse  
of infestation.  
The sun sidles round  
to persecute the lounge.  
The revelation: further filth.  
Temptation is to burn  
this whole place down.

It's dusk.  
A man with shabby jacket  
and wrapped-up pack  
of piping chips  
has come to feed the cemetery rats;  
unwinds the grease-slaked bandage -  
watch the mass  
of greedy hinds  
emerge and gorge  
a gluttonous repast.

A whole day,  
and what about these spores  
behind the toilet?  
And when I scrub  
the off-scourings that fall?

I know  
underground the rats are forced  
to heed the line of the Dissenters' wall,  
surfacing at enclaves, empty of their angels,  
a tomb where evidence has been enscrewled,  
that it be known: *Laura & Becka are whores.*

Beneath this window,  
the crocuses flirt.  
By night they'll tremble  
in tattered skirts,  
thirstful and buffeted  
in the earth's dark hold,  
made a spectacle  
unto the world.

## Before The Garden

"Mistaken long, I sought you then  
In busy companies of men"  
'The Garden' Andrew Marvell

This morning yet again you aren't  
a party to the lift's ascent.  
Assailed by bag and coughing wretch  
I scarcely make it to my desk  
but sweep the violation off  
to see if you will show yourself  
in trawling email sent adrift  
across the night-time's slack abyss.

Beside the photocopier's splash  
and idling murmur, hum and dash,  
I linger, hoping to discern  
the rhythm of the taciturn  
and magic-eye the corporate web  
of big-time bosses in vignette.  
But fail to make that schema drop  
the secret of each sanguine sop.

The stationery's dim-lit cove  
would be a sanctum of repose  
if it were not graffitied with  
the evidence of baser love:  
initials etched on stapleguns  
and whetted pencils. With moist hands  
I take the marker's dizzy notes,  
peer through the windowed envelopes...

The afternoon pads lamely in  
bamboozled to the fold again  
but as the phone bleats off the hook  
I fear you've been misdocketed  
and find my heart grows weak, abhors  
the long and obfuscating clause.  
I rush at, snap shut and throw down  
each case you have absconded from.

Relieved at five the hat-stand waves  
to the precision of the safe;  
its thirty-west and forty-east  
the dial's dance of slick release.  
I glimpse its cavern's emptiness  
where spoils like precious fruit are pressed.  
While in the nooks of bottom drawers  
the mice begin to yawn and paw.

A cleaner starts to vacuum up.

I'll leave the dregs to fudge this mug,  
the office phantom in the glass,  
the city too, on bending close,  
with golden arches, neon strips  
and tilting, half-spent epithets.  
A hive of lights that writhe and smear.  
Perhaps I'm wrong to seek you here.

## Speldhurst

It is always late summer,  
an impractical hour,  
as we begin to draw near.

From her rocking chair  
she will have heard  
the whistle of the train,  
the church bell swinging  
on the breeze.

Leaving the platform  
we follow the lane.  
Mowing grazes the graveyard air,  
drapes a greenish haze  
around each cherub's generous hips...

I always have her  
set out rose-licked china,  
arrange a plate of crystallized ginger,  
stand back in birdsong silence.

We linger in the long shade  
of a crumbling wall,  
watch the sermon's stragglers  
gabble down pathways.

And all of this is prompted  
by a radiator's blockage.  
The plumber who visited, bled,  
dislodged whatever it was,  
vanished, never billing us, told  
how mice nesting in the city archives  
devoured those records:  
chewed dozingly through  
the best part of a century  
to leave the only testament  
within the parish boundary,  
how, by-the-by, with plumbing  
he dabbled in genealogy.

Inside the church let us approach the Vicar,  
have him bring his eyes to rest on us,  
as steady bronze as the heavying plate  
passed among his bookish parishioners.

His earnest gesture leads us to a volume,  
tallow-soft and open on a velvet cushion.  
And as we bend to read the elegant hand  
a late sun sets the stained glass all ablaze.

Back at home our hot pipes flourish,  
rueful mice bring clods of laundered lagging.

## **A Game of Patience**

*after the painting by Meredith Frampton*

She thinks she hears a movement at the door.  
It doesn't move. Its heavy iron studs  
are blind and stupidly inscrutable.

The clock before her cannot help to tell  
what time is left, if any left at all.  
She worries at the threads of arguments.  
The sharp words and the petulances  
wheel around, and then march all the things to say,  
unsaid, and yesterday and yesterday.

And what will happen now, a clearing out,  
a going back? She turns another card,  
remembers how determined he had seemed  
that they had seen the very last of England.  
Behind the door her mother would be drawn  
in white, and waiting, patient for the time.

Any moment now the doctor will emerge  
and she will pause mid-card to claim his glance.  
He'll step with vigour out of this chill house.

## Galuppi's Ghost

*after Robert Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's'*

At the masked ball on the last day  
leaning sleekly brow to brow we  
bore a finely wrought toccata  
in that alabaster hall.

Night-scent drifted through the windows,  
tall as ships with masts of muslin,  
softly veiling and unveiling  
bridges racked with moon and shadow.

Waiters wound with fluted crystal  
through the pristine-featured couples.  
We had barely reached our table  
when the clavichordist changed his tune:

jarred the faces  
jaunty or serene  
set a careful skeleton  
in minor key  
gave it ribs to jibe and crack  
the Sistine-white veneer

made it jangle  
terrible and true  
as if he saw the masks  
we bought that fortnight  
mortal, empty-eyed and chilly  
as our Decree Absolute.

## Creepers

'Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence?'

The Horla, Guy de Maupassant.

It's blissful in the calming morning light,  
all snares and shadows undermined, although  
they creep across the lawn to you at night.

The men who work the river shout their bright  
'halloos' – slip past and back all day and so  
it's blissful in the chamomile light.

The shameful matter is you have to fight  
the sense that something watching from below  
will creep across the lawn to you at night,

get in and perch an inch just out of sight  
and parched brains in a frenzy overthrow  
the calmness of the blissful morning light.

The boating parties' table cloths are white  
as flags made to surrender once you know  
they creep across the lawn to you at night.

I keep my wits about me as I write.  
It's plain they are not pacifists, and though  
it will be blissful in the coming morning light  
they're streaming fast across the lawn – hold tight.

## The Act of Laughing

*Smile* I said.

I thought she wanted pictures,  
stepped away to size her in my frame.

Her back to the grassy pit  
where flames must once have raged

see how she gazed  
in that strange moment's lull,  
before the hoard of wild flowers.

*Smile* I said.

She knew the guide wanted us back.  
*You English are so good at time* he'd said.

And five minutes behind  
the tour was playing out again:

the next group herded and craning to hear  
how parents for luck or salvation from ruin  
would offer sacrifice to Tanit, Goddess of the Moon,  
and mighty Baal, whose great sloped arms of bronze  
they'd drape their fresh-slain first-borns on.

How the drumming, bucking crowd danced wild  
as the infant would begin the slide towards the fire,  
which made its eager limbs contract  
and little milk-toothed mouth pull back as if in joy,  
or rapt, calling the specifics of some game  
to playmate or younger brother, say.  
And so the Act of Laughing got its name.

*Smile* I said, that one last time.

And there she stands  
bright-cheeked with talk of death and flames.

## In The Yellow House

*Vincent Van Gogh to Paul Gauguin, Arles, December 1888.  
(The picture is Van Gogh's 'La Berceuse')*

Madame Roulin in this picture holds the string  
that rocks the cradle, lulls its occupants,  
in mind of songs their mothers used to sing.

She pulls the thread and watches day advance  
until a single star pins up the sky;  
a dawn as Rousseau or Daubigny paints.

You think Rousseau's mornings nothing, but the way  
the Barbizons catch nature - I could weep!  
How can you shrug at such sad majesty?

Are we to take a walk before we sleep?  
Perhaps a brandy at old Ginoux's place.  
Our funds can stretch to that - and it might keep

the Horla from my room - buy us some peace.  
You know I'm better stunned against the storm;  
the only time these roaring colours cease.

Inside the crib the fishermen are warm  
and rocked yet tethered by this mother's pull.  
Forgetful of the catch they stretch and yawn.

Thick tendrils creep along the nursery wall,  
between them dahlias rear up and stare,  
but Mother Roulin keeps watch over all.

Where are you going? Can I meet you there?  
The evening air will be a salve to me.  
At least say you won't go beyond the square!

I'll follow him and beg for clemency.

## The Execution of Prado

*Paul Gauguin, January 1889, on his return to Paris after staying with Van Gogh in the Yellow House in Arles.*

And still I have not had the sleep I'm due  
for as we smoked and talked in Place Pigalle  
that notice from the city guard came through  
informing us of the impending death  
by guillotine of Prado. Murderer  
he may indeed have been; he held himself  
in just the manner of a character  
from Zola or a Balzac tragedy.  
We doubted they could snuff him out so easily.

So I and Shuffernecker made our way  
across the town to stamp our numbing feet  
beneath the grimy square of starless sky.  
But Christ how long they kept us captive there  
before they even brought out the machine!  
Another hour before the man himself  
was dragged on to complete the tawdry scene.  
They need not have demeaned him with their chains;  
he bore the spectacle with weary insolence -

until the blade came down upon his nose,  
then roared and cursed his executioners,  
who blanched and bustled with the shaft and ropes  
and forced his shoulders back onto the block  
until his shaven head lay in the box.  
It could have been the jute they lined it with;  
the blood thick as impasto on the gauze,  
perhaps the violent sloping of his brow,  
for I was put in mind of Vincent and of Arles.

And having not yet slept since coming here  
and travelled arduously all yesterday,  
my brain feels full of that strange atmosphere,  
as bristling as the air before a storm.  
I think I'm seeing Vincent everywhere,  
still smell the oily pungence of that house,  
as glaring yellow as the wheat fields there  
and just as dark and creaking at its heart;  
a livid place where dreams and nightmares come apart.

Well, you have had a whiff of what went on,  
how no one would come near towards the end.  
The evenings were unconscionably long.  
The children even stopped tormenting him  
as if they somehow sensed him on the brink.  
So do not push me further on it now.  
I feel so weary I can hardly think.

I'll drain this final tumbler and retire  
with neither stamina nor stomach, nor desire.

## Our April At-Home

*Christina Rossetti to her brother, Dante Gabriel.*

That long-awaited afternoon  
the tea things tinked their gentle tune  
but, once served out, there fell a note  
of awkwardness about the room  
I've not forgot.

All conversation seemed to fail  
no matter what the theme or tale.  
She was not eager, as you wrote,  
to meet with us, and sought to veil  
her chagrin not.

The time drew on at snail pace.  
We cursed the gold clock's knavish face.  
I traced a flush along her throat  
as mother turned the talk to lace  
- a last resort.

I grant she is supremely fair  
and with a graceful, bird-like air:  
a cushat dove, sweet in its cote.  
Yet mordancy was also there,  
which jarred somewhat.

The spell is cast and in your power  
she waits the fate-appointed hour.  
Her knight draws near, by steed, by boat,  
to sweep her from her cloistered tower,  
this lady of Shallot.

But tinged with fear *he will not come*  
and wan with waiting for the sun,  
though spring sings brightly o'er the moat  
her grange is bare, her prospect glum.  
*He cometh not.*

She wonders how long she can wait,  
so drearily, to catch her mate.  
Your hand would prove the antidote  
and if you'd cease to hesitate,  
could mend the plot.

She nursed her cup, declined to take  
a slice of plum or seeded cake.  
Her famous hair appeared to float  
mock-halo like, and in its wake  
forget-me-not.

You brought her here to shine, enchant,  
but dull she sat, your hothouse plant,  
this one you fervently promote.  
By autumn then, you might recant  
and keep your heart.

## Emma Advises

*Emma Maddox Brown to Elizabeth Siddal*

Lizzie, let me in! They promised me  
a mere ten minute start ahead of them  
and Gabriel gave his word so grudgingly  
I know they follow hot upon my heels.  
How glad I am that you are out of bed  
and pale, poor thing, as if you never slept,  
and in your bombazine – see, as I said;  
its stiffness complements a sombre state.

Oh, Lizzie, you are not alone you know,  
in having spent a wretched, restless night.  
Our house-guest was determined that if he  
could find no peace, well, neither then should we!  
I know you can imagine just the way  
he paced and ranted, hurled himself about  
without a minute's thought for our good couch -  
on which he'd suddenly let loose his fists.

Three times he woke up Nolly with his howls,  
yet Ford would hush and shush and baby *him!*  
When I said the dramatics were in vain,  
that he had squandered his last chance with you,  
he stopped, and gathered breath, and turned on *me*.  
And what a shock that I deserved the blame  
for this and every other incident:  
I put you up to being petulant!

Ford intervened and said it was not so;  
that you complained enough not to require  
encouragement. At this he ground his teeth,  
began again at our upholstery!  
He swore he loved you forty thousand times  
more than you knew, would crawl through fire, would, well -  
there *was* no worldly thing he would not do!  
I asked him would he eat a crocodile.

That frown's for *his* part in all this, not mine?  
Ah, see now, here they come across the fields!  
Was that ten minutes' start? Make haste, sit here,  
and move those flowers to the lower shelf,  
and let us drape the curtain by like this –  
there! Just the meanest slip for him to peep  
inside and shudder at your suffering,  
until you sadly bid me let him in.

## John Ruskin to Mrs. Acland

*Shortly after Ruskin's protégé Elizabeth Siddal has stayed with the Aclands at Ruskin's behest.*

But pardon that in her you call *ungraciousness*  
and come to view it in a softer cast of light.  
Shall we take this way, down towards your Grecian porch?  
If I recall, the colours are unparalleled  
around this season, as the afternoon grows late.

If you could try to overlook the frightful state  
in which she kept her room, I would be most obliged.  
I know it is provoking but these geniuses -  
large and small - are all alike! Yes, *genius*  
(that sketch she left you was an invalid's attempt).

I know Rossetti and know he should not have dreamt  
of giving her his soul if she were not all that  
is good and gentle. Furthermore, my parents found  
her charming - Father swore that live before us stood  
a thirteenth-century Florentine of noble birth!

You found her sadly agitated by ill-health,  
no doubt compounded by the dreadful precipice  
her suitor – dare I say - has set her trembling on.  
Oh, not in malice – more through sheer wrongheadedness!  
Yet still her honour blusters at such altitude –

remains intact, of course: reluctantly renewed  
in strength and ardour through endurance – just as these  
primroses, dallying along our path, are bright  
for striving with the brutish breeze. Yet don't they long  
for temperate days beneath a modest haze-draped sun?

But let's not try our nerves by having our talk run  
along that dark vein of your former guest's malaise.  
This stroll was meant to build us hearty appetites!  
She is much better for what dearest Henry's done.  
What was it now that your good husband diagnosed?

Yes, *mental power long pent-up* which he supposed  
to have been *lately over-tasked*. He is astute.  
I have insisted she abstain, at once, from work  
and strongly recommended travelling abroad,  
but begged her not to think of choosing Italy

which would, I know, excite her senses fearfully  
and bring her to a vicious fever in a week.  
The South of France? A sound suggestion, I am sure!  
But were she my own sister how hard I should plead

a little cottage in some sheltered Welsh retreat.

My goodness, is not being useful and discreet  
the most unthanked and wearying of things?  
True happiness I think must be to bolt one's gates  
and lie all day upon the lawn – not dine too rich –  
and simply buy as many Turners as one can!

But what is this? I feel sure Henry said his plan  
for this west prospect was a quasi-wild domain  
of varied beauties, each grown for intrinsic worth.  
This craze for bedding out is just too much! I should  
advise your gardener – how he wants the natural touch!

## From the Memoir of Georgiana Burne-Jones

I wish I could recall more of that day:  
the reception we received at Wombat's Lair.  
I've something vaguely lodged about the way  
that Lizzie laughed, the way she wore her hair.  
I'm plucking out the image of an owl,  
whom Gabriel embroiled in a feud.  
They rushed at one another, Gabriel  
clang-clanging with his stick across the cage.  
Their eyes locked fast in fury – how he made  
the fearsome creature almost bark with rage!

Another afternoon at Hampton Court  
we lost ourselves completely in the maze.  
Upon the hedge-hemmed paths we danced and thought  
this how we'd spend our sumptuous every-days.  
We rounded corners, whirled, and doubled back,  
expecting half to meet ourselves again!  
Each time we lost or found our rightful track  
how Gabriel would whoop, declare his bliss,  
and Lizzie flutter, breathless, on his arm.  
We swore we'd always merry-make like this.

I see her standing in that little room  
to which she beckoned me on our return.  
Before its latticed window she removed  
her bonnet, and her hair, so loosely pinned,  
dropped down in soft and heavy deep-red wings.  
We mused on future schemes, imagining  
the wealth of colours, rooms to keep them in.  
That day her cheek was delicately bright;  
rose petals surely lay beneath the skin -  
her eyelids scarcely seemed to veil such light.

# Claims

## 1. Warning at the Barrel Inn

*Mr. Fountain sent his son, Stephenson Fountain, on horseback to Sheffield, to tell Mr. Gunson to come to the reservoir as soon as possible, as there was a crack in the embankment; and off the young man rode as fast as the darkness of the night, the fury of the tempest, and the mountainous nature of the road would permit.*

What a terrible slip -  
I hoped not to lose time,  
entrusted on such a grand errand as this.

Being driven two miles  
by the thundering gales,  
I was set to impress with the time that I made

but treacherous scree  
and a dark, downward course  
broke my damned horse's saddle girth!

I'll not take a flagon, Sirs, thank you the same.  
Momentarily only my ride is postponed;  
I fly on the moment my beast is returned!

Nay, this rain does not slow down one jot.  
You fellows may do well to keep  
your bacchanalian antics up!

What a different scene at the reservoir.  
My father does his utmost to assure  
that there is but an innocent crack  
...that is...fissure -  
even now the men still bend and puzzle,  
squint their hardest, with hoisted lamp,  
my father explaining over them that  
it is simply the inner part of the embankment,  
twixt the water and the puddle wall,  
how does he put it? *Subsiding* a little,  
that there really is no call for fright,  
no present danger - though some gents  
do not heed his words at all!

So I am sent to satisfy their frets,  
to fetch and deliver, the chief engineer,  
all the way from his West Street townhouse  
where I warrant he'll not welcome being roused!  
Yet I would be a fool indeed to shrink  
from such a chance to prove my mettle and  
- my horse!

Oh Gentlemen, please,  
do not stir from your seats.  
Proceed in your former, most jovial, stream!

I have spoken  
not to alarm but inform –

with God's speed  
I may not stop again  
'til these hooves greet the ear of Mr Gunson!

## 2. The Ballad of Mrs. Kirk

*In the house of Thomas Kirk and his wife lodged a neglecter of the flood warning,  
Henry Burkinshaw, known as Sheffield Harry.*

I knew the evening he arrived  
we'd taken in a fool,  
as taking from the drawer, a spoon,  
I'd chanced to let it fall.

It hit the floor, gave out a clang,  
its bowl stared up at me –  
a shining silver omen which  
fortold catastrophe.

Oh Sister, from your coastal home,  
enjoy this narrative.  
I'll tell you the particulars  
now you're assured we live!

\*\*\*

I felt, the evening of the flood,  
a dread chill through and through:  
my Thomas and our neighbour paced  
as if the talk were true.

Our lodger, Harry Burkinshaw  
burst in with all his fuss.  
He laughed at their queer, ghostly looks  
and scoffed, proclaiming thus:

“A dozen grown men squint and squawk,  
around a cavity  
so minor that I'll eat my hat  
and coat before I flee!”

They pressed him, but he brushed them off.  
“There's nothing to be done –  
the reservoir is more than safe;  
I know the ombudsman!”

So, with a flourish, off to bed  
old Harry swept instead.  
My Thomas and our neighbour sat;  
I took them tea and bread.

The fire made their eyes burn bright  
and hints of present danger  
made me shudder in my sweeping and  
retire to my chamber.

\*\*\*

Not upward of an hour had  
I washed and said my prayers:  
a most ungodly thumping seemed  
to come from next door's stairs.

Then Thomas dashed into the room  
and swiftly out again  
half-screaming "Love, we must depart -  
we'll drown if we remain!"

Between us then we roused the house,  
and made an urgent plea  
to leave no matter what their state,  
to forego modesty!

In states of varying undress  
across the bridge we fled.  
Why, Mrs Walton from next door  
was carried in her bed!

Just then as I was scrambling safe  
it came into my head,  
to my great horror, I had left  
poor Tim and Tabs for dead!

\*\*\*

So back across the iron bridge,  
still nightgown-clad, I race,  
and no one sees to stop me on  
that thronging hill's dark face.

Dear quivering Tim I gladly grab  
from out his little shack,  
and finding still a candle lit,  
upstairs to save my cat!

I drag her out from underneath  
my bed, which makes her hiss -  
then comes a gruff, uncivil voice:  
"What damned commotion's this?"

"Oh, Mr. Burkinshaw!" I cry  
"Is that you still in bed?"  
No time to harken at his door,  
I throw it wide instead.

He's by his elbows half propped up,  
and gaping in surprise,  
adorned in striped nightgown and cap -  
Wee-Willy-Winky-wise!

“Oh Mr. Burkinshaw” I chide,  
“You must get out of bed.  
The dam has burst, the water comes -  
the other lodgers fled!”

His only answer is a snort.  
I turn with puss and hound.  
(Have I not, Sister, often said  
I thought his mind unsound?)

Yet, as I glance back from the hall,  
‘though muttering and mocking,  
I do believe he's made a move  
and seized one worsted stocking.

But Tim and Tabs and I cannot  
delay one moment more.  
I clasp them, one beneath each arm,  
and stagger to the door.

And as we pass the parlour –oh -  
I scarce can find the words  
to tell you I had no hand free  
to fetch my poor song birds!

Across the bridge once more I dash.  
The river roars beneath  
so violently to gain the bank  
is such a great relief.

No sooner have we laid our feet  
and paws upon the ground,  
than roll a thousand thunder claps  
that echo all around!

And louder still and louder still  
and nearer draws the thunder.  
We scramble farther up the bank  
and turn and gawp in wonder –

Between the hills there slides a huge  
and horrifying sight:  
a roaring, foaming, monstrous thing.  
It charges with such might  
that trees are snapped and barns upturned  
and carried through the night!

And for a time the valley holds  
a violent, thrashing tide,  
just like a giant's peggy-tub,  
and everything inside,  
with tree trunks turned to dolly poles,  
is rattled and destroyed.

The bridge is lost – our house stands up  
for just a moment more –  
then shudders and is dashed away  
as if built out of straw.

The awful wash-load tumbles on  
and pounds the countryside,  
and nothing in its path can duck  
a terrifying ride

The noise subsides and up go cries  
lamenting foolish Harry  
(He had his chance and wouldn't budge -  
*I mourn my poor canary*).

\*\*\*

Well, Sister - Tim and Tabs and I,  
and Thomas, now reside  
in Neepsend, by the tanneries,  
which I cannot abide!

So, how I long to visit you  
and take the Blackpool air -  
to stroll the front and watch the gulls  
with sea-spray in our hair!

And 'though you rave about that great  
attraction built this year -  
I don't think, after my near miss,  
it wise to risk the pier!

### 3. A Head Clerk's House

*...the ruins were such as to strike the mind of the visitor with wonder that the destruction should have gone so far and yet have stopped where it did.*

So any passer-by may see the way  
his house stands gaping –frontage at its feet!  
Who would have thought he'd come to work today

sails full of wind as ever! When he lay  
our orders down we kept our winks discreet  
'though any passer-by may see the way

things were within his kingdom yesterday;  
the quilling on his bed, each royal pleat.  
To condescend to come to work today!

Such stock of silverware, they start to say,  
was managed through some elegant deceit  
and simple passers-by may see the way

each collar, cuff and front, pressed to obey;  
hangs rigid and meticulously neat,  
and still hang those ordained for work today!

His home's a doll's house – any eye may play  
across the scene, pulled open for the street  
and every passer-by must guess the way  
his savvy-faire will not quite work today!

#### 4. The Sermon and *The Trail of Sin*

*Local and District News – The Surrey Theatre – Other and more important engagements have prevented our usual notices of this place of amusement for the past week. The principal novelty is a new drama of the modern sensation school entitled “The Trail of Sin”.*

St. Stephen’s was popular yesterday night.  
The Reverend’s sermon most dreadfully good!  
How we all listened appalled and transfixed  
as he told of the terrible work of the flood.

Then he took up the bible with fire in his eyes  
and bade us think closely of Luke, Chapter 8.  
For all who were mawkish or burdened by loss,  
he would inquire of them “Where is your faith?”

Just like the disciples when crossing the lake  
we had to forbear and put trust in the Lord.  
The late Visitation was not wholly bad:  
the proud had been humbled and meekness restored.

Were you at the Trickett girls’ May Dance last year?  
Can you quite believe they lie cold in the ground?  
I felt rather odd when the Reverend told how  
the swine, full of devils, were driven and drowned.

The candles were fancy and never so tall –  
the forms which they threw on the windows, exquisite!  
I never saw so many flowers before.  
Our faces looked buoyant – becomingly lit!

I chided myself with rebukes most severe  
and prayed for the wretched with all of my might,  
for all of that talk of the Fallen and Sin  
had put me in mind of the theme for tonight!

And Reverend Burbidge up there at the front  
had somehow the look of tonight’s leading man –  
but not such fine whiskers – and even more stern,  
with his warning that frivolous revellers are damned!

He would not approve of tonight’s play, I fear -  
would frown on your feathers – although they are sweet -  
and go so excessively well with that gown!  
The theatre’s so crowded now! Where is your seat?

## 5. George

*All the inmates of the Workhouse were in bed except a young man in charge of the boiler house. He is an imbecile, and known only by the name of George.*

I confess Mr Wescoe, I stopped my work  
when I heard the roar of the Devil through the dark  
and I climbed up onto the boiler house top  
and whistled to keep my courage up.

I confess Mr Wescoe, I saw Matron Day  
throw up her window across the way  
and when she asked me what I heard  
I answered truly to please the Lord:

I said I do not know, I do not know  
and only smiled for Matron's sake,  
ladies like to be comforted in that way  
as you always say, Mr Wescoe.  
But I do not know, I do not know  
why the waters began to rise.  
The tanks were always attended to!  
They're saying it was a sign.  
Do you think so, Mr Wescoe?

But, see Sir, it wasn't me it came for –  
for the waters started on the lowest floor  
where those ladies you so often tell me about,  
the ones with improper morals, are housed.

I couldn't move from the boiler house top  
and whistled to keep my courage up  
and I didn't aid the ladies' rescue  
but my soul is as white as yours, Mr Wescoe,

## 6. The Apothecary's Widow – a Sensation Story.

Come now, you did not ride half way 'cross town  
to stand on ceremony, pray, sit down.  
Let Sarah take from you your hat and coat  
and bring us tea. I read with haste the note  
you sent and scarce could take it in at first –  
then how my bosom trembled! I rehearsed  
what I should say when you arrived to seek  
an explanation. Sir, I want to speak  
as artlessly as possible, and have  
you grasp the circumstance that made me crave  
such dark solutions. So, it seems you've turned  
detective and, as thus, suppose you've earned  
the privilege to peer inside my heart,  
to scrutinise my conscience, prize apart  
each scruple for inspection, place it back  
beside my soul – which you think Brunswick black!  
I fought to quell my raging passion's claims  
as the vessel curbs its substance, over flames.  
Shall I now hold myself aloft for you,  
that you may judge this fragile phial's hue?

My husband, your dear brother, was a man  
devoted to his work; he often ran  
his business into hours of the night;  
preparing orders, setting papers right.  
That fateful night he came to me and stood  
before my cheval glass. He said he could  
not from his work retire, despite the time.  
This made him sorry, but if I would climb  
into our bed then just to leave me safe  
and sound would bring a measure of relief.  
So this I did, insisting that he take  
the wine I had decanted; it would make  
his arduous labours lighter as he sipped.  
He praised my soft attentiveness and slipped  
then from the house – I upped and dressed,  
for once not musing this or that gown best,  
drew fast my hooded cloak against the cold,  
foreboding dark, and desperate now to hold  
my nerve and hoping that revenge was sweet  
as bergamot, I plunged into the street.

The town felt larger than it does by day.  
I shrank into my cloak and kept at bay  
the dread by concentrating on my feet:  
how small they looked and sounded as they beat  
the cobbled lanes. At length I came upon  
the shop. A thick, warm glow like honey shone  
forth; cloying in the gutter, and within  
I saw two figures: *she* was there with him!

‘Though I had known what I would find, the sight  
still turned my gut. To see they thought me quite  
as green as a tureen of turtle soup  
and safe tucked up at home in bed – to stoop  
to such foul depths! The blood roared in my veins!  
I clutched the window ledge, peeped through the panes,  
and crouching now, could see the real work he  
pursued inside that nasty nectary!  
Amid the shelves of tinctures, bulbous glass  
with tall and tear-dropped stoppers, gaudy casks  
inscribed with names of wicked-sounding goods:  
Venetian Red, Boiled Oil and Dragon’s Blood,  
I spied the wine which I had pressed on him –  
unstoppered yet; still potent to the brim!  
My gaze fell on their honeying once more –  
I must have fainted clean away and for  
some minutes lay a sad and crumpled heap.  
When I awoke I found I could not keep  
the sound of raging tempests from my brain,  
yet, through the dismal streets I flew again  
not stopping until Sarah took my cloak.  
I need not paint the scene the town awoke  
to the next morn – you *know* how they were found;  
my husband and a nameless *other*, drowned!

Sir, you are death-mask white and do not wield  
your former knowledge now that I’ve revealed  
my desperate scheme, that God would not let be.  
Ah, Sarah brings the tray – you’ll take some tea?

## 7. A Further Lamentation of the Late Inundation and Ensuing Claims for Compensation

*After Richard Nesbit Ryan: Late Theatrical Manager; Now Author Poet and Publisher*

'Twas a dark and stormy night in wildest March.  
The nightingale shuddered in the larch.  
All Sheffield snored from Moorfoot to the Wicker Arch.

No man can be in doubt and ask "Of which night do you speak?"  
Nor woman neither – though some believe the fairer sex in intellect are weak!  
'Twas the night a roaring, watery beast seized the Loxley valley in its beak!

Oh, innocent Sheffield and each sweet north-westerly district,  
The appalling damage done to you my former ode on this theme does depict  
And the great unrest of these post-diluvian months did I predict.

Such loss of life and property has rarely e'er been seen.  
A great deal of time and money will be, or has already been,  
Spent recovering goods and bodies and getting our toll roads clean.

Now our munificent Mayor and considerate Corporation,  
In the light of the scale of the terrible devastation  
Have persevered in negotiating us town-folk compensation.

For although we are sure the Water Company took utmost care,  
It was they who did build the reservoir there,  
So along with Mother Nature, the blame must share.

So a three-man commission at the Town Hall will sit  
Lead by William Overend QC, they will award as they see fit  
And decipher each and every case with eruditious wit.

First they might take a butcher's claim.  
Why, how can he carry his business on the same  
With his livestock drowned and his eldest son lame?

Then a widow's case is brought to the fore.  
Her clothes and furniture were lost, and what is more,  
Her house made aqueous from chimney to floor!

For these good and piteous creatures, the Commissioners, we see  
Employ a gracious amount of compassion and sympathy –  
Both are sent away – with fair and ample fee!

But who's this now taking centre stage?  
A hawker – whose list of damages exceeds a page!  
Claiming all manner of commodities from silk cravat to gilded cage!

The Commissioners confabulate a while and finally say  
"This kind of churlish villain over us will not hold sway!"  
The case, with due repugnance, is directly sent away.

That foolish hawker his chance for recompense hath missed,  
Through the crafty compilation of such a gross, inflated list.  
I say that he is justly served – his case being dismissed!

As the days march bravely on, our three wise men shall see  
Many-a-and-important case relating to local industry:  
Sheffield's famous manufacturers bereft of time and property.

Messrs. Ibbotson and Company, of the world-renowned Globe Works,  
Your great factory was halted, round each dark corner more expense lurks.  
Yet you do pay the weekly wages of your idle smiths and absent clerks.

Of Neepsend's noble tanneries – Mr. Fawley's was hard hit.  
His hides and hackles sullied; for further treatment, are unfit.  
They languish, slayed a second time, in an inundated pit.

But Little Mesters and Grand Masters up and down our Sylvan glen  
Do not fret upon the judgement – You are dealing with such men  
As our three grand commissioners, who most fairly wield their pen!

I, myself, sustained a bitter, cruel and most pernicious blow!  
But being men of culture and of elevated taste I know  
That panel will rule justly and recognition of my labours show.

There is, for instance, my ode celebrating  
John Brown and Co's great armour plating  
All copies of which were swept through my roof (despite superior slating).

Messrs. Stanleys' monster anvil block still stands, thank goodness, broad and  
true.

Yet my ode on its great majesty – Alas, what has become of you?  
My long, painstaking memoir has been rent asunder too!

My famous poems on places –I hear the populace cry “Oh, what of them?”  
They are lost! Ay, e'en the favourites; those on Bakewell, Buxton, Rotherham.  
For the Board I bind a thorough list, 'though it pains me so to bother them.

And so to all who mean to put in claims – by all means be meticulous.  
But should you feel inclined to cheat, remember how conspicuous  
You will appear – and end up most reviled and ridiculous.

It may be just a panshon – or some trousers – but forefend!  
Shame the devil, make him howl! Refuse the truth to bend!  
Thus raise yourself in the esteem of William Overend (QC).

## 8. The Particulars

*All claimants are to provide sufficient detail as to the particulars and nature of their loss. All claims are to be heard and settled by the Commissioners, who have the authority to approve, negotiate or dismiss all claims.*

Earthenware of various sorts:  
bottles, pancheons, a maiden pot.  
A besom and an oil cloth.  
All of which I'm afraid were washed  
from my dwelling house and lost.

A pair of boots and workbox.  
Stuff dresses and plain petticoats,  
one woollen shawl, two trunks  
of fancy drapery, a silk umbrella -  
the latter items came to me by my late mother.

Three small ornaments in the parlour,  
an old but very comfortable chair  
with nicely embroidered antimacassar  
which cannot have been worth so much  
as that I do not know that I can get another.

Quite a quantity of Britannia goods  
belonging to the owner of Love Street Works  
who employs me as an outworker,  
to engrave and buff his teapots,  
which I did my best to salvage and recover.

Other unfortunate articles in my care:  
in the yard John Jepson's deals of timber,  
Mr. Bagnall's donkey's supply of straw.  
Unluckily, a case of gin and one of porter -  
which I was looking after for my brother.

I feel certain there are other items  
which I cannot at this present time  
quite bring to the forefront of my mind  
or have forgotten.

## 9. Claim for Mary Ann Pickering, Aged 8

*Made by Alfred Pickering, Saw Grinder, Creswick Street, Langsett Road.*

The memory of my foresaid daughter  
is, by the late flood, much impaired.  
She starts and raves about the water.  
Her spirit's low and all seems marred.

She was residing with my brother,  
above the public house he kept.  
What now remains of his endeavour?  
The attic corner where she slept.

I do indeed attempt to rouse her  
from out her melancholic state.  
We walk out when the mood allows her.  
I take home figs and ha'penny cake.

I read this morning from the paper  
of Whitsuntide festivities  
and promised if I could I'd take her;  
reeled off the curiosities -

gymnasts and vaulters  
clowns and nimble jugglers  
pipers and conjurers  
acrobats to turn the mind  
bears who lumber and delight  
a helter-skelter decked and bright  
jollity of every kind -  
and everything together  
in the warm whit weather -  
paddling for tiny-foots  
Daring-David swing-boats  
titbits for sweet-tooths:  
lozenges of green and yellow  
candied rinds  
for the eager hands  
of open-faced little fellows!

But still a dark cloud passes over:  
the pantomime may seem grotesque,  
the shadow puppets loom like phantoms.  
What of the contortionist?

At best, I fear it will not cure her  
and by the evening she'll forget  
and only rave about the water  
and cry that it may get her yet.

## Monologue at an Upstairs Window

after Robert Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'

He's out there trowel in hand again  
among his roses, tending them  
as if his kneeling at their beds  
will fortify their flagging heads.  
And now he strides across the grass  
to check his flaccid lettuces.  
If hate killed – Oh, you won't believe  
he's started massaging their leaves!

At Christmas-time we get a card  
inviting both of us around  
for *nibbles and an Xmas drink*  
and all the neighbours go and think  
him philanthropically inclined  
and quaff his sherry, never mind  
his *local cheese* is pale and bland  
and pork pies vegetarian.

And you will laugh and clink your glass  
with him, along with all The Close.  
How long before he drops it in  
that he's just bursting for the spring?  
His plans for that most sunny spot  
are in full bloom – he chirps he's got  
*high hopes* for this, the *budding year*,  
with smugly non-religious cheer.

I've heard him claim to have a nook  
of fairies at his garden foot  
and say no one can disagree -  
well, if it is analogy  
or clever banter, tell me then  
why is he cataloguing them?  
I've seen him down there with a guide  
and notebook flopping at his side.

And always with that same half-smile  
which warms into a whistle while  
he *potters* – stopping to breathe in  
the glory of his gardening.  
*It's heartening to get outside.*  
He leans on gateposts satisfied  
with everything - a dreary tree!  
*The magic of reality...*

Those strawberries, if they're ready, he'll  
be taking to the fete and we'll  
all have to suffer him to tell  
how they have grown supremely well

with just a *weeny nudge* from him.  
He'll bask in praise and simpering  
and you're the biggest culprit there -  
you leave him beaming ear to ear.

That bulging cat from twenty-three  
is down there, smirking up at me  
and proving cat repellent's shit.  
I wouldn't mind as much if it  
would take its furry rump next-door  
where it could kindly lend a paw  
in burdening him with some proof,  
secrete an omen in the earth.

And chicken-keeping! He has thought  
of taking up that poor man's sport.  
But what if they were to get free  
and rampage through his celery?  
Or break into his house at night  
and softly stalking, feather-light,  
they'll plump and climb inside his bed  
and lovingly peck through his head.

He says he'd like to keep a hive  
of *pollinators*. *O to dive*  
*each morning in that golden jar*  
*of breakfast-time elixir!*  
If he were found with toast, face down,  
the victim of an angry swarm,  
they couldn't trace it back to me.  
Will you laugh *then*? We'll wait and see.

## The Other Side

So everything I've told you is a lie?  
Get out then, or I'll call security.  
I knew I couldn't trust you from the start.  
It just seemed too theatrical the way  
you flustered in one day and claimed  
to need my second sight so badly that  
I let you pay to see me privately.  
Before those leaflets slithered from your bag  
I had a feeling you weren't what you said.  
I saw you in a hospital-like place  
where everything was cold and clinical  
and men in bleached bright coats stood round and laughed  
and you laughed too, but not so easily.  
A door stood open and you longed for air.  
A forest lay beyond with birds and paths  
but you resisted - there's that laugh again!

I don't know where you people get the nerve  
to stamp on anything that can't be proved.  
Not everything can be accounted for.  
You'll learn that in your own sweet time, I'm sure.  
It's Shakespeare isn't it, who says there's more  
in Heaven and Earth than can be dreamt about  
by us? But your lot scoff and constantly  
play games to paint my work as trickery.  
I can't be tested by you - I'm afraid  
it wouldn't work. The spirits please themselves.  
You can't demand they leap up and perform  
and just like anyone they really hate  
a smart-arse. Anyway, I've proved myself  
time and again - there's a professor at  
the University of Texas says  
I leave him dumb and struggling for breath.

Surprise, surprise! They're friends of yours, those two  
who tried to sabotage my show last month!  
It makes me sick- the shameful disrespect  
for the departed and their relatives.  
Next thing, they're tweeting that they've scented out  
a charlatan! All when I sensed their game  
so fast it didn't cut it with the crowd.  
The darkness and explosion wasn't theirs -  
you'd realise if you'd seen that family's tears.  
Now you come with another childish plan.  
So then, the woman in this picture's not  
your mum, or even dead - you think that proves  
a point, but what? The messages I got  
were meant for someone else - some poor  
soul strains to reach across and to console  
a grieving daughter and you barge between.

What are you? Twenty-seven, twenty-eight?  
And pretty, so you don't need to resort  
to trendy scientifics to turn heads.  
Now wait – sit down again – I'll tell you how  
this all began and how we're richer when  
we keep an open mind – you've slammed yours shut  
so fast it locked – who was it said don't fight  
it, ride it, climb inside life's mystery?  
I first made contact at the age of five.  
At nursery when I innocently asked  
why we weren't all allowed to have  
our grandads standing by us in the class,  
like one girl did, the teacher went berserk  
and had me spend the dinner-time shut in  
an attic room with musty stacks of chairs.  
I came to make some different friends in there.

And thankfully my mother came to see  
that I was special, that I had the gift  
she coveted. She'd sit with me, enthralled,  
encourage fraternising with the dead.  
She took me to a medium who knew  
the score. I had a flair – and so it grew,  
became a way of life, until my days  
were crowded full of messages and signs.  
Since then I've learnt to switch it on and off  
or veil it – like this lampshade masks the bulb.  
That's how I see it – one nudge and the fringe  
lets fly a flash or two of radiance.  
Some people, like you, fear the pure white light  
and scrabble round with broken prisms – try  
to make them fit – won't you at least admit  
that there are different ways of knowing things?

Then take your slick of flyers and get out  
and tell your men-friends that I won't be there  
this Halloween, or next – I won't defraud  
the souls who need my gift with petty tests.  
Sometimes they hide, sometimes I see them here  
as brazen as I see you in that chair.  
Go! There's the door! I have assistance on  
the other side to deal with you from there.

## The Laboratory

'How many microbiologists does it take to change a tabloid story?'  
Ben Goldacre, Bad Science column on MRSA, The Guardian.

They came to me, I never looked for them  
or for their money, though I needed it,  
God knows. A private enterprise like this  
is such a money pit – you pour it in  
and watch it falling through the black - but still  
I didn't always give them what they asked.  
You never seemed to think to mention that -  
the forty-five percent of negatives.  
You talk of cherry picking with the facts  
but never let me get mine all unpacked.

Remember when we *first* spoke on the phone  
and everything was civil and you asked  
me casually why all the journalists  
preferred my lab, why they came back and back  
and drove for miles with undercover swabs  
and told their friends. I answered honestly.  
I really couldn't say. I did my best.  
I never told them to put *Mop of Death*  
or claimed I'm *internationally renowned*.  
They made that up. I was too keen, perhaps.

It's something I've been told by the bereaved,  
by all the families whose pain I've eased.  
They said I helped by trumpeting their cause,  
by fighting to expose - I never fought...  
just shone a light down filthy corridors.  
But if I stopped one patient getting ill  
I never did it just to sell my kits.  
I could have done – I could have pushed them when  
I had the eyes of all the papers – well,  
it's done, they're gone, and now the loans draw in.

My interest wasn't vested like you said.  
I laid it bare. Just like I answered on  
the day the two inspectors came. I showed  
them how I would prepare the media.  
They nodded, wiped their glasses, clicked their pens.  
I never said they gagged me or made threats.  
They were obliged and careful on my lawn.  
They shook my hand and left with promises  
of contact slides. There were no *goons*. It's just  
the papers thought that I'd been victimised.

And then I was. You called me names, referred  
to this place as a garden shed and made

bad jokes about my non-accredited...  
credentials, said I mispronounced some words  
and couldn't even tell my rods from balls.  
But does a garden shed have all of this?  
A telephone? And I am qualified,  
it's just they held me up as expert and  
you know they can't be stopped once they set off  
and that they love a shaggy underdog.

I've come to think that's what I always was.  
You beat me. After twenty years of work  
you came and pulled me from my perch  
just like the cat with cream...

It's cold for May.

The blossom's brown and heaped in corners and  
the traffic will be jammed for hours yet  
around the Northern Circular. I'll wait.  
Some space to think. My apparatus creaks.  
The windows of this place are dim with grime.  
Are you still there? No, you've been gone some time.