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ROCHE-JACQUES, Shelley

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**Name: Shelley Roche-Jacques**

**Affiliation: Sheffield Hallam University**

**Work Address: Room 1130, Owen Building  
City Campus  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Sheffield S1 1WB**

**Email: s.roche-jacques@shu.ac.uk**

**Tel: 07717 020663**

## **‘Out of the forest I come’: lyric and dramatic tension in *The World’s Wife***

### **Abstract**

This article looks at lyric and dramatic modes of poetic expression in Carol Ann Duffy’s collection *The World’s Wife* (1999). This book is of particular interest because it is Duffy’s only volume devoted entirely to the dramatic monologue. In the opening sections of this article, lyric and dramatic modes are defined and discussed, and the work of Green (1992) on deixis the poetic persona is considered in relation to the dramatic monologue. Of particular use is Green’s elaboration on the traditional deictic categories of ‘time’ and ‘place’. Green incorporates the concepts of ‘coding time and place’ and ‘content time and place’ into his analysis of lyric poetry. These concepts are used here as tools to consider and describe the communicative contexts established in lyric and dramatic poetry respectively. Sessions’ (1947) early, taxonomic approach to defining the dramatic monologue, in particular her idea of ‘action in the present’, is also found to be useful in the identification of the ‘dramatic’.

The third section of the article is a close analysis of two poems from *The World’s Wife*; ‘Little Red Cap’ and ‘Mrs. Sisyphus’. Other poems, and the communicative context evoked by the collection as a whole, are also considered in the light of Green, Sessions and the lyric and dramatic traditions in poetry.

The work of Duffy examined here is found to be more clearly rooted in lyrical and narrative than dramatic traditions. It is suggested that the indexicalisation of the symbolic elements of deictic terms is essential to the building of the dramatically-realised coding environment necessary for a Browningsque dramatic monologue. A call is made for further work to be carried out in identifying the ‘dramatic’ in poetry, and for a more meaningful employment of the term dramatic monologue.

**Key words:** lyric, dramatic monologue, deixis, Browningsque, coding time and place, content time and place, indexicalisation, action in the present.

## 1. Defining the lyric

So much of the poetry published in the UK today falls into the category of ‘lyric poetry’ that it might be thought of as the default mode of poetic expression. The conventions of the lyric mode are so embedded in the notion of *poetry* that it seldom seems necessary to even add the word ‘lyric’. The OED defines lyric poetry as ‘expressing the writer’s emotions, usually briefly, and in stanzas or recognised forms’. Scott (1990) observes that ‘[l]yric poems typically express personal (often emotional) feelings, and are traditionally spoken in the present tense’ (7). The use of the present tense in poetry is something Green (1992) scrutinises. Green’s assumptions about lyric poetry centre on 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). Green’s conflation of experiencing and observing modes can be seen as a formalising of Wordsworth’s ‘emotions recollected in tranquillity’; his idea that the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802) results in the revivification of a remembered moment, via a kind of ‘simulated spontaneity’ (Faas, 1988: 6); an elevated version of the historical present.

Green defines deixis as ‘the encoding in an utterance of the spatio-temporal context and the subjective experience of the encoder’ (121-122). He uses the traditional deictic categories of ‘time’ and ‘place’ to examine the present tense in lyric poetry. He suggests that although lyric poems implicitly present a ‘coding time and place’ (the time and place from which the utterance is transmitted) which is separate from ‘content time and place’ (the time(s) and place(s) to which the utterance refers), it is frequently, through various linguistic strategies, dramatised as synchronous (126-127).

Green takes the linguistic phenomenon of deixis and examines its occurrence and behaviour in a particular discursive site (lyric poetry). His insights and methodology provide a useful template for the examination of the distinct, but superficially similar, discourse of the dramatic monologue.

Bound up with the use of the present tense in lyric poetry is the idea of the personal. As the definitions above make clear it is the ‘the *writer’s* emotions’ which are expressed. Although the sophisticated reader theoretically knows better than to assume the ‘I’ of a poem refers to the poet, the

sheer prevalence of the personal in contemporary poetry makes the possibility of a personal connection hard to dismiss out of hand. This is highlighted by the fact that poems which employ a specific character as speaker are frequently assigned to the special category of ‘dramatic monologue’.

## 2. Defining the dramatic

In his introduction to *The Penguin book of Victorian Verse*, MacBeth (1969) asserts that the chief poetic achievement of Victorian poetry lies in its development of narrative fiction (20). He notes Eliot’s belief that Browning was the most effective creator of characters in English, after Dickens and Shakespeare (21). On the subject of Tennyson’s monologues, MacBeth suggests that the majority are ‘essentially lyrical and narrative poems in the first person, rather than dramatic monologues proper (25)’. This raises the question of just what makes a poem a ‘proper’ dramatic monologue.

Browning described his work, in an advertisement for his volume *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), as ‘always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine’ (cited in Byron, 2003: 35). This quotation is often dropped into discussion of the dramatic monologue as though Browning’s meaning were obvious. But it is not clear what Browning actually meant by ‘always *dramatic* in principle’, nor whether this dramatic quality is to be seen as distinct from the poems as utterances of ‘imaginary persons’. There has been much debate about what constitutes a dramatic monologue (for an overview see Byron, 2003). One problem is the use of poetic persona; the frequent ambiguity in poetry between the poet’s voice and the voice of a potential, separate speaker. Poets’ employment of personae is not always straightforward, and whether a poem is read as a dramatic monologue or not tends to depend on a number of factors.

Building on Green’s work, Semino (1992) notes that ‘[t]he degree to which readers assimilate the constructed poetic persona to the author varies [...] depending on [readers’] knowledge and expectations about different writers and genres and on their perception of each individual text’ (136). Semino observes that the ‘communicative situations evoked by different poems may vary considerably, not only with respect to the identity of the speaking persona, but also with respect to the scope of the deictic field, the status and presence of the addressee, the position reserved for the reader

and so on' (136). In other words, whether a poem is considered a dramatic monologue or not is somewhat context-dependent.

Sinfield (1977) defines the dramatic monologue as a poem which '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' (32). 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). He sees a kinship between all poems in which the speaker is indicated to be someone other than the poet. This catch-all approach seems to be in line with most modern definitions. A dramatic monologue, it seems, is first and foremost a poem spoken by a character. This approach allows Byron (2003), to see the dramatic monologue as embracing a 'wide and diverse variety of forms' (2).

Langbaum (1957) and Rader (1976) attempt to define the dramatic monologue by pitching the rhetorical against the purely expressive. Langbaum focuses on the 'disequilibrium' between the meaning of the speaker and meaning of the poem (35), as well as the pull between our sympathy for and judgement of the speaker (85). Rader's categorisation plots poems along two axes; one going from 'poet' to 'definite character', the other from 'lyric' to 'dramatic' (in term of setting and action) (150). This leads us back to the question of what constitutes the 'dramatic' in poetry. 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 (135)'. But this definition is somewhat limiting and reveals that inherent in most people's definition of drama is a kind of (to use Sinfield's phrase) 'Ibsenite naturalism' (1977: 19). Nevertheless, such emphasis on the idea of interpersonal communication, and the pragmatic nature of the situations often evoked in dramatic monologues, is useful in attempting to identify the kind of communicative context built. Sessions' (1947) early work to attempt to codify the dramatic monologue has been largely dismissed as overly taxonomic and ultimately reductive (Byron, 2003; 10). Sessions set out seven characteristics which she deemed necessary for a 'perfect' dramatic monologue:

‘speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present’ (508).

Sessions saw Browning’s poem ‘My Last Duchess’ as ‘splendidly illustrating’ all seven characteristics. The obvious problem here is that we are in danger of measuring nothing more than how similar a poem is to ‘My Last Duchess’. However, the final feature on the list (‘action which takes place in in the present’) is something which I feel has been overlooked in the critical debate around definitions, and an idea which helps us get at the notion of ‘drama’. Sessions defines ‘action in the present’ as something which ‘unfolds as the poem develops, giving the reader the impression that this is the original occasion’ (511). This idea that the reader witnesses something happening, that something is at still stake for the characters, rather done with and determined (as in a retrospective narrative) is central to the form, and a large part of what gave the dramatic monologue its original distinctiveness. It stands in contrast to the ‘simulated spontaneity’ of lyric revelry. Green’s distinction between ‘coding time and place’ and ‘content time and place’ will prove useful in unpicking this further in relation to specific texts.

Drawing on Green’s work on the operation of deixis in lyric poetry, the close readings of Duffy’s poems which follow will explore the differences in the operation of deixis in the dramatic monologue and lyric poetry, and question whether the poems in *The World’s Wife* owe more to the lyric or dramatic tradition.

### **3. *The World’s Wife***

The poems in *The World’s Wife* satisfy the loose modern definition of the dramatic monologue simply by having speakers who are indicated to be someone other than the poet. The use of historical subjects is also thematically typical of the genre. Duffy draws on a rich poetic tradition (Homer, Tennyson, Eliot) of presenting figures from classical mythology. She also follows in the footsteps of Victorian poets Augusta Webster and Amy Levy, who gave voice to female figures, and who used the

dramatic monologue to comment obliquely on issues surrounding gender inequality (See Webster's 'Circe' (1870) in particular).

Formally, all the poems in this collection seem to be 'spoken'; that is, marked with the signs of verbal communication, and an addressee of some kind is usually referenced (although this is frequently an unspecified and ontologically ambiguous 'you'). Yet the adoption of a specific speaker is not in itself sufficient to make a poem *dramatic*, in the sense of 'relating to drama'. Sessions' idea of 'action in the present' seems largely absent from *The World's Wife*. I would suggest that the use of named speakers and the 'verbal' register of many of the poems leads the reader to interpret them as more firmly rooted in the dramatic tradition than they really are. Indeed, Duffy remarks, in an interview for *Sheer Poetry*, that she finds it interesting that these poems should have been so widely taken up and performed by theatre companies (Duffy, 2005). 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. I shall now look at several of the poems more closely in order to identify exactly how Duffy's lyric tendencies manifest themselves within these seemingly dramatic pieces.

In 'Little Red Cap' Duffy fuses elements of the fairy tale 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 fairy tale, in which Little Red Cap fears she will be consumed by the wolf, and says that the piece is based on her own first relationship (with the poet Adrian Henri) (Duffy, 2005). This autobiographical information is fairly widely known and could therefore 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 Sinfield's idea of 'the feint' (1977: 23-34). Sinfield believes that the absence of a dramatically realised setting (coding time and place) tilts a poem towards the lyric mode. 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 fairy tale, 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 way in which it pushes the reader towards an impressionistic, visceral understanding of the world of the poem, is 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 addressee 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 (face-to-face), 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, 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 the poet as speaker, which in turn seems to reinforce the lyric universe of the writer rather than the dramatic, fairy tale 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 Martin (1979) 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 Duffy’s characteristically arresting final line, as the speaker emerges from the woods, which is perhaps most interesting regarding the tensions between the lyric, narrative and dramatic modes:

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 (See Jeffries’ (2008) analysis of deictic shifting in contemporary poetry), 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 Faas (1988) calls ‘simulated spontaneity’ (6) is located right at the end of the piece and seems to function as a springboard into a different mode of expression and way of being. 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, into a new life, as a fully-fledged poet. Thus Duffy embeds the notion of the speaker’s claim to lyric expression grammatically and metatextually, as well as through the imagery of emerging from the woods with the lyrically-charged symbols of flowers and song.

In the more Browningsque dramatic monologue we could expect the narrative element to be framed by a present-tense situation; a specific ‘occasion’, as Sessions defines it. To use Green’s terminology, 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, and in the communicative context it establishes, much 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. Secondly, through the consistent use of verbs of progressive aspect (such as ‘choosing’, ‘walking’, and ‘bringing’), which make the piece feel a little more temporally ambiguous, encouraging us to ‘look at the situation from inside’ (Martin, 1979: 62). The line ‘I swear / the air softened and warmed as she moved’ (11-12) also aids the immediacy of the utterance. ‘I swear’ acts as a particularly important marker, being a sentiment from coding time, and 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). 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* 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' ('That's him, pushing the stone up the hill') establishes a context of this nature, although its seemingly straightforward dramatic set-up is complicated in the second half of the piece.

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 line is similar to Browning's well known opening: '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 action within the fictional world. The addressee 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 position of the reader here is not straight-forward. Jeffires (2000) argues that Duffy finds numerous ways to involve the reader in the deictic field of her poems. Here we are invited to 'stand in' as text world auditor. Everett (1991) suggests that Browning frequently withholds the identity of the auditor until the latter part of his poems. He sees this as a strategy to dupe the reader into thinking that it is she who is being directly addressed, thereby engaging her more fully in the action. (130). In 'Mrs Sisyphus' we as readers are initially made to feel part of a dramatically-realised setting, although our place in the world of the poem becomes less clear as the poem progresses.

The rest of the first stanza continues its 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.

In the second of the three stanzas the speaker continues to vent her frustration, with the present tense here used to communicate the *habitual* nature of Mr. and Mrs. Sisyphus' disagreements. Such 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 narrative portion of a Browningsque dramatic monologue. It is characteristic

of the Browningsque dramatic monologue for much of the narrative element to be revealed by the speaker via a retrospective narrative or ‘back-story’. Faas (1988) notes how in Browning’s less successful monologues he ‘exceeds the limits of what is sustainable’ (154) as regards ‘action in the present’. Faas argues that ‘on stage’ action is most effectively employed when it is ‘primarily suggestive’, citing as an example the handshake that reveals Fra Lippo Lippi has successfully got himself out of a tight spot (155). Here Duffy uses her speaker’s comments on the general state of her relationship to fill us in on the world of the characters without the need for too much ‘action in the present’.

It is the final stanza of ‘Mrs Sisyphus’ which calls into question the communicative context of the poem.

But I lie alone in the dark,  
feeling like Noah’s wife did  
when he hammered away at the Ark;  
like Frau Johann Sebastian Bach.  
My voice reduced to a squawk,  
my smile to a twisted smirk;  
while, up on the deepening murk of the hill,  
he is giving one hundred percent and more to his work.

The first line is initially unproblematic. Following on from the complaints of the previous stanza, it seems 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 to an auditor who shares her physical view-point. 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 orient the activity taking place on the hill to the speaker as she lies in bed, and the non-finite nature of the subsequent phrases ‘deepening murk’(3.7) and ‘is

giving'(3.8) adds 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 dramatic monologue's characteristic return to coding time and place, and without further direct address to the implied text world auditor of the opening line. The dramatic and colloquial language of the piece also recedes and 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'.

In addition to this more traditionally lyric treatment of setting, the spatio-temporal ambiguity of the last stanza of 'Mrs Sisyphus' is in itself more characteristic of the lyric mode. One way of accounting for such ambiguity is that of 'deictic decay'. This is something addressed by Galbraith (1995) and one aspect of the larger 'deictic shift theory'. Galbraith uses the term to describe deictic fields which are not regularly 're-activated' after being introduced (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) can 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 (through reference to the physical landscape or happenings of the time and place from which the utterance is being transmitted, or through interaction with an auditor) and most emphatically reinforced 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 equally workable, interpretation of the piece, in which it functions as a soliloquy. This way of reading the poem has the speaker coding from the dark of her bedroom. The referent of the demonstrative 'that' in the opening line is the *sound* of the stone being pushed up the hill. The speaker therefore addresses the frustrated utterance to herself or some kind of imagined addressee, with reference to the

coding time and place of the utterance being made through the opening allusion to the sound of the stone and through 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 (directed 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, and the resulting deictic shifts, is something identified by Semino (1992) as characteristic of the lyric mode. Deictic shifting in contemporary poetry is something which is now beginning to be given due critical attention (Jeffries 2008, Castiglione, 2013, for example). The kind of deictic shifting engaged in by Duffy and many contemporary poets is something not found in the Browningsque dramatic monologue which, with its more pragmatic concerns, presentation of physical activity, and use of contiguous moments, is usually much more firmly anchored in space and time. In *Mrs Sisyphus* 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 collapsed and 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 as a conceit 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 than a device to signify the sealed fictional world of the dramatic.

To address other issues around the dramatic aspects of the collection, in particular the effect of using definite text-world auditors (in contrast to an unspecified 'you'), I shall briefly consider the poem '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 undertakes the physical task of a cookery demonstration in real-time as the utterance unfolds. The 'occasion' 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 of 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 (2005) comments that, when performing ‘Eurydice’, Duffy looks up and directly addresses the women in the room as the ‘girls’. It is unclear 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’. This seems to reveal a general disregard for the high status afforded to the temporal aspects of the more conventional dramatic monologue, which often take place at a pivotal moment, when something is still at stake for the speaker. 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) (Duffy 2005). It is this switch to a distinctly lyrical register which disrupts a straightforward interpretation of the piece. As in ‘Little Red

Cap' and 'Mrs Sisyphus', Duffy has Eurydice move, at the close of the poem, from the colloquial and narrative-driven into a more overtly lyrical mode.

Throughout the collection attention is drawn to the fact that the coding time of the poems is distinct from the content time of the stories they tell, and 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 also works to imply that the addressee is 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 dramatic monologue than a serious attempt to reproduce it.

In addition to 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).. Yet while on the surface this 'spoken quality' seems to push the pieces towards the Browningsque dramatic monologue, such language, as Byron (2003) has argued of Ezra Pound, is perhaps better understood 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.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Through my analysis I have attempted to reveal that the dominant poetic modes of *The World's Wife* are *narrative* and *lyric*. The typical speaker largely communicates through the former, moving into the latter as she strives to accurately represent the emotional truths of her story. The poems in this collection are certainly dramatic monologues in the loose, modern sense (in which nothing more than 'a speaker' who is not the poet is required). They also make use of the pull of first-person narrative to pitch sympathy against judgement (Langbaum, 1957). However, Duffy's postmodern playfulness complicates the communicative context of the poems. She employs deictic shifts and frequently blurs

the boundary between reader and text world auditor. Although most of the poems of *The World's Wife* have some kind of explicit addressee or auditor, they do not feel part of the more fully dramatic, Browningsque school of poetry, in which something is at stake for the speaker in the *moment* of utterance, and in which reference to the physical *surroundings* of the speaker is used to build a dramatically-realised coding environment. Thus, in their use of time and space they feel closer to lyric poetry.

In the Browningsque dramatic monologue, the building of a dramatically-realised coding environment is largely achieved through the indexicalisation of exophoric reference. Green (1992) states that in the discourse of a lyric poem we are unlikely to be able to ascribe indexical meaning to the symbolic elements of deictic terms. This is because ‘the co-incidence of symbolic and indexical meaning is only possible when we know what object is being “pointed to”’ (124). In this sense the deixis of the dramatic monologue, and the communicative context it creates, can be seen as functioning differently from that of lyric poetry. Unlike deictic centres mobilised in much lyric poetry, which Green observes are often achieved without reference to an immediate situation (130), those of the Browningsque dramatic monologue require the reader to ascribe definite and fixed indexical referents to the symbolic meanings of certain deictic elements. Castiglione (2013) notes how in ‘real pragmatic-governed situations deixis acts as a means of identifying specific referents’ (127). He relates this to the deixis of poetry, which is ‘virtually free from all the constraints that characterise other communicative situations’ (127). This lexico-grammatical freedom in poetry is something also noted by Green (1992;121) and many others (such as Leech, 1969: 192 and Eagleton, 2007: 38). I would suggest that in the case of the Browningsque dramatic monologue, the poem *is* constrained by the ‘pragmatic governed situations’ of face to face communication, at least as regards the deixis of coding time and place. This is the case even for the soliloquising speaker, whose spatio-temporal coordinates and relationship to the physical world remain pragmatically governed.

In this article I have examined a handful of Duffy’s poems in relation to the Browningsque dramatic monologue, and with reference to the lyric tradition. I have drawn on the huge body of literary critical work surrounding the dramatic monologue, and attempted to develop some of these

ideas in the light of work done in Stylistics, specifically on the operation of deixis in poetry. I feel this approach offers a promising way forward. There is more work to be done regarding the identification of 'the dramatic' in poetry, and on the operation of deixis in Browning's dramatic monologues, as well as in contemporary examples of the Browningsque. Such poems are sometimes misread, being viewed through the prism of lyric poetry. It is to be hoped that a greater understanding of the way in which 'drama' is encoded in poetry will ultimately lead to a more meaningful use of the term dramatic monologue.

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