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DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE, PUBLIC ADDRESS, AND THE ENDS OF CHARACTER

BY JUSTIN SIDER

His numbers though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
But boys and girls pale from the imagined love
Of solitary beds knew what they were,
That passion could bring character enough;
And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

—W. B. Yeats, “The Statues”

Alfred Tennyson’s “St. Simeon Stylites” deplores a self whose confirmations are purely external. Telling the story of the first “pillar-hermit” and his quest for sainthood, Tennyson’s satirical early poem is the most context-dependent and Browningsque of his monologues.¹ In the poem, the self-aggrandizing Simeon perches atop a stone pillar, suffering deliberately under the elements, and though he addresses himself to God, he seems more interested in the way his behavior is interpreted by the crowds that mill and marvel below. Twisting about his loins the rope that hauls his water bucket up the pillar, for instance, Simeon speaks “not of it to a single soul” yet is perversely pleased when “the ulcer, eating through [his] skin,” reveals his “secret penance” to the crowd (*S*, 65–67). Tennyson means us to understand in Simeon’s gratification the complex circuit of his address. The crowd was never meant not to see the torment endured for beatitude. Sainthood for Simeon is not so much a state of grace as it is a reception. The pressure this puts on Simeon’s self-characterization is observable throughout the poem, as in this moment of protest:

O Lord, thou knowest what a man I am;
A sinful man, conceived and born in sin:
’Tis their own doing; this is none of mine;
Lay it not to me. Am I to blame for this,
That here come those that worship me? Ha! ha!
They think that I am somewhat. What am I?
(*S*, 119–124)

What indeed? Simeon's problem—a problem, I argue, that the dramatic monologue as a genre works at throughout the Victorian period—is that of being public. Tennyson's poem positions Simeon as both mediated and mediating: a “sign betwixt the meadow and the cloud,” between the assembled congregants below and God above (*S*, 14). Insofar as his identity depends on the confirmation of the crowd, Simeon is his own mediation for and reception by this public.

Extending recent work on nineteenth-century poetry's fictions of address by Virginia Jackson, Adela Pinch, Emily Harrington, and others, this essay connects a concept of public address to the historical meaning of the dramatic monologue in the Victorian period and locates the genre's investment in character not in the metastasizing interiority of the era's novelistic realism but in the challenge of imagining and addressing a modern reading public.² Victorian poetry's investment in characters (fictional) and character (ethical) may be attributed to a variety of forces, from the novel's shaping influence on the literary field to the new prominence of biography and memoir to the nascence of disciplines like psychology, sociology, and ethnography. Yet it is no accident that the poems we often identify as the first dramatic monologues were composed in the decade or so between the last major writings of the Romantics and the installation of Queen Victoria on the throne: not because the monologue indexes a shift away from Romantic solipsism to Victorian social realism, nor because of a breakdown between poets and audiences after Romanticism, but because “[t]he beginning of the Victorian period was also the historical moment when the trajectory of an idealized public opinion in Britain turns downward from its apogee.”³

Poetry's relationship with this ebbing faith in a unitary public manifested itself in two inter-animating discourses: that of the representative poet, hypostatizing the spirit of the age, and that of poetry's decline, its fundamental mismatch with modernity.⁴ From Thomas Love Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1821) to Matthew Arnold's deliberately graceless term “unpoetrylessness,” what the proliferation of declinist writing in the period actually signifies is not the loss of an audience per se, but a concern about poetry's ability to address and organize a national reading public.⁵ The explosion of reading and public education, the expansion of the franchise, the growth of and competition among print media—all these factors multiplied and rendered newly perceptible the many publics within the English readership, including women's publics, working class publics, artistic publics, and religious publics. At the same time, these changes were accompanied by a persistent demand that poets speak to and for all the men and

women of England. Victorian poets could less easily “mistak[e],” in John Guillory’s words, “[a] class-based sociolect for the language of ‘humanity.’”⁶ Even so, the language of humanity was exactly what critics and readers demanded, in the form of a poetry that could somehow address not coteries or literary readers but England. Poetry’s cultural authority became yoked to a notion of public address precisely at the point when the public became less possible to assume.

“The end! The end! / Surely the end!” (*S*, 198–99). Simeon’s plea for conclusion marks his desire to be not “somewhat” but someone. The fixed and final character he demands will offer the fallible people below the pillar an “[e]xample,” a “pattern”: intriguingly, the problem of having a self for a public, a self subjected to the contingencies of reception, assimilates Simeon’s self-characterization to the Victorian discourse of exemplarity, in which public address and personated intimacy commingle (*S*, 220).⁷ Satirized though it is, Simeon’s desire for an end (and for the communicability that comes with it) is a persistent preoccupation of the dramatic poetry in the period as it tests forms of relation. Victorian poetry’s dramatic farewells anticipate the assertion by Walter Benjamin that “not only a man’s knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life . . . first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death,” a sentiment that glances back across countless deathbed scenes in Victorian novels and poetry as well as stacks of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies filled with dying words.⁸ In the valedictory speeches that proliferate in Victorian dramatic monologues, from Tennyson’s “St. Simeon Stylites” and Robert Browning’s “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church” to Augusta Webster’s “Medea in Athens” (1870) and Amy Levy’s “Xantippe” (1881), the rhetorical pressures of concluding or departing provide the basic pattern by which character is not simply made but made public. The farewell offers a fantasy of relation (even as it analyzes the costs of that relation) in which the character’s way of imagining his or her transmission and reception anticipates the transmission and reception of the poem itself as a public and circulated object.

These dramatic farewells offer one entrance to an essential question: how did Victorian poets imagine addressing a mass public across the mediation of verse, genre, or print? The dramatic monologue has long been the privileged Victorian poetic genre for mediating private and public selfhood. As Dorothy Mermin notes in her classic study of the monologue, “The elaborate characterization of a speaker is itself a signal that the poet is interested in communicating with his readers.”⁹ Yet my argument in this essay suggests that we might learn most about

the public aspirations of Victorian dramatic monologues by considering how they imagine speakers as leaving their addressees behind. In directing characters toward ends, both of their existential fictions and of the printed matter in which those fictions circulate, dramatic monologues work to imagine the forms of reciprocation that might obtain between writers and readers in an emergent mass culture.¹⁰

I. ARTICULATE AND HUMAN

“They think that I am somewhat. What am I?” The identities of both Simeon the character and “Simeon” the poem are propped up by columns—one of stone, the other of text—that symbolize their availability as specifically public figures. Simeon’s question is complicated because it touches not merely a straightforward problem of identity (am I a sinner or a saint?) but extends to take in his formal and material mediations as well. Simeon presses the reader to ask toward what, when a text addresses readers as an *I*, that pronoun actually points. The dramatic monologue was not the only place in Victorian writing for such questions. In Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, the dispossessed heir John Harmon worries at a similar problem. Over the course of the novel, Harmon assumes the identity of one John Rokesmith, a secretary, for the purpose of scouting his future bride. As he ponders the night he created this new persona, Harmon expresses the needfulness of the pronoun *I* in organizing and communicating that story: “I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.”¹¹ Rokesmith is a fictional identity. When a fiction says *I*, Harmon wonders, who is talking?

Rather than reflect on fictionality as such, we should here observe how this pronoun (and the character it conjures) was imagined by Victorian writers as a style of address: both Simeon and Rokesmith have recourse to this pronoun as a condition of communication. Simeon’s *I* is not just for himself but also for an audience. The question of the first-person pronoun’s address seemed particularly significant in the era of autobiography and sage-writing—genres that prized self-disclosure. In *The Conscience*, his 1868 lectures on casuistry at Cambridge, F. D. Maurice begins with a question about the *I*: to which branch of intellectual inquiry does it belong? He concludes that only moral philosophy, the discipline that understands the character of man (and specifically not history, not philology), is granted any explanatory power over this unusual sign. Even moral philosophy, Maurice worries, may

evade the *I* by talking about “Individuality or Personality” (C, 6). This, he warns, echoing William Wordsworth, means you have “killed [the man] that you may dissect him” (C, 7). “So the link between the two characters is broken,” he writes, “that which characterizes a man is gone” (C, 7). Character and character. To talk about an individual’s character, Maurice insists, is to talk about the strangely mutable mark that orients him in the world.

Maurice is interested in the *I* as a mediating address, “at once the most universal and the most exclusive of all words” (C, 5). *I* is the character that gives character, that makes it legible to the reader or interlocutor: “Articulate speech is the characteristic of men. How does the speech become articulate and human? What is the difference between the cries of beasts or the songs of birds which Homer must have known intimately, and the winged words which went forth from the mouths of his heroes? Each of them called himself *I*” (C, 4). For Maurice as for Harmon/Rokesmith and Simeon, the needfulness of the *I* involves its utility first in imagining a self and then in having that self in public. The first-person singular models address as disclosure, a dramatic display of self, and like the *you* described by Pinch in her work on second-person address, this *I* too “represents [modern literature’s] self-conscious orientation toward that singular personage, ‘the reader.’”¹²

For the Victorians, character was the most public thing about themselves. As Janice Carlisle notes, character was “irreducibly public in its manifestations, equivalent to an individual’s reputation or to a written reference.”¹³ More recently, in emphasizing character’s role in the discourse of Victorian liberalism, Amanda Anderson has argued that, “[a]s opposed to identities conceived in terms of essence or nature, character is antifoundational, open-ended, and in process, the site of self-crafting and mediation between the individual actor and the wider social world.”¹⁴ As both Carlisle and Anderson suggest, character is not only frequently mediated by genres of print, but is also itself a mediated address, oriented toward a particular audience with a particular kind of response as its object. Thus it depends, like any address meant to circulate in public, on the way it moves through public space, be that space the field of convention and privilege that Dickens calls “Society” or the printed matter of periodicals in which writers like Marian Evans and Matthew Arnold established critical personae.¹⁵ Character is a self that circulates. Character is how you, whoever you are, make your way out into the world and become a public entity, a process that depends as much on the contingencies of reception and

the media of your circulation as the energy you put into design and production. As financial speculator Fascination Fledgeby says to the con artist Alfred Lammle in *Our Mutual Friend*, you might very well worry that “somebody has been giving you a bad character.”¹⁶

Thinking about character meant thinking also about public address. Augusta Webster’s essay “Poets and Personal Pronouns,” first published in the *Examiner* in 1878 and reprinted in her essay collection *A Housewife’s Opinions*, puts character at the center of Victorian poetry’s relationship with its publics. It proposes a simple question—what is an *I* in poetry? Webster was herself a great writer of dramatic monologues, beginning with *Dramatic Studies* in 1866, and her essay on poetic character places dramatic poetry at the center of Victorian anxieties regarding poetry’s reading publics. She begins by defining poetic against novelistic character, disentangling the achievements and demands of poetry from common assumptions about reference in fictional realism. The novelist may take subjects such as a morally anguished parson from real life, whereas the poet, by contrast, even when depicting known personages, works characters up from the inside so that they are “born again in his brain.”¹⁷

The payoff lies with a very particular kind of sympathetic relation that Webster’s prose struggles to discriminate:

We look to the poet for feelings, thoughts, actions if need be, represented in a way which shall affect us as the manifest expression of what our very selves must have felt and thought and done if we had been those he puts before us and in their cases. He must make us feel this not only of what we ourselves, being ourselves, could come to think and feel and do in like circumstances, but of what no circumstances could possibly call out in us. One may be hopelessly incapacitated by a limp and considerate mental temperament from ever becoming a murderer even in a moment’s thought, and for the matter of that so may the poet, but if the poet describes the sensations of an intending murderer he has to make one feel that he has found just what one’s sensations would be if one could have been capable of thinking about committing murder. . . . Not many have it in us to be Iagos, but we feel sure that, if we were to be an Iago, we should be that Iago. (*H*, 151–52)

This reading practice elicits not so much identification as analogy; readers distinguish their subject position from that of the character even as they imagine what it would be like to feel as such a figure. Isobel Armstrong describes this sort of reading, solicited by writers and propounded by critics, as “a series of delicately reciprocal acts of imagination in which each person is able to call up an ‘analogous

emotion' in response to the feeling of another."¹⁸ As Browning's Napoleon III jauntily exclaims in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, The Savior of Society*: "Each has his own mind and no other's mode. / What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize!"¹⁹

Webster ultimately performs all this wrangling in the service of a distinction not between genres but between reading practices and their associated publics. The problem, she argues, does not lie with literary readers but instead with "the general public" (*H*, 152) or "the majority of non-literary readers" (*H*, 155). These readers are inclined to see in all poetry sketches out of life, or "the presentment of some special person known in the flesh" (*H*, 151). Webster is worried about poetry's ability to organize a larger public around conventions of address, a worry that extends back to the first generation of Victorian critical writing. In his 1831 review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, Arthur Hallam had referred to "the Reading Public" as "that hydra," observing both its fractures and its fractiousness.²⁰ Remarking this situation, Hallam describes an accompanying inability (or lack of desire) on the part of contemporary poets to address a general public, a problem he refracts through poetry's form, rhetoric, and habits of thought: "Hence the melancholy, which so evidently characterizes the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself, and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest."²¹ Marking a significant step toward modernist coterie poetics, Hallam's solution is to turn isolation into a virtue. He establishes for Tennyson's poetry a proto-avant-garde position by distinguishing the poetry of "sensation" (associated with John Keats, Percy Shelley, and the Cockney School) from Wordsworth's poetry of "reflection."²² Reflection, Hallam argues, must subordinate itself to the demands and contingences of public opinion; sensation breaks with those demands. James Chandler explains the nascent aestheticism of Hallam's essay as a means of removing poetry from the demands of public opinion, creating an artistic counter-public: poets are to have "little immediate authority" but work instead through "strong under-currents [that] will in time sensibly affect the principal stream."²³ Hallam's central concern "might indeed be construable as part of an effort to effect a kind of counter-public sphere."²⁴ Tennyson's career diverges from Hallam's early program, embracing public opinion (though not uncritically) and striking for the heart of Victorian national culture, yet his friend's insight into the limitations of artistic publics will both trouble and excite writers and critics throughout the period.²⁵

Webster's essay represents a late articulation of this ongoing anxiety about poetry and public opinion, different in degree from Hallam's but alike in the shared concern for the mechanism by which poets might address a larger, more general public. She objects to non-literary readers making identifications out of life, and she writes pointedly, "It would be interesting to know how many young ladies were . . . declared with absoluteness 'the Original of Tennyson's Maud'" (*H*, 153). Yet this barb ends up merely a preamble to a more intractable problem, as "more especially still is the poet believed to be his own lay figure" (*H*, 153). The non-literary reader is one who misunderstands the mediations of form and fiction. Whatever else an *I* in poetry is, Webster argues, it is specifically not the mark of private selfhood. It is a public utterance, and, in Maurice's terms, the pronoun gives character to the text rather than receives it from some extra-textual referent. "At all events," Webster writes, "few poets are even ostensibly autobiographical; and it is hard on them to investigate them as if they were putting themselves through a process of vivisection for the public to see how they were getting on inside" (*H*, 155). Webster wards off autobiography in order to pick out character's mediation in two different respects: first, that the poem does not give access to some real scene of social or mental life; and second, that the first-person pronoun is itself one of poetry's mediations, an aspect of address rather than reference.

Webster concludes with a tongue-in-cheek consideration of editorial or typographical means for poets to avoid this sort of misreading. She proposes variously a lower case "i" as a "modest disclaimer of the writer's personality" (discounted on the basis of printers' sensitivities); the use of "says he" (problematic for reasons of meter); and the indefinite "one" ("a more bashful but equally individual I") (*H*, 156). Finally, she reaches her solution: "the editorial pronoun, the 'We' and the 'Our' and the 'Us,' is what can safely be recommended to poets for their future protection" (*H*, 156). Webster's grammatical prophylaxis is, of course, a joke. The editorial "[w]e" is less a way of writing than of reading, and character emerges in Webster's argument as a form of address that holds out the possibility of a relationship with a general public that exceeds the bounds of a strictly literary public sphere.

Yet the essay finally depends on the recognition by Webster's readers that they are themselves in on the secret, so to speak, of poetry's conventions. Literary readers, as opposed to what Webster calls "non-literary readers," constituted a semi-defined public through the circulation of journals and newspapers like the *Examiner*, the radical paper founded by Leigh and John Hunt where Webster published her

essay (*H*, 155). Indeed, though the *Examiner* reached a national, if dwindling, audience in the 1870s when Webster published her essay, its public was constituted largely by the cultivated, literary readers whom Webster excludes from censure.²⁶ The essay's conclusion, then, is divided: character at once reveals the limits of the literary public for whom Webster writes and gestures beyond those limits to a larger public whose attention it might nonetheless capture. In its division, moreover, it suggests the ways in which mass culture made the calibration of address, affect, or theme to the demands of one's readers a fraught venture for Victorian poets. At stake in Webster's poetics of character (indeed, in character as an aspect of Victorian poetics more generally) is the publicness of poetry, and in the fictional speakers of their dramatic monologues, poets like Tennyson, Browning, and Webster tested poetry's ability to imagine and create relations across the distances of modern print culture.

II. IN THAT SHAPE WHEN YOU DIE IT LEAVES YOUR MOUTH

Unlike the Victorian readers of whom Webster complained, contemporary scholarship assumes that dramatic monologues insist on their fictional scene of address over and against their addressivity, or structural address, as circulated texts. Walt Whitman's mode of poetic address makes a useful contrast. As Michael Warner has discussed, Whitman's poetry demonstrates a pervasive awareness of "publication context" or "our mutual nonknowledge, our mediation by print."²⁷ Stranger, Whitman calls his addressee, and along with this recognition comes a sophisticated pragmatics of self that takes place not in spite of but through the "genericizing conventions of publication."²⁸ Warner contrasts this awareness with the representations of a dramatic monologue like Browning's "My Last Duchess," which "fictionalize[s]" both the speaker and the scene of address.²⁹ The deixis of the monologue, Warner argues, points not to the page in your hands but to the fictional scene, a strategy adapted to the increasingly novelized world of Victorian reading rather than Whitman's American print public sphere.

Yet in the hands of its most sophisticated Victorian practitioners, the monologue often rests uneasily between addressing its fictional interlocutor(s) and calling out to an unknown reader posted above the page. Browning's first publication, *Pauline*, is a long semi-autobiographical monologue in which the narrator's opening sally—"Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me"—suggests an erotics of the page not unlike Whitman's.³⁰ It was a strategic ambivalence to which Browning turned

repeatedly throughout his poetry.³¹ These moments propose fictions of character as constituted through publication and response. Shall these dry bones live? You'll have to lean over the page and see. As the characters of dramatic monologues address their fictional interlocutors, character itself addresses the Victorian reader and solicits a response. The dramatic monologue is a genre committed to the phenomenology of the printed page as an aspect of its meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of speech genres is helpful in thinking through the relationship between character as utterance and character as mediated address, distinguishing as he does between primary genres (all the varieties of utterance by which we construct our social encounters) and secondary genres (complex, literary genres). Few verse genres make this distinction as apparent or crucial as the dramatic monologue, which conflates the utterance of the poet with the utterance of a character. The dramatic monologue's prerogative to fictionalize the scene of utterance allows the reader to treat lines from within, say, Tennyson's "Tithonus" (1860) as belonging to the figure of Tithonus without reference to their organization as lines in a dramatic monologue. It limits our attention, in other words, to what Bakhtin calls primary genres. Yet as a genre of literary utterance, the dramatic monologue coordinates primary genres into the utterance not of the character but of the poet: the character is less speaker than spoken. The poem's character is not so much a guiding subjectivity that produces speech, as it is a figure for the coherence of speech within the coordinating structure of the monologue itself. The monologue's orientation toward what Bakhtin calls the "responsive understanding" of its addressee (whether historical or conventional) invites us to account for the publication, circulation, and reading that makes the character's utterance available to anyone at all.³²

As Bakhtin explains, the utterance marks its availability for response through "finalization."³³ In a face-to-face conversation, finalization is indicated by pacing and other forms of verbal or somatic punctuation that let our interlocutors know we're ready for their reply. With a printed text intended for circulation to a public, finalization must include not only those closural devices that belong to the poem proper but also the printing and publication of the text. As the speakers of dramatic monologues fashion their endings and finalize their own utterances, they concern themselves with the possibility of obtaining a response. As a mode of address, farewells and parting words suggest both an occasion for and a style of performance. The philosopher Valentin Volosinov writes that "[a] word is a bridge thrown between

myself and another,” yet parting words are necessarily words that part, that separate speaker from addressee.³⁴ They are transactions not only between speaker and addressee, but also between economies of address, between the present scene of utterance and its future path of transmission. Speakers use their valedictions to arrange relations that they can no longer superintend, relations that exist in the essentially imaginative space between distant parties. Dramatic endings like that of St. Simeon attempt to specify the responsive understanding of the reader through the kind of making-public performed in the valedictory scene, which also models the addressivity that they want their poems themselves to have.

“Ah, I remember me,” says Webster’s “Sister Annunciata,” and so she does.³⁵ And so do we. Retrospective self-constitution is a hallmark of Victorian poetry’s fictions of character, and among its strategies for producing these contextualized selves, the juxtaposition of “speaking” text and narrated past is one of the most persistent and an aspect of the poem’s valedictory perspective. Like dramatic monologues themselves, Victorian character is directed toward ends—“incidents in the development of a soul,” as Browning described *Sordello*—and the monologue’s mandate to allow the fictional self to narrate itself elides the poem’s wind-up to a textual stop with the severance or completion of that character as well.³⁶ As Robert Langbaum notes, citing John Dewey, the question of character is “what he shall *do*, shall he act for this or that end.”³⁷ Browning’s monologues, in particular, are rife with this sense of process and completion. The monologue’s narrative apparatus elaborates character toward a conclusion that is both loss and fulfillment.

The dramatic monologue shares this interest in endings with a number of the genres that fed into its development over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly the much-neglected monodrama. Until the 1870s, the “dramatic monologue” was rarely a term of art for poems with fictional speakers; instead there were prosopopoeiae, dramatic lyrics, lyrical monologues, dramatic idyls, laments, ballads, and other genres both traditional and experimental featuring the speeches, songs, or mental divagations of fictional characters. The monodrama was a popular eighteenth- and nineteenth-century form and the most likely category that early nineteenth-century poets themselves would have given for many of the poems we now call dramatic monologues, as Dwight Culler demonstrated in a seminal essay, “Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue.”³⁸ This tradition of histrionic, monological poetry given over to the display of emotions only loosely condensed

into something resembling a rounded character was practiced by such writers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Goethe, Matthew “Monk” Lewis, and Robert Southey, among others, but by the 1820s and 1830s perhaps its most important practitioners were L. E. L. and Felicia Hemans. In the monodrama’s traditional association with gender and passionate self-display, these late Romantic poetesses found opportunities for formal innovation and authorial self-fashioning in a number of remarkable pieces that fed directly into Tennyson and Browning’s experiments in the 1830s. Such poems as L. E. L.’s *The Improvisatrice* (1824) and Hemans’s “Arabella Stuart” (1828) and “Properzia Rossi” may lack the finely delineated characters of poems by Browning, Tennyson, and Webster, yet they did much to evolve the monodrama toward its more familiar Victorian successors.

For the importance of endings to the monodrama, we may glance briefly at just one: Hemans’s “Properzia Rossi” gives the last words of the Bolognese sculptor, painter, and poet who died, according to popular tradition, of unrequited love for a nobleman who married into his own class after her death. Within the poem’s fictional scene, Properzia Rossi is “showing her last work, a basso-relievo of Ariadne, to a Roman Knight, the object of her affection, who regards it with indifference.”³⁹ In the sculpture of Ariadne, the poem can be understood to represent a constitutive paradox of the monologue form. As Properzia Rossi is nominally addressing her “Roman Knight” in order to show him the statue, the work should be complete and present. The poem, however, indicates throughout that the sculpture is in process. In this it mirrors the genre’s fiction of character, which is already present to speak the poem and yet must constitute itself line by line. Thus Properzia Rossi imagines herself as the product of her own artistic shaping: she declares, in the chiasmic logic of her self-reflexive lines,

The bright work grows
 Beneath my hand, unfolding, as a rose,
 Leaf after leaf, to beauty; line by line,
 I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine.⁴⁰

(“To burn” might be to suffer one’s passions privately, but “to shine” is clearly uttered in supplication to an imagined public.) Through her farewell, Properzia Rossi becomes finally her own sculpture: “I give my own life’s history to thy brow” so that it may “meet his sight, / When I am pass’d away.”⁴¹ Hemans pursues the monodrama’s penchant for striking poses in order to measure the costs to female artists of entering cultural circulation, and the movement of the speaker toward her final

attitude prepares us to see how endings will link character, address, and circulation in the developing strands of the Victorian dramatic monologue.⁴²

I have taken this section's title from a line of "Fra Lippo Lippi," a character whose sensuous zeal often seems an analogue for Browning's capaciousness. Caught leaving a brothel by the night watch, brother Lippi's fast-talk takes its time through a *kunstlerroman* in miniature. At one point, he describes the objections of the Prior to his depicting bodies "like the true / As much as pea and pea."⁴³ The Prior wants Lippi's Quattrocento vitality sublimed into a wispy mannerism:

Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!⁴⁴

The image of ghostly babies leaving the mouths of the dead might provoke a disgust in readers to match the Prior's own at Lippi's physicality. Yet the Prior's most interesting comment is in that parenthetical. If we replace "soul" with "character," the remark is less odd than apt: the "shape" of the character on display in the monologue is drawn forth as a function of what Bakhtin calls "finalization," or the availability of any utterance for response. The valedictory shape of the dramatic monologue pushes character toward a completion that is its public meaning.

"The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church" takes this idea to its furthest extreme—"a serious parody," as Jerome McGann is fond of saying.⁴⁵ The poem gives the last words of the eponymous pastor, who connives to receive the tomb of his dreams from his auditors—in this case, his "nephews," a euphemism for the illegitimate sons of clergy.⁴⁶ Lying on his deathbed, he sketches out his tomb, prodding and coaxing his household all the while. He lists its ornaments and materials and imagines himself laid within it. Reading the poem we recognize the language of someone struggling to have his way and failing. He entreats and insults, bargains and wheedles his way through the poem, surrounded by sons whose indifference and self-interest mark the Bishop's every plea. The Bishop is trying to accomplish something by an act of language; describing his tomb, he hopes to "[o]rder[]" it and thereby see it produced. His calculating desire is juxtaposed with a riddle he poses to his audience: "Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?"⁴⁷

The answer: in the grave. As a reflection on the character the poem engenders, this line initiates a powerful de-idealizing gesture that the poem completes about 60 lines later. There, the Bishop imagines his future habitation and, in the poem's characteristic paradox, his future state of mind.⁴⁸ He imagines himself lying on the cheap entablature his greedy sons will purchase and asking, "Do I live, am I dead?" only to break off and cry, "There, leave me, there!"⁴⁹ The question is supposed to chastise the sons, to show them the pathetic limits of their gratitude (one imagines the cry, "Don't you see how you hurt me? Fine, go ahead!"), but it also demands that the Bishop be left suspended in that question as much as in any physical space. The Bishop lies in state in a text about which readers will perennially ask, "Does he live, is he dead?"

Character is the tomb that all dramatic monologists are building for themselves. Indeed, the Bishop is horrified to imagine himself "oozing through" the cheap materials he fears his sons will buy and wants a proper tomb to preserve the integrity of the self.⁵⁰ The Bishop's question and its rejoinder highlight the weirdness of mistaking a text for a speaking self and the dramatic monologue's continued enjoiner that we do so. But what sort of speaking self are we solicited to imagine? An expressive theory of the monologue forces us to retroject a subjectivity whose contours we perceive only after the monologue's engines have cooled, and amid the whine and hum of his ongoing speech, it might be difficult to say with any precision where the Bishop is. The reader leans over the page as the nephews over the deathbed, and the Bishop hovers somewhere in between. Like his anxious authority over his sons, then, the Bishop's character is a "perlocutionary discourse" realized through finalization and response: in a tomb and a text both made available for reception.⁵¹ (It was perhaps with some sense of this meaning that Browning initially titled the poem only "The Tomb at St. Praxed's" for its initial publication in *Hood's Magazine*, as though tomb and speaker were interchangeable.) All the minute utterances of the poem, all the different persuasive attempts, go into constructing the tomb and making the Bishop whole. His speech acts may be invested in his afterlife, but literature has a way of selling off stock in death to purchase character. The Bishop must be published, and asserting this, the poem defers the question—"Do I live, am I dead?"—to the reader's judgment and makes character into a canny assessment of the contingencies facing any address mediated for public circulation.

III. IT IS MY SHAPE AND LIVES AGAIN

The dramatic monologue thrives on these contingencies throughout the Victorian period. From St. Simeon's exemplary sainthood and Properzia Rossi's statue to the mechanical creation of Webster's anonymous inventor and Childe Roland's horn-blast, the emphatic artifice of their conclusions tests the possibility of communication with an anonymous and distant public. Browning's 1864 "A Death in the Desert" features a particularly salient and self-conscious example of a speaker who says goodbye in order to place his faith, quite literally, in circulation. Hailed as a major poem at the time of its publication, "A Death in the Desert" is somewhat less well known now, perhaps due to what A. C. Swinburne termed its "mask of indurate theological mud."⁵² The poem tells the story of John, perhaps the author of the fourth gospel and also the disciple whom Jesus loved. A poem perplexed by the relationship between material and spiritual histories, it narrates the deceased John's revival by a group of early Christians in order that he may pass on his wisdom as the last living soul to have seen Christ. That soul comes back somewhat into the body to speak its final words, a "higher critical apology," as Elinor Shaffer writes, "in reply to the higher critical attack" on the historical figure of Christ.⁵³

Victorian critics were alert to the thematic and rhetorical importance of endings in the poem, to which they assigned its powers of argument and affect. The poet, Christian Socialist, and amateur Egyptologist Gerald Massey, writing for *The Quarterly Review*, makes clear the generic resonance of John's dying words:

The dying man rises and dilates . . . [and], as he grows more and more inspired, and the energy of his spirit appears to rend itself almost free from the earthly conditions, the rigid strength of thought, the inexorable logic, the unerring force of will, have all the increased might that we sometimes see in the dying.⁵⁴

An unsigned review in *The Athenæum* drew similar conclusions about the issues of genre and address involved in this complex poem:

It embodies the death of St. John in the Desert, and has the piquancy of making the beloved apostle reply with last words, in far-off ghostly tones, which come, weirdly impressive, from that cave in the wilderness, to the Frenchman's 'Life of Jesus.'⁵⁵

The review locates us in the midst of the "reflexive circulation of discourse," where the words of the poem, regardless of whom they

ostensibly address, are aimed at a reading public familiar with ongoing debates about the historical interpretation of the Bible; and the reviewer recognizes the distinction as well as the connection between the character's address in the poem and the address of the poem itself.⁵⁶ John's speech replies with "last words" that seem to address not his actual interlocutors, not Victorian readers, nor even Renan, whose work John's speech implicitly disproves, but Renan's book. The publicity of the poem lies not in its freight of topical Victorian religious discourse but in the competition with other texts for readers' attention and uptake. In reporting the dying apostle's last words, then, the poem tells the story of John as mediated address.

It is a story played out not only in the discursive contest described by the anonymous reviewer but within the poem as well, which thematizes this process through a complex series of fictional mediations. The Russian-stacking-doll contexts Browning sets up are elaborate and need some rehearsal, if only for the disorienting effect of their accumulation: John's extended monologue is relayed within the framing narrative of Pamphylax the Antiochene, who informs us that tomorrow he will die "fight[ing] the beasts," presumably for Roman sport.⁵⁷ The story we read (and it is emphatically a story for reading as opposed to hearing) has been told by Pamphylax to one Phoebas, whom Pamphylax implores his auditor/reader to believe. It is not clear that this is the same story we read; Phoebas may name nothing more than a failed path of oral transmission. The manuscript is in the hands of one whose name is indicated by the Greek letters *Mu* and *Epsilon* ("ME") and who signs his name only with a cross. We learn in a bracketed prologue that this figure received the manuscript from his wife's uncle, Xanthus, who may or may not have been the Xanthus attending this resurrection scene. Further, the manuscript has been glossed at the end with another bracketed addendum: the musings of someone named Cerinthus, though the gloss itself is written by another, perhaps a student of said Cerinthus. And after this gloss—which ends, "Call Christ, then, the illimitable God, / Or lost!" (*D*, 686–87)—there comes a final chastising punctum: "But 'twas Cerinthus that is lost" (*D*, 687). Presumably this note is from someone other than the "one" who recorded Cerinthus's musings. Is the last line the comment of the manuscript's owner? Browning's signature? The poem offers no orienting sign, and so we are left with a possibility which I take to be Browning's point: print mediation does not allow the recovery of a speaker but is in fact the engendering thereof. Cerinthus is lost because "Cerinthus" (let's imagine him titled like a dramatic monologue) is lost, and the truth

of John's testament (which in a very real sense is himself) resides in its ongoing circulation.

The narrative of Pamphylax begins with an incredibly vivid description of the apostle's body and the attempt to resuscitate it. Hiding in a secret grotto, the early Christians "wet his lips with wine" (*D*, 13) and dip a plantain-leaf in water and "lay it right / And cool his forehead just above the eyes" (*D*, 14–17), all while two "brother[s]" (*D*, 18), one on either side, "chafe each hand and try to make it warm" (*D*, 19). This fails, as do prayers. Then a "Boy" (*D*, 30) fetches a plate of lead with engravings on it, to which he presses his fingers while uttering "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (*D*, 64). At the Boy's words John rises, looks around, expresses confusion, and, after a brief pause for more scholarly glossing, begins his speech. The material substance of John's body and the intangible force of its reanimation, as they are juxtaposed in the successive attempts to revive him, become the "animating" dialectic of his monologue:

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end;
Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!
Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself
A little where the fire was; thus I urge
The soul that served me[.]"

(*D*, 105–9)

We should hear in these lines an echo of Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," in which the poet's "mind in creation" is described "as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness."⁵⁸ Yet the inconstant wind is here no empyrean breeze of inspiration but the rather mundane actions of the early Christian community as they feed, fan, chafe, and pray him into utterance. Their naïve attention to the body might suggest the violence Webster associates with autobiographical reading—"vivisection," she called it. Yet John's ongoing self-characterization will come to depend on such attempts to make use of him, to make material objects speak, crudely or otherwise. The speakers of Browning's monologues are notable for the way they bind themselves to context.⁵⁹ But St. John tells his story not only as the entanglements of a personal history but also as his material transmission forward in time. As with the Bishop of St. Praxed's, who wonders whether he'll enjoy the centuries as a graven tomb, John's vitality is dependent upon his public form, upon circulation and response. Each new reader will blow the spark back to life, one of Browning's many figures for the reading of character.

The question of John's character is bound up throughout the poem with his medial condition and the manner of his reception.⁶⁰ John describes his visionary exaltation on Patmos and the attempt to communicate that experience after:

But at the last, why, I seemed left alive
Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,
To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared
When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things.
(*D*, 152–55)

The “sea-jelly” may not be vocal, per se, but it is legible; it “tell[s]” by its availability for interpretation. Shelley again comes to mind: “[W]hen composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.”⁶¹ For Shelley the text is always inspiration's poor remainder, and here John is less an inspired prophet than a text, washed up on Patmos for bathers to wonder at. Eventually he falls sick and dies. Or so he thought:

Yet now I wake in such decrepitude
As I had slidden down and fallen afar,
Past even the presence of my former self,
Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,
Till I am found away from my own world,
Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,
Along with unborn people in strange lands.
(*D*, 188–94)

This neatly describes the temporality of utterance released into circulation. In John's new existence, self-characterization is complicated (“[p]ast even the presence of my former self”) by the strangeness of his future surroundings. His question—“And how shall I assure them?” (*D*, 198)—resonates with Victorian poets' concerns about the cultural authority of poetry when faced with a mass public: an anonymous “they, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength” (*D*, 199), is juxtaposed with the attenuated John, whose soul is worn and “scarcely withheld at all [by his body], [. . .] But shudderingly, scarce a shred between” (*D*, 199–204).

Pounded paper-thin by his role as prophet, John addresses his public much as Browning's poem does its Victorian one; both publics consist of strangers conscripted by their own attention, laid out along the branching networks of the text's transmission. Elsewhere in the

poem, John's attenuation is described as a "weakness" that becomes in turn his auditors' "strength" (*D*, 339). Indeed, it is only by being so—thin with the thinness of J. S. Mill's "hot-pressed paper"—that John reaches any public at all.⁶² Browning's poem locates its grounds for belief in the transmission of John's testimony, and the material mediation and uncertain provenance of his speech, its passage through many hands, become signs of its power (as opposed to that of Cerinthus, whom we know only as a gloss on the greater history of John's text): "My book speaks on," John explains paradoxically, "because it cannot pass" (*D*, 368).

Before concluding, John turns to the matter of human perfectibility, which is made possible because man is "[s]et to instruct himself by his past self" (*D*, 601). The perfected human shape emerges by a process that echoes the scene of resuscitation with which the poem begins, as an inert lump of clay—the raw material of the imagination—comes to resemble a human figure:

So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,
 Cries ever "Now I have the thing I see":
 Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,
 From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.
 How were it had he cried "I see no face,
 No breast, no feet, i'th ineffectual clay"?
 Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,
 And laughed "It is my shape and lives again!"

(*D*, 611–18)

For Browning, these images of man are essential to the continued growth of man, and his John situates such shapes in a valedictory economy where images of one's "past self" become the grounds of future improvement. John's moral perfectionism comes to resemble Browning's own dramatic poetics: juxtaposing an articulate present self with its own past in a narrative framework, this process shadows forth a third figure, a *tertium quid*, whose notional existence stands for possibility itself; perfection rests, in other words, with the subjunctive gaze of St. John's valediction. The importance of imperfection then turns to a discussion of lost originals:

Will ye renounce the pact of creatureship?
 The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,
 Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;
 But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,
 Serve still and are replaced as time requires:
 By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!

(*D*, 624–29)

As Sophie Ratcliffe rightly notes, “it is crucial that he describes the pact [of creatureship] in terms of the reception and transmission of texts.”⁶³ Turning on the replicability and circulation of print, John’s pact of creatureship is another name for the sympathetic imagination of the reader, and his fantasy of copies made, worn out, and replaced across time exposes the temporality of public address. The textual frames within which Browning situates this speech only serve to underscore the way in which his dramatic valedictory scenes exploit the printed mediation of experience as a mode of publicness. John’s speech imagines the way a history of personal experience might create a community of Christian faithful, bound together across time through the endless resuscitation of John himself in the articulate phenomenon of his printed character.

The endings of characters like St. Simeon, the bishop, and St. John are generic in that they repeat over and over again this valedictory *topos* of completion and transmission. These poems of retreat, retraction, disavowal, and departure take the measure not only of poetry’s disenchantment or exclusion from the public sphere, but more importantly, of poets’ self-conscious attempts to come to terms with its nineteenth-century form. “Public speech,” as Warner explains, “differs from both lyric and sermonic eloquence by construing its addressee as its circulation, not as private apprehension.”⁶⁴ The emergence of the dramatic monologue can seem like a crucial marker on the road to what Jackson and Yopie Prins have called lyricization: eliding poem and person, it appears to naturalize the fiction of the speaker that New Critical methods would later identify with all supposedly lyric utterance. Yet in the ends of character, poets demonstrate an aspiration that poetic address be also public address as they explore the mediated intimacies and forms of relation that might obtain between readers and circulating texts. The Victorian dramatic monologue reimagines poetic address as a leave-taking—not only a farewell to the addressee but also a farewell to the poem and the fiction that is at once fulfilled and lost to the world of its circulation.

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NOTES

I am grateful to Thomas Koenigs, Len Gutkin, and my anonymous reader for suggestions that improved this essay in several respects. Thanks as well to generous audiences at NAVSA and the Yale 18/19C Colloquium. My thinking on this subject was also sharpened by a fortuitous visit to the Historical Poetics Working Group at Rutgers during their session on the dramatic monologue.

¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "St. Simeon Stylites," in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969), page 542. headnote. Hereafter abbreviated S and cited parenthetically by line number.

² See Emily Harrington, *Second Person Singular: Late Victorian Women Poets and the Bonds of Verse* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2015); Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), 118–65; and Adela Pinch, *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 77–111.

³ James Chandler, "Hallam, Tennyson, and the Poetry of Sensation: Aestheticist Allegories of a Counter-Public Sphere," *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (1994): 537.

⁴ For useful overviews of the decline narrative in early Victorian poetry and criticism, see David J. DeLaura, "The Future of Poetry: A Context for Carlyle and Arnold," in *Carlyle and His Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of Charles Richard Sanders*, ed. John Clubbe (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1976), 148–80; and Dino Franco Felluga, *The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2005), 143–62.

⁵ Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 14 December 1852, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, 6 vol., ed. Cecil Y. Lang (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1996–2001), 1:249.

⁶ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 80.

⁷ Andrew H. Miller's recent work on exemplarity and moral perfectionism has restored to view a reading culture in which the characters of Victorian biographies, novels, and dramatic monologues offered opportunities for readers to reflect on their own selfhood—to learn, in the words of F. D. Maurice, that "I too am an I" (*The Conscience: Lectures on Casuistry* [London: Macmillan, 1872], 9, quoted in Miller, *The Burden of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008], 12. Hereafter abbreviated C and cited by page number). On the social mediation of masculine identity in "Simeon," see James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 42–45.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Hary Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 94. For the importance of last words in nineteenth-century literature and culture, see Karl Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 126–33; Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 28–47; and Diana Fuss, *Dying Modern: A Meditation on Elegy* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2013).

⁹ Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1983), 11. More recently both E. Warwick Slinn and Cornelia Pearsall have put forward compelling arguments for the public entanglements of dramatic monologues with bearing on this argument. For Slinn, the dramatic monologue employs its contextualizing devices to test the social conditions governing speech acts. Pearsall, also with recourse to the idea of performative utterance, sees the monologue as pressing toward personal transformation, particularly in her reading of the role of Whig oratory in Tennyson's major monologues. See Slinn, *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique: The Politics of Performative Language* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2003), 9–31; Pearsall, "The Dramatic Monologue," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000),

67–88; and Pearsall, *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 19–50.

¹⁰ For a discussion of poetic mediation and mass culture, see John Plotz, “Mediated Involvement: John Stuart Mill’s Antisocial Sociability,” in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, ed. Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2010), 69–92. Plotz recasts J. S. Mill’s writing, particularly on poetry, as an attempt to create mediated involvement, allowing intimacy with and yet distance from the threatening crowds of the Victorian public sphere. In the terms of my argument, the farewell offers another such mediation.

¹¹ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Michael Cotsell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 369.

¹² Pinch, 81.

¹³ Janice Carlisle, *John Stuart Mill and the Writing of Character* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁴ Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 120.

¹⁵ Dickens, 99.

¹⁶ Dickens, 426.

¹⁷ Augusta Webster, *A Housewife’s Opinions* (London: Macmillan, 1879), 151. Hereafter abbreviated *H* and cited parenthetically by page number.

¹⁸ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830–1870* (London: Athlone Press, 1972), 9–10.

¹⁹ Robert Browning, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, The Saviour of Society*, in *The Poems*, 2 vol., ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), vol. 1, lines 182–3.

²⁰ Arthur Henry Hallam, “On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson,” in *The Writings of Arthur Hallam*, ed. T. H. Vail Motter (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), 184.

²¹ Hallam, 190.

²² Hallam, 186.

²³ Hallam, 190.

²⁴ Chandler, 534.

²⁵ Beyond Webster’s essay, one could look also to A. C. Swinburne, who bluntly dismisses the general public as a “gigantic *malade imaginaire*”: “Let those read who will, and let those who will abstain from reading. *Caveat emptor*” (*Notes on Poems and Reviews* [London: John Camden Hotten, 1866], 14). From here it is only a short distance to the figure of the minor poet, apotheosis of early Victorian decline narratives, and beyond that, to the modernist *poète maudit*, out of key with his time.

²⁶ See Laurel Brake, “The Examiner,” in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), 210.

²⁷ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 288, 286.

²⁸ Warner, 286.

²⁹ Warner, 288

³⁰ Browning, *Pauline*, in *The Poems*, vol. 1, line 1.

³¹ See Herbert F. Tucker, “Browning as Escape Artist: Avoidance and Intimacy,” in *Robert Browning in Contexts*, ed. John Woolford (Winfield: Wedgestone Press, 1998), 1–25. In a series of essays spanning several decades, Tucker has repeatedly called attention to the importance of character as a phenomenon that should be neither assumed nor

dismissed. His thinking on poetic character's matrix of formal and cultural dimensions should be apparent throughout this essay. See also Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 226–43; and "Wanted Dead or Alive: Browning's Historicism," in *Victorian Studies* 38 (1994): 25–39.

³² Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), 68.

³³ Bakhtin, 61. For Bakhtin's full description of this process, see 60–102.

³⁴ V. N. Vilosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 86.

³⁵ Webster, "Sister Annunciata," in *Portraits and Other Poems*, ed. Christine Sutphin (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 95.

³⁶ Browning, *Sordello*, in *The Poems*, vol. 1, page 150.

³⁷ Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), 224.

³⁸ See A. Dwight Culler, "Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 366–85. On monodrama, monologue, and women writers, see also Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 26–57; and Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 57–68. Some critics (see, for example, Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* [London: Methuen, 1977]) see no reason to distinguish among these many monological forms with fictional speakers, drawing together everything from Ovid's *Heroides* to the personae of Sylvia Plath. I do not endorse that position here; there are good reasons, as Culler and Preston also observe, to mark the specificity of the monodrama as a genre. We should be wary of ignoring the various generic contracts that underwrite and differentiate much writing within this line of poetry. As these various monological forms evolve during the Victorian period, however, the fluctuating categories (as well as the many nonce and hybrid monological forms) do suggest the development of the dramatic monologue as a genre within an emergent meta-discourse, even before its formal articulation in the criticism of the *fin-de-siècle*. As I note above, by the last decades of the nineteenth century, the term had collected under its wing many of its own antecedents, and early twentieth-century criticism completed the process of generic consolidation.

³⁹ Felicia Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pages 351–52.

⁴⁰ Hemans, "Properzia Rossi," in *Selected Poems*, lines 31–34.

⁴¹ Hemans, "Properzia Rossi," 36; 42–43.

⁴² Preston reveals the significance of this posing as mythic self-presentation and connects the monodrama to a long history of gendered solo performance, in which the monodrama offered a unique opportunity for "public performance and emotional expression" (26–27). Importantly, Preston restores to view not only the textual genre but also the embodied gestures and attitudes with which monodramas would have been associated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers and viewers.

⁴³ Browning, "Fra Lippo Lippi," in *The Poems*, vol. 1, lines 177–78.

⁴⁴ Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church," in *The Poems*, vol. 1, lines 183–87.

⁴⁵ Jerome McGann, "Introduction," in Swinburne, *The Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. McGann and Charles Sligh (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), xxvi.

⁴⁶ Browning, "Bishop," 3.

⁴⁷ Browning, "Bishop," 52.

⁴⁸ Tucker calls this "the trick of the poetic resurrection-man: incorporating into the speech of the living dead a pattern of references to the process of resuscitation itself, a pattern that evokes and proleptically figures the cooperation of poet and reader in representing the vanished past" ("Wanted," 31).

⁴⁹ Browning, "Bishop," 113.

⁵⁰ Browning, "Bishop," 117.

⁵¹ Miller, 222.

⁵² Swinburne to John Nichol, 19 June 1864, in *The Swinburne Letters*, 6 vol., ed. Cecil Y. Lang (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959–62), 1:100.

⁵³ E. S. Shaffer, "*Kubla Khan*" and *The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), 220 Following the account in Renan's *Life of Jesus*, Browning's John admits that he was not present at the crucifixion and that his gospel "manufactur[es] historical particulars," but he recuperates the grounds of faith by replacing "the narrower conception of 'ocular witness,' of historical reportage, [with] the interpretation of history" (Shaffer, 212, 220). The false history in John's visionary gospel, in other words, is only there "to provide the clarity required by the non-visionary" (Shaffer, 212). Shaffer's reading remains the most thoroughgoing, both in its sensitivity to the art of Browning's powerful casuistry and in its understanding of the historical nuances of higher critical argument. See also Jonathan Loesberg, "Browning Believing: 'A Death in the Desert' and the Status of Belief," in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.1 (2010): 209–38.

⁵⁴ Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley, ed., *Robert Browning: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995), 271.

⁵⁵ Litzinger, 221.

⁵⁶ Warner, 96.

⁵⁷ Browning, "A Death in the Desert," in *The Poems*, vol. 1, line 652. Hereafter abbreviated *D* and cited parenthetically by line number.

⁵⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Freistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 531. On the relationship between reading and reanimation in "A Death in the Desert," see Erin Nerstad, "Decomposing but to Recompose: Browning, Biblical Hermeneutics, and the Dramatic Monologue," *Victorian Poetry* 50 (2012): 543–61.

⁵⁹ See Tucker, "Overhearing," 229.

⁶⁰ As Jan-Melissa Schramm suggests, "The privileged claim of the eye-witness is . . . replaced by a communal exercise in collective construction and interpretation" (*Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000], 169).

⁶¹ Shelley, 531.

⁶² Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," in *Collected Works*, 33 vol., ed. John S. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), 1:349.

⁶³ Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 112.

⁶⁴ Warner, 84.