

Narrative Aspects in the Dramatic Monologue

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Abstract This article identifies the existence of narrative aspects in dramatic monologues chiefly by discerning commonalities between dramatic monologists and first-person narrators in prose. It establishes that narrative concepts such as fictional self-making, strategic techniques employed to construct fictional identity, dissonant/consonant self-narration, discursive choices, reliability and intentionality of the monologue, as well as temporal aspect (temporality of speech act, temporality of action, and frequency of narrated events) can be detected in this poetic form. The interdisciplinary approach this article proposes is tested out on a narrative reading of Browning's "Pictor Ignotus," "Porphyria's Lover," and Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites," followed by a comparative reading of Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" and Browning's "My Last Duchess." Based on these analyses, we suggest that first-person narrators and dramatic monologists are engaged in projecting their identities through the narrative text, that they intentionally convey ideologies through the narrating act and control narrative aspects such as time, presentation of characters and scenes in order to claim ownership of the narrative.

Keywords dramatic monologue; first-person narratives; fictional self-making; discursive choices; narrative strategies.

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Introduction

Postclassical narratology derives from classical narratological models by expanding its scope to include oral telling, film, computer games, drama (the list goes on), reacting against the scientific approach to narrative of classical narratologists who aimed at the systematic creation of dichotomies of the type story x plot, author x narrator, implied author x implied reader, narrator x narrate, thus limiting their work solely to fictional prose. By contrast, for postclassical narratologists "*A narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, building, or a combination thereof" (Bal 5). Such a definition allows for a narrative consideration of poetic form as narrative text, although narrative is generally not a prerequisite of the poetic form excepting narrative poetry such as the epic or the ballad. This article proposes applying narrative terminology in the reading of dramatic monologues, a poetic genre, to primarily emphasize the existence of narrative aspects in dramatic monologues, and secondly, to discern commonalities in dramatic monologists and first-person narrators in prose.

As Dorrit Cohn investigates techniques of narrative in prose in her seminal *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, she examines the autonomous monologue as a presentation of consciousness in first-person texts and dedicates a few paragraphs (257) to the connection between this form of presenting consciousness in prose and the dramatic monologue which combines the lyrical and the dramatic. Cohn states: "This presence of a fictive speaker relates the dramatic monologue not only to soliloquy in drama, but also to fictional narrative in the first person—a relationship that has been largely disregarded in discussions of the dramatic monologue, perhaps because of the "dramatic" emphasis of the English term. Viewed from this vantage point, all dramatic monologues are first-person narratives in verse form" (257).

More recently, Phelan in *Experiencing Fiction* examines the combination of narrative and lyrical aspects in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-lighted Space" by calling it "a lyric narrative" (158), and Alice Munroe's "Prue," which Phelan calls a "portrait narrative" (178), specifically demonstrating that studies on the merging nature of lyric and narrative are of key importance to the contemporary research on narrative. Meanwhile, in his *Theory of Lyric*, Jonathan Culler maintains that "the dramatic monologue lies at the limit of lyric on a third side, in the direction of narrative fiction and drama, at the borderline between lyric and fiction" (264). Similar to Cohn's, this take on dramatic monologues is expounded within a larger study that deals solely with the lyric. Evidently, studies on the nature of dramatic monologues as a poetic genre do exist (perhaps the most salient one being Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience*), but there is a need for studies on the narrative aspects of dramatic monologues, limited so far within the study of the lyric.

Our research paper aims to discern the presence of narrative aspects in dramatic monologues, such as the speech act of a narrating monologist, word choices, fictional self-making, strategic techniques used to construct identity, reliability of speakers, purpose of the monologue/narrative as well as temporality of the speech act vs. temporality of events in the narrative, and frequency of narrated events. Combining tenets of classical and postclassical narratology (as there is a theoretical consideration applied to a poetic form), we see parallels between prose narrative (narrative fiction) and the dramatic monologue by denoting dissonant/consonant self-narration and temporal duality in narrating agents of both cases. It stands to reason that the argumentation for the theoretical assumption proposed in this article can be achieved by finding textual evidence in dramatic monologues by the two creators of the genre, i.e. Browning and Tennyson, the corpus being Browning's "Pictor Ignatus" and "Porphyria's Lover," and Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites." Lastly, the proposed theory is tested out on a comparative reading of Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" and Browning's dramatic monologue "My Last Duchess." The narrative mode of reading prose or dramatic monologues stimulates critical reflection leading to awareness of textual strategies employed to control mental constructions in the real reader.

Defining the Dramatic Monologue in the Context of Narratology

The nineteenth-century Victorian poets Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning invented the dramatic monologue with the purpose of detaching themselves as poets from the fictional voices or monologists. Due to the evident and clearly

distinguished fictionality of such monologists, this detachment the Victorian poets were seeking was achieved and is, now, easily recognizable as being similar to the narrator-novelist distinction in prose. In *Browning's Dramatic Monologue and the Post-romantic Subject*, Martin regards monologists in the dramatic monologue as “hypothetical centers of being-in-language” (28). The dramatic monologue starts with their very existence and the words they use—language is created and used by them and for their diegetic purposes. They reveal themselves through language. The same happens in first-person narratives in prose: even if a homodiegetic but not autodiegetic narrator tells the narrative, the diegetic world unfolds because the narrator is telling it. The monologist in dramatic monologues and the narrator in prose are centers of the narrative told through language.

In this article we are examining the dramatic monologue in comparison and relation to first-person narratives. Specifically, the 19th century dramatic monologue can also be considered as one of the forerunners of modern techniques of rendering consciousness in the first person (supporting this claim: no external ‘omniscient’ intrusion, only the existence of the words/thoughts of the monologist/focalizer, events and other characters are filtered and presented only by the focalizer). Dramatic monologists may hint at an interlocutor or may be conveying what they have to say or they may be speaking to the self. It follows that one narrative aspect detected in the dramatic monologue is the implied listener: he/she has either previously asked a question or made a gesture or at least the monologist assumes that the listener has done so. In “My Last Duchess,” the monologist says “not the first are you to turn and ask thus” (1282), in “Fra Lippo Lippi” the monologist states: “Who am I? Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend” (1300).

In his *Theory of the Lyric*, Culler criticizes the tendency of scholars to impose the obligatory existence of fictional speakers in lyric poetry while maintaining that some types of lyric, for instance the dramatic monologue, require a fictional voice and that the speech act of the said voice is important to consider. Culler proposes that during the reading of a dramatic monologue there occurs “a dissociation of levels: readers unconsciously separate the act of communication by the fictional speaker in his or her situation from the verse produced by the poet” (275). This furthers our argument on the existence of commonalities between dramatic monologues and first-person narrators in prose. Readers acknowledge the existence of an author in both cases, but tend to separate him/her from the fictional narrating voices (speakers/narrators). There is a dual mental process occurring in the real reader: we read the words of the fictional narrating agents while being aware that these are the words and poetic arrangements being stipulated by the author.

Culler's view shares theoretical principles with optional-narrator theory (see Patron, *Optional-Narrator Theory*).

There exists another narrative feature shared by the dramatic monologue and first-person narratives. First-person narrators usually use techniques such as suspense and anticipation in fictional autobiographies. A similar function is performed by gaps and the process of delaying information used in dramatic monologues. The genre is contingent on obscurity of information; it entails asking questions but now answering them. If there is a plausible answer in the poem, it can only be found in the understanding that occurs in the reader-author rapport. No authorial intrusion or illusion of 'omniscience' is to be found in dramatic monologues or homodiegetic narratives. The outcomes of using suspense, gaps of information, and delays are the same in both genres: they require the active participation of the reader, exciting curiosity and seeking readerly attention.

Dramatic monologues belabor the psychological state of the monologist. Action or event is not a mandatory condition of the genre as is the case with narrative (at least in the traditional definition of narrative). Morgan states that "the actions themselves are not the focus of the work" (160) in the dramatic monologue. Yet, action and event are not entirely ruled out from the genre—often the psychological state of the monologist unfolds by recounting past events. At times, events occur as the monologue is being delivered (Browning's "Andrea del Sarto" is an example among many). A change from point A to point B exists to carry the narrative forward. The monologist of Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites" utters the monologue in the present tense, while using the past tense to refer to past events of his life. In these passages, three stanzas contain three events denoted clearly by the places he lived at in the past (see stanzas 6, 7, and 8). Each stanza signifies change, thus stimulating a "then what?" or "then where?" reaction that naturally creates in the mind of the now curious reader the question "why?." Providing a brief examination of these three stanzas, indivisible links between event and character construction ensue:

Stanza 6: St. Simeon begins by recounting his life at a convent occupied by other people of similar interests to St. Simeon's: "while I lived/ In the white convent down the valley there/ For many weeks about my loins I wore/ the rope that haled the buckets from the well" (56). There is a focus on the spiritual and physical state of St. Simeon and throughout the stanza readers come to realize that other people used to face similar circumstantial events.

Stanza 7: St. Simeon confides that "Three winters, that my soul might grow

to thee,/ I lived up there on yonder mountain-side”(56). This following stanza emphasizes his religious piety. Details are offered about the few drinks and the lack of food, excepting the gifts of food received from men who had heard of St. Simeon’s healing powers. It is evident that the place has changed and so has St. Simeon’s situation.

Stanza 8: St. Simeon narrates: “Then, that I might be more alone with thee,/ Three years I lived upon a pillar...last of all, I grew/Twice ten long weary weary years to this [pillar]” (57). The third and last place is the pillars where St. Simeon takes his time into choosing and positioning himself on the pillar he is actually standing on as he delivers the monologue. Above all, the passage predominantly emphasizes his solitary standing on the pillar.

Considering events and places in these three stanzas, three separate locations actually allow for three reiterative actions of St. Simeon, moving from one place to another. The action is the same (i.e. moving), yet there is a triple repetition of this action and a change of place whenever this action is performed. The action and consequently the telling of the action, apart from suggesting questions of the “why” type, are also important in terms of character construction – the reader is naturally interested to make sense of the personal, psychological, possibly cultural motives that inform the actions of the character. Each action signifies St. Simeon distancing himself from other people and worldly cares. Spatially, each action and movement notes his movement away from humanity and symbolizes his attempts at moving closer to God. From being a part of the community (stanza 6), he moves to an isolated state which still offers him the devotion of the community (stanza 7), onto a true isolation on a pillar (stanza 8) from which God can pick out his physically separate form and sanctify him. Event, action, and psychological state in this poem suffice for a diegetic cause-effect narrative structure which a reader can summarize as: *Because St. Simeon wished to be a saint, he decided to live a life of religious piety*, or action-wise: *One day, St. Simeon went to X, the other day he decided to go to X*.

Deictics also help in discerning spatial and temporal aspects in the dramatic monologue. In the sixth stanza of “St. Simeon Stylites,” the valley is referred to as “down the valley there” (56), whereas in the seventh stanza another line speaks of the mountain as “up there on yonder mountain-side” (56). Deictics designating places reveal, in the case of St. Simeon, that in the present moment he is not “there”; prepositions signify the valley and the mountain as locations in the narrative. If

we ask where St. Simeon is at the moment of the narrative, the lines show that he is on the pillar, the last of the three locations mentioned: “For not alone *this* pillar-punishment/Not this alone I bore” (56). If the pillar were to be his past location, the deictic “this” would turn to “that.” In Tennyson’s “Ulysses,” deictics are used as part of the monologist’s manipulative strategies. By pointing out to the port and the sea, in the lines “*There* lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:/ *There* gloom the dark, broad seas” (1171, emphasis added), he creates a sense of immediacy in the mariners (his listeners), creating an urge to go on the next journey.

Such arguments underpin the notion that narrated events are significant in the construction of fictional identities in the combination of lyrical and narrative elements in the dramatic monologue. Such evidence relates to what Phelan calls “unfolding portrait” (*Experiencing Fiction*, 151) as readers build mental constructions of the characters by putting together the pieces of the puzzle—motivations, past actions, emotions—that is the fictional character, and most importantly, readers come to see the monologist’s own interpretation of his/her life and identity. Events, locations, deictics, and the speech act of the monologist thus generate a narrative aspect in the monologue as readers are invited to make judgments on the monologist’s actions, decisions and worldviews. In the case of St. Simeon, when he decides to move away from the convent to the mountains to be closer to God and sees himself as a man at whom his “bretheren marvelled greatly” (56), the implied reader possibly makes a negative ethical judgment on his action as the reader sees ambition in St. Simeon’s asceticism and understands that his wish to be declared a saint originates from his feeling of superiority. St. Simeon interprets his secluded life as an act of pious devotion to God, whereas readers interpret his actions as the actions of a man who wishes to be celebrated by others. This adds to the author-reader-monologist dynamics of the dramatic monologue, the equivalent of the author-reader-narrator dynamics we find in prose.

There is another common characteristic shared by both genres. A discerning element of dramatic monologues as a genre is that the monologist unconsciously reveals more information than he/she initially plans to reveal about himself. This resembles two types of retrospective techniques in first person prose, dissonant self-narration and consonant self-narration, proposed by Dorrit Cohn in her *Transparent Minds*. Cohn defines dissonant self-narration as a “cognitive deficiency of the past self” (148) and defines it as “a lucid narrator turning back on a past self steeped in ignorance, confusion, and delusion” (145). When narrators tell past stories in retrospective, they may be narrating after they have realized something about themselves, other characters or particular situations, in which case they may

ironically or comically narrate their past experience or they may comment on their limited view of the past (dissonant self-narration). In contrast, a consonant narrator is a 'narrating I' who continues to be limited in worldview or in information in the present moment of the narrative.

As a rule, dramatic monologists embody a duality. In the text, they are separated into two beings: a) the voice that speaks, and b) the character up to the moment of the delivery of the monologue. Thus, Tennyson's Tiresias is the voice that narrates and the narrative is concerned with Tiresias of some years past; Porphyria's lover is the voice that narrates after he murdered Porphyria; Browning's Pictor Ignotus is the voice that narrates how he (as an experiencing character) renounced painting. This duality in dramatic monologues is identical to cases of retrospective first-person homodiegetic narratives in which the narrator is separated into a *narrating I* and an *experiencing I*. The narrating I is defined as "the older, narrating self who tells about the situations and events" (Herman 279), whereas the experiencing I is "the younger self who lived through the experiences" (277). The distinction between the narrating voice and the actant that experiences the narrated events is pivotal for a narratological reading of dramatic monologues and first-person narratives. Consequently, readers must take into consideration this duality and other narrative aspects mentioned above constituting the narrating event as they lead to a better readerly understanding of the narrators' strategies in delivering the narrative.

Applying Narratological Principles to the Reading of Dramatic Monologues

Moving on to a different aspect, we maintain that temporality is also an indicator of the narrative nature of dramatic monologues. As Martin in *Browning's Dramatic Monologues* explains, "Each poem seems to emerge without interruption out of a past that has been long in the unfolding" (25), i.e. each dramatic monologue begins in a correlation to a past moment in the life of the monologist, presented in the poem as action time, which relates how the past action/event has led to the present moment of the speaker which necessarily begins the speech act that becomes the monologue. The first line of Browning's "Andrea del Sarto" is "But do not let us quarrel any more" (1309) which suggests that the quarreling has been going on before the moment of the speech act. Another line, "Bear with me for once," suggests aspects of an iterative narrative passage. In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette defines iterative narrative as "*narrating one time* (or rather: at one time) *what happened n times* (1N/1S)" (116).

In another dramatic monologue, Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites," the first line

reads “Although I be the basest of mankind” (53), a present tense of the speaker related directly to his past, i.e. to past reasons that make him feel a sinful man. In the same stanza, he also refers to a future beyond the time of the monologue: “I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold/Of saintdom” (53). The reader understands where St. Simeon will be after the monologue concludes.

Another case in which a dramatic monologue assumes first-person narrative traits, such as temporality and retrospective narrative, is Browning’s “Fra Lippo Lippi.” The event of the monologue is concerned with Lippi being caught by some officers in the red-light district. While the text is Lippi’s monologue and the temporality of the speech act begins from the moment he is caught until he escapes the grip of law, during the narrating event he reports all his life (his past and what he expects of his future), much like a first-person narrator would. Martin also explains that “many monologues stretch the attention forward into a future beyond the moment of the text” (26). Lippi’s case is not the only one: Porphyria’s lover states that he is waiting for an answer; the Duke waits for another wife; Tennyson’s Tiresias anticipates the time of death; St. Simeon waits for a moment in the near future when he will die.

Apart from this temporal aspect of the narrating act referring to the past or to the future, researchers of dramatic monologues have also emphasized temporality within the dramatic monologue. Scholars like Morgan have differentiated between the time of actions mentioned in the dramatic monologue vs. the temporality of the speech act (160-63). In Tennyson’s “Ulysses,” time passing by is indicated in the words of the monologist: “The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:/ The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep/ Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,/ ‘T is not too late to seek a newer world” (1172). It is Ulysses himself who points out to the sunset (intentionally motivating the mariners by metaphorically reminding them of their old age), yet the passage also becomes an indicator of the duration of the speech act.

A close reading of this poem also points to the similarity between the dramatic monologue and interior monologues in modernist prose. The sixteenth stanza of St. Simeon creates an illusion of immediacy through phrases St. Simeon uses to narrate. It is as if the monologue reveals the unsolicited, impromptu thoughts of St. Simeon: “What’s here? A shape, a shade” (62), i.e. abrupt phrases which can only denote the interiority of the mind of the character: “The end! The end!” (62). Exclamatory phrases in this poem such as “What? deny it now?” (62), and other passages reporting events by the focalizing camera of the character, i.e. what he sees or imagines to see, such as “‘Tis gone: ‘tis here again” (62), only add to the likeness

of dramatic monologues and passages of modernist prose.

In the following sections of this paper we test the application of these and other narratological principles, such as the process of fictional self-making, discursive choices and questions of reliability.

Fictional Self-making in Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites"

Presentation and unfolding of fictional selfhoods in dramatic monologues require just as much attention by the reader as the creative processes of fictional selves in first-person narratives (for instance, in fictional autobiographies). Tennyson's "St. Simeon Stylites" contains many inconsistent and conflicting passages in St. Simeon's worldview. He says "I do not breathe, nor whisper, any murmur of complaint" (54) when in fact most of the stanzas intentionally describe his sufferings in rich figurative language [e.g. "In hungers and in thirsts, fever and colds" (53)]. By vividly describing his agonies, St. Simeon aims at constructing the identity of a saint. Considering the verbal implications of all dramatic monologists, Langbaum concludes that "the speaker of the dramatic monologue starts with an established point of view, and is not concerned with its truth but with trying to impress it on the outside world" (146). In the case of St. Simeon, by addressing the Lord in his monologue, he wishes to create the possibility of being considered a saint after his death. This is the purpose of his monologue, at least the part that is deliberate. Knowledge of the genre informs the reader that the monologist reveals information beyond his intentions.

Here it is worth considering the frequency of narrated events, a narrative aspect traditionally reserved for the study of prose fiction. According to St. Simeon, his sacrifice has begun quite early and it will continue until the end, as he says "I die here/ Today, and whole years long, a life of death" (55), which in Genettian terms is recognized as *iterative narrative*. In another passage, he describes his suffering as "my teeth...would chatter with the cold" (54), suggesting that this happened from time to time, after which he enumerates the repetition of actions of the past which will supposedly continue in the future "I...bow down one thousand and two hundred times,/to Christ, the Virgin Mother, and the Saints" (58). All of his descriptions in the present are in fact repetitive: "I wear," "I am wet," "I wake." A recognition of such narrative propensities is important for the reading of dramatic monologues as it helps the reader question the credibility of that which is narrated by the monologists. This repetition of sacrificial events prompts the reader to doubt the recounted event. Genette defines this as the pseudo-iterative: "the pseudo-iterative – that is, scenes presented, particularly by their wording in the imperfect, as iterative, whereas their

richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without variation” (121). It creates distrust towards St. Simeon’s experience and narrative due to possible exaggeration, for instance: “one thousand and two hundred times,” or “whole years long.” Ultimately, the use of the pseudo-iterative in dramatic monologues raises questions related to the credibility of the narrative.

One method of providing answers to readerly questions about credibility is to consider the narrator’s rhetorical choices. In the case of St. Simeon’s monologue, his word choices reveal a sense of superiority when being compared to 1. other people, 2. other saints, 3. God himself. He portrays people who have worshipped him and given him the status of a healer as: “The silly people take me for a saint” (59), and says “But thou, O Lord,/Aid all this foolish people” (63). When speaking of other saints, he says: “it may be, no one, even among the saints,/ may match his pains with mine” (59). After this unintended show of arrogance and superiority, he asks Jesus: “O Jesus, if thou wilt not save my soul, Who may be saved?” (55). Within the author-monologist-reader triangle, the implied author invites the implied reader to make an ethical judgment of St. Simeon’s character. When the monologist addresses Jesus with “Show me the man that has suffered more than I” (55), the suggestion is that this challenge in the statement utterly disregards Jesus’s sacrifice for humanity. St. Simeon becomes the egocentric being-in-language in the poem, concerned with mundane fame and reputation.

At a first glance, it appears this monologue is addressed to God, yet it is possible that the monologist addresses the people below the pillar. In the process of addressing these two audiences, St. Simeon consciously and unconsciously reveals aspects of his identity. Being aware that his sin was the worship he received from people, he fails to realize that he is suffused in that earthly glory. In the following stanza he expresses:

Good people, you do ill to kneel to me.
 What is it I can have done to merit this?
 I am a sinner viler than you all.
 It may be I have wrought some miracles,
 And cured some halt and maimed; but what of that?
 It may be, no one, even among the saints,
 May match his pains with mine; but what of that?
 Yet do not rise; for you may look on me,
 And in your looking you may kneel to God.

Speak! is there any of you halt or maimed?
 I think you know I have some power with Heaven
 From my long penance: let him speak his wish. (59)

The first two lines show a false modesty in which St. Simeon doubts and expresses that he hardly deserves this worship. In fact, he thinks lowly of other people (in previous passages he has referred to them as ‘silly’ and ‘foolish’). Although he employs a false modesty when he claims that he is a sinner much like they are (which in fact is true), he contradicts himself upon telling them not to rise as they might be cured because of his pious devotion and connection to divinity. Such hypocritical statements reveal incongruity and instability in his fictional self-making. In telling his story through the narrative, it becomes evident that certain aspects of his personality remain unclear to St. Simeon.

Identity Construction and Discursive Choices in Browning’s “Pictor Ignotus”

The verbal ownership of the text in dramatic monologues is oftentimes evident from the title, as is the case with Browning’s “Pictor Ignotus” (quite similarly to fictional autobiographies, such as *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*). Ignotus believes to have had the talent to paint all that the eye could see: “And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,/ Over the canvas could my hand have flung” (426). Apart from unfolding his self-esteem, his rhetoric also denotes a return to a young painter whom the reader constructs as the obsession of the monologist. Further lines reveal additional aspects of his personality: “Never did fate forbid me, star by star,/ To outburst on your night with all my gift/Of fires from God” (426). The reader learns through this word choice that 1. When Ignotus says that fate did not hinder his painting career it is understood that he believes he has made his choice and that this choice was reasonable, 2. When mentioning that fate did not hinder his career, he assumes that he had sufficient talent to be as successful as the young painter, 3. Ignotus interprets his talent as a gift from God, an interpretation that may be the key to understanding his actions (specifically that of renouncing art). A pivotal question arises: has he renounced art due to religious reasons or has he made an escape into religion because of his fear of art?

Primarily, the monologue implies that Ignotus did not question his skills, but that he feared the excessive wish to be revered by men, i.e. being suffused by earthly concerns that would not grant him heaven. This fear is stated in the monologue. Later on, however, Ignotus says:

These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
 Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
 And where they live needs must our pictures live
 And see their faces, listen to their prate,
 Partakers of their daily pettiness,
 Discussed of – “This I love, or this I hate,
 This likes me more, and this affects me less!”
 Wherefore I chose my portion. (Browning 1845/1994, 427)

The second reason for renouncing his art contradicts the first. No concern of heavenly reward is evident here. The passage indicates fear of the reception of his works. Ignotus believes to have offered sufficient claims for his renouncing actions, but the imaginary dialogues he creates in which his oeuvre is discussed by others reveal his truest fear. Hence, the self-esteem of the prior passages is refuted by the latter. Ignotus claims to have made an informed judgment while the reader deduces it to be a mere frightened judgment.

If Browning’s “Pictor Ignotus” were a lyric poem, readers would anticipate an emotional outburst of the speaker by the end of the poem by which past fears and current regrets (whether artistic or religious) would be stated. Being a dramatic monologue, the emotions of the speaker are coded into his words which are afterwards deciphered by the implied reader. Instead of a personal emotional outburst, Ignotus addresses the addressee by asking him whether the praise he received was worth it. The genre impedes an answer by the addressee – this being an element we find in dramatic monologues and first-person narratives – yet questions do arise about the nature of the narrative. Is he asking the youth with the intention of moralizing and rebuking him? Is the question alluding to regret for not having known praise from others, as he has chosen to ignore it? While the dramatic monologue keeps the expressive aspect of lyric poetry (Browning dubbed these poems “Dramatic Lyrics,” see the 1842 collection), it also resembles narratives in which the narrating agent in first-person narratives reveals and constructs his/her fictional self by using the narrative text owned entirely by this narrator.

In view of this complexity of the dramatic monologue, many inconsistencies in the text of “Pictor Ignotus” make him an unreliable monologist who resembles a dissonant first-person narrator who narrates his own past and is unable to clarify certain aspects of his personality. “Pictor Ignotus” invites for ethical and aesthetic readerly judgments. Events recounted through the speech act form the foundation for such judgments. Moreover, the speech act by which the events are recounted

is just as important to the understanding of the monologue as the events recounted through it. When Pictor Ignotus narrates repetitive events, for instance “If *at whiles/* My heart *sinks*, as monotonous I paint/ These endless cloisters” (427, emphasis added), the reader is able to discern past and present events of the speaker’s situation as well as aspects of his identity, specifically the monotony that suffuses the artist who has renounced originality and artistic potential.

Monologists as Narrators of Others and of the Self: The Case of Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover”

Narrating voices often use the text to construct their identity. There are exceptions, however, in the intentionality of the narrative text. Not all monologists use the speech act to construct their identity. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility of identity constructs existing independently regardless of the intentionality of the narrating agent. Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” is such an exception. The monologist seems entirely disinterested in creating a version of himself, as his mind is obsessively focused on Porphyria. While other monologists name themselves as they are too engaged with ambition or aristocratic titles and their spouses remain unnamed (for instance, the last Duchess in “My Last Duchess” or an ‘aged wife’ in “Ulysses”), in “Porphyria’s Lover,” a love-driven madman is focused on the object of his affection and he himself remains unnamed. The speaker’s greatest concern is utter possession of Porphyria and not a presentation of himself as an independent being. It is evident that the monologue is owned and controlled by the monologist: “I listened with heart fit to break” (1278). It is specifically this “heart fit to break” that invites a careful reading of the text, as this description of an emotional turmoil becomes the greatest indicator (a primary conflict) of the succeeding events.

Not unlike a narrator in prose, Porphyria’s lover describes characters, places and situations. Through his descriptive narrative, we learn of Porphyria’s “yellow hair,” “dripping cloak and shawl” and her “soiled gloves” (1279). There is also a succession of events as described in the speech act: Porphyria enters the cottage, she warms the flue, sits next to him and tells him of her love. We regard Porphyria’s lover as the sole source of the text and we focus on his word choices. What we learn from the early lines is that this is not a first meeting—Porphyria appears to be comfortable and familiar with the surroundings and with the lover. The reader is surprised to learn of the speaker’s doubt, confusion and emotional turmoil related to the love Porphyria feels for him. But the lines “at last I knew/ Porphyria worshipped me; surprise/Made my heart swell” (1279) reveal that the speaker is

surprised to finally conceptualize the truthfulness of her love. As the narrator of his own thoughts and feelings, he allows the listener (even if the listener is only himself) to understand that this realization is happening for the first time. Sensing such inconsistencies in the speaker's psyche, the reader starts to doubt the reliability of this person as narrator. As Hurley and O'Neill also state: "we are first drawn into the verse by the *incoherence* of what the speaker says and does. It is only later that we might dwell on the perverse consistency of the speaker who fails to register any contradiction between his actions and his professed affection" (177).

The last words of the monologist define spatial and temporal aspects: "thus we sit together now" (1279). It implies that the monologue has begun there, as he is sitting next to Porphyria after he strangled her (even if he is imagining the event of the monologue while he in fact is physically elsewhere). The poem thus becomes a useful example of illustrating the monologue as being a moment in time of the person who speaks the monologue. All actions related to the get-together with Porphyria are provided in the past simple; it is only after the murder is narrated that the monologist switches to the present. The temporality of the speech act occurs in the night of the murder after all events have occurred [the first line reads "The rain set early in to-night" (1278)], whereas the temporality of actions narrated in the poem begins with Porphyria entering the cottage up to the moment of the murder, when the deceased Porphyria and her lover remain seated and the lover begins the monologue.

His monologue is similar to a narrative in which one event is narrated once, a frequency of narrative defined as *a singulative narrative (IN/IS)*, if the terminology of classical narratology is used (Genette 114). Past events directly influence the performance of the monologue and character construction of the monologist as a man of excess. The time in which the monologue is narrated being immediately after the murder and the performance of the monologue occurring in the same location perhaps lead to the use of the singulative narrative to show that temporally the lover is trapped in that time and location. However, it also relates to another narrative method used in first-person narratives in prose in which narrators tell stories in retrospective. In such cases, some scenes are dramatized and emphasized by switching from the past to the present tense. In Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Jane interrupts the narrative in the past to narrate a scene in the present: "And where is Mr. Rochester? He comes in at last: I am not looking at the arch yet I see him enter" (174). Such a turn creates a moment of suspense, an invitation for a closer reading of the scene, while giving narrating voices the power to control the trajectory of the narrative.

Comparing Dramatic Monologues to First-person Narratives

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" relates the narrative of Montresor who buries Fortunado alive in his family vault. This short story is a first-person narrative, Montresor's narrative being the only source of information (unreliable and insufficient) that the reader receives about this fictional world. This prominent tale of murder and revenge has stirred up ideas about Montresor's motives for the murder, oftentimes relating it to some insult that may or may not have happened. There is a thematic thread that likens this short story to a dramatic monologue such as Browning's "My Last Duchess," in which the monologist takes offence from a possible insult his deceased Duchess supposedly made. In Poe's short story, the narrative is singled out by Montresor's use of "I" and "me" at the very beginning of the story. Both the Duke and Montresor start out the narrative by fixing on the object of obsession—for Montresor that is Fortunado ["The thousand injuries of Fortunado I had borne as I best could..." (696)], for the Duke that is the Duchess, now captured in the painting ["That's my last duchess painted on the wall" (1282)]. Both narrators are concise in what they focalize and describe as both genres (the short story and the dramatic monologue) being limited in length offer detailed content in a relatively small textual space.

Discursive choices offer the reader the opportunity to engage in an evaluation of the recounted events. A careful reading of Montresor's rhetorical choices helps in understanding his motivations. He narrates: "The thousand injuries of Fortunado I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge" (696), which implies that this was not a real confrontation, but rather that Montresor is hurt by yet another insult. This insult is never specified and is thus questionable as sufficient motivation for his revenge. Similarly, in "My Last Duchess" the Duke presumes certain conversations to have happened between the Duchess and her painter in the Duke's absence. He recounts: "perhaps/Fra Pandolf chanced to say" (1282)—the use of "perhaps" indicates that the Duke is guessing rather than deducing.

Dramatic monologues resemble Poe's short story due to their limited number of speakers, events, limited length, and addressing a 'you' in the story. The form in which Montresor's narrative is delivered is unclear (is it written, thought, or told orally?) as is the case with "Porphyria's Lover." Montresor's narrative states at the beginning "You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat," whereas in the narrative he is revealing all events of the immurement. Similarly, the Duke addresses the marriage envoy,

politely ordering him to rise, to look at the painting, to keep in mind the next Duchess's dowry and to look at the statue of Neptune.

The Duke describes characters and situations just as Montresor, a first-person narrator, describes them. The former narrates the actions of the Duchess, her appearance in public [the Duchess supposedly has a "spot of joy" in her cheeks, a heart that was "too soon made glad," she was a curious person "her looks went everywhere" (1282)], whereas the latter describes Fortunado: "He had a weak point—this Fortunado – although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared" (697). By controlling the narrative, these narrators wish to influence the listener's or the readers' mental image of other characters. Nevertheless, this intentional mental image is not in accordance with the real mental image created in the listener/real reader as a result of the reading process. After the murder, Montresor narrates that "My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so" (701), revealing a deficiency in understanding his true feelings, even fifty years later (a consonant narrator). Yet, the reader is aware of this deficiency and constructs Montresor's character as vengeful and prideful. We have previously pointed out cases in which dramatic monologists are limited in understanding their past selves.

Short stories and dramatic monologues also make use of temporal elements. It is only in the last paragraph that Montresor switches the narrating time to the present tense, "For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them [the bones]" (701), indicating that the time of the speech act is half a century after the murder, whereas the time of the actions begins with him meeting Fortunado on the street: "It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend" (697). Similarly, the Duke begins the speech act during his conversation with the marriage envoy until they go back to other guests downstairs and the time of actions begins with the Duke pointing to the Duchess's painting and in telling retrospectively how it was painted by Fra Pandolf, leading up to the moment in which the Duke "gave commands." Montresor as narrator of the short story, the Duke as monologist of this dramatic monologue, and, by principle, all first-person narrators control narrative time thus taking ownership of the text they narrate. In fictional autobiography, for instance, Jane Eyre tells the reader: "therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence" (82) affirming that she decides on what events are important to narrate. The narrator's word choices and presentation of other diegetic elements provoke readerly judgment and evaluation of the narrative text. It follows that narratological reading practices can be useful in the reading of some poetic genres.

Conclusion

The experimental nature of dramatic monologues which oscillates between lyric, dramatic and narrative, allows for a consideration of these poems from a narrative angle. As the delivery of the monologue is a narrating process, consequently one must consider the narrative aspects at play, such as the time of the speech act and the time of actions, word choices of the narrating agents, and reliability of the speaker. Dramatic monologists and first-person narrators project an identity through the narrative, made possible due to the duality of the narrating agent into the *narrating I* and the *experiencing I*, an event that is as significant as it is complex because it deals with an identity ever-in-flux in a double process of the narrating I ‘reading’ his/her character and the reader simultaneously ‘reading’ both the narrating voice and the character.

Narrating monologists have strategies and motivations for narrating of their past selves (as *experiencing I*) and they use the narrative text for such reasons. Seen from this perspective, the implied listener is pivotal to the understanding of this genre as the narrating text is used to address an audience in order to unfold the monologist’s self (with the purpose of influencing the listener, of changing his views, or in the cases in which the monologist speaks to himself, the monologue is delivered retrospectively as the speaker reconsiders his past actions/thoughts). It follows that these monologists-narrators can engage in dissonant or consonant self-narration, depending on the internal change of the speaker. Such a narrative reading of dramatic monologues enables the readers to discern inconsistencies in the characters—obsession with the female, wish for an ensuing dowry, obsession with aristocratic titles, selfishness—characteristics that the narrating voices are unable to detect about themselves.

As narrating agents in these two genres aim at constructing fictional selves, the reader must consider the word choices of the narrators. Dramatic monologues and fictional autobiographies, for instance, use the written format to convey ideologies (social, economic, educational, philosophical, and so forth) to the implied reader. The latter is responsible for creating an awareness of strategies narrators use (such as temporal control or informational gaps) in first-person narratives. The reader is invited to think critically about the text and its speaker. That includes gathering information by determining whether the language used is hyperbolic (therefore not plausible) or by being able to identify the use of the pseudo-iterative (as in the case of “St. Simeon Stylites”) which creates doubt about the credibility of the narrative.

The ability to detect temporal aspects also contributes to our reading of

dramatic monologues. The recounted events as well as the time in which the monologue is delivered help construct an accurate background of these fictional characters in addition to relating to the purposes of the monologue. For instance, in Tennyson's "Tiresias," the narrative of Tiresias's past story helps us understand the context in which he is delivering the monologue now. However, the time of the delivery of the monologue reveals the purpose of this speech act: a night before the monologue, God Ares warned him that Thebes will fall if there is no sacrifice and the day after this vision, Tiresias is speaking to Menoeceus as an attempt to save Thebes. Deictics also add meaning to the narrators' rhetorical purposes and strategies as they determine the place and time in the narrative which in turn contributes to a better readerly understanding of the delivery of the monologue.

In the trajectory of literary developments, experimentation with narrative form, the nature of narrative itself, it appears that the dramatic monologue, a poetic form, has many common elements with traditional first-person narratives as well as modern narratives that focus on representing thoughts. The complexity of language, the use of abrupt phrases, complex and semi-chaotic sentences, all point to the resemblance of dramatic monologues to interior monologue passages. This indicates the modern and experimental nature of this genre. A careful reading of the revisionist dramatic monologues of England's former poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, in her collection *The World's Wife* (1999), with its use of consonant self-narrating voices, gives evidence to the developing narrative and experimental form the dramatic monologue can take either with the intention of tackling old Western myths (Duffy's "Queen Herod" or "Mrs Midas"), or expressing contemporary feminist claims ("Little Red Cap").

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