

Quiet is hell, I say

The Role of Women Poets in the Development of the Victorian Dramatic Monologue

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Dramatic Monologue

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Abstract

This thesis explores the claim that the Victorian dramatic monologue developed into two distinct traditions – the traditional, predominantly male tradition represented by writers such as Browning and Tennyson, and a separate women’s tradition. Focusing on three elements believed to be characteristic of women’s monologues, the thesis tries to explain why the main critical discussions on the genre excluded women for most of the twentieth century. The first element is the claim that we can better understand the monologues of Victorian women in light of monologues written by other women poets, such as Felicia Hemans, than in light of male writers such as Browning. The second is that women poets largely used the dramatic monologue as a mask to conceal their own social criticism. The third is that women blurred the lines between the lyric and the dramatic by writing speakers that were vaguer and more stereotypical than the speakers written by male poets. My argument is that the problem with a separate women’s tradition is that it excludes women from the contextual developments of the Victorian age. Instead, the thesis traces an alternative line from Browning’s early efforts in the 1830s to Amy Levy’s almost Modernist monologues in the 1880s, and claims that what all these poets had in common was the ways in which they used the dramatic monologue to explore the instabilities of the speaking self against an objectified other.

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1 Introduction

As soon as the word “genre” is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one tries to conceive it, a limit is drawn. (Derrida 56)

While the Victorian dramatic monologue is widely recognised as ‘the most significant poetic invention of the age’ (Slinn ‘Dramatic Monologue’ 80), after more than seventy years of critical scrutiny, no one seems to agree on what defines it. Robert Browning, alongside Tennyson, is often described as the master and creator of the genre.¹ While Browning is undoubtedly the poet who has come to represent the genre, many of the most prominent writers of the Victorian age were also prolific writers of dramatic monologues. In the middle of the twentieth century developed an interest in defining, categorising and separating the dramatic monologue from other kinds of poetry. Out of this emerged the idea of the Victorian dramatic monologue as a separate poetic genre. This eventually led to an exclusion of several poets from the canon of Victorian dramatic poetry, especially many women writers, who, although they were prolific writers of monologues, often did not fit into the strict definitions created by Browning-scholars. However, a recent surge of new interest in these women poets has led to a call for new definitions, and a reassessment of the role Victorian women writers played in the genre’s development.

Those interested in gender and feminist issues have found the dramatic monologue to be especially intriguing, because so many of the poems explore questions surrounding sexuality, agency and the suppression of the female voice. The dramatic monologue is significant because, as Glennis Byron puts it, it questions ‘the authority, integrity and autonomy of the isolated lyric voice’ (‘Rethinking’ 81). By doing this it shows us how historical and social contexts, as well as psychological factors, shape the speakers in these poems. In turn, this leads to a more ‘complex, fragmented and contextualised representation of the subject’ (‘Rethinking’ 81). It follows, then, that the dramatic monologue is a genre that concerns itself with subjectivity, and the construction of identity.

In the chapter ‘The Politics of Dramatic Form’ in her *Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), Isobel Armstrong points to an element that has become the central focus for studies on the Victorian dramatic monologue: the relationship between subjectivity and context.

¹ Although Tennyson’s poetry does not feature prominently in this thesis, he undoubtedly played a major part in developing the genre. For an in-depth analysis of Tennyson’s dramatic monologues and the ways in which he developed dramatic poetry, see Cornelia Pearsall’s *Tennyson’s Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue* (2008).

Using Browning's monologues 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Johannes Agricola' as examples, Armstrong claims that these poems differ from for instance soliloquy because they are simultaneously about 'acting and *taking action*, the construction of roles and their connection with volition and agency which relates people to the world' (138). This tension between internal and external forces, which Armstrong further develops into a theory about what she calls the 'double poem', is at least partly responsible for the modern critical attention these poems have received. This duality is also inherent in another feature present in countless dramatic monologues, namely the fact that for the speakers to see themselves as subjects and claim agency for themselves, they need to define and separate themselves from an other. This other, as U.C. Knoepfelmacher has demonstrated in his influential essay 'Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue' (1984), is usually female. In several of the most acclaimed monologues the speakers' need to assert themselves often leads to a literal or more figurative suppression of the other's voice. This suppression is often linked to traditional gender dynamics in poetry, which show the man as an active subject turning the woman into a passive object. This tendency, Knoepfelmacher argues, has proved to be one of Browning's longest lasting legacies, and it has proved highly influential in the writings of later poets such as D.G. Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne (141). Yet, as more and more women poets are introduced to the study of dramatic monologues, one question presents itself: what happens when women become the subjects? Moreover, who becomes the object?

According criticism on dramatic poetry, by critics such as Glennis Byron and Dorothy Mermin, one key difference between men and women writers seems to be how they describe and understand the relationship between self and context. Byron and Mermin argue that men and women poets often had a different approach when dealing with the duality latent in dramatic poetry. The monologues of male writers, such as Robert Browning, are more concerned with how the minds of their erratic speakers shape the world around them, while the poetry of women poets, such as Augusta Webster, focus more on how external and social factors work upon the speaker's mind, and in turn limits their ability to assert themselves. This divide, between writers who focus more on psychological analysis and those who use the monologue as social critique, has become central to the debate on the dramatic monologue in recent years. It is part of a wider literary project that has sought to rethink the dramatic monologue and reintroduce women writers into a canon of works that until quite recently was almost exclusively male (Byron 'Rethinking' 79).

The struggle between wanting to reintroduce women poets as dramatic monologists, and the realisation that their poetry can differ quite substantially from the expectations one might have of the genre, has led critics to come up with different ways of attacking the issue of women writers as dramatic monologists. Much of the poetry by these women writers does not necessarily fit into the 'ideal' of dramatic monologue. For instance, they often omit the presence of an auditor, and the speakers at the centre of their monologues are not such vividly drawn characters as for instance Browning's Duke of Ferrara in 'My Last Duchess'. Some might therefore argue that women poets were part of a separate literary tradition. Patricia Rigg, for instance, dismisses the term 'dramatic monologue' altogether when discussing the writings of a substantial amount of Victorian women poets. Instead she argues for the need to 'find some way to describe dramatic poetry written by women that is more flexible and less absolute than the polarized subjectivity of the lyric or objectivity of the dramatic monologue' (76). Rigg then goes on to suggest that the term 'monodrama' might be more suitable for women writers of dramatic monologues such as Augusta Webster and Amy Levy. I appreciate Rigg's attempt to create a more inclusive term that focuses on the distinctiveness of women's dramatic monologues. I also agree with her claim that we need to study women's poetry on its own terms, instead of seeing the ways in which it differs from that of male writers as anomalies or weaknesses. However, while Rigg's project is admirable, I question whether her labelling women's monologues as 'monodrama' in reality achieves a more 'flexible' and 'less absolute' understanding of women's poetry. In some ways I fear that it is just another reductive way of further creating a divide between the canonized dramatic monologues by men and the lesser known monologues written by women.

Other critics do not simply want to rethink and redefine the dramatic monologue; they instead seek to rewrite its entire history. Isobel Armstrong argues that the poets Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, and not Browning and Tennyson, were the true originators of the genre (318). By looking at how poets such as Hemans created speakers based on historical characters, and thus rejected the Romantic conflation between speaker and poet, the possibility of an alternative history emerges. While the projects of Rigg, Armstrong and several other critics have certainly achieved the goal of introducing more unknown writers of dramatic monologues to a modern literary audience, there are still problems with taking this type of literary approach. By repeatedly trying to distinguish monologues written by women from those written by men, or classify them as something other than dramatic monologue, one risks several things. First, the constant need to define, redefine, or diminish women's dramatic monologues as a separate field of study within Victorian literary studies, might

cause critics to retreat back into the debate on the generic features of the genre. While this debate was a major part of the earliest discussions on the dramatic monologue, it is important to remember that it was also partly responsible for the exclusion of so many of these women poets in the first place. As I argue in chapter one, generic terms such as ‘speaker’, ‘auditor’ and ‘occasion’ are not sufficient when studying the poetry we have come to understand as ‘dramatic monologues’. Besides, while such definitions might help us to understand the critical history of the dramatic monologue, they might not do much to advance further the study of Victorian poetry.

Perhaps even more worryingly, one risks reducing the writings of women writers to polemic disguised as verse. It is certainly true that Victorian women writers used the genre as a way to question social structures, and to criticise oppression. Augusta Webster, for instance, was an outspoken advocate for the rights of women, especially for women’s right to education (Sutphin ‘Introduction’ 12). I nevertheless feel hesitant towards the excessive focus on social criticism that has shaped so much of the literary scholarship on Victorian women poets. What defines the dramatic monologue, and this I feel is true whether the monologue is written by Browning or Webster, is its ability to be two things at once. In dramatic monologues, the speakers’ words are often psychologically revealing, but they also reflect the ways in which the speakers are subjected to their historical and social contexts. This is true of monologues written by men and by women. To focus too much on either one, might obscure the ways in which poets defy these conventions. The focus on psychological revelation in monologues written by men might for instance obscure the importance context and historical development plays in dramatic monologues written by male writers such as Browning or D.G. Rossetti. Likewise, feminist studies have offered new ways of interpreting dramatic monologues by both male and female writers. There are several examples of this. Robert Langbaum argued in 1957 of Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’ that the poem’s effect lies in the ‘willingness of the reader to understand the duke, even to sympathize with him as a necessary condition of reading the poem’ and that this ‘is the key to the poem’s form’ (85). Cynthia Scheinberg, forty years later, instead sees the poem’s greatest achievement as the ways in which ‘Browning’s poem makes any poetic sympathy/identification impossible for a reader like [herself]’ (‘Recasting’ 178). To Scheinberg, ‘a woman, feminist, and scholar who was trained in the late eighties and early nineties’, Browning is a ‘proto-feminist’ who demonstrates ‘how deeply women have been oppressed by male language’ (178). What these two very different analyses of the role reader-response plays in studies of the dramatic

monologue have in common, is that they emphasise the importance of context. As new perspectives emerge, our understanding of the genre also changes.

I fear that by trying to re-define the genre in light of women's monologues, or to look for women precursors to the genre, and thus diminishing Browning's role, one simply reinforces the set boundaries between 'women's' and 'men's' dramatic monologues. While the historical development of the genre is a fascinating area of study, and women writers such as Felicia Hemans certainly have not been given the critical attention they deserve, the tendency in some criticism to create two separate literary traditions might need some nuancing. If not, one faces the danger of further emphasising the divide between so-called 'women's monologues' and the more 'authentic' monologues written by men.

In my thesis, I therefore argue that while different writers adopted different approaches to the dramatic monologue, and wrote on a variety of subjects, there is still a clear poetic tradition that stretches all through the nineteenth century. I believe that in order to fully serve these writers justice, we need to expand the critical debate beyond simply a debate on gender. In addition to this, I feel one might benefit greatly from adopting what Robert Hume calls an Archaeo-historicist approach to literature. Hume puts forth a strong argument for the importance of studying works in context, and presents two main areas of interest. The first is the work's *genesis*, in other words the origins of the work. The second is the work's *reception*, that is, how contemporary readers responded to the text or how we imagine that they might have (84). By looking at the literary communities in which these texts were conceived, as well as their contemporary reception, new perspectives on the development of the genre emerge. Judging from the contemporary reception of a poet such as Augusta Webster, for instance, women writers of dramatic monologues were mostly read and understood alongside Browning and Tennyson. While new critical perspectives have helped to illuminate the study of Victorian poetry, I think it is vital to be aware of how we create literary histories. On the one hand it is true, as Cynthia Scheinberg argues, that poetry in the Victorian era 'was never created, published, or received in a gendered vacuum' ('Recasting' 175). At the same time, there was undoubtedly a tradition for reading women poets into a line of so-called 'feminine-poetry', an inheritance from the 'poetess-tradition' of the eighteenth century. The main traits of this poetry were believed to be its sentimentality, affect, and confessional nature, traits that are not so easily reconcilable with the dramatic monologues of for instance Browning. It seems, then, as if dramatic monologues written by Victorian women poets have always posed a challenge to those who wish to categorise women's poetry. Women poets have been both included and excluded from the wider community of Victorian

poetry, and even today critics still seem to battle with this tension inherent in much of the poetry written by women writers.

No matter the approach, all the poems I have chosen, deal with subjectivity and the construction of self against an other. This other often evokes both recognition and alienation in the speaker, and highlights who is entitled to speak within the context of the poem. Traditionally, as Susan Gubar points out in “The Blank Page” and *Female Creativity*, Romantic poetry often show the male artist as a creator and subject and woman as a creation and object (244). Gubar argues that the women in Romantic poetry are not just reduced to objects, but objects of art. When looking at the monologues by Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne, this becomes especially evident, since the women in these poems are either dead or asleep. Their silence leaves the speakers free to aestheticize the unconscious objects of their desire, without any interferences from the women they address. One can therefore argue of all these poems that they contribute to continuing the tradition of seeing the artist as male and his object as female. At the same time, all three poems also defy this tendency to some extent. Browning’s ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ does so by creating an ironic distance between the speaker and the poet, which in turn works to reveal the manipulative nature of the speaker’s rhetoric. Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’ is perhaps the most formalistically intriguing poem in this thesis, and by mixing internal monologue with the dramatic monologue the poem reveals the mind of a speaker who is trying to resist his own urge to objectify the sleeping Jenny. In many ways, I think this development culminated with the monologues of Swinburne. His poem ‘The Leper’ can be read as a subversive re-imagining of Browning’s ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, where Swinburne goes far in his attempts to break down the set binaries of self and other, living and dead, and male and female.

However, as my discussions on Webster and Levy’s poetry demonstrate, the problematic relationship between man as speaking subject and woman as object is in no way restricted to monologues written by men. Struggling to navigate between seeing herself as an autonomous speaking subject and as a woman whose body has become public property, the prostitute who speaks in Webster’s ‘A Castaway’ is shown as someone who has internalised, but also tries to reject, social discourses on femininity and fallenness. Furthermore, ‘A Castaway’ and the other poems discussed in this thesis all examine the strong connections between female sexuality, agency and fallenness. Both in literature and in Victorian culture in general, the character of the ‘Fallen Woman’ appears frequently, and I would argue that all the poems I discuss in this study depict women who for some reason are considered fallen. I would argue that the women in these dramatic monologues are not just othered on the basis of

their gender, but also because of society's perception of them as sexually deviant. Due to the prevalence of the 'Fallen Woman' trope, it is therefore no coincidence that poets such as Webster and Levy chose prostitutes as their speakers. Susan Gubar argues that women writers, especially those writing in the nineteenth century, developed several strategies for how they most efficiently could enter into the ongoing poetic conversations on subjectivity that were taking place in Victorian society (445-447). In my study, I argue that one such strategy was to write dramatic monologues, since it perhaps more than any other genre works to reveal the instabilities of subjective experience. I also argue that even in the cases where the speakers speak alone, such as in 'A Castaway' and in Levy's 'Magdalen, the occupation with otherness and the challenges for women speakers to adopt the role of speaking subject are always present.

Rather than to seek new ways to define the dramatic monologue, or search for women inventors of the genre, my thesis starts traditionally with Browning and one of the first published dramatic monologues, 'Porphyria's Lover'. The reason for this choice is that while it is important to recognise literary predecessors to the dramatic monologue other than Browning, it is nevertheless also important to recognise that Browning powerfully influenced the literary consciousness at the time. Victorian dramatic monologues are in many ways highly intertextual in nature, engaging in a constant dialogue with each other. Instead of arguing for a clear separation of two disparate traditions of dramatic monologue one can rather choose to see it as a linear evolution that shows how the dramatic monologue was shaped in the hands of a multitude of diverse writers. Glennis Byron writes in her book *Dramatic Monologue* (2003) that

If the most significant recent approaches to the dramatic monologue have resulted from the postmodern attack on the idea of the autonomous subject and the accompanying growing interest in how the self is constituted, the most significant future changes may result from the adjustment of the generic grouping to include women's poetry. (28)

As Byron predicts, future studies on dramatic monologues will perhaps find new ways to incorporate the writings of women poets into the wider discussions on the dramatic monologue. Through close readings of poems written by some of the best monologists of the era, I hope to show how the 'doubleness' of the dramatic monologue works in ways which resist constructs such as male and female, and reveal both the subjectivity and psychology of speech and the historical and social forces that shape it. This duality works in many different

ways and I will argue that it is not limited to and cannot be reduced to simply a question of the poet's gender. Byron and Mermin might be right when they argue that women writers were more prolific in writing social criticism into their monologues, but I fear that focusing too much on this aspect, and not enough on the psychological aspects that are at work in their poetry, might actually do more harm than good. It creates, in my opinion, an unnecessary divide and imposes unhelpful limits on the discussions on dramatic monologues.

The thesis consists of three main chapters. The poems discussed in each chapter are presented chronologically, starting with Browning's poem 'Porphyria's Lover', first published in 1836, and ending with Amy Levy's poem 'Magdalen' published in 1884. I do not count Hemans' poem 'Arabella Stuart' (1828) into these developments, as I do not believe it is a dramatic monologue in the same way as the other poems discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, I still think it is worth including Hemans' poem to show how nineteenth century poetry can be dramatic without necessarily being a dramatic monologue. I hope to demonstrate that the dramatic monologue was in no way a static genre. It developed in many different directions as the century progressed, and more importantly, women writers played a central part in these developments.

The first chapter, 'Origins', goes straight to the centre of the debate, by asking what constitutes a dramatic monologue. Starting with Robert Browning's seminal monologue 'Porphyria's Lover', the chapter looks at how Browning came to be seen as the originator of the genre. Elements such as sympathy, judgement and irony are important parts of criticism on Browning's poetry, and in order to understand why women poets have been excluded from much of the critical debate, it is important to recognise the widespread critical influence of these concepts. The chapter also looks at the possibility of a competing tradition: a separate women's tradition of dramatic monologues originating with Felicia Hemans. Hemans' poetry, in this case represented by the poem 'Arabella Stuart', preceded Browning's monologues by several years. Recent revisionist projects have consequently sought to claim Hemans as the true originator of the genre. Critics, most prominently Isobel Armstrong, have argued that Hemans' poetry was especially important for women writing dramatic monologues later in the nineteenth century, such as Webster and Levy. However, while I recognise that 'Arabella Stuart' in some ways anticipates the possibilities intrinsic in later dramatic poetry, I nevertheless agree with Glennis Byron who argues that Hemans' more dramatic poetry lacks some of the defining features of Victorian dramatic monologues.

The second chapter explores what many believe to be the strongest legacy of the dramatic monologue, namely how poets used it to criticise oppression. Criticising social

institutions, the representations of marginalised characters and the attack on oppression are all central parts of many of the most powerful dramatic monologues written by women writers. However, the dominant focus on these elements has perhaps led to the exclusion of others. By comparing two poems that both negotiate the social discourses of contemporary Victorian society, Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny', the chapter seeks to explore why social criticism has become so intimately linked to women poets.

The final chapter focuses on the idea that women wrote less particularised speakers in their dramatic monologues. Like their male counterparts, these women poets also created speakers that are often marginalised and isolated. Several critics, however, have argued that the dramatic speakers of women writers often become representative of a certain archetypal character, such as for instance 'The Fallen Woman'. These characters are often very vaguely drawn. In other words, one might argue that women poets often wrote speakers that are more representations of various types than individual characters. Yet instead of connecting the idea of vague speakers to a separate woman's tradition, I argue that it has just as much to do with the literary developments of the end of the Victorian age. While Browning's speakers certainly served as inspiration for a multitude of poets, it is important not to lose sight of how poets experimented with the subjective dramatic voice. Just because speakers might seem 'vague' at first, it does not mean that they are not psychologically complex. By comparing two poets writing dramatic monologues towards the end of the nineteenth century, Amy Levy and Charles Algernon Swinburne, I hope to demonstrate the limiting nature of talking about a separate women's tradition that is representative of the entire Victorian literary era.

1.1 The Term 'Dramatic Monologue'

Before one can discuss the place of women writers within the canon of Victorian dramatic monologues, it is necessary to define the term 'dramatic monologue'. Despite the vast material of literary criticism written on the subject, defining the term has proved surprisingly difficult. There are several problems with trying to create a comprehensive outline of the development of Victorian poetry, perhaps especially of such an elusive genre as the dramatic monologue. While studying its generic features might not be as relevant as it was previously perceived, I will still argue that there is value in studying the dramatic monologue as a separate genre. One should note that that term 'dramatic monologue' was not in widespread use until the end of the nineteenth century, and thus the focus on it as a separate genre is a

later invention (Pearsall *Tennyson's Rapture* 25). Still, if one considers the titles poets used for their collections of dramatic poetry, it becomes clear that there existed a need to differentiate their poetry from lyric. As Cornelia Pearsall notes, titles such as "Dramatic Lyrics," "Dramatic Romances," "Dramatic Idylls," "Dramatic Studies," as well as "Monodrama" all appeared during the period (25). One of the first critics to define a 'perfect dramatic monologue' was Ina Beth Sessions in her 1947 essay 'The Dramatic Monologue'. In her definition, which she bases almost exclusively on Robert Browning's poetry, Sessions lists seven characteristics. The first is a *speaker*, who is always distinguishable from the poet. There should also be an *audience*, and an *interplay* between the speaker and the audience. The poem should also lead to a *revelation of character*. It is also important, according to Sessions, that the action taking place within the poem is *dramatic* and linked to a specific *occasion*. Finally, this action should give the appearance of happening in the *present* (Sessions 508-509).

No matter how elegant and appealing Sessions' definition of the 'perfect' dramatic monologue is, it has proved problematic since there are in fact very few poems that fit her description. Even several of Browning's monologues do not tick all of Sessions' boxes. Furthermore, Sessions' definition indirectly suggests that monologues that do not fit her criteria are somehow lacking when compared to Browning's 'perfect' monologues. This idea has proved especially damaging when it comes to women's dramatic monologues, since there are virtually no monologues by women that fit Sessions' model. Perhaps more importantly, it can be argued that such generic definitions as the ones created by Sessions have contributed little to the advancement of studies on the dramatic monologue. Therefore more recent criticism has turned away from the excessive focus on formal features, and instead turned its attention to Glennis Byron's claim that 'more than a formal list of characteristics is likely to be required in the definition of any genre' (*Dramatic Monologue* 11). While critics might be aware of the dangers of focusing too much on generic formal features, the need to classify monologues be it based on formalistic features, subject matter, or style, still seems to be a vital part of the study of Victorian dramatic poetry.

Robert Langbaum entered into the critical conversations on the genre with his 1957 book *The Poetry of Experience*. This proved a breakthrough in modern studies on the dramatic monologue. Langbaum argues persuasively that we need to move beyond empty characteristics in order to understand what makes this poetry so effective, or as he himself puts it: 'While such a classification is *true* enough, what does it accomplish except to identify a certain mechanical resemblance?' (76). However, just like Sessions, Langbaum bases almost

his entire analysis on a few poems by Robert Browning. Of the few other poets he includes, none of them are women. As I stress later in the thesis, I believe that Langbaum cannot be faulted for ignorance about writers that have in recent years become important to the discussion, such as Webster, Levy, Landon and Hemans. These writers were after all still suffering from years of critical neglect when Langbaum was writing his study. Amy Levy's writings were for instance not made widely accessible until the 1993 publication of Melvyn New's *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*. Even though Langbaum's failure to include women writers into his argument is justifiable in the context of his own historical moment, his theories still seem to linger over much contemporary criticism on the subject. Especially Langbaum's authoritative theory on the tension between sympathy and judgement within dramatic monologues, as well as his focus on dramatic irony, has proved challenging to those unable to detect a similar tension in the writings of many of the women monologists.

In many ways, it seems as though every critic is free to come up with their own definition, which naturally raises the question of whether it is even useful to talk of the Victorian dramatic monologue as a poetic genre at all. However, there are elements that feature frequently in most definitions. In addition to a speaker, dramatic monologues often include the presence of an auditor or interlocutor. While the auditor remains silent throughout the course of the poem, his or her presence is nonetheless imperative. Sometimes there are indications within the text that the speaker is replying to something the auditor has previously said. Other times, the auditor seems to remain entirely silent. The auditor can have several different functions within dramatic monologues. She or he can be a catalyst for the speaker's decision to speak, or someone to challenge the authority of the speaker. E. Warwick Slinn adopts a rather liberal understanding of the auditor, claiming that regardless of whether the speaker seems to be addressing an auditor or an imagined audience, the words are always imagined speech and bear the markings of communication (81-82).

It can be argued of several of the monologues in this thesis that they challenge the idea that a dramatic monologue needs an auditor. The murdered Porphyria in 'Porphyria's Lover' or the decayed body of the noblewoman in 'The Leper' are hardly auditors in the traditional sense. Likewise, Webster's Eulalie or Amy Levy's Magdalen seem to be alone in their rooms when speaking. However, I agree with the assumption that even though these poems do not include auditors in the strictest sense, they are still representations of directed speech, and deal with issues concerning communication. Glennis Byron points to one of the dangers of placing too much emphasis on the auditor when she reminds us that 'To insist

upon placing dramatic monologues without auditors in a quite different category is to risk overlooking the way in which the text may be playing with the conventions of the genre' (*Dramatic Monologue* 24). I agree with Byron, especially since I believe that it is important to remember that different writers developed the dramatic monologue to suit their own poetic styles. Poets changed the genre in order to both play with and challenge its conventions. While Browning's early monologues were highly influential, my study will also highlight the underlying implications of using Browning's poems as an entry into the ongoing critical debates.

There have been several attempts to create an all-encompassing definition of the dramatic monologue. In one of the most recent (2008), Helen Luu claims that

the dramatic monologue is defined by three essential features: it is (1) a first-person poem whose speaker stands in at least one degree of separation from the poet; (2) this external split causes an internal one, a discursive split within the poem; (3) and this discursive split effects an ideological critique, be it of absolute truth (Langbaum), the nature of consciousness (Sinfield), the authentic and authoritative self (Tucker; Armstrong; Bristow), the sovereignty of the Cartesian *cogito* (Martin), cultural institutions and norms (Slinn), or gender ideology and systems (Byron). (20)

Luu's definition is helpful for the ways in which it intertwines the various strands of critical focus, and for how it demonstrates that monologues written by both male and female writers are concerned with criticism in one way or another. Especially Luu's first point, which concerns itself with the separation between the poem's speaker and its author, has been the source of much debate on the dramatic monologue, and in particular, when it comes to monologues written by women. We might therefore conclude that where the genre was previously understood almost exclusively based on formalistic features, critics now agree that in order to fully understand the dramatic monologue we need to move beyond generic terms such as speaker and auditor.

1.2 A Comment on the Selection of Poems

It has been challenging to select poems that are both representative of the genre and its historical developments, as well as of the debate on the role gender plays in these texts. The poems in this thesis span several decades, from 1828 to 1884, and even though I have had to make certain omissions, including well-known monologists such as Tennyson, Christina

Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, I still feel that the poems offer a good overview of the main developments in the genre. Each chapter deals with two separate poems that can be taken as case studies, one by a female writer and one by a male writer. The first chapter compares Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' to Felicia Hemans' 'Arabella Stuart'. It has been argued of both poems that they represent some of the first examples of dramatic monologues, and thus both poems can offer an entry into the main debates on dramatic poetry in the nineteenth century. As previously argued, the 'Fallen Woman' was a particularly prominent character in the Victorian literary imagination. Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny', two poems that explore prostitution from both the perspective of the prostitute and of the client, are poems that reveal the politics of the genre. In the final chapter I have chosen to focus on how Levy and Swinburne in their dramatic monologues 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' sought to challenge the underlying ideologies in their society.

Dramatic monologues from the Victorian era are often addressed to women. Frequently these women are represented as objects of desire, but also as a source of uncertainty and even aggression. For the most part female characters function as silent auditors, quietly listening to the speeches of the male speakers. However, in some cases, the women are not only rendered passive because the monologues are spoken by men. Sometimes their passivity and inability to engage in dialogue with the male speakers stems from the fact that the women are not conscious. What these female characters, either asleep or dead, have in common is that they are not given their own voice. All their words and actions are filtered through the words of male speakers, and thus readers are left to make sense of the speakers' usually fragmented narratives. Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' (1836) is one such poem.

This thesis traces the character of the silenced woman in dramatic poetry throughout the nineteenth century, and looks at the ways in which different writers adopted, but also re-imagined, themes found in Browning's monologue. Robert Browning has always been, and is still in my opinion, a good starting point for any discussion on the dramatic monologue. However, his poem 'Porphyria's Lover' might not seem as an equally obvious choice for the study of Browning's monologues. After all, it does not contain what has often been believed to be one of the defining features of Browning's monologues: an auditor. The speaker never directly addresses the dead Porphyria, and although he confronts God in an attempt to justify his own actions, it is difficult to argue that God functions as an auditor in the poem. However, this fits well into one of my overall arguments: that if we are to talk of dramatic monologues as a separate poetic genre we need to look elsewhere than generic terms such as 'auditors'

and ‘occasions’ in order to define it. While I resist the idea of Felicia Hemans as a precursor to the Victorian dramatic monologue as it is known today, I nevertheless recognise the importance of including such writers into the discussion. The poetry of Swinburne and Rossetti is in my opinion worth reading in light of Browning, because it simultaneously adopts and rejects the impulse found in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ to reduce the sleeping woman into an artistic image and object. When it comes to Webster and Levy, they are both examples of poets that have benefited greatly from the new interest in neglected women poems that started in 1980s. While Webster is now hailed as one of the most important writers of dramatic monologues, many areas of Levy’s poetry are still relatively unexplored in comparison.

E. Warwick Slinn points out one of the most obvious challenges in the study of dramatic poetry when he claims that ‘one of the fascinating features of the dramatic monologue as a mobile hybrid is that it almost perversely exposes the limits of any attempt to pin it down’ (‘Dramatic Monologue’ 85). While I agree with Slinn, I will nevertheless attempt to show why studies of the dramatic monologue as a separate genre continues to be relevant, and why it is worth talking of the dramatic monologue as a genre. I have named my thesis ‘the role of women in the *development* of the dramatic monologue’ because I believe that it is crucial to remember that the genre developed quite substantially over time. While it certainly can be said of Browning’s and Tennyson’s early monologues that they can be read as a reaction against the Romantic lyric, this is not necessarily the case for monologues written towards the end of the century. Yet, to understand the genre’s development, we nevertheless need to go back to its origins.

2 Origins

The dramatic monologue has always been considered a literary invention of the Victorian age, even in its own time (Pearsall 'The dramatic monologue' 69). That does of course not mean that it did not have any literary predecessors. We can trace the genre's early beginnings back to classical Greek literature, and there are countless examples of British poets who experimented with dramatic form long before the onset of the Victorian era (69). Despite this history, there seems to exist a general critical consensus that the monologues published in the 1830s and 40s by Browning and Tennyson undoubtedly represented a great shift in the poetic tendencies at the time. Generally, the dramatic monologue has been understood as a transitional genre between the lyric of the Romantic period and later Modernist experimentations. E. Warwick Slinn, for instance, argues of the dramatic monologue that 'this type of poem stands as the main Victorian contribution to a distinctly modern, if not Modernist, literature' ('Experimental form' 47). In other words, the early dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson anticipated a new kind of poetry, a poetry that has proved to have an enduring legacy long after the end of the Victorian period. However, as dramatic monologues written by women have gained new critical interest, some have questioned the traditional narrative of the genre's origins. This chapter therefore discusses the claim that transitional women poets writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, such as Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans, wrote dramatic monologues years before Browning and Tennyson, and considers the implications that come with seeing these poets as the genre's true originators.

As much as the dramatic monologue is believed to be a poetic invention of the Victorian age, its origins are still disputed. Tzvetan Todorov claims in 'The Origin of Genres' (1976) that a 'new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination' (161). This becomes particularly evident when one studies a genre such as the dramatic monologue, a genre often described as a hybrid between drama, lyric and narrative (Slinn 'Experimental form' 47). The hybrid form also manifest itself in the relationship between poet and speaker, because unlike in lyric poetry, the poet and speaker in dramatic poetry cannot necessarily be understood as a unit. The dramatic monologues that appeared in the 1830s can in many ways be seen as a continuation of the Romantic poets' experiments with mixing lyric and drama. Robert Langbaum, like most critics, reads the emergence of the genre as a reaction against Romantic poetry,

especially as a break with the personal and subjective lyric (79). Other critics, such as Slinn also links the newfound interest in the speaking subject with the contemporary developments of the time, especially the uncertainties arising around questions of science, modernity, theology and the human psyche ('Experimental Form' 48). In an era characterised by change and unpredictability, poetry started reflecting uncertainties surrounding previously established knowledge (48). Where poets once had written speakers that spoke in a unified voice, those who favoured the dramatic monologue instead focused increasingly on the relationship between the speaking self and the historical and social context in which the subject speaks. By doing this, they were able to highlight issues of both a psychological and social nature. Browning came to be seen as the foremost representative of this development. Though he had previously written poetry closer to Romantic lyric, the 1836 publication of his first dramatic monologues, 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation', introduced a new poetic approach from Browning.

More recently, however, some critics have started exploring the role women poets played in the genre's development. As closely identified as Browning's name has become with the dramatic monologue, some critics, including Isobel Armstrong, have nevertheless contested his status as the originator of the genre. Armstrong argues that 'it was the women poets who 'invented' the dramatic monologue' (319), and traces an alternative literary history that focuses on the poetry of the transitional poets Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans. Hemans and Landon have become especially important for those who seek to cement the importance of women writers of Victorian poetry. Both Hemans and Landon experimented with dramatic speakers, and some critics have tried to draw lines from the poetry of these writers to the dramatic monologues of later Victorian poets such as Augusta Webster and Amy Levy.

The women's tradition traces the genre, and especially the way it was shaped in the hands of women writers, back to women writing in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. While these early women's monologues were equally invested in exploring representations of self, they were particularly devoted to challenging ruling ideas on femininity and poetry. For those who argue that we should understand women's monologues as an independent tradition it is especially important that these early precursors to dramatic monologues not only wrote speaker that were easily distinguishable from themselves, but also that these speakers were *women*. Isobel Armstrong and Dorothy Mermin understand women's dramatic monologues primarily as a way for women writers to challenge the ideas of 'feminine poetry', and to defy the dichotomy between the male subject and the

female object so often found in lyric poetry. By speaking in the voice of another, women could free themselves from the restraints of their own subjectivity, and instead insist on the status of their poetry as art (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 47).

This chapter looks at the two ‘competing’ traditions within scholarship on the dramatic monologue. The first is the traditional, canonized (and predominately male) dramatic monologue, represented by Browning. The second, alternative tradition is the women’s tradition, represented by late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century women writers, with a particular emphasis on Felicia Hemans’ poems in her collection *Records of Woman*. By juxtaposing Browning’s monologue ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ with Hemans’ poem ‘Arabella Stuart, a poem that was published eight years prior to Browning’s poem, we might start to question the stylistic originality of Browning’s early poems. However, the problematic nature of speaking of a separate women’s also tradition emerges by separating Victorian poetry in this manner. Byron claims that by taking a gendered approach to Victorian poetry, one risks discrediting the importance of contextual developments (*Dramatic Monologue* 31). Those who favour this way of reading the history of the dramatic monologue, present the women’s tradition as almost a static tendency that lasted for most of the century, separate from cultural, political, social and historical developments. Furthermore, Byron also shows how by isolating women poets from their own contexts, critics actually overlook the very thing that writers of dramatic monologues were reacting against:

To see generic categories purely in terms of formal features is to dehistoricise a piece of work, and to treat it as an autonomous aesthetic object rather than something which is produced within specific material circumstances. [...] it is precisely this kind of isolation from context against which the earliest dramatic monologues reacted in the construction of the speaking ‘I’. (*Dramatic Monologue* 31)

Isobel Armstrong, on the other hand, does not agree with Byron’s assertions. Armstrong sees several benefits with reading women’s monologues in the nineteenth century as a distinct tradition. For instance, a tradition modelled on the work of poets such as Hemans would explain, she argues, the divergences from the poetry of male poets such as Browning found in many dramatic monologues written by women. Some of the most obvious of these differences include the focus on social criticism in women’s monologues and the apparent blurring of poet and speaker. By comparing ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, a poem that has traditionally been studied as the starting-point for the dramatic monologue, and ‘Arabella Stuart’, a poem

that dramatizes the historical figure of Arabella Stuart, it becomes evident that the dramatic monologue is a genre with a long history.

2.1 Monologue and Monomania: Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover'

Browning's poem 'Porphyria's Lover', first published in 1836, is often presented as one of the earliest examples of the Victorian dramatic monologue, and one of Browning's most striking efforts in the genre (Slinn 'Dramatic monologue' 87). Spoken from the perspective of someone who has been labelled as a complete 'madman' (Sutton 280), the poem's speaker tries to preserve his lover Porphyria in a state of remaining 'Perfectly pure and good' (37) by strangling her with her own hair. Several critics read 'Porphyria's Lover' as a poem that engages with the suppression of the female voice, and the objectification of the female body. While looking back on the events that led to him eventually killing Porphyria, the speaker reveals how he has constantly revoked Porphyria's right to speak. He denies Porphyria this right in an attempt to fully possess and control her, and the poem reveals how this process started even before the speaker finally decided on killing Porphyria. Completely caught up in his own justification, the speaker sees himself as performing Porphyria's 'utmost will' (53), when in fact Porphyria is never given the chance to express it. As Glennis Byron puts it: 'In a world constructed in the speaker's own self-image, there is no room for reciprocity, for dialogue' (*Dramatic Monologue* 39). While the poem certainly can be read as a monomaniac's attempt to completely take over the female voice, the dramatic monologue in the hands of Browning gave him the opportunity to both step into the troubled mind of his speaker, while at the same time maintaining a distance to his subject. This distance allowed Browning to both reflect on and ironize his speaker's motives and drives. 'Porphyria's Lover' is also the first poem where Browning uses the dramatic monologue in order to scrutinise the speaking subject as subjected to context, a duality countless other writers would go on to explore in their own poetry.

2.2 Anticipating Monologue: Hemans' 'Arabella Stuart'

The poem 'Arabella Stuart' is based on the life of the historical Arabella Stuart, who was a possible successor to Elizabeth I on the throne (Armstrong 329). In the poem, Arabella

Stuarts sits imprisoned in the Tower of London longing for her husband William Seymour. Since she married him without royal consent, Arabella was imprisoned. In the poem she declares her love for the absent Seymour and concludes her speech by insisting on her own willingness to die if they cannot be reunited. Arabella moves between hope and despair and several critics have noted how the poem offers a psychological exploration of its heroine's deteriorating mind. While she wrote mainly lyric poetry, Hemans' started to experiment with more dramatic forms, for instance in 'Arabella Stuart'. Hemans was well known during her own lifetime, and she was continuously read throughout the nineteenth century (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 46). Therefore, it is not controversial to assume that she had a widespread influence over other writers of poetry in the nineteenth century. Discussing the influence of Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans on later Victorian women poets, Isobel Armstrong argues that 'even when there seems no direct link between these earlier and later writers it does seem as if they worked within a recognisable tradition understood by them to belong to women' (323). While Hemans' poem undoubtedly shares some similarities with subsequent Victorian dramatic monologues, the 'recognisable tradition' Armstrong speaks of has been thoroughly challenged by more recent criticism, especially since it places Hemans' poetry within a critical framework that both singles out women's poetry as different, and fails to read Hemans' poetry on its own terms.

2.3 Woman as Object and as Subject

When discussing Browning's early dramatic monologues, such as 'Porphyria's Lover', words such as 'expose' (Armstrong 13), 'distance' (Knoepflmacher 141), and 'reveal' (Langbaum 85) appear frequently in criticism. These concepts point to the tendency of reading dramatic monologues as a genre that separates, opening up fissures between speaker and poet, between speaker and reader, and between subjectivity and context. Instead of creating speakers that reflected the personal and confessional, Browning's dramatic speakers speak in their own distinct voices. The dramatic form also allowed poets to keep an ironic distance towards their speaking subjects, and thus dramatic irony has become closely associated with the genre. Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience* represented a shift in how critics read Victorian poetry. Under the header 'poetry of experience', Langbaum includes both Romantic, Victorian and Modernist poetry, and argues that what these poetic traditions have in common is a post-Enlightenment exploration of individuals seeking to understand themselves within

contexts. Langbaum sees this exploration as a process where the individual seeks to break out of their own subjectivity and instead find connection:

No sooner had the eighteenth century left the individual isolated within himself – without an objective counterpart for the values he sensed in his own will and feelings – than romanticism began as a movement towards objectivity, toward a new principle of connection with society and nature through the imposition of values on the external world. (28)

At the heart of Langbaum's analysis of the poetry of experience lies a 'concern about the relations between subjects and objects, the ways that subjects can know objects, and the question of individual perception' (Psoniades 31). Browning's monologues, 'Porphyria's Lover' included, are heavily involved with these issues. Since the dramatic monologue is a genre that creates clear separations and is often concerned with dualisms, it is perhaps no wonder that it is also particularly suited to examine the relationship between subjects and objects. Several of Browning's early dramatic monologues explore the relationship between a speaking, male subject and a passive object or 'other', which is usually female. This passivized other is different to an auditor in the usual sense of the word. Consider for instance Browning's 'My Last Duchess', the poem that Ina Beth Sessions named as the perfect dramatic monologue. In the poem, the duke gives a tour of his home to an envoy who represents the duke's future wife. The duke stops before a painting of his late wife and marvels at its beauty. While the envoy does not speak, the duke's speech still reflect that he is replying to, or at least anticipating, the envoy's words. Examples of this include instances where the duke directly addresses the envoy, such as when he says 'Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt' (43) and 'Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir' (53-54).

However, in a poem like 'Porphyria's Lover' there is no possibility of verbal reciprocation. Porphyria's entire story is told in retrospect, and the dead woman is reduced to nothing more than an inanimate object that exists solely for the speaker's perverse pleasure. In this sense, Porphyria bears closer resemblance to the dead duchess in 'My Last Duchess', who has literally been reduced to a painting on the wall, than to the visiting envoy. In both 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' the object is a dead woman, and in both these poems the dead woman is what prompts the speakers to deliver their speeches. Seeing women as objects in poetry, or in literature as a whole for that matter, was not something that originated with the Victorians. However, in dramatic monologues one might argue that this separation becomes especially visible since dramatic poetry often highlights the imbalances

between those who have been endowed with linguistic authority and those who have not. Browning's occupation with these issues also inspired other poets who wrote dramatic monologues, such as D.G. Rossetti and Swinburne. Despite the fact that Rossetti and Swinburne created poetry that differed from Browning both in style and content, many critics, including U.C. Knoepfelmacher, argue that the split between the speaking, male subject and the silent, female object is a trope that stretches across the nineteenth century. While it was not a theme that originated with Browning, he is still the poet most associated with it.

Since Browning himself wrote very little prose, his 'Essay on Shelley' which primarily deals with the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley but also reflects several of Browning ideas on poetry, has been quoted extensively by those who wish to understand how Browning perceived his own poetic project. In the essay, Browning separates between what he calls *subjective* poets and what he calls *objective* poets. The objective poet is a 'fashioner' who reproduces 'things external' (1001) and 'chooses to deal with the doings of men' by writing 'dramatic poetry' (1002). The subjective poet 'whose study [is] himself', on the other hand, produces works that reflect the 'radiance and aroma of his personality' (1003). In other words, the objective poet functions more like an observer who reproduces what he sees, while the subjective poet's writings are a reflection of himself. In many ways, Browning's theory fits well into modern scholarship on nineteenth century poetry, who often reads Victorian poetry as a break with the subjective Romantic lyric. It is however important to note that Browning does not seem to be saying that there is necessarily a clear separation between the two, nor is he saying that it is not possible to be both. In fact, what he seems to be saying is that what sets Shelley apart from other poets is that his poetry reflects both the subjective and the objective. Shelley is both able to reflect reality but also to infuse reality with his own genius. Yet, while Browning is full of admiration for Shelley as a Romantic poet, he also seems to be conveying the idea that the poetry of his own age is moving towards a more objective poetry, and this entails the poetry becoming more dramatic.

While 'Porphyria's Lover' and other dramatic monologues have been studied for the ways in which they separate the 'I' of the poem from the 'I' of the poet, perhaps even more influential is the critical attention that has been paid to reader response in dramatic monologues. Robert Langbaum was one of the first to introduce a shift in focus when it comes to critical writing on the dramatic monologue. Instead of trying to define the genre in terms of technical features, he argued for a new perspective and a focus on the inner workings of the poems, as well as the effects the poems have on the reader. He reads

'Porphyria's Lover' as a love poem, where the speaker is so maddened by his own love and desire to possess his lover that he chooses to kill her in order to preserve a moment where he feels her complete surrender to him (Langbaum 88). Since Porphyria is 'Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour / To set its struggling passion free' (22-23), the speaker sees himself as a liberator who, by killing Porphyria, allows her to finally fulfil her 'utmost will' (53). This will, according to the speaker, is to surrender and give herself to him forever. Of course, this 'will' is never expressed explicitly by Porphyria in the poem. A simple glance into Porphyria's 'happy and proud' (32) eyes is enough to convince the speaker that she accepts the fate he has chosen for her. As an expression of her complete surrender, the speaker strangles her. Symbolically, he does so with a lock of her own hair, as to further emphasise Porphyria's acceptance of the act. At the centre of Langbaum's reading of the dramatic monologue are the concepts sympathy and judgement. According to Langbaum, these two factors are always competing against each other, and this is also the case in 'Porphyria's Lover'. There can be no doubt that the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' is a criminal, yet, since the only entry into the poem is through the speaker's voice, his reasoning dominates the entire narrative. Langbaum's focus on the response the poem provokes in the reader has been vital in understanding the complex relationship between poet, speaker and audience in dramatic poetry.

However, Langbaum takes his argument a step further, controversially claiming that the speaker has a 'rationally understandable motive' (88) for killing Porphyria. The murder is the 'culminating expression' of the speaker's love for her, in an attempt to 'preserve unchanged the perfect moment of her surrender to him' (88). According to Langbaum, even the most objectionable of Browning's speakers are able to evoke sympathy from their readers. Langbaum certainly has a point when he argues that since our only entry into the poem is through the speaker, we as readers are always subjected to the speaker's logic. At the same time, it is also important to remember that the form of the dramatic monologue rescues readers from being completely absorbed by the speaker's justifications. A. Dwight Culler agrees with Langbaum's assertion that the tension between sympathy and judgement is essential to understanding Browning's dramatic monologues (367). At the same time he also argues that Langbaum does not place enough emphasis on irony, another characteristic element in Browning's early monologues (367). Culler claims that dramatic irony 'arises from the contrast between the limited understanding the speaker has of his own words and the larger, encompassing understanding of the poet and reader' (367). Irony is closely linked to revelation in Browning's monologues, as the speakers' true motives are often revealed

through their words or actions. This revelation can both be intended and unintended, and includes verbal as well as formalistic clues within the poem. For instance, it is worth noticing how Browning breaks up the steady iambic tetrameter of the poem's first lines in lines of the poem where the speaker reveals something about his own inner turmoil, for instance when he utters in the fifth line 'I listened with heart fit to break' (5). According to Glennis Byron, the use of dramatic irony in dramatic monologue is usually there to 'indicate the presence of a double-voiced discourse, two differently oriented speech acts within the same words' (*Dramatic Monologue* 16). Nowhere in 'Porphyria's Lover' is this double-voiced discourse better demonstrated than when the speaker claims that he through killing Porphyria has performed her 'utmost will' (53). While the speaker claims that he is in fact only helping Porphyria in achieving her desire to sacrifice herself for love, we as readers are nevertheless fully aware that speaker's words are entirely based on interpretation.

Another way in which the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' reveals himself is through the poem's retrospective nature. All Porphyria's actions are filtered through the mind of the speaker, who retells in a calm and chronological manner the events that led him to kill Porphyria. The most questionable element of the speaker's retelling is how he reveals himself to have deliberately tried to silence Porphyria's voice. When Porphyria first tries to speak, her words are met with silence: 'And, last, she sat down by my side / And call'd me. When no voice replied, / She put my arm around her waist' (14-16). No voice replies to Porphyria's call, in other words the speaker deliberately denies her the possibility of engaging in any conversation with him. Another mention is made of Porphyria trying to speak, when the speaker recalls how Porphyria moments before her death was 'Murmuring how she loved me' (21). Porphyria's voice has turned into a quiet murmur, which the speaker links to her weakness and inability to free herself '[...] from pride, and vainer ties dis sever / And give herself to [him] for ever' (24-25). According to Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, the listener's silence in dramatic monologue is almost never a chosen silence; the speaker usually imposes it on the listener (289). Often this silence is caused as a direct result of the auditor feeling intimidated by the speaker's authority.

Part of why the speaker's narrative in 'Porphyria's Lover' might seem so convincing is the feeling of inevitability that characterises it. The speaker dramatizes himself and his surroundings, and places himself within a chronological narrative. The pathetic fallacy of describing the 'sullen wind' (2) that 'tore the elm-tress tops down for spite' (3), immediately offers the reader an entry into the speaker's troubled mind. It is worth noticing how Porphyria, by entering into the speaker's home, has 'shut the cold out and the storm' (7).

When she leaves the stormy and chaotic world, and enters into the speaker's home, she also enters into his mind – a world defined by his logic and worldview. According to the speaker's logic, Porphyria has to die because she is unwilling to sever her ties to the outside world. The speaker realises that there is no real possibility of her staying with him, and so the only way for him to possess her is by killing her.

However, 'Porphyria's Lover' is a poem that subtly disrupts the speaker's authority, because even though it is a poem that demonstrates the traditional masculine and feminine dichotomy of the active, male subject and the passivized, feminine object, there are still elements within the poem that resist such readings. Again, it is worth considering the double-voiced discourse within the poem. While the speaker sees Porphyria as 'Too weak' (22) for her own good, it is Porphyria, and not the speaker, who is shown at the beginning of the poem as the facilitator in their affair. David Eggenchwiler counts twelve different acts that Porphyria performs before she sits down next to her lover, including lighting the fire and taking off her wet clothes (41). As she prepares the scene, the speaker sits and waits for her with a 'heart fit to break' (5). When Porphyria eventually sits down, she is the one who puts the speaker's arm around her own waist and thus initiates physical contact, seducing the speaker by making her 'smooth white shoulder bare' (17). In other words, the speaker starts out as passive in comparison to Porphyria. Even the name of the poem defines the speaker from his relationship to Porphyria, and consequently indicates what shapes the speaker's identity is his relationship to her.

Subtle hints of Porphyria's apparent 'fallenness' are included in the poem, for instance her 'soiled gloves' (12) and the way she lets her hair 'fall' (13). According to Catherine Ross, a sexually unrestrained character such as Porphyria challenges Victorian ideas of the role of women (70-71). In a society that really only offered women two outlets for their sexuality – either within the socially accepted structure of marriage or as disrespectful 'fallen' women, Porphyria disrupts social expectations. She neither is the 'angel of some man's house' nor is she 'prostitute' (71). By killing Porphyria, the speaker sees himself as purifying her, since in death Porphyria's eyes become 'blue' and 'without a stain' (45). The poem shows how the speaker gradually takes away Porphyria's agency and freedom. First by refusing to answer her when she speaks to him, then by reducing her to nothing but the sum of her physical parts and finally by killing her in order to reduce her to a dead object.

While Langbaum's theories continue to be relevant to the study of dramatic monologues, new perspectives have challenged his focus on the importance of and

relationship between sympathy and judgement. Several feminist critics disagree with the notion that the reader's sympathy is fixed and given, and especially with Langbaum's claim that by 'seeing what the speaker sees we are able to identify ourselves with him, stand in his position and thus inside the poem where meaning resides' (137). They have criticised that the universal reader Langbaum imagines is in reality white, Western, male, heterosexual and so on and thus questioned the notion that readers of dramatic monologues have to identify with the speakers in order to understand the poems (Scheinberg 177). J

Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor points out another apparent flaw in Langbaum's analysis – the fact that it downplays, or sometimes even ignores, the reader's sympathy with the implied listener or interlocutor (289). Langbaum leaves Porphyria almost entirely out of his analysis and this is something more recent critics have tried to avoid. Isobel Armstrong, for instance, sees 'Porphyria's Lover' as an 'externalised psychological narrative', and claims that the absence of dialogue in the poem creates a 'hermeneutic shock' (145). This shock forces the readers into acknowledging how they, like Porphyria, have been excluded from the poem's conversation (145). In other words, the absence of any voice within the poem to challenge the speaker's authority, since even God apparently chooses to remain silent, makes the reader wary of the speaker's monologue, and more equipped to expose its deceptiveness. Like Langbaum before her, Armstrong's analysis is to a large extent reader-centric. Unlike Langbaum, however, Armstrong's analysis is as much focused on Porphyria as it is on the speaker. By reading a dramatic monologue such as 'Porphyria's Lover', readers both take part in and work to resist the objectification of the dead woman. Especially for critics interested in the ways in which dramatic monologues explore objectification of women, Porphyria emerges as a character able to evoke a profound sympathy in readers. As U.C. Knoepfelmacher argues, readers in dramatic monologues are presented with the opportunity of becoming the objectified other's 'chief ally' and to rescue them from remaining 'perennial captives of masculine speech' (145).

The trouble with an interpretation based on the anticipated reactions of an imagined readership, is that it does not really take into consideration the context in which the reader understands the poem. For instance, the presence of irony within Browning's monologues is an element that has been highly debated among critics, and the presence of or lack of it does in many ways define how one reads 'Porphyria's Lover'. Most criticism seems to agree that Browning's dramatic monologues are highly ironic in nature. There are however a few exceptions, perhaps most notably Harold Bloom, who reads 'Porphyria's Lover' as 'neither dramatic nor a monologue, but rather a barely disguised High Romantic crisis lyric, in which

antithetical voices contend for an illusory because only momentary mastery' (3).

Knoepfmacher argues on the other hand that Browning, by writing in the style of the dramatic monologue, is able to keep an ironic distance to the material, which would be more difficult in a poetic genre such as the Romantic lyric (142). Knoepfmacher also notes how Browning, while he 'ironizes the act of projection by which a devouring male ego reduces that Female Other into nothingness' (143), simultaneously 'flattens the female anima, into a mere image, a representation, an object of art' (143). In other words, there is a tension within the poem between the 're-animation' done by the reader and the objectification done by the speaker, and to some extent, the poet.

Recently, Cornelia Pearsall has challenged another feature previously believed to be essential in the study of Browning's monologues, namely the notion that the poet's ironic distance to the poem's speaker exposes how speakers 'reveal' themselves. Pearsall disagrees with the idea that speakers reveal their 'true self' unintendedly through their speech. On the contrary, she argues that dramatic speakers always work in order to attain a certain goal ('The dramatic monologue' 67). She emphasises how the speaker's words function as *acts* that 'articulate [the speaker's] goals' (*Tennyson's Rapture* 20). Furthermore, she claims that 'the monologues themselves also come to perform these goals in course of the monologue, by way of the monologue' (20). Pearsall's theory is important particularly for the ways in which it downplays the role of the reader as the one who has to confront and 'reveal' the speaker as an unreliable narrator. Reader-centric theories have come to dominate the field, but new perspectives are emerging, and consequently some of the most well-established conceptions about the Victorian dramatic monologue are being challenged.

Browning's early monologues, 'Porphyria's Lover' included, have certainly been vital to studies on dramatic poetry, and even to the very idea that Victorian poetry developed into the separate poetic tradition which we now know as 'the Victorian dramatic monologue'. 'Porphyria's Lover' is not only an important poem because it highlights some of the central concepts in studies on the genre, such as sympathy, judgement and irony, but perhaps even more because it uses the dramatic form to dissect the long poetic tradition of showing men as creator's and artists, and women as their artistic objects. As we have seen, the subject-object dichotomy is as demonstrated highly complex in 'Porphyria's Lover'. In Knoepfmacher's view, it is a poem in which Browning expresses an uncertainty over the tendency of writing women as objects in art (141). Moreover, the dramatic monologue presented Browning with the opportunity to avoid the 'melodramatic overtones' and 'sentimentality' that previously characterised his poetry, and created art that was 'powerfully and magically three-

dimensional' (142). As will become evident in the analysis of Rossetti's 'Jenny' in the second chapter, uneasiness surrounding the objectification of women in art was adopted by later writers of dramatic monologues. Rossetti poem also went further than Browning in exploring the idea of what Kasey Bass Baker calls 'contrasubjectivity' in dramatic monologues, which Baker defines as the 'denying of the interrelationship of the self and the other' (110). Whereas Browning often uses the dramatic monologue to show speakers with a authorial need to obliterate the female voice, both through language and through violent acts, later poets would instead use the form to show speakers that question their own ability to speak with this kind of certainty. However, male writers were not alone in continuing Browning's legacy.

2.4 Speaking in Another Voice

Victorian women poets often, but in no way exclusively, wrote female speakers. For Victorian women writing dramatic poetry this, according to Dorothy Mermin, posed a dilemma. For if woman is usually the object in poetry, what happens when woman attains the position of a speaking subject? Furthermore, who becomes her object? ('The Fruitful Feud' 156). The ways in which Victorian woman poets dealt with this are manifold, but they often manifest themselves in two easily recognisable ways. First, women's monologues are formalistically different, for instance in the way that they frequently omit the presence of an auditor, and instead display speakers who speak in total isolation. Yet while the speakers are isolated, they interact with themselves in a process that reveals them as both speaking subject but also as subjected to forces outside themselves. In other words, the speakers in these monologues are shown as both subjects *and* objects within their own narratives. The other way in which these monologues differ from Browning's monologues, is how they seem to blur the boundaries between poet and speaker. While these monologues are clearly dramatic, in some regards they also seem to be approaching lyric. This has led some critics to ask whether perhaps it is better to understand the dramatic poetry written by women as a separate tradition, and if Victorian women poets perhaps owe a greater debt to the poetry of Felicia Hemans than to Robert Browning.

For women writing poetry in the nineteenth century one of the most troubling issues was the traditional dichotomy between the masculine subject and the feminine object. Often, as is the case with Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover', the male speaker in the poem addresses a woman, who is for some reason rendered silent. It can be literally, as in Browning's poem

where the speaker kills the woman and thus denies her own agency, or more figuratively, as in D.G. Rossetti's poem 'Jenny' where the speaker imagines what Jenny would say had she been awake, and in this way speaks for her. U.C. Knoepfelmacher writes of Browning's influence that Browning became aware of the possibility in poetry of 'distort[ing] the Other into what she is not' and that the dramatic form allowed him the possibility of both perfecting and ironizing this in his own poems. According to Knoepfelmacher, this was the primary legacy Browning passed on to his fellow Victorian poets. However, Cynthia Scheinberg disagrees with Knoepfelmacher. When discussing the poetry of Victorian women writers Scheinberg consequently rejects the focus on the relationship between the male subject and the female object in poetry by women writers by questioning the idea that women poets 'relied on Browning's insights about the problem of being a "female Other"' (174). She argues convincingly that the 'critical understanding of women's dramatic monologues has had less to do with their "different" use of generic forms than with the critical readers who have constructed dramatic monologues and women's poetry as separate genres' (176).

Scheinberg certainly has a point when it comes to the critical neglect of many women poets on the basis of gender. However, while I agree with Scheinberg when it comes to the need for not letting gender limit our understanding of the genre, I also agree with Knoepfelmacher that the idea of men as creators and women as objects can be helpful when trying to understand the formalistic differences in poetry written by Victorian women. Even though women writers might not have adopted the exact same treatment of the relationship between subjects and objects as we see in Browning's poetry, it is still vital to understanding the dramatic monologues of writers such as Augusta Webster and Amy Levy.

Another way in which women poets were able to show the challenges facing women who want to take on the role as subject, was to write poetry that directly concern itself with the conception of art. A common theme in these poems is failed artists who for some reason struggle to either create art or to be recognised as artists. It is worth noticing that the artist these poems depict are often male, notable examples include Webster's 'A Painter' and Levy's 'A Minor Poet'. Perhaps this is another way of showing how, as feminist critics like Susan Gubar has persuasively argued, the idea of the male artist as creator and his creation as female was so culturally fixed that it was extremely challenging to overcome for women writing in the nineteenth century. Gubar argues that 'just as important as the anxiety the male pen produces in the would-be woman writer is the horror she experiences at having been defined as his creation' (247). This effect is demonstrated brilliantly by the speakers in the poetry of writers such as Webster and Levy. Their speakers are shown as in control of their

own words, but they also reflect society's views by seeing themselves from a distance, as objects, or as a 'thing' (62) as Webster's Eulalie in 'A Castaway' calls herself. By making their speakers the object of analysis, as well as the speaking subjects, women poets were able to highlight some of the challenges presented by gender for women writing in the Victorian age. This is a defining trait of the dramatic monologue, especially as it developed in the last part of the nineteenth century.

There can be little doubt that Browning's monologues, with their mixing of genres and explorations of subjectivity, can be seen as a move away from Romantic poetry. Romantic poetry is often seen as a genre that fuses the voice of the poetic speaker with the voice of the poet, who is seemingly unbound by his or her own historical context (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 33). While it is true that more recent criticism on Romantic poetry has focused on the ways in which Romantic poetry disrupts these beliefs, it is important to note, as Glennis Byron does, that the primary literary legacy passed down from the Romantics to the Victorians was that of the autonomous, subjective speaking voice (33). Whereas the Romantic poets often sought to 'remake the world through their art' (Cox 'The Living Pantheon' 11), the early dramatic monologues by Tennyson and Browning instead reflect the instabilities of human perceptions and most importantly, question Romantic ideas surrounding transcendent truths (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 34). As Browning himself argues, the 'subjective' poet of the Romantic age does not try to explain what 'man sees' but what 'God sees' ('Essay on Shelley' 1001), while the objective studies 'the combination of humanity in action' (1002).

Shanyn Fiske agrees with the assertion that the early dramatic monologues by writers such as Browning and Tennyson clearly show signs of going against the Romantic representation of the self. Women writers too, she argues, concerned themselves with questions of representation, albeit in a slightly different way. For women poets, she argues, the dramatic form encouraged them into the 'crafting of emotive poetic personas' which again inspired 'previously unheard-of possibilities for self-fashioning (470). Fiske is quick to point out that she does not wish to further cement what she calls 'the dubious critical division between masculine rationality and feminine sentimentality', but rather to emphasise how women's monologues appear to mediate somewhere between these two binaries (470). As a result of the increased interest in dramatic monologues written by women, it is perhaps no wonder that critics have also started looking for possible female precursors to the genre who can explain why women's poetry seem to mediate somewhere between the rational and the

sentimental. One writer who has been presented as a possible contender for this role is Felicia Hemans.

In the introduction to a 1873 collection of Hemans' poetry, William Michael Rossetti praises Hemans' poetry for its beauty and skill, but also faults it for being what he calls 'female poetry'. The words he chooses to describe Hemans' poetry: 'feminine', 'female', 'sentiment', 'fineness' and 'charm of womanhood', are all reflections on how women poets were often read in light of their gender:

One might sum up the weak points in Mrs. Hemans' poetry by saying that it is not only "feminine" poetry (which under the circumstances can be no imputation, rather an encomium) but also "female" poetry: besides exhibiting the fineness and charm of womanhood, it has the monotone of mere sex. [...] She is a leader in that very modern phalanx of poets who persistently co-ordinate the impulse of sentiment with the guiding power of morals or religion. [...] The poet must not write because he has something of his own to say, but because he has something *right* to feel and say. ('Introduction' xiv)

In many ways, Hemans' reception by her contemporaries such as Rossetti, and the critical understanding of her as a 'feminine' and 'domestic' lasted long into the twentieth century, and in some ways it continues to do so. Women writing poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were met with a wide range of prejudices, including the idea of the sentimental 'poetess-character' who wrote poetry seen as different to, and often less accomplished than the poetry of their male counterparts (Scheinberg 'Recasting' 175). It is certainly true that nineteenth-century critics often used 'feminine poetry' as a negative term. However, feminine poetry did not necessarily equate to poetry written by women. As Kate Flint points out, contemporary reviewers used these categories to devalue so called 'feminine poetry', but interestingly those poems most often accused of these feminine qualities were not written by poets such as Augusta Webster, they were 'ironically written by men like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Swinburne' (165). This illustrates the complex nature of the term 'feminine poetry'.

In the last few decades critics have started to question Hemans' status as the ultimate 'domestic' poet, and instead focused on the ways in which her poetry might have influenced later Victorian poets. As already mentioned, Isobel Armstrong argues that Felicia Hemans, in her poem 'Arabella Stuart', created one of the earliest examples of a dramatic monologue. Armstrong takes her argument one step further by arguing that not only was Hemans one of the inventors of the genre's form, her poetry also inspired a 'discourse which could

accommodate the poetics of the feminine' (323). This discourse lasted throughout the nineteenth century, and involved all women poets who wrote dramatic monologues during the Victorian age (323). While Armstrong recognises that women did write dramatic monologues in the same vein as Browning and Tennyson, she also claims that women used the genre differently. Starting with the poetry of Hemans and Landon, she claims that the main legacy of the 'women's tradition' is how women writer used the monologue to tackle oppression.

Creating speakers such as Arabella Stuart allowed Hemans to speak in the voice of another woman. Hemans and later Victorian women poets were according to Isobel Armstrong able to use the dramatic monologue as 'a disguise, a protection against self-exposure and the exposure of feminine subjectivity' in order to make feminine subjectivity the object of investigation (325). Therefore, Armstrong also argues that it is especially important to note that women poets writing in the years after Hemans 'insisted' on writing in the voices of other women (325). While Armstrong is right that women often wrote female speakers, the claim that women 'insisted' on writing women speakers seems a bit strained when one considers a writer such as Augusta Webster, who wrote both male and female speakers almost interchangeably. The recent critical interest in so-called 'cross-gendered' monologues have shown that writing as another gender was a feature in monologues by both men and women writers (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 74). However, Armstrong's argument is interesting because it calls into question whether women's monologues are distinctive not only as a result of their formalistic differences such as the omission of auditors, but also because women's monologues engaged in their own separate discourses.

If it is true that writers such as Felicia Hemans created dramatic poetry specifically based in feminine experience, it is therefore worth asking if this also entails that women's dramatic monologues reacted against something other than the Romantic idea of a unified speaking subject so often associated with Browning's poetry. According to Armstrong, Hemans' primary legacy was how she developed the dramatic monologue as a way for women poets to criticise oppression. 'Arabella Stuart' is in Armstrong's view one of the first examples of this. Armstrong undeniably has a point when she argues that social criticism has proved to be one of the longest lasting legacies of dramatic monologues. Later poets, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Algernon Swinburne and Augusta Webster all used the form to confront and criticise ruling structures and ideas. Be it of a political, ideological, religious or social nature, they seem to concern themselves with how the individual's possibilities are determined and often limited by these structures. However, to claim that Hemans' poetry focuses on criticising oppression is a controversial claim.

Supposing that Hemans were a predecessor for a tradition of dramatic monologues especially focused on reacting against patriarchal oppression and the 'institutions and customs which burden women' (Armstrong 319), one would surely expect to find these elements present in her dramatic poetry. However, if one considers Hemans' poem 'Arabella Stuart', a poem frequently offered as one of the foremost examples of early dramatic monologues, it becomes difficult to determine what the poem is actually reacting against. Hemans' monologues, and this is also true of 'Arabella Stuart', often concern themselves with family and the domestic. The speakers at the centre of Hemans' monologues are often depicted as passive and self-sacrificing (Luu 'Fantasies of "Woman"' 42). While 'Arabella Stuart' is set in a prison, the main concern for the speaker is always how she can be reunited with her husband Seymour. Like many female dramatic speakers, Arabella is shown as subjected to forces beyond herself. Her imprisonment is the physical manifestation of her suppression, and of her being denied the life she truly seeks. She is an 'insect to be crushed' (158) under the feet of those who aim to destroy her. The headnote that frames the poem gives the background for Arabella's imprisonment, and tells of her greatest misfortune, which was to be denied domestic happiness. In some ways the headnote can be seen as a way for Hemans to distance herself from the character, by claiming that the poem is a record of Arabella's 'imagined thoughts and feelings' (332). In this sense, 'Arabella Stuart' certainly shows signs of moving towards a poetry that is more dramatic.

Formalistically, 'Arabella Stuart' and 'Porphyria's Lover' resemble each other to a certain degree. The poem's speaker is clearly separated from the poet in the sense that it is placed in an historical context and the speaker is given a name. If reconsider Ina Beth Sessions' requirements, the poem does at least have a clearly defined speaker and a dramatic occasion. Armstrong reads the poem as a psychological exploration of a disintegrating mind. She argues that the poem is much more concerned with the 'inward and psychological' than the 'external and classical' but argues that the poem nevertheless turns 'the expressive moment towards investigation and critique' (329). The idea that the poem is chiefly concerned with psychological explorations is interesting, because later women poets such as Augusta Webster have come to be primarily associated with social criticism, rather than psychological explorations. Nevertheless, Armstrong insists that 'Arabella Stuart' is a poem mainly concerned with critique.

Armstrong's focus is, as is the tendency with most post-Langbaumanian criticism, on the inner workings of the genre rather than formalistic features. For Armstrong, women's poetics is recognisable for the focus it places on the 'affective moment' as well as its

relationship to ‘moral convention and religious and cultural constraint’ (325). She argues that Hemans, instead of concerning herself primarily with an overt criticism of ‘particular political positions’ tries to find ways in which to navigate ‘conventions and constraints’ (332). While Armstrong is right to label ‘Arabella Stuart’ a psychological narrative, one might disagree with her claim that the psychological elements in the poem necessarily show how Arabella Stuart is subjected to social constraints. Even if the reasons for the historical Arabella’s imprisonment are political, it does not necessarily follow that the poem itself is involved with critique. Armstrong believes that what Arabella realises through the course of her reflections is that her ‘rebellion was in fact in conformity with a romantic paradigm which failed to work’ (330). While it is true that Arabella’s rebellion fails, the final lines of the poem ‘To thy heart’s holy place; there let them dwell – / We shall o’ersweep the grave to meet – Farewell!’ (259) nevertheless suggest that Arabella keeps believing in this paradigm until her death. While Armstrong reads the poem as critique of oppression, her analysis of the poem is ultimately focused on the psychological aspects in Arabella’s narrative. One might therefore argue that ‘Arabella Stuart’ has more in common with the early psychological narratives of Browning and Tennyson, than with the deeply political monologues of someone like Webster, who often deal quite explicitly with issues such as women’s right to education and female sexuality.

While Hemans’ monologues in *Records of Woman*, including ‘Arabella Stuart’, are undoubtedly dramatic, many feel hesitant towards labelling them as ‘dramatic monologues’. The reason for this is that it cannot easily be said of these poems that they create the type of discursive split one would expect in a dramatic monologue. Arabella is punished for her transgressions, and as a result ends up dead. Women being punished for their sexual transgressions is a theme that appears in all the poems this thesis discusses. Yet, unlike in the dramatic monologues of Browning or Webster, Hemans does not seem to explore or question why women are punished in this way. As shown by the discussion on Browning’s poetry, the focus on historical and social context is one of the most distinct ways Victorian poetry separated itself from Romantic lyric. When it comes to the dramatic monologue, one of the genre’s key features is how it reveals the ways in which the individual is subjected to their context. Glennis Byron, however, argues that this focus is not really present in Hemans’ dramatic poetry. Instead, she argues that Hemans’ poetry reflect essentialist ideas on femininity:

With Hemans, however, context appears to be used primarily as a means of reinforcing the idea that, in all times and in all places, the essential nature of woman is fixed. The poems are, I think, crucial predecessors of the dramatic monologue, but they exploit the dynamic of the self in context in a manner diametrically opposite to the way now considered characteristic of the form.' ('Rethinking' 84)

Byron's general point on Hemans' poetry also proves valid when one considers 'Arabella Stuart'. The context of the poem does very little other than to provide a framework for the poem's tragic story of the two divided lovers. Hemans does not use the monologue to meditate on the conditions of women in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, nor does she adopt mythological or historical backgrounds in order to explore contemporary issues. This is a strategy that many later writers adopted, for instance Webster in her poem 'Circe'. In conclusion, one might say that 'Arabella Stuart' is more of a lamentation of lost love and a meditation on death than it is a demonstration of the speaking subject being subjected to her context and forces beyond herself.

Similar to Webster's Eulalie in 'A Castaway' and Levy's speaker in 'Magdalen', Arabella Stuart seems to be speaking alone. This entails that there is no expressed auditor present in any of the poems. In the second and third chapter, I suggest that the lack of an auditor in the traditional sense became a way for women writers to show the issues facing women seeking to take on the role as authoritative speaking subject. Dorothy Mermin argues that when Victorian male poets write both male and female self-projection, they always end up with a clear distinction between the poet and the projection. When women poets write female self-projection, however, the poet and the speaker merge into one and become hard to distinguish from one another ('The Damsel' 68). Since women are often defined by their relationship to a man, Mermin claims that in Victorian poetry 'a male poet is to a woman as a female poet is to a child or an animal' (70).

However, I disagree with Mermin when she draws the conclusion that these projections must be reflections of the poet. Victorian poets such as Augusta Webster and Amy Levy, were in my opinion able to create clear distinctions in their poetry, they just adopted different methods than male writers such as Browning. By turning their focus back on their speakers, they were in fact able to develop the self-reflective nature of the dramatic monologue even further. Frequently women poets achieved this effect by making a physical split within their poem, as is the case with many of Webster monologues. Her speakers often confront their own reflections or words, in mirrors, portraits or diaries, for instance in the

poems 'Faded', 'A Castaway', 'Circe', and 'By the Looking-Glass'. Recurrently, the speakers feel so alienated from themselves that their speech represents a discursive split between their past and current selves, as if they were two separate entities. However, none of these elements are present in 'Arabella Stuart'. When Arabella speaks, she addresses Seymour, even though he is not present.

One of the ways in which one can understand the differences between Browning and Hemans' poems, is to consider the degree to which the poems function as 'performance'. This idea is related to Armstrong's theory on masks, but it also has its own distinct features. Richard Cronin sees performance as key when it comes to differentiating between Victorian dramatic monologues, and poems that anticipate them, naming 'Arabella Stuart' as one of his examples ('The Divided Self' 46). Browning's speakers, he argues, are always concerned with performing. Their words reflect a desire to manipulate and control, and their words are 'overheard' by the reader who is left trying to expose the speaker. In some ways, Cronin has a point when he argues that speakers in dramatic monologues are performers in some ways. At the same time, his analysis bears strong resemblance to the reader-centric 'poetry of experience' that Langbaum advocates. This focus has, as previously been argued, been responsible for the exclusion of many women writers. While Cronin is right when he argues that the speakers in Browning's monologues perform to a greater extent than the speakers created by Hemans, 'performance' is nevertheless a problematic concept. Cronin's theory does not just exclude the poetry of Hemans; it also makes it difficult to understand any Victorian women poets as dramatic monologist, even writers such as Webster, who recently has been recognised as one of the greatest writers of dramatic monologues, regardless of gender. As will become evident in the second and final chapter, women who wrote dramatic monologues were often less concerned with manipulating, instead seeking to persuade by evoking sympathy.

As previously argued, women writing poetry in the nineteenth century were often faced with the expectations of women's poetry to be sentimental and confessional. Isobel Armstrong argues that writers like Hemans, instead of directly challenging these expectations, chose to work within the conventional form. By doing so, they were able to highlight the limitations these expectations place on women, while avoiding alienating their readers. Armstrong argues that Hemans' poetry show the 'dissonances women's poetry created by making problematic the affective conventions and feelings associated with a feminine modality of experience even when, and perhaps particularly when, poets worked within these conventions' (323). What Armstrong seems to be arguing, is that by adopting

poetic modes and subjects deemed ‘fitting’ for women, poets like Hemans were able to question and subvert expectations. The subject matter of ‘Arabella Stuart’, a woman searching to fulfil herself through marriage and domestic bliss, is definitely among these ‘fitting’ subjects. Armstrong, focusing on the dramatic monologue’s ability to convey two ideas at once, argues that the

doubleness of women’s poetry comes from its ostensible adoption of an affective mode, often simple, often pious, often conventional. But those conventions are subjected to investigation, questioned, or used for unexpected purposes. (324)

While, as the second and third chapter of this thesis will demonstrate, this is true of many of the monologues of for instance Amy Levy, it is not as easily applied to the poetry of Hemans.

Undoubtedly inspired by Armstrong, Helen Luu attempts in a recent article entitled ‘Fantasies of “Woman”: Hemans’s Deconstruction of Femininity’ (2014) to demonstrate how the essentialist ideas of Hemans as the model domestic poet are still prevalent in criticism on her poetry, and why this has kept her from attaining the status she deserves. Luu presents two tendencies in criticism on Hemans. The first is the tendency of critics to conflate Hemans with her speakers; the second is the tendency to read all her speakers as simply variations on the same character (43). Luu argues that Hemans’ poetry is not a ‘way of consolidating the hegemonic model of femininity’ but rather a way to challenge it (45). She agrees with Armstrong and claims that the tradition of reading Hemans as a sentimental poet always associated with the domestic has severely limited the ways in which her poetry can be understood. Luu argues that Hemans, by repeatedly using tropes associated with women, is able to dramatize how this illusion is upheld in different societies through different historical times.

While Luu’s argument of Hemans’ would definitely strengthen the claim that Hemans was indeed the primary inspiration for women writing dramatic monologues, the problem is the lack of evidence within Hemans poems. While it might not be completely fair to label ‘Arabella Stuart’ as little more than simply a sentimental love story, since it does include some psychological explorations by showing a mind that moves between hope and utter despair, this does not necessarily mean that it is a dramatic monologue. Luu’s concludes that Hemans through adopting the dramatic monologue ‘opens up a structural space across which she can ironize and interrogate the voice that speaks, regardless of what it speaks, perhaps especially when it speaks like Hemans’ (54). This is in many ways similar to Armstrong’s claim that Hemans’ poetry highlights the ‘dissonances women’s poetry’ by working ‘within

these conventions' (323). While both of these claims are exciting, the problem with them is that neither Armstrong nor Luu is able to demonstrate exactly how Hemans' poetry subverts ruling ideas on femininity. For a genre like the dramatic monologue, speech is essential. For Luu to argue that Hemans is able to ironize the speaking voice 'regardless of what it speaks' is a claim that says little about why Hemans' poetry was apparently so influential.

Several critics object to the views presented by Armstrong and Luu when it comes to the claim that Hemans used the dramatic monologue as a mask that allowed her to obtain an objective distance to female subjectivity. Glennis Byron makes a strong point when she questions why, if it is indeed the case as Armstrong argues that women used the dramatic monologue as a mask, Hemans seems to be reaffirming male ideas of femininity and womanhood rather than to confront and challenge them (*Dramatic Monologue* 47-48). Hemans' collection of monologues is aptly named *Records of Woman*, and thus it becomes clear from the beginning that the collection emphasises what one might call female experience. However, as Byron notes, by naming the collection *Records of Woman*, and not *Records of Women*, Hemans' gender essentialism is introduced before one even opens the volume of poetry (*Dramatic Monologue* 52). The 'different masks' Hemans supposedly adopts, is in reality just a single one.

Some might argue that Arabella Stuart is a speaker that reflects the internalised social discourses on the role of women, but that these words should not be confused with the opinions of the poet. The discussion on Augusta Webster's poem 'A Castaway' in my second chapter, for instance, shows that later poets also created speakers that view themselves from the outside, and have to some extent internalised the idea of women as objects. Eulalie, the speaker in 'A Castaway', delivers the following observations when looking at her own reflection in the mirror:

Aye let me feed upon my beauty thus
be glad in it like painters when they see
at last the face they dreamed but could not find
look from their canvass on them, triumph in it
the dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all, (34-38)

The difference between Hemans and Webster's speakers, however, is that the dramatic monologue, with its ways of revealing and exposing, demonstrates how the speakers are subjected to structural forces beyond themselves, and more importantly, how they are shown as defiant towards these structures. In 'Arabella Stuart', however, they have become so

internalised that there seems to be no voice challenging Arabella's sentimentality. Her all-encompassing concerns – love and family – leave no place for psychological explorations or social criticism (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 47). Arabella's status as a potential heir to the throne keeps her from the domestic life she yearns for:

Oh Love and Freedom! ye are lovely things!
With you the peasant on the hills may dwell,
And by the streams; but I – the blood of kings,
A proud, unmingling river thro' my veins
Flows in lone brightness, – and its gifts are chains! (150-154)

Arabella has no visions of power, what she craves is domestic happiness with her beloved Seymour. By completely focusing on Seymour, Arabella ends up obliterating herself (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 48). While she might be the subject in her own narrative, she still defines herself solely by her relationship to a man (47). It is true that by writing a monologue spoken from the perspective of an enigmatic historical woman, Hemans bestows the imprisoned Arabella with her own voice. It nevertheless remains unclear what, if anything, Arabella's words are meant to challenge. In some sense this proves the claim that dramatic monologues cannot simply be defined on the basis of formalistic features, it needs to be understood as something more. As Robert Langbaum puts it: 'It is when we look inside the dramatic monologue, when we consider its effect, its *way* of meaning, that we see its connection with the poetry that precedes and follows Browning' (77). While Hemans, by taking on the voice of another woman, is able to explore the notion of woman as subject, 'Arabella Stuart' is a poem that nevertheless cements, rather than challenges, traditional ideas of femininity and womanhood. To understand what these ideas entailed, one might look back to women writing poetry in the eighteenth century.

In *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry*, Paula R. Backscheider shows how the poetry of early women writers was continually trivialised, on the grounds of being sentimental, and often labelled as 'poetesses' (xiv-xv). Backscheider further argues that modern criticism, who often seek to rebuild the reputation of these writers, has become increasingly occupied with how these eighteenth-century women poets wrote poetry that criticises patriarchal oppression. However, Backscheider argues that this focus on oppression in the poetry of early women writers has in many ways done these writers a great disservice, as the criticism of oppression is not necessarily the main focus of their poetry:

To seek and privilege anti-patriarchal themes falsifies women's – and human – literary history, and while I give the theme of defiance its due, I believe that emphasis on it has been almost as much a detriment to assessment as trivialization. [...] defiance and resistance to patriarchy are not primary motivations for many of these women. (xvi)

This is an important argument also when it comes to understanding the origins of the dramatic monologue. Critics often find it difficult to place Hemans' poetry, because it seems to belong somewhere between the Romantic and Victorian period. In this sense, it is perhaps no wonder that her poetry has started to gain interest for the ways in which it adopted recurring tendencies. Several critics agree with Luu when it comes to the fact that much of the work by eighteenth and nineteenth-century women writers have been largely ignored on the basis of it being sentimental and subjective. However, I think that Armstrong and Luu fall into exactly the kind of critical trap that Backscheider warns us against. It is true that Hemans' poetry was trivialised and neglected for a long time, but to claim that the qualities in Hemans' early monologues lie in their ability to criticise oppression is to place Hemans' poetry within a tradition where it does not necessarily belong.

One of the most problematic parts of the 'women's tradition', and this has already been pointed out by Glennis Byron, the fact that it excludes women writers from the greater literary contexts of the nineteenth century, and consequently overlooks the role these writers might have played in these developments. If one considers Armstrong's *Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, for instance, Armstrong devotes entire chapters to writers such as Browning, Tennyson, Arnold and Swinburne, while such diverse writers as Augusta Webster, Amy Levy, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti are all discussed in a single chapter of her book. Armstrong suggests a diachronic reading of the development of the dramatic monologue, by grouping the texts she studies into three main periods. First, she starts with what she calls the 'experiments of the 1830s' where she deals with the early efforts of Browning and Tennyson. Then she goes on to discuss the poetry of the mid-nineteenth-century, by looking at how it is characterised by a new focus on the individual as well as social and cultural critique. Finally, she discusses some of the tendencies towards the end of the Victorian period, with an interest in language, aesthetics and ideological conflict.

This is an elegant reading, especially because it shows how writers adapted the dramatic monologue to deal with a wide range of topics and issues. Yet the problem with Armstrong's reading is that the women poets she discusses seems to be left out of these main developments. They are grouped together in the middle of the book, as mid-century poets,

and seem to exist separated from the concurrent tendencies that surround them. Amy Levy, for instance, who published primarily in the 1880s, can hardly be described as a mid-century poet in my opinion. Yet, by placing her in this chapter, that is exactly what she becomes. Armstrong recognises that it is not possible to construct a history of women's dramatic monologue's simply as a poetry that attacks oppression, but at the same time she feels that this element is so important in dramatic monologues written by women that she justifies labelling it as 'a "music" of their own' (323). Consequently, she overlooks a number of other ways in which women poets engaged with the poetic conversations happening around them.

The aim of this chapter has not necessarily been to determine who 'invented' the dramatic monologue, but rather to show how the conversations on the dramatic monologue's history and origins matter to how women writers can be understood as dramatic poets. While revisionist histories of the genre's origins can be useful in many respects, especially when it comes to reconsidering and challenging the exclusion of both talented and influential writers from the literary canon, it is also important that the new inclusions provide an insight into the uniqueness of the genre. Felicia Hemans was a popular poet in her own time, and 'Arabella Stuart' is part of the poetic experiments with dramatic form originating in the early nineteenth century. However, it is also a poem that has an unclear relationship to some of the features we have come to associate with the dramatic monologue. Concepts such as revelation of character, sympathy and judgement, and irony are all certainly important to how critics historically have understood the dramatic monologue. However, as new waves of literary criticism has shown, these concepts are in no ways fixed or absolute. While concepts such as irony and sympathy might not be as important to the study of dramatic monologues as they once were, one term has increasingly come to be associated with the dramatic monologue, namely social criticism.

3 Social Criticism

One of the key writers of dramatic monologues is Augusta Webster. Until critics such as Although Webster was widely read in her own time, her poetry was left out of critical discussions on the dramatic monologue until critics such as Mermin and Armstrong recovered her as an important poet in the 1980s and 1990s. Even though her contemporaries labelled her the ‘first living English poetess’ (*The Examiner* ‘Portraits’ 324), Robert Langbaum makes no mention of Webster in *The Poetry of Experience*. Langbaum’s exclusion of women writers, one might argue, still affects the way we think about and define dramatic monologues today. Whenever Webster is mentioned in criticism that predates the 1980s, it is usually as a side-note. Vita Sackville-West, who makes an early mention of Webster in 1924, dismisses Webster’s achievements as a dramatic poet rather abruptly by claiming that Webster most likely saw her own monologues as ‘vehicles for expressing her sociological opinions rather than as poetry’ (qtd. in Sutphin ‘Introduction’ 124). Even in cases when poets created speakers that were widely different from themselves, separated by for instance history, gender or social background, women writers of dramatic monologues have not been able to escape the idea that they simply wrote feminist pamphlets in verse.

The idea that women’s monologues are often a kind of polemic in disguise has been persistent throughout the twentieth century, and although new perspectives have modified it to some extent, the idea still prevails. Some might argue that all poetry reflects ideological or political ideas in one way or another. Yet, the problem with focusing too much on social criticism in women’ is that it might lead to the failure of seeing women’s dramatic monologues as art in the same ways as their male counterparts. This is not to say that social criticism is not an element in Victorian dramatic monologues. In fact, as Glennis Byron has so persuasively argued, the dramatic monologue as social critique has become one of the most long-lasting legacies of the genre (‘Rethinking’ 84). The fairly recent recovery of more ‘minor poets’ in comparison to Browning and Tennyson has even indicated that social criticism was probably far more important to the development of the dramatic monologue than previously believed (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 100-101). In this sense, the ways in which the dramatic form allowed poets to express social criticism was probably as influential to the reasons why poets chose to write dramatic monologues, especially in the second half of the century, as the ‘reaction against the romantic I’ so often attributed to the earliest monologues by Browning and Tennyson.

However, there are reasons to doubt whether the prevalence of social criticism in the monologues of women writers should necessarily lead to the conclusion that women poets developed their own separate tradition of dramatic monologues. As Christine Sutphin points out, there is no reason to think that Webster saw herself as part of a separate women's tradition, or considered her poetry as different to that of her male counterparts ('Introduction' 35). Indeed, there is evidence that speaks against it. Webster herself writes, in her essay entitled *Poets and Personal Pronouns*, that when it comes to her poetry 'as a rule, I does not mean I' (370). Like Browning, who insisted on the separation between his own person and his speakers, Webster too insisted that her poems were more than simply a reflection on her own feelings. There is no lack of diversity amongst Webster's speakers. Whether it be the female demigod in 'Circe', an unsuccessful male artist in 'A Painter' or a desolate prostitute in 'A Castaway', her monologues all offer a wide range of speaker's and subjects, and also seem to convey a great variety of ideas.

However, there is no denying that Webster's poetry deviates noticeably from by Browning and Tennyson's early monologues. Webster's monologues are different, for instance in the way that they almost exclusively omit the presence of an auditor, as well as for her development of what many feel are more sympathy-evoking (some might even say one-dimensional) speakers. Therefore it should perhaps come as no surprise that a fair amount of critics are reluctant to label Webster's poems as dramatic monologues, at least in the same tradition as Browning and Tennyson. Randa Abou-Bakr argues that Browning defined whether a poem was dramatic or lyric on how far removed the speaker is from the poet (116). If we return to Browning's essay on Shelley, Browning argues that the biographies of so-called 'objective' poets are of little interest, since the 'work speaks for itself' and that the writer's biography is no more necessary than 'a geologist's map and stratification, to the prompt recognition of the hill-top, our landmark of every day' ('Essay on Shelley' 1001). When it comes to understanding the poetry of 'subjective' poets on the other hand, Browning argues that biography is the key to unlocking the true greatness of these poets. He claims that 'in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him' (1001). While few, if anyone, would argue that Browning's speakers in for instance 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess' are an expression of the poet's own murderous mind, critics have gone far to suggest that the dramatic 'I' in Webster's poetry is actually a mask for the poet's own views.

The issue, then, becomes how to place Webster within the dramatic monologue tradition. One can surely read Webster's poems as a powerful attack on gender ideology, and themes such as fallenness, the education of women and the excessive focus society places on women's physical appearance all feature prominently in her poetry. This has led critics, most notably Patricia Rigg, to claim that Webster ends up somewhere in-between subjective lyric poetry and the objective dramatic poetry of which Browning sees himself as a representative. 'Monodrama' is according to Rigg a more suitable definition for Webster's poetry. Monodrama, she argues, is centred on female experience, and is a genre that developed fairly independently from the dramatic monologues of for instance Browning (77). Recalling the views of early twentieth century criticism, which focus almost exclusively on Webster's poetry as social criticism, Rigg claims that 'Webster's social activism suggests that her poetry is in essence an extension of her general feminism' (Rigg 78). Even though Rigg's concern with reading Webster and other women poets on their own terms should be commended, her insistence on creating a rather arbitrary 'women's tradition' should perhaps not. While Webster's monologues are certainly original in many ways it is also important to note that her experiments with genre are also present in many of the dramatic monologues written by men. It might therefore be rewarding to look at how Webster was read in the context of Victorian literary criticism, and compare her to one of her male contemporaries, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

By looking at two poems that easily lend themselves to comparison, Rossetti's 'Jenny' and Webster's 'A Castaway', this chapter considers the ways in which these two poems contributed to the debate on the very pressing social issue of prostitution. Both poems include elements of social criticism, and are therefore applicable to the study of how the dramatic monologue became a poetic genre suited for criticising the ruling social structures. Moreover, the chapter also focuses on how Webster and Rossetti were both part of a development that was perceived, especially by their contemporaries, as a movement that advanced the dramatic monologue into an increasingly self-reflective genre of poetry. This 'new dramatic monologue' further dealt with the recurring themes of subjectivity and agency that are central in many of Browning and Tennyson's poems. Recent scholarship has focused on how one can read the two poems as an ongoing conversation, where Webster's speaker Eulalie offers a voice to the disenfranchised Jenny. Both poems are highly original, specifically for the way they play with the conventions of dramatic monologue as a literary form. By focusing on both the aesthetics as well as the politics of these two instances of dramatic poetry one might gain a greater insight into how poets made use of Browning's legacy in new ways.

3.1 Negation of Monologue: D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny'

Rossetti's monologue 'Jenny' is a poem concerned with subjectivity and self-creation. Unlike many other dramatic monologues, it is not situated in some distant past, nor does it have a speaker based on a historical or mythological character. It is a poem placed firmly in contemporary Victorian society, and much insight has been offered on how the poem discusses social issues such as commodification culture and prostitution. A young scholar on a nightly visit to a prostitute named Jenny is at the centre of the poem, but unlike what one might expect from this kind of scene, the prostitute falls asleep, leaving her customer to ponder some highly existential questions. While some critics choose to focus on the poem as more of an interior monologue that points towards later Modernist developments (Harris 197), others, such as Amanda Anderson, reads the poem as a 'negation of dramatic monologue' (142). By showing a speaker that is in a constant process of deciding whether to speak to Jenny, and thus engage her in dialogue, or to remain silent, and as a result deny Jenny her own voice, Rossetti avoids the complete solipsism of 'Porphyria's Lover'. At the same time, he also shows how the speaker creates Jenny through language. By playing with the conventions of the genre established by writers such as Browning, especially the idea of the dramatic monologue as speech, 'Jenny' is a poem that, perhaps more than any other, demonstrates the duality inherent in the form. It expands upon the ideas of the struggle between the internal, subjective voice that seeks to understand its surroundings and work its will upon them, and the external, social and historical factors that are revealed to contribute to shaping such a mind.

3.2 Monologues In Dialogue: Webster's 'A Castaway'

'A Castaway' has in recent years become Augusta Webster's most widely studied dramatic monologue. The speaker in the poem is a woman named Eulalie, who recalls how a series of betrayals by her brother and by her lover left her with no other alternative than to become a prostitute. She reflects on her own life, the death of her infant child, her feelings towards men, God and society as a whole. Webster published the poem only a few months after 'Jenny', in a collection of primarily dramatic poetry called *Portraits* (1870). Webster had at this point already established herself as someone who could use the dramatic monologue to great effect, after the publication of *Dramatic Studies* four years earlier (Sutphin

‘Introduction’ 11). Studies of the poem often focus on how it relates to wider Victorian discourses on fallenness, gender and agency, as well as how it compares to other texts with similar topics, especially Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’. Some have even gone as far as to suggest that Webster’s poem directly engages with Rossetti, putting the ‘monologues in dialogue’ and that ‘In many ways, Eulalie speaks with a voice we might expect from Jenny’ (Baker 131). While some might contend the idea that ‘A Castaway’ should be read as a direct response to ‘Jenny’, the two texts still form an interesting pair to discuss two of the main issues within critical debates on dramatic monologues – dramatic monologue as social criticism and the formal features of dramatic poetry.

3.3 Confronting the Fallen

Both ‘Jenny’ and ‘A Castaway’ are poems that show a deep social and cultural awareness, and engage with debates that featured prominently in art as well as in other parts of society around the time when the poems were written. Angela Leighton and Susan Brown read the poems in light of the Contagious Diseases Acts, laws that were passed in 1864, 1866 and 1869 and allowed police officers to arrest women suspected of prostitution and check them for venereal diseases (Brown 78-79). While Rossetti’s poem does not have the confronting tone of ‘A Castaway’, one should note, as does Susan Brown, that Rossetti’s poem was also understood as a comment on Victorian debates on prostitution (81). She argues that while the intimate scene depicted in ‘Jenny’ might at first seem far removed from the political turmoil of the outside world, many of those who first read ‘Jenny’ upon publication saw it as a highly political poem. A contemporary critic of Rossetti, H. Buxton Forman, reads ‘Jenny’ as a poem that analyses the role of prostitution in society:

not from the distant stand-point of a parliamentary or scientific debate – not from the half-instructed vantage-grounds of a woman’s rights’ council – but from the near position which only one who has seen the inside of Jenny’s room could assume. (qtd. in Brown 81).

It follows, then, that his contemporaries understood Rossetti as a writer with a keen awareness of social issues. By bringing the speaker into the prostitute’s room, ‘Jenny’ directly confronts the poem’s readers with their own preconceived notions. Combining the image of the ‘public woman’ within the ‘private sphere’, Rossetti created a poem that felt deeply personal and subjective, but at the same time also decidedly political.

Whereas the ‘cold and greedy violence’ displayed by the speaker in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ helps to create a ‘privacy in which the external world disappears’ (Armstrong 138), the external world intrudes with great force upon the speakers in Rossetti and Webster’s monologues. ‘A Castaway’ and ‘Jenny’ are also studies of individual minds, but the speakers’ words seem to project social issues in a way that Browning’s ‘Porphyria’ never does. Browning published his two first monologues, ‘Johannes Agricola’ and ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, under the joint heading ‘Madhouse Cells’ (Pearsall ‘The dramatic monologue’ 73). Browning, by labelling his speakers as lunatics, simultaneously dismisses social or cultural explanations for his speaker’s actions. ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ becomes an individual case study of madness, rather than a critique of for instance social gender constructions. This does of course not mean that no one has attempted to read Browning’s dramatic monologues into a social context, whether it be of sexual violence within the domestic sphere (Gregory 492) or social class (Eggenschwiler 42). However, all these readings still primarily focus on the psychological elements within Browning’s monologues, in other words how the speakers shape their surroundings and not so much on how these speakers have fallen victim to society’s institutions. Browning’s monologues do seem to reflect conflicting ideas, but they seem to do so through the speakers’ unintended revelation of character, such as acts of speech and action. The result is the type of monomaniacal speaker readers are faced with in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, characters that seem completely incapable of reflecting on their own situation.

According to Glennis Byron, women poets did for the most part write dramatic speakers that speak within the bounds of contemporary Victorian society (*Dramatic Monologue* 58). While Webster created several contemporary speakers, as is the case with ‘A Castaway’, some of her best known monologues, such as ‘Circe’ and ‘Medea in Athens’ do not adhere to this claim. Despite this, Byron argues that even in cases where women poets such as Webster did write fictionalised or mythological speakers they still seem to criticise elements in contemporary society (*Dramatic Monologue* 58). In this sense she aligns herself with Isobel Armstrong and Dorothy Mermin, who both see Webster’s monologues as situated firmly within Victorian context, even when they depict historical or mythological characters.

Both ‘A Castaway’ and ‘Jenny’ are poems that, like Browning’s ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, have speaker that define themselves against an other. In Rossetti’s case, this other is the prostitute Jenny, who functions as a catalyst for the musings of the male speaker in the poem. The speaker understands himself through what he is not, and what he is not is the ‘Lazy’, ‘laughing’ and ‘languid’ (1) Jenny. As a scholar, he sees himself as a thinker, who dances

with his 'eyes' and 'brain' (31). Jenny, on the other hand, is linked solely to her physicality and her body; she is a 'Poor beauty, so well worth a kiss' (55). As a fallen woman, the speaker at first views Jenny as his complete opposite. Jenny's empty room stands in contrast to the speaker's own room 'so full of books' (23). The speaker links the emptiness of Jenny's room to her mental capacities and perceived inferiority. Jenny is in other words an empty shell, a 'thoughtless queen' (7), in which the speaker is free to insert any meaning that he chooses. The contrast between 'this room of **yours**'(22) directly followed by '**my** Jenny'[my emphasis], shows the Jenny might be in her own room, her private sphere, but also that she is still in the possession of the speaker for the time he has paid for her. It underlines Jenny's status as commodity, and as public property. Amanda Anderson argues that 'fallenness should be understood principally in relation to a normative masculine identity seen to possess the capacity for autonomous action, enlightened rationality, and self-control' (13). All these points seem to fit well with the speaker's understanding of himself. At first, Jenny seems more like 'a book, a statistic, an academic problem' (Spector 436) than an actual human being. The speaker, on the other hand, is the autonomous man of the world that prides himself in his own ability to resist making any sexual advances towards the dozing Jenny. He is the epitome of the enlightened and rational character that Anderson sees as the antithesis of the fallen woman. He is not like the other 'drunk and ruffianly' (65) men, who abuse Jenny, instead he sees himself as a saviour who protects the tired Jenny and lets her 'rest upon [his] knee' (66).

Unlike the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover', the scholar in 'Jenny' recognises the subjectivity of the young woman sleeping in his lap, and he wonders what she might be thinking of. At the same time one should note that while the speaker recognises Jenny's own subjectivity, he imagines that she is probably dreaming of *him*: 'If of myself you think at all / What is the thought – conjectural' (59-60). Then he goes on to envision an elaborate life-story for Jenny, starting with her youth, when she would lie in fields and dream of the city. He also describes Jenny's current lifestyle, living like an outcast. She is subjected to the will of men 'Whose acts are ill' (85), and who 'Thrusts [her] aside' (87) when they are finished with her. Perhaps most notably, the speaker also imagines Jenny's future:

When wealth and health slipped you past, you stare
Along the streets alone, and there
Round the long park, across the bridge,
The cold lamps at the pavement's edge
Wind on together and apart,
A fiery serpent for your heart (149-154).

In this scenario, he alludes to the possibility of Jenny committing suicide in a not so distant future. This fate is according to the speaker virtually inevitable, as it is a story 'Much older than any history / That is written in any book;' (127-128). Lynn Nead shows that the future the speaker imagines for 'Jenny' is in no way original; in fact it was the norm for how Victorian artists imagined the life of a prostitute, both in painting and in literature:

the mythology of the life and death of the prostitute – the steady downward progress, the guilt and desperation, poverty and homelessness, and the inevitable final scene – the suicide itself – as she throws herself from a bridge into the water of the Thames.
(32)

Consequently, the poem demonstrates how the speaker has internalised stereotypical ideas of prostitutes, and how he applies them to the sleeping Jenny. The tragic tale of Jenny seeing no other possibility than to end her own life shows the speaker reflecting the Victorian attitudes towards prostitution. Jenny's fate is predetermined, and since the speaker sees her as a book, he is also free to 'read' her whatever way he chooses.

Autonomy and oppression also becomes a central issue in 'A Castaway' when Eulalie confronts herself and her imagined audience by asking '[...] Choice! what choice? / Of living well or ill? could I have that? / And who would give it me?' (255-257). Like Jenny, who the speaker imagines as completely subjected to forces outside of herself, Eulalie does not see herself as someone who has a choice. Notably, she argues that she needs someone to give her the right to choose. Death, as a solution or an inevitable end, presents itself to Eulalie in the same way as it does to the speaker imagining Jenny's life, when she in a moment of despair tells herself that '[...] death itself / shews kinder promise...' (183-184). However, Eulalie dismisses the possibility rather quickly by asserting that 'Death: I'll not think of it' (187). While Eulalie sees herself as a victim, she does not see herself as some 'fractious angel misconceived' (78), and the choice to continue living is at least her own. In other words, she rejects the imagined life trajectory of the prostitute presented by Rossetti. She might be a victim, but she is also an individual, 'a woman sure / No fiend no slimy thing out of the

pools' (28-29). One might therefore argue that Webster's speaker is neither fallen angel nor a 'slimy thing', but a fully rounded character.

The speaker in 'Jenny' wonders if he has played any part in Jenny's misfortune. At first it seems as though the speaker blames God for Jenny's situation, when he asks himself if Jenny has been predestined for her fate: 'Or think this awful secret sway, / The potter's power over the clay' (181-182). The role of a creator, who has singled out Jenny and moulded her into the woman who now appears him, creates a distance between Jenny and the speaker (Cohen 6). This also removes any responsibility the speaker might have in the situation. However, only a few lines later the speaker recognises the role that society, and indeed he himself, has played in victimising Jenny: 'What has man done here? How atone, / Great God for this which man has done' (241-242). One should, however, keep in mind that the speaker in 'Jenny' speaks for the sleeping Jenny in the same way as for instance the speaker 'Porphyria's Lover' speaks for the dead Porphyria. Whereas the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' takes control over the narrative of Porphyria's life by killing her, the speaker in 'Jenny' does so through language. Although the speaker is not directly responsible for Jenny's death in his story, he nevertheless recognises that he plays some part in it, through his own role in the objectification and exploitation of women. Jenny functions as a catalyst who allows him to reflect upon his own past:

It was a careless life I led
When rooms like this were scarce so strange
Not long ago. What breeds the change, –
The many aims or the few years?
Because to-night it all appears
Something I do not know again. (37-42)

This ability to reflect over the moral validity of his own actions challenges Langbaum's assertion that 'it is just in the matter of moral judgement that the speaker of the dramatic monologue is oblivious and committed to his own strategy' (204). After all, Rossetti's speaker seems capable of at least some introspection. However, the ending of the poem suggests otherwise. The speaker concludes with feeling 'Ashamed of [his] own shame' (384), and expressing some hope that he might sometime in the future escape these feelings by comparing himself to Jenny:

In my life, as in hers, they show,
By a far gleam which I may near
A dark path I can strive to clear. (388-390)

These lines suggest an aspiration to a future understanding of Jenny, but also a recognition of his own failure to do so in his current state. The speaker ends up leaving the sleeping Jenny before she wakes up, and thus rejects the possibility of engaging in any dialogue with her. And thus Jenny remains the 'cipher' (278) and the 'riddle' (280) the speaker sees her as, an image and a symbol rather than a human being, consistent with Daniel A. Harris' assertion that 'the whore, having no valid social existence, need not be represented poetically save as a figure (trope, icon) in the man's imagination' (200). While the speaker takes steps towards mutual recognition, he nevertheless ultimately ends up rejecting it.

Eulalie and the scholar in 'Jenny' are both on different sides of the fallen/unfallen spectrum. They do however seem to inhabit both sides within their speeches. Where Rossetti's speaker reflects society's view of prostitution when he is talking to the sleeping Jenny, Eulalie does also reflect these ideas when talking of herself. Her body is her 'all' (38), even though it is just a '[...] tool / To snare men's souls' (40-41). In other words, the separation of the body and spirit we see in 'Jenny', which is part of the reason why the speaker is able to justify his own encounter with a prostitute and denounce his own responsibility, is present even without another through which Eulalie can compare herself. Even without the presence of a male gaze, Eulalie's speech still self-objectifies her own image:

Aye, let me feed upon my beauty thus,
Be glad in it like painters when they see
At last the face they dreamed but could not find
Look from their canvas on them, triumph in it
The dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all, (34-38)

This aligns the poem with Browning's and Rossetti's poems, because even in the privacy of her own room she is still othered and seen as an object. Her body is public property, just like Jenny's body. 'A Castaway', then, like so many other dramatic monologue, inhabits the duality of the genre, where the speaking subject is also made an object for scrutiny.

One of the reasons why 'A Castaway' has been read as poem that mainly concerns itself with social criticism is due to the poem's 'pamphleteering quality' and its 'accessible language' (Demoor 135). By making the language as accessible as possible, Webster would

be sure to get her feminist message across (135). What many seem to overlook is how this quality brings 'A Castaway' closer to actual speech than any of the dramatic monologues previously discussed. Webster's use of blank verse and enjambments, as well as interjections such as 'Pshaw!' (132), contrasts greatly to Rossetti's almost nursery rhyme-like and slightly infantilising language when describing Jenny. Eulalie's speech shows none of the metaphorical and romanticising descriptions of prostitution. Eulalie's world is a world without the 'myth and magic' (Leighton 'Because Men' 121) that often surround the speakers in dramatic monologues, including Rossetti's 'Jenny' and Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover'. There are no fairy tale moments, comparable to the point at which Browning's speaker wraps Porphyria's yellow hair 'Three little times around' (39-40) around her neck, nor is there any 'wise unchildish elf' (Rossetti 77) imagined in the scene. Eulalie's story is tragic, but at the same time it is also remarkably sober.

Even more unusual is the fact that parts of the poem almost border on dialogue. After having spoken for some time, Eulalie picks up a religious pamphlet criticising prostitution and starts reading it aloud. By reading the text aloud, Eulalie is able to directly respond to her critics:

Of insults Biblical? *'I prey on souls'* –
 Only my men have oftenest none I think:
'I snare the simple ones' – but in these days
 There seem to be none simple and none snared
 And most men have their favourite sinnings planned
 To do them civilly and sensibly:
'I braid my hair' – But braids are out of date
'I paint my cheeks' – I always wear them pale:
'I' – (154-162)

Contrasting her 'public I', in other words the public's idea of the fallen woman, with her 'private I', the person she really is, Eulalie is able to claim an identity for herself. As a result, she becomes more than a stereotypical character. By confronting clichés such as the prostitute as a femme fatale in heavy makeup who lures innocent men, Eulalie demands to be understood on her own terms. Instead of accepting society's vilification, she turns society's eyes back on itself and on the patrons of women like herself. It is important to note that Eulalie sees herself as more privileged than other prostitutes; she is not a 'skeleton in rags' (72) who wanders 'drunk in the streets' (49). Instead, she lives in a beautiful home full of 'velvet and marqueterie and pastilles' (71). Despite this fact, she rejects the possibility of distancing herself from her fellow fallen women. Instead she identifies with the less

fortunate, and insists that 'Our traffic's one: I own it' (79). In this sense, her words come to represent all women who for some reason have been ostracised from society, while they at the same time are spoken in a personal voice.

Patricia Rigg has argued that 'the tension in [Webster's] poetry is not the tension produced by the lack of self-knowledge typical of the speaker in the dramatic monologue' (76). Webster's speakers, such as Eulalie in the poem 'A Castaway,' do not find themselves in their current situation because they lack some sort of insight, but because they are subjected to forces outside of themselves. Rigg further argues that Webster's monologues 'blur the lines between personality and context, thereby managing to shift reader interest from the individual within a social context to the society that makes up that context' (79).

While I agree with Rigg, I disagree with the notion that Webster necessarily removes her away from the individual. As demonstrated by the first chapter, Cornelia Pearsall challenges the hegemony of insight and self-revelation by claiming that speakers are in fact extremely self-aware and always working towards a goal. 'A Castaways' effectiveness lies in my opinion in its combination of the deeply personal, almost confessional and the social and cultural background. Webster's poem is deeply engaged with the individual, evident in the fact that the speaker is *not* the typical prostitute depicted in Victorian culture. Unlike Jenny for instance, Eulalie is not imagined as poor or simple minded, and she rejects the possibility of suicide. Eulalie is surrounded by a myriad of past and future selves, identities she can choose to either accept as parts of herself, or By claiming agency for herself Eulalie becomes not just a social outcast, but also someone who 'can cast away and yet rescue an identity straining against itself' ('The dramatic monologue' 77). It might therefore not be correct to say that 'A Castaway' is a poem that draws its focus away from individual experience. What the poem draws attention to, however, is how the individual cannot function in solitude.

Similar to 'A Castaway' 'Jenny' is also concerned with the limits of individual experience, and especially the limits of language. Unlike Porphyria in Browning's poem, Jenny is not dead. Rather, she is half-asleep, drifting in and out of consciousness. This is important because since Jenny is alive, the possibility of her engaging with the speaker and consequently becoming a part of the poem's discourse is always present. However, as the poem progresses it becomes clear that the speaker has very ambivalent feelings about engaging Jenny in this manner. The liminal nature of sleep means that Jenny is both a conscious subject and an inanimate object. This ambivalence and conflict between engaging Jenny and rejecting to do so is inherent in the very nature of Rossetti's use of the dramatic monologue. Through the use of direct address, a common device in the genre, the poem gives

the impression that the speaker is talking directly to Jenny. It is however revealed in line 156 of the poem that what at first seems like the speaker engaging Jenny in conversation is mostly an interior conversation in the speaker's mind. This is exposed when he suddenly exclaims 'Suppose I were to think aloud, - / What if to her all this were said?' (156-157). This moment becomes a moment of revelation in the poem. It makes us question not only what would happen if the speaker chose to speak aloud, but also why he chooses not to do so. Some might argue that while it is true that the male speaker is the one who speaks, Jenny's silence and unwillingness to engage with him also becomes a way for the voiceless prostitute to assert herself. By falling asleep, she at the same time refuses to take part in the economical transaction of her own body and that sense rejects her status as an object. Unlike Porphyria, Jenny's silence is not enforced – it is an act of her own free will. Similarly, the speaker's apparent wish to engage Jenny in conversation, such as when he tells her to 'sit up' (89) and 'do not sleep' (93), seems to show a willingness to talk to her. Amanda Anderson does however remind us that

On one level, it is true, the "directness" of repeated address seems to act as a form of recognition. But [...] to use it solipsistically in the very presence of the subject it "invokes", eerily implies that this subject exists only by virtue of being addressed by the speaker, who is thereby endowed with the power to animate (Anderson 145).

The scholar might direct his speech at Jenny, but only because he is certain that she cannot hear him and that she will not reply. As Daniel A. Harris puts it, by 'having the protagonist worry about speaking "aloud", Rossetti accentuates his struggle to wrest free from a powerful public censorship so internalized that that he cannot readily discover his own attitudes' (201). What the speaker seems to fear most is rejection, and he seems to believe that Jenny is too far removed from him both socially, economically and culturally, for there to be any meaningful exchange between them:

Why as a volume seldom read
Being opened halfway shuts again,
So might the pages of her brain
Be parted at such words, and thence
Close back upon the dusty sense. (158-162)

The speaker wants to know Jenny's thoughts, but he simultaneously fears that by attempting to understand her she will only become more incomprehensible to him. The ambivalent feelings the speaker feels towards Jenny are not only reflected in his words, but also in his

actions. While Jenny is sleeping, the speaker places gold coins in her hair, suggesting that they might be the 'subject of [her] dreams' (342). Placing gold coins in the sleeping woman's hair seems like a peculiar thing to do. As Elisabeth Gitter points out, it is never clear why the speaker actually does it: 'Does he put the gold in her hair out of tenderness or contempt? Is she receiving a gift or being soiled and degraded?' (Gitter 947). The speaker constantly moves from sympathising with Jenny since she is subjected to the 'hatefulness of man' (83), to mocking her: 'poor shameful Jenny, full of grace' (18). The speaker seems to recognise that Jenny is a victim of her surroundings and clearly experiences some sympathy for her. At the same time, he is also in a process of distancing himself from her. Whenever he gets too involved in his own reflections he dismisses them completely as nothing but meaningless thoughts: 'Let these thoughts pass, an empty cloud!' (155). Just like Robert Langbaum places the feelings of readers of the dramatic monologue somewhere between sympathy and judgement, so Rossetti's speaker seems to be moving between these feelings himself when looking at the sleeping Jenny.

Eulalie is also caught between conflicting feelings. On the one hand, she certainly sees herself as a victim of circumstance. On the other, she also expresses feelings of deep guilt and questions her own role in her current circumstances. Contrasted with the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover', who is so caught up in his own justificatory rhetoric that he only expresses a hint of doubt through a single phrase: 'I am *quite* sure she felt no pain' (42) [my emphasis], Webster creates a speaker that seems to be completely overtaken with doubt. Eulalie comes across as strongly accusing and judging towards a society that has ostracised her. At the same time, the language she uses points to an insecurity and self-conflict. The words Eulalie chooses to describe herself, such as 'animal' (394) and 'fool' (419) implies that she has internalised some of the social prejudices towards prostitutes. Another way in which Eulalie's words express conflict, is through her incessant use of the phrase 'I think' at the end of her statements. Where Browning's speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' barely hesitates, and speaks with an absolute authority where he places himself above God, Eulalie moves between different states of conviction. Her use of the personal pronoun 'I' is both important because it, like in other dramatic monologues, focuses on the subjective nature of Eulalie's experience. However, it is also important because it highlights the fact that Eulalie is speaking in her own voice, and thus gives a voice to a character that often is rendered voiceless.

3.4 Inner Standing-points

While discourses on fallenness and the roles of marginalised characters such as prostitutes are an important part of 'Jenny' and 'A Castaway' and have duly received much critical interest, this has perhaps led to some neglect of the relationship the poems have to the dramatic monologue as a literary genre. Especially the complex relationship between speaker, auditor and reader takes on new forms in these poems. This has in turn led critics to come up with quite similar characterisations for both of the poems. 'A Castaway' has been labelled as an 'internal monologue' (Armstrong 373), while 'Jenny' has been called a precursor to the Modernist 'interior monologue' (Harris 197). The two poems engage with speakers that are for some reason locked in their own subjectivity, and how they are both attempting to break out from their isolation.

Both Webster and Rossetti were criticised by their contemporaries for the introverted nature of their poetry. While immensely popular, Rossetti's *Poems*, and especially 'Jenny', received its fair share of criticism. When replying to critics that argued that his poetry was too sensual and self-indulgent, Rossetti writes that 'the motive powers of art reverse the requirements of science, and demand first of all an inner standing-point' ('Stealthy School' 337). He then goes on to explain why he believes that 'Jenny' is a poem that requires this 'inner standing-point':

The heart of such a mystery as this must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds; and the beauty and pity, the self-questionings and all-questionings which it brings with it, can come with full force only from the mouth of one alive to its whole appeal, such as the speaker put forward in the poem, that is, - of a young and thoughtful man of the world. To such a speaker, many half-cynical revulsions of feeling and reverie, and a recurrent presence of the impressions of beauty (however artificial) which first brought him within such a circle of influence, would be inevitable features of the dramatic relation portrayed. (337-33)

Rossetti's defence presents several interesting issues. Firstly, he finds great value in showing the subjective nature of both how we understand ourselves as well as the world around us, and sees the form of the poem as essential in this endeavour. Secondly, the ways in which he naturalises the 'young and thoughtful man of the world' as the prime subject to deal with these issues further cements the dichotomy between female prostitute and male scholar that he presents in the poem. Lastly, he clearly sees his poem as dramatic in nature, since he clearly distances himself from the poem's speaker by referring to the speaker in the third person.

Like 'Jenny', 'A Castaway' also faced some controversy upon its initial publication. One contemporary critic praises Webster for her 'subjective analysis of thought and feeling' ('Contemporary Reviews' 407) but simultaneously questions whether perhaps the 'analytical process' that characterise the early dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning has been taken too far by subsequent writers (407). Noting how one of the key features of the dramatic monologue; its self-reflective nature, has become increasingly more prevalent in dramatic poetry, the reviewer claims that

the blank verse introspective idyl, if we may so name it, has come to be rather a plague. Moreover, the more our poets have looked within, the deeper they have seen, or seemed to see: so that his same idyl has, in some of their hands, become a thing of dark hints and puzzling ellipses. (407)

What the review suggests is that Webster and her contemporaries go even deeper in their psychological explorations of the speaking subject than Browning or Tennyson. This focus on the psychological elements in Webster's poetry contrasts somewhat to modern scholarship who seem to read Webster almost exclusively on basis of her social criticism. The contemporary reviewer sees the introspective nature of 'A Castaway' as one of very few flaws in Webster's poetry. Modern readers might object to the idea of introspection in poetry as a flaw. It is still worth noticing that Webster is seen as part of a tradition that moves towards an increasingly psychological and self-aware type of poetry, and that this development is understood as a break with the early dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning. The focus in this review, and indeed in many other contemporary analyses of Webster's monologues, is not on the social issues her poetry deals with. Rather it focuses on how Webster aligns herself both her contemporaries and her predecessors within the dramatic monologue tradition. Browning and Tennyson were already established as poetic geniuses when Webster published her monologues, and her contemporary readership certainly saw her as part of a wider literary tradition.

Several reviews on *Dramatic Studies* and *Portraits* remark on Webster's kinship to the 'two greats' Browning and Tennyson. In a review of *Dramatic Studies*, one critic feels that her poems 'are worthy, in point of conception, of high praise, and show a peculiar psychological insight which suggests (with little detriment to the present writer's originality) the influence of Mr. Browning' ('Contemporary Reviews' 405). While much of Webster's poetry has been recovered by those working within the field of feminist literary studies and neglected women writers, it is still important to remember, as Robert D. Hume argues, that

‘we can and should attempt to read with an awareness of the perspective of the original audience’ (7). Considering Webster’s contemporary reception it is evident that women poets were understood as a part of, and not excluded from, the existing literary developments.

Something both ‘Jenny’ and ‘A Castaway’ have in common is that they explore what speech actually means in the context of dramatic monologues. Daniel A. Harris argues of ‘Jenny’ that even though the scholar contemplates whether or not he should engage in dialogue with the sleeping Jenny. Harris suggests that the reason why the speaker is never able to talk to Jenny is that the speaker’s ‘personal reformation is thwarted by an inveterate sexism and the protagonist’s inability to breach his interior monologue with a “true” outward language free from male prejudices’ (211-212). As a result, Harris concludes that even though the speaker’s words are representations of speech, the poem is still ‘so subjective that its language is inaudible’ (200-201). Stephen J. Spector concurs with Harris and claims that much of Rossetti’s poetry, including ‘Jenny’, deals with the problem of ‘the self locked in subjective isolation’ (437).

Similarly, Eulalie in ‘A Castaway’ is never free to *actually* speak due to her status as a castaway in society. Unlike in other dramatic monologues, no one hears or overhears her words. She starts her speech by addressing her own diary, a diary full of ‘simple thoughts’ (1-2). Even though she recognises that the words on the pages are her own, with stories of reading, singing, going to church and attending tea parties, she does not feel any connection to the person who wrote them. She has lost her enchantment with the world after having experienced betrayal and abuse, and what used to be her ‘hazed and golden dreams (22) are now reduced to a faint memory. In some ways, the lack of another person being present in the poem likens it to soliloquy, even more so than Browning and Rossetti’s poems. Nevertheless, there is more than one voice present in the poem, because even though Eulalie might not define herself against an external subject, as we see in Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’, her speech does not come across as unified. Eulalie is surrounded by her past, present and former selves, but is unable to reconcile them: ‘and now it seems a jest to talk of me /as if I could be one with her, of me / who am...me’ (24-26). Eulalie’s fragmented self is even reflected in the way she is unable to form a complete sentence. By juxtaposing her former, respectable self and her current state as a prostitute, and literally confronting herself in a mirror, one might argue that Webster is able to create an effect that is similar to the one we see in ‘Jenny’. The diary, and later the mirror, become physical manifestations of Eulalie’s torn mind. Neither the diary, which reflects the feelings of her younger self, nor the mirror, reflecting her beauty that she sells as a commodity, seem recognisable to her. Webster goes even further in creating this

separation within her speaker when Eulalie debates possible solutions to end her own misery. Again Webster brings up the recurring theme of using physical space as a metaphor for the speaker's condition. Feeling that she is unable to go back home, Eulalie tells herself that 'tis not *your* home, has no place for you, / And, if it had, you could not fit you in it' (214-215). In other words, even if her family would be willing to accept her, it would not only be too late, it would be impossible. Eulalie recalls several attempts at reconnecting to the outside world, which includes living at a refuge with other women, but all her attempts proved to be nothing but a 'sick fancy' (212). Interestingly, her reason for leaving the refuge is that it made her feel 'so much alone' (242). Again Webster emphasises the importance of social connection as a prerequisite for the individuals existence. However, as a Victorian prostitute, without any 'valid social existence'(Harris 200), Eulalie seems destined to a life in isolation.

The idea that the two monologues are inaudible might seem paradoxical, since critics one the two poems seem to agree with Byron's assertion that even assertion that even in cases when the speaker is alone the dramatic monologue can be read as speech (*Dramatic Monologue* 23). As previously argued, the presence of an auditor as a prerequisite to call a poem dramatic monologue is complicated, as many poems do not adhere to it. While a copious amount of Browning's monologues have auditors in the traditional sense, others such as 'Porphyria's Lover' do not. However, Porphyria nevertheless serves a function within the reality of the poem. She is after all the catalyst for the speaker's monologue. Similarly, the sleeping Jenny, drifting in and out of consciousness, is what sparks the scholar's thoughts. These women, as Daniel A. Harris shows in his analysis of 'Jenny', become what the speakers define themselves against, and therefore, while they do not speak, they serve an important role in constructing the poem's 'silent discourse' (198). In 'Jenny', as in 'A Castaway', the speaker speaks alone. As Albert D. Pionke notes, 'A Castaway' like most of Webster's dramatic monologues, lack the presence of another subject the speaker can define herself against (466). This leaves the speaker in what he calls a 'crippling stasis' (466). In both cases, the inability of Eulalie as well as the scholar to speak has been linked to the inability to interact with the fallen. Amanda Anderson's argument on Rossetti's Jenny also fits very well into the understanding of why Eulalie speaks alone:

because the Victorian fallen woman is seen as hopelessly subject to structural forces that do not so powerfully determine more privileged subjects, it becomes difficult for writers to imagine or dramatize scenes in which any form of dialogical reciprocity can occur between fallen and unfallen characters. (167)

This inability to imagine any dialogical reciprocity manifests itself differently in the two poems. In Rossetti's poem it scholar eventually ends up leaving Jenny before she wakes up. In 'A Castaway', it is demonstrated by the fact that Eulalie speaks secluded in her own room. Eulalie is shown as someone who deeply longs for connection. She asks herself: 'Will no one come and laugh with me?' (453) and powerfully exclaims: 'Quiet is hell, I say – as if a woman / Could bear to sit alone, quiet all day / and loathe herself and sicken on her thoughts' (236-238). In some regards, 'Jenny' and 'A Castaway' are therefore just as invested in what *cannot* be said.

Rossetti and Webster actively engages their readers in a way that seems somewhat unusual. The speaker in 'Jenny' confronts any potential judgement from his audience by inviting them into the discourse of the poem: 'Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams' (364). The 'we' implies shared responsibility, and acts according to Jerome McGann as a 'dangerous critical mirror that turns the readers' eyes back on themselves' ('Introduction' xxvii). The speaker's attempt at decoding Jenny, means that his reading of 'Jenny the woman' becomes interchangeable with the way we read 'Jenny the poem'. Jenny becomes a riddle for us to solve, and is transformed from a human being into a symbol, an object and a vehicle for desire:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
The woman almost fades from view,
A cipher of man's changeless sum
Of lust, past, present and to come,
Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
To challenge from the scornful sphinx. (276-281)

In a sense this leaves her like Porphyria, flattened into a stylised image. The poem's ending, where the speaker leaves the sleeping Jenny alone, also becomes a rejection of her. The final lines of 'A Castaway' could also be read as a way of inviting the reader into the conversation of the poem. After having almost the entire poem alone, Eulalie's speech is disrupted by an unnamed person entering the room: 'Oh, is it you? / Most welcome dear: one gets so moped alone' (629-630). However, as is the case with dramatic monologue, the poem ends before it can turn into a dialogue. Unlike 'Jenny' who ends with the speaker leaving the scene, 'A Castaway' ends on a more optimistic note, with the promise of dialogue.

Studying the dramatic monologue on the basis of gender, as Cynthia Scheinberg notes, can sometimes be helpful when it for instance comes to understanding the construction of female literary identity and revising the literary canon (175). But Scheinberg also warns

against making gender into a primary focus in the study of Victorian poetry as it is ‘an extremely problematic methodology in the case of genre theory, and particularly so in the Victorian period, where poetry was never created, published, or received in a gendered vacuum’ (175). Likewise, Amanda Anderson recognises that ‘our contemporary investments in questions of agency, subjectivity, and social transformation light up hitherto obscured aspects of the Victorian approach to fallenness (8). Like Scheinberg Anderson also warns against how these recent approaches to understanding Victorian literature often reveal a ‘failure to mediate between their own theoretical horizon and the intellectual and social horizons of Victorian discourse’ (7-8). Both ‘Jenny’ and ‘A Castaway’ were widely read upon their first publication. While Webster’s interest in social injustice and involvement in the suffragist movement are important elements in understanding her life and work, it is not the sole reason why she should be regarded as one of the important contributors to the development of the dramatic monologue during the Victorian era. Judging from her reception, Webster was seen by many of her contemporaries as part of the same literary tradition as her fellow male writers. It is worth considering, as Robert Hume does, that

changes in literature are not caused by something intrinsic in literature or genre, but rather reflect a set of complex relationships to the political, psychological, cultural, economic, and sociological factors that affect authors and readers. (112)

As we have seen, the dramatic monologue is a powerful device for social criticism because it places subjectivity within context. Thus, it allows us to observe the forces that shape individuals. However, as I have demonstrated, women’s monologues are often said to be more focused on exploring context than on psychological explorations of the individual mind. This also influences another claim for why women’s monologues should be understood as a separate tradition – that women wrote speakers that represent stereotypical characters rather than individuals.

4 Particularised Speakers

According to Patricia Rigg, women writers wrote speakers that are ‘generic and stereotypical, rather than individualised and particularised’ (79). Naming Webster’s ‘A Castaway’ and Levy’s ‘Magdalen’ as examples of poem’s where both characters and contexts are vague and ‘sketchy’ (79), Rigg argues that these poems are not dramatic monologues in the traditional sense. The reason for this is that they blur the lines between subjective lyric and objective dramatic poetry, and thus confuse the relationship between speaker and poet. However, while this is a common feature in poetry written by Victorian women poets, it is important to remember that it was in no way restricted to the writings of women. Swinburne’s contemporaries did for instance accuse him of using the dramatic monologue as a smokescreen to express his own perversities. Modern critics have also argued of Swinburne’s speakers that they are in fact ‘not developed, rounded dramatic characters at all’ (Riede 44). In this chapter, I explore the role of speakers in dramatic monologues. I argue that both Swinburne and Levy through their monologues question the ideological constructs on which society is founded, and consequently that they reveal the instabilities of our understanding of self and other and of self and context. Moreover, I also argue that in some ways Rigg’s claim that speakers in women’s monologues are generic could not be further from the truth.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, some critics argue that the dramatic monologue became a way for women poets to disguise their own social criticism. Overt social criticism does however not seem to be of primary concern in a monologue like Amy Levy’s ‘Magdalen’, where the ambiguous speaker has inspired several different interpretations. The focus on women’s speakers as vague has been harmful to the study of dramatic monologues in several ways. Both because it possibly suggests that women’s monologues are somehow flawed when compared to for instance Browning’s monologues, but also because it perpetuates the idea that women’s poetry is recognised by the subjective and confessional. Instead, one might argue that poets such as Levy and Swinburne used the ambiguity of their own speakers as a conscious strategy to further expose the instabilities of the speaking subject and to blur the lines between self and other.

While the various definitions of Victorian dramatic monologues might define the genre differently, one thing almost all of them have in common is the distinguishability between the speaker of the poem and the poet. According to E. Warwick Slinn the dramatic monologue is a ‘lyrical-dramatic-narrative hybrid’ and the defining feature of this poetry is

that it 'overtly separated speaker from poet ('Dramatic Monologue' 80). He also argues that the separation of poet and speaker became a way for poets to avoid the 'excesses of authorial self-absorption' or sometimes a way to elude 'gender constraints' (81). However, Slinn also recognises that the dramatic monologue is not a fixed genre, and that the relationship between the different elements varies between different poets and poems. This eventually leads him to ask 'Who speaks? Poet, speaker, dialect, reader? All four?' (84). Slinn makes a point when he tries to draw attention to the various ways all these elements work together in dramatic poetry from the Victorian period. Concurring with Slinn's assertions, Richard Cronin claims that 'dramatic I' in dramatic monologues functions as 'a compound rather than a simple subject' (28). As previously argued, the dramatic monologue is a genre that both allows for a subjective and objective look at the speaking subject, which in turn allows for the poet to reflect on and create an ironic distance to their speakers. In order for the poet to do so, the separation between poet and speaker is crucial. However, the manners in which these speakers express themselves are different. Browning's speakers are vividly drawn characters, whether they be jealous, narcissistic, or plagued by religious doubt. They are usually given a name or title; examples include Caliban, Johannes Agricola, and the Duke of Ferrara etc., and placed within a very specific context, such as Italy during the Renaissance ('My Last Duchess'). In addition, they are very often based on either historical characters (as is the case with Johannes Agricola), or mythological or literary characters (such as Caliban, a character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). Poems such as 'Porphyria's Lover' deviate somewhat from these traits since it is a poem where we learn very little about the speaker's background. Yet, the psychological complexity of the speaker is nevertheless central in the poem, and even with the lack of biographical detail, the speaker in the poem emerges as a fully developed character.

Nevertheless, a substantial amount of monologues, especially of the ones written in the latter half of the century, do not have such a clear distinction between poet and speaker. There are several explanations for this. One is the theory that the dramatic monologue was used as a mask to allow the poets to distance themselves from their own political opinions, as is the case with for instance much of Augusta Webster's poetry. This idea is closely linked to the previous chapter and the claim that women more often than men used the dramatic monologue for social criticism. Another reason was that poets increasingly started to experiment with form, and merged the dramatic and the lyrical in new ways, such as is the case with the poetry of Swinburne. What these poems have in common is that they vary in the degrees to which they can be said to be dramatic. Those who argue in favour of reading

women's dramatic monologues into a separate literary tradition often claim that the speakers in women's monologues are different to those written by men. Levy's speaker in her poem 'Magdalen', unnamed and alone, exists only in a 'bare blank room where is no sun' (Levy 2). Unlike other dramatic speakers clearly shown as subjected to their history and context, the Magdalen-character is in fact so vaguely drawn that she has inspired at least two very different readings. If Webster's Eulalie can be accused of being a character that is more vaguely drawn than those dramatic speakers written by her male counterparts, Levy's Magdalen complicates the matter even further by obscuring *who* is actually speaking.

Yet, women writers were by no means the only writers who explored the relationship between poet and speaker in dramatic monologues. Swinburne, in his poem 'The Leper', does almost the complete opposite of Levy. Not only does he place his speaker, a poor scribe lusting over the corpse of a dead woman, in a fictionalised medieval reality, he even claims that the story is based on actual events. Dramatic speakers based on historical characters is of course nothing new, but Swinburne's claims of historical precedents to his story are entirely false. The alleged historical source he places at the end of the poem called *Grandes Croniques de France*, written in French and dated to the year 1505, has no basis in historical fact (Harrison 71-72). By doing so, he makes the reader confront the idea of the speaker's words as 'truth' in a way his contemporaries are not able to (Harrison 73). Furthermore, Swinburne creates a character that some critics argue lacks what Robert Langbaum believed to be the essential feature of dramatic speakers, namely the ability to evoke sympathy. Ultimately, Swinburne and Levy end up confusing the relationship between speaker, poet and context within the dramatic monologue, and in the process also the fundamental ideas of what constitutes dramatic poetry.

4.1 Monologue as Transgression: Swinburne's 'The Leper'

In the dramatic monologue 'The Leper', the speaker, a 'poor scribe', tells the story of how he fell in love with a wealthy noblewoman and how he took care of her in the time before her death. Even six months after the woman's death the speaker is still unable to let go of her dead body. The influence of 'Porphyria's Lover' on the poem is evident, from the imagery of a dead woman in her lover's arms, to the allusions to necrophilia, and the evoking of God in the final line. Browning wrote on Swinburne's poetry that it combines the '*minimum* of thought and idea with the *maximum* of word and phraseology' (qtd. in *Swinburne Critical*

Heritage 115). Even though Browning seems to have held Swinburne in rather low esteem, Swinburne's development of the dramatic monologue, especially in his *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866), was undoubtedly new. He drew heavily on medieval and classical imagery, and often used historical characters such as Sappho as his speakers. Transgressing boundaries, whether it be through criminal acts, as in 'Porphyria's Lover', or sexual boundaries, such as 'A Castaway' and 'Jenny', is a recurring theme in dramatic monologues of the Victorian age. However, none can have been said to have written quite as transgressive poetry as Swinburne. 'The consciousness of limits drive Swinburne to haunt boundary lines' argues Jerome McGann ('Swinburne' 171), while Glennis Byron claims that 'Swinburne, more directly than any other poet, exploits the dramatic monologue to express all that is prohibited and attack all that is sacrosanct' (*Dramatic Monologue* 105). By placing the poem in a very specific context outside of Victorian society, and insisting on the objective nature of his monologue, Swinburne was able reflect upon and ironize contemporary Victorian society.

4.2 The Breakdown of Monologue: Levy's 'Magdalen'

Amy Levy's 'Magdalen' was published in 1884, when the Victorian dramatic monologue was nearing the end of its prime. The poem revisits the fallen woman encountered in 'A Castaway' and 'Jenny', but unlike these two poems, Levy's poem does not seem strikingly political. Magdalen is in many ways one of the most fractured speakers encountered in the dramatic monologue discussed in this thesis, and this fraction has inspired at least two very distinctive critical readings. The first, presented by critics such as Angela Leighton, reads the poem as a sad tale of a Victorian fallen woman who is waiting to die, probably of some venereal disease. The second interpretation, presented by Cynthia Scheinberg, imagines the poem as a revision of the biblical story of Mary Magdalen, where Magdalen accuses Christ of rejecting earthly love. Not only a woman, but also Jewish and possibly homosexual, Levy has captured the interest of those interested in the ways in which the dramatic monologue could be used to represent marginalised voices. However, there is also an increased critical tendency to read Levy's poetry in light of the literary developments towards the end of the Victorian era, such as *fin de siècle* and Aestheticism. Her poem also marks, one might argue, a shift towards a more narrative style of poetry, and a change of the dramatic monologue in its traditional style.

4.3 Who Speaks?

While there can be little doubt that both 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' are dramatic poems, it has been said of both Levy and Swinburne's poetry that their speakers are not dramatic in the same ways as Browning's speakers. As the previous chapter demonstrated, accusations of conflating the personal and dramatic were commonplace for writers of dramatic poetry during the Victorian era. Poets routinely had to defend their own poetry from the accusation that the dramatic I in their poetry was nothing more than a mask for their own voice. With 'Magdalen', Levy places herself within the wider tradition of dramatic monologues dealing with marginalised characters. Many have interpreted the monologue as a poem that, similarly to 'A Castaway' and 'Jenny', concerns itself with the fallen woman's place in society. Taking on the voice of a woman who has been betrayed by the man she loves, Levy explores the psyche of someone who has lost all will to continue living. Similarly, the speaker in 'The Leper', a 'poor scribe, nowise great or fair' (10), spends his life in service of others, but is given a voice and an outlet for his twisted logic in Swinburne's poem. Glennis Byron argues that writers of Victorian dramatic monologues often used the genre to 'disrupt rather than consolidate authority' and to create speakers 'who are in some way alienated from, rather than representative of, their particular societies' (*Dramatic Monologue* 100). This certainly applies to both Levy's Magdalen as well as the scribe in 'The Leper'.

According to Isobel Armstrong, Swinburne's contemporaries read him almost exclusively on the basis of moral categories, and this obscured and removed focus away from the serious issues raised by his poetry (387-388). The idea of Swinburne as an immoral poet, bent on shocking and destroying the ruling order, and especially the concept of 'Englishness', seems to be a common theme with critics who wrote on *Poems and Ballads* upon publication (Seagroatt 48). Like Webster, Swinburne was also read in connection to Browning, but where Webster was seen as drawing on Browning's genius while at the same time cultivating her own, many saw Swinburne primarily as an imitator and parodist. In one of the most hostile contemporary reviews of *Poems and Ballads*, Robert Buchanan claims that Swinburne poetry includes some 'ingenious parrotings of the way of Mr. Browning' ('Athenaeum' 33), but that his poetry is for the most part 'prurient trash' (32). Buchanan finds few redeeming qualities in Swinburne's poems, and concludes with a hope that 'perhaps it is not too late for [Swinburne] to turn back from ruin; perhaps, being young, he has ill advisers. Let him, then, seek wisdom, and cast evil advisers aside' (34). Among the most shocking subjects in *Poems and Ballads* were sex, atheism, homosexuality and necrophilia, and several of these themes feature

prominently in 'The Leper'. While Swinburne is still often read as the 'bad boy of Victorian poetry' (Saville 692), recent criticism has challenged the idea that much of Swinburne's poetry was written simply to shock. Julia F. Saville, for instance, claims that Swinburne is 'a spectacular exemplar of the mid-Victorian capacity for self-reflection and modern insights into intersecting individual, national, and international investments and responsibilities' (Saville 693). Yet, Swinburne's capacity for blending genres and resisting conventions means that even today Glennis Byron claims that it is not simply the fact that Swinburne blends the lyrical and the dramatic that still puzzles his modern readership, but the fact that Swinburne

blends [the lyrical and dramatic] in so many different ways that critics today still often express uncertainty as to whether in fact he actually did write dramatic monologues at all, and, if he did, which of the poems in *Poems and Ballads* could legitimately be placed in such a category.' (*Dramatic Monologue* 108)

Levy's contemporary critics, on the other hand, seems to have read her exclusively for the ways in which elements such as melancholia feature in her poetry, and how this linked her to other women writers writing poetry in the nineteenth century (Beckman 99). In other words, even for a woman writing at the end of the century, the figure of the sentimental poetess was difficult to escape for women writers of dramatic monologues. According to Linda Hunt Beckman, critics were unable to recognise that 'Levy's woefulness had intellectual roots', especially since 'for many reviewers and readers the female poetic tradition remained so distinct that they could not conceive of significant influence across the gender barrier' (100). Consequently, this led to a critical neglect of the ways in which Levy placed herself within the wider tradition of dramatic monologue, and especially the kinship she had with writers such as Swinburne and Browning (100).

This does not however mean that Levy was not aware of other women poets writing dramatic monologues. Beckman argues that it is unlikely that Levy would not at least have some knowledge of the poetry of Hemans, Landon and Webster, even though Levy makes little reference to these writers in her diaries or personal correspondences, and only names male poets (Shelley, Browning, Swinburne) as her favourite writers (47-48). In this way Beckman agrees with Isobel Armstrong's assertion that even when direct links between women poets writing in the nineteenth century are hard to come by, there still seems to be a shared ground among these writers (323). Critics have argued of the poetry of all these women that it was written as a reaction against oppression. However, 'Magdalen', which is

after all one of Levy's most widely studied monologues, does not necessarily seem to fit into this category. Whatever social criticism the poem might conceal seems secondary to its psychological explorations. As shown in the first chapter, early twentieth-century critics previously spoke of 'perfect' dramatic monologues, which subsequently led to sub-divisions into 'lesser' dramatic monologues. Cynthia Scheinberg persuasively argues that much recent criticism on Levy 'replicates Victorian critical practice, in which "poetesses" constituted their own critical category separate from (and rarely equal to) male writers' ('Recasting' 175). While Levy certainly shares common ground with writers such as Augusta Webster, comparing her to writers such as Swinburne might offer new perspectives on Levy as a dramatic monologist.

The speaker in 'The Leper', a poor scribe keeping watch over the corpse of a dead noblewoman, is a rather unusual choice for a dramatic speaker. Usually someone who copies and retells other's stories, Swinburne places him at the centre of his own narrative. The speaker tells the story of how he served a woman in a 'royal house' (5) for several years and how he continued to serve her even after she had contracted leprosy and the rest of society shunned her. According to the speaker, the woman's illness and death are punishments from God for her sexual transgressions, as she engaged in a sexual relationship with a knight. The poem gives several graphic depictions of the woman's affair with a knight and how she 'Felt her bright bosom, strained and bare, / Sigh under him, with short mad cries' (59-60). Her disease is understood as a punishment for her sexual transgressions, and according to society, it is God who has '[...] wrought / This curse to plague her, a curse of his' (53-54).

The speaker in 'The Leper' takes great pride in being the only one who stays by the woman's side through her illness. Like Levy's speaker, the scribe speaks in isolation, but unlike Magdalen, his isolation seems to be self-inflicted. He even seems to thrive in it. After the woman's death, the speaker is finally able to possess his beloved, and six months after her death he is still holding her corpse in his arms. Similar to the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' and to a lesser extent 'Jenny', the scribe reduces the woman to a mere object in order to possess her fully. Thomas Blackburn argues about 'Porphyria's Lover', and I would argue that this also applies to 'The Leper', that the 'logical conclusion of this desire for total possession is a species of necrophilia, intercourse of one kind or another with a human who has been reduced to a thing' (58). However, what is often the case with Swinburne's poetry, argues Isobel Armstrong, is that 'once the other has been objectified and destroyed, it becomes apparent that the identity of the agent actually depends on the victim' (411). This is also fitting when applied to 'The Leper'. The speaker's devotion to his mistress is so strong that

his own identity is inseparable from her, and he is unable to leave her side, even after her death. He has 'small care to sleep or feed' (76), and despises the fools who fail to see 'How sweeter than all sweet she is' (56).

Few would disagree with the assertion that Levy's *Magdalen* is a rather vaguely drawn character. Her words are addressed to an unnamed former lover who has abandoned her, but we never learn why. The poem's title does not explain if it is the woman's actual name or if it is a reference to her social status as a fallen woman. Even the space the speaker inhabits is just a 'bare, blank room' (2) where she sits alone waiting to die. Alongside 'Porphyria's Lover', 'Magdalen' is probably the poem that includes the fewest contextual clues to where the action takes place. Unlike 'A Castaway' which is a decidedly Victorian poem, thanks to references to the colonies, women's refuges, the Contagious Diseases Act, the possibility of working as a governess, and nineteenth-century fashion, 'Magdalen' is much harder to place within a historical context. Like in 'A Castaway', there seems to be no auditor present, the speaker sits isolated: 'Here, on my pallet-bed alone, / I keep apart from all the rest' (54-55). The lack of dramatic clues, might inspire some to read the poem as lyric, rather than dramatic monologue.

The recipient of the speaker's words is equally enigmatic, since the speaker never tells us who he is or what he did to betray her. The repeated address towards an unnamed 'you', means that the poem shares more in common with a poem like 'Jenny' where the direct address is directed towards an actual, living person, even if that person is unconscious or not present. It becomes clear that the speaker believes that the pain her lover has inflicted upon her was intentional, and that this deceit is what makes the pain so unbearable:

Not as one ignorant or blind
But seeing clearly in your mind
How this must be which now has been,
Nothing aghast at what was seen. (15-18)

Apart from this, Levy gives very little information about the speaker's lover. One possible explanation for the lover's anonymity is that he is a universal representation of all men who exploit women. As the woman becomes ostracised and gains the status as the fallen woman, the man remains anonymous and is able to continue his life in the same way. Yet, it is also possible that the nameless 'you' she confronts throughout the poem functions in the same way as the 'you' who enters into the room at the very end of 'A Castaway'. In some ways it

might way of confronting readers of the poem with their shared responsibility in the woman's exclusion from society.

Due to the ambiguous nature of the speaker in 'Magdalen', it has inspired two separate, but at the same time connected interpretations. The first, and most widely adopted, interprets the speaker as a prostitute, dying of a venereal disease. This links it closely to other texts about fallen women, such as Rossetti's 'Jenny' and Webster's 'A Castaway'. There are a few clues within the poem that points to it being situated in a contemporary Victorian reality. The speaker seems to be living in a hospital, and she is routinely visited by a doctor that tells her that she 'shall die' (65). The second stanza can be read as a reference to the speaker's loss of virginity and consequently her beginning decent towards becoming a fallen woman: 'I stretched to pluck a rose; a thorn / Struck through the flesh and made it bleed / A little drop of blood indeed!' (26-28). The poison that 'lurks within' (43) her lover's kiss is interpreted by Angela Leighton as a venereal disease (*Victorian Women Poets* 591). In this way the poem is very similar to 'The Leper' where sexual transgressions are punished with physical disease. Just like the knight in 'The Leper' who 'Stained with sharp kisses red and white' (58) the body of the noblewoman, and thus inflicted her with leprosy, Magdalen is punished for her sin with a deadly illness. While there is little overt criticism in 'Magdalen', one might read the punishment of the speaker as a depiction of society's treatment of these types of women. While the man remains anonymous and is free from any responsibility, the woman is the one perceived as a sinner. One might assume that this is also how Levy's contemporary readership would understand the poem. Yet, critics such as Angela Leighton, by calling the poem one of the 'saddest' retellings of the fallen woman myth ('Because Men' 123), and for some reason linking it to the fact that she committed suicide a few years later continues to perpetuate the tradition of the sentimental and tragic poetess-character. There are however alternative ways of understanding 'Magdalen' as a dramatic monologue.

The other main interpretation of 'Magdalen', presented by Cynthia Scheinberg, interprets the poems speaker as the biblical Mary Magdalene confronting Christ after the Resurrection for abandoning her ('Canonizing the Jew' 191). Scheinberg detects several allusions to the story of the death and resurrection of Christ in the poem, including the 'thorn' (26) and the 'stone' (52), as well as the fact that the speaker both explores and ultimately rejects religion. Scheinberg reads the poem in light of Levy's Jewish background, and sees the poem as a challenge to the Christian worldview. The interpretation, while certainly intriguing, does seem detached from the actual poem's story in some ways. The biblical references are after all rather vague. However, Scheinberg argues that readers' inability to

read the story as a revision of the story of the biblical Mary Magdalen is proof of her own thesis. The fact that readers seem to adopt a reading of the poem where the speaker adheres to the typical Victorian ‘fallen woman trope’, is not surprising, argues Scheinberg, because it ‘transforms Christian blasphemy into mere feminist outrage’ (191). ‘Magdalen’ is in Scheinberg’s view a poem that seeks to reveal the ‘instability of Christian discourse at any moment the Jew speaks from outside Christian epistemology’ (192). Contemporary Victorian readers of the poem as well as modern readers, argues Scheinberg, often seem to adopt the Christian worldview that Levy’s poem rejects. Yet again, it becomes evident how poets appropriated the double form of the dramatic monologue in yet another way – by creating a speaker that can simultaneously be read as a representation of Victorian society as well as a historical character. In this way, Levy incorporated both the historical and mythological elements found in several of the best known dramatic monologues by Tennyson and Browning, as well as the contemporary and secular tendencies found in the monologues of Rossetti and Webster.

Comparing the dramatic monologues of Swinburne, including ‘The Leper’, to the dramatic monologues of Browning, David G. Riede concludes that the ‘real objection to the erotic poems is that the speakers lack the independent vitality and humanity of Browning’s characters – they all seem to speak with one voice, and that voice seems to be Swinburne’s’ (44). Although the speaker in ‘The Leper’ exists in a reality far removed from the Victorian society in which Swinburne wrote his poem, critics still see it as reflecting contemporary Victorian issues. In this sense, Swinburne has much in common with Webster, who often used mythological characters as a way of criticising her own society.

John Maynard sees both Swinburne and Webster as writing within the same tradition, and claims that when it comes to women poets ‘Augusta Webster [...] is perhaps the closest to [Swinburne’s] libertine position, again with her celebration of the seducing woman as ‘Circe’, and her realistic, unsentimental treatment of the courtesan in ‘A Castaway’ (Maynard 559). Glennis Byron also recognises that both Webster and Swinburne wrote poetry firmly established in a contemporary reality. The main difference, she argues, is that Webster’s poetry challenges social institutions while Swinburne’s poetry is a poetry that attacks ideological constructs (especially religion) (*Dramatic Monologue* 104). She also sees Swinburne’s poetry as ‘appearing to anticipate the more modern notion that individuals are subjects because they are never outside of ideology’ (104). The speaker in ‘The Leper’, who revels in chaos and dissolving boundaries, becomes a way for Swinburne to challenge all that his society holds sacred. In a defence of *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne foregrounds this

criticism. When defending his own poetry, he adopts a strategy very similar to both Webster and Rossetti, arguing that his speakers are not a reflection of himself:

the book is dramatic, many-faced, multifarious; and no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed a the assertion of its author's personal feeling or faith. ('Swinburne defends' 49)

Perhaps borrowing from Browning's separation of subjective and objective poetry, Swinburne distances himself from the likes of Byron and Shelley. He claims that these poets were always 'speaking in their own persons, and with that sublime effect we know, openly and insultingly mocked and reviled what the English of their day held most sacred' (*As Critic* 49). Those who interpret 'The Leper' and the other transgressive poems in *Poems and Ballads* as simply a reflection of the poet's own desire to shock, overlooks one of the crucial features in Swinburne's speakers. They are not, like Browning's speakers often are, an attempt to 'generate sympathy for the individual eccentric (Riede 44), but rather to explore parts of society as a whole. This leads David G. Reid to the following conclusion on Swinburne's speakers in *Poems and Ballads*:

The speakers, then, are not developed, rounded dramatic characters at all; each is a sort of Everyman, reacting to, rather than shaping, the terms of his existence. Far from merely representing Swinburne's peculiar brand of perversity, they are *types* of nineteenth-century Western man and [...] can be used to explore not only the responses of an individual to the determining forces of his civilization but also the responses of the civilization itself to its own cultural, moral, and philosophic premises. Consequently *Poems and Ballads* is not merely an exploration of the diseased psyche of the individual – it is an exploration of the diseased psyche of Western civilization. (44)

In other words, in 'The Leper' Swinburne is able to show how the individual mind works within a historical and social context. One might say that in many ways Swinburne's dramatic poetry combines the psychological as well as contextual possibilities presented by the dramatic monologue, and in this way moves close to fusing the tradition of dramatic monologues as a genre that challenges subjectivity, and the tradition of dramatic monologues as a genre that criticises social constructs and ideologies.

4.4 Revisiting Sympathy and Judgement

Levy and Swinburne do in many ways seem like each other's complete opposites. Swinburne with his constant shifting meter and wordiness, and Levy with her repetitive language and gloomy melancholy, demonstrate how poets were able to incorporate their own poetic styles into the dramatic form. Beneath the surface, however, 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' have several things in common. Both poems have speakers that have for some reason been rejected by the person they love, which consequently leads them to isolate themselves from the outside world. 'Magdalen', like countless monologues written by women, has been discredited for the fact that its speaker is vague, one-dimensional and is unable to evoke the tension between sympathy and judgement found in for instance Browning's monologues. It has also been said of Swinburne's speakers that they too are one-dimensional and representations of types rather than individuals.

When it comes to the relationship between sympathy and judgement, Swinburne has been accused of the opposite of Levy. Critics have argued of Swinburne's speakers, such as the scribe in 'The Leper', that they are unable to raise any sympathy in readers and that instead of presenting psychological character-studies. The reason for this is that they are simply a reflection of Swinburne's passion for shocking Victorian society. While it is certainly true that both Levy and Swinburne wrote monologues that for different reasons do not adhere to the critical expectations of dramatic monologues, it is nevertheless also true that some of this criticism has overlooked the ways in which 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' work to challenge the underlying ideological constructs of Victorian society. Especially noteworthy is how they both seem to the Christian worldview. Unlike poems like 'Jenny' and 'A Castaway', I would argue that 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' are more concerned with ideological conflict, than with direct social criticism. As a result, Levy's poetry might be better understood alongside a radical poet such as Swinburne, than next to a poet such as Webster.

One of the main reasons why dramatic speakers written by poets such as Levy and Webster are believed to be less distinctive is because they are more sympathetic towards their own speakers. Dorothy Mermin generalises that monologues written by women are different to those written by men because women writers

sympathize with their protagonists, and neither frame them with irony like Browning does nor distance and at least partly objectify them like Tennyson by using characters with an independent literary existence. ('The Damsel' 75)

It is important to note however, that Mermin wrote this in 1986, before the rediscovery of writers such as Webster and Levy. Mermin's claim that 'women did not find figures in literature or mythology or history through whom they could express in an apparently dramatic and impersonal manner the feelings that they did not wish directly to avow' (75), does not seem particularly apt when one considers Webster's 'Medea in Athens' and 'Circe' or Levy's 'Xantippe' for instance. Mermin does however have a point when she claims that women writers often created speakers that appear in a more sympathetic manner. Readers might find it easier to sympathise with the marginalised prostitutes at the centre of Levy and Webster's poems, they are after all not such extreme characters as Browning's murderer in 'Porphyria's Lover' or Swinburne's necrophiliac in 'The Leper'. As demonstrated by the second chapter in this thesis, the line of women's dramatic poetry connected to social criticism is perhaps partly responsible for the lack of morally deviant characters in women's monologues. Their speakers cannot be too unlikeable, or else one risks alienating readers from the poem's underlying message. However, as more and more writers are adopted into the canon of Victorian dramatic monologue, it might be worth looking at why the quality or criterion of sympathy has gained such a prominent place in criticism on the dramatic monologue, and perhaps also revise the role it should play in criticism on these poets.

In order to understand why sympathy is still such an important argument for those who see women's dramatic monologues as a separate literary tradition it is useful to revisit Robert Langbaum's influential theory on sympathy and judgement. Langbaum argues that since the reader is made to adopt the speaker's viewpoint, and this viewpoint in turn becomes the entry into the poem, readers will always sympathise in one way or another with the speaker (78). What defines dramatic monologues is that this sympathy is always balanced with judgement on the morality of the speaker. Langbaum concludes with the assertion that 'it is safe to say that the most successful dramatic monologues deal with speakers who are in some ways reprehensible' (85). As noted earlier, some critics argue that women writers of dramatic monologues created speakers that evoke more sympathy in their readers. Although Magdalen or Eulalie might not come across as 'reprehensible' to modern readers in the same way as the speakers in 'The Leper' and 'Porphyria's Lover' for instance, it is crucial to remember the repercussions of being a prostitute in a Victorian context. No matter how much sympathy Magdalen or Eulalie might evoke in their readers, their actions would still be deemed condemnable. This is also true if one considers the case of 'Jenny', where the

speaker is a prostitute's patron. In this way, the sympathy and judgement thesis is still valid when considering the dramatic monologues of women writers such as Levy and Webster.

Even though 'Magdalen' shares several similarities with 'A Castaway', especially when it comes to the poems' subject matter, they are nevertheless quite different. While 'A Castaway' is a decidedly a political poem, the same thing cannot so easily be argued of 'Magdalen'. As shown by Scheinberg's reading of 'Magdalen' into a Jewish context, Levy's background as a Jewish woman is seen as integral to her poetry. Her position also seems to influence the ways in which critics read and interpret her monologues. As Levy appears as such as marginalised character herself: female, Jewish and possibly homosexual, it is not strange that those engaging with her poetry might hope to find similar elements in her poetry. However, when reading 'Magdalen' very few of these issues seem to be a major part of the discussions within the poem. The speaker of the poem makes references to the social injustice facing her, with the 'outer women's cold regard' (5), and the 'Pastor's "iterated sin"' (6), but these are not presented as the cause of her despair. Unlike Eulalie in 'A Castaway', Magdalen does not seem to take an especially confronting stance towards society. She claims that 'All things I can endure, save one (7). The one thing she cannot endure however, is the betrayal of her lover:

Yea, all things bear, save only this:
That you, who knew what thing would be,
Have wrought this evil unto me (10-12)

Angela Leighton argues that 'Magdalen' is not a poem about social criticism or protest at all (*Victorian Women* 591). On the contrary she argues that Levy's worldview is 'unredeemed by faith, love, or social change' (591). This makes her very different to writers such as Webster. Linda Hunt Beckman argues along the same lines that what separates Levy's speakers from those of Webster is that Levy's speakers '[do] not welcome the opportunity to re-establish a connection with [their] youthful [selves]' (193). Unlike Eulalie, who welcome the possibility of dialogue at the end of 'A Castaway', Magdalen is a character that truly rejects it. The speaker lives with other women in similar situations, but she is somehow unable to join them in their mourning. Even though she can 'hear the other women weep' (49), her own pain 'lies too deep / For the soft rain and pain of tears' (50-51).

Hunt Beckman links Levy's interest in and involvement with the Aesthetic movement to the lack of overt social criticism in poems such as 'Magdalen'. This movement, with its focus on art for art's sake profoundly influenced Levy's attitudes towards poetry, eventually

‘causing her to reject polemical poetry’ (Beckman 99). Although there has been a tendency to read ‘A Castaway’ and ‘Magdalen’ alongside each other, since their subject matter is fairly similar, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these poems take quite disparate stances to several issues. If Webster’s motivation for drawing Eulalie as a generalised character is to make her a speaker who speaks for ‘all women’ (461), it is very difficult to argue the same of Levy’s Magdalen-character. Magdalen does not seem like the desolate fallen woman encountered in ‘Jenny’ and ‘A Castaway’. She does not share much about her past, and consequently resists any interpretations about her future.

One should note that even when discussing the dramatic monologues of Browning, Langbaum always places the most emphasis on sympathy. ‘Condemnation’ he argues, is the ‘least interesting response’, and the hallmark of any accomplished dramatic monologue is its ability to evoke sympathy (83). Of course, many critics have refuted Langbaum’s claim that readers naturally sympathise with speakers such as the one in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, and many do not agree with his very ‘reader-centric’ focus (Scheinberg ‘Recasting’ 176). Cynthia Scheinberg points to the fact that Langbaum’s imagined reader overlooks the importance of the reader’s ‘cultural, political, and gendered identity’ when it comes to the capacity for sympathy (‘Recasting’ 176). Glennis Byron echoes this sentiment when she rejects Langbaum’s concept of a ‘universalised reader’ (*Dramatic Monologue* 22). Despite critics being more aware of the subjective nature of sympathy, critics still frequently use the concept when writing on dramatic monologues written by women. However, neither Scheinberg nor Byron reaches the conclusion that sympathy and judgement are not important concepts when it comes to understanding dramatic monologues. Unlike critics who have tried to downplay Langbaum’s focus on sympathy and judgement because they feel that the theory is not applicable to the study of women’s monologues, Scheinberg on the contrary claims that she seeks to ‘reclaim’ Langbaum’s theory for these studies (‘Recasting’ 179). Scheinberg argues that

rather than splitting the reader’s capacities for sympathy and judgement, dramatic monologues by both men and women work to reveal the contingency between powers of poetic sympathy and moral judgment. Further, this relation between personal sympathy and moral judgement has everything to do with the aesthetic judgments that have historically worked to classify much Victorian women’s poetry as didactic, sentimental, and without formal complexity. (179)

While there is a long critical history of dismissing dramatic monologues by women because their speakers are too one-dimensionally sympathetic, it has on the other hand been argued of

Swinburne's poetry that his speakers completely lack the ability of evoking sympathy in its readers.

David G. Riede claims that 'Swinburne's speakers are characterized by both eccentric morality and pathological emotions – what they seem to lack is a pole for sympathy' (44). Riede is correct when he argues that Swinburne's eccentric speakers are somewhat different to some of the most famous of Browning's speakers. Both 'The Leper' and 'Porphyria's Lover' are poems about love, albeit love gone wrong. Swinburne's poem starts as a kind of tragic medieval love story, with the poor scribe admiring the noblewoman whose love he might never hope to attain. However, the truth is soon revealed when the speaker confesses that he is '[...] glad to have her dead / Here in this wretched wattled house / Where I can kiss her eyes and head' (18-20). U.C. Knoepflmacher sees both Swinburne and D.G. Rossetti as direct followers of Browning, writing monologues within a tradition of 'queen worship' and 'thwarted lovers' (142). Echoing the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' that claims that the dead Porphyria's cheek blushed 'bright beneath my burning kiss' (48), the scribe's passion for the noblewoman is only fuelled by her death, and he claims that even in death the woman's hair 'Thrills' and 'burns' him 'in kissing it' (104). He takes a perverse joy in possessing the dead woman's corpse, holding her 'little feet' (33) in his hands and kissing her 'hair, half grey half ruined gold' (103). Like Porphyria and Jenny, the inanimate woman with hair of gold becomes an object of lust, and the more her body decomposes, the more it fuels his passion. In death the woman is reduced to the sum of her parts, to her 'small feet' (33), 'curled up lips' (12) and 'amorous hair' (12). Rod Edmond is right when he argues that the speaker's obsession with the woman's feet has a strong element of fetishism in it (510), but at the same time, it is important to note the symbolic dimension of enclosing the woman's feet in his hands. In death, she cannot escape the scribe's love. Like the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover', who admires Porphyria's 'rosy little head' (52), the speaker in 'The Leper' is also preoccupied with the small stature of the dead woman, and her size in comparison to himself. While she was his superior in life, death leaves her in the speaker's control.

Death becomes a way for the speaker to transgress beyond the accepted social barriers, and his blurring of social class becomes one of several ways the poem deals with transgressions (Edmond 510). While the speaker, like Rossetti's speaker in 'Jenny', might express some doubt over his own actions, he ultimately ends up rejecting it for his own pleasure. Unlike in 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Jenny', however, the noblewoman is given her own voice. Using quotations marks and claiming that he is reciting the woman's words 'word

by word' (40), the entirety of the tenth stanza is made up from words allegedly spoken by the woman:

"Sweet friend, God give you thank and grace;
Now am I clean and whole of shame,
Nor shall men burn me in the face
For my sweet fault that scandals them."

One might of course argue that the scribe's claim of reciting the woman word for word is nothing more than another way of manipulating his audience into sympathising with him. Just like in 'Porphyria's Lover', the events of the poem are told in retrospect, which means that the reliability of the speaker's words are questioned. However, unlike the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' who claims that Porphyria wished to die, the speaker in 'The Leper' seems to be fully aware that the woman never loved him.

Swinburne's strange medieval tale does seem to lack any true moral. Whatever doubt the speaker expresses does not stem from uncertainty over the moral validity of his actions, it is simply a reflection of a selfish desire of having been loved by the dead woman. He regrets taking such joy in 'kissing her' (75), and thus having rejected the woman's wish to be left alone to die. The speaker does not go into detail of what happened in the time before the woman's death, but the poem does at least suggest the possibility that the scribe attempted to engage a physical relationship with the woman against her will. The scribe fears more than anything that 'all [his] love went wrong' (129), and reaches the conclusion that while the woman's attitude towards him softened a little before her death, he still knows that her 'old love held fast his part' (126) in her heart.

Like 'Porphyria's Lover', 'The Leper' is a poem told in retrospect, with the speaker holding a dead woman in his arms. After first having presented himself as a rejected lover, his narrative becomes more and more troubling. At first, it seems as though Swinburne's scribe might not be directly responsible for the woman's death, unlike the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' who is of course solely responsible for Porphyria's death. Yet, the speaker admits to being the one who led the knight into the woman's room, as he reveals when he confesses that he 'brought [the knight] by a privy way / Out at her lattice' (30-31). One way of reading this scene is as a reflection of the speaker's selfless love, where the speaker sacrifices his own happiness so that the woman can be with the knight she loves. However, this reading does not necessarily go well with the rest of the poem's narrative. His words also reveal that he has been spying on the woman and the knight. The most revealing

part of the poem is perhaps when the scribe mentions the three things that he takes 'pleasure of' (25). These things are: uniting the knight and the woman, the woman's gratitude towards him, and, most disturbingly, that God 'Changed with disease her body sweet' (47). The scribe also claims that he is 'glad to have her dead' (18). In other words, while he claims that he always loved the noblewoman and served her selflessly, he also suggests the possibility of being an accomplice in her death.

The sympathy the scribe evokes in readers is therefore dependent on how we understand his involvement in the woman's death. The speaker believes that God hates both the noblewoman and himself, and their similar fates indicate that they are both punished as sinners. The woman becomes afflicted with leprosy after she has engaged in sexual relations with the knight, and the scribe becomes blind and thereby loses his ability to write beautifully. His writings end up 'Scrawled after the blind evensong / Spoilt music with no perfect word' (131-132). The scribe's fate and that of the woman somewhat mirror each other, with the knight's kisses 'blinding her eyes' (58) and the scribe eventually losing his eyesight. In the final line, the speaker asks 'Will not God do right?' This line is very similar to the final line in 'Porphyria's Lover': 'And yet God has not said a word!' (60). However, where the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover' frames his final words as a statement that indicates that he takes God's silence as a sign of approval, the speaker in 'The Leper' formulates his final words as a question. This is significant because whereas Browning's speaker becomes so caught up in his own rhetoric that he genuinely believes that God supports his actions, Swinburne's speaker at least expresses some doubt.

There are those who disagree with Riede's claims that Swinburne's speakers seem to lack a pole for sympathy. While the speaker's actions are certainly horrific, Thaïs E. Morgan views the speaker in 'The Leper' as a character that is able to rouse sympathy in readers, especially when it comes to the religious themes in the poem. Morgan argues that the

medieval backdrop in 'The Leper' is 'an ironic mask', calculated to take the publicly prudent but privately prurient Victorian reader unaware, as he or she finds himself or herself silently identifying with the silent aberrations and the religious doubtings [of Swinburne's characters].' (177)

Like Morgan, Anthony H. Harrison also sees the scribe as an ultimately sympathetic character. Harrison rejects the focus on the erotic elements in 'The Leper', and contends that 'Swinburne in "The Leper" has aptly produced a poetry that reflects the purity of the speaker's simple devotion to his beloved' (73). He sees the speaker's actions as a reflection of

a spiritual and selfless love, not of erotic obsession (73). The speaker certainly separates between the woman's physical body and her spirit when he talks of the 'body of love wherein she abode' (48). Her body is not 'She', it is separated from her body, and thus her illness can do little to change her. In this sense, his reading is similar to the way in which Langbaum reads 'Porphyria's Lover', since Langbaum claims that the murder of Porphyria is the 'culminating expression of [the speaker's] love' (88). While Harrison's reading sheds some light on the more emotional and spiritual elements in the poem, it does not necessarily explain the speaker's continued obsession with the dead woman's body long after her death, especially the thrills he gets from touching and kissing her. Her body is after all 'a body of love', and it seems as though the speaker continues to view it in this way even after she is dead.

These readings highlight the challenges with Swinburne's tendency to 'blur and blend' (*Dramatic Monologue* 109), as Glennis Byron calls it, is probably at least partly responsible for the confusion created by his speakers. Swinburne's speaker in 'The Leper' is exceedingly difficult to work out, and this has consequently produced diametrically different readings. In addition to the religious and spiritual elements in the poem, it also has a decidedly political edge. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of the *abject*, Rod Edmond sees the dead woman's body as the ultimate blurring between life and death. It becomes the most 'vivid and horrifying manifestation of the impossibility of a clear distinction between the clean and unclean, order and disorder' (510). When the leper woman is alive, her body is simultaneously alive and decomposing, as the illness is turning her body 'inside out, revealing its content as another fundamental boundary – that between the visceral self and the world – erodes (Edmond 511). In a sense, 'The Leper' completely dissolves the barrier between self and other, and between the subjective self and the outside world. The speaker delights in spending all his time with the dead woman, and his passions grow stronger the more decomposed her corpse becomes:

Love bites and stings me through, to see
Her keen face made of sunken bones.
Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
That were shot through with purple once. (105-108)

Through her illness, the formerly high-ranking woman and her servant are levelled (46). By transgressing boundaries of class, gender, sexuality, violence, and turning society 'inside out', 'The Leper' is a far more than just an attempt to shock.

In addition to the relationship between gender and poetic authority, which we find in say 'A Castaway', Levy includes theological issues in her poem. This is in no way revolutionary, as religious issues were always a part of dramatic monologues.² Cynthia Scheinberg's reads 'Magdalen' into a distinctly Jewish context. In the same way as Swinburne's poem becomes a critique of moral values and an expression of religious doubt, Levy's 'Magdalen' is by Scheinberg read as a poem that challenges the very core of Victorian poetry. As a woman and a Jew, Levy's poetic project 'obstructs the assumed belief in transcendent, universal, spiritual identity' ('Canonizing the Jew' 177), that is present in so much of the poetry from the era. Writing from the perspective of an Anglo-Jew, someone who is both a part of this community and an outsider, Levy's poetry 'challenges the very definitions of Christian prophetic literary identity' (177), by writing from the perspective of a Jewish speaker outside of Christian context. What Scheinberg defines as 'prophetic identity' is the typically

(male) prophet [who] speaks to a community with whom he shares a certain set of beliefs or assumptions; the prophetic model, that is, precludes the notion that the prophet speaks to a heterogeneous community. Or, if he does speak to difference, his job is to transform that difference into sameness, to create a community of followers who share a set of universal goals. (177)

By doing this, Levy is also able to challenge ideas on interpretation more generally, especially the inconsistencies of subjective readings.

Language is often at the centre of criticism of both Levy's and Swinburne's poetry and this is also true for 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper'. Much of the criticism Swinburne received for his poetry was not only centred on the imagery of his poetry, but also on the elaborate and sensual language (Seagroatt 41). His heavy use of alliterations, such as 'well-water' (2) and 'delicate to drink' (3), means that the reader is never able to lose focus on the poem as a piece of *art*. Whereas poems such as 'Jenny' and 'A Castaway' are written in a more realist vein, 'The Leper' models itself on medieval love-stories and ballads. 'Magdalen', on the other hand, is stylistically a much simpler poem. The dreariness of the iambic tetrameter, with its slow and steady beat, reflects the of the speaker's mind. It suggests that she has given up, and is passively moving along towards her own death, since her tale is already 'told and done' (19). As previously discussed with reference to 'A Castaway', the

² Notable mentions include Browning's 'Caliban upon Setebos' (1864), Tennyson's 'St. Simeon Stylites' (1842), Christina Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' (1862), and Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine' (1866).

poem's 'extremely accessible language' (Demoor 135) is chosen in order to 'guarantee the correct transmission of the ideas it wants to convey' (135). This, then, becomes a way for Webster to represent the poem's message in a non-aggressive context (136). While 'Magdalen' can also be described as simple, one might argue that 'accessible' is not necessarily a fitting characterization. When it comes to 'Magdalen' the poem's 'message' seems to be concealed despite the simple language. While stylistically different, I would argue that Levy's poem has as much in common with 'The Leper' as it does with 'A Castaway'.

Swinburne influenced Levy a great deal, despite the fact that she never adopted his heavily stylised manner of writing. She even published a parody poem, entitled 'Felo De Se' (with the rather humorous subtitle 'With Apologies to Mr. Swinburne'). In the poem Levy imitates Swinburne's style, especially his heavy use of alliterations, such as 'And weary I could lie at length on the soft, sweet, saffron sand...' (27). She also exaggerates Swinburne's nihilistic and atheist worldview when she speaks in the voice of someone who is 'held in the Circle of Being and caught in the Circle of Pain' (3), as well as his fascination with morbid details: 'long limbs lay on the sand with an eagle eating the heart. / Repose for the rotting head and peace for the putrid breast' (9). At the same time as it is a brilliant parody, Melvyn New notes, it is also a poem which deals with some of the main topics of Levy's own poetry, namely suffering (7). This is also a prominent part of 'Magdalen'. The speaker in the poem claims that 'The future and the past are dead / There is no thought can bring delight' (58-59). If it can be said of Swinburne's poetry that it is exaggerated and too concerned with form, Levy's poem has been criticised for the exact opposite: its simplicity. Angela Leighton calls it an 'immature poem' ('Because Men' 123), and dismisses the language as 'too limply melancholy' (123). Leighton does find some quality in the poem, but the quality lies in the way the poem contributes to 'betray the strain of that social morality which founds its whole system of good and evil on the sexual propriety of women' (123). Again, the critical tendency to read women's dramatic monologues as social criticism becomes apparent. However, as Isobel Armstrong argues, dramatic monologues by women writers might at first seem 'simple' (324), 'pious' (324) and 'conventional' (324), but that 'the simpler the surface of the poem, the more likely it is that a second and more difficult poem will exist beneath it' (324). This, as shown for instance by Cynthia Scheinberg's interpretation, is also true for 'Magdalen'.

Even if 'Magdalen' and 'The Leper' are stylistically different, they still engage with many of the same ideas. Levy's speaker cannot find any solace in a world so completely void

of any purpose or meaning. Linda Hunt Beckman remarks that ‘Levy’s voice might blend with that of her dramatized speaker, but Magdalen speaks of deprivation so fundamental that it raises questions about whether there is any order or any meaning that can justify such suffering’ (102). The speaker in ‘Magdalen’ sees the world as a ‘hideous masquerade’ (71) where ‘All things dance on, the ages through’ (72). She cannot find any meaning in life, and denounces the possibility of a God or afterlife. She imagines God as merciless, and when recalling how her lover deceived her she bitterly questions ‘did God laugh in heaven?’ (33). Swinburne’s speaker also denounces God, but his nihilism is nowhere as complete. Although Swinburne places his speaker in ‘The Leper’ within a Christian framework, the way he elevates ‘sensuality over God’s law’ is, according to David G. Riede, decidedly pagan (44). The poem poses a challenge to a ‘hollow Christian spiritualism’ (Byron *Dramatic Monologue* 108) and instead substitutes religion for sensuality and earthly pleasure. When Magdalen rejects God and of the outside world it marks the beginning of her end. When the speaker in ‘The Leper’ does the same thing, however, he does it to avoid taking any moral responsibility for his actions.

While the speaker’s pessimism in ‘Magdalen’ is central in the poem, Melvyn New still chooses to focus on the ending as a powerful reclaiming of the self (14). In this way, he aligns ‘Magdalen’ with the tradition that reads the dramatic monologue as a genre focused on linguistic authority. New notices how the speaker remarks that had she known that her lover would betray her, she would have been able to leave him: ‘Thereon I straight had turned away / Ay, though my heart had cracked with pain / And never kissed your lips again’ (45-47). In this sense, the speaker shows how The final stanza, then, with the speaker denouncing her former lover ‘through all eternity’ (84), emerges as a powerful reclaiming of her own freedom:

The doctor says that I shall die.
 You, that I knew in days gone by,
 I fain would see your face once more,
 Con well its features o’er and o’er;
 And touch your hand and feel your kiss,
 Look in your eyes and tell you this:
 That all is done, that I am free,
 That you, through all eternity,
 Have neither part nor lot in me. (77-85)

When Swinburne and Levy wrote ‘The Leper’ and ‘Magdalen’, the dramatic monologue was already firmly established as the primary poetic invention of the Victorian age. Both poems

seem to draw upon, but also challenge, features believed to be essential to the form – contextual and historical situatedness, linguistic power, and the idea of monologue as speech. Alex Goody argues of ‘Magdalen’ that it replaces ‘the stable persona of the dramatic monologue’ with ‘a lyric voice that occupies an unstable, modern, urban world’ (461). These instabilities makes it ‘impossible to maintain the divisions of self and other, object and subject’ (461). I very much agree with Goody’s claims. At first glance, a poem such as Levy’s ‘Magdalen’ might easily seem like a sentimental and tragic love-story, similar to the one we find in Hemans’ ‘Arabella Stuart’. Similarly, the title of the poem gives the expectation that it might be a defence of the Victorian fallen woman, along the same lines as Webster’s ‘A Castaway’. In my opinions, neither of these interpretations do Levy’s poem complete justice. The vagueness of the character is not a sign that we should understand Levy and her speaker as the same person, nor is it a way of making the poem’s social criticism more palatable to Victorian readers. It is a deliberate strategy to develop further Browning’s early explorations of the instabilities of the self, in an ever-changing world. In this sense, the poem is deeply connected to the history of the dramatic monologue, but perhaps not so connected to the ‘women’s tradition’ of criticising oppression. Swinburne’s ‘The Leper’ is also a poem that explores similar themes. Through the blurring of boundaries, Swinburne questions how we can really understand the relationship between poet and speaker, poem and reader and the speaking self and the other. Both Swinburne and Levy are iconoclastic poets in the sense that they challenge the underlying ideologies that shape their own reality, and not just the social structures in which these ideologies manifest. Consequently, they both anticipate later developments with dramatic form, long into the twentieth century.

5 Conclusion

In an article published in 2015, Joshua Taft shows how even today critics debate the role women poets played in the development of the dramatic monologue. He points to the apparent paradox that a writer such as Augusta Webster ‘writes widely admired dramatic monologues that violate what many critics have seen as central to the form’ (402). As my thesis has shown, this is not only true of Webster’s poetry, but of the poetry of most women writing dramatic monologues in the nineteenth century. I think the phrase *have seen* in Taft’s statement is essential, because as my thesis has demonstrated, the ways in which we read and understand the dramatic monologue, and even the set of poems we accept as dramatic monologues, have greatly changed. While they are an integral part of studies on Victorian poetry, I would still argue that form and generic terms such as auditor or speaker are in no way sufficient to understand the genre. Neither do I believe that critical concepts such as sympathy and judgement, ironic distance, or self-revelation do quite comprise the type of poetry we now label as Victorian dramatic monologues.

Instead I have chosen to focus on what I believe is one of the most fascinating areas of studies on the dramatic monologue: the ways in which various writers used the genre to explore the subjective self against an objectified other. These studies are also helpful when it comes to understanding the challenges facing women writers, and why they were completely excluded from the canon of Victorian dramatic monologues for such a long time. I have focused on the historical development of the form, as I believe that the genre developed in several directions after the early experiments of Browning and Tennyson. I have also shown that the relationship between the speaking subject and the passivized other is important to understanding the challenges facing women writing dramatic monologues in the Victorian period. The trope of the fallen woman permeates Victorian culture, and thus it became a natural starting point for my explorations. The tension between female sexuality and agency and between the traditional male subject and female object in art is present in all the poems from *Porphyria* to *Magdalen*, and as my thesis has shown, the doubleness of the dramatic monologue gave poets an outlet to write poetry that both repeats and subverts these dichotomies.

In chapter one, I argued that while elements such as ironic distance are important in understanding the innovative nature of Browning’s early monologues, they have also proved problematic when applied to the monologues by women poets. Instead I suggest that Browning’s longest lasting legacy is the ways in which he developed a genre suited to

explore the relationship between self and other, and that similar ideas can be found in the poetry of a multitude of both male and female Victorian writers. In the chapter I also explored Isobel Armstrong's claim that Felicia Hemans was the originator of the dramatic monologue, and that her legacy is particularly prominent in the poetry of later women monologists, including Augusta Webster and Amy Levy. While Hemans' monologues certainly show some similarities with the poetry we have come to understand as 'dramatic monologues', poems such as 'Arabella Stuart' seem to negate the very tradition they are taken to represent. The poem does not show how the speaker is subjected to context, nor does it explore the complex relationship between self and other reflected in the other poems discussed in my thesis. More importantly, the poem does not particularly concern itself with issues associated with dramatic monologues written by women, such as social criticism and a general critique of oppression. This means that the poetry of Hemans is in my opinion better read as a series of early experiments with dramatic form than as examples of Victorian dramatic monologues.

In chapter two, I argued that as the century progressed, writers started using the dramatic monologue for purposes other than exploring Romantic representations of self. Focusing on the social criticism in 'A Castaway' and 'Jenny', I have proved that while Browning certainly can be seen as influential, for instance in the ways in which he used the genre to explore the stability of the speaking subject, later poets developed the genre in new directions. This is a line of poetry that has become particularly associated with women poets such as Augusta Webster. The donning of a different persona could certainly allow women writers to express beliefs they would not be able to convey through lyric. Yet, I also feel that the focus on social criticism in poetry by Victorian women writers has perhaps obscured the ways in which women poets explored other issues, and their distinct poetic qualities, as well as the role social criticism played in monologues by male writers.

In chapter three, I returned to a claim that has become associated with many Victorian women poets, namely that they wrote speakers that seem less 'particularised' than those of their male counterparts. I demonstrated why this claim is highly problematic, not only because it seems to suggest that by writing more ambiguous characters women poets were somehow less accomplished as dramatic monologists, but also because it helps to perpetuate the myths associated with the Victorian 'poetess-character' as confessional and sentimental. As Amy Levy's 'Magdalen' demonstrates, this view is too simplistic, as the poem does not necessarily conflate Levy with her speaker, nor does it display any overt social criticism. Rather, one might argue, it uses the duality of the dramatic form in yet another way, by

obscuring the identity of the speaker and thus offering at least two very different interpretations. This is a reflection of the new literary developments towards the end of the nineteenth century, and thus it might be more natural to compare Levy to a poet like Swinburne in some cases, than say, to Augusta Webster.

Due to the limitations of this thesis, I have only been able to discuss a small number of poets and poems. Perhaps most noticeably, I have not discussed Tennyson, the man often presented alongside Browning as ‘inventor’ of the dramatic monologue. Like Swinburne and Rossetti, Tennyson was also frequently accused of writing feminine poetry (I use the word ‘accused’ because, as this thesis shows, the idea that poetry was ‘feminine’ often bore negative connotations). For those who study the development of the dramatic monologue, and especially those interested in how dramatic poetry could often blur the lines between the traditionally feminine and masculine, Tennyson’s poetry can perhaps even be said to open up a third line of dramatic poetry, alongside the classical, masculine poetry of Browning and the women’s tradition.

Another issue that deserves more critical attention in my opinion is the ways in which writers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century reflect early Modernist ideas, and especially how women writers reflected these tendencies. Some research has already been done in the field, for instance in Patricia Rigg’s *Julia Augusta Webster: Victorian Aestheticism and the Woman Writer* (2009), and the newfound interest in Levy’s relationship to the city and as a New Woman poet during the fin de siècle. I embarked on this project primarily interested in the dramatic monologue’s relationship to linguistic authority, and the question why the genre so clearly highlights imbalances of power. These of course are issues that are highly applicable to studies of gender. It has never been my intention to downplay the importance of feminist literary studies in the critical debates on dramatic monologues for the last thirty years or so, but rather to show that the creative output of both male and female writers was greatly influenced by a variety of literary, cultural and social developments throughout the Victorian period. Personally, this project has opened my eyes to the ways in which literary histories are created, and the consequences of writing women out of the poetic canon.

Today few, if any, would argue with the fact that women poets played an important role in the development of the Victorian dramatic monologue. Poets such as Augusta Webster, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Christina Rossetti and Amy Levy have all claimed their rightful place as important contributors to the genre, and have become central figures in syllabuses of Victorian poetry all over the world. Poets such as Augusta Webster, now hailed as one of the greatest Victorian poets, can no longer be said to be obscure. This is evident for

instance by the fact that the entire spring 2017 issue of *Victorian Poetry* is scheduled to be devoted to her (Meyer 'CFP'). This a sign that critics writing on Victorian women monologists are no longer required to defend the quality and uniqueness of the creative outputs by Webster and her contemporaries in the ways that they previously had to. As the project to establish these writers as canonical in their own right has been accomplished, perhaps now is the time to move beyond categories of gender and instead look towards new ways of engaging in critical dialogues with the Victorian dramatic monologue.

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