DISCIPLINE AND OTHER POEMS (CREATIVE COMPONENT)
AND
THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY
AMERICAN POETRY: PERSONA, IDENTITY, PERFORMATIVITY
(CRITICAL COMPONENT)

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Creative Writing
at Royal Holloway, University of London

by

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January 2017

Revised July 2017

Declaration of Authorship

I, Jane Yeh, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: ____Jane Yeh_____

Dated: ____3 July 2017_____

Abstract

DISCIPLINE AND OTHER POEMS (CREATIVE COMPONENT) AND THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY: PERSONA, IDENTITY, PERFORMATIVITY (CRITICAL COMPONENT)

Jane Yeh

This thesis consists of a creative component, comprising a collection of original poems, and a critical component, consisting of a critical essay.

The collection of poems engages with subjects and themes including contemporary art, animals, feminism, popular culture, and the urban landscape. Formally, the collection ranges from dramatic monologues to lyric poems to ekphrastic poems written in the third person. The poems make use of techniques such as fragmentation, disjunction, repetition, and parataxis, and variously employ surreal imagery and unusual metaphors and similes.

The critical essay considers the dramatic monologue as an alternative to lyric through the work of three contemporary American poets: Lucie Brock-Broido, Mary Szybist, and Terrance Hayes. The focus is on the nature of the persona in the dramatic monologue, the relationship between the persona and the writer, and the ways in which the dramatic monologue challenges and subverts the personal lyric. The methodology is drawn from what is broadly termed queer theory, particularly the work of Judith Butler and others on performativity and the construction of gender and sexual identities, work which is itself derived from poststructuralist theory.

After an introduction that evaluates previous work on the dramatic monologue, a chapter is devoted to each poet. The first explores Lucie Brock-Broido's collection *The Master Letters* in relation to the practices of camp and female masquerade in order to demonstrate how the persona in the dramatic monologue embodies Judith Butler's understanding of identity as provisional and groundless. The second chapter discusses Mary Szybist's poems on the Annunciation, in the collection *Incarnadine*, to draw an analogy between the writing of dramatic monologues and the metaphorical wearing of drag by the writer. The third chapter examines poems from Terrance Hayes's collection *Lighthead* to illustrate how identity in the dramatic monologue is fabricated through performance.

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Acknowledgements

Discipline and Other Poems (creative component)

I

Discipline

The shape of a deer
In silhouette

Projected on a woman's dress. Off
With her arms, her head— the mark

Of a hoof in snow, superimposed
On a high heel, a pool of milk;

The lines converge
And part like migrating birds. Her skirt

Is an hourglass
Filling up with stones. Her heart

Is a caveat. *See how they run.*
If her foot

Points towards the past,
It's called composition. (Too much

Thinking spoils a fawn.) Her
Secrets play on continuous loop,

Like a B-movie. On
The reverse: a blank surface

Painted over— another girl,
Blotted out.

A Short History of Migration

We boarded a seashell to ride across the waves.
The mythology of our passage involved dirt, sharks, a zeppelin, and wires.
We ate the same meal seventeen days in a row (pancakes).
We learned to say yes, please in four different languages.

Our fur-lined hats were useless in the fine September air.
The mystery of our parentage was a serape on our backs.
Out on the prairie, the locals tried to take us at face value.
We learned about sturgeon, washing machines, ennui, and fake tan.

We joined a fruit-of-the-month club to widen our horizons.
The mastery of our foliage required an endless sea of mowing.
We attended bake sales with a suspicious degree of fervour.
We hindered our children with violins, bad haircuts, and diplomas.

Our names were changed to make them easier to remember.
The monastery of our heritage was repurposed into handy snacks.
We sold refrigerators to people who already had refrigerators.
We lived in suburban glory in our newly-built townhouses.

Our children were changed to make them meaner and fatter.
The memory of our verbiage was as a schnitzel in the wind.
We kept our money close, and our feelings closer.
In the event of an emergency, we kept a baseball bat prepared.

A Short History of Style

Joey Arias at Jackie 60, New York, 1997

The disposition of her arms
Is a case of

Nothing ventured, nothing
Gained. Her violet ear

Makes sense if
Something wicked is

Being said. The angle
Of her nose is a challenge,

A crime against nature. Her
Throat a fine line. *Lover*

Where have you been?
Mistakes come back to her

Like wrong notes, a clarinet
Of echoes. You can take the boy

Out of Dubuque . . . Nothing
Like bourbon

To make her sing
A slow tune: downcast

Eyes, hands swaying
Just so. The catch

In her voice like a rusty key
Turned. A hundred

Nights blurred together
Like an ink blot

Smeared— her long fall
Of hair saying *No no no.*

Rabbit Empire

In the empire of the rabbits, the long-eyed girl is king.
The afterlife is like a movie, edited
And full of plot holes. On a leatherette settee
We twitch our ears coquettishly. We think she loves us.

Green walls will with a green dress chime. The angora
Of our hearts softly blows, whenever she draws near.
The door to the past only opens one way,
Into a hotel room— you can't turn it off like TV.

It's swish to nibble on a cream cracker
While she goes about in heels like a bachelorette on speed.
At the picnic, the grass is so green we could cry.
The language of the dead sounds like static

Or a weird encyclopaedia; when the phone rings,
It's for her. Our eyes light up in the dark.
She wakes up in Kansas, trailing memories like babies.
Roses fall through the air like a sweet shop exploding.

A Short History of Camberwell

1. As soon as the lights come on making of us a scene

2. The velvet of an imaginary tongue

3. Lake-effect cloud, ghost phone, down the glistening street

4. Night veils us (but the holes in my tights still show)

5. Under the arches, like an heirloom coverlet

6. As if the lights could be armour (or a cocktail dress)

7. Our reflections in windows like passing fancies

8. Matte brick lip, empty bottle, prone to shrieking

9. Part cream puff, part poison, part tranquilizer dart

10. In terms of lurking: half-moonlight at our throats

11. If I told you, I would have to kiss you

12. A shiver of bracelets guarding my arms

13. Huddled under heat lamps and their unrelenting gaze

14. Mini martini, cloaking device, autonomic response

15. Like falling off a ledge in the dark (only slower)

16. The sound of our breath in the unfurling night

A Short History of Violence

The rush of air.
The fear

Is black and white,
A blur

Just over his head, a feathered
Ball of bad dreams

And someone shouting. A body
Just wants to mind himself,

Keep a blind eye. Out back
A string of lights

Pierces the horizon;
The ground

Races away beneath. He's
Been running for miles

In his ripped jeans, strips
Of T-shirt flapping, dirt

Like a rumour all over him.
His arm a bent lesson

In obedience – not enough.
Out here

Boys are ten a penny,
One less ain't worth

Spilt milk. The pulse
In his throat

Is a bridle against his skin.
The tyre tracks, the smell

Of burning – he can't outrun
The smoke at his back,

Like a panic
Rising. His body

A lamb sheared. The velvet
Of his ribs.

A Short History of Patience

The soft chiffon of the river as it turns
Out of view. The woodpecker's stutter saying
Wish you were here. The birch branches tangled
Like wires overhead, sending mixed messages

To the birds. Baby, I could go out on a limb
And say the evening's smoky eye draws near,
The floorboards creak like a harpsichord played wrong,
The kettle rumbles with anticipation, then

Shuts itself off. Honey, without you it's cold
As a warthog's bare bottom, or the draught
That slips in under the door. Without you
I'm lonesome as a cricket in a jam jar, chirping

Till all the air runs out. *Won't you come home?*
Says the dustpan to the wandering broom.
Catch as catch can say the weeds to the scythe.
Ryegrass spreading through the yard like an open secret.
The blue line of the horizon like an eyelid, closed.

Scenes From *Sherlock Holmes and the Pearl of Death*

1. Following on from a horse collar
2. Ensconced at home with tuxedo cat
3. Rollmops
4. The glass dome of night, momentarily lifted
5. Ready or not, a mesomorph comes
6. Behind the splendour of Crabby Mountain
7. Unpleasant emission from a malapert plover
8. Circling or braking or passing through the mazy tunnels
9. Far from the light of sweet seabirds
10. Where the crumbs go

11. Big cheese + old bag + interval = gabfest
12. Spreading the net, waggling the fingers
13. Dead end is to dogleg as cursory is to smokeless
14. Like swimming through custard with feathers
15. Enter a mandarin
16. A missive from the mysterious East (i.e., East Grinstead)
17. Hog-tied, railroaded, softsoaped, and rifled
18. In the belly of the well of the pergola of doom
19. To cover with gold stars, or glitterpalooza
20. How we became angels

21. Up periscope v. open sesame
22. The indivisible wall between the living and the dead
23. As gullible as a bowl full of honey
24. Exit on milk float, pursued by sausage dog
25. *Oy vey can you see?*

26. Nacre or lacquer or melted-down buttons
27. For the last time, humming a Milanese song
28. For the last time, per the ferocious chasm of yearning
29. Dumpling Village, Oxfordshire (twinned with Flushing)
30. No more llamas?

Installation

Bird hanging
From a taxidermy door.

One leg
Dangling. To install

A shoe,
Find a shoe

Missing a foot. The brass rail
Is for help. In the work

A wheel is taken apart,
The third bird

Hops the perimeter
Of floor, something spilt

Is a circle cut out
Of wood. If a boy could make

His own world
Like this, it would be safe

To go out. The Braille
Of his fingers reading

Another hand's shape.
Another foot

Without a leg—
Beautiful fragment. Nobody's coming

To take you to the ball.
If a boy could be a bird—

Behind the door
Of his eyes, a crowd of words

Pressed mute. His hand
Is a book with the pages glued

Together; his throat plays
A precorded song.

The sea is a circle
That spits him out—

The foot on the wall,
Hanging.

The Rhinos

We meet under the stars, touch noses
In the dark. Our secret greeting.

Our nocturnal meetings are brief, but friendly.
Sometimes I pretend to be asleep.

We really aren't
The loners you think. We snort and cluck
When we're together. Our private conversation.

The enchilada of Africa— the whole
Kalahari— is our kitchen.
I'm only interesting to smaller males.

We're not in a hurry
To copulate. I swing my head from side to side,
Then run away. It's called flirting.

Our dusty hides are thick, but sensitive.
I capture bugs by accident in my teeth.

By day we don't gather,
Just do our own thing. I poke my nose
In a mud hole, splash around in my piss.

I'd rather not have a bath
If I can help it. My powerful smell.

We're vanishing
One by one from the bare savannah.

Above, the high sky—
Our canopy, our heaven.

Public House

Glitter in the trees.
Glitter and shadow. Leaves

Massing like birds or
Faces, clusters of people passing

Through the narrow
Streets, full of litter

And heroes. A serenade
Of buses down the road

From the spaceship
Library! Our incense

Is the smell of raw chicken
And tilapia in summer,

Our rough cassavas
Precious gems— *no*

Stopping between the hours of
Primark and Rizla, only dancing

On a reservoir on top of
The world: *look what*

The cat dragged in. Oh angels
Of Peckham, from the nail bars

To the Common, we sweep
Your fiery steps clean. The

Clink of glasses
Is found music, a belated

Poem: our temple to lager
And order, archive

Of dogs lost, old
House holding our stories between

Its boards (*please
Respect the neighbours*). In

This ragged and ordinary
Palace, our voices merge

Like rustling leaves. The way
A dozen tea lights make

A constellation: stars
In the dark, our collective dreams.

True Facts About the Herring Gull

The cries of the herring gull sound like a small barking dog.
I like to see a gull perched on a railing or a chair.
Gulls will eat bread, rotten fruit, crisps, and even vomit.
One of their cries means *This is my piece of food*.

If a herring gull approaches you, be somewhat afraid.
A gull in every pot and a herring in every chamber.
The ulterior motives of gulls are like Wotsits trapped in crystal.
Their exceptionally leathery feet let them stand on bird-repelling spikes.

If gulls were horses, burgers would ride.
Their natures are capricious like that of a small beautiful dog.
Gull me not, lest ye be sat on by a massive gull.
Of the language of the gulls, we must remain silent. [*pause*]

Most of their cries mean *Give me your chips*.
In the company of gulls, a bagel is as good as a smile.
The long-term plans of gulls are like the holes in a box full of concrete.
If in doubt, placate a gull by singing of its mother.

The Otters

The otters hold hands
As they float on their backs
In the sea-green water, as nettles
Drift past in bushy ranks
On the banks of the gelatine
Stream, as if their fur
Weren't a wet mess. The otters
Close their eyes to it while gliding
By the silent reeds, the nests
Of river birds, the silvery
Trees, trailing patterns in
The water like long ribbons
In their wake. In the shade
The otters recoup and spin
Their feet, reverse into
The shallow weeds to rest. The last
Rays of sunlight paint a
Gilded screen across the rushes.
The otters couldn't care less
About plants or the picturesque
Scenery or anything they can't
Eat. Everything slows
To a heartbeat as they dive
Under the shining water
And come up again— a fish
In each mouth, water
Dripping from their chins.

A Short History of Protection

In my other life, I was swashbuckling and brave.
I could turn a chain of backflips and land on one hand.
(My free hand held a whip to be cracked on enemy ankles.)
I could drop-kick a visiting pigeon in the face, just by accident.
I could *krav maga* half the way to Swiss Cottage.

I trained by running the opposite direction on moving walkways.
I scaled Victorian water towers with kettlebells tied to my toes.
I skipped rope until the rope broke, then kept on skipping anyway.
I learned to fence with a cuirass, a blunderbuss, and a pickle.

I pistol-whipped a cactus until it gave up its secrets.
I won a staring contest with an uninformed bison at ten paces.
I grasped the basics of the longbow even though I was too short for it.
I could wrap a cat in a towel like a burrito to disable it.

If anyone asked, I composed a little chin music to answer them.
I slayed monster trucks and liberated their tyres.
I doubled-down on pummeling inconsiderate flatmates.
I saved a dozen ibises from a gang of ruthless egg poachers.
Their ebullient beaks smiled up at me as I went on my way.

Under the Ground

Running through the darkness, deep beneath the streets
The lost rivers of London trail us sometimes, sometimes line
Their own tracks to wash up against rusty grates
In long-forgotten cellars (where once they reigned over stones,

Reeds, angular trees, now faint as veins they trace the old
Highways across the city), then turn back and head
For home again: buried treasure. The prom-
Ise of bodies buttoned into rock is history (crimson

With iron ore, layered with shale), the bones
Of a playhouse under an office block are stations
Of the cross, lock and reliquary: digging

Up the past is a form of attention. What remains
Underground: invisible branches; clusters of trains;
Rivers of us moving through the dark, a long way down.

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A Monstrous Regiment of Women

My uniform was gabardine brown, with extra straps attached.
I wheedled the shit out of the target. I Mumbai'd his sorry ass
All over the pavement. *Don't believe the lies they tell.*

My ornamental shrubs were planted for maximum effect.
I took a bullet right in the pitta pocket. I kebabed
And weaved back to camp. My weapons?

A photographic memory, ditsy flowers, and good legs.
I could dismantle a tenderloin without looking.
I could shake a tail, cobra-style. I saddled up the Thighmaster

And rolled into town— *Hey baby, nice veal.*
This is what we train for: the wicked *thwack* and fall.
I pocketed the nunchucks and cleared the scene.

I manacled a sandwich and totted up the score.
Sisters, I think our kindness will surprise them
When the time for judgement comes.

Ten Scenes From an Exhibition (Part 1)

      1.

A maze of cake,
Frosted pink and white.
Every turn looks the same.
The walls close in,
Marzipan— the plush blue carpet
Like a tongue, flopped down.

2.

In the weird rainbowland video
The woman is dressed as a cat.
She interviews herself, dressed
As someone else. In the underground lair
There are even more of her.
Scary dancing.

3.

Llamas in fog. Then the silent
Ride of Lycra, a mob
Of men on bicycles.
The llamas sit on the road,
Unbothered. In their heads
It's winter, no big deal.

4.

A line of text
Printed over and over again.
The posters curl on the floor,
Illegible— you can take one.
The words say something
About being American.
Block caps.

5.

On the blue and orange walls
She draws. Chalk
Is a rite, melancholy
Are flowers, under a sinister
River an invisible landscape
Grows. A road and a door.

Utopia Villas

In our utopia, the oysters always sing.
There is a metronome the colour of Sacré-Coeur.
There is a messenger opening a secret scroll (good news).
In our lazy maisonette, we count the days until summer.

Pizza will come in two sizes: snack and preposteroso.
Poetic cockapoos will serenade us with their thoughts
While beseeching looks shoot out of their eyes like lasers.
In the strongholds of the North, a Cumberland sausage will rise

While a slain avocado comes back to life as guacamole (good karma).
We will spread out everywhere and chill like a floppy omelette.
We will be meticulous in love, ornithology, and dance.
Long avenues of deer will part like magic

In the sentimental sunlight. When we kiss,
Magpies will fly to our side like granted wishes.

II

A Short History of Destruction

In the palace of the cats, we minused and gnawed.
We burrowed and simulated, skirting the wormholes.
In the shiny halls, cubist paintings looked down on us
Like startled Martians; lavish flower arrangements loomed
From the persistent étagères. Our peril

Was molten and diabolical, with a side of *told you so*.
Our children vanished and reappeared under different names.
All day, cats covered in gold sat in their perpendicular chairs,
Planning invasions. In the padded drawing-rooms
They ate statement salads and filed their nails.

Item: Beshrew areas of carpet or supernumerary globes.
Item: The case of M., who was flattened by a ewer.
Each day, the smell of cat wafted malevolently through the cracks
In the platinum ceiling. We cowered and filleted
In our synthetic beds. The glamour of the cats

Was undeniable, like their long and curling hair.
They rinsed their paws in lemon-scented finger bowls
Between fish courses. A potpourri of tiny bells
Rang out silkily whenever one of them passed by.
We did covet and die many times

In the palace of the cats. Beneath the jagged
Candelabras, with our backward fur and shifty eyes,
We were killed like children. The antlers on the wall
Were implacable as Valkyries. Some of the cats
Played drastic minuets on diminutive grand pianos.

A Short History of Childhood

Leaves brush against the window like fingers in the heat.
It's 1982. Summer holidays. Prison is a house
With all the windows shut, medley of sweat
And boredom. Carpets itchy under my bare feet.

I learn algebra from a foreign textbook, make bread
No one eats. The telly is an encyclopaedia
Of frosted makeup and panting kisses. $x + y =$
Thank you, ma'am. Information swells in my chest like yeast.

Insects buzz in the night, loud as a choir.
Lawns multiply down the empty street. My hair
Is a comedy of frizz and errors, big
As a soufflé. It takes me years to outgrow it.

Happy Hour, New York City

The maxidress of the afternoon sags like cheap jersey
As the first margarita is shaken and poured. The heat is
A blanket smothering all thought, is an abominable
Sauna room the size of a city; the steady drip
Of air-conditioning units pools on the sidewalk.
We clink our plastic glasses together, duel with tiny umbrellas.

The cinnamon bun of the conversation
Unspools till all the gossip is gone— Maxine of the office,
Our Lady of Scandals, Fernando of the enormous
Nose. Another round. The strawberry daiquiris
Melt like pink slush in the sunlight's glare.
In the unfathomable depths of the popcorn bowl

Lie the answers to all life's questions: what are
We here for? (Cheap drinks.) Day drains from the sky
Like the contents of a highball glass. A succession
Of dogs comes out to be walked before dinner.
The traffic stops and goes past, a mechanical river.
A siren goes off in the distance somewhere, like somebody crying.

Thanksgiving, New York City

The wild turkeys should be worried this year.
Their luscious free-range thighs are coveted
By every chef in the city. The cornucopia
Of tubers at the Greenmarket stand
Is a tumultuous mob of spectators, jostling
For position. Decorative gourds invade us
Like misshaped aliens; a mountain of cookbooks
Sprouts on the kitchen counter. You could stab
A ham with all the advice you've been given.

Where the pie plates buckle, there buckle I.
The metaphysical weight of the potluck dinner
Makes muffins of us all. On the sideboard lurk
The candied yams of no one's dreams, uneaten
Tubs of stuffing. The TV chatters to itself
Like a crazy uncle, the moon fills the sky
Like a ripening cheese. We could sit here till the cows
Come home, if we didn't have work tomorrow.
The marshmallow fluff of your cerebellum says *go to sleep*.

Lunch Hour, New York City

If an $8 sandwich falls on the floor,
Will anyone eat it? Beneath the tables
A forest of chair legs shifts. A sliver of freedom
For eight hours of labour. We chew
Sourdough and rocket, make weekend plans.

The line for the gyro cart snakes to the corner
Where the smokers stand like a middle-aged gang,
Fidgety as pigeons. We occupy the plaza
With our wash-and-wear separates and chicken wraps.
The sun beats down on the concrete and marble

Like the world's biggest grow-lamp; neckties flap
In the chargrilled breeze. Our ability
To live like this is our downfall. Time's up;
Back to the open-plan workstations.
The printer spits out another hundred pages.

Poem in Which All the Questions Are Answered

Next time, the last time really will be the last time.
The astrology column is written by a computer program in Stoke.
'Out of the mouths of babes' doesn't mean what people think it means.
Where there's a will, there's a dead body and a guilty-looking capybara.

For these questions: ellipsis, Smithsonian, South American dish.
If you wait long enough, everything will come back at the same time.
Where there's smoke, there's an ex-smoker bumming other people's cigarettes.
Nothing is made in Middlesbrough but baked beans and disappointment.

'Tit for tat' doesn't mean what some people think it means.
Where there's hope, there's a poet with an unpublished memoir.
Acid-wash denim is actually washed in spinsters' tears and chlorine.
Never underestimate the speed of a hungry walrus.

You can't hurry love (except at closing time in Doncaster).
Pareidolia, crêpe paper, 57% of adult men.
Organized religion was invented as a stand-in for hot dogs.
When it's over, you can pretend you never cared about it anyway.

The A-Team

I pity the fool whose blinkered eyes can't see
Our magnificent potential— like a four-point star
On the verge of exploding, like a plan
That takes a lifetime to bear fruit. We were

The outcasts, the rejects, the scum of the earth. We had
To make ourselves over. We made ourselves new.
Like the steel jaws of a trap, or the teeth of a lock,
Like a jigsaw map or a bomb-maker's shards—

We add up to more than the sum of our parts.
I pity you, fools. You'll never understand
Why we do what we do— our sheer talent for

Mayhem— how a hand outstretched means both *Please help*
And *Hold on tight*. That hope is everything
In a corner. That we'll blast our way out.

The Facts of Life

Haven't you people heard of lesbians? What's up
With this school? Where are the hockey skirts,
The shortie pyjamas, the barely clad girls?
I expect a little more titillation

Before some saccharine lesson is learnt
About friendship or sharing or the value
Of work. I'm not like the others— I'm a new
Kind of girl: part tomboy, part mechanic, part

Up to no good. Give me the airhead with boobs
For a roomie— I know we'll get on, Toots.
The blonde and the fat chick can bring up the rear;

I'll show them how we do things in the Bronx.
We've all got the same parts under the hood—
And I'm handy with a toolbox. I think I'll like it here.

Quantum Leap

Home is a shape I don't remember any more,
Between an ocean and a tree. The newspaper tells me
The date, I just live it. My time isn't mine

Any more than the air a sparrow breathes
Is the sparrow's— the scarf I lost when I was six,
My wife's face, the number of stars on the flag

In 1804: all data. Yesterday it was snowing in Russia
On the onion domes— my new moustache twitched
As my love interest rose from an Empire couch,

A czarina with trust issues. If I knew which button
To press, I wouldn't be here. Take me away
From the whirlpool bath of existence, old friend—

I can't predict the birth rate of insects or make a gun
Out of cardboard. My torso is disproportionately
Long. When I look in the mirror, somebody else's

Face looks back at me. What's that about? Take my
Six PhDs, my California tan, my ambiguous manbag
And freeze-dried hair— there aren't enough wontons in China

To fill the holes in my memory, like a song played back
At the wrong speed. I think of inventing the pizza
Or stopping the H-bomb. I think about baseball

In summer, the smell of cut grass. Home
Is a set dressed to look like a cornfield— sun
In the sky, going nowhere fast.

Love in a Dorm

Down the hall
The hot girl is doing yoga
While you sleep.

The imprint
Of the desk organizer—
Temporary tattoo.

Maybe your poster
Of a male genius
Could be accidentally sprayed with beer.

Like a salmon in a rucksack.

The Americans

We worshipped at the altar of the free-market gods.
We played by the rules, or what we said the rules should be.
We plundered the tundra for convenient foodstuffs,
Then plastered the wildlife with banner ads.

Our temples were bedecked with corn dogs and Stetsons.
Our rifles were fired whenever we damn well pleased.
Our sentimental journey went from slavery to *Playboy*.
The bones of our dead made a hearty winter stew.

We amortized our relatives to discount their value.
We leveraged our citizens for maximum return.
The mantra of our virtue was recited in our boardrooms.
Our factories made cancer, but we didn't really care.

We vanquished our rivals with smallpox and lattes.
Our dollars were laundered with mass-produced tears.
The future was bright as a nuclear reaction.
We roamed the earth like dinosaurs in our giant SUVs.

Castle of Owls

       across the bare, bare floor   nothing moves

no whisker   on their perches tiny hooks

       from which hang trophies   scraps of 16 recipes for goat

a ribbon   they communicate with each other

       through telepathy   castle of silence

sideways eye movements   under their wings austere pockets

       holding pictures of their children   no smiling

At the Dog Show

A crate of placid collies beckoned me. Behind the scenes
Dogs were being blow-dried left and right, dogs were flying

High as their flowing locks waved in the breeze, dogs
Were jogging on treadmills for a little exercise and improved

Muscle tone, dogs were standing on tables with a paw raised,
Getting their nails filed. Their people were plying tall cans

Of hairspray or kirby grips or giving them oversized chews
Made of cow ears or wrapping their feet in chamois squares

To keep them clean. There was a standard poodle looking typically
Sinister and a chihuahua not much bigger than a pork chop. There

Were plenty of boxers milling about and a gang of pugs
Hogging the water bowl. I was looking for my friend Joe

Whose dog Señor Queso wasn't here but who was a stringer
For a national newspaper, on assignment to interview a famous

Dachshund. When I found them, the dachshund was reclining
On a dachshund-sized sofa (a gift from an admirer). Its

Auburn hide glowed in the spotlight held by an assistant
As its picture was taken. It nodded sagely at a proffered

Biscuit. As I gazed into its liquid eyes it seemed to be
Pondering humanity's obsession with arbitrary standards

Of beauty, or just wondering where its dinner was. Behind
A screen dogs were getting leg massages and holistic

Skin treatments, other dogs were watching TV shows on
Tablet computers and scratching their noses, dogs were sprawled

On the floor like beached whales, lightly snoring. Their paws
Twitched in their sleep with dreams of squirrels.

Dames Don't Care

If you give them flowers, they'll chew them up
And use the stems for floss. If you cuddle them
Like kittens and fall asleep, they'll bite your arms off.
You just can't win with dames. They don't give a damn
How big your car is. They don't care if you have
A hot bod or a Swiss chalet. They don't want to hear about
How hard your life is or what happened to you
When you were ten. There's just no pleasing a dame.
Everybody knows they're a different species. They live
In underground tunnels like moles. They eat raw lamb
And fetuses for breakfast— dames are sneaky like that.
They steal candy from blind people. They hide money
In their hair. They write poems to trick you into thinking
They're soft. Everybody knows you can't trust them.
Deep in their subterranean chambers, dames are busy
Hatching plans. They're grooming more dames
To take over. They're causing earthquakes in Venice.
They're marking troop movements with drawing pins
On oversized maps. They're wearing lingerie
Under Kevlar. They're taking their revenge.

The Detectives

No matter where we go, it always looks like California.
Get in the car and drive. Our invisible friend
Comes with us everywhere, like a shadow.
He tells us how to keep moving on. We're haunted

By news of the absurd, by doors without locks, by bottles
Rattling in six-packs like bones. The game of
What's behind the dumpster. The game of *Don't be*
Such a dick. Behind every door is another

Motel room: light as a feather, stiff as a board,
No place for the weary. By the time you read this
We'll be gone. We can play air guitar for hours.
We can go anywhere, as long as it's east.

The needle points a finger, the birds in the sky
Make a V, the road to hell is paved with fresh
Burritos. The case of *The unwashed thermos.* The case
Of *Sit and spin.* Behind every day is another

Freaking day: trail of breadcrumbs, devil dog, a long
Line of shrunken heads. We study the book
Where all the words are written down. We follow
The script. There are more endings than we remember.

Ten Scenes From an Exhibition (Part 2)

6.

Big as a house,
Eyed up and down. A woman
Carved out of
A sugar block, gargantuan.
Around her heels bacteria form—
Slow and green, not a metaphor.

7.

Crochet Molotov cocktail.
Crochet sausages and eggs.
Display of sweets that would be in a corner
Shop, crocheted. The stitches
Perfectly even in allure, an armour
Of yarn, little miracle.

8.

Birch trees in porcelain. Just the trunks,
With all the bark smoothed down. Slim hands,
Columns— an ear curved,
Three soldiers. Cross-section
Of the middle: filled with
Coloured glass like jelly.

9.

The girls
Are looking down
At the bottom of the frame. Two heads
Identical— eyelids, short curls, silvery cheeks
Pressed together. They might be crying.
Cut to letters on a cliff spelling ECHO.

10.

If you walk into the door
Lined with fake fur, it's a tunnel.
Birdsong and electronic
Voices, paper clocks.
When you leave, it's like being born—
A buzzer sounds, then nothing.

A Short History of Silence

In our house, all the clocks are turned off and the mirrors
Don't work. We sit like bread in a stay-fresh wrapper,
Keep ourselves to *our selves*. Sometimes the speeches
Are so beautiful it hurts. On the porch where we can't be

Seen to smile, the honeysuckle meshes with silent
Weeds. We rock back and forth, back and forth in our long
Black dresses. Mosquitoes taste our blood and find it good.

Inside, candles are lit every night and keep going
Until they burn themselves down. We kiss our fingers
To our lips like Italians, promise we'll never look back.
Whip-poor-will. When the doorbell rings we don't answer.

In winter, the fur grows long on the horses and the ice
Grows long on the eaves. We sleep in the same bed
Like good animals, braid our hair together, tailor
Our limbs to fit. *Conspiracy of wood*.

NOTES

'Discipline': The title is taken from the painting *Discipline* (2013), by Kirsten Glass, which initially prompted the poem.

'A Short History of Style': The opening of this poem was prompted by the painting *Portrait of Madame X* (1884), by John Singer Sargent.

'Rabbit Empire': This poem was inspired by David Lynch's 2006 film *Inland Empire.*

'A Short History of Violence': The opening of this poem was prompted by the 2012 painting *Brujas en el Aire*, by José Carlos Naranjo.

'Scenes From *Sherlock Holmes and the Pearl of Death*': The title *Sherlock Holmes and the Pearl of Death* is taken from the 1944 film of the same name, directed by Roy William Neill.

'Installation': This poem was inspired by the work of David Escalona, as shown at Copperfield Gallery, London, in 2016 and elsewhere.

'Under the Ground': This poem was written for but not published in *Poetry Ireland Review,* for a special issue in memory of Seamus Heaney. I used the end words of Heaney's poem 'The Underground' and incorporated them into a new poem of my own, but took liberties with a few of his end words (e.g., 'and head' instead of 'ahead').

'Ten Scenes From an Exhibition, Parts 1 and 2': Some of the works described in this poem are loosely derived from pieces by Félix González-Torres, Scott Holt, Hilma af Klint, Rachel Maclean, Pipilotti Rist, and Kara Walker; others are wholly imaginary.

'Castle of Owls': The title is taken from the Japanese ninja-genre film *Castle of Owls* (1963), directed by Eiichi Kudo.

'Dames Don't Care': The title is taken from the 1937 pulp fiction novel *Dames Don't Care*, by Peter Cheyney.

The Dramatic Monologue in Contemporary American Poetry:
Persona, Identity, Performativity (critical component)

Introduction

My interest in making a critical study of the dramatic monologue grew out of my practice as a poet. Although much of the creative component for this thesis consists of poems written in the third person, the dramatic monologue continues to form an intrinsic part of my practice. It was the fictive aspects of the dramatic monologue that initially attracted me, both as a reader and as a writer: the fact that the speaker of a dramatic monologue could be anyone—even an animal or inanimate object—anywhere, in any time period. Poems such as Lucie Brock-Broido's 'Jessica, from the Well' (written in the voice of a baby whose 58-hour-long rescue from a well captivated the American media), James Dickey's 'The Sheep Child' (partly spoken by a half-human, half-sheep mutant), and Sylvia Plath's 'Mushrooms' (in the collective voice of the eponymous fungi) seemed far more imaginative than an earnest personal lyric or a narrative of everyday life. The creative freedom available to the writer of a dramatic monologue appealed to me as a practitioner, as did the inhabiting of different identities through artifice and 'dressing up'.[1] The sense that I could express some of my own emotions more readily through another character—what Oscar Wilde called the truth of masks—also drew me to the dramatic monologue.

In this essay, which forms the critical component of my thesis, I will consider the dramatic monologue as an alternative to lyric through the work of three contemporary American poets: Lucie Brock-Broido, Mary Szybist, and Terrance Hayes. My focus will be on the nature of the persona in the dramatic monologue, the relationship between the persona and the writer of the dramatic monologue, and the ways in which the dramatic

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[1] During this period at university I had a strong interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and the history of dress, as well as designing costumes for many student theatre productions.

monologue challenges and subverts the personal lyric.[2] My methodology will be drawn

from what is broadly termed queer theory, particularly the work of Judith Butler on

performativity and the construction of gender and sexual identities, work which is itself

derived from poststructuralist theory. I will discuss the practices of camp, drag, and

female masquerade in order to demonstrate how identity is fabricated through

performance in the dramatic monologue. Lastly, I will propose that the dramatic

monologue offers writers a powerful alternative to lyric because it enables them to escape

from the constraints of their given social identities.

      In the first chapter of this essay, on Brock-Broido's 1995 collection of dramatic

monologues, *The Master Letters*, I will argue that the persona in the contemporary

dramatic monologue embodies the poststructuralist view of the subject as essentially

fragmented and unstable, as well as the queer theorists' understanding of identity as

contingent, groundless, and constituted through performance.[3] The fractured and

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[2] My understanding of the personal lyric in this essay—as a poetic mode that features the expression of the writer's own thoughts and feelings to represent his or her given identity—is based on Virginia Jackson's article 'Lyric', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn, ed. by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, and others (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 826-34. See the next section of this Introduction for a further discussion of lyric.

[3] On the poststructuralist view of the subject as fragmented and unstable, see Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, 'The Subject', in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 123-26. Rice and Waugh note:

> The notion of the 'subject' has proved crucial to the Post-Structuralist enterprise; the concept can be traced in most varieties of Post-Structuralism and acts as a focal point for the critique of humanist ideology. [...] Humanist ideology depends upon a fundamental assumption about the primacy of the autonomous and unified individual. [...] Post-Structuralism has sought to disrupt this man-centred [*sic.*] view of the world, arguing that [...] rather than being fixed and unified, the subject is split, unstable or fragmented. (p. 123)

Nikki Sullivan, in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 41, observes, 'There are a range of poststructuralist accounts of subjectivity, but what each shares is a rejection of the belief that the subject is autonomous, unified, self-knowing, and static'. Catherine Belsey, in *Post-Structuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), discusses Kristeva, Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault and concludes, '[S]ubjected by meanings outside its control and even its consciousness, divided against itself as the effect of a loss, the subject of poststructuralism is neither unified nor an origin' (p. 65).

      On the queer theorists' understanding of identity as contingent, groundless, and constituted through performance, see Sullivan, 'Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics', pp. 81-98: 'There is not first an "I" who performs, rather, the "I" is constituted in and through performance processes [...,] constituted in and through action rather than being the origin and cause of action' (p. 89). Judith Butler, in 'Imitation and Gender Subordination', in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. by Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 300-15, notes, '[T]here is no "I" that precedes the gender that it is said to perform'; there is only 'a string of performances that constitute [...] the coherence of that "I" ' (p.

provisional speakers of such dramatic monologues can be read as subjects arising out of

poetic discourse, in contrast to the lyric 'I', which is read as representing the stable,

unified 'self' of the humanist tradition.[4] Furthermore, I will explore how *The Master Letters*

exemplifies Butler's analysis of gender and identity as not only contingent and

groundless, but also constituted by a sustained set of acts.[5] Identity itself is a fabrication,

an illusion constructed by such acts. Butler's ideas are demonstrated by the persona who

speaks *The Master Letters*, a female subject who is brought into being over the course of

the collection through the accumulation of the acts of speaking she performs. The

persona's identity is constructed by the accretion of statements, images, and actions in

the poems she speaks, i.e., by her performance of the poems. In the contemporary

dramatic monologue, the persona does not pre-exist the poem;[6] rather, like the subject

posited by Butler, it is always provisional and in process, constituted through its

performance in the poem. The fabricated, ever changing nature of the persona represents

a challenge to the hegemony of lyric and its supposedly sincere expression of a stable,

unified self.

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304). See also's Butler's works *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1999); 'Critically Queer', in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 223-42; and 'Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 121-40. Anna Livia and Kira Hall's chapter ' "It's a Girl!": Bringing Performativity Back to Linguistics', in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 3-18, also addresses this topic.

[4] On the idea of the poststructuralist subject as provisional and arising out of discourse, see Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs "Identity"?', in *Identity: A Reader* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 15-30. Citing Foucault, Hall writes, 'The subject is produced "as an effect" through and within discourse, [...] and has no existence, and certainly no transcendental continuity or identity from one subject position to another' (p. 23). On the poststructuralist subject versus the humanist 'self', see Rice and Waugh; Sullivan, 'Queer: A Question of Being or a Question of Doing?', pp. 37-56; Belsey, pp. 65-73; Hans Bertens, 'Derrida, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism', in *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 103-112; and Livia and Hall.

[5] In *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that the 'gendered self' is structured by acts 'that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity' where there is none; she adds, '[T]he *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity' (emphasis in original, p. 179). In the book's preface, she writes of gender identity, '[W]hat we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts' (p. xv).

[6] As Herbert F. Tucker observes: '[W]hile texts do not absolutely lack speakers, they do not simply have them either, they invent them as they go. Texts do not come from speakers, speakers come from texts'. From 'Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric', in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. by Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 226-43 (p. 243).

In the second chapter of this essay, on Szybist's 2013 collection, *Incarnadine*, I will examine the complexities of the relationship between the persona and the writer of the dramatic monologue. The writer's creation of another (or an Other) 'I' involves a kind of ventriloquism, the speaking of the poem as an 'I' who is not oneself. I will use the term 'strange' (from the Latin *extraneus*, meaning external; *extra* derives from the same root) to describe the peculiarities of this relationship.[7] The persona is a 'strange' entity, external to the writer, an extra 'I'; yet at the same time, persona and writer are intimately connected. In *Incarnadine*, this relationship is dramatized in a series of poems about the Annunciation through the characters of Mary and Gabriel. I will argue that Mary and Gabriel can be seen as figures for the persona and the writer, respectively. The Mary persona is shown to be a kind of drag identity for Gabriel, suggesting that the creation or fabrication of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue is like the wearing of drag for the writer. Persona as drag is one of the ways in which the relationship between the persona and the writer is 'strange'.

Another element of 'strange'-ness lies in the paradoxical status of the persona, the other 'I': it is connected with yet external to the writer, similar yet different, attached yet separate. In the poems of Brock-Broido, Szybist, and Hayes, this paradoxical relationship is embodied by the figures of the ventriloquist's dummy (in *The Master Letters*), the distorted reflection (in *Incarnadine*), and the severed head (in Hayes's 2010 collection, *Lighthead*). Each of these tropes demonstrates how the persona created by the writer turns out to be something 'strange' or alien (which is another meaning of the word *strange*), estranged from the writer. There is an unsettling sense that the persona might escape from its creator's control and take on a life of its own, like Frankenstein's

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[7] 'Strange', in *Oxford Dictionaries* <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/strange> [accessed 29 November 2016]. I could call this quality of 'strange'-ness 'uncanny', but the Freudian associations of that word are too established to be set aside. 'Queer' would also convey the appropriate sense of 'strange'-ness, but again the word's applications in critical theory, and in the real world, cannot be detached from it.

monster. This 'strange' quality, I will suggest, is characteristic of the contemporary dramatic monologue.

In the third chapter of this essay, on Hayes's *Lighthead*, I will consider how the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue is 'strange' because it stands outside, is external to, both the 'I' of the traditional dramatic monologue and the lyric 'I'. The 'I' of the contemporary dramatic monologue does not quite fit into either of these categories; it is 'strange'-ly ambiguous, neither wholly dramatic nor wholly lyric. In *Lighthead* Hayes blurs the boundaries between the dramatic monologue and lyric with speakers whose identities are indeterminate. The 'I' in these poems, even when apparently autobiographical, still exists somewhere at a remove from Hayes himself; what seems at first to be a lyric poem turns out to be, perhaps, a dramatic monologue, and vice versa. Hayes's 'strange' personae are hybrids, partly fictional and partly autobiographical; their fluidity of identity resists classification. For the writer of the contemporary dramatic monologue, fabricating such personae can be a subversive way to avoid speaking as a lyric 'I'.

Finally, I will suggest that the contemporary dramatic monologue affords writers a valuable alternative to lyric because it allows them to escape from the bounds of their given identities. Where the personal lyric can be seen as an expression of the writer's own feelings and experiences, representing his or her given identity, the dramatic monologue grants free rein to the writer's imagination. Both the legacy of Confessional poetry,[8] with its emphasis on autobiographical subject matter and authenticity, and the development in recent decades of what has been called identity politics have contributed to the dominance of the personal lyric in American poetry. Against this backdrop, the dramatic

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[8] See Susan Rosenbaum, 'Confessional Poetry', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn, ed. by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, and others (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 335-37; and Jahan Ramazani, 'Deep Image Poetry and Confessional Poetry', in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, ed. by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), II, pp. lii-liv.

monologue can enable contemporary writers to evade the categories of identity that they occupy in the social realm, whether in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or any other category. The construction of an alternative identity in the dramatic monologue provides a strategy for escaping from expectations and assumptions, however well meant, that are based on the writer's given identity. For instance, Claudia Rankine and Harryettte Mullen have each commented on 'the complexities of writing as a black woman' by observing that

> although they inevitably are writing from this specific subject position, to allow this fact to determine meaning in the work, or to imagine that readers occupying other social spaces cannot participate in the text, is to mistake an open text for a closed set of identity markers.[9]

While Rankine and Mullen take various measures in their work to prevent reductive readings of it (such as writing in the second-person voice and employing experimental forms like the lyric essay), I would argue that the dramatic monologue is a particularly useful method of resisting the identity markers with which writers may be labelled. To break away from the lyric 'I', from the constraints of the poet's given identity, in the dramatic monologue is a freedom some writers are rarely granted in the real world.

I should add that Butler's view of identity as groundless and constituted through performance applies to both the speaker of the dramatic monologue and the lyric 'I'; regardless of the poetic mode, the writer cannot be a stable referent for the 'I' of the poem, as his or her own identity is only produced as an effect through and within discourse. In other words, even the lyric 'I' does not represent a stable identity or 'self', rather, it is an illusion constituted through the discourse of the lyric poem.[10] But in the social realm, the writer cannot help but occupy a given identity based on categories that

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[9] Amy Moorman Robbins, 'Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*: A Lyrical Language Poet in a Post-Language Age', in *American Hybrid Poetics: Gender, Mass Culture, and Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), pp. 124-49 (pp. 131-32).

[10] Despite Butler's theories, however, in the social realm we tend to view one another as having stable, unified identities, which are in turn usually assumed to be expressed in lyric poems, hence the difficulty of discussing the lyric 'I' accurately.

include gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and so forth. This given identity can be said to be represented by the lyric 'I'. In this context, the dramatic monologue offers a means of occupying an alternative identity and evading the limitations of the writer's given identity. In the dramatic monologue, the speaker of the poem, unlike the lyric 'I', is understood as distinct from the writer's given identity in the social realm.

In the following sections of this Introduction, I will briefly summarize the recent debates around lyric in American poetry and the existing critical literature on the dramatic monologue. This will provide a foundation for my discussion of the contemporary dramatic monologue in the rest of this essay.

1. Lyric and Its Discontents

While the definition of lyric has often been contested by critics, Virginia Jackson surveys the history of the genre in the 2012 *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* and concludes:

> In modernity, the term is used for a kind of poem that expresses personal feeling (G. W. F. Hegel) in a concentrated and harmoniously arranged form (E. A. Poe, S. T. Coleridge) [...] [I]t remains the normative model for the production and reception of most poetry.[11]

Jackson states that the modern definition of lyric, or what may be called the personal lyric, describes poems that are 'brief, personal, and expressive'.[12] For example, T. S. Eliot, in the 1957 essay 'The Three Voices of Poetry', refers to lyric as 'the expression of the poet's own thoughts and feelings'.[13] Similarly, the influential American critic M. H. Abrams, in the 1953 essay 'The Lyric as Poetic Norm', defines the subject matter of lyric

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[11] Jackson, pp. 826 and 833.
[12] Jackson, pp. 826-27.
[13] Jackson, p. 833. See T. S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp. 192-200 (p.197).

as 'principally the author's own feelings'.[14] More recently, in their introduction to the essay collection *Radiant Lyre*, David Baker and Ann Townsend note that lyric traditionally 'functions to identify and probe the perceptions of the self; [...] it is, literally, a song of that self'.[15] My references to lyric in this essay will be based on an understanding of lyric as expressing the writer's thoughts and feelings to represent his or her given identity.

This type of lyric poem—variously dubbed the personal lyric, the expressive lyric, and the personally expressive lyric—has become the norm or mainstream against which American avant-garde movements have positioned themselves during the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As Jackson and Yopie Prins observe in the essay 'Avant-Garde Anti-Lyricism', by the end of the twentieth century there was 'general agreement that the lyric had become the icon of what [Language poet] Charles Bernstein famously called "official verse culture" '.[16] Jackson and Prins cite the 1988 article 'Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto' as an example of attempted resistance to the dominance of lyric. In this co-authored manifesto, Language poets Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten state that certain 'mainstream literary norms have been maintained over the last twenty years [... during] which the "personal", expressive lyric has been held up as the canonical poetic form'.[17] Craig Dworkin holds lyric in similar disdain in the *Ubuweb Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, remarking, 'Poetry expresses the emotional truth of the self [...] Or at least that's the story we've inherited from Romanticism, handed down for over 200 years in a caricatured and mummified ethos'.[18] Gillian White sums up the situation in her 2014

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[14] M. H. Abrams, 'The Lyric as Poetic Norm', in Jackson and Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 140-43 (p. 141).

[15] David Baker and Ann Townsend, 'Introduction', in *Radiant Lyre: Essays on Lyric Poetry* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2007), pp. xi-xvi (p. xiv).

[16] Jackson and Prins, 'Avant-Garde Anti-Lyricism', in Jackson and Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 451-59 (p. 452).

[17] Jackson and Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader*, p. 451-52. See Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, and others, 'Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto', in *Social Text*, 19/20 (Autumn 1988), pp. 261-75 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466189>.

[18] Jackson, 'Lyric', p. 833.

study, *Lyric Shame*, by noting that 'avant-garde anti-lyricism [is] now forty years in the making'.[19] The fact that self-described avant-garde poets have, since about the 1970s, considered the personal lyric to be the mainstream form that they oppose speaks to the long-term dominance of lyric in American poetry.

In the last ten to fifteen years, a new critical discourse around 'hybridity' has arisen in which a number of contemporary American poets are said to be applying some of the techniques and principles of Language and other avant-garde poetries to lyric, resulting in what has been called the hybrid or postmodern lyric. This concept has already produced anthologies (*Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries* and *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*), articles and critical studies (*Radiant Lyre: Essays on Lyric Poetry*; *Lyric Shame: The "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry*; and *American Hybrid Poetics: Gender, Mass Culture, and Form*), and a 2010 conference at Columbia University titled Rethinking Poetics.[20] However, the notion of a new hybridity itself depends on a familiar view of American poetry's recent past in which the mainstream, represented by the personal lyric, was challenged by an avant-garde, primarily consisting of Language poetry—'the two camps that dominated American poetry', as one of the editors of *American Hybrid* describes it.[21] White likewise depicts 'a decades-long discursive gridlock in the field of contemporary poetics' that existed between the two camps and reached its height in the 1980s and 1990s,[22] a situation sometimes referred to as the 'poetry wars'. The hybrid lyric of the twenty-first century

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[19] Gillian White, 'Introduction', in *Lyric Shame: The "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 1-41 (p.4).
[20] Other critical works on hybridity, although they do not use the term, include Stephen Burt's article 'Smokes: Susan Wheeler', in *Boston Review*, 23.2 (Summer 1998) <http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR23.3/burt.html> [accessed 15 March 2015], in which he coins the term Ellipticism, and his essay 'The Elliptical Poets', in *Close Calls With Nonsense: Reading New Poetry* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2009), pp. 345-55; and Reginald Shepherd's introduction to the anthology *Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries* (Denver: Counterpath Press, 2008), pp. xi-xvi.
[21] Swensen, Cole, 'Introduction', in *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*, ed. by Cole Swensen and David St. John (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), pp. xvii-xxvi (p. xx).
[22] White, p. 16.

essentially represents a truce or accommodation between the personal lyric and Language poetry. While such hybridity may signal a new movement or trend, it does nothing to unseat lyric as the dominant mode of American poetry; if anything, it reinforces the centrality of lyric by bringing it up to date with contemporary readers' tastes.

In light of the long-running critical attention to Language poetry and mainstream lyric, as well as the current activity around the hybrid lyric, it could be argued that the dramatic monologue's place in American poetry has been overlooked. The works that I will examine in this essay emerged against the backdrop of the 'poetry wars' and the subsequent rise of the hybrid lyric, and could be said to form a subversive alternative to these other types of poetry.

2. The Dramatic Monologue as Dramatic-Lyric Hybrid

The first major study of the dramatic monologue is Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957), which covers the genre from what Langbaum sees as its invention in the Victorian period by Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson through its modernization by Ezra Pound and Eliot. As the book's title indicates, Langbaum coins the term 'poetry of experience' to describe what he considers to be a post-Enlightenment development in English literature: poems that emphasize 'experience' rather than 'ideas' or analytical reflections.[23] The aim of such poems is 'self-realization' or the 'discovery of the self' (25). Rather surprisingly, Langbaum finds both the Romantic lyric, represented by William Wordsworth and John Keats, and the Victorian dramatic monologue to be examples of the poetry of experience. In Langbaum's view, the dramatic monologue is in fact a dramatic-lyric

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[23] Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 28. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

hybrid: the dramatic situation of the poem—its narrative quality and provision of historical context—is simply the occasion for 'a total outpouring of soul', in other words, the expression of the 'self' that we associate with lyric (183). The trappings of the dramatic monologue serve 'an ultimately self-expressive or lyrical purpose', creating a framework within which a fictional character can express his or her thoughts and feelings (182). The persona in the dramatic monologue, like the writer of a lyric poem, speaks autobiographically of his or her experiences; but what Langbaum fails to consider is that the persona's words have been produced by the writer of the dramatic monologue. This act of ventriloquism—the writer's creation of another 'I', the speaking as an 'I' who is not oneself—is the 'strange'-ness I wish to explore in the following chapters of this essay.

Instead of Langbaum's analysis of the dramatic monologue as a dramatic-lyric hybrid, most critics have focused on his thesis that the dramatic monologue centres around a tension between 'sympathy' and 'moral judgment' in the reader (85). To take the example of Browning's 'My Last Duchess', Langbaum believes that readers choose to suspend their moral judgement in order to understand or sympathize with the Duke, despite his evil nature. Langbaum characterizes the dramatic monologue as a mode that foregrounds '[e]xtraordinary moral positions and extraordinary emotions', citing works by Algernon Swinburne, E. A. Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Eliot, and Pound (93). On the one hand, it is true that some dramatic monologues, from the Victorian era to the present, portray what could be called extraordinary points of view.[24] On the other hand, Langbaum's narrow definition of the dramatic monologue as (a)

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[24] Notable modern and contemporary examples include Dickey's 'The Sheep Child' and 'Falling' (narrated by a flight attendant who accidentally falls out of a plane to her death), Brock-Broido's 'Jessica, from the Well' and 'Elective Mutes' (in the voice of one of the murderous Gibbons twins, who were incarcerated in Broadmoor), Frank Bidart's 'Ellen West' (spoken by a severely anorexic patient who commits suicide), Ai's 'The Kid' (in the voice of a boy who has just killed his family), Carol Ann Duffy's 'Education for Leisure (spoken by a potential serial killer), and Jo Shapcott's 'Mad Cow Dance' (in the voice of a cow with mad-cow disease).

involving a tension between the reader's sympathy and judgement and (b) depicting extraordinary emotions does not apply to many other dramatic monologues, including the contemporary examples that I will discuss in this essay.

3. The Dramatic Monologue as Lyric-Narrative Hybrid

Alan Sinfield's 1977 monograph, *Dramatic Monologue*, is the next extended study of the genre and ranges from the Romantic period (Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Burns) through the Victorian to Modernism, as represented again by Pound and Eliot. Sinfield defines the dramatic monologue as a poem in the first person spoken by someone who is not the poet, whereas in a lyric poem the speaker is presumed to be the poet him- or herself. The dramatic monologue is also differentiated from third-person narrative because it is written in the first person. At the same time, however, it is similar to third-person narrative because it features a fictional character (the persona) and, by implication, a fictional world. The dramatic monologue thus 'lurks provocatively between these two forms', namely, lyric and narrative.[25] The fact that the dramatic monologue can be described as a lyric-narrative hybrid gives it a divided quality that Sinfield calls 'feigning', after Käte Hamburger's use of the term in her work on narrative. According to Sinfield, 'dramatic monologue feigns because it pretends to be something other than it is: an invented speaker masquerades in the first person[,] which customarily signifies the poet's voice' (25). The dramatic monologue as a form of feigning is a compelling idea that Sinfield fails to develop adequately. I would argue that the creation of the invented speaker, the persona, by the writer of the dramatic monologue requires further investigation; the writer's act of feigning, of masquerading as another identity, is related

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[25] Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen and Company, 1977), p. 24. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

to the concepts of camp and drag that I will examine in this essay. Identity as itself a feint or fiction is also a concept that will be central to my argument.

Like Langbaum's, Sinfield's analysis of the dramatic monologue is limited in its scope and relevance. Sinfield views the dramatic monologue as merely a means for the writer to express him- or herself through the guise of another, a form of 'oblique self-expression'; the persona amounts to nothing more than 'a convenient vehicle for the poet's opinions'.[26] Such a conception is insufficient to depict the complexity of the relationship between the persona and the writer of the contemporary dramatic monologue. Another part of Sinfield's thesis proposes that readers of a dramatic monologue experience what he terms a divided consciousness: they sense the speaker of the poem as 'a character in his [*sic*] own right', while at the same time 'sensing the author's voice through him' (32, 25). While Sinfield focuses on the allegedly divided consciousness of the reader, he ignores the fact that it is the writer whose awareness must be divided when composing a dramatic monologue. Sinfield's theories fail to account for the nuances of the writer's role because he assumes that the persona is simply a mouthpiece through which the writer can express his or her thoughts. The fabrication of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue, however, is more complex than this. As both a practitioner and a critic, I hope to bring my insights as a writer to bear on the workings of the dramatic monologue in this essay in a way that critics like Sinfield cannot.

4. The Persona as a Bivalent Subject

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[26] Sinfield, pp. 59 and 25. In the case of dramatic monologues with disagreeable speakers, like Browning's Duke or Tennyson's St Simeon Stylites, Sinfield asserts that they still 'promot[e] the poet's views [...] by making the reader react against the speaker' (p. 14).

Loy D. Martin's *Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (1985) employs a more sophisticated methodology in its treatment of the genre. Martin considers the dramatic monologue to be a form of discourse that constitutes a subject whose nature is contradictory and bivalent—namely, the persona. While we tend to think of the persona and the writer as what Martin calls discrete, mutually excluding entities, neither actually exists as a discrete entity within the dramatic monologue: they are merely voices, 'in some sense [...] both different and the same'.[27] Martin concludes:

> One of [the dramatic monologue's] effects is to divide the subjectivity of poetic discourse [...] There is still only one discourse that constructs and locates its subject; all we can say is that the subject is bivalent, split but not multiplied.

The bivalent subject constructed by the dramatic monologue's 'discursive unfolding' is the persona, who in some sense combines the voices of the poet and the persona (34).

Martin's understanding of the persona as a subject constructed by and within the discourse of the dramatic monologue is a significant advance on that of earlier critics like Langbaum and Sinfield. I would agree that the persona is constructed through the dramatic monologue's discursive unfolding, i.e., that it comes into being over the course of the poem. Martin further observes that while the persona is a divided, bivalent subject, it creates the illusion of being the epitome of 'coherent Cartesian selfhood' within the poem (164). I will similarly characterize the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue as non-unitary and revealing in its operations that the humanist conception of the self is an illusion. Finally, Martin's concept of the persona as split but not multiplied,[28] both different and the same, in some ways resembles my analysis of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue. I will suggest that the persona has a

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[27] Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 110. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.
[28] Although Martin's notion of bivalent subjectivity appears to be drawn from psychoanalysis, I will not be using psychoanalytic theory as a methodology in this essay.

'strange', paradoxical nature, being different from yet similar to the writer's given identity, separate yet not independent.

5. The Dramatic Monologue as an Alternative to Lyric

Glennis Byron's 2003 monograph, *Dramatic Monologue*, offers a comprehensive survey of the critical writings on the genre. Byron depicts the previous literature on the dramatic monologue as largely consisting of unproductive attempts to define the genre. She concludes that the dramatic monologue is now generally believed to have originated in the early nineteenth century in relation to, or in reaction against, the Romantic lyric and Romantic theories of poetry. The dramatic monologue signified a move 'away from the Romantic emphasis on the subjective, on the poet's own experience and emotions, and towards the exploration of a more objectively perceived world, of what is external to the poet's mind'.[29] In short, writers seem to have turned to the dramatic monologue as an alternative to the Romantic lyric.

Byron notes a change in critical approaches to the dramatic monologue in the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted from the poststructuralist critique of 'the idea of the autonomous self' and an accompanying interest in how subjects are constituted (24). For instance, Herbert F. Tucker and Isobel Armstrong have described the early monologues of Tennyson and Browning as subverting the Romantic idea that poetry expresses 'something sincere, some emotional truth' (41). The Romantic model of the self as an autonomous centre of experience is challenged by the Victorian dramatic monologue, which constructs a fictional 'self' (the persona) who is in fact a subject, the fragmented product of various social and historical forces or discourses. In this way the dramatic

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[29] Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 35. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

monologue can be said to expose the illusory nature of the stable, unified Romantic self. Where the Romantic lyric claims to features the authentic and sincere expression of the poet's thoughts and emotions, the Victorian dramatic monologue does not express the poet's own experiences, but rather portrays a fictional, fragmented subject who has been produced by discourse. This account of the Victorian dramatic monologue anticipates some parts of my argument in this essay: that the contemporary dramatic monologue embodies the poststructuralist view of the subject as fragmented and unstable,[30] and that it represents an alternative to the personal lyric.

Byron also points to Wilde's critical writings on 'the mask' as a refutation of lyric sincerity. In the essay 'The Critic as Artist', Wilde states, 'What we call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities'.[31] Insincerity—the wearing of various masks—is a way of evading limitations, allowing writers to escape both 'the general constraints of life and the specific restrictions of their own civilisation' (112). The multiple 'personalities' or identities made possible by masks provide an alternative to the single, unified self implied by lyric sincerity. Wilde also remarks on the paradoxical relationship between writers and their masks, which he refers to as the truth of masks: namely, that the mask reveals the wearer's secret, hidden identity even as it conceals his or her outward appearance. I would suggest that Wilde's theories of the mask can be applied to the function of the persona in the dramatic monologue; indeed, the word *persona* in Latin means the mask worn by an actor in the Classical theatre.[32] The paradoxical nature of the mask is related to my notion of the persona's 'strange'-ness,

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[30] On the poststructuralist view of the subject, see note 3 above.

[31] Byron, p. 112. See Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*, ed. by Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 241-97 <https://books.google.co.uk/books> [accessed 21 December 2016].

[32] 'Persona', in *Oxford Dictionaries* <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/persona> [accessed 29 October 2016].

while the idea of masquerade will be discussed in terms of drag and performance in the following chapters of this essay.

Like Wilde, Pound can be seen to be anticipating, to a certain degree, the conception of identity as shifting and multiple, a series of masks. Pound explains his work in the dramatic monologue with reference to masks in an essay cited by Byron:

> In the 'search for oneself,' in the search for 'sincere self-expression,' one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says 'I am' this, that, or the other thing, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing. I began this search for the real in a book called *Personae*, casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem. I continued in long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks.[33]

According to Pound, no sooner does a writer express an identity ('One says "I am" this') than he or she 'ceases to be that thing'; in other words, identity is provisional and ever changing, not fixed. The thought of 'sincere self-expression', or what could be called lyric sincerity, is so unattainable or ludicrous that Pound has to render it in scare quotes. In short, in the absence of the stable, unified self, lyric sincerity is no longer possible. For Pound, the alternative to writing lyric poems was to write the collection of dramatic monologues titled *Personae*.

6. The Modernist Dramatic Monologue

The Modernist dramatic monologues of Pound and Eliot can be considered forerunners of the contemporary dramatic monologue in some important ways. As experiments in poetic voice, they challenge naturalistic or realist conceptions of character and setting. Sinfield observes that in the Modernist dramatic monologue, '[t]he speaker and his [*sic*.] situation hang in an insubstantial void [, ...] not in a social and physical setting' (65). Evocative images, rather than historically accurate details, are employed to construct the

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[33] Byron, p. 113. Pound's extremely loose 'translations' include the dramatic monologue 'The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter'.

persona, who seems to exist in 'an undefined and elusive space', with little to no context; the emphasis is on capturing mood.[34] Rather than being a clearly defined character, the persona is suggested through the series of statements he or she makes, which consist of fragments of voice. He or she is brought into being through the accumulation of such fragments over the course of the poem. This anti-naturalistic approach to constructing the persona in the dramatic monologue continues to be practised by some poets today, including Brock-Broido, Szybist, and Hayes.

A key influence on the contemporary dramatic monologue is Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. The persona of Prufrock exemplifies Wilde's theory of the truth of masks, i.e., that the mask unwittingly reveals the writer's true identity; Prufrock's loneliness, awkwardness, and alienation, we suspect, are also Eliot's, such that Prufrock serves as his alter ego. The poems I will analyse in this essay likewise involve personae who are, in part, alter egos for their writers. Eliot's poem can be said to blur the boundaries between the dramatic monologue and lyric; it is a dramatic monologue in which the 'song of [the] self', the 'outpouring of soul' associated with lyric, is given full expression.[35] Prufrock seems to be a hybrid persona, both dramatic and lyric, fictional and autobiographical; this type of hybrid persona is characteristic of contemporary dramatic monologues, especially those of Hayes. Finally, Eliot's poem demonstrates the notion that the dramatic monologue is a discourse that constructs the identity of the persona; in other words, the persona of Prufrock only comes into being through the poem's discursive unfolding, through the performance of the poem. Identity as brought into being through performance is a central element of the contemporary dramatic monologue.

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[34] Byron, p. 114.
[35] Baker and Townsend, p. xvi; Langbaum, p. 183.

Chapter 1:

Lucie Brock-Broido's *The Master Letters*

1. Introduction

Lucie Brock-Broido's second collection, *The Master Letters*, is a book-length sequence of dramatic monologues originally inspired by three unpublished letters by Emily Dickinson. The latter are referred to by scholars as the Master Letters because each opens with the greeting 'Dear Master'; the identity of the Master remains unknown. The letters were discovered after Dickinson's death as fair copies in her hand, but whether other copies were ever sent to anyone is likewise unknown. Brock-Broido's collection contains a mixture of prose poems and lineated poems, the latter of which include what she dubs 'cracked sonnets', fourteen-line poems in free verse that employ the structure of Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnets. Some, though not all, of the poems are explicitly couched as letters to a figure called the Master. However, the persona who speaks Brock-Broido's dramatic monologues is not, as one might expect, Dickinson; rather, it is an invented figure called the Speaker, a peculiarly composite entity. As Brock-Broido explains in the Preamble to the collection, the Speaker is 'a brood of voice—a flock of women with Dickinson as mistress of the skein'.[36] A brood or flock is a single entity composed of many individuals, while a skein is a group of geese or swans.[37] Brock-Broido's Speaker is thus a single persona that incorporates multiple identities, a persona constructed or fabricated out of multiple elements.

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[36] Lucie Brock-Broido, *The Master Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. viii. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

[37] 'Skein', in *Oxford Dictionaries* <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/skein> [accessed 29 October 2016].

In this chapter I will discuss how Brock-Broido's Speaker embodies the poststructuralist understanding of identity as fragmented and provisional. Borrowing from Judith Butler's writings on gender and sexual identities,[38] I will argue that *The Master Letters* demonstrates how identity is constituted by discursive acts in the contemporary dramatic monologue. The identity of the persona is a fabrication that is contingent and groundless; in other words, the persona does not pre-exist the poem, but rather is brought into being through its performance of the poem. I will explore the idea of identity as performance in *The Master Letters* in relation to theories on gender, drag, camp, and masquerade in the works of Butler, Susan Sontag, and other critics. I will also consider how the intertextuality of *The Master Letters*, which reflects the Speaker's multiple identities, operates against the monovocal hegemony of lyric. Finally, I will argue that the contemporary dramatic monologue offers a powerful alternative to lyric by allowing the writer to imagine identity as multiple and ever changing.

2. 'Everyone & her sister': Persona and Identity

As Brock-Broido explicitly states in her Preamble, the Speaker of *The Master Letters* is a persona that incorporates 'a flock of women' and their voices, including those of Dickinson, Sappho, Anne Bradstreet, Emily Brontë, Anna Akhmatova, and Sylvia Plath (viii). This ever shifting, chameleonic persona seems to exemplify the poststructuralist view of the subject as unstable and precarious, in contrast to the 'autonomous, unified, self-knowing, and static' self of the humanist tradition.[39] Indeed, the identity of Brock-Broido's multiple-personality, polyvocal Speaker changes not only from poem to poem

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[38] Specifically, *Gender Trouble*; 'Critically Queer', in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 223-42; 'Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 121-40; and 'Imitation and Gender Subordination', in *The Second Wave*, pp. 300-15.
[39] Sullivan, p. 41.

but even from line to line: as Stephen Burt observes, 'the "I" in a single poem [in *The Master Letters*] will be sometimes a medieval monk, Anne Boleyn, or an early twentieth-century rural Southern girl, and at other moments in the same poem another historical figure, or a contemporary'.[40] Brock-Broido herself, in an interview, described the Speaker as a persona that 'constantly evolves & transforms', encompassing 'a whole little galaxy, [...] everyone & her sister'.[41] Such a persona literally contains multitudes, to borrow Walt Whitman's formulation. The radical multiplicity and mutability of the Speaker in *The Master Letters* demonstrates, within the poetic realm, how the poststructuralist model of identity as inherently fragmented and unstable can be articulated.

Brock-Broido's Speaker represents a critique of the humanist model of the self. In the Preamble to *The Master Letters* Brock-Broido writes: '*When I state myself, as a representative of the Verse—it does not mean me—but a Supposed Person*' (viii). In other words, the 'I' in these poems does not express Brock-Broido's own thoughts and feelings, as it would in the personal lyric, but rather those of a fictional persona. Brock-Broido's characterization of the persona as a 'Supposed Person', however, takes the matter a step further. It suggests that the Speaker should not simply be thought of as an imaginary person, or self, as critics usually do when writing about persona in the dramatic monologue. Instead, the Speaker is only a supposed person—a fabrication or illusion, just as selfhood in the humanist sense is an illusion. The concept of the self as an illusion, with any kind of identity as having been constructed, is discussed by Butler in relation to gender when she observes: '[G]estures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute

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[40] Stephen Burt, ' "Subject, Subjugated, Inthralled": The Selves of Lucie Brock-Broido', in *American Women Poets in the 21st Century*, ed. by Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), pp. 103-25 (p. 109). This magpie-like appropriation of identities from anywhere in time and place in some ways also recalls Frederick Jameson's definition of postmodern pastiche: '[S]peech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture'. From Pamela Robertson, 'What Makes the Feminist Camp?', in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. by Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 266-82 (p. 266).
[41] Carole Maso, 'Lucie Brock-Broido', *Bomb*, 53 (Fall 1995) <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1906> [accessed 17 March 2015]. Brock-Broido's idiosyncratic use of punctuation (including ampersands), italics, capitalization, and spelling are given as in the original throughout this essay.

the illusion of an abiding gendered self. [...] [T]he *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity' (emphasis in original).[42] And again, 'gender is a performance that *produces* the illusion of [... a] psychic gender core' (emphasis in original).[43] In short, there is no psychic core or substance we can call the self; in Butler's view, all persons are in fact 'supposed persons'. Likewise, the Speaker of *The Master Letters* offers the illusion of a 'self', but is actually constituted by an accumulation of 'gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds', namely, those of everyone and her sister.

More specifically, *The Master Letters* demonstrates that identity in the contemporary dramatic monologue is constructed through discursive acts. According to Butler, 'what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts'.[44] If this thinking is applied to the dramatic monologue, we could say that the persona, which appears to have an internal, unified identity, is simply an illusion manufactured through a sustained set of acts. And where Butler mainly expounds on bodily acts in her theorizing, in the poetic realm any 'acts' that take place must occur—can only occur—within and through discourse. The acts that constitute the persona in the dramatic monologue are discursive acts, i.e., acts of speaking: the accumulated acts of the persona speaking the poem.[45] The persona does not pre-exist the poem, but rather is brought into being through the performance of the poem. Or, as Butler puts it, 'there is no performer prior to the performed'.[46] The persona of the Speaker in *The Master Letters* exemplifies the notion that identity in the contemporary dramatic monologue is groundless and fabricated through an accumulation of discursive acts.

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[42] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 179.
[43] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 312.
[44] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xv.
[45] I use the expression 'acts of speaking' in this essay to avoid conflation with J. L. Austin's term 'speech acts', which has its own precise meaning in linguistics and in the field of performativity mined by Butler.
[46] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 309.

Brock-Broido's multiple-identity Speaker represents not only an alternative to the stable, unified self of the humanist tradition, but also an alternative to the lyric 'I' in poetry. Burt notes that the Speaker 'seeks to be two or more people at once, as if no single given self [...] could accommodate her'.[47] The impulse to escape the confines of the single given self—in other words, one's given identity—is, I would suggest, a key reason why contemporary writers turn to the dramatic monologue. In this respect *The Master Letters* offers an extreme example of the rejection of the personal lyric. Where the lyric 'I' is an attempted expression of an individual writer's given identity, Brock-Broido's Speaker expresses 'a brood of voice'. As Ann Keniston observes, *The Master Letters* 'does not represent the articulation of a preexisting [*sic*] or fixed speaker';[48] rather, we are faced with a multitude of ever changing speakers. Brock-Broido spurns the authenticity and sincerity associated with the single lyric 'I' in favour of a brazenly artificial, polyvocal Speaker. The artificial, one might say theatrical, nature of *The Master Letters* will be explored further in the following sections of this chapter.

3. Identity as Performance: The Ventriloquist's Dummy

Butler's conception of identity as a performance is literally acted out in some of the poems in *The Master Letters*. In the prose poem 'From the Proscenium', the Speaker is partly figured as an actor in an empty theatre, 'play[ing] for the Balconies' (30). The 'old script' from which she reads requires her to play a series of ever changing roles, including those of Dickinson, an Elizabethan playwright, a coast guard sailor, and a chorus girl. As an actor, her identity is provisional and unstable, wholly contingent on the script that she is performing. The Speaker's relationship with a married male lover is here portrayed

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[47] Burt, ' "Subject, Subjugated, Inthralled" ', p. 109.

[48] Ann Keniston, ' "The Fluidity of Damaged Form": Apostrophe and Desire in Nineties Lyric', in *Contemporary Literature*, 42.2 (Summer 2001), pp. 294-324 (p. 321) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1209124>.

through theatrical metaphors: his bed is a proscenium stage, their affair an old-fashioned

musical, with the orchestra in the pit playing badly to reflect their break-up. The

Speaker's grief, she says, 'goes on like a Sixth Act', an image that signifies both theatrical

excess—a sixth act exceeds the five-act structure applied by editors to Shakespearean

drama—and an excessive theatricality in the Speaker, a sense of melodrama. On a

metafictional level, the poem 'From the Proscenium' can itself be said to be the 'old

script' that the Speaker performs; the performance of the poem, i.e., the lines she speaks,

is what establishes her identity from paragraph to paragraph.

The prose poem 'Unholy' features another self-reflexive account of theatrical

performance, one which can be read as a metaphor for the workings of the

contemporary dramatic monologue. Overall, the poem is structured around six plots

drawn from *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* (a book by Georges Polti that reduces all of

dramatic literature to thirty-six possible plots), as well as referencing the closing scene of

August Strindberg's play *Miss Julie* (the Speaker jokingly claims to have played the title

role for a year when she was sixteen) (78). Most importantly, the Speaker describes a

surreal ventriloquist's act in which she plays both dummy and ventriloquist:

> It's this devil of the ventriloquist bending my [...] back again. My voice
> thrown, my Other littler self on my own knee, [...] the tongue of the
> Inventor wagging the tongue of the Invented. (6)

The first sentence here implies that the ventriloquist is a metaphor for Brock-Broido, the

writer or Inventor of this dramatic monologue, with the Speaker as the ventriloquist's

dummy, an Invented persona. The writing of a dramatic monologue involves a kind of

ventriloquism, the invention of another (an Other) 'I', in order for the writer to speak as

an 'I' who is not him- or herself. The other 'I', the persona, is like the ventriloquist's

dummy, an inanimate figure that only comes to life through being animated by the

ventriloquist's hand and voice. The dummy is an empty vessel whose identity is entirely

contingent, dependent on the words generated for it by the ventriloquist. Like an actor

reading aloud from a script, the dummy can only assume the role that the ventriloquist/scriptwriter gives it. The persona's identity in the contemporary dramatic monologue, like that of the ventriloquist's dummy, is constituted by performance, through acts of speaking.

On the other hand, the second sentence of the previous quotation further complicates the picture: 'My voice thrown, my Other littler self on my own knee'. Now it is the Speaker, the persona, who is figured as a ventriloquist, with another 'self' of hers as the ventriloquist's dummy. We might say that the persona has 'flipped the script' by becoming a ventriloquist herself—in other words, occupying the position of the writer of a dramatic monologue, taking on a life of her own. This *mise en abyme* highlights the peculiar relationship between the persona and the writer that I would like to foreground, which I will describe as 'strange' (as previously mentioned, the word derives from the Latin *extraneus*, meaning external). The ventriloquist's dummy has a 'strange', unnatural quality; as a doll, it is something external to the ventriloquist, yet at the same time the two are intimately connected (physically by the ventriloquist's hand, and verbally by the ventriloquist's voice being thrown into the dummy).[49] The dummy or persona exists as another 'I', separate from the writer yet somehow part of him or her, a 'strange' relationship represented by the unsettling image of having one's Other self sitting on one's knee. Although the persona has been invented by the writer, the ventriloquist's act that results turns out to be something alien from the writer (alien being another meaning of the word *strange*). In the performance of the poem, the persona is able to 'flip the script' and gain an agency of its own. The 'strange'-ness of the contemporary dramatic monologue lies in this sense that the persona can, at least partially, escape from the writer's control.

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[49] The ventriloquist's dummy also usually looks like a miniature, caricatured version of the ventriloquist; again, they are separate yet (visually) connected or linked.

4. Artifice and Performance: Camp

Butler's theory that identity is fabricated and constituted through performance is embodied by the Speaker of *The Master Letters*, as I have argued above. Another way of considering performance and identity in Brock-Broido's collection is through the framework of camp, a concept outlined by Susan Sontag in the essay 'Notes on "Camp" '. In Sontag's formulation—which has been contested, expanded, and/or refined by later critics—camp is a cult sensibility characterized by 'love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration'.[50] According to Sontag, camp is a modern form of aestheticism that places value on the frivolous and stylized, is essentially apolitical, and overlaps with but is not limited to what she calls 'homosexual taste'.[51]

Sontag's conception of camp in many ways applies to *The Master Letters*, with its artificial Speaker and exaggerated writing style—or what Brock-Broido has called in an interview 'the perceived extravagances of my Supposed Persons' (i.e., personae).[52] The artificial nature of the Speaker of *The Master Letters*, a persona consisting of multiple identities from almost anywhere in time and place, is flaunted in Brock-Broido's poems, with their continually shifting dictions, registers, and narratives. Her dramatic

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[50] Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp" ', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966; repr. London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 275-92 (p. 275). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text. The unnatural and the artificial also happen to be qualities associated with the word 'strange'.

For essays on camp by later critcs, see Mark Booth, '*Campe-Toi!*: On the Origins and Definitions of Camp', in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. by Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 66-79; Andrew Britton, 'For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp', in *Camp*, pp. 136-42; Cleto, 'Introduction: Queering the Camp', in *Camp*, pp. 1-42; Chuck Kleinhaus, 'Taking Out the Trash: Camp and the Politics of Parody', in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. by Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 182-201; Moe Meyer, 'Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp', in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, pp. 1-22; Esther Newton, 'Role Models', in *Camp*, pp. 97-109; Pamela Robertson, 'What Makes the Feminist Camp?', in *Camp*, pp. 266-82; and Andrew Ross, 'Uses of Camp', in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Pop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 135-70.

[51] Sontag, p. 290. Epigraphs by Oscar Wilde punctuate her essay.

[52] Brock-Broido, 'Q&A: Lucie Brock-Broido', *Poetry* (December 2012) <http://poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/244980> [accessed 17 March 2015]. In the same interview Brock-Broido acknowledges a kinship between herself and Wilde: 'Ambrose Bierce, in a sharp-tongued review, wrote that Oscar Wilde was a "gawky gowk" who "wanders about, posing as a statue of himself." I'll be taking that one to heart as well.'

monologues repeatedly violate realist conventions of coherence, whether of setting, character, diction, or tone. Absurd apostrophes like 'Gerbil! Noodle! Little One' are followed by gravely formal statements ('My innocence diminishes in the thrall / Of a New World symmetry') (6, 8). In addition to adopting identities from different historical periods in a single poem, the Speaker sometimes uses verb tenses in such a way that no consistent reading is possible. In the poem 'Carrowmore', for instance, the Speaker says, 'I / Remember how cold I will be' (3). The style of *The Master Letters* is equally artificial and mannered. Brock-Broido's hallmarks here (and in dramatic monologues such as 'Jessica, from the Well' and 'Elective Mutes' in her previous collection, *A Hunger*) are a frequent use of italics, em dashes, and ampersands; eccentric capitalization, à la Dickinson; obscure or invented diction (*ambsace*, *pharos*, *lapilli*, *Numidian*, *masterwind*, *vixenlimb*); and epigrammatic pronouncements ('All gods secretly wish to be women— baroque, fecund, vulgar') (30). The epistolary prose poems especially incline towards archness, with closing signatures such as 'Bird, Singing—' and '*Would you but guide, your—* / Punitive Divine' (43, 11). Brock-Broido's detractors deem her style excessive; the *Washington Post* called it 'haute couture vulgarity'.[53] The artificial and exaggerated qualities of *The Master Letters*, I would argue, place it in the category of camp.

In particular, *The Master Letters* exemplifies the understanding of identity that Sontag depicts as central to camp. Camp, she states,

> sees everything in quotes. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp [*sic.*] in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension [...] of the metaphor of life as theater. (280)

The concept of Being-as-Playing-a-Role in some ways resembles Butler's view of identity as an illusion that is constituted through performance.[54] Fabio Cleto, another theorist of

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[53] This quotation, from a review of *A Hunger*, is reprinted by Brock-Broido in the Notes to *The Master Letters*, p. 81.

[54] '[G]ender is a performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner [...] essence or psychic gender core'. Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 312.

camp, observes that Being-as-Playing-a-Role 'reconfigure[s]' identity 'as a theatrical act, not an expression of an inner core'.[55] Identity as an act (a ventriloquist's act?) or performance, Being-as-Playing-a-Role, describes the Speaker's entire mode of existence in *The Master Letters*. She is not Emily Dickinson, but 'Emily Dickinson', not, at another moment, Plath but 'Plath'—in short, she is playing the roles of Dickinson and Plath. Rather than attempting a realistic or naturalistic rendering of the various figures the Speaker impersonates, Brock-Broido makes explicit the artifice of identity itself. To 'be' anyone or anything involves playing a role.

The principle of Being-as-Playing-a-Role can be applied to the contemporary dramatic monologue in general. In adopting a persona, the writer of the dramatic monologue plays the part of a fictional character, so everything he or she puts in the poem is effectively 'in quotes'. What Sontag calls the metaphor of life as theatre is made literal within the dramatic monologue: all the poem's a stage. Just as devotees of camp embrace the state of Being-as-Playing-a-Role, for the writer of a dramatic monologue the experience of Being-as-Playing-a-Role, of assuming another identity, is creatively rewarding. Camp, the love of the unnatural and artificial, stands in opposition to what Sontag terms 'traditional high culture', which places value on 'truth, beauty, and seriousness of intent' (286-87)—qualities that are, in the realm of poetry, associated with lyric. The values of sincerity and authenticity attributed to the personal lyric are challenged by the artificial, inauthentic dramatic monologue, a genre that prizes Being-as-Playing-a-Role.

5. Gender and Performance: Masquerade and Drag

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[55] Cleto, pp. 14-15.

Sontag's essay on camp touches on the question of gender identity in a fleeting but suggestive way. Camp, she states, 'sees everything in quotes. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman" ' (280). To see a 'woman' in quotes, to perform as a 'woman' in quotes, is what Butler terms gender parody, a set of practices that call into question the innateness of gender, including but not limited to drag, same-sex drag or feminine masquerade, and various forms of transvestitism. Gender parody reveals that 'the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin'.[56] To imitate a woman, to act as a 'woman' in quotes, is to imitate what is already an imitation, since gender identity is a fabrication produced by a 'repetition of acts through time'[57]—in other words, by its performance. The portrayal of gender in *The Master Letters* demonstrates how identity is constituted through performance.

Apart from the Speaker, the other main character in *The Master Letters* is the eponymous Master, the male authority figure to whom the Speaker's letters (the poems in the collection) are addressed. Like the Speaker, the Master encompasses a multitude of ever shifting identities, including 'editor, mentor, my aloof proportion, the father, the critic, beloved, the wizard'.[58] Brock-Broido describes him in her Preamble as a 'composite portrait'; in the poems he is variously depicted as a schoolteacher, doctor, shoemaker, tinsmith, and Faust, among others. The Speaker greets him in her letters as *'My Most Courteous Lord—'*, *'Shepherd—'*, *'Master, my astronomer—'*, and *'My Apparition—'* (4, 24, 52, 72). Most importantly, the Master is almost parodically gendered as male, from his titles (Sir, Lord, Master) to his power to punish the Speaker: 'I think I will be broken by your [...] Hand'; 'in your hand you seek to tame / Me' (48, 14). The Master is the ultimate alpha male, a composite of commanding masculine identities against which the feminine Speaker defines herself. The exaggerated maleness of the Master exemplifies Butler's

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[56] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.
[57] Ibid., p. 179.
[58] Brock-Broido, *The Master Letters*, p. viii. I am following Brock-Broido in referring to the Master as male.

notion of gender parody, as the character's gender identity is constituted through the performance of a hypermasculine, same-sex drag.

The Speaker's submissive relationship to the Master in turn reinforces their respective gender identities, as she performs a kind of exaggerated femininity in these poems. She portrays herself as the Master's masochistic victim, 'cowering' and 'grovelling' before him, or as a dead game bird in a dog's mouth, 'neck broken by fear' (34, 46, 26). Even when she describes herself as an animal, her feminine gender is stressed; she is by turns a 'she / Fox', falconress, female pigeon, and female swan (51). The conventional costume and accoutrements of femininity feature throughout, including the Speaker's white dress, crinoline skirt, rouged cheeks, barrette (hair grip), and thick braid (plait) of hair. I would argue that the femininity acted out by the Speaker in *The Master Letters* qualifies as gender parody: it is a form of same-sex, female-to-female drag, what the film theorist Mary Ann Doane calls parodic mimicry or feminine masquerade. Doane observes that a woman can 'flaunt her femininity, produce herself as an excess of femininity', so as to perform a self-conscious masquerade of gender.[59] In a similar vein, Andrew Ross quotes an interview with Sontag in which she remarks that the camp taste for the 'corny flamboyance of femaleness' displayed by certain film actresses helps to 'undermine the credibility of certain stereotyped femininities—by exaggerating them', thus revealing femininity itself to be a masquerade.[60] The feminine masquerade performed by the Speaker of *The Master Letters* is what constitutes her identity as female, not some innate or internal essence.

Feminine masquerade and drag are especially relevant to the workings of the dramatic monologue, a genre that requires masquerade as a condition of its being. Pamela Robertson observes that the 'surprise' of feminine masquerade lies in 'the identity

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[59] Robertson, p. 273. See Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', in *Screen*, 23.3-4 (September/October 1982) <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/23.3-4.74>.
[60] Ross, p. 161.

between she who masquerades and the role she plays—she plays at being what she is already perceived to be'.[61] This sense of playing a role that is itself a role recalls the *mise en abyme* of the ventriloquist's dummy that I described in Section 3 of this chapter. Drag is another example of playing a role that is itself a role, in Butler's view: '*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*' (emphasis in original).[62] The notion of gender identity as an imitation of an imitation can be extended to identity in the contemporary dramatic monologue in general. The dramatic monologue, I would suggest, can be seen as a form of poetic drag. The persona is a fictional 'I' that imitates another kind of 'I', the writer's given identity that lyric is said to express. But in imitating lyric, in imitating the lyric 'I', the dramatic monologue reveals that lyric itself is a fiction or fabrication, an imitation without an origin.

6. Imitations: Copying With Distortion and Language as a Virus

Feminine masquerade and drag, forms of parody and imitation, are concerned with copying: copying markers of gender and/or sexuality, markers of identity. Copying in an intertextual or linguistic sense is central to Brock-Broido's practice in *The Master Letters*. The lengthy section of Notes that follows the poems consists of six pages of citations identifying the quotations and allusions that have been incorporated into the Speaker's 'brood of voice'. For example:

> **A Rome Beauty** is the name of one of the more than 10,000 varieties of chance seedling winter apples. *Heaven paints its wild irregularity* is a line from "November" of *The Shepherd's Calendar* by John Clare. (78)

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[61] Robertson, p. 274.

[62] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175. On a related note, in her work on transvestitism, Marjorie Garber writes that cross-dressing 'denaturalizes, destabilizes, and defamiliarizes sex and gender *signs*. [...] [W]hat is revealed is that the signs by which heterosexuality had encoded and recognized itself have been detached from a referent with which those signs are thereby revealed to have had a conventional rather than natural connection'. Marjorie Garber, 'Breaking the Code: Transvestism [*sic*] and Gay Identity', in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 128-61 (p.147).

So plentiful are these sources of inspiration that only three of the fifty-two poems are without an end note. Brock-Broido's particular approach to copying, however, involves modifying or distorting her source material, not simply replicating it in her poems—what I will call copying with distortion. As she writes in an introductory paragraph:

> In the following notes, when I indicate a source, it does not necessarily mean that the quotation is verbatim. [...] I use the term *refract* to mean—a nod, a pilfering—an homage, in each case, to the Original.

The concept of refraction covers a broad spectrum of types of copying with distortion, from direct quotation to the faintest echo of phrasing. In optics, refraction refers to the way that a beam of light is bent as it passes across the boundary between two media, emerging from the other side at a different angle.[63] In *The Master Letters*, Brock-Broido's mind is the boundary through which her source materials, her 'Originals', must pass, emerging altered on the other side. Copying with distortion is thus an act of transformation that involves the writer's creativity; it results in the production of something new, work that supersedes its original sources.

It is important to note that Brock-Broido's intertextuality differs from the Modernist technique of collage, 'found' poetry, and the sorts of Conceptual poetry practised by other contemporary poets.[64] Her borrowings from other texts are usually small and subtle, often amounting to a couple of words or lines woven into a poem on an entirely different subject. For instance, in 'Work', a poem of 299 words, only five words are copied from other sources: the phrases '*I hid me*' (taken from Clare's *A Vision*) and 'terrible crystal' (from a letter to Gerard Manley Hopkins) (82-83). At other times Brock-Broido uses quotations, verbatim or slightly altered, as titles for poems that have nothing to do with the sources of the quotations: 'The Supernatural Is Only the Natural,

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[63] 'Refraction', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/science/refraction> [accessed 29 October 2016].

[64] See Paul Hoover, 'Introduction', in *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*, 2nd edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), pp. xxix-lvii, on various types of Conceptual poetry.

Disclosed', 'And You Know That I Know Milord That You Know' (78-79). So, although *The Master Letters* can be said to be highly intertextual, it is not simply a tissue of quotations or a derivative pastiche. Brock-Broido's source texts are so wholly absorbed into her poems that were it not for the Notes, we would be unable to determine which words belong to whom. In fact, even the Notes do not fully distinguish between what has been copied or borrowed and what is Brock-Broido's own writing. In the introduction to the Notes, Brock-Broido explains, 'In the poems, many of the italicized passages without notation are from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*' (78). But since Brock-Broido also uses italics throughout *The Master Letters* to indicate quotations from other sources, to signal a change of voice or register, or as a structural device, it is impossible to tell which italicized passages are copied from Dickinson. In *The Master Letters* the boundaries between copied material and original writing by Brock-Broido have virtually been erased.

Brock-Broido's method of copying with distortion can be said to embody Butler's thinking on imitation and identity. Butler states, '*[I]mitation* does not copy that which is prior, but produces and *inverts* the very terms of priority and derivativeness' (emphasis in original).[65] In other words, an imitation or copy is considered to be derivative, a copy of something original, but that origin is only constructed as an origin by the existence of the copy. '[T]he entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other', Butler concludes. In *The Master Letters*, copying with distortion produces poems that creatively supersede their 'Originals', rather than being derivative; the (distorted) copy in fact becomes something new, something more original than its origins. (This inversion of value, in which the copy is superior to the origin, is a notion I will return to shortly.) These poems also blur the boundaries

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[65] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 307.

between words copied from other sources and words that are original, i.e., written by Brock-Broido. The framework of copy and origin is thus rendered unstable; what is a copy, what an origin, cannot be fully determined. In Butler's analysis, the instability of the categories of copy and origin reveals that there is no fixed ground of identity. In *The Master Letters*, the blurring of copy and origin reflects the fact that the Speaker's identity is groundless, always provisional; fabricated and patched together from multiple sources as opposed to being an authentic, homogeneous inner core.

Brock-Broido comments self-reflexively on the concepts of copying with distortion and intertextuality in the prose poem 'To a Strange Fashion of Forsaking'.[66] A description of trees growing 'contagious as a small pox [*sic.*]' is followed, via associative logic, by the line: 'language abandons rapidly to form new strains, resistant, unbridled like that, & not surrendering' (19). In this image, language is like smallpox, a contagious virus that can develop new strains because it mutates as it is replicated. Like viruses— microorganisms that infect larger bodies—bits of language from other texts infect Brock-Broido's poems and proliferate throughout *The Master Letters*, replicating themselves as mutated or distorted copies. These distorted copies become 'new strains', taking on new meanings due to the different context in which they appear in Brock-Broido's poems. To return to a previous example, the phrase 'terrible crystal' is a tiny bit of language found in a letter to Hopkins that infects, finds its way into the body of, the poem 'Work', where it takes on a new meaning specific to the poem's narrative about a jilted lover. Like the idea of refraction—the copying of an 'Original' that produces a distorted version of it—the metaphor of language as a virus depicts copying as a positive act, one that results in 'unbridled' poetic power and 'new strains' of creative fecundity.

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[66] The poem's title is a very slight distortion of a line from '[They flee from me...]', by Thomas Wyatt.

Language as a virus holds broader implications for *The Master Letters* as well. The Speaker's voice is infected with many different linguistic strains, from those of Dickinson, Plath, and other female poets to those of Tudor England ('To a Strange Fashion of Forsaking', 'And Wylde for to Hold', 'Your Cromwell, Your Thomas More'), Renaissance Italy (quotations from Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci), twentieth-century Germany (Georg Trakl, Viktor Frankl), and American popular culture (Otis Redding, *All About Eve*). As the Speaker observes, 'I write to you from an hour of broad linguistic flux' (19). The multiple strains that infect her language are, like constantly mutating viruses, 'resistant' to eradication, 'not surrendering'. I would argue that these poems, with their many strains of language, can be seen as resistant to the monovocal hegemony of lyric. Where the personal lyric is said to represent the homogeneous voice of a stable, unified self, Brock-Broido's poems are fabricated from multiple bits of language, multiple scraps of text—a linguistic flux rather than a single voice. The strains of language that infect *The Master Letters*, which are the copied words of other writers, stand in contrast to the supposed authenticity of the lyric voice and its representation of a stable given identity.

The sense in which the copy or imitation presents a challenge to the authentic, the origin, can be extended to the contemporary dramatic monologue in general. The persona, the 'I' of the dramatic monologue, is a fictional character, what we might call an imitation 'I'. To use Brock-Broido's own terminology, it is a refracted 'I', a kind of altered quotation, or distorted copy, of the lyric 'I'.[67] This situation is demonstrated when the Speaker reminisces: 'I was mute. A voice bound [...] *I didn't be—myself*' (35). The various ways in which the italicized sentence can be read reflect the nature of the persona's 'I' in the dramatic monologue. On a basic narrative level, '*I didn't be—myself*' can

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[67] Or, as Sontag might have written, it is not a woman but a 'woman', not an 'I' but an ' "I" '—in other words, an 'I' in quotes.

be parsed as 'I wasn't myself', meaning that the Speaker wasn't herself, in the colloquial sense, when she was mute; being unable to speak at some time in the past was discomfiting to her, an unwelcome and unfamiliar state. On the other hand, at the ontological level, the Speaker '*didn't be*', i.e., did not exist at all, when she was mute; she is only brought into being through the act of speaking, through the performance of these poems. However, we could also say that the statement '*I didn't be—myself*' expresses the Speaker's self-conscious awareness of being a subject rather than a lyric 'self': the subject in the contemporary dramatic monologue is multiple and ever changing, such that there may not be an identity between the 'I' and the 'myself' at all times. This kind of slippage occurs at a number of other points in *The Master Letters*, such as when the Speaker says: 'Wherever I went I came with me', 'I / Remember how cold I will be', and '*I hid me*' (3, 3, 66). In such lines the Speaker refers to herself as if she is another (an Other) character. The proliferating 'I's and 'me's represent an alternative to the single, stable 'I' of the personal lyric.

For the writer, I would argue, this multiplicity of identity opens up a wider field for creative endeavour. Where one's identity tends to be fixed in the social realm, in the dramatic monologue one is free to construct a persona comprising multiple identities. To escape the prison of the 'self', what we might call the prison of lyric, can be empowering. As Eliot wrote:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.[68]

The Master Letters demonstrates how relinquishing one's own given identity for that of a persona can result in multiple, endless possibilities.

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[68] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, ed. by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), I, pp. 941-47 (pp. 946-47).

Chapter 2:

Mary Szybist's Annunciation Poems in *Incarnadine*

1. Introduction

Mary Szybist's second collection, *Incarnadine*, includes a group of eleven poems exploring the story of the Annunciation: the Biblical episode in which the angel Gabriel visits the Virgin Mary to inform her that God has chosen her to bear his son, Jesus, and that she will be impregnated by the Holy Ghost. Of Szybist's eleven poems, eight are dramatic monologues, one is a third-person narrative, one is a lyric poem, and one features an ambiguous speaker (who might be Gabriel or Szybist herself). In discussing this group of poems I will focus mainly on the dramatic monologues. While the personae Szybist adopts in them include Gabriel, Eve, an anonymous servant, and some blades of grass, the majority of the poems are spoken by Gabriel, making his persona the most prominent one.

I will argue that Szybist's dramatic monologues offer a meta-commentary on the workings of the contemporary dramatic monologue. Both Mary's and Gabriel's identities are constructed or fabricated through Gabriel's repeated acts of speaking, through his performance of the poems. In particular, the persona of Mary is brought into being through being interpellated or 'pronounced' (per J. L. Austin) by Gabriel, who is in this sense her creator. Like the writer of a dramatic monologue, Gabriel creates the persona of Mary, a persona that can be considered to be a distorted reflection of Gabriel himself. This distorted reflection is 'strange' in that it has the ability to partially take on a life of its own, to resist its creator's control. I will also suggest that Mary is a kind of drag identity for Gabriel, and that the fabrication of the persona in the dramatic monologue is like the wearing of drag by the writer.

The notion of the persona resisting the authority of its creator finds a parallel in the way that Szybist's Annunciation poems resist the authority of their Biblical source. Her multiple re-writings of the Annunciation story offer vivid alternatives to the fixed, unitary narrative of the respective verses in the King James Bible. In addition, Szybist's poems subvert how Mary's and Gabriel's identities are depicted in the Bible by portraying them as resisting God's authority. Similarly, I would argue, the contemporary dramatic monologue can be seen as resisting the authority of the personal lyric. The fictional 'I' that a writer creates in a dramatic monologue stands in opposition to the presumed sincerity and authority of the lyric 'I'; the representation of the subject in the contemporary dramatic monologue as multiple and provisional presents a challenge to the stable, unified self supposedly embodied by the lyric 'I'. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by discussing how writing dramatic monologues enables a poet to escape the bounds of his or her given identity by fabricating alternative identities to inhabit.

2. Multiplicity as Subversion

Szybist's approach to the dramatic monologue in some ways resembles that of other contemporary practitioners. Rather than the faux-historical details found in Browning's work, or the internally consistent (if sometimes non-naturalistic) settings of Pound and Eliot, Szybist allows anachronistic elements and imagery to permeate her poems. Her retellings of the Annunciation are informed by multiple frames of reference—not only Biblical, but also political, zoological, art historical, and technological. Intertextuality is foregrounded in poems that incorporate italicized phrases from *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov, and *The Starr Report*,[69] as well as the words of American politicians George W.

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[69] The published account by Congressionally-appointed investigator Kenneth Starr describing his inquiry into Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky.

Bush and Robert Byrd. A section of Notes at the end of the collection is used to identify the diverse sources of and inspirations behind various poems. As in many contemporary dramatic monologues, the speaker's identity in Szybist's poems is often implied rather than declared, leaving the reader to deduce whose viewpoint is being represented and how the poem fits into a larger narrative. All of these aspects align Szybist's work with the dramatic monologues of Brock-Broido and Hayes, the other two poets I am discussing in this essay.

Brock-Broido and Szybist both use older, pre-existing texts as starting points for their work (Dickinson's Master Letters and the King James Bible, respectively). Just as Brock-Broido expands her original source into a book-length sequence of Master Letters, addressing everything from her father's and stepfather's deaths to a failed love affair to the legacy of the Holocaust, Szybist takes a few verses from the Bible and generates multiple alternate versions. She explores the Annunciation from a host of perspectives, employing multiple personae and even writing in modes other than the dramatic monologue, i.e., narrative and lyric. In these poems the Annunciation is rendered from a variety of angles and retold differently each time. Thus, although the poems focus on a single story, Szybist's repeated rewriting of the Annunciation produces a multiplicity of voices that exceed their original source.

Fracturing and refracting the Annunciation story, creating multiple variations on a single narrative, Szybist's poems imply that no one version, no unitary text, can adequately represent events. While her source material—Luke 1:26–38, the verses of the King James Bible that describe the Annunciation—is reprinted as a paragraph of prose in the collection's end notes for reference, the authority of this single source is challenged and ultimately undermined by the many versions of the story that Szybist presents. Having relegated the Bible verses to the back of the book, she neither quotes from nor refers to them in her poems—a deliberate choice that reinforces the sense that the

original text is simply another version of the story, holding no special authority. A further way in which Szybist flouts the authority of the Biblical verses is by using the first-person voice in all but one of her Annunciation poems. The apparently objective and neutral third-person narration of Luke 1:26–38 is rewritten—indeed, overwritten—by Szybist's series of subjective first-person voices. The interiority of these first-person poems, whether dramatic monologue or lyric, represents a challenge to the affectless third-person narrative of the Biblical original. The fractured and provisional accounts of the Annunciation in Szybist's poems supersede the fixed, unitary text of Luke 1:26–38.

Szybist's poems, in their resistance to Biblical authority, echo the way in which the poststructuralist understanding of the subject is opposed to the traditional humanist self. Just as the notion of the stable, unified self came to be challenged by the poststructuralist model of subjects as multiple and provisional, so the fixed, unified Biblical text is, in Szybist's work, challenged by multiple texts. For instance, Szybist employs intertextuality in two poems to question the authority of the Bible's account. In 'Annunciation in *Nabokov* and *Starr*', a dramatic monologue spoken by Gabriel, the interweaving of quotations from *Lolita* and *The Starr Report* depicts the Annunciation as both violation and interrogation. Mary is implicitly recast as a mixture of Lolita and Monica Lewinsky, Gabriel as a combination of abuser, seducer, and hostile investigator. This is a striking departure from the Biblical narrative, in which Gabriel is presented as a benevolent angel bringing blessings to Mary. And in 'Annunciation in *Byrd* and *Bush*', a lyric poem, the post–9/11 debate over America's invasion of Iraq informs Szybist's retelling of the Annunciation. Bush's words are put into Gabriel's mouth, while Byrd's (the voice of political opposition) are spoken by Mary. Szybist again portrays Mary and Gabriel's relationship as an antagonistic one, re-inscribing the Biblical account with her own version. As well as radically altering the characterizations of Mary and Gabriel, the inclusion of quotations from other texts in these poems reinforces the impression that

the Biblical account is simply one text among many. Moreover, Szybist's signalling of intertextuality renders the texts of these poems themselves fractured and non-unitary; they are fabricated, pieced together, through the weaving of phrases from other sources into Szybist's own lines. For example, 'In the *windowless hallway*, / I bent toward her', or 'She touched her mouth with her *damp-smelling hand*'.[70] As in Brock-Broido's *The Master Letters,* the use of italics is a typographical convention for indicating quoted matter, but the italics also make visible the fabricated nature of the poetic text. These poems, like the poststructuralist notion of the subject, are inherently fractured and multiple.

I would argue that Szybist's Annunciation poems subvert the traditional authority of both the Bible and of lyric in contemporary American poetry. As I discussed in my Introduction, many critics and poets consider the personal lyric to be the canonical mode, or norm, of mainstream American poetry writing. The dominance of the personal lyric, with its single speaker and emphasis on sincerity and authenticity, is resisted by Szybist's Annunciation poems, most of which are dramatic monologues, and which offer multiple versions of a narrative that is itself fictional. The original that establishes the norm, whether it consists of Biblical verses or the lyric 'I', is challenged by the multiplicity of its variants, what we might call its imitations. As Butler remarks when discussing how drag challenges heterosexual norms, '*imitation* [...] produces and *inverts* the very terms of priority and derivativeness' (emphasis in original).[71] Far from being derivative, Szybist's poems surpass their original source with their imaginative power. An imitation that inverts the terms of priority and derivativeness also describes the dramatic monologue in general. The fictional speakers of dramatic monologues are imitations of an original, namely, the lyric 'I', yet their existence reveals the authority of that original to

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[70] Mary Szybist, *Incarnadine* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013), p. 8. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text. Spelling, italicization, and the use of ampersands are given as in the original throughout this essay.
[71] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 307.

be a fiction—'a copy of a copy, for which there is no original', in Butler's words.[72] In short, the production of multiple fictional 'I's in the dramatic monologue undermines the authoritative status of the lyric 'I'.

3. Annunciation and Pronunciation

An important aspect of Szybist's Annunciation poems is the story of the Annunciation itself, an episode that tallies closely with Butler's conceptions of performativity and interpellation. Butler's view of identity as performative involves Austin's definition of speech acts, in which the very speaking of a sentence performs an action in the world, the classic example being 'I now pronounce you man and wife'.[73] Such an utterance is also called a 'performative'. Butler's own example, the doctor or midwife's cry of 'It's a girl!', is a performative that calls into existence the gender of the newborn.[74] 'Pronunciation', in the Austinian sense, is an act that performs something in the world: someone is being pronounced something, assigned an identity, constituted as a particular kind of subject. As Butler puts it, 'The performative constitutes the appearance of a "subject" as its effect'.[75] In this light, we might say that the Annunciation is a story of pronunciation. In Luke 1:26–38, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary's house to announce God's plan to her: that she is to be impregnated by the Holy Ghost and give birth to God's son, who will be named Jesus. After Mary gives her assent, the angel departs. In this account, Mary is pronounced the future mother of Jesus, called into existence as a mother, constituted as a female vessel for the son of God. In Austin's example of the marriage ceremony as speech act, pronunciation's ability to perform an action depends

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[72] Ibid., p. 308.
[73] Butler, 'Critically Queer', in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 223-42 (p. 225), and Livia and Hall, p. 11.
[74] Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 223.
[75] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 309.

on the law, the authority vested in the one who pronounces; to take another common example, the judge who pronounces a defendant guilty is able to 'do something with words' because he or she administers the law.[76] In the Annunciation story, Gabriel's pronunciation of Mary is founded in the ultimate authority or law, God's will. The Annunciation is a pronunciation that 'subjects' Mary, in Butler's terminology—she is constituted as a subject under the law by Gabriel's pronouncement. I will discuss how Szybist's poems resist, rewrite, and subvert this subjection below.

Related to the concept of pronunciation is that of interpellation, which Butler adopts from Louis Althusser. In Althusser's account, a police officer hailing a fleeing suspect—'Hey, you there!'—is an instance of interpellation: the suspect is hailed or called by a representative of the law, turns to acknowledge the call, and is thereby brought into being as a subject. 'The call is formative', Butler writes, 'because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject'.[77] In Luke 1:26–38, Mary is literally hailed by Gabriel, the representative of God's law, whose first line is 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee'.[78] Gabriel's hailing of her calls her into being as a subject under the Lord's domain. Although Mary initially resists this interpellation—'she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be'— she eventually acquiesces. Mary acknowledges the call in an act of self-interpellation, declaring, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'. In calling herself the Lord's handmaid, she constitutes herself as such, pronouncing her identity as an obedient female servant under God's law. Gabriel's interpellation of Mary

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[76] Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 225.
[77] Butler, 'Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 121-40 (p. 121). See Louis Althusser, 'From "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" ', in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), pp. 42-50 (pp. 47-48).
[78] Cited by Szybist, p. 67.

and her own self-interpellation thus work to construct her identity in the Bible. Szybist's poems, however, destabilize and ultimately dismantle this identity.

Szybist's depiction of Mary departs from the Biblical version in ways that resist the powers of pronunciation and interpellation. In the poem 'Annunciation in Play', Mary tries to deflect Gabriel's pronunciation of her. The plot of the poem consists of Mary refusing to acknowledge his interpellation: 'the girl / holds on, determined not to meet his gaze' (44). At one point she turns *away* from him—the opposite of Althusser's turning towards—'still repelling / every attempt'. In 'Annunciation in *Byrd* and *Bush*' Mary exercises resistance by ignoring Gabriel whenever he addresses her: burying her nose in a book, yawning, and looking down at the sound of his voice. Again she literally turns away from him, dismissing his words as '[*b*]*luster & swagger*' (32). And the entire poem 'Heroine as She Turns to Face Me', as its title indicates, portrays Mary in the act of turning to face Gabriel—the key moment in Althusser's drama of interpellation, when the suspect turns to acknowledge the call. In this case, however, Szybist presents Mary not as a guilty suspect, nor as a lowly 'handmaid' bowing down to God's will, but as a '[h]eroine': confident and 'indefatigable' (9). Rather than being subjected, she seizes her own agency, her own identity; Gabriel marvels:

> [S]ee how bravely she turns, [...]
> & in the turning
> most herself.

Through these various rewritings of the Annunciation, Szybist constructs an alternative identity for Mary.

Szybist's depiction of Gabriel also subverts the identity ascribed to him in Luke 1:26–38. Instead of a self-assured representative of God's authority, he is often shown to be conflicted or ambivalent. Althusser's account of interpellation involves an aggressive act of hailing, the police officer's shout to the subject, while the Biblical version of the

Annunciation shows Gabriel verbally overpowering Mary.[79] In many of Szybist's poems, however, Gabriel is the opposite of aggressive or forceful. He regards Mary tenderly, describing her as '*gentle*' and '*touching*', praising her 'softness' and 'sweetness' (8, 8, 58, 58). In 'Annunciation as Fender's Blue Butterfly with Kincaid's Lupine' he imagines his role as that of a butterfly 'stumbl[ing]' into a flower (13). And in 'Long After the Desert and Donkey' he is even more reluctant to carry out God's will; he would rather 'bend low and close / to the curves of [her] ear', whispering in it, than hail or shout at her (20). In fact, he is struck dumb in her presence, with 'no words for it'—literally rendered unable to pronounce or interpellate her. By representing Gabriel as a reluctant or impotent agent of the Lord, Szybist challenges the Biblical account of the Annunciation.

4. Dramatic Monologue and the Distorted Reflection

Turning away from the Annunciation story, a closer examination of Gabriel and Mary's relationship allows for these poems to be interpreted as a self-reflexive commentary on the operations of the dramatic monologue. The majority of Szybist's Annunciation poems are spoken by Gabriel and reveal his fixation on Mary. Like the Speaker of *The Master Letters*, whose relationship with the Master is all consuming, Gabriel dwells obsessively on Mary, describing her in poem after poem. She is less a person, however, than a projection of his longings, more an absence than a presence, more imaginary than real. In the two poems in which he addresses directly her, 'Hail' and 'Long After the Desert and Donkey', she is figured as a disembodied essence, 'spilled // in ash, in dust', or an image Gabriel only sees in his dreams:

> I sleep to the sound
>
> of your name,

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[79] He speaks in long strings of sentences, while she is almost silent; Gabriel speaks 160 words, compared to Mary's twenty-four. Szybist, p. 67.

[...]

dream of your ankles. (12)

Mary is depicted as something insubstantial, a projection or figment of his imagination. '[Y]ou were not solid', Gabriel says; '[i]t was like something was always dissolving / inside you' (20-21). The imaginary nature of her existence is summed up by the lines

I say there is no Mary
except the word Mary, no trace

on the dust of my pillowslip. (12)

Mary lacks any physical trace, being only a word spoken by Gabriel—the name of a character. She is nothing more than 'the syllables / of [a] name'. I would suggest that we see Mary as an imaginary character in Gabriel's mind, with Gabriel as a figure for 'the writer', the one who envisions and creates such a character. Gabriel's position as a writer bringing a fictional creation into being in fact parallels his role in the Annunciation, where he must pronounce Mary into being as a subject. When he tells her, 'Even now I can't keep / from composing you', his position as an author composing, putting together, a fictional character is made explicit. Similarly, when he asks, '[W]hat meanings / can I place in you?' (21) we see him behaving like an author contemplating one of his creations; having invented the character Mary, he must endow her with meanings.[80] In short, the relationship between Gabriel and Mary is that of a writer to the fictional character he has created.

More specifically, Gabriel can be seen as a figure for the writer of a dramatic monologue, with Mary as the persona (a character created by the writer). In this respect, when he says of her, 'I carried you a long way // into my mirror', it reveals a truth about the relationship between a writer and the persona he or she has invented (12). Mary, the persona, is described as an image in the writer's mirror. So should we say that the

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[80] Gabriel's placing of meanings into Mary interestingly echoes her impregnation by the Holy Ghost. Gabriel's role as an author, a creator, can be said to parallel that of God the Creator.

persona is the mirror image of the writer? Not quite. In carrying Mary into his own mirror, Gabriel has made her into his reflection. When he looks in the mirror, instead of seeing himself, he finds Mary's image looking back—she is a distorted reflection of him. This scenario offers a useful model for conceptualizing the contemporary dramatic monologue. If Gabriel is a figure for the writer of a dramatic monologue, then Mary, the persona, is his distorted reflection. Like Gabriel, a poet writing a dramatic monologue 'compos[es]' a persona and imbues it with 'meanings', but this creation is a reflection, to some degree, of the writer's given identity. The persona in the dramatic monologue is thus a distorted reflection of the given identity of the writer who created it.[81]

The idea of the persona as distorted reflection differs from Sinfield's and Langbaum's conceptions of the dramatic monologue, which were based on Victorian and Modernist examples. (See Introduction, Sections 2 and 3.) While critics tend to lack an awareness of the subtleties and vagaries of the creative process, as a practitioner I would suggest that the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue is an ongoing and provisional creation. The writer may embark with an idea of the persona he or she intends to create, but during the process of writing, the persona can change into something different, escaping in a sense from the writer's control. The persona as a distorted reflection—imaginary and without substance, as well as shifting and mutable, since a reflection changes with its source's every move—is closer to contemporary practice in the dramatic monologue than the persona as a kind of straw man or mask.

The persona as distorted reflection also relates to Butler's thoughts on identity, for instance, lesbian identity as 'a kind of miming' of heterosexuality.[82] Quoting Jacques

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[81] The dramatic monologue as a mirror is a concept that bears further exploration; just as a distorted reflection exists only within a mirror, the persona exists only within the dramatic monologue. The persona/distorted reflection does not seek to accurately imitate reality, but is constituted, brought into being, within the fictive realm. (Despite the Lacanian associations of the mirror and the reflection, I do not wish to employ Lacan or psychoanalytic methodology in this essay.)
[82] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 306.

Derrida at length in a footnote, Butler concludes that miming is in fact a copy of nothing. If mimicry imitates nothing, Derrida writes, we are faced with a mirror that 'reflects no reality: it produces mere "reality-effects". [...] In this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a difference or dyad does exist'.[83] This difference 'is a reference without a referent', 'a ghost that is the phantom of no flesh'. The persona in the dramatic monologue, being a distorted reflection of the writer's given identity, is a kind of mime: as an imaginary character in a poem, it is a phantom of no flesh, a reference without a referent. The contemporary dramatic monologue, like Derrida's speculum, reflects no reality; it is a mirror of a mirror, which introduces a difference or distortion into its reflection. The persona may mimic a person's identity, but that identity is itself a fabrication—what Butler, following Derrida, calls a phantasm of the original.

Finally, the persona as a distorted reflection embodies the quality of 'strange'-ness that I identified in *The Master Letters* (see Chapter 1, Section 3). Brock-Broido figures her writing of dramatic monologues as the act of a ventriloquist throwing her voice(s) into a ventriloquist's dummy: 'My voice thrown, my Other littler self on my own knee' (6). In this metaphor, the ventriloquist is the writer, the dummy the persona. The ventriloquist's dummy can be compared to the distorted reflection; traditionally, the dummy looks like a caricatured, smaller version of the ventriloquist—a kind of distorted reflection. The dummy is animated by the ventriloquist's hand motions; the distorted reflection is also animated by its master, since it shifts with every movement of its source. The dummy is a vessel into which the ventriloquist projects a character, just as the distorted reflection is a vessel for the writer's projections: in Gabriel's words, 'what meanings / can I place in you?' (21). Most importantly, the dummy is an Other self, at once similar to yet different from the ventriloquist. The distorted reflection is both similar to yet different from its

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[83] Ibid., p. 314, note 12.

original, the writer: as an Other self, it is something 'strange', estranged from the writer yet intimately connected at the same time.

The persona is also 'strange' in the sense that it can take on a life of its own and partially escape from the writer's control. This relationship is dramatized in the poem 'Hail', in which Mary is portrayed as Gabriel's distorted reflection. Gabriel, a figure for the writer, tells her:

> I carried you a long way
>
> into my mirror, believing you would carry me
>
> back out. (12)

The fact that he thought his reflection could carry him back out of the mirror demonstrates the agency of the Other self, the persona he has created: the possibility that it might be able to act independently, with a life of its own. Moreover, as this quotation reveals, Gabriel has been disappointed in his hopes of being 'carried [...] back out'; the persona has failed to obey its creator's wishes. Szybist's poem, I would argue, represents the experience of writing a contemporary dramatic monologue: the writer creates a persona within the poem, a distorted reflection or Other self, but the persona ends up assuming a life of its own, in some sense escaping from the writer's control.

Another example of the writer-persona dynamic is displayed in the poem 'Heroine as She Turns to Face Me'. The identity of the poem's speaker, the 'Me' of the title, is ambiguous; it might be Gabriel, or it might be Szybist—or both of them at the same time. Such ambiguity makes sense given that Gabriel in these poems is a figure for the writer. The speaker of 'Heroine as She Turns to Face Me' is in any case also a writer, who spends the poem describing the 'Heroine' he or she has created, namely Mary. The poem's setting is a theatre, with Mary standing alone on the stage—the dramatic monologue as a form made literal. The poem opens with Mary turning to face her creator—'Just before the curtain closes, she turns / toward me'—a charged moment that

the speaker elaborates on for the rest of the poem (9). The 'strange'-ness of this moment lies in the confrontation between the persona and the writer; how can an imaginary character suddenly turn on her creator? Mary is a persona who has acquired her own agency, as shown by the way she 'arranges *herself* for the exit' (emphasis mine). Her independence from her creator is underlined by the speaker's description of her as 'unapproachable' and 'sure of' herself, with an 'indefatigable' spirit. This character is determined that 'whatever the next scene is, / she will fill it': the writer may be the one who devises the 'next scene', but it is the persona, the imaginary character with a life of its own, who chooses to inhabit it. The idea that the persona can partially escape from the writer's control is the 'strange'-ness at the heart of the contemporary dramatic monologue.

5. Persona as Drag: The Fabrication of Identity

Returning to the notion of Mary as Gabriel's distorted reflection, I would like to consider gender, drag, and questions of identity in relation to the contemporary dramatic monologue. As I have explained, Mary is a distorted reflection of Gabriel, an Other self: a persona created by Gabriel, who is a figure for the writer. But in creating a female persona in Mary, Gabriel has created a drag version of himself, a drag identity. We might say that the distortion in the distorted reflection, the Other-ness of the Other self, is drag. In Butler's analysis, drag is not simply the imitation or 'putting on' of a different gender; drag, broadly speaking, encompasses the way 'in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done'. [84] This is because gender identity itself is always already 'a kind of impersonation and appropriation'. When Gabriel says to Mary:

> Even now I can't keep from

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[84] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 306.

> composing you, limbs and blue cloak
>
> and soft hands (12)

we see how he has composed or fabricated her persona out of various components. The accoutrements of femininity he ascribes to her—'blue dress', 'silver bracelets', 'bright scarf', 'gauzy veil' (8, 32, 32, 9)—likewise construct her identity; Butler's view of gender as a fabrication or fantasy inscribed on bodies is relevant here.[85] Like gender identity in the social realm, I would argue, identity in the dramatic monologue is fabricated. The fabrication of gender identity through drag resembles the creation of a fictional identity, the persona, in the contemporary dramatic monologue.

In each case the task of the fabricator or creator—drag artist, writer—is to construct an alternate identity, an Other self. Gabriel's statement that 'there is no Mary / except the word Mary' foregrounds the fact that she is a fictional persona, who only exists as a name, not a substance: there is no *there* there (12). That there is nothing behind the word *Mary*, no fixed ground of identity, is revealed when Gabriel asks in the same poem, 'Mary, what word [...] / can I look behind?' If there is 'no Mary / except the word Mary', behind the word *Mary* there is nothing: this is precisely the nature of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue. Butler observes that the 'gendered self' is structured by acts 'that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity'.[86] Similarly, in the dramatic monologue, the writer seeks to construct the persona's 'self' by approximating or impersonating a ground of identity. The Other self of the dramatic monologue, like the Other self of drag, is a fiction or fabrication, one whose identity is contingent and groundless.

The construction of persona as a kind of drag also recalls Marjorie Garber's work on transvestitism. According to Garber, transvestitism reveals that the (sartorial) signs by

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[85] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 174.
[86] Ibid., p. 179.

which heterosexual identity encodes itself have only a conventional connection to their referent, rather than a natural or innate one. The destabilizing effect of cross-dressing arises from the fact that such signs have become detached from their referent.[87] While drag is not entirely congruent with cross-dressing, Garber's description of the latter recalls Butler's account of the former: 'In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which [...] dramatizes [...] their fabricated unity'.[88] Like the act of cross-dressing, Gabriel's fabrication of the Mary persona results in a sign becoming detached from its referent, namely, 'the word Mary' being detached from an actual (female, heterosexual) person. The word *Mary* is revealed as a sign that can be attached to any identity.[89] Both transvestitism and drag demonstrate that identity (gender, heterosexuality) is itself a fiction or fabrication. The construction of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue likewise reveals identity to be a fabrication.

To look at it another way, in writing a dramatic monologue, the poet constructs an alternate identity that he or she temporarily inhabits. Gabriel, a figure for the writer, expresses this when he proclaims:

> Here I am,
>
> having bathed carefully in the syllables
> of your name. (12)

His immersion in the name *Mary*, the word *Mary*, represents his inhabiting of this persona. And in turn, Szybist, as the writer of these poems, has created the persona of Gabriel; so he is the alternative identity she inhabits, a drag identity. The notion of Gabriel as a drag identity for Szybist could be said to resolve the ambiguity I discussed

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[87] Garber, p. 147.

[88] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

[89] In fact, 'Mary' has historically been used as a term of address from one gay man to another, and is still current in the term 'muscle Mary'. 'Mary' and 'muscle Mary', in *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English,* 9th edn, ed. by Tom Dalzell and Terry Victor (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1270 and 1343 <https://books.google.co.uk> [accessed 10 December 2016].

earlier regarding the speaker of 'Heroine as She Turns to Face Me'—is it Gabriel, Szybist, or both of them at once? In short, writing a dramatic monologue is like performing in drag because the poet inhabits a persona and imitates an identity that is different from his or her own given identity (gender or otherwise).

The imitation of identity, however, carries further implications. Butler notes, '*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*' (emphasis in original).[90] Extrapolating this to the contemporary dramatic monologue, we might say: in imitating identity, the dramatic monologue reveals the imitative structure and contingency of identity itself. There is no stable ground or origin of identity in the dramatic monologue, rather, identity is revealed to be contingent or provisional, and constituted by a series of acts repeated over time.[91] It is the writer's repeated acts of imitation, of performing as another (an Other), that constitute the persona and bring it into being, not some pre-existing notion of that persona. The alternative identity is constructed or fabricated by its very performance in the poem.

Considering the persona as a form of drag, a distorted reflection, or an alternative identity highlights the way in which the contemporary dramatic monologue offers writers a useful alternative to the lyric 'I'. In the social realm, as Butler is at pains to note in the face of her misinterpreters, drag provides neither a paradigm of subversive action nor a model for political agency, for the 'matrix of power and discursive relations' that regulates our bodies cannot be escaped so easily.[92] In the realm of poetic practice, however, I would argue that the fabrication of an alternative identity in the dramatic monologue enables the writer to temporarily escape the bounds of his or her given identity, whether in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other categories. To

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[90] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.
[91] 'Gender is [...] a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time'. Ibid., p. 43.
[92] Ibid., p. xxii.

break away from the lyric 'I', to turn away from its subjecting of oneself into the social

order, may be especially (but certainly not exclusively) desirable for poets who are other

than straight, white, or male. The contemporary dramatic monologue opens an

alternative space in which writers can enjoy freedom from the constraints of, and

expectations and assumptions based on, their given identities.

Chapter 3:

Terrance Hayes's *Lighthead*

1. Introduction

The fourth collection of poems by Terrance Hayes, *Lighthead*, offers another example of contemporary practice in the dramatic monologue. *Lighthead* contains poems written in a mixture of different voices: some dramatic monologues, many apparently lyric poems, some ambiguous or indeterminate, and a few narrative. Like many contemporary dramatic monologues, Hayes's feature speakers whose identities are not immediately obvious or clear-cut; their situations must be deduced from an attentive reading of the poems. Rather than inhabiting a realistic world, whether in the present or the historical past, his speakers exist in imaginary settings that mingle elements of fiction and reality. 'Tankhead', for example, is a barbed satire of military triumphalism that takes place in a surreal theme park of American history, while 'Music To Interrogate By' is set in a dystopian future where a war is raging in an unspecified land. Like Brock-Broido and Szybist, Hayes draws on an eclectic range of references in his poems, juggling history, politics, pop culture, and autobiography, the Book of Revelation with James Joyce and little boys playing baseball. And like Brock-Broido and Szybist, Hayes makes the ever changing and multiple nature of identity apparent in his poems.

In this chapter I will examine Hayes's dramatic monologues and three related poems from *Lighthead* in order to demonstrate how identity in the contemporary dramatic monologue is constituted through repeated acts of speaking. The identity of the persona does not pre-exist the poem, but comes into being through its performance; as

Butler states, 'every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity'.[93] I will explore how Hayes creates poems that blur the boundaries between the dramatic monologue and lyric through the practices of reiteration and rearticulation. I will also consider how the personae in Hayes's dramatic monologues are 'strange' hybrids of dramatic and lyric. Lastly, I will discuss how Hayes's construction of alternative identities in his poems offers freedom from both the lyric 'I' and the pressure of societal expectations.

2. Citation and Reiteration

Hayes's interest in the dramatic monologue is unsurprising, given the emphasis on speech and the act of speaking in his work, whether lyric, dramatic, or narrative in mode. He also displays an awareness of the canon of modern poetry, as, for instance, when he 'answers back' to Wallace Stevens's poem 'Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery' in the poem 'Snow for Wallace Stevens'. In *Lighthead* Hayes combines these tendencies in poems that allude to two well-known 20th-century dramatic monologues: 'The Golden Shovel', which references Gwendolyn Brooks's 'We Real Cool', and 'The Shepherd', which refers to James Dickey's 'The Sheep Child'. In this section I will analyse 'The Golden Shovel' and how Hayes uses reiteration—a form of intertextuality—to create a lyric poem that approaches the category of dramatic monologue, thereby revealing the fabricated nature of the lyric 'I.'

'The Golden Shovel', which seems to be an autobiographical lyric, is divided into two sections, the first headed 'I. 1981', the second 'II. 1991'.[94] The poem's speaker, if Hayes, would have been ten years old in the first section and twenty in the second

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[93] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 312.
[94] Terrance Hayes, *Lighthead* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 6-7. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

section. The poem's title is taken from the subtitle of Brooks's dramatic monologue 'We Real Cool': *'The Pool Players. / Seven at the Golden Shovel'*.[95] Hayes further subtitles his poem *'after Gwendolyn Brooks'*, making his homage explicit. Butler, in her analysis of Austin's work on speech acts, observes that it is 'never quite right' to view language as a set of acts, since each act 'will turn out to refer to prior acts and to a reiteration of "acts" that is perhaps more suitably described as a citational chain'.[96] In the case of 'The Golden Shovel', the poem itself refers to and reiterates a prior set of linguistic acts, Brooks's poem; while that poem in turn reiterates the language of another set of speakers, the fictional group of pool players Brooks has created. Indeed, Hayes literally reiterates Brooks's poem by repeating the words of 'We Real Cool', one by one, at the end of each line of 'The Golden Shovel'—i.e., every word in 'We Real Cool' is used, in order, as an end word in Hayes's poem. For instance:

> When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we
> cruise at twilight until we find the place the real
> men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool. (6)

Hayes in fact repeats this reiteration twice, once in the first section of his poem and then, having exhausted the text of 'We Real Cool', doing it again in the second section of his poem.

But although 'The Golden Shovel' reiterates the text of 'We Real Cool' as its end words, these words are incorporated, woven, into a new, distinctive poetic text.[97] As Butler notes, 'reiterations are never simply replicas of the same'.[98] Even as Hayes copies Brooks's poem word for word, he constructs his own pair of narratives into which Brooks's words can be slotted. For example, in the first section of 'The Golden Shovel'

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[95] Gwendolyn Brooks, 'We Real Cool', in *Poetry Foundation* <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/28112> [accessed 21 June 2016].
[96] Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 281, note 4.
[97] As I have shown, the same kind of intertextuality operates in *The Master Letters*, where Brock-Broido interweaves the words of Dickinson and others into her own poems so artfully that we cannot distinguish whose words are whose.
[98] Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 226.

the presumed speaker, Hayes, recalls various memories from his childhood. The pronoun *we*, repeated so many times in Brooks's poem, is transformed into representing the speaker and his father in 1981: 'When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we / cruise' (6). Where Brooks's poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by a fictional 'we', the first section of Hayes's poem is an apparently authentic lyric spoken by an 'I'. And where Brooks's speakers are a group of delinquents doomed to an untimely end ('We / die soon'),[99] Hayes's speaker is an innocent ten-year-old being taught about life by his father. In reiterating Brooks's poem, Hayes fabricates a new text that presents an original, alternative narrative.

Butler's remarks on identity are also suggestive in relation to this section of 'The Golden Shovel'. She asks, '[C]an the "I" ever repeat itself, cite itself, faithfully, or is there always a displacement from its former moment [...] ?'[100] In the first section of Hayes's poem, the citation of 'We Real Cool' results in a displacement from a 'former moment'— an earlier poem that Hayes departs from significantly. However, Butler adds, that which is prior or an 'origin' is always already a copy, such that 'the entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other'. The end words of 'The Golden Shovel' may be copied from their origin in Brooks's poem, but Brooks's words can themselves be said to be already a copy or imitation rather than authentic, as they are spoken by fictional characters in a dramatic monologue. 'The Golden Shovel' amounts to what Butler might call 'an imitation of an imitation, a copy of a copy, for which there is no original'.[101] The categories of lyric ('The Golden Shovel') and dramatic monologue ('We Real Cool'), real and fictional, copy and origin, are rendered unstable by Hayes's intertextual reiteration.

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[99] Brooks, lines 7-8.
[100] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 307.
[101] Ibid., p. 308.

Hayes repeats himself, and Brooks, with a difference again in the second section of 'The Golden Shovel'. The 'I' of the first part is now a twenty-year-old, and this section of the poem is spoken by a collective voice, a 'we' that comprises both the 'I' and his friends. Hayes again uses the text of 'We Real Cool' as end words, this time weaving them into a narrative that depicts a group of young people heading '[i]nto the city' on a night out (7). In all of these respects—the time jump, the collective first-person-plural speaker, and the action of the narrative, as well as Hayes's use of much shorter lines—the second section of 'The Golden Shovel' can be said to be a displacement from the 'former moment' it is repeating, namely, the first section of the poem. It is, in Butler's terms, a reiteration that is not simply a replica of the same. At the same time, the second section of 'The Golden Shovel' is also a reiteration of Brooks's poem. The same aspects I have just listed as distinguishing this section from the first section of 'The Golden Shovel' in fact cause it to resemble Brooks's poem more closely. The 'framework of copy and origin' is destabilized again, with each position inverting into the other. The second section of 'The Golden Shovel' copies the compositional method of the first section, its 'origin', but what it ends up copying more closely is the origin of the first section, Brooks's poem 'We Real Cool'. (We might call it a copy of a copy of a copy.) The instability of the categories of copy and origin also applies to the categories of dramatic monologue and lyric here: the second section of 'The Golden Shovel' seems to feature a lyric speaker, but harks back so strongly to Brooks's dramatic monologue that its own status as lyric is called into question. Is this 'we' really an expression of Hayes's experiences, or a fiction like the 'we' of 'We Real Cool'? This in turn causes the reader to reconsider the lyric nature of the first section of 'The Golden Shovel'. Is Hayes describing his own childhood, or has he invented a fictional 'I' for the sake of the poem? We might argue that, in spite of the seemingly autobiographical dates '1981' and '1991', and the conventionally personal subjects of childhood and family, 'The Golden Shovel' is

actually a dramatic monologue in disguise as a lyric. Hayes's use of reiteration works to blur the line between dramatic monologue and lyric.

To examine it in slightly different terms, 'The Golden Shovel' consists of repeated acts of ventriloquism, in which the words of Brooks's poem are put into the mouth of Hayes's speaker. By putting another's words into the mouth of a seemingly lyric speaker, Hayes calls into question the authenticity and sincerity of the lyric voice. Rather than expressing its author's thoughts and feelings, 'The Golden Shovel' merges two reiterations of a poem by another writer with what appears to be lyric material. We might say that the poem 'We Real Cool' is like the ventriloquist's dummy through which Hayes throws his voice, since Brooks's dramatic monologue is a body of words that is manipulated and animated by the lyric voice speaking through it. This hybrid of dramatic monologue and lyric, stitched together like Frankenstein's monster from the dismembered words of Brooks's poem, makes apparent the fabricated nature of lyric. 'The Golden Shovel' demonstrates that, far from being a natural outpouring of expression or William Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity',[102] lyric is fabricated and artificial. The conceit of the authentic, unitary self of lyric is revealed as a fiction by Hayes's lyric speaker, who turns out to be not only inauthentic but multiple: his voice is a combination of his own, his friends', and that of the characters in Brooks's poem, whose words he repeats. 'The Golden Shovel' shows that what was thought to be natural—the lyric 'I'—is no more than a convention. Just as drag exposes the hidden artifice of gender and heterosexuality,[103] 'The Golden Shovel' exposes the hidden artifice of lyric. Hayes foregrounds the artificial nature of his poem by placing Brooks's words at the end of every line, where they are immediately visible, rather than camouflaging them

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[102] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' <http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].

[103] '[D]rag is subversive to the extent that it [...] disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness'. Butler, 'Gender Is Burning', p. 125. We might say that 'The Golden Shovel' puts on, or wears, Brooks's dramatic monologue as a kind of intertextual drag.

by, for instance, burying them in the middles of the lines or following no fixed pattern. The seamless surface of lyric is disrupted by the repeated intrusion of words from an alien text. Through his double use of reiteration in 'The Golden Shovel', Hayes reveals the fabricated nature of the lyric 'I'.

3. Disobedient Son: Rearticulation and Resistance

The other poem in *Lighthead* that references a well-known dramatic monologue is 'The Shepherd', whose epigraph is a line from James Dickey's poem 'The Sheep Child': 'I am here, in my father's house'.[104] Dickey's poem begins as a narrative about '[f]arm boys wild to couple' in the American countryside, spoken by an unidentified 'we', then switches to an italicized dramatic monologue for its second half, which is spoken by a 'sheep-child' [*sic.*] preserved in a jar in a museum. This mythical creature is a half-sheep, half-human hybrid, the offspring of intercourse between a farm boy and a ewe. Like the sheep-child, Dickey's poem is itself a hybrid creature, half narrative and half dramatic monologue. In Hayes's poem 'The Shepherd', by contrast, there is a single first-person speaker throughout, one who seems to be Hayes, complete with allusions to his parents and childhood—in short, a lyric 'I'. The relationship of 'The Sheep Child', a narrative-dramatic monologue hybrid from 1967, to Hayes's contemporary lyric poem can be seen as that of father to poetic son.[105] This father-son relationship is mirrored by Hayes's poem, in which the speaker recalls uneasy memories of his father; the poem's epigraph ('I am here, in my father's house') also focuses on the father-son dynamic.

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[104] Hayes, p. 14, and James Dickey, 'The Sheep Child', in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 3rd edn, 2 vols, ed. by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), II, pp. 238-39.
[105] My methodology in this chapter will not involve Harold Bloom's theories on the anxiety of influence in poetry.

One way of reading the interplay between 'The Sheep Child' and Hayes's poem is through Butler's thoughts on interpellation. Butler posits that the subject who is formed by interpellation may yet be able to resist authority or the law through various forms of '*disobedience*' (emphasis in original).[106] This is because interpellation unintentionally produces consequences 'that exceed and confound' the law, creating 'more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent'. I would suggest that the figures of the father—Dickey and the speaker's father in 'The Shepherd'—be seen as representatives of the law; Hayes is thus the subject formed by that law who attempts to resist it, a disobedient son. The climax of Hayes's poem depicts such disobedience; the speaker is shown as a sulky boy defying his father's wish for him to join a sports team, 'shaking [his] head' and 'yielding to nothing' (15). Likewise, we could say that Hayes's lyric poem resists the authority of Dickey's poem by rejecting the latter's form (a narrative-dramatic monologue hybrid); 'The Shepherd' itself is a disobedient son.

Specifically, Butler mentions repetition and rearticulation as two means of resisting authority. She writes: '[W]here the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded' by law, there might be produced 'a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority' that underlies it.[107] In 'The Shepherd', Hayes resists the authority of Dickey's poem by not conforming to a uniform theme or structure. 'The Shepherd' jumps back and forth between passages of irregular length in which the speaker muses on sheep (for example, 'Sheep strike / the same pose each season') and passages of personal lyric, in which he remembers his childhood ('Whenever my parents fought, my father would drive me / to the dollar movies') (14). Butler's idea of disobedience to the law via hyperbolic repetition is also suggestive in light of how frequently sheep and sheep imagery are mentioned in

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106 Butler, 'Gender Is Burning', p. 122.
107 Ibid., p. 122.

the poem. Where Dickey's poem offers a coherent (if fantastical) narrative, Hayes's poem repetitively refers to sheep without any narrative justification. The word *sheep* alone is repeated thirteen times. Even the passages about the speaker's childhood involve unexplained mentions of sheep, such as 'my mother bought a sheepskin brush / for my father's sheepskin jacket' (15). The excessive quality of these allusions to sheep resembles what Butler calls 'consequences that exceed and confound' the law, 'signifying in excess of any intended referent'. Lacking the narrative context they had in Dickey's poem, the repetitive references to sheep in 'The Shepherd' come across as hyperbolic and comedic. Instead of conforming to Dickey's poem, Hayes's poem repeats its theme until it becomes farce.

Butler also posits that a 'rearticulation of the law' by the subject can be a form of disobedience or resistance. The law may be 'ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question' its authority.[108] Hayes's poem enacts just such a rupturing and rearticulation of Dickey's poem. As I have argued, the coherent narrative of 'The Sheep-Child' is ruptured to produce the alternating and disjunctive sets of subject matter that make up Hayes's poem. The speaker of Hayes's poem is himself ruptured, divided into two minds (one obsessed with sheep, one concerned with his childhood memories). The metaphor of rearticulation is especially apt when we consider the definitions and etymology of the word *articulation*.[109] Articulation most commonly refers to the clear and distinct pronunciation of words, or else fluent expression in words. However, another meaning of articulation is being connected by joints (from the Latin *articulare*, to join): in anatomy, bones can be articulated to each other, or are articulated (wired together) into a skeleton.[110] Articulation as the joining together of components to construct or fabricate a

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[108] Ibid., p. 122.
[109] 'Articulate', in *Oxford Dictionaries* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/articulate> [accessed 24 August 2016].
[110] One more example: an articulated lorry is one that consists of two sections connected by a pivoting joint. 'Articulated lorry', in *Collins Dictionary* <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/

larger entity describes Hayes's method in 'The Shepherd', in which different components (disjunctive sets of subject matter) are assembled into a single poem. 'The Shepherd' can also be said to be articulated, jointed, at the level of the sentence, due to Hayes's use of parataxis.[111] One sentence follows the next seemingly without causal or narrative connection:

> Lambs, which is to say sheep,
> are mentioned twenty-eight times in the Book of Revelation
> alone. I like the wily black sheep of the shepherd boy
> who lacked training. (14)

The poem's paratactical construction offers a means of challenging the coherence of Dickey's poem. 'The Shepherd' re-articulates 'The Sheep Child' by taking its elements—sheep, boys, father-son relations—and joining them together in completely different ways.

The resistance to interpellation in Hayes's poem can also be seen as a resistance to the authority of lyric. Butler writes that disobedience may take the form of 'a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force' of the law.[112] Lyric's monotheistic, monovocal force is called into question by Hayes's poem, in which two elements—autobiographical lyric and an unrelated monologue on sheep—are awkwardly joined together. The unitary lyric 'I' is re-articulated into a speaker who lacks the 'uniformity of the subject' or 'behavioral conformity' commanded by the law of lyric. Given its resistance to lyric conformity, I would argue that Hayes's poem is more accurately described as a hybrid of lyric and dramatic monologue, or even a dramatic monologue in disguise as lyric, as I suggested of 'The Golden Shovel'. Rather than reading as a seamless personal lyric, the poem keeps switching back and forth between

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articulated-lorry> [accessed 24 August 2016].

[111] Parataxis is '[t]he placing of clauses or phrases one after the other, without words to indicate subordination or coordination'. 'Parataxis', in *Oxford Dictionaries* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/parataxis> [accessed 24 August 2016].

[112] Butler, 'Gender Is Burning', p. 122.

modes, between the autobiographical and the passages about sheep, of which the latter

form a monologue directly addressed to an audience:

> If you and every person in the county mailed
> me an envelope of five to ten dollars, I think
> I could rehabilitate the sheep. You should know,
> however, that they are mentioned over three hundred times
> in the Bible. (14)

It is as if two different poems, with two different speakers, have been spliced together.

The artificial nature of this conjoining, which draws attention to the poem's text as a

fabricated thing, raises the possibility that the entire poem is a fabrication—that even the

apparently authentic and lyric passages are fictional. It may be that the poem is not a lyric

but a dramatic monologue spoken by an imaginary character, a persona who is obsessed

with both sheep and his unhappy childhood. Like that of 'The Golden Shovel', 'The

Shepherd' 's status as lyric turns out to be uncertain. Is it a dramatic monologue disguised

as a lyric, or is it a hybrid of the two? The poem's resistance to categorization embodies

the shifting and multiple nature of identity in Hayes's work, which I will discuss in the

next section in terms of performance.

4. 'Our pronouncements develop selves'

There is a noticeable emphasis on speech and acts of speaking throughout the collection

Lighthead. Hayes's dramatic monologues are explicitly cast as acts of speaking, words

spoken aloud by a persona to another character (and/or the reader). For instance, in

'Music To Interrogate By', the speaker is a war criminal confessing his or her misdeeds to

an interrogator in some dystopian future; the speaker of 'Tankhead' is the manager of an

imaginary theme park instructing a new employee in his or her duties.[113] In the trio of

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[113] There are shades of Browning's 'My Last Duchess' in the latter poem, with the manager giving his or her listener a tour of the theme park and narrating the story behind its General Patton exhibit.

Lighthead poems from which the collection takes its title ('Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy', 'Lighthead's Guide to Addiction', and 'Lighthead's Guide to Parenting'), the speaker is a persona named Lighthead, who is something of an alter ego for Hayes.[114] The poem 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' is of particular importance given its position as the prologue to the collection: it stands alone as the first poem in the book, with the following poems grouped into individually titled sections. The poem is also something of an *ars poetica*, self-reflexively commenting on Hayes's practice, for example: 'An arrangement / of derangements; I'll eat you to live: that's poetry' (1). 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' is spoken by a persona addressing an unspecified audience. It opens declaratively: 'Ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and children of the state, / I am here because I could never get the hang of Time'. Connective expressions like '[t]hus' and 'for example' contribute to the impression that Lighthead is delivering a speech or lecture; similar expressions appear in 'Lighthead's Guide to Parenting'. The poem 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' closes with a direct appeal to his listeners, consisting of two imperatives and a vocative:

> Ask a glass of water why it pities
> the rain. Ask the lunatic yard dog why it tolerates the leash.
> Brothers and sisters, when you spend your nights
> out on a limb, there's a chance you'll fall in your sleep. (1-2)

The poem is very much a *dramatic* monologue, declaimed as if from a stage—in short, a performance.

Although we must be careful to distinguish the notion of performance from Austin's and Butler's definitions of performativity (a piece of speech, or act of speaking, is not always a 'speech act'), it is worth considering Butler's analysis of performance and identity in relation to the Lighthead poems. Discussing gender and heterosexual identity,

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[114] John Berryman's persona Henry, in the Dream Songs, plays a similar role as an alter ego for the poet, although Henry's story hews much more closely to Berryman's life than Lighthead's does to Hayes's. I will assume Lighthead's gender is male in my discussion of these poems.

Butler posits that gender is 'a performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or essence' (emphasis in original).[115] However, she emphasizes that such a performance 'is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do'; in other words, there is no 'volitional "subject" who elects at will which gender and/or sexuality to be at any given time and place'.[116] In Butler's view, 'there is no performer prior to the performed', but rather, 'the performance constitutes the appearance of a "subject" as its effect'. Identities and subjects are brought into being through performance, rather than pre-existing it. While Butler acknowledges that this may be 'difficult to accept' in the sphere of lived experience, I would suggest that it accurately depicts how the contemporary dramatic monologue functions. In the dramatic monologue, the persona is like the 'subject' of Butler's theories: one who is brought into being through performance, namely, the persona's speaking of the poem. The poem is not a performance that the persona elects to do, as 'there is no performer prior to the performed'. The persona, this imaginary 'subject' or being, only comes into existence as he or she speaks the poem: a case of 'I' speak, therefore 'I' am. This perhaps could be said of any dramatic monologue, but the heightened sense of the persona's provisionality, the radically fragmented and improvisational quality of the performance and the poem, is especially characteristic of contemporary dramatic monologues like Hayes's. Butler's definition of gender identity— a performance that produces the illusion of an inner essence or psychic core—aptly describes the contemporary dramatic monologue.

In Hayes's dramatic monologues, the identity of the 'subject' or persona called Lighthead is brought into being through performance, specifically through speech. Just as there is no performer prior to the performed, Butler writes, 'there is no "I" who stands *behind* discourse' (emphasis in original).[117] The subject 'who utters or speaks and

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[115] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 312.
[116] Ibid., p. 309.
[117] Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 225.

thereby produces an effect in discourse' is in reality constituted or formed by that

discourse. At the start of 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy', the identity of Lighthead is

an unknown quantity; the character only begins to come into focus as his utterances

accrete over the course of the poem. He is formed, fabricated, by his own discourse, the

cumulative effect of his speech.

It is significant in this light that Hayes uses parataxis so extensively in the

Lighthead poems. 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' consists of a series of non sequiturs

that leap from one sentence to the next, often lacking in even associative logic. For

example:

> Sometimes I play a game in which my primitive craft fires
> upon an alien ship whose intention is the destruction
> of the earth. Other times I fall in love with a word
> like *somberness*. (1)

The disjunctive nature of such statements might be seen as embodying the

poststructuralist notion of the subject as multiple and ever changing. Alternatively, it

might be a representation of the speaker's stream of consciousness, or an indication that

his mental state is confused or disordered. However, I would point to the Language poet

Bob Perelman's thoughts on parataxis as being relevant here. Analysing Ron Silliman's

concept of the paratactical 'new sentence', Perelman notes that parataxis is essentially

opposed to narrative; 'new sentences' are not subordinated to a larger narrative frame.[118]

Neither are such sentences subordinated to a frame of logic or argument. Instead, a

series of sentences that seem to make no sense 'may take on meaning by contiguity'.[119]

To put it in Lighthead's own words, 'an arrangement / of derangements [...] : that's

poetry' (1). In 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy', it is neither narrative, nor logic, nor

argument that governs the series of sentences Lighthead speaks. What matters is the

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[118] Bob Perelman, 'On *Ketjak*', in *Modern American Poetry* <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/ s_z/silliman/ketjak.htm> [accessed 24 August 2016].
[119] Marjorie Perloff, 'On "The Chinese Notebook" ', in *Modern American Poetry* <http://www. modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/new-sentence> [accessed 14 August 2016].

speaking itself, the performance. His series of spoken sentences comes to constitute his identity over the course of the poem. We, his audience, must piece together who he is, fabricate his identity, based solely on his accumulated statements. The importance of speech in constituting identity is a central element of Hayes's work.

In 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy', the idea that identity can be fabricated through speech is exemplified by the self-reflexive lines 'I know all words come from preexisting [*sic*.] words / and divide until our pronouncements develop selves'.[120] The first part of this quotation features the image of words reproducing themselves repeatedly. But it is only when these words become 'pronouncements', or statements pronounced out loud, that 'selves' enter the picture. Pronouncements—i.e., pieces of speech—Lighthead says, can develop or bring into being selves. This resembles Butler's theory that 'performance constitutes the appearance of a "subject" as its effect', or, to put it another way, that there is always a discourse that 'precedes [...] and forms in language' the subject.[121] Pronouncements develop selves in the dramatic monologue, not the other way round. Acts of speaking constitute the persona or 'self'. The performance of identity through speech is what brings a persona into being, not some prior notion of that persona's existence.

Hayes's use of repetition—in the form of anaphora, epistrophe,[122] and other repeated words or phrases—is marked in the Lighthead poems. Repetition is also crucial to Butler's analysis of how identities are constituted. She observes, '[R]epetition is the way in which power works to construct the illusion of a seamless heterosexual identity'.[123] In the dramatic monologue, we might say, repetition is the way in which the writer works to construct the illusion of the persona's identity. We can see repetition at work in

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[120] Hayes, p. 1. Hayes's choice of the term 'pronouncements' also recalls Austin's and Butler's notion of pronunciation, in which a subject's identity is 'pronounced'. See Chapter 2, Section 3, of this essay.
[121] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 309; 'Critically Queer', p. 225.
[122] Particularly in the poem 'Ghazal-head', p. 82.
[123] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 309.

Hayes's poems through anaphora; the titles of the three Lighthead poems themselves form an anaphoric sequence. 'Lighthead's Guide to Addiction' is further composed of a series of anaphoric sentences: almost every line in the poem begins 'If you are addicted to [_____]' (49). Similarly, in 'Lighthead's Guide to Parenting', three lines begin with 'Remember when we [_____]' (80). 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' contains three pairs of sentences using anaphoric form, as well as four other pairs of repeated words spread out across the poem. These repetitions of language, performed by a speaking persona, accumulate until they construct the illusion of that persona's identity. The structure of anaphoric repetition in fact embodies Hayes's image of words springing from pre-existing words: in the anaphoric lines beginning 'Remember when we [_____]', the repeated words are pre-existing, are a given, while new words arise to fill the blank each time. The result is that these 'pronouncements develop selves', in other words, they construct their speaker's identity. Likewise, Butler defines identity as a 'repetitive performance', adding that every performance 'repeats itself to institute the effect of identity'.[124] Through his speaking of repetitive language, as well as through repeated acts of speaking in general, the identity of the persona Lighthead is constructed or constituted.

Another self-reflexive line in relation to the dramatic monologue appears in 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy': 'Maybe Art's only purpose is to preserve the Self' (1). The use of what could be called scare caps on the words 'Art' and 'Self' seems to be partly an ironic gesture, a means of undercutting the seriousness or grandeur of the statement. The capitalized words 'Art' and 'Self' also hark back to Romantic abstractions like Truth and Beauty; the sentence may express a nostalgia for the fixed, unified 'Self', the lyric 'I', that is preserved by the 'Art' of lyric. However, given that the sentence is

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[124] Ibid., p. 312.

spoken by a persona in a dramatic monologue, I would argue that it be read in another way: that Art acts to preserve a character who is named the Self—i.e., the persona. Art can be seen as artful speech, or the performance of the poem; it is the continued performance that preserves the persona's existence. As Butler notes, 'the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence'; to preserve the semblance of the 'I', 'a string of performances' is required. The series of sentences in each of the Lighthead poems, as well as the series of poems themselves, composes the string of performances that 'preserve the Self' of Lighthead, produce the illusion of his continued identity.[125]

5. 'No allegiance to form': Persona as the Severed Head

The notion of form appears in Hayes's work in multiple guises. Lighthead's definition of poetry as an 'arrangement of derangements' suggests that poetry involves forming disparate parts into a whole, or creating form out of chaos through rhetorical devices like anaphora and parataxis. Hayes uses a variety of poetic forms in *Lighthead*, including the dramatic monologue, the ghazal, the *pecha kucha* (a poem in twenty short sections based on a Japanese business presentation format) (94), and the invented form of 'The Golden Shovel'. Per*form*ance, or a string of performances, is what constitutes Lighthead's identity in Hayes's dramatic monologues. Lastly, the final lines of the entire collection concern form:

> "I have no form because
> I have no allegiance
> to form." (93)

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[125] The poems collected in *The Master Letters* particularly exemplify how a string of performances can produce the semblance of continuity and a coherent 'Self' (that of Brock-Broido's Speaker).

These lines come from a poem titled 'Airhead' that functions as the collection's epilogue, appearing after the last section of poems in the book. ('Airhead' and 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' thus frame the collection.) 'Airhead' comprises two scenes from an imaginary film, 'I. Translation of a Scene From a Nonexistent Movie' and 'II. Scene Deleted Under the Emperor's Order'. This rather gnomic poem reads as an allegory that comments on the collection that precedes it, as well as on Hayes's poetics. There are two characters, an emperor and a prophet; the latter is clearly a figure for 'the poet', or for Hayes in particular.[126] The emperor, who orders the prophet to be beheaded, represents tyrannical authority, not unlike Brock-Broido's Master: critic, editor, state censor, 'the Man', all rolled into one. Both scenes in the poem depict the emperor and the prophet exchanging words just before the prophet is beheaded. The poem in fact consists wholly of direct quotations and speech tags, such as 'the emperor tells the prophet' or 'the prophet says'; it is literally formed from speech.

Hayes's conceit that these are scenes being played by actors in a film suggests that the poem can be read as an allegory for the dramatic monologue itself—the dramatic monologue, like a film, conjures a fictional world in which there are characters performing. In this respect, it is notable that the word 'I' only appears in the poem in a direct quotation spoken by the prophet's head as he is being decapitated:

> the head of the prophet
> taking leave of body [*sic*]
> can be heard saying,
> "I have no form because
> I have no allegiance
> to form." (93)

Like the persona in a dramatic monologue, it is only the prophet's head who speaks in this poem in the first person, as an 'I'. I would argue that the prophet's head represents the persona in a dramatic monologue, and that the statement 'I have no form' can be

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[126] The prophet is referred to by male pronouns in the poem, increasing his identification with Hayes.

interpreted as meaning that the 'I' of the dramatic monologue has no form, no fixed identity. Unlike the supposedly stable, unified self of the lyric 'I', the 'I' of the contemporary dramatic monologue has 'no allegiance to form', is ever changing and provisional. In the trio of Lighthead poems, for instance, the 'I' or persona of Lighthead changes identity from one poem to the next. In 'Lighthead's Guide to Parenting' he seems to be an unpleasant Christian disciplinarian who recommends corporal punishment for children, while in 'Lighthead's Guide to Addiction' he becomes an armchair philosopher observing the follies of humankind and the legacy of slavery. In 'Lighthead's Guide to the Galaxy' he plays a multiplicity of roles, from public speaker to erudite thinker, ordinary joe to reflective artist. 'No allegiance to form' sums up the protean, provisional nature of the persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue

The fact that these lines are spoken by the prophet's severed head, rather than the prophet himself, also recalls the Classical myth of Orpheus. Traditionally a figure for the poet, Orpheus was killed by the Maenads, who tore him limb from limb; only his head remained to float out to sea, still singing, until it washed ashore on Lesbos. At Lesbos the head was treated as an oracle and spoke prophecies until Apollo finally silenced it. The myth of Orpheus's head is said to represent the immortality of poetry (song).[127] In my reading of 'Airhead' as an allegory for the dramatic monologue, the severed head signifies not only the immortality of poetry, but specifically the persistence of the dramatic monologue in poetry. In 'Airhead', the opposition between the emperor and the prophet can be seen as that between lyric and the dramatic monologue: a dominant authority attempting to silence that which dissents from it. The resistance of

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[127] Fritz Graf, 'Orpheus', in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edn, ed. by Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) <http://www.oxfordreference.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-4611?rskey=IkWWAN&result=4677> [accessed 1 September 2016], and 'Orpheus', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Orpheus-Greek-mythology> [accessed 1 September 2016].

the prophet's speaking, severed head to the tyranny of lyric exemplifies the persistence of the dramatic monologue as a genre.

The severed head further resembles the trope of the ventriloquist's dummy in *The Master Letters* in its 'strange'-ness. Both are objects that should be inanimate and mute, but which 'strange'-ly have the ability to speak. In the case of the ventriloquist's dummy it is the poet who throws his or her voice into the dummy, while in 'Airhead' it is the prophet (or poet) who speaks through his own severed head. The severed head as a metaphor for the persona in the dramatic monologue is a suitable description of Hayes's approach in *Lighthead*: the 'I' in his poems, even when seemingly autobiographical, is still detached, somewhere at a remove, from Hayes himself. In the tropes of the ventriloquist's dummy, the distorted reflection (from *Incarnadine*), and the severed head, we can see how writing a contemporary dramatic monologue—speaking as an 'I' who is not oneself, creating another (an Other) 'I'—produces a persona who is similar to yet different from the writer's given identity, connected yet also separate. Such personae are what I have called 'strange' because of this paradoxical relation to their creators, as well as the fact that they do not quite fit into either category of the 'I': neither the dramatic (i.e., fictional) nor the lyric (i.e., supposedly authentic and personal). The persona in the contemporary dramatic monologue is a 'strange' kind of hybrid, part dramatic, part lyric; it has no allegiance to either poetic form.

The poems that I have examined from *Lighthead* demonstrate the tensions inherent in the contemporary dramatic monologue. In 'Airhead' these are dramatized through the allegorical conflict between the emperor and the prophet; 'The Golden Shovel' and 'The Shepherd' are apparently lyric poems that, on closer inspection, may be dramatic monologues. In the three Lighthead poems, Hayes again blurs the line between dramatic and lyric in the persona of Lighthead. The 'I' who speaks in 'Lighthead's Guide

to the Galaxy' is both fictive—a semblance of a Self preserved by Art, constituted by a string of performances—and lyric, in part expressing Hayes's own thoughts and feelings.

6. Identity as Playing a Role

Overall, the variety of voices and forms Hayes plays with in these poems reflects the nature of identity as ever changing and multiple, a concept that recalls Sontag's principle of Being-as-Playing-a-Role. (See Chapter 1, Section 4.) The notion of identity as the playing of a role or roles, rather than the expression of an internal essence, permeates Hayes's poems. For example, in another self-reflexive moment in the collection, the dramatic monologue 'Tankhead' includes a description of a Disneyland-mascot-style General Patton costume that an employee is to wear:

> Carrying such an enormous head, your body will seem
> drunk on patriotism.
> [...]
> This should give you a sense of what it will mean
> to spend your days in the head of Patton. (58-59)

The wearing of a costume head to become someone else is the embodiment of identity as playing a role. The many 'heads' that appear in the collection—the three 'Lighthead' poems; others titled 'Tankhead', 'Airhead', 'Ghazal-head', and 'Anchor Head'; Patton's head; and the prophet's severed head—are metaphors for the various roles that Hayes as author plays.[128] When the severed head declares, 'I have no form', it is notable that the 'I' who speaks through it is the prophet, in other words, a figure for the poet, or what might be called Hayes himself. We might say that as a poet, Hayes has no form of his own; his identity consists of playing a series of roles. Every 'I' in *Lighthead*, whether

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[128] The fact that roles are colloquially called 'parts' (e.g., 'What part did you get?'; 'There are no small parts, only small actors') makes the metaphor of heads (body parts) as roles especially apt.

dramatic, lyric, narrative, or some sort of hybrid, represents a different identity, another part to be played.

Identity as the playing of a role or roles also relates to Butler's ideas about identity being constituted by a string of performances, as discussed in Section 4 of this chapter. In this light, we might observe that the speaker of the line 'I have no form' is a fictional character (the prophet) being played by an imaginary actor in a nonexistent film invented for a poem—a *millefeuille* of fictiveness with no underlying ground. It is what Butler might call 'an imitation of an imitation, a copy of a copy, for which there is no original'.[129] In Butler's world view we are all subjects, constituted by and at the mercy of forces like discourse, power, the law. Without wishing to sound naïve, I would argue that writers are able to experience freedom from such constraints (however limited, temporary, or illusory that freedom may be) when creating fictional works. What the chameleonic shifts of identity from one poem to the next, or within individual poems, in *Lighthead* demonstrate is Hayes's agency as a writer. Identity as playing a role, after all, requires one who plays, not a passive subject. The allure of the dramatic monologue lies in the writer's freedom to construct an alternative identity: to play a role of his or her own choosing, not society's.

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[129] Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p. 308.

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Conclusion

As I have argued in this essay, the contemporary dramatic monologue exemplifies poststructuralist and queer theories about identity: that identity is groundless and provisional, an illusion fabricated through its repeated performance. The persona in the dramatic monologue exhibits precisely these qualities. The persona is a fictional character fabricated by the writer of the poem, a character whose very existence is an illusion. His or her identity is constructed by the writer, rather than being an innate essence, and comes into being through the poem's performance. Nothing is natural in the world of the dramatic monologue; everything is scripted, a fiction created by the writer, whose identity is itself a fiction, an illusion produced through and within discourse.

The openly artificial quality of the speaker of the dramatic monologue stands in opposition to the supposed sincerity and authenticity of the lyric 'I'. In a lyric poem the writer gives expression to his or her own given identity, whereas in the dramatic monologue, the writer expresses a fictional character's identity. The latter process requires the writer to play the part of another, to adopt another's identity, as if (we might say) performing in drag. While I have examined how this situation can be considered 'strange'—the persona's identity is inherently estranged from, strange to, the writer's given identity—I would also have liked to have addressed the pleasures of 'strange'-ness, which are what first drew me to the dramatic monologue as a reader and writer. The drag artist relishes inhabiting an alternative identity, just as the actor enjoys playing a role and the purveyor of camp delights in the artificial and the exaggerated. To appreciate 'strange'-ness is to prefer imagination and play to sincerity.[130] Particularly for the writer,

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[130] As Wilde wrote, 'A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal'. Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 284.

the dramatic monologue provides an escape from the prison of the self, from the self-regard of autobiographical lyric poetry.

As an alternative to the dominance of lyric in American poetry, the dramatic monologue has never been more essential. In enabling writers to construct other identities for themselves, the dramatic monologue grants them temporary freedom from the identities they inhabit in the real world, as well as the assumptions that may accompany them. Writers of colour, for example, have been increasingly vocal about their frustration at the ways in which some teachers, editors, and critics expect them to represent themselves in their work. In the 2015 essay 'Tokenism May Cause the Following Side Effects', Morgan Parker surveys a number of American poets of colour on the subject of identity, including Roberto Montes. He states, 'In undergrad [at university] I was advised to make my work more latino, more more latino [...] Literally someone suggested tacos'.[131] Montes continues:

> Why would someone publish a queer latino who writes about sincerity
> in the classroom when they can publish a queer latino who writes about
> being a queer latino? [...] Sometimes when a press publicizes an effort at
> diversity, they mean to publish those who write about being latino, not
> latino poets.

As this comment illustrates, sexual orientation is another type of identity that some readers presume poets should express in certain ways. Sandeep Parmar, in the 2015 essay 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the UK', reflects on similar attitudes towards British poets of colour, describing 'the expectation from a mainly white British readership' that their poems be filled with 'exotic tropes (a confluence of saris, mangoes, pomegranates, arranged marriages)'.[132] As an advocate for experimental poetry, Parmar is

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[131] Morgan Parker, 'Tokenism May Cause the Following Side Effects', in *Poetry Foundation*, 23 December 2015 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2015/12/tokenism-may-cause-the-following-side-effects> [accessed 21 December 2016]. Spelling and punctuation are given as in the original.
[132] Sandeep Parmar, 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the UK', in *LA Review of Books*, 6 December 2015 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/not-a-british-subject-race-and-poetry-in-the-uk> [accessed 14 August 2016].

also critical of lyric's ability to grapple with issues of identity, castigating what she sees as 'a mainstream lyric mode that normalizes difference by fetishizing and orientalizing BAME poets'. In such an environment, I would suggest, the dramatic monologue offers one means of resisting the identity categories used to label, and limit, poets.

Nevertheless, contemporary poets tend to make use of the dramatic monologue only occasionally. In the two decades since *The Master Letters*, Brock-Broido has published two collections of wholly lyric poetry. Of her decision to abstain from the dramatic monologue, she has written, 'I am done with "Personae" ', adding, 'This is where biography & Real Life enter in. I become less & less interested in Invention [, ...] on making a poem out of Nothing'.[133] Likewise, Carol Ann Duffy, whose bestseller *The World's Wife* was a collection of dramatic monologues, and whose previous collections featured numerous acclaimed monologues such as 'Warming Her Pearls' and 'Education for Leisure', has virtually stopped working in the genre. The dramatic monologue remains something of a rare bird in contemporary practice, a mode with which all are familiar yet few choose to write. In the creative component of this thesis I have explored various alternatives to the personal lyric, from the dramatic monologue to ekphrastic poems written in the third person; for me, the dramatic monologue still exercises a strong hold on the imagination. I can only hope its presence in contemporary poetry grows larger in the future.

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[133] Brock-Broido, 'Myself a Kangaroo Among the Beauties', in *American Women Poets in the 21st Century*, ed. by Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), pp. 100-03 (p. 101-02).

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